

# 5 Modern Myths of B2B Marketing

## *By Bob Bly*

There's a lot of misinformation out there about what works in B2B marketing – much of it spread by highly paid consultants with a new technology or channel to hype and an axe to grind.

With that in mind, here are 5 of the biggest lies being told about B2B marketing today and the truth about each:

*The myth: The Web has made print obsolete.*

*The reality: Many people still prefer to read words on paper instead of on a screen, and many marketers are still heavy users of catalogs, brochures, and other print collateral.*

"We still market our various niche services with brochures," says Norman Freeman, president of Associated Global Systems.

"Since we have been around for 50 years, we tend to favor print. Young professionals may agree, however, that print is not now needed if the information is available online."

"I don't believe print media will die," says B2B copywriter and consultant Joan Damico. "Instead, it has been downsized to serve as a complement to electronic media.

"There's also been a shift as to who's doing the printing. The consumer is doing a larger share of the printing from the PDF files they download from your website. It's still easier for many people to print and then read and annotate later than it is to boot up a laptop and do the same electronically. But that will change, too, as more print pieces are designed for mobile electronic devices such as PDAs and cell phones."

*The myth: Social networks are the most important and most widely used B2B marketing tools of our time and have overtaken websites in importance.*

*The reality: Millions of people have embraced social networks – and millions of others don't use them at all.*

Yes, social networking – along with mobile marketing and SEO – is clearly one of the "hot" marketing methods, gaining a disproportionate share of media attention.

But the truth is that many of your customers don't participate in these social sites and have to be reached through conventional websites and other traditional B2B marketing methods.

"Social media has yet to prove itself as a medium that can out-monetize a website," says copywriter April Parcher. "When prospects are searching for something specific, they don't turn to LinkedIn or MySpace first. They Google it and hunt up the websites in that category that seem to be most relevant to their search – and that provide the most valuable content."

"Your website is your office, the formal place of your business," says copywriter Susanna K. Hutcheson. "Your blog, Facebook, Twitter – these are the water cooler and the lunch room. Informal places where you make contacts, much like the golf courses and country clubs of the 1950s."

"Social networking sites are certainly a new 'feather in the cap' of many business operators and marketing professionals," says marketing consultant Fiona Fell. "But I do not think at this point in time that they outweigh the power of a website for a business. A website provides a place of solidarity and 'permanency' to an online business. It gives your 'tribe' and 'raving fans' a place to call home and to drop in to find out about you and your offerings."

*The myth: Direct mail is dead as a B2B lead generation tool.*

*The reality: Direct mail is still very much alive.*

Despite the prediction that e-mail would make snail mail obsolete, the Winterberry Group reports that spending for direct mail marketing in the U.S. was \$58.4 billion in 2007, a 5 percent increase over the previous year.

"Although much B2B lead gen has moved online, direct mail is still very effective," says copywriter Ed Gandia. "In fact, in working with clients on lead generation strategy and campaigns, I've found that response to direct mail campaigns can sometimes be higher than that of e-mail. Also, I find direct mail to be extremely effective in lead nurturing efforts – often much more so than e-mail."

How could this be so? According to Gandia, with so many B2B marketers rushing online over the last 5 years, a strong, personalized direct mail piece actually stands out. And pieces that stand out often get read, which leads to greater response and high return on marketing investment – even higher than many e-mail and social media efforts in some cases.

"In the end, you need a little of everything. Direct mail alone won't save you," Gandia admits. "But DM can be a crucial part of a successful B2B marketing mix, regardless of what might be more fashionable or hip at the moment."

*The myth: E-mail marketing is an old-school online marketing channel and, with spam filters and firewalls, doesn't work anymore.*

*The reality: It does, despite the challenges of e-mail deliverability.*

Marketing theorists dismiss e-mail marketing as outmoded push or interruption technology. Their belief is that prospects shun communications sent to them and instead respond only to communications they initiate and control, like social media, blogs, and online search.

But research shows that people still pay attention and respond to their e-mail. A study at Loughborough University found that users take action, on average, in less than 2 minutes upon being notified that a new e-mail is waiting for them.

The most effective e-mail marketing, however, may not be renting outside e-lists of B2B prospects. Two reasons why it doesn't work so well: it's expensive, and people tend not to buy from strangers online.

A better strategy is to build your own opt-in e-list, typically by offering a free e-newsletter subscription or other valuable free content. According to a report by Forrester Research, opt-in lists (such as e-newsletter subscriber lists) retain 49 percent of their subscribers over time – more than double the retention rate of compiled or harvested e-lists.

*Myth: White papers are old hat – a transparent marketing ploy masquerading as real content that today's sophisticated B2B prospects see right through.*

*Reality: Free content – and that includes white papers – has never been a more effective marketing tool than it is today.*

Web 2.0 evangelists champion blogs over white papers, presumably because blogs are user-generated content and therefore more unbiased, while white papers are company-generated content and therefore promotional.

However, in my view, when it comes to quality and value of content, white papers often trump blogs. Many blogs are unfocused ramblings of an individual whose credentials are unknown or unproven. White papers, though they may have a marketing objective, are carefully crafted to deliver valuable content – because without good content, they won't achieve their marketing goals.

"Social media, blogs, and user-generated content are of great value yet have one major shortcoming," says white paper writer Michael Stelzner. "They require constant innovation and fresh content to transform lookers into prospects. Alternatively, the single well-crafted white paper can deliver a steady stream of quality leads for literally years.

"Given shrinking marketing budgets and greater pressure to perform, I would stick with what we know works." Stelzner notes that a recent study by TechTarget places white papers number one among buyers, more so than other marketing materials.

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