



INTERVIEW WITH

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**B2B Customer Acquisition: The role of human engagement in a world of digital-first enterprise marketing**



**How should sellers of B2B technology products and services adapt to address a generational shift towards entertainment seeking buyers?**

The overload of information and digital media has conditioned all of us to 'tune out' to most advertising. Our minds can only absorb so much data at any time, and typical B2B advertising is full of technical jargon and overused buzz words. Buyers respond to entertainment because it engages the senses and makes them feel something: joy, surprise, intrigue, even sadness, such as with celebrity fundraising after natural disasters. But you don't have to hire Beyonce or start a circus to create effective B2B marketing.

The key is to present your message in a manner that is unexpected and stirs an emotion. For example, at trade shows we often ignore the barrage of wordy signage and highly animated, large-screen graphics, but we may pause to take a second look at a stand where the message is being delivered as a country song, or carved as a sand sculpture, or included in the 'wedding vows' of a bride and groom representing two merging companies. (These are all real examples!)

Humor, music, gamification, and other forms of entertainment can effectively grab the attention of the potential buyer, but it's important to remember 'awareness' is only the first of many steps in a sales cycle. B2B technology purchases commonly involve hefty price tags and significant risk. To help the buyer manage that risk, vendors need to move past entertainment quickly and offer high value resources like education, case studies, and 'how-to' guides to give buyers what they ultimately need to make a decision, which is trust.



**How important are experiences in driving B2B sales?**

I think it is the responsibility of the whole company, not just the salesperson, to create and deliver experiences that engage, inform, and delight buyers across the full customer journey. The salesperson's specific role is to be the trusted concierge to the solution. Just as a guest in a fine hotel turns to the concierge for advice, business buyers will rely on the salesperson who brings something of value to the customer that is useful whether the customer buys or not.

Experiential marketing is not just limited to trade shows. We've seen great examples of this in recent years, such as arranging a virtual round table with peers, building an interactive ROI model customized to each stakeholder, or sending a practical (inexpensive) gift in the mail. One of my favorites was an air freshener reminding CMOs that tracking leads doesn't have to 'stink' if you capture the right data!

By guiding people through an experience that speaks to their challenges and desires, and helps them gain new insights or build useful relationships independent of a purchase, salespeople can build trust with customers. Ultimately, these trust relationships yield better close rates, larger deal sizes, and higher lifetime value from each customer.



**Should sellers be adopting marketing strategies that help buyers build social capital, and what should that look like?**

Everybody wants to be a hero. Everybody wants to go to work and feel like they did a good job, and be recognised for their contributions. LinkedIn is a place where people show pride in their workplace, their company, and their achievements.

As a seller, you can help someone become that hero or champion through social media and other channels. Perhaps you elevate the customer's role by sharing their posts and introducing them to new people who can help them. You may be able to curate content that allows your customer to comment and demonstrate their expertise. When you focus on making a positive impact on people's careers, not just getting the next sale, you increase your own social capital and earning potential.

It's about moving away from a transaction to building a relationship and showing someone you are there to help them shine. This approach has a multiplying effect by driving customer loyalty and generating referrals, because a customer who feels like a hero thanks to you will tell everyone they know about you.



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Carla Fitzgerald is a technology marketing veteran who helps companies grow revenue and increase market value by successfully launching products, capturing mindshare, building pipelines, boosting sales teams, and gaining advocates. As a former CMO, Carla has experience that spans corporate, product, digital, content and field marketing alongside extensive work in business development and sales enablement.

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