

# The B2B buying power shift

By [Sibongile Lehloo](#)

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Online media has created a power shift, a buying power shift, from the hands of the sales team to the hands of the people, the consumers.

This new phenomenon must be carefully considered when an online marketer sets out creating a business-to-business digital marketing strategy, at the core of which is the business objectives of the company. In order to address this power shift, one must contemplate the three key factors that can either make or break an online B2B marketing strategy: The people, the content and the context. The right combination of these three key factors is pivotal in supporting the business in its sales and return on investment efforts.

The effects of this power shift on the 'people factor' can be felt by both the buyers and sellers equally so. The buyer no longer needs to be taken through the buying cycle by a sales representative but rather by the internet. Gone are the days when the cold caller would convince a customer to buy solely on their call, and here's to today, where virtual sales hand-holding is the order of the day.

Now, customers take themselves through the first four phases of the sales funnel, from identifying the business need to testing and evaluating the services and/or products online via search engines and social media where they are influenced by peers and industry specialists into making a purchase.



Image via [123RF](#)

An organisation's online brand ambassadors or sellers, are essential to the online marketing strategy as they fulfil both the pushing out of content and pulling followers to the content roles. The seller, who is the tech and online savvy subject matter expert in the organisation should be well positioned to build the brand and assist in establishing it as industry thought leaders. Sellers with the correct content will guide the B2B buyer to move further along the buying cycle without much 'physical' assistance.

## A changing content landscape

The 'content factor' is key in the strategy because the buyer finds themselves on a website search engine to find solutions that address their needs and criteria. B2B content must be strong in addressing important industry issues and answering the customer's concerns. Content is not just articles but also rich media, videos, infographics, blog comments, white papers, slide share and much more. The buyer will always consume different content in a personal way, it is up to the marketer to meet them at their point of entry.

The dynamic of mobile devices, especially in Africa where mobile internet usage grows daily, has also changed the landscape of creating content. One must deliberate on creating content that is mobile-friendly. All branded content from the company or influencers must be quality content that adds value and makes a sale.

Quality content sets companies apart from each other, and separated leaders from followers in the different business sectors. Exceptional quality and the right quantity of content is paramount to establish B2B marketers and sellers in the digital space as thought leaders in order to attract the buyer, who is most of the time, a senior member of a target organisation.

## **Be current and relevant**

The third and last key factor is context. Context is all about being current and being relevant, being applicable at each point of the sale cycle. First listening and then responding makes the brand message pertinent to its target market. Online media lends itself to having conversation rather than one way communication.

Our response to a billboard cannot be measured however we can respond online, with a click, comment or time spent on a page and that's what the B2B marketer needs to 'listen' to. The metrics are different in assessing a variety of engagements and campaign KPIs however there are tools to translate the data and marketers can rely on them to reply by creating the right message in context. Is the brand message or sales pitch the right one to make at the particular time? Are significant hot topics of the industry addressed? In the digital world it is survival of the fittest. The first company with the right solution makes the sale.

Balancing the three key factors; people, content and context is delicate and once the marketer is mastering this art the objects set out by the company and the digital marketing strategy can be met. The power shift to the consumer is not a bad thing, in fact it should be leveraged by marketers to rather shorten the buying cycle and get the return on investment in a shorter time.

## **ABOUT SIBONGILE LEHLOO**

Sibongile is the Digital Manager at KPMG taking care of KPMG SA's digital footprint and playing an advisory role for KPMG Africa's digital presence. She has over ten years of professional experience in online branding, marketing, web design and digital media strategies and implementation. She specialises in B2B integrated digital campaigns and this includes online reputation management, social media strategy (for companies, professionals and youth), content management and paid digital media strategy which she is currently responsible for.

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