

"Albee shows how smart business-to-business marketers learn about buyers, tell a story, and greatly influence the B2B lead-to-sale process. This is your guide for Web marketing success."

—David Meerman Scott, bestselling author of  
*The New Rules of Marketing and PR* and *World Wide Rave*

# eMARKETING STRATEGIES FOR THE COMPLEX SALE

**Differentiate Yourself with Attraction Marketing**

•  
**Create Contagious Content**

•  
**Drive Qualified Leads to Sales**

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**ARDATH ALBEE**

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*Chapter 1*

Why eMarketing Is a  
*Big* Opportunity for  
Complex Sales

What are marketers to do when traditional marketing alone isn't producing the business results their companies need? What if you can double, or even triple, your company's results with the same marketing dollars you have today? Sound impossible? It's not.

But first, it's important to realize that the way your potential customers buy has changed. Prospects are now much better informed. Their ability to access information directly on the Web has changed their expectations about the value and content delivered by vendor communications. By the time they interact directly with your company, chances are they know almost as much about your products as your salespeople—maybe even more. They've talked with their peers and colleagues and checked out your company via online resources far beyond the controlled environment of your corporate Web site.

These changes in the way buyers buy present a powerful opportunity for marketers to incorporate eMarketing strategies into their marketing mix to expand the way they build relationships across all the stages of the buying journey. Trusted relationships are the prerequisite for complex purchase decisions. With buyers staying elusive longer, creating an eMarketing strategy to reach, attract, and engage them through digital content and communications is one of the most important ways you can help to build that trust. In return, your marketing programs will generate higher levels of qualified demand predisposed to purchase from your company.

In addition to e-mail communications, eMarketing can enable companies to create online conversations, assess digital behavior, build virtual engagement, and use their Web properties to create interactive experiences that attract the extended interest of prospective and current customers. To attract and keep the increasingly limited attention of prospects, marketers must figure out how to incorporate the evolving opportunities the Internet empowers for building relationships that shorten time to revenue. The right eMarketing strategy enables marketers to meet their prospects online as trusted experts, engaging and educating them with relevant and valuable information that leads to sales success.

Taking a look into the beginning of a typical prospect's day demonstrates the difficulty of catching your prospect's attention—and the

imperative of “What’s in it for me?” that must be addressed to build engagement.

It’s Monday morning. Jerry arrives at the office running late due to a traffic snarl, chugging a mocha latte. He empties his briefcase, taking a moment to glance through the presentation he finished polishing last night after the kids went to sleep. Jerry’s looking forward to the strategy meeting this afternoon, confident that the executive team will respond enthusiastically to his new pipeline momentum program. Sitting at his desk, he boots his computer and clicks to download e-mail, pleasantly surprised at the appearance of only 182 e-mails waiting for his attention. Noticing he only has 15 minutes before his departmental staff meeting, Jerry starts scanning messages.

His brain immediately starts processing information, looking for senders or subject lines that appeal to him either because they are known or because they hit on an immediate need he’s got. Like all of us, Jerry searches for things that are relevant to him because of his current personal and professional values and requirements.

Jerry’s calendar flashes a reminder on the screen. He’s down to 10 minutes before his first meeting of the day. Part of his mind starts reviewing this meeting’s agenda, another part wonders if he’ll make his son’s soccer game this afternoon, and the rest of it sifts those e-mails trying to deal with the most important first, decide which are useful enough to hold onto, and delete the ones that don’t grab his attention.

If you think your prospects don’t follow the same experience, think again. It’s probably a lot like yours.

To put the problem of company-focused messaging into context, take a look at these e-mail first sentences and Jerry’s likely reactions:

“I wanted to share with you the success of our [company] program which allows marketers to tap an influential group of [company’s] readers for product sampling and reviews.”

*I don’t know you. I don’t know who your readers are or what they could mean for me.*

“[Company name] has spent years perfecting its product for small businesses, leading to awards for both the company and the product and attracting more than 40,000 customers.”

