

How to Shorten the B2B Sales Cycle with Case Studies

By Kent Sorensen

“Getting to yes” has changed since I piloted a direct sales force 15 years ago. Now it takes coaxing with content before a prospect will engage with you personally. Surprisingly, written case studies are still one of the most effective types of content. Read on to find out how B2B case studies get you to yes faster.

First, some evidence supporting the important role of case studies in B2B content marketing.

Case Studies Optimize Content Marketing

According to the Content Marketing Institute (CMI), B2B content marketing is now used by 93% of B2B marketers, up from 91% in 2013.¹

73% of B2B marketers use case studies, and rate them as their second most effective tactic, just behind in-person events and ahead of videos, webinars, blogs and white papers¹.

Yet, B2B marketers struggle to optimize their content marketing strategies. The top three challenges cited by B2B content marketers in the 2014 CMI study are:

- 1) Lack of time (69%)
- 2) Producing enough content (55%)
- 3) Producing content that engages (47%)

Written case studies meet these challenges well because they:

- 1) Take little staff time to produce
- 2) Are easily re-purposed for blogs and articles
- 3) Engage buyers’ minds and emotions

Content marketing seeks build a relationship with the prospect, nudging them closer to the purchase decision. The strength of marketing materials and messages is a key factor in shortening this process.²

This article will discuss three ways case studies shorten the B2B sales cycle: 1) By presenting prospects with the kind of information they need to “know, like and trust” your business, 2) by effectively engaging their emotions, and 3) by supporting the purchase decision with quantified results. Continue reading to find out how.

¹ “B2B CONTENT MARKETING, 2014 Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends—North America,” Content Marketing Institute and MarketingProfs

² “How to Shorten Your Sales Cycle,” MarketingMO.com

Speed Through Know, Like and Trust

Moving prospects through “know, like and trust” to get to the purchase decision takes time and 7-13 touches, according to current marketing thought. B2B case studies speed up the process by addressing all three milestones in a single document, performing like three or more touches:

1. Prospects get know your company reading details about the business, its products and services.

"Phast Online has extensive experience with QuickBooks and other financial applications."

"Concentric Solutions is more than a software development company. They are a trusted business advisor for companies having technology as a core part of their business."

2. Feelings expressed in case studies influence the buying decision. When someone says they like you, others are more prone to as well³.

"I love Phast Online! The time saved allows me to take on more clients with the same staff."

"It just works and I love it!"

3. Positive feedback, quantified results and quotes from customers in case studies build trust, like getting advice from peers when you ask, 'Would you buy from them?'

Does MedPix Hosted save 62 hours per week as MedPix claims? "Easily, and more," responded Williams.

"I would recommend them to similar organizations because of their competency, collaborative spirit and ease to work with. I consider them a trusted advisor."

"The sooner you can lower the trust barrier, the faster you can move your prospect to make a decision."⁴

"Include case studies that document the success of companies that you have served in the past. Any positive feedback or proven results will help assure visitors that they can be confident choosing your business."⁴

³"Emotions Are Contagious—Choose Your Company Wisely," psychologytoday.com

⁴"Content That Helps Shorten Your Sales Cycle," impactbnd.com

Engage Buyers' Emotions

Advertising Mad Men recognized the emotional component of buying decisions over 50 years ago.

"Purchasing seems like a very rational kind of thing, but in fact we don't make decisions rationally. We make decisions emotionally."⁶

A recent trend in advertising, dubbed 'sadvertising,' seeks a stronger emotional response from buyers, and to tell a story that connects with people. Technology companies have employed this tactic successfully in recent product ads, as in these examples: "[No White Flags](#)" (Microsoft), "[Dear Sophie](#)" (Google) and "[Chérie's Verse](#)" (Apple).

Effective B2B case studies also resonate with buyers emotionally, satisfying the need for connection. The customer's own words forge that connection better than any marketer's prose. People relate to other people, their stories, their challenges and their success.

"Really great content, like really great stories, provides the audience with an emotional connection. And as human beings, we naturally prefer to do business with people we're authentically connected to."⁷

A great example is this quote by an IT director at a South Carolina school district from a recent cloud videoconferencing case study:

"These kids come from families that don't have a lot. I will never, ever forget when a reporter asked one of the students, 'What did you get out of the project?' and she said... 'It feels good to help other people!'"

Another example:

One month after launch, the founders of a NYC IT services company entered the World Trade Center on 9/11, just before the first plane hit. The experience forged a business continuity mindset that their small business customers relate to well.

Their customer service performance during hurricane Sandy makes the reader think, "Wow, these people must really care." Here's a quote from a case study about the firm:

"In the days leading up to Sandy, every employee was moved to a support role, checking backups and making sure clients were as prepared as possible. Within 72 hours of Sandy, we recovered all of our 400+ customers. With that effort, we not only kept all of our customer base, we have expanded another 50% since Sandy."

⁶"The Rise of Sadvertising, Why Brands are Determined to Make You Cry, By Rae Ann Fera," Fast Company

⁷"The Future of Marketing Automation," johnsmolucha.com

Support the Purchase Decision

Quantified results in B2B case studies are the proof that buyers often seek to cost-justify the purchase to decision-makers. Numbers satisfy the rational component of the buying decision.

"People don't buy for two reasons:

1) They do not believe their problem is significant enough to take action, or

2) They do not believe the solution will work.⁸"

Superlatives and vague statements about product superiority are not proof. Careful buyers want real numbers to plug into their own situations to support the purchase decision.

"...the projected monthly labor savings exceed 200% of the total project investment."

"VirtualTECH saves over \$15,000 per week in consulting time by using ReadyBoost."

"...saved Peak Software an estimated \$500,000 plus in development costs."

"So the key to shortening the sales cycle and avoiding the "let me think about it" response, is to have proof that your product can do what you say it can do."⁹"



Customers may need assistance in putting numbers to the results they are seeing.

Asking the right questions such as,

Who does this affect?

How much time does it save?

How much do you pay them?

helps writers get the information they need to calculate concrete savings.

Well-written B2B case studies effectively meet today's content marketing challenges. They shorten the sales cycle by developing "know, like and trust," make an emotional connection with the buyer, and provide proof in the form of quantified results. Authentic stories show prospects that you understand their business and know how to solve their problems.

⁸"The Best Way to Shorten the Sales Cycle," inc.com

⁹"Shortening the B2B Sales Cycle," sellergroup.com

Case Studies are Easy to Outsource

Many companies don't have the writing talent in-house to produce effective B2B success stories. Fortunately, case studies are easy to outsource. Some freelance writers may even specialize in authoring case studies in your industry.

All that you need to do is to discuss objectives with the writer and identify the case study candidates, a few of your most satisfied customers.

Call them and ask them to agree to a short interview. If that seems awkward, some writers will do that for you.

A good B2B writer has deep experience in your industry and understands the terminology, requiring little or no time to come up to speed. They know how to research the details and how to conduct an effective interview.

"Case studies... are excellent tools to show how a product or service works in their specific vertical or horizontal domain. This specialized content can have a much greater impact on prospects than a generic product pitch."¹⁰

When choosing a B2B case study writer, find one with matching industry experience that you're comfortable with and ask to see some sample case studies. Then, get ready for some great content and increased sales.



Shorten the Time to a Finished Case Study

To see how easy it is to produce high-quality B2B case studies quickly visit:

www.cloudcasestudywriter.com

Or email kents@mstar.net

¹⁰"Use Digital Content to Shorten the B2B Sales Cycle," greatb2bmarketing.com