
RACONTEUR

HOW TO INFLUENCE DECISION-MAKERS

Marketers focus so much on reach and metrics that they forget about influence. But understanding the math and science behind decision-making means you can play the game when it counts



UNDERSTANDING THE MATH

1 REACH \neq INFLUENCE

The difference between reach and influence is that marketers spend all their money and metrics on the former – but what they're actually after is the latter. Getting in front of the right audience is only half the battle – what you 'say' when you show up and they show up is an entirely different story.

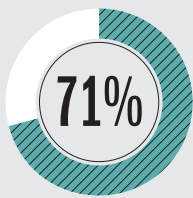
The first step to influencing is not to confuse it with reaching. A staggering 94% of customers have discontinued communication with a vendor because of irrelevant messaging, and 71% of business executives say that branded content turns

them off when it feels like a sales pitch. So while you might be PAYING for reach, that doesn't automatically mean it's a good enough strategy to gain you INFLUENCE.

What's more, if you 'reach' your audience but don't offer them value – or you waste their time – you're at high risk of actually losing influence. Gaining influence is the battle of un-teaching and re-teaching your prospects (and peers) to provide them with new, important knowledge and ultimately be part of changing their thinking or feeling on a particular issue.



of customers stopped engaging with a vendor because of irrelevant messaging



of business executives say sales branded content turns them off

2 THEIR CHALLENGES > YOUR BENEFITS

The 'value gap' between people looking for information on how to address their challenges and marketers trying to sell their product's features and benefits is the stumbling block to unlocking influence.

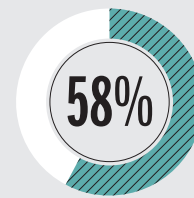
As we pointed out, 71% of business executives say that branded content turns them off when it feels like a sales pitch – but 93% of marketers (that is, almost every single one of them) still link their content directly to products and services. That mismatch is costing marketers the influence they're looking

to score with prospects – because prospects are more interested in how to solve their problems than in why they ought to work with you.

Research says 58% of prospects disengage because sales reps are unable to help them solve business challenges. That means marketing that is totally focused on helping prospects address their challenges is the way to close the value gap and get prospects to believe in the brand and view you as knowledgeable, helpful – and influential.



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THE SCIENCE OF PURCHASE DECISION-MAKING

People are most influenced by their subconscious – 85% of the decisions we make are made by the unconscious part of the brain, and the unconscious part of the brain likes what it knows – what’s “easy”.

So part of the science of winning over decision makers is about understanding the anthropology behind what choices become the “easy” ones to make – those choices are the ones that include, say, going with a vendor they’ve heard of before, or going with a brand that consistently associates with other great brands, or a brand with positive connotations and messaging.

WHAT DOES AN EASY DECISION LOOK LIKE?



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THE SCIENCE OF PURCHASE DECISION-MAKING

EXPLICIT VS. IMPLICIT GOALS

The majority of marketers focus only on explicit goals – these are the benefits we can quantify for our prospects; your ROI will increase by 20%, you'll shave 5% off your budget, you'll be able to count on 9% more inbound leads this quarter, etc. What they're ignoring, however, is that implicit goals count for a LOT – goals such as; I want to be seen as the hero to my boss, or I want to make my workload easier, or I want to be lauded for progress, or I want to be the one to champion a new work process.

But implicit goals are buyer specific and are driven by the individual – so marketing needs to be tailored accordingly. And when it comes to influence, it's the implicit goals that trump all other buying factors except cost.

GETTING PAST AUTOPILOT

Status-quo bias means that decision-makers are more likely to go with what they know than stick their necks out for something new. People make fast decisions and snap judgments and prefer things they already know because they're easier to process – and because they represent less risk.

Marketers therefore need to play that game and work on building enough influence to not be seen as a risky option. According to McKinsey strong brands outperform weak brands by a full 20%, and that outperformance is due to how much traction that brand already has with its audience – so to gain the kind of influence that makes a strong brand and gets people past autopilot, you've got to be present enough in the right places and associated with the right partners.

UN-TEACHING

Information that stands out, is new and is relevant is more likely to affect the way a decision maker acts, according to research on behavioural change. And CEB's theory on Challenger Marketing tells marketers to focus on un-teaching prospects what they know or believe about how their business currently operates – it's a level beyond mere 'engagement' because it does, in fact, challenge prospects, putting them in a position of vulnerability in which they are open to being influenced. They can then re-set purchase criteria in your favour, or with you in mind.

Un-teaching also has a lot to do with presenting new and unique insights – commercial data and analysis that back up what you're saying and help to convince in the short term (and influence in the long term).