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*This is the first I've ever heard of you. So, if you've tried to get my attention before, it wasn't memorable.*

"If [Company name] has its way, every last one of us will be communicating with video as naturally and regularly as we now use e-mail and our phones, no matter what industry we work in."

*Good for you. So why should I care?*

Each of these first sentences is all about the company sending the message with no indication they recognize issues Jerry is working to solve and how they can help.

- There's no consideration evident about Jerry. He's a busy guy with issues to solve and a daily to-do list that never seems to shorten.
- There's no reason at all for Jerry to keep reading. Unless he's a fan of your company's information, what will engage him?
- There's nothing relevant to anything he's thinking about right now. He's got lots of top-of-mind responsibilities. These sentences don't set any expectations of helping him meet them.

All these e-mail openings are talking about the company that's sending them, not speaking with Jerry about his high-priority issues. Because these messages don't immediately engage Jerry, he deletes them. Talking about your company versus your prospects is status quo. It's evident in the content companies publish on corporate Web sites, microsites, blogs, and in social media exchanges.

Articles, reports, and research findings claim that e-mail effectiveness is declining or that e-mail is dead. Don't believe it. E-mail is a valuable marketing tool, as are the other modes of digital publishing that empower marketers to publish content in real time. eMarketing effectively provides information to all of us every single day—when it's done with us in mind instead of a company.

The reason response and engagement rates are not impressive isn't due to the technology or the delivery method. It's the lack of contextual stories that relate to your prospect's specific situations—their challenges, issues, and opportunities. To attract and engage prospects with your company, you've got to take the time to understand who your audience is and what they're interested in—and why. The better

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you know your buyers, the more interactions you can create that drive business results. Through current eMarketing techniques, companies are able to eliminate cold calling while achieving results such as 375 percent increases in qualified opportunities, 30 percent shorter time to revenue, and more.

### THE SHIFT TO SELF-EDUCATION

By all accounts, the sales cycle is lengthening. More people are involved in making the purchase decision, and each of them has less time. On top of this, innovation is changing the way business gets done faster than ever. Your prospects only have time to ingest new information that stands to impact a current, pressing priority. This is why they've taken control over the information they choose to access and use. They use their time to gain the specific knowledge they need to make confident purchase decisions. Being better informed means they can delay sales conversations until marketing has engaged them with valuable ideas that indicate your company can improve the outcomes they get from solving their problems.

Even as prospects are more informed, the growing complexity of their problems offers marketing an opportunity. By publishing content that shows buyers you understand their problems and can show them how to solve them, you build credibility. With consistent reinforcement that your content is continuously relevant to them, prospects will seek it out proactively. This self-education shift is an invitation to marketers to build better engagement by showing prospects that you've helped customers just like them solve their problems successfully.

The information buyers need is becoming more freely available online. And because of this, there's no longer a big advantage to opting-in to your marketing initiatives. Effective eMarketing strategies have shifted to focus communications to wherever a company's prospects spend time online. The point is now not to capture them, but to attract them. Instead of forcing them into your nurturing programs, use content to entice them to self-identify and ask for inclusion. Once your company is known for delivering valuable

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information, you'll find prospects readily seeking you out to grow a relationship.

However, in order to do this, you have to know your buyers really well. If you don't, someone who does will come along at any moment. Prospects respond when companies "hear" them. They don't have time to figure out how products suit their specific situations. The problem for your prospects isn't in finding products but in getting the outcomes they're tasked to deliver. To do this well, they need advisory vendors who are experts in delivering desired business outcomes. The sooner marketers adjust to the fact that prospects control the buying process, the more valuable marketing will become to your company.

### **SIX THINGS TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR CONTENT AND COMMUNICATIONS**

Once marketers can put themselves into the shoes and perspectives of their customers, they'll gain higher engagement levels and increased credibility. The following six tips expose some of the most common missteps marketers make with their marketing programs. Incorporate these tips into your marketing, and you'll find your focus shifting naturally to your prospects and customers—instead of on your company and products.

