

How Buyer Trends Are Impacting The Future of Business Thinking

By Tony Zambito



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Introduction

Conventional business thinking today is being challenged more than ever today. The prolonged recession economy, rising global pressures, continuing advancement in social technologies, and rapidly changing buyer behaviors are significantly impacting business. Requiring business leaders to constantly adjust their views and thinking on how to succeed in today's hyper-connected and hyper-competitive business marketplaces.

In this ebook, notable buyer trends are presented within the context of how conventional thinking may need to change to align with new buyer behaviors affecting purchase decisions. We take a look at what future trend is evident, what CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's must do, and how the future may look as a result of future buyer trends.

It is hoped that this eBook will serve as a reference and guide to business thinking in the future and beyond.



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Think Experience Creation vs. Content Creation



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

During the past two years, we've seen a significant rise in focus on content and how content is the new marketing. While some may debate that content marketing is messaging in new clothing, it is now a competency that marketing executives need to assure getting right. We've learned in the past few years about the value as well as the role content can play in the early stages of buying processes. In light of the heightened and almost frenzied attention paid to content marketing, there has been much written - and I'm sure internal meetings held in corporations all over the world - on the "how-to" of content creation. This has led to a crying game in the corporate halls bemoaning the need for publishers and journalists to come in and help.



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

Content creation has become a driving force in marketing and sales organizations. So much so, buyers today are faced with the unintended consequences of information overload and content fatigue. They are often faced with the daunting task of sorting through myriads of information that will allow them to learn and hopefully help them to make an informed purchase decision. In essence, a buyer trend is evolving whereby managing and filtering information is becoming overwhelming.

Experience, as a unique form of competitive advantage, has suffered through its own identity crisis during the past decade. Customer experience has had the unintended consequences of being identified as predominantly beefing up customer service capabilities. At the same time, we have seen companies who have done admirable innovation of truly unique experiences that cut across an entire organization's functions.



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

What we are seeing today however is resurgence in the original intentions of [The Experience Economy](#) as put forth by [B. Joseph Pine II](#) and James Gilmore. That is, people - be they consumers or B2B buyers - want to be part of an experience in its totality. They want to enter stage left or stage right into a theatre of experience and onto the business stage being offered.

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's Do?

I chose to use the word *creation* intentionally to label *from content creation to experience creation*. Both require that mixing of skill, talent, knowledge, and intuition to put forth something new and creative. What C-Suite leaders can do is begin to shift the focus from purely on content creation and lead the organization to see the context of the end game. The end game being creating experiences that provides a stage in which buyers can play a leading role. This requires new thinking.



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

What may sound like a semantics difference is truly a corporate mind shift that must occur. While on one hand it is important to provide excellent customer experiences, on the other hand it is entirely a different matter for an organization to see themselves as *experience creators*.

Instilling such a mind set into corporate culture is no easy shift. Companies seeing themselves as experience creators' means looking at content creation in terms of how it fits as an essential piece of creating an experience buyers want to be a part of. It requires the C-Suite to discover new talent that can in effect create a theatre of experience. Using the metaphor offered by Pine and Gilmore, leaders today will need to find producers of experience and find directors who are skilled at interweaving content, conversations, interactions, and roles into the production of buyer experience.



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

Content creation can be likened to, in this metaphor, as scriptwriting. Writing content that makes the experience vision and the artful direction required come alive for buyers. The focus becoming one of creating content that fits into the overall vision of the experience and discovering, just as scriptwriters write in pauses and silence, that less can be more.

The Future

As we look to the future, the C-suite will in effect become the producers and directors of the experience theatre a company builds. Allowing buyers to participate in as well as experience a story on a business stage that unfolds and marvels them each and every time. One of my favorite theater productions has been *A Chorus Line*. No matter how many times I see it, I still get emotionally wrapped up in the story, the script, the music, the choreography, and the experience of the production.



1. Buyer Trend: Overwhelmed By Content

Organizations today must create their own version of the longest running Broadway show that buyers want to return to and revel in the experience more than once.

