

What separates the best B2B marketers from all the rest?

If you've been navigating the marketing groups on LinkedIn lately, you've probably run across this thought-provoking question: [Can you use ONE WORD to describe the biggest challenge facing B2B Marketing today?](#) Answers vary wildly from "time", to "noise", to "myopia". All good answers. But I have a different take on this question. Instead, I wonder if there is one word that can be used to separate the best B2B marketers from all the rest. As a consultant to high-tech marketing leaders, I spent the last 10 years working with B2B marketing teams looking for clues, and I think I found the answer.

Empathy. Specifically, empathy with the customer. When marketing teams had strong empathy with the target customer and geared their lead generation and nurturing campaigns around the problems they cared about, their campaigns produced more, better quality leads. When campaigns were centered solely around product features or pricing, they didn't do so well.

A company that cannot fully empathize with its customers can never be market driven. Here in Silicon Valley, our roots come from either sales-led or engineering-led dogma. But the problem here is that these approaches will always run out of steam eventually because market conditions can (and do!) change at any time. Don't think this is true? Let me ask you this: as a citizen, have you ever felt that a company has communicated with you or treated you with a less-than-empathetic attitude? You don't have to look far. I'm willing to bet that a couple of top brand name, Fortune 500 companies come to mind. But these are not bad companies. What happened? When a company becomes so big, or a small company grows so fast, empathy for prospects and customers gets trumped by the insatiable urge to maintain growth, raise shareholder value, and meet expanding quarterly revenue targets. Empathy falls out of style. That's ironic, because it was largely empathy that attracted so many customers to them in the first place. Now, a lack of empathy will cost them customers.

We as marketers are in the best position to ensure that empathy for the customer and prospect is never lost. To achieve this, we need to become the customer's advocate, and for that we need to operate on the [marketing high ground](#).

3 Tools Used by the Most Effective Marketing Teams

Effective marketing teams can be found within global enterprises as well as the newest start-ups. What they share in common is a deep-rooted belief that the customer, not their product, should be the center of their universe. To understand the customer and create a shared sense of empathy across their organization, these marketers take advantage of a set of simple tools and templates to accelerate the planning process while driving true sales-marketing alignment.

- 1) Persona:** They are able to paint a picture of a target buyer to better understand their needs, expectations, values, and the type of content they require at each stage of their buying process. The seeds of empathy are generated in the 20 minutes it takes a small cross-functional team to fill out the [persona template](#).
- 2) Positioning Statement:** They realize that customers always have alternatives. (Sorry Mr. VP of Engineering, but yes there is always competition, even if the competition is the “status quo” or “doing nothing.”) The secret is to map the product to a specific persona (or a set of related personas, rather than trying to target “everyone” at the same time). The [positioning statement template](#) challenges marketers to focus their value proposition on what the customers value most and against only the relevant competitive alternatives that may show up in the target audience’s field of vision. The hardest challenge of the positioning statement exercise is that it demands sacrifice. We know instinctively that it is folly to try to be all things to all people, yet that is exactly what many companies try to do. When this happens, customers have no idea what our product stands for or why they should care.
- 3) The Message Box:** Guess what: it’s not about you. It’s about the customer. Messaging that is not rooted in the persona will only add noise in the marketplace. Clues regarding the right words to use can be found within the persona description and the positioning statement. From those tools we can use the [message box template](#) to hone our own story (i.e. elevator pitch) – a story that will *engage* prospects and invite them to respond with the three little words we are dying to hear, “Tell me more.”

When used together, these simple techniques and templates greatly improve a company’s ability to empathize with its customers. They set the framework for every marketing campaign, product launch, and go-to-market plan. Without it, you can only hope your marketing efforts will produce results. And hope is not a marketing strategy.

About the Author: [Mike Gospe](#) is a marketing strategist, co-founder of KickStart Alliance, and the author of [Marketing Campaign Development](#). His new book, [The Marketing High Ground](#), is a B2B marketer’s playbook describing the best practices

surrounding persona development, positioning statements, and messaging. The book is loaded with illustrations, figures, templates, and examples. Both books are now available on the Kindle.

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