



THE 2024 STATE OF
MARKETING AUTOMATION

Promoting Customer-Centricity & Streamlined Messaging By **Evaluating Marketing Automation Solutions**

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Introduction

Automation might make the marketing world go 'round, but it's also completely bogging it down. All it takes is one glance at Scott Brinker's [Marketing Technology Supergraphic](#) to realize marketers are neck-deep in technology that they may or may not need. Specifically, a whopping 85% of B2B marketers using marketing automation platforms feel they aren't reaching their full potential — primarily because systems across the board are too disparate.

With point solutions for seemingly every problem a marketer might encounter, "shiny new object syndrome" compelled practitioners to adopt every automation technology possible. Now that the marketing automation goldrush has run dry, businesses are focused on re-evaluating their technology stacks to make the most of existing solutions.

"It's an interesting time: We're coming out of a SaaS hangover with martech from the expansion and boom years," said Jon Russo, Founder of [B2B Fusion Group](#), a marketing consultancy firm. "We're more in a consolidation era now. There's a premium on ensuring a platform delivers on its promise, attributable to ROI. Integration is critical since that's where you maximize the platform's value and how the platforms become fully engrained in the fabric of the business."

Throughout this special report, we'll examine the current state of marketing automation, with a focus on consolidation and maximizing the effectiveness of existing tools. Specific topics of discussion will include:

- The role of automation and AI technologies in predicting buyer behaviors and informing next-best actions;
- How marketers can balance lead and brand marketing priorities while leveraging automation;
- The power of utilizing automation tools to promote cohesive narratives and customer-centric experiences;
- How to analyze data and other signals via AI; and
- How to update tech stacks with the latest tools and eliminate lagging technology.



Leveraging Automation To Create Customer-Centric **Experiences & Cohesive Narratives**

The ghosts of B2B marketing's past relied on hitting prospects and buyers over the head with wordy product information and overt sales pitches, which came at the expense of personalization and strong relationships. In the modern era of marketing, however, B2B practitioners are much more apt to take a personalization page out of B2C's handbook.

"For a long time, people said, 'Oh, we're selling to businesses; they don't care about our brand or what we stand for,'" said **Brooke Duffy**, a Business Consultant and Fractional CRO for start-ups, during a CRO panel at the **B2B Sales & Marketing Exchange**. "But, at the end of the day, your buyers are human and brand matters to them. More times than not, people aren't ready to buy what you're selling but over time, they will be, so it's important to stay in front of them."

Duffy continued that while she believes organizations should keep an eye on their competition, it's more important to focus on what their customers care about. She explained that there are a lot of similar choices out there, and a specific feature or price tag isn't going to move the needle. Instead, building trust across the customer lifecycle will.

"Organizations often have multiple teams that all have different goals and measurement requirements around how they're engaging with prospects and customers, and they're doing this through multiple different technology platforms," said Amy Hawthorne, a Principal Analyst at **Forrester**, at the **B2B Marketing Exchange** (#B2BMX). "We have multiple teams executing out of multiple platforms with different goals, and we have different messages being broadcast across multiple technology platforms by different teams. This doesn't make it easy to ensure that we're aligned to the customer — in fact, it forces us to have a playbook."



Brand Marketing Vs. Lead Generation: Why Can't We Be Friends?

By Matt Sailor, Act-On

If you believe what you read on the internet, battle lines are being drawn between two camps of marketers. On one side are lead generation marketers, who insist that every marketing activity must be tied to ROI and building pipeline, while brand marketers are advocating for splashy, awareness raising campaigns and bold creative that doesn't necessarily tie their activities to results.

Maybe some marketers have the ability to truly pick one of those paths, but most of us live in the messy middle. We'll probably never be able to reliably tie every single marketing effort to its impact on sales and pipeline creation, but there is a limit to how much awareness campaigns can accomplish if sales are your organization's priority.

The only answer is to prioritize both — let's explore three ways a brand awareness approach and a lead generation approach can work together to make your marketing unstoppable.

Messaging: Your Roadmap For When To Emphasize Brand & Lead Gen

The not-so-secret answer to the lead versus brand conundrum has actually been sitting in front of our noses this whole time: Messaging. Admittedly, messaging is becoming a bit of a lost art. Often, teams skip this foundational step entirely, moving straight to the deliverables without pausing to align on the key messages.

But messaging is an incredibly powerful tool, especially when combined with customer journey mapping. After aligning on the core brand and product messaging, go deeper to define messaging pillars for each stage in the customer journey. At the top of the funnel, you'll lean heavily on awareness and high-level ideas. As you move through the journey, adjust your messages to help warm up your leads by focusing on pain points and product features that alleviate those pains. Yes, this is a classic nurture plan, but getting back to these fundamentals and avoiding the distraction of flashier tactics will reward patient marketers.

Use PR Awareness To Boost Search Engine Marketing

PR is one of the most tried-and-true awareness channels, especially if your company is regularly releasing new products, programs and solutions: A steady drumbeat of PR announcements will help build name recognition and interest in your brand.