While the corporate hallways may be filled with talk bemoaning the need for the talents of journalists or publishers, the C-Suite who sees themselves as experience creators will have a keen eye towards finding the brilliant producing, directing, and scriptwriting talent that can build a theatre of experience. Creating a theatre of experience that builds the anticipation, engages buyers in the story, and has them talking afterwards – each and every time.



Think BIG Insights vs. BIG Data



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

Evident over the past two years are monumental shifts that are occurring in buyer behavior. We've seen buyers entering the buying stages in unpredictable ways and deferring direct interactions further down the buying process. There have been generational differences noted between the rise of the younger social buyer as well as hybrid behaviors of traditional buyers. Buyers at first seemingly consuming information at a rabid thirst pace while other buyer groups demonstrating content fatigue and rejecting content outright.

Rather than rehash the mountain of information that can be found about what buyers are exhibiting, suffice to say that buyers are adapting, changing, evolving, and developing new processes along the way. We know, to a degree, what buyers are doing. And data-driven marketing and BIG data has become BIG business to tell us what buyers are doing.



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

In the past two plus years, we are seeing a rise in the analytical push and explosion in the want for data. This is turning into a Catch-22 dilemma for C-Suite executives. While research can be found that data-driven companies do outperform non-data driven companies, the C-Suites in corporate worlds can be drowning in data and can never hear the still voice of their existing customers and prospective buyers. This dilemma is most certainly compounding the issue of unpredictability about buyers in the future.

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's do?

There is no question that the C-Suite and perhaps in particular the CMO is under constant duress to figure out how to find the right mix of products, services, and experiences that make loyal customers and wins over prospective buyers.



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

I suspect that on any given day of the week, a C-Suite member is pouring over the data explosion taking place and attempting to decipher what insight can be useful for predicting how buyers will behave and buy.

Here's a problem we all know business has. When it comes to looking at the future – we just do a plain bad job at it. We've been trained, conditioned, brainwashed, whipped, and had the fear of the devil put in to us to rely on BIG data as a way of planning and predicting the future. And to some degree, analytics and data help us to find out what buyers are most likely to do in the future. But, is BIG data on its' own a reliable measure of outcome? While I am not certain, I am willing to guess that the 80/20 rule applies here with 80% of the C-Suite not being able to give an affirmative yes to that question.



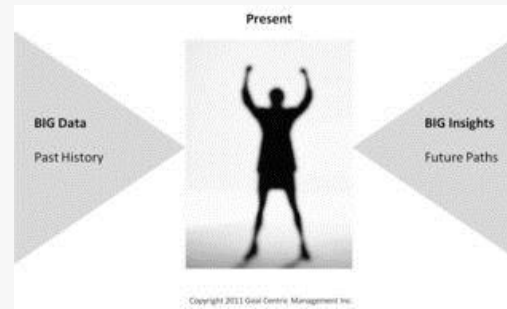
2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

What the C-Suite needs to do is balance the equation on finding out how to predict as well as meet buyer goals. The C-Suite of the future will come to rely on BIG insights and see such interwoven into their strategy planning. By BIG insights I refer to the qualitative nature of research that gets to the most important questions of how and why buyers behave as they do to make purchase decisions. Giving us the BIG insights that can help us to plan for a future in ways buyers have yet to envision even for themselves.

The C-Suite today must add BIG insight to the equation of being informed about buyers and making sound decisions that will put them on their existing customer's and prospective buyer's computer or tablet screen consistently.



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing



The problem that has always plagued BIG data is that it is an analytical view of past results – it is rooted in a past-to-present orientation. And past results are important. I am not saying they are not. What I am saying is that buyer behavior is changing so rapidly that the C-Suite must balance out the equation to attain the deep understanding of buyers that is focused on future orientation. An equation that leads to BIG insights that also shapes the organization’s future relationships with existing customers and prospective buyers.



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

The Future

In the present and in the future, C-Suite leaders will be called to lead their organizations in distinguishing between data that is factual in nature and insights which helps to inform decisions. This is where it gets tricky. The existing dialogue about BIG data uses language about insights – and to be sure there is insight to be had quantitatively. However, there are BIG insights to be had qualitatively that propel the organization forward into a future that they co-create with existing customers and prospective buyers.