#### ***Feeds and Speeds***

Marketing content that revolves around a company's products, features, and statistical outcomes without addressing the context of the prospect's specific situation is not valuable to today's prospects. Feeds and speeds don't affect your prospects unless you've helped them to visualize getting successful outcomes by using them and, of course, unless you've shown them that those outcomes solve the priority at the top of their to-do list.

#### ***Preaching to the Choir***

Instead of developing content from the perspectives of people inside your company, reach outside to embrace your prospects' perspectives.

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For example, instead of talking about a new feature, share a story about why that feature helps prospects get something they need. Where you once would've discussed your solution, start a dialogue about the industry trend that increases the need for what your product does. Focus on generating dialogue interesting to your customers and people like them.

***Impersonalized Outreach***

Inserting the first name of your prospect into an e-mail message is not personalization. A generalized message meant to serve everyone isn't relevant to most. To get personal, you need to focus communications on groups of people with similar interests. Segmentation, as a component of your eMarketing strategy, will help you focus the entire message and content offer on your prospects, not just the salutation. Content that promises to discuss a specific topic should do so, not serve as a thinly veiled sales pitch. Content published on industry-related Web sites must be shaped to serve the interactions happening in that venue. One-size-fits-all content is still the norm for today, and it serves no one well.

***The Fantasy of Control***

People who may have never met each other in the past are now discussing your company and products online. Marketing now has the opportunity to step into conversations never before available, but only if they share in the discussion, not try to control it. You may have lost the ability to control the conversation, but by showing up in a context that is instantly relevant to your prospects, you've gained the ability to help shape those dialogues. Regardless of the spin you'd like to put on something, give it up. Instead, respond to people discussing issues with helpful information that attracts them to seek more.

***One-Off Messaging***

Sending out messages based on the latest product management or executive whim is not an eMarketing strategy. It's a recipe for boring,

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even alienating your prospects. Many marketers fail to realize that content that's not consistent has no story—at least not one that compels your prospects to want to know more. An invitation to a Webinar about the capability of one product followed by a white paper download and then an inquiry about setting aside 15 minutes to chat about some other product doesn't build engagement. An eMarketing strategy designed to engage buyers from the beginning of their buying journey through purchase will help marketers deliver a compelling story their prospects want to spend time with because it's valuable to them.

### *Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt*

Think carrot, not stick. We've established that your prospects are better informed. Painting gloom-and-doom pictures of failures they'll experience if they don't use your products and solutions will turn them off. Instead, develop content and communications that show you understand what they're facing and that you've helped other customers with the same issues solve their problems.

### **OFFLINE VERSUS ONLINE**

The truth about marketing is that someone has to respond to marketing content before you know it's had impact. The difference between offline and online marketing initiatives is that online marketers have more visibility into how people are responding. Marketers know who they're engaging, and what's being said regardless of whether or not prospects respond directly.

Marketing is in the curious position of interacting with a high volume of people they (mostly) never meet personally. Traditionally, marketing measured results with press clippings, direct-response mailers, and the vague circulation numbers stipulated by print publications. With eMarketing, marketers can gauge interest levels and assess a multitude of indicators—such as pass-along value, views of related content, and real-time comments. They can monitor interest expressed by audiences previously unknown to expand sales channels and reach influencers they aren't aware of.

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All this said, there are similarities between online and offline marketing that should be noted. For example, content that flows freely across the Internet and is accessed by people who find it valuable is similar to TV exposure. Companies have spent a lot of money on television and radio without strict correlation with revenue. They spend these dollars to generate awareness, attract people to their products, and engage them with their brand. The more reach, the better, and the Internet expands this opportunity.

