



Omnichannel Marketing

Catching Up to the Future of B2B

Private office, Greenwood Village, CO. Turner Construction Company. ©BradNicolPhotography, bradnicolphotography.com.

By Ida Cheinman

Today's marketing is packed with buzzwords. While mostly innocuous (if a little annoying), the buzzword nature of marketing does have one major downside: It makes it too easy to dismiss ideas that deserve attention.

Such is the case with omnichannel marketing—a concept that brings together all the central elements of digital marketing, including data, content, experience, and personalization. In other words, omnichannel marketing is one buzzword that shouldn't be ignored.

But what exactly is it? Isn't omnichannel just another way of saying multichannel? In fact, there's an essential difference: Multichannel marketing simply means

that the marketing message is distributed across multiple communication channels.

Omnichannel takes all the individual channels and brand touch points and creates a single, unified, and seamless experience across the entire customer journey. So, the focus is on optimizing the experience across all phases of customer engagement and across all channels, screens, and devices.

It's more than simply being in front of your customers wherever they happen to be. It's meeting each customer in the right place, with the right message, at the right time—thus shortening the sales cycle and building much stronger, lasting customer relationships.

Additionally:

- Multichannel's value proposition is increased awareness and, possibly, reach as a result of being seen in more places, more often
- Omnichannel's value proposition is increasingly better decision-making at each point of contact, resulting in better engagement and action



Outdoor Industry Association, Boulder, CO. Edifice Builders. ©BradNicolPhotography, bradnicolphotography.com.

Omnichannel = Ideal Fit

Although omnichannel marketing earned its reputation for generating results in B2C, the very nature of the B2B dynamic makes these firms better positioned to capitalize on its advantages.

Revenue depends on relationships.

B2B firms live and die by the strength of their relationships. Omnichannel marketing emphasizes building deeper relationships through understanding customers, becoming more relevant to them, and being truly present with them.

Facts beat assumptions.

The pressure on marketing to be more strategic and accountable—and to demonstrate ROI—is mounting. In omnichannel marketing, decisions are based on hard data, not guesswork.

Room for risk is nil.

With shrinking marketing budgets, B2B firms have even less room for error. Omnichannel's central promise is well-informed decision-making, the first step on the path to reducing risk.

Omnichannel = Improved Conversion

Omnichannel implementation has two essential requirements: understanding the firm's customers—who they are and what they need, want, and expect—and making sure that every touch point is seamless and on brand.

You must:

- Know what the customer is seeking at each point in the customer journey
- Define customer segments (e.g., stage in the customer life cycle, industry, geography, interests)
- Understand which platforms and channels your customers use most for gathering information
- Clarify your brand and have a plan for how you will deliver on your brand promise with every customer interaction

This increased level of understanding and clarity is how omnichannel marketing delivers on its central

promise to help firms make smarter marketing decisions. To achieve that, however, marketers need accurate data and the power of technology.

Both data and technology enable marketing teams to gain knowledge and insight, which translate into improved targeting and, subsequently, improved reach.

The ongoing, deeper learning is also essential to improve the relevancy, consistency, and authenticity of communications and, therefore, the overall effectiveness of marketing programs and campaigns.

Quite simply, omnichannel marketers are always striving to gain a better understanding of what works and identify paths to improvement. Therefore, they're much better equipped to increase conversions at each point in the customer journey and, by extension, improve the overall lead-to-revenue conversion ratio.



Getting Started With Omnichannel

The primary obstacles to implementing omnichannel marketing are the same roadblocks that prevent firms from leveraging any effective strategy.

Today's integrated marketing approach relies on the ability to collect, analyze, and share real-time information across departments, offices, and often continents. And doing so requires a corporate structure, culture, and technology toolkit capable of supporting and facilitating this level of collaboration and transparency.

In fact, nothing will stop a firm from reaping the benefits of omnichannel marketing faster than:

- Functional silos and the resulting lack of communication and collaboration between departments—especially among marketing, sales, and IT
- Lack of modern systems, processes, and technologies, as well as an unwillingness to invest in technology integration

- Limited knowledge and skill sets—in particular, those related to digital marketing
- Resistance to change or lack of the agility required to keep up with the speed of change

Given how detrimental these obstacles are to any marketing strategy, it's worth the effort to overcome them once and for all—whatever it takes. But specific to omnichannel marketing, these are the non-negotiable action steps:

1. Build the right team. To execute omnichannel marketing, you need an integrated, agile, and cross-disciplinary team of people who can bring new thinking and perform well across all skill sets and technologies—whatever they may be today or tomorrow.

You can't provide a unified customer experience if your internal structure doesn't support sharing data and insights. Break down the silos and create a culture and processes that ensure internal collaboration and the free flow of information.