The C-Suite of the future will look at shifting resources to be more balanced between quantitative data and qualitative insights that are achieved through mixed qualitative investigative methods. The quest for deeper insights will grow as it becomes the path to finding ways to differentiate in a constantly changing social world.



2. Buyer Trend: Buyer Behavior Changing

What buyers are saying today is pretty simple. They are saying “you are not going to get me just on numbers and facts.”

Buyers are evolving a new expectation. That is, they want you to “get” them qualitatively and they want you to “get” them in ways that will help them.

What I’ve discovered through qualitatively research is that while today buyers want to self-direct their own buying processes and minimize sales involvement, they are future oriented towards committing to a relationship that will help them grow.

Are you ready to invest in the BIG insights that will guide your organization to exactly what that relationship is suppose to look like?



Think Demand Fulfillment vs. Demand Generation



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

The conventional as well as social buyers of today can be said to be on a quest to have their demands fulfilled. *Demand* being, for the purpose of this article, the catchall phrase to represent a buyer's desire to have their goals realized, challenges met, problems solved, and concerns alleviated. What the convergence of the Internet and the Social Age has proffered is the ability for buyers to chart the quest for meeting their demands with much more control, participation, and engagement than in any time in history.

The significant buyer trend of the past decade has become the blinding obvious – we know that buyers are self-directing 70% to 80% of their own buying process. This trend is profoundly changing the landscape of business in macro as well as micro level ways. It is the under layers of this trend that is having the most affect on marketing and sales in terms of the thinking towards demand generation.



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

I have emphasized thinking in this eBook due to how trends require us to reshape our thinking. *When you change the way you think about things, the things you think about change.*

One of the things we need to change our thinking on – and what is meant by the under layers – is what happens when buyers find you? If our thinking is still in the context of push and generation, then there will be little difference in whether buyers found you or you found them. Their thought processes are becoming more complex and intelligent engagement is what they seek to help them get their demands fulfilled. What do buyers find – when they find you? Do they find themselves akin to being in the middle of Times Square with flashing billboards, bright lights, and the consistent horns of taxi cabs? Are they bombarded by insistent push messaging – loaded with the conventional features and benefits dogma they've come to loathe?



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

Being in the business of buyer personas for over a decade, I've seen companies still have this thinking despite having personas right in front of them. The fatal flaw being buyer personas were developed as profiles with push messaging and demand generation thinking as opposed to how to fulfill the goals of buyers. Buyers today have a sixth sense and becoming astute at knowing the difference in how an organization is thinking. The under laying aspect of this trend is this: *what buyers are seeking today is to have their own demands fulfilled - not to have your demands for generation met.*

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's Do?

The C-Suite today can begin to look at what really is going on in its' interactions with existing customers and prospective buyers. Questioning whether the incessant need to hit short-term quarterly results is blinding them to the need to shift their thinking.



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

In essence, finding that the drum keeps beating loudly on urging the troops to push harder and harder. Evaluations can be performed to look at interactions and determine whether they are being used as an opening to push message or are they being made into an available opportunity for buyers to have their demands fulfilled.

CMO's can begin to look at how to develop fulfillment models based on the demands of their existing customers and prospective buyers. Fulfillment modeling will thus become an important new competency. By fulfillment, I do not mean the mere availability of information and content as in the early days of direct marketing – where collateral was king then. I do mean that CMO's will have to lead efforts to develop an appreciable deep understanding of the demand fulfillment goals and scenarios that drive purchase decisions.



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

When buyers are in the 70% window of self-directed activity or in the 30% window of direct engagement, CMO's and CSO's can ensure that buyers are able to connect in ways that allows them to continue their quests to have demands fulfilled. As opposed to push messaging, buyers find tools and logic available to them that help them in their pursuit. What CMO's and CSO's have to be on guard for, especially in light of the growing role of content strategy and content marketing, is if their content is more of the same – push messaging – or is it truly serving the purpose of demand fulfillment.

The Future

Perhaps I am playing on words and semantics. I think not. My many conversations while engaged in qualitative investigative efforts is telling me that the future will require a shift in thinking on exactly what takes place when buyers find you.