But many marketers are wary of allowing content to flow freely online. Just because marketers can gate content doesn't mean they should. In fact, given the information choices available today, it makes a lot of sense to go for the broadest reach and leverage your content to do the heavy lifting. Think about it this way: Instead of a 15-second spot, you can deliver valuable content that people will spend minutes reading. Smart marketers focus on making their content so engaging that readers forward links to their friends, post links on their blogs, and mention what's valuable about the content on social applications. With opt-in and hand-raising the new measures of demand generation, forcing the issue just isn't in your best interests. In fact, why would you want to spend precious time focusing on people who haven't demonstrated an interest in your products and services beyond knowledge transfer? Instead, marketers need to realize that each bit of knowledge prospects ingest from you builds your credibility and expertise with them for whenever the time comes that your products and services answer their needs. When that happens, prospects will happily opt in to learn more about how you can help them.

Online marketing presents unprecedented visibility, intelligence-gathering options, and distribution at rates previously unattainable. Using these benefits, marketers can take action to build trusted relationships that turn into customers.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

eMarketing strategies for complex sales have lots of moving parts and require different ways of thinking than were used in interruptive-style marketing. This book is designed to serve as a complete guide to how

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to create eMarketing initiatives that establish strong connections with your prospects and customers, getting them to buy more often from your company as a result. You'll learn how to build the foundation that personalizes your marketing initiatives and how to engage buyers across the stages of their buying process with progressive nurturing programs. Beyond producing sales-ready opportunities that power faster and more profitable revenues, you'll also gain strategic insights about how to set up salespeople to win more often after the handoff to sales. And you'll see some methods for measuring the impact of eMarketing strategies as valuable components of your marketing mix that directly impact business results.

The sooner you start shifting toward embracing your customers' perspectives and developing high-value content that encourages dialogue, the faster you'll start reaping the rewards. And so will your prospects and customers.

*Chapter 2*

# The Mutual Rewards of eMarketing Strategies

eMarketing can become the driving force behind why your prospects actually make the choice to become your customers. The very nature of eMarketing calls on marketers to get closer to their customers by understanding what's important to them. And when your marketing is backed by a strategy designed to deliver business value, the farther you reach, the better the outcomes. Building online engagement also depends on your ability to develop compelling content. This is next to impossible if you don't write for an audience you understand. When you do, the rewards are plentiful.

*Engagement bling* is what I call the positive results your company gains from sustaining trusted engagement with prospects and customers throughout their buying journeys. The really great thing, though, is that it's not all just for you. Your prospects and customers also receive payoffs from your dedication to eMarketing strategies. And that makes a huge difference in the potential benefits—for both of you.

Let's take a look at the engagement bling for both you and your prospects and customers so you know what you're working toward accomplishing.

## **REWARDS FOR YOUR COMPANY AND YOU**

Building relationships through online interactions delivers value beyond the simple analytics of clicks and views. A complex sale takes a number of interactions to result in a purchase decision. Engagement bling swings the odds in your favor and shortens time to decisions.

### ***Interactive Dialogues***

Interactive exchanges are what transform push marketing to attraction marketing that pulls more prospects into your pipeline. In the traditional push style, marketers broadcast their content to people they select without regard for relevance based on audience perception. The content is usually about the company and its products, followed by a sales offer. The marketing database is treated as a universal clump of as many people or companies the marketer can find that might have

a need for the product the company sells—kind of like throwing stuff against the wall to see what sticks. Push marketers generally take the opt-out approach, making the assumption that unless their audience chooses to “unsubscribe,” they want to hear from you. What happens when companies do that to you? You delete or unsubscribe and generally ignore messaging that wastes your time.

On the other hand, messaging that invites interactive dialogues entices prospects to make faster progress through their buying journey. With attraction marketing, marketers make it worth their prospects’ time and effort to give their permission. Your prospects request to be included in your company’s content delivery plan because they value the information the company provides. Attraction marketing invites such interactions as responses, feedback, comments, questions, and participation. All these activities can be designed to shorten the time-to-purchase decision. Given the increased trust created, prospects pass along referrals to your content, increasing your reach and attraction potential, pulling even more prospects into your marketing programs.