Meanwhile, search engine marketing is often treated as a solution-focused lead generation operation. When customers search "best email marketing software," you want to be in the mix. But we often overlook search engine marketing's potential to drive awareness. Branded search terms help potential customers find you and learn more about your product from the source. PR is one of the best sources of high-quality backlinks, which increases your authority with search engines. (A potential wrinkle: Some news sources that pick up your story will use "No Follow" links that don't have as much of a search impact).

It's also important to remember that all awareness efforts support search in the long term. Take Act-On for example: One of our most reliable sources of new web traffic is from people searching our name, either on its own or paired with a term like "marketing automation" or "growth marketing."

PR activity might not cause someone to click the link they find in the press release, but it improves your awareness. Next time that buyer needs a solution, they're more likely to search you out. Current attribution technology makes it very difficult to trace this kind of activity, but that doesn't mean it's not happening.

Build Awareness, & Tomorrow's Leads, At The Top Of The Funnel

Top of funnel marketing is where brand and lead gen can really thrive together. Content marketers love the top of the funnel because it tends to offer more opportunities for exploration and experimentation. Often, top of funnel content goes light on the product push to avoid alienated potential buyers and coming across as too "sales-focused."

Brand identity is crucial for this content. Your brand's distinctive approach to color, photography and illustration can help you stick out in prospects' minds even if they don't consider themselves in the market for your product (yet!). They may not be ready for the message, but if you have strong branding, you can still make an impression. Later, when you target that user with a lead gen campaign, they'll be more likely to recognize you.

Remember, although unexpected economic times can shuffle the calculus for boards and leaders, awareness marketing is a tried-and-true strategy. With all of brand awareness marketing, the real question isn't if it aids sales, but when it does so. Particularly in B2B, the sales cycle is long. True, awareness campaigns are a slow burn, leading to potential sales in the future that won't help you hit your quarterly number. But that doesn't mean they have no value.

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Creating More Compelling CX Through AI-Driven Analytics

In 2024, industry experts and practitioners agreed that AI-driven predictive analytics and automated personalization will become even more commonplace in modern tech stacks as B2B marketing teams strive to create compelling customer experiences and increase attributable ROI. In fact, a Forrester survey found that the top use case for AI in B2B marketing was targeting (40%), followed by personalization (36%) and marketing automation/tactic orchestration (36%).

"You're certainly seeing AI help predictive platforms predict what business may or may not close with a higher probability," said B2B Fusion's Russo. "And AI is being leveraged creatively to do more personalization at scale, which is now sharper."

AI-driven technologies, such as natural language processing (NLP), give marketers powerful insights into customer sentiment and engagement. Experts see that marketers can now determine how customers interact and engage with their product, service or brand — at an individual level and across larger groups — to create more tailored content.

For example, [Cisco](#), a provider of networking, cloud and cybersecurity solutions, uses machine learning (ML) and AI within its tech ecosystem to support cases like lead scoring, identifying digital intent and personalizing offers based on account and individual interactions. According to Chad Reese, Sr. Director of Digital Marketing at Cisco, personalization efforts on the company website yield 6X conversion rates relative to static, non-personalized offers.

"We use digital intent modeling to understand what our B2B customers are searching for and to optimize the content and copy on our website for organic search," continued Reese. "We're also focusing on integrating our digital and demand operations to deliver a unified account and customer experience as we enable B2B buyers through the buying process to coordinate seller outreach, prospecting and nurture based on the accounts we are targeting and those demonstrating digital intent."



Updating Tech Stacks & Eliminating Lagging Solutions

Looking back at Brinker's martech map, it's clear there's an overwhelming amount of marketing technology available for practitioners. With such a high quantity of solutions with overlapping capabilities, practitioners must evaluate these technologies carefully.

"There are many incredible platforms today, but there are also a lot of 'shiny new objects,'" said Fractional CMO/CRO Duffy. "You need to look at the full customer lifecycle to see what needs optimization; it's just not about seeing where the breakdown in the sales cycle happens."

Duffy continued that content AI is something organizations "definitely need," noting that companies can't make content fast enough. With that in mind, she suggested that marketers first look at the assets they're trying to create and determine what pieces of technology would be best suited for that endeavor. Building on those AI insights, Andrea Eaton, another panelist and the VP Global Revenue Marketing at low-code development platform [Outsystems](#), added that she puts AI tools in three buckets:

- Those that help practitioners understand the past;
- Those that help teams work better and smarter; and
- Those that help promote future growth.

But incorporating new technology often goes hand-in-hand with budgeting — and with **53% of practitioners** pointing to issues with legacy technologies, Eaton encouraged practitioners to be discerning about the technology they keep around. As 2024 draws closer, organizations should audit their tech stacks to identify strengths and cut weaknesses.



Conclusion

The marketing technology landscape is evolving rapidly, and experts agree that the industry's current focus on integration and automation is unsurprising. As martech expands, companies must adopt innovative solutions that prioritize the integration of various platforms and the automation of processes to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their marketing strategies.



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