2. Capture customer intel. B2B marketers need to get better at capturing information from every customer interaction and learn to understand and apply gained insights at each critical juncture of the customer journey.

Two applications where customer intel—including real-time data, customer research, and direct feedback—is invaluable are buyer personas and customer journeys.

- **Develop meaningful buyer personas:** The customer is at the center of omnichannel marketing. Understanding your primary decision-makers, beyond a few superficial demographics, is essential. Use buyer persona templates to capture key facts about each customer type and to develop detailed profiles.
- **Map customer journeys:** Develop customer journey maps that depict your customers' needs, challenges, attitudes, interactions, and actions for each stage in their engagement with your firm. Reviewing data and analytics at each touch point will help you tailor communications (online and off) and to move customers along their decision-making path.

3. Respect individual preferences. Different customers want to interact with companies in different ways—and always on their own terms. Some prefer to talk with “real” people; some like finding information, and even taking initial steps online before contacting your firm.

Customer data and analytics will reveal a lot about your audiences' individual preferences, but sometimes it's best to simply ask customers how they prefer to communicate.

4. Keep context king. Delivering contextually relevant messages and content is a priority of omnichannel marketing. The context of each interaction informs the next, and each builds on a conversation already in progress.

Understanding customers' context is what enables marketers to deliver a personalized experience and communications that are tailored to the needs of individual customers at a specific stage in their relationship with your firm.

This not only creates relevance and increases engagement and action; it also saves you from embarrassing mistakes, such as sending communications suitable for the “barely aware” segment to your firm's lifelong customers. We all hate getting messages that reveal that the sender has no idea who we are or doesn't understand our current relationship.

5. Tap technology. Omnichannel marketing's proposition is fueled by insight from dependable data—both gained and applied in real time. To do this, you need the right technical expertise and tools that evolve with your goals and the needs of your customers.

Omnichannel marketing requires tools for mining, analyzing, and sharing data. Firms considering implementing an omnichannel marketing strategy should first realistically assess the capability of their existing infrastructure and technology. However, it doesn't require completely new or expensive technology. What's needed is well within the reach of any size firm—and likely much of it is already in your digital toolbox. ■

See the sidebar, “Marketer 2.0 and the Digital Toolbox,” on page 22 for the technology you'll need to get started with an omnichannel marketing strategy.



Marketer 2.0 and the Digital Toolbox

By Ida Cheinman

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In today's fully digital world, synergy between data, content, and channels is a must. The "digital-first" mindset calls for new tools and the strategic expertise to leverage technology without getting caught up in the hype and neglecting to give customers what they need and expect.

Marketer 2.0 is a savvy strategist who combines new thinking, approaches, and skills with the right technology stack to plan, execute, measure, and optimize marketing campaigns.

In other words, Marketer 2.0 competes—and wins—with a fully updated digital toolbox.

Pivotal Strategies

Internal alignment: Today's marketing requires the ability for different departments (especially marketing, sales, and IT) to combine resources and to share data and insights with one another and the rest of the firm.

Data-driven mindset: Marketing technologies provide firms with critical customer data, but turning numbers into insight and decisions requires marketing analytics expertise, and experience.

Agile process: Adopted from the software development field, the Agile process enables marketing teams to react quickly to changing business and marketing conditions; brings flexibility and faster, more effective decision-making; and increases efficiency and effectiveness of marketing operations.

Customer experience: Customer experience is now both a top business priority and a key brand differentiator. It's also been identified as the primary job function of the future CMO.

Implementation of the above strategies is highly dependent on technology. Whether you have a department of one or 100, each category has options to best fit your needs and your budget.

Must-Have Tech Tools

Content management system (CMS): The CMS allows nontechnical website managers to create, edit, organize, and publish content without knowing a single line of code. In other words, it puts control over your website's content at anyone's fingertips.

Email marketing software: Email remains one of the most effective marketing tools. Even basic solutions typically include the ability to create workflows for follow-up, making them a good starting point for automation.

Customer relationship management (CRM): CRMs are critical sales tools for collecting and managing detailed customer information. They could include email marketing capabilities and some marketing automation.

Marketing automation platform: Marketing automation brings efficiencies in the lead generation/nurturing process and enables marketing teams to provide more frequent, relevant, and targeted communications to different customer segments.

Analytics tools: Data analytics tools allow you to track customer actions across digital platforms and obtain data and insight into customer behavior. Many integrate with other marketing technologies to provide a complete picture of customer engagement.

Digital asset management (DAM): As digital assets amass, firms need a centralized, secure, and accessible place from which to manage graphics assets and media content. DAMs provide a full view of assets, streamline review and approval processes, and help maintain the global consistency of your brand.

Account-based marketing technologies (ABM): ABM targets a select list of valuable accounts with highly personalized communications. ABM-specific technology is what allows such robust personalization to be executed at scale. ■