

B2B success lies in solving customers' problems

 By [Warren Moss](#)

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Many of the conversations I've had with CMO's in the B2B space over the last six months - across industries, verticals and categories - have been about how they can position what they do amidst all the uncertainty in the world at the moment and stand out from their competitors.



Source: www.unsplash.com

The answer is that that concern shouldn't be specific to times like the ones we're currently experiencing – it's something that should always be at the forefront of a B2B marketer's mind, no matter what the global situation.

B2B products and services are all, by nature, very similar in terms of their offering, effectiveness and pricing. Many of them are commoditised and can be bought from a variety of companies and providers, so CMO's often come to us over their struggles to remain relevant and access the right audience. Our starting point for them is always asking them to identify the problem they're really solving for a client.



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One of the key influences in what we practice is based on the work of Harvard Business School marketing professor Theodore Levitt and his famous quote about drill companies not selling quarter-inch drills, but quarter-inch holes. The customer has to get a drill, but what they really want is the hole.

While that's a consumer example, it also applies to the B2B space. When a bank is trying to make one of their products more noticeable and appealing, they need to think about their customers' problems and how they can solve them, as opposed to advertising features and benefits that are largely similar to a lot of their competitors'.

Selling business internet solutions is another example – all the major players offer similar products, with similar speeds and features and at largely similar price points. By canvassing its potential customer base, a telco could discover that one of the major pain points is finding a centralised way to manage invoicing and inventory.



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They can then decide if they're in the business internet business or in the 'making it easier to do business' business. By offering customers an easier way to facilitate those processes, they can stand out from their competitors and sell business internet products at the same time.

I struggle with ATL B2B ads that focus on price because that shows that the company's assumption is that the customer knows what product or solution they need. I speak to audiences and target markets across our clients every day about the problems they have in their businesses - when I ask them what product or solution out there will solve it, they almost never know. It's up to the business to understand those issues and communicate that their products solve those problems.

While the B2B marketing challenge remains the same, the most effective advertising channels to achieve that have shifted over the last year or so. Pre-lockdown, companies could rely on people commuting to work in a car, driving by billboards or listening to business radio.



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With far more people now working from home, those channels have very little impact – even under Level 1 lockdown, the roads had a fraction of the previous traffic volumes on them. The obvious solution is that digital is the way to go - reach people on their devices, where they spend most of their time.

While digital media usage is way up, it's also important to consider the volume of electronic communication is what people are now subjected to. When they were at the office, say they got 100 emails a day. Now that they're working from home, that number may have swelled to 250, so there's a lot more competition for their attention - and screen fatigue is real. So the key there is to produce digital content that's valuable to them – not advertising, but content that they can consume because it's entertaining and engaging, underpinned by a subtle brand message.

I've recently seen some incredible examples of this type of work done in the B2C space this year. One which is still coming is a documentary that's been put out about the amazing story of the life of Springbok winger Makazole Mapimpi.

By associating a brand with a compelling story that many South Africans – and beyond – will want to watch, they've created an affinity between the content and the brand which will, in turn, create an affinity with consumers. B2B marketers can learn a lot from examples like this.

ABOUT WARREN MOSS

Warren Moss is the founder & CEO of Demographica, a full-service specialist agency focusing on Business to Business (B2B) and niche consumer markets. What makes Demographica unique is the fact that anthropology (the study of human societies and cultures and their development) is at the heart of all of their strategies. Warren and Demographica have been recognised by winning some major business and marketing awards. Warren is also currently the Chairman of the Direct Marketing Association of South Africa.

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