### ***Intelligence-Enhanced Listening***

When your eMarketing strategy presents a planned, consistent delivery of high-value content focused on what drives your prospects and customers, you have the opportunity to communicate with them and learn more about their specific needs. By interrelating your content, each click deeper into the subject matter can be designed to gather intelligence about your prospects. You begin to learn not just that they like to do their research on Tuesdays but also about their interest levels, buying stage, and intention to take action to solve their problems.

Learning to listen to your prospects and customers by creatively designing how you gather intelligence pays off in big ways. If you compare the content your prospects and customers pay attention to with your content map for that topic, you can learn if you have gaps that should be filled. Additionally, you can learn if you’ve missed with your hyperlink wording, or misjudged what your prospects need based on their buying stage.

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Content marketing is never perfect. The ways in which people gather and ingest information are continually evolving along with the nature of the problems they're solving. By enhancing your "listening" with gathered intelligence, you can discover a lot about what works—and what doesn't. Listening is a new skill for many marketers. It requires time, patience, and the ability to exchange your perspective with that of your prospects for the purpose of evolving meaningful interactions. Listening is likely to become the "secret sauce" for effective marketing in an increasingly interactive world that powers increased revenues and profits for your company.

### *Increased Demand*

The goal of marketing in a complex sale is to generate qualified demand that efficiently transitions to revenues. And if you want to increase the level of demand for your solutions, it is critical that you enrich the relationships your company establishes with prospects and customers. Marketing with contagious content operates like a pay-it-forward system for your company. This is because the value your content provides transfers to the value your prospects and customers ascribe to your company. Marketing is like a trial run from a prospect's experience perspective. The better the prospect's perception of the experience your content delivers, the higher the revenues in return.

Influencing the influencers pays you back by generating more conversations focused on your company's ideas and concepts. These conversations serve to aid in escalating the interest people have in your company's products through insights to your company's unique expertise. The more people talk to other people like them about your company's ideas, the higher the growth in demand, and the easier it is to gain consensus from the project team for a purchase decision.

### *Higher Trust*

Consistency in messaging, delivery, and perceived value all add to your company's credibility with prospects and customers. Once prospects trust you to deliver relevant and helpful content, they'll want to hear

more from you and will anticipate working with your company. In addition, being able to apply personalization to improve the quality of relationships is more important than ever in influencing your prospects' buying decisions. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer 2008,<sup>1</sup> people say that they trust "people like me" more than any other source. When you show that you understand the problems and business realities they're facing, people can't help but talk about the valuable ideas you've shared with them and the insights you've provided.

With each positive interaction, their trust in your company will grow. Trusted advisors are much more valuable to prospects than vendors. People buy commodities from vendors. They buy expertise and outcomes from trusted advisors—which means higher and more profitable revenues. And they rely on them long term for continued success. Engagement is a critical component of gaining trust, and that trust is a prerequisite for purchase decisions.

#### **REWARDS FOR THEM (YOUR CUSTOMERS AND PROSPECTS)**

Buyers are focused on the "What's in it for me?" when they search for ideas and insights. Rewarding them with engagement bling when they interact with your content encourages more of them to self-select your company and enter your pipeline.

#### ***Valuable Knowledge***

Your prospects need your help to learn how to best solve their problems. People are being asked increasingly to solve problems that are not within their core competency. They're already overloaded with work before they get this new responsibility. In fact, they're so busy that they don't have time to think strategically. For example, a recent survey of CIOs showed that only 10 percent of their time was spent on strategy; the rest was spent on tasks to keep things running smoothly. People need to acquire knowledge that helps them make the best possible decisions—for their companies as well as their careers. When the content you provide helps evolve how prospects approach problems

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and applies your solutions in ways that work based on their company's unique situation, they can visualize the valuable outcomes attainable from working with your company. People buy outcomes from vendors who understand their businesses.

***Increased Confidence***

Well-executed interactive marketing gives prospects the confidence to reach out to vendors who engage them to validate the assumptions they've made while gathering knowledge. Beyond making the best choices in how they address problems or capitalize on opportunities, your prospects need the confidence to know they've selected a trusted advisor to help them execute projects that deliver the outcomes their businesses require. Buyers hesitate when they're unsure. If they have doubts that they're making the best choice, they tend to make no decision at all. And that outcome isn't good for anyone.