3. Buyer Trend: On A Quest To Be Fulfilled

How organizations think on whether they are performing demand fulfillment or demand generation will be reflected in how buyers find organizations to be when they do find them. Changing thinking and getting results from that change is one of the hardest undertakings an organization can go through.

The businesses of the future who think demand fulfillment first will find a new world of opportunities opening up to them. It opens the road to creative and innovative ways to engage buyers in helping them to have their demands fulfilled. Developing fulfillment models that no longer force buyers into the tired framework of push and generation – a framework that still exists and cannot be disguised with the label of content marketing or the technologies of social business.



Think Buyer Network vs. Buyer



4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

As many B2B organizations know, when dealing with complex selling situations, identifying the influences on buying processes and the purchase decision is often the most difficult challenge faced by marketing and sales teams. This is doubly so as we enter a new world order of business models altered significantly by the convergence of the Internet and the Social Age. The traditional views of how business is conducted and the buyer-seller relationship operating in a vacuum are running out of steam.

A key trend that is altering the landscape of conventional buyer-seller models is buyers are developing complex networks that engage in collaboration whereby decisions are not made in isolation. The buyer network acts as a collective form of collaboration with each node of the network directly influencing purchase decisions. In addition, the buyer network is expanding.



4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

External collaborators such as partners, suppliers, communities, and valued customers are participating in the buyer network with direct influence on decisions. This emerging development makes each “node” not only an influencer but an activate participant in the purchase decision. While there still may be an ultimate buyer, the buyer is guiding each node of the buyer network in collaborating on meeting financial, technical, strategic, and productivity goals.



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4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

My work in originating buyer persona development led me to collaborate with three Fortune 100 companies on developing a *Buyer Persona Ecosystem™* view of buyers. This is now evolving into what I call a *Buyer Persona Network™* view. Understanding an ecosystem is the foundation for understanding how a buyer network is formed and how it behaves. One element we've come to learn is that a singular view of a buyer today is woefully inadequate in complex B2B marketplaces. Let me echo a recent interview with a head of sales for a large IT service provider:

“We had an opportunity with an existing customer where we knew they had about an \$18m spend annually on our type of services. For the past two years we’ve been only getting about \$2m of that spend. What we learned recently is that one of their key partners considered our services to be inferior. We had no idea and it really put us behind the eight ball.”



4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's do?

The implications that results from the emergence of buyer networks are no doubt enormous. They will shake the very foundation of our existing thinking on how buying gets conducted and how decisions are made. Today's C-Suite will need to adjust their own views of existing customers and prospective buyers. The power of "group think" really does begin with the kool-aid organizations drink. If you are drinking a single view of a buyer and the mantra of pushing harder, then the organization will eventually pass out from this toxic mix.

The modern C-Suite must enable an organization's fundamental understanding of emerging buyer networks and adapting operations such as marketing and sales to account for this emergence.



4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

A place to start is to improve the organization's insight as well as intelligence in two distinct areas:

- Identifying relevant buyer networks for their existing customers and prospective buyers
- Identifying how different scenarios impacts a buyer network and how the weighted degree of influence changes



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4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

For CMO's and CSO's in particular, working together on developing the mix of conversation and interaction that meets the goals of the buyer networks relevant to their industry is crucial to longevity. Buyer networks will continue to expand and grow. Not having a deep understanding of the tools used by relevant buyer networks, how buyer networks interacts, and the desired outcomes of buyer networks will in essence cause their own efforts of pushing harder to hit a brick wall. Long held perceptions about buyers and the role of influencers will begin to fade away as buyer networks and collective collaboration on buying and purchase decisions emerge.

The Future

In the future, the relationship between selling organizations and buyer networks will begin to look and relate differently than the buyer-seller relationship of the past.



4. Buyer Trend: More Complex Networks

The buyer of the future will have a different set of skills to go along with a new mindset of collaboration. The connected buyer of the future will help to guide this new form of collaboration in ways that will no doubt change rapidly as new technologies are introduced. Engaging with such new technologies that enable collaboration amongst organizations and reshaping our thinking on existing models of business relationships.