THE PLAYBOOK

UNDERSTAND THE DECISION-MAKER IS RARELY ONE PERSON

The average B2B deal now has 5.4 decision makers that get involved or influence the final sign-off. Whereas once upon a time marketing would be segmented to target a specific buyer persona or job title, that no longer suffices – and marketing that targets just one of those 5.4 decision makers will miss the mark, both because each decision maker will have different priorities and because building advocacy in a group is more complex than building advocacy with

INFLUENCE EACH DECISION-MAKER DIFFERENTLY

According to Ogilvy & Mather and AdMap's research, more C-suite executives are increasingly making decisions about technology purchases they know nothing about, resulting in a lot of decision makers choosing suppliers almost solely based on perceived personal value. This goes back to external versus internal goals, and how internal goals win out – marketers and business development teams need to understand who that group of decision makers is most likely comprised of and figure out the qualities or information that make them tick – aside from what can be written down on paper.

BUILD INFLUENCE AT THE TOP TO ENABLE THE BOTTOM

CEOs make the mistake of wanting their junior sales reps to be taken seriously by other CEOs when they pitch their products – but wouldn't give a junior sales rep the same courtesy themselves. It's hard for sales teams to build their own credibility through cold calls and emails, or even at events – by way of being seen as 'junior' they're less likely to be given the time of day, and less likely to be given due consideration.

USE YOUR LEADERSHIP TO DRIVE PERCEPTION AND INFLUENCE

By using senior leadership to help drive influence, you're facilitating influence for those doing the day-to-day work of your business. A senior decision maker is more likely to respect the time of a sales manager if he or she has read great content by the CEO of that sales manager's company, or has seen that company's messages in the right places. Effectively, to gain influence, the leaders of a company need to create a perception of knowledge that has a halo effect on everyone else within the business, which helps them to build influence in turn.

PROVIDE ORIGINAL INSIGHT

Generating new, research-based commercial insight that can help your prospects think through how to address their challenges gets you buy-in with your target audience because it helps you 'un-teach' them what they currently know. It puts you in a position of authority as a knowledge provider, which builds your influence factor. By producing original research and packaging and presenting it to your industry, you're making a statement both about your traction and longevity in your niche as well as about your investment in and commitment to excellence within it.

USE IT TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

By going to market with an entirely different message, focused neither on your product's attributes and benefits nor on how the modus operandi of your prospects is correct just because it's best practice, you stand to pique serious interest and gain credibility by presenting a new perspective that prospects will not have considered, and which forces them to re-evaluate their planning. It's much harder to argue with research than it is with more qualitative reasoning or support such as testimonials – it also puts you in an entirely different league when you go to challenge what people currently do.



A CEO or senior decision maker is more likely to respect the time of a sales manager if he or she has read great content by the CEO of that sales manager's company

THE CHEAT SHEET



TIP 1: HANG OUT WHERE THEY HANG OUT

Senior business decision-makers are time poor. But they do make time for what they love, and what they learn from.


Make sure your marketing, your content and your brand show up in the environments in which your prospects 'hang out' – i.e. where they go for intellectual down time. And, of course, make sure that what you're presenting in those environments is on point.



TIP 2: DON'T BE 100% DIGITAL – UNDOUBTEDLY YOUR PROSPECTS AREN'T

Marketers that spend budget exclusively on online advertising or content are missing out because they're out of touch with the reality of their prospects' lives and habits.

Your prospects don't live their lives entirely in the digital space – so neither should your opportunities to engage, challenge, educate and influence them focus solely on digital environments.



TIP 3: BE READY TO QUANTIFY YOUR IMPACT, BUT NOT UNTIL YOU'RE ASKED

Pitches that appear salesy and jump straight to the numbers often get a bad rapport, unless that prospect has already qualified him/herself.

According to Contently, 74% of consumers are likely to trust branded educational content, but only 45% do so when that content includes a sales pitch. It's important to build influence first without jumping the gun and giving the hard pitch.



TIP 4: AIM TO WIN THE BIG BATTLES OF INFLUENCE AND ADVOCACY

Wasting time with the quality of marketing that gets low-value leads has zero impact on building influence – it engages the wrong people to matter, and it's always about the short term.

Focusing instead on a strong top-of-the-funnel game where you can win the big battles will impact the right names and faces – and will ultimately yield sustainable results.



TIP 5: CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO

People only operate with as much information is available to them – sometimes even less.

If you invest in creating original insights or capitalise on the very latest data, you'll be able to go to prospects with something that completely upends their thinking and execution – and, if you do it right, will get them to listen to you and open the door to a relationship where you're influential.

THE RECAP...

Building influence is about being committed to the value of excellence. And excellence in marketing and communication is about putting yourself, your brand, and your products second to the needs and challenges your prospects and clients care about solving.

The science behind building influence backs this up – of all the reasons decision makers buy, it's rarely the ones we've prepared for.


More often than not, it's because we've managed to speak to some unvoiced doubt, fear or goal one or more of the decision makers has in their mind. To that end, building a high-profile strategy where your leadership has some un-teaching to do, in the right environments and at the right time, will build influence that will serve your whole organisation. The value gap remains to be closed by marketers everywhere, remember, with 93% of marketers

RACONTEUR

Want to understand more about how to influence decision-makers? Get in touch:

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