With the right eMarketing approach, prospect interactions grow engagement. With trust-based relationships, your prospects' confidence in your company's capabilities and the increased quality of their decisions grows.

***Useful Conversations***

Engagement helps you to simplify complexity by establishing conversations with your prospects based on their needs. We all know that the buying journey is getting longer. Economic conditions are pushing the time it takes to establish the consensus required to make a decision. The complex nature of business problems, coupled with the opportunities for competitive advantage, makes the decision process unwieldy. With eMarketing focused on your buyers, not only are you sharing knowledge and building confidence, but you're also able to converse with them from their perspective about the specifics that interest them.

The best thing about conversations created through engagement is that your prospects often will initiate them on their own. This mindset is all about the prospect's desire to be in control of his buying

process. With increasing levels of engagement, your company won't be sitting out on the crucial discussions you need to participate in to make the sale. In fact, with a solid eMarketing strategy, you'll have the opportunity to connect salespeople with prospects at that conversational point—seamlessly and fluidly—without missing a step. With conversations focused on providing the business value they need, buyers will make purchase decisions faster, without the need for protracted evaluations.

### *Higher Credibility*

As you nurture your prospects, providing relevant knowledge they need, helping them build their competence in new subject matter, and encouraging them to enter into conversations with—and about—your company, you're building credibility for them and for you. The very nature of an eMarketing strategy for the complex sale dictates that relevance, consistency, and value are inherent in every single interaction. With each impression designed to deliver on these factors, based on the perspectives of your prospects and customers, credibility grows.

Don't ever think that you're only nurturing your prospects to keep yourself at the top of their minds for whenever they decide to buy. Nurturing is as much about your company as it is about your prospects. Your credibility is strengthened by each valuable impression. As they reap the rewards of knowledge that builds their competence in solving their problems, your prospects are enabled to discuss their project objectives with clarity and confidence. This evolution in knowledge, built with your content, contributes to increasing their credibility with project stakeholders. Your intent to help them is clear and must remain pure and transparent. By following these guidelines, you'll see engagement pay off on both sides of the scale—for you and, most important, for them.

### **SHAPING THE STORY**

Engagement bling delivers some great rewards for your company. The way you choose to use your bling will determine just how big

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a part those rewards can play. But it gets even better. By integrating your rewards, you can raise the stakes by applying them to how you shape the continuous story your company is sharing. A consistent and coordinated eMarketing strategy uses integrated building blocks to communicate the overarching storyline you need to generate buy-in from your existing and future customers. This happens when you empower your audience to visualize the success made possible by harnessing your expertise, along with your product or service offerings.

When your words—whether audio, video, or textual—enable customers to step into your stories and see themselves solving their problems in a way that delivers the business value they need, you’ve got traction. Talk is cheap. This is evident every time you have an “About Us” company Web page or bio at the end of a press release that starts off with, “Our company is the leading provider of . . . .” People are immune to the inflated statements companies make about themselves. Even if the statements are true, your customers care only about how that information manifests in reality for them.

The more traction you have, the more power you have to shape (notice I didn’t say *control*) the story around your company’s promise delivery. However, this doesn’t happen in a vacuum. You have to spread your content far and wide to intersect with your prospects and customers—and their peers—online. Until you’re in the conversation, your stories won’t have the traction they need to make a difference.

The mutual value derived from shaping stories is that the people who retell them by visualizing their futures will add to those stories. They’ll share them with their colleagues, peers, and bosses. Your stories will take on a life of their own. Instead of just pushing content out, you need to be focused on pulling the threads people evolve back inside your company. They’ll help you to continuously shape and develop new directions for your stories that meet the evolving needs of your customers.

You see, shaping also goes both ways. There’s mutual value in the insights you help your prospects and customers understand, as well as the reciprocal value you receive when they put their own spin on them. To get the best results, you’ve got to start with the imperative to really and truly get to know your customers.