One way for organizations to stay on top of this emerging trend is to earn a very special privilege. That privilege being to earn the right to be a participating member, or node, of relevant buyer networks. Whether it is as a supplier, partner, or even a customer themselves – there is much to learn in this new form of collective and connected collaboration. Are you ready to start learning?



Think Buyer Decision Model vs. Buyer Journey



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

Decision-making in business is undergoing its most significant changes in modern business history. For decades, business decisions were almost exclusively hierarchical. The convergence of the Internet and Social Interactions has produced a movement towards flattening models of decision-making. This is enabling more participants and more involvement in decisions that affect organizations. Buying decisions are not excluded from this profound movement.

The previous trend explored, *Buyer Network*, provided the first clue of how buyers are establishing networks for co-creation as well as co-deciding. In essence, new enabling technologies and the flattening of organizational decision-making are allowing members of buyer networks to have more “say” in purchase decisions. This is drastically changing buyer decision models.



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

There are four elements of buyer decision models that are being altered as a result:

Context: new contextual scenarios are emerging in the modern business era that affects decision-making in general business – including purchase decisions. Business as usual no longer exists and buying as usual no longer exists as well.

Goals: buyer goals have become more elastic and buyers are considering more input and alternatives to overcoming obstacles to achieve goals. Additionally, what we are seeing is more interdependencies, made evident by expanding buyer networks, on achieving goals.



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

Process: the buying process, or the more recent trendy description of buyer's journey, is undergoing change as well. Well documented over the past two years is how buyers are typically up to 70% into their buying processes before encountering direct sales interaction. This means that stages of the buying processes are not as clear as they once seemed and that the standard textbook views of buying processes or the buyer journey needs reviewing.

External: the global marketplace as well as the global economy is proving to be a disruptive force in buyer decision models. This is resulting in a more careful examination and scrutiny of decisions on an organizational level. The affects of higher degrees of uncertainty, risks, shifting markets, and changing buyer behaviors are becoming long-lasting.



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

What is clear today is that these four metamorphosing elements are directly impacting the *how* and *why* of buyer decision models in ways unimaginable just a decade ago. These elements also have a direct impact on buyer behavior with respect to purchase decisions.

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's Do?

The C-Suite of today can begin to gather business insight into changing decision models of organizations and consequently buyer decision models. Using explored business insight to expand their sphere of understanding beyond that of just the buying process or buyer journey. The general pattern for decades has been to view the buying process or the buyer journey linearly or from a circumference viewpoint that appeared symmetrical. The reality today is that buyer decision models may have appearances akin to disparate networks and at times be very asymmetrical.



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

This development is creating the need to understand how to connect these disparate networks of decision-making. C-Suites may find this occurring in their own organizations and can begin assessing how this is plays out in the markets they serve.

In a recent qualitative study I was fortunate to be a part of for a Fortune 100 organization; four specific vertical markets were looked at. What business insight uncovered were four distinct buyer decision models for each of the vertical markets studied. While the buying processes or buyer journeys had consistencies across each of the vertical markets - with various stages being omitted by each, the models for decision-making were distinctly different. This led to senior members of the organization to focus marketing and selling efforts more proportionately on buyer decision models as opposed to a strict buying process orientation. This also meant shifting resources vertically as well as redesigning their conversations with existing customers and prospective buyers.



5. Buyer Trend: Decision Models Are Changing

What CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's can begin to ascertain is *how* buyers are making decisions (i.e. their buying processes) – what is even more important in today's business climate is to understand *why* buyer decision models are transforming and to adapt accordingly.

The Future

Future trending suggests that buyer decision models will become more complex. While the technologies of social business and Enterprise 2.0 enable more flattened decision-making, they also create more complex buyer decision models. Subsequently then, more complex buying processes or buyer journeys emerge as an element of transformed buyer decision models. The C-Suite and organization of the future will need to become adept at understanding, through business insight, how purchase decisions are part of – as well as adhere to - newly forming organizational models of decision-making.



