

MARKETING

# How B2B Marketers Can Get Started with Social Media

by Laurence Minsky and Keith A. Quesenberry

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Many [B2B CEOs](#) still believe that social media isn't right for them. And it's no surprise. The attention being paid to social today mostly focuses on reaching out to consumers. But social media marketing can offer B2B marketers a range of benefits if they take advantage of it, from increasing engagement and influencing decision making before the sales call to customizing sales messages and enhancing their company's reputation.

The [Content Marketing Institute](#) reports that social media marketing can help B2B brands build awareness and showcase their expertise. [McKinsey](#) points out that social media is a great place for B2B marketers to uncover early intelligence on competitor developments and on customer problems, needs, and beliefs. They can also respond to questions and influence the emotional reaction to their brand.

That's because not all social media discussion revolves around B2C products. Rather, customers and prospects *do* talk about business-related companies and subjects on social media, and there are enough social conversations about B2B brands to monitor for brand, product, and service optimization. And the information and reviews these people are providing about B2B interactions carry a lot of heft. One [study](#) found that 62% of respondents said they'd purchase products or services from a B2B company after reading a positive review, while only 42% said they'd purchase from a B2C company after reading a positive review.

In addition, the number of people likely to seek and share a B2B experience is increasing. In a [Demand Gen Reports survey](#), almost all respondents (97%) gave more credence to content that included peer reviews and user-generated content during the B2B purchasing decision process — higher than what was found for [B2C products](#).

Most importantly, B2B companies are proving that social media builds sales and profits for brands. For example, Maersk Line, one of the world's biggest container and bulk shipping companies, has made social media an integral part of its marketing mix by leveraging more than 30 local and global social media accounts. The company uses everything from [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), where, interestingly, it got a sales [lead](#) from a Russian company off one of its posts.

But look beyond the numbers of followers (which Maersk has many of). [Davina Rapaport](#), the company's LinkedIn Pulse and social media manager, has concentrated on exploring social media's influence on customers' purchasing decisions. She's found that an average Maersk customer consumes more than 10 pieces of social media content before calling the company. While the sales conversion may happen after a conversation with a sales representative, if social media accounted for a majority of the customer's consumed content leading up to the call, Maersk knows that its social media program made an impact.

B2B companies need to take this to heart. Instead of ignoring social efforts, they need to engage. Here are a few steps to get started.

1. **Sell in by connecting the benefits of social media marketing to the concerns and objectives of your organization.** Since senior management tends to discount the value of social media marketing, stay away from using terms like “followers” and “engagement.” Rather, show how social media will help the organization achieve business objectives such as generating leads and facilitating conversions. That’s just what Rapaport did. “If I went into a meeting and only spoke about engagement rates and impressions, they’d probably ask me ‘OK, great, 100,000 impressions, what’s that in dollars?’” she said in a recent interview. To gain credibility, Rapaport converts social media metrics into leads, opportunities, and containers sold.
2. **Identify your key audience and goals to achieve.** What do you want your social media program to do? Identify who you should reach and what your aims are. It’s important to note that the social media channels and the content that’s consumed and shared will be very different in the B2B world, so assumptions should not be drawn from B2C case studies. To ensure success, B2B marketers should start with social listening and optimizing monitoring capabilities. Find out where current and potential customers are talking and what subjects they are discussing before creating strategies to influence brand perceptions and identify sales leads.
3. **Don’t rush out with a sales pitch.** In the B2C world, brands tend to focus their social media efforts on generating awareness, driving shoppers to retail, or empowering brand advocates. B2B companies tend to focus on generating leads, a priority that can nudge them into coming on too strong. Instead, B2B brands need to concentrate on engaging core audiences and providing valuable information. When the time is right, and with enough cultivation, the sales will happen.
4. **Determine analytics and how best to track them.** Rather than merely adopting the typical KPIs and tracking tools for B2C brands, B2B marketers need to find the most appropriate metrics for the unique category. In developing metrics, remember that influencing a B2B purchase with social content is much more valuable than a B2C purchase, since a single purchase could be worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. As Rapaport pointed out, it’s not about impressions and shares. Rather, it’s ultimately about the delivery of qualified leads, sales conversation rates, and profits. The B2B marketer’s job is to determine social media’s contribution to those key metrics.

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**Laurence Minsky** is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication and Media Innovation at [Columbia College Chicago](#). He is the author of *The Get a Job Workshop* and *How to Succeed in Advertising When All You Have Is Talent*.

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**Keith A. Quesenberry** is Assistant Professor at [Messiah College](#) in Mechanicsburg, PA. An expert in [social media and digital marketing](#), he is author of *Social Media Strategy: Marketing and Advertising in the Consumer Revolution*.

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