

# Buyer Journey Marketing Is Hard: A Five-Step Guide to Making It Easier

By: Tom Jacobs

While “customer-centric” is hardly a novel marketing approach, we’ve recently witnessed a great deal of refinement around what it means to be truly buyer-focused in an organization’s marketing and sales activities.

This is in part being driven by the great deal of control the buyer now has around when, where and how they engage with a brand—Forrester recently reported that 75% of the purchase decision is completed before sales is contacted. And by their account, the buying cycle is no longer a neat three-, five- or six-step circle, but a veritable labyrinth that crosses media formats and engagement tactics.

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So what does it take to actually implement buyer journey marketing from a lead generation perspective? Organizations who ask the question need to be prepared for a daunting response. But if approached in the right way, it is possible to achieve the Holy Grail that is buyer journey marketing. More importantly, even baby steps can yield results. Industry veteran and President of Jacobs Agency, Tom Jacobs, shares what to expect and offers five crucial guidelines for organizations that are considering the plunge:

- Prepare your marketing and sales teams for a shift
- Don’t guess at buyer needs
- Step up your segmentation
- Commit to content
- Get ready to manage multi-channel execution

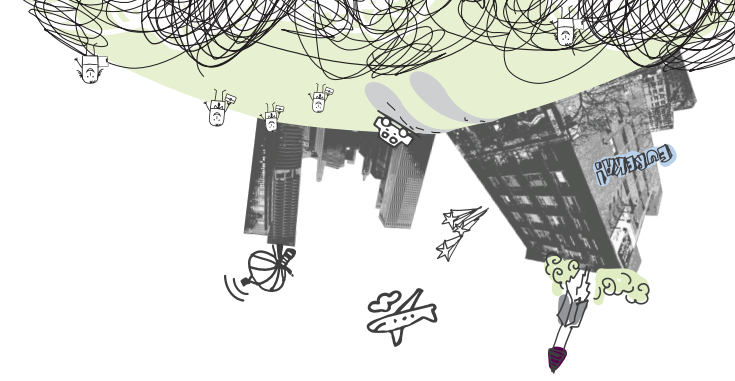
## Prepare Your Marketing and Sales Organizations for a Shift

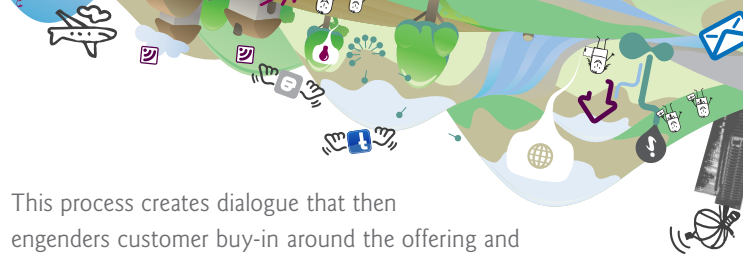
The product/solutions team hands off a shiny new offering to marketing and tells them to launch next quarter and start building the pipeline. Marketing then develops campaigns and content focused on the business benefits of the product/solution, assuming that there is an established need for the offering among the customer base. Sales wants to be the dominant channel of communication and deliver the content to customers.

Sound familiar? This is often what we observe in organizations prior to their becoming more customer-centric and exploring how to shift towards buyer-focused marketing.

The process through which to take your offerings to the marketplace has to start with customer needs—what challenges they are facing now and what they’ll be dealing with in the near future. Marketers today have to understand if these needs are apparent to prospects, or if they are yet unrealized at the beginning of this decision-making journey. We can no longer start from products/solutions and assume all customers are ready to buy. The go-to-market driver must shift from the organization’s need to roll out new offerings or increase market share, to the customer’s desire to resolve a business issue.

Organizational processes need to be reevaluated through a customer-centric lens. Too often we find marketing departments supporting numerous internal





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groups with independent goals that touch all of the same customers and prospects. Your marketing and sales processes and metrics need to be aligned to support the buyer-focused approach.

### Don't Guess at Buyer Needs

Many businesses make assumptions about their buyers' needs. Sometimes the gaps between what customers are seeking and what you are offering are significant. Take the necessary time to research your prospects and the industry to gauge what they need right now and where there are future opportunities. Remember, customer needs occur prior to a customer knowing what you're trying to sell.