Think Intelligent Content vs. Content Mapping



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

A growing need for existing customers and prospective buyers today is that of furthering their intelligence on how to tackle problems, meet challenges, and accomplish goals. While many may have college degrees or M.B.A.'s today, nothing has prepared them for the avalanche of rapid changes, tumultuous economic conditions on a global scale, and technological advancements on a scale never seen before. These global, economic, technological, and market conditions are changing the very nature of how people search and what they learn. *Knowledge and Intelligence Search* is becoming more prominent.

The growing surge of content as a strategy and a marketing tactic has resulted in the unintended consequences of content proliferation and a burden on the part of buyers to sort through a continuous stream of messaging in various forms.



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

Messaging has been the dominant practice of marketing as well as sales for decades and despite the new label of content marketing - continues unabated. It is a habit that does not fade easily. Push messaging is clearly still happening through content marketing as one buyer interviewed suggested:

“The amount of incoming emails and information nowadays is just too much. There is just not enough time in the day to go through everything. And frankly, it still amounts to marketing promotions that I just don’t need. Way too busy for that!”

Contributing to this issue is the focus that’s been placed on content mapping. The idea of mapping content to the buying process or the trendy name of buyer’s journey has some inherent built-in problems.



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

First, it suggests we presume to know exactly how buyers navigate decision-making through the prism of just the buying process. As mentioned previously on buyer decision models – not only are decision models changing but so are processes. Buyer decision processes do not come in generic form.

Second, mapping to the generic buying process has actually resulted in a constant stream of content that leave buyers gasping for air on intake. This is true when content marketing and mapping are viewed in the context of sending out more messaging - with the presumption that they are relevant.

Thirdly, there are in-house attempts as well as B2B marketing consultants who offer misguided knowledge of buyer personas as targeted profiles. This very notion embeds push messaging into plans that are created on the premise of content mapping to buyer personas. In many ways this misguidance is exacerbating the problem of content proliferation.



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

What is happening when buyers find you? While labeled content marketing, the actual information amounts to disguised push messaging and does nothing to further the intelligence that existing customers and prospective buyers seek. Let's hear from another interviewed buyer:

“Some of the sites I’ve visited can be annoying. What I mean is that I feel like I have to get through so much clutter and steps to even see if the information I am looking for is going to help me.”

Are your inbound efforts filled with clutter? Do they prevent buyers from finding the information they need that furthers their intelligence?



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's Do?

These inherent problems however does not devalue mapping to being non-usable. Mapping has value if performed in a different context. That context relates to understanding as well as modeling the intelligence that existing customers and prospective buyers seek. The C-Suite of today can begin to spearhead efforts that are designed to not only model the intelligence sought but how intelligence found navigates through buyer decision models.

The modern C-Suite of today must guide efforts to acquire deep business insights into how companies approach challenges and specific goals. Gaining insight into why they matter and why certain decision models are used over others. The business insights leading to offering *Intelligent Content* that supports buyer decision models as opposed to outmoded views of mapping push messaging to generic buying processes.



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

There comes a new responsibility with this approach for C-Suite teams. That responsibility relates to accepting the role of offering learning opportunities that contributes to furthering buyer's intelligence on how to tackle issues. What C-Suite teams can and must achieve is establishing capabilities and services that invite buyers into a learning experience. As one senior executive interviewed put it:

“We are confronted with new situations every month. Situations we’ve not encountered before. When working with a supplier for example, we want to be able to learn something about how to handle these new situations.”

The Future

In the future, organizations will take on some resemblance to ongoing education. They will offer unique learning experiences to existing customers and prospective buyers.



6. Buyer Trend: Seeking Further Intelligence

To do so, more emphasis will be placed on gaining deep business insights that is focused on how to model intelligence as well as learning that address challenges, issues, and goals. *Intelligent Content* will become an irreplaceable aspect of building trusted relationships with buyers.

The focus on content as a strategy and as a marketing tactic will continue to undoubtedly grow. However, the future of content strategy and content marketing will hinge on adapting to the growing need for intelligence on the part of buyers. Does your existing content strategy translate into an intelligent learning experience?



