

Direct-Response in B2B ...

Yes, it Exists

By Mac Bull

Direct Response in B2B ...

Really?

Yes, it is not only those long sales letters, or VSLs that you see direct-response writers plugging away at. It has a place in our world too. Therefore, even for us B2B writers, it is good to at least have a basic foundation in direct response. One significant difference that stands out is the level of "hype." In B2B, we see direct response at play, but it is clearly "a minus" in the hype category. Digging further into "direct response for B2B," we will also find that many direct response core basics are seen in B2B. Also, we can't forget the huge role it plays in the area of "lead generation." Furthermore, in looking at my own B2B writing career, I myself can think of a few past jobs which followed direct-response strategies.

So, let us first look at ...

What is Direct Response?

When asking a "what" question, the dictionary is often a fantastic place to start, but when specifically looking for "business terms," a business dictionary is an ace card.

So I took a quick Internet trip over to BusinessDictionary.com, and there I found the following ...

Direct Response is:

A promotional method in which a prospective customer is urged to respond immediately and directly to the advertiser, through the use of a 'device' provided in the advertisement. These devices (called direct-response mechanisms) include a (1) coupon to cut and mail, (2) Business Reply Card, (3) toll-free telephone number, or, on the Internet, (4) hotspot to click.

In looking at the above definition, one may think of retail sales. In many cases, retail sales advertisements are direct-response ads in one form or the other — not only VSLs or long print sales letters. Think about it. Maybe a retail store running a limited sale during the month or week — that's scarcity, a direct-response tactic.

Keeping that in mind, let's jump back to B2B, and look at ...

Lead Generation

B2B sales letters are one tool that are often used for lead generation. Yet, they are not used as a lone soldier like their counterpart, the Business-to-Consumer direct-response sales letter. Rather, they are often a part of, or a single step, within a multistep B2B lead-generation campaign.

In talking about B2B sales letters, a good B2B sales letter does share a call-to-action, along with its 10-20 page counterpart. However, a B2B sales letter usually falls into the 1-2 page spectrum instead. It is clearly a powerful tool because those 1-2 pages have to do the same thing as their lengthy counterpart. That being, get the prospect or customer to take action. However, without the drama and hype to inspire interest, which we see in strict direct-response consumer marketing.

Now, let's take a step back and look at ...

Some Core Basics

At this point, it would be very easy for us to do a very extensive list, but I would like to focus on three core basics of direct response. I specifically want us to look at these three points, given that they are very much a part of the B2B marketing process. These points are:

Point #1. *Headlines:* They are always important. Headlines get the attention of the reader and pull them in. Just as in direct-response copywriting, the headline makes its power move and pulls the reader in, getting them excited enough to move on and read the opening. Yet, we need to keep the reader's attention, because even in B2B we have "scanners." Which brings us to Point #2.

Point #2. *Bullets:* Bullets keep the reader moving swiftly through the copy, or at least scanning the section, so they will keep going through the message. Reading onward, which brings us to the place we hope our reader makes it to ... Point #3.

Point #3. *Call-to-Action:* As we have stated before, in B2B, it is about the features and benefits. Factual, no fluffy talk. In other words ... minus the hype. That doesn't mean that it is dry, boring, and completely lacking anything close to excitement. No, not at all. It just means that we are operating on a different level. One that drives a fire within the prospect to act, but this fire stays within our prospect and not in our letter. Especially in the "call-to-action" itself. Therefore, a good call-to-action is fact-based, just the contact details and any other specifics that might be applicable. You see this a lot in white papers. Hopefully the information, benefits, and features, woven into a nice business sales letter, has covered all the bases. Enough so, that your "soft" call-to-action is going to make that "home run" hit come through. Yet, if it doesn't, the follow-up piece within the campaign might be the winner, and we know that the second piece, whatever it may be, will come into play again, with another call-to-action.

Now we can crank it up a notch and look at ...

B2B Direct Response in Use

I am going to talk about just a few projects directly from my own experience. Of course, this is in no way the full spectrum of opportunities for writing direct response within B2B. It is simply a handful of experiences related to our topic that jumped out from my memory. One specific project I remember was an email with the focus of getting the readers to take action and do a survey. Direct-response strategies were necessary, because I needed to excite the reader enough to do something they really didn't want to do ... take a business survey.

Another project was yet another B2B email. However, this time the goal was to drive traffic to a website. Therefore, I again needed to excite the reader enough to click on the link and go to the website. So, of course, I needed to dazzle them with the features, tie in any at-hand benefits, and then drive it home with a sound call-to-action. I remember my client was pleased because I brought in 80% new visitors from their list to the website. And from those visitors, they were able to convert a certain percentage into leads, and later some of those leads became buyers.

The last one I want to mention is a B2B sales letter. It contained all the necessary things we have been going over:

1. *Headlines*

2. *Bullets*

3. *And the very important Call-to-Action.*

Lastly ...

"My final thoughts"

For those who are new to B2B, or just new to the idea of direct response in B2B, I hope you can now see that direct response is very much a part of B2B.

While the long sales letters might be a less attractive form of writing to you, which may be the reason you were attracted to B2B, it is still important to remember that expanding your knowledge and skills is ALWAYS good. So don't brush off direct response completely. In your exploring, surely you will learn more and bring that extra value to your pool of clients.

This article, [Direct-Response in B2B ... Yes, it Exists](#), was originally published by [B2B Writing Success](#).

Published: October 8, 2015

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American Writers & Artists Institute

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924