Helping your customers realize their needs is also part of delivering value in your business relationship. When your communications and content help a customer recognize a need, they will often perceive your company as possibly best poised to meet that need and deliver that product/solution. Additionally, there is tremendous value in being the organization that has uncovered previously unidentified needs—opportunities that can be capitalized on.

Conduct primary qualitative or quantitative research and supplement with secondary data—even the simplest in-depth interviews can help to frame buyer needs differently and often add more relevance to your messaging. Another successful tactic is to establish a customer council to uncover needs, identify obstacles to purchase decision, and foster an environment where organic co-creation can occur.

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This process creates dialogue that then engenders customer buy-in around the offering and starts to cultivate the need for a product/solution.

Uncovering customer needs can also add value to your company's approach to new product/solution development. Too many times we have observed R&D or innovation teams push out products/solutions with the objective of simply offering customers something new which doesn't necessarily address a business challenge or customer pain points. In this time of heightened expectations, customers want companies to be attuned to their wants and needs. The misstep of promoting something they really don't want or need may be misinterpreted to mean that your organization lacks an understanding of their issues, interests or needs. The expectation of all marketing communications today is that the customer's behavior should dictate what comes next. There's a reason why Amazon.com is regarded as the paragon of customer clairvoyance.

### Step Up Your Segmentation

There's no easy way around it—moving towards buyer-focused marketing requires another filter on your customer segmentation, and it's challenging to segment by buyer behavior or stage of the buying cycle. One question companies frequently have is how to identify buyers by stage and start the difficult process of segmentation. Our observation has been that marketers can use their initial campaign touch points to uncover where prospects are in their buying journey, and allow the prospects' actions to define where they are on the continuum in the decision-making process.

Communication touch points will require a wider range of potential responses, engagement beyond just interested versus not interested. If you only allow for one outcome, you will be at this stage of segmentation for a long time! Your marketing campaigns should offer “forks in the road” to uncover current needs, different stages of buying, content preferences and more. We have also seen that some industries have distinct groups of buyers with

varying buying personas, each with different preferences for how to conduct their discovery and evaluation of a new product/solution.

Many organizations have taken big leaps toward becoming more account-focused with their marketing efforts. They treat individual organizations as markets of one. When you extend that idea to segmenting by buyers, it seems quite daunting. Every organization should try and find an aggregation of behaviors or buyers in various stages. You don't want to end up segmenting your lists excessively for no real gain and then become paralyzed by how much customization needs to take place.

### **Commit to Content**

Implementing a buyer-focused approach can grow your content needs exponentially in a blink of eye. One of the first steps we recommend to our clients is to conduct a content audit and organize all previously developed content by the various phases of the buying cycle. Does your point-of-view paper uncover a need or does it help a prospect evaluate their various options? A case study could help deliver reassurances and minimize concerns to move forward with a decision but also could build the customer need to buy.

There is no way around it—you will need to commit to creating more content. By conducting an audit,

you will find gaps as you begin to engage your prospects. We often find that organizations that succeed at keeping up with content demands tend to establish an editorial calendar to remain focused and extend each piece of content into multiple phases and vehicles to suit the buying journey.

### **Get Ready to Manage Multi-Channel Execution**

Marketing automation is a critical tool in fulfilling buyer-focused marketing challenges across multiple channels. It's essential to capturing buyer behavior and automating the next touch point. By knowing what each person does next, we can better understand where they are in the buying process and what is the next communication or sales step we need to take to advance them towards purchase.

The reality is that buyer-focused marketing is challenging due to the sheer expansion of segments, the need for more campaign versions and the growth in nuanced content needs. Marketers need to be realistic in their shift towards this approach. While multi-channel communications and marketing automation are essential, these are not the only hallmarks of becoming buyer journey-oriented. It starts in the organization's processes from innovation, product/solution management, customer segmentation and marketing strategies.

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**Source:** Wizdo, Lori. "Buyer Behavior Helps B2B Marketers Guide The Buyer's Journey." Forrester Blogs. October 2012. [http://blogs.forrester.com/lori\\_wizdo/12-10-04-buyer\\_behavior\\_helps\\_b2b\\_marketers\\_guide\\_the\\_buyers\\_journey](http://blogs.forrester.com/lori_wizdo/12-10-04-buyer_behavior_helps_b2b_marketers_guide_the_buyers_journey).

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