Think Value-Based vs. Needs-Based



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

Product centricity has been the driving force behind marketing and sales for decades and practically all of the 20th century. As we entered into the 21st century, roots were planted that have created a shift towards customer centricity centered around initiatives such as customer experience, customer focus, voice of the customer, and numerous other phrases that describe customer centricity. However, this shift continues to occur at a slow pace in the B2B marketplace and many B2B organizations have product centricity wired into their organizational DNA.

Product centricity causes selling organizations to not only focus on the merits of their product but also to have prescribed views of existing customer and prospective buyer needs. Products, in general, are designed and produced to fulfill needs. This thinking has spawned the functions of product management and product marketing – all designed to fulfill needs.



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

To be sure, products must fulfill needs. A key buyer trend that is occurring is that buyer values are changing rapidly while buyer needs have more constancy. This trend, along with the introduction of new values spurred on by the convergence of the Internet and the Social Age, is having a drastic affect on buyer decision-making.

Needs-based thinking, as the dominant driver, has been a focal point for marketing and sales for a few decades. Efforts to correlate products with needs that relate to fulfilling tasks or an objective that buyers undertake permeate much of marketing and sales. The focus on identifying what buyers use as criteria for decision-making still relate heavily on a product's performance ability to fulfill a task or reach an objective.



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

What is not so surprising is that buyer needs and objectives having a high degree of constancy built-in. For example, a constant need or objective is to grow revenue. While the metric may change yearly, say from 2% to 5%, the need or objective remains constant. Another example related to tasks is a product fulfilling the need of ease of use. I doubt we would ever hear a buyer change that criterion to harder to use.

The impact of the changing world related to the Internet, social technologies, global economic uncertainty, and shifting marketplaces is having a direct impact on buyer values as they relate to buyer goals. These values extend far beyond decision criterion based on needs related to tasks and objectives. Values correlate strongly to buyer goals and thus have a big impact on why buyers are making organizational as well as purchase decisions. Buyers desire more reflection of their values in products or services.



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

Oftentimes, these are difficult to ascertain and for buyers to articulate clearly. But be sure – they are there. A simplified example can be that a high-tech organization has a value related to being “green” and environmentally friendly. How this value gets articulated and expressed may change significantly year-to-year and even be supplanted by another value due to a global event – while needs such as ease of use and revenue growth will remain constant.

What Must CEO’s, CMO’s, and CSO’s Do?

C-Suite leaders today can play a role is shifting organizational thinking from solely needs-based to that of value-based thinking. The leaders of today will need to work in concert to put into place efforts that not only focus on creating value but places a premium on keeping a pulse on the changing values on the part of buyers.



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

While needs will have more constancy, individual and organizational values will be more transitory and influenced by internal as well as external factors. This means organizations will need to consistently engage buyers qualitatively to understand how values are shifting. Doing so will be no easy feat since buyers characteristically have difficulty in clearly articulating values and goals – oftentimes they are couched in the unarticulated world of thought.

This difficulty places an imperative on organizations to invest in as well as establish a foundational understanding of their buyer's values. Including such efforts as learning how these values are being modified as well as how they are affecting decisions. Grounded in informed qualitative business insights on values, the modern C-Suite can take a *“Value Leadership”* role in helping existing customers and prospective buyers to articulate as well as define values more clearly and turn them into actionable strategies.



7. Buyer Trend: Changing Values

The Future

Buyers in the future may very well adopt a commoditized view themselves of needs and objectives. Establishing expectations that require selling organizations to be well aware of what these needs are well before any direct relationship. The dominant driver affecting purchase decisions will be transitory values that change over time significantly. What we can expect is that new world events, social technologies, market conditions, and buyer behaviors will not only alter values but alter the way business is conducted in the future.

Key questions to ponder for the future are: What is your organization doing today to shift from only needs-based thinking to that of incorporating value-based thinking? Do you know your buyer's values and can you help them to articulate more clearly? Are buyer values reflected in your products, services, marketing, and selling efforts?



Think Humanize the Buyer Experience



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

The concept of *Experience* in business has undergone a roller coaster ride during the past ten to fifteen years since it was first introduced. Both the terms *customer experience* and *buyer experience* taking on different meanings in this time period. For buyers in general, there has been a slow but progressing convergence of desiring B2C like experiences in B2B market worlds. Without question, the rise of the Internet and Social Technologies has shaped and reshaped our concept of *Experience* in general. I believe we are at a pivotal moment in business history with respect to buyer behavior and experience.

This pivotal moment is centered on the idea that buyers desire human experiences in the business world and see experience as a two-sided coin.



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

The two key principles of experience in the modern Social Age are:

Contextual: the overriding foundation of customer and buyer experience is engaging existing customers and prospective buyers in relevant contextual experiences – whether they are in social mediums, conversations, or interactions.

Learning: rising as an essential component of experience in business is the growing expectations on the part of buyers that undergoing an experience also mean they will learn from the experience. Knowledge and practical intelligence will be gained by entering into the experience.

Buyers today are redefining the meaning of *business experience*. Consequently, integrating their *business experience* into how buyers are reshaping their *human experience*.



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

Buyers not only want to “feel good” about the business experiences they undergo, but now also have a higher expectations they will take away knowledge they did not have before.

The seven buyer trends presented in this book point to what I call *The Buyer Circle of Experience*. As they reshape their definition of what a business experience means and integrate it into their human experience, buyers are expanding their circle of experience in a business context.



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

This Buyer Circle of Experience consist of desired humanized buyer experiences stated as:

- To undergo rewarding and fulfilling experiences
- To be understood qualitatively – in human terms and not data terms
- To enable their quest to fulfill knowledge needed; not be seen as object for demand generation
- To enhance collaborative experiences with expanding buyer networks
- To be enabled to make informed decisions that align with organizational decision models versus generic buying process views
- To grow their intelligence and in essence grow their knowledge and practical wisdom in their respective areas and beyond
- To foster the ability to meet shared corporate values, in addition to needs, as part of the business experience



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

What Must CEO's, CMO's, and CSO's Do?

A place for C-Suite leaders to start is to rethink their own concept of what experience – customer and buyer experience – means in today's Social Age. Guiding the organization to adopt a two dimensional view of experience – contextual and learning – as opposed to one dimensional views. It will take hard work and deep customer and buyer understanding to turn B2B business engagement into humanized social experiences. This becomes a new imperative for the C-Suite. Undergoing think shift - viewing every interaction as one that must become an engaging and fulfilling experience and represent a learning experience for existing customers and prospective buyers.

The implications affect every area of businesses – talent, training, functions, technologies, operations, marketing, and sales. It will test the resolve and capabilities of business leadership as we know it today.



Summary: Humanize The Buyer Experience

The Future

In the future, buyer expectations for experiences that engage them contextually and provide learning opportunities will grow. The open systems of new social technologies fueling the rise in humanizing the buyer experience. Buyers will be looking to integrate their business experience into their personal human experience.

As the millennial grows into leadership, we will see metamorphoses take place around the concept of business, organization, leadership, and shared values. This will drastically affect our notions of what is thought of as a business experience. We may very well begin to see a narrowing gap between the business experience and the human experience happen sooner than we think.



About Tony Zambito

Tony is the founder and leading authority in buyer personas for B2B Marketing. In 2002, Tony established the first buyer persona development methodology designed specifically for B2B Marketing and Sales. This innovation has helped leading Fortune 100 companies gain a deeper understanding of their buyers resulting in improved lead generation and revenue performance. He has assisted companies such as HP, Reed Elsevier, FedEx, Pearson, Robert Half International, Microsoft, Genesys, and IBM in customer research, buyer research, and buyer persona marketing. Tony has empowered organizations with buyer personas, which communicate deep customer insights and tells the story of buying behavior. Tony's pioneering development in Buyer Persona Marketing™ has helped clients to achieve improved revenue performance by as much as 25% year over year, increase customer retention rates by as much 10%, improve ROI on content marketing, and grow revenues in new markets by as much as 15%.

Tony and his wife Cindy with their two daughters returned to the east coast after nearly a dozen years living through the boom and bust of Silicon Valley. He is an avid jazz fan as well as jazz percussionist and you just may catch Tony playing with his band My Cousin Tone' somewhere on the east coast.

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