Nurturing A High-Performance B2B Marketing Ecosystem

The Essential Elements For Success
The Quest For Optimal Marketing Performance

B2B marketing organizations are the engines of growth and retention in their companies. Harnessing their full potential takes more than having the right organizational structure. It requires building and nurturing a high-performance marketing ecosystem that also encompasses capabilities, workflows, and the operating environment.

This short guide explains the elements of a high-performing marketing ecosystem. It also introduces the Forrester B2B Marketing Ecosystem Model, which describes how those elements interconnect and interact. Understanding the workings of your unique ecosystem will help you make the right decisions, shore up potential weaknesses, and avoid potential pitfalls.
The Customer: The Marketing Ecosystem’s Energy Source

All ecosystems are fueled and sustained by a central energy force. In high-performing B2B marketing organizations, that energy source is an understanding of the customer. B2B organizations will outperform competitors only when the customer is at the center of the company’s entire operating model and when all functions consistently deliver superior customer experiences.

Determine what customer obsession means for your organization, and aim to infuse it in your processes, interactions, and decision-making.

The Forrester B2B Marketing Ecosystem Model

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The Inner Ring: How Marketing Supports Business Objectives

The ecosystem elements surrounding the core describe the fundamental work of marketing: the capabilities required to achieve its goals and the structure, workflow, and interlock needed to keep efforts coordinated and integrated both within and outside marketing.

**CAPABILITIES**

Capabilities — the specific actions or tasks required to achieve desired outcomes — are the building blocks of marketing success. Marketing leaders need to continually identify and develop the capabilities that their organization needs to succeed.

Common capability categories include brand and communications, demand marketing, and customer marketing. The capabilities you prioritize will depend on your organization’s size, complexity, maturity, and go-to-market model. Companies that sell directly to customers, for instance, may not need channel marketing capabilities.

**Defining Capabilities, Competencies, And Traits**

Marketing leaders sometimes work backward and hire for traits (e.g., business-savvy, innovative, analytical) instead of capabilities. While such characteristics are valuable, they are not inherently linked to the tasks and actions that the organization needs to succeed. Identify capabilities first, then look for hires with related competencies (i.e., the knowledge and skills needed to perform a role successfully). You then can define the traits that these team members should embody.
STRUCTURE

Identifying capabilities will help inform your organizational structure — your configuration of roles and teams. For example, if your organization has content strategy and creation capabilities as well as brand and communications capabilities, you may have both teams report to the same leader to ensure that your content reflects your brand identity and messaging. Similarly, if both your customer marketing team and portfolio marketing team are responsible for audience planning, you might group them closely in your organizational structure.

Organizational structure also reflects the degree to which teams and resources are centralized or distributed. For example, you may have demand and channel marketing capabilities that are carried out centrally for consistency across regions and teams as well as have some of those capabilities distributed among regional or country-level teams.

ORCHESTRATION

Having the right capabilities and structure is important — but they alone won’t guarantee high performance. To realize the full value of your ecosystem, you also will need to determine the interlocks and workflows that will use each individual’s and team’s contributions most effectively.

Examples of these workflows include shared services to create and support standardized, repeatable activities at a large scale and centers of excellence that support more innovative initiatives and incubate new approaches. Alternative models such as pods or squads that bring together specialists from different marketing subfunctions (e.g., a portfolio marketer, content marketer, and campaign manager) may be assembled to support a product, business unit, or audience segment.
The Outer Ring: The Marketing Ecosystem Environment

An ecosystem needs the right environment to thrive. For a B2B marketing ecosystem to perform at the highest level, four key elements must be in place.

ACCOUNTABILITY
Lack of accountability can erode morale, stoke tensions, and lead to blame. Even when accountability is understood within a specific marketing team, it may be lacking between groups. Fortunately, the problem is easy to fix.

Weak accountability often results from a lack of clarity. Marketing leaders can address this by documenting and communicating roles, responsibilities, processes, and goals. Top performance can be sustained only when everyone is clear on the scope of their role and the handoff points between individuals and teams.

CULTURE
A company’s culture determines its success — no matter how effective its marketing strategy is. A weak or negative company culture often hinders marketing efforts and performance.

The most successful marketing leaders strive to create a customer-centered culture. Keeping pace with evolving buyer needs and the changing business landscape also demands a data- and insights-driven culture, as well as one of innovation and experimentation. Encourage employees to innovate, and make experimentation integral to work.
INFRASTRUCTURE

Marketers need the right technologies, systems, tools, and protocols to perform. A solid infrastructure enables marketing organizations to standardize and automate routine practices to drive consistency, efficiency, productivity, and scale.

GOVERNANCE

Building a high-performance marketing function requires more than just laying the foundation. Ongoing monitoring helps ensure that all ecosystem components are in harmony. Revisiting and reevaluating team capabilities to bring them in line with what marketing needs to deliver will help maintain the integrity of the ecosystem.

Nurturing An Adaptable Ecosystem

Keep in mind that your marketing ecosystem won't be static. As the broader company ecosystem and business landscape evolve, the ecosystem must adapt. Ongoing attention to each ecosystem element and how they interact is crucial to sustaining high performance.

To implement the B2B Marketing Ecosystem Model in a way that meets the specific needs of your marketing organization, explore our Eight C's Of Effective Organizational Design model overview. And for even more insights and hands-on guidance, reach out to us.
Build A High-Performance B2B Marketing Engine

Forrester works with senior marketing leaders to build and execute long-term strategies that advance company objectives and deliver long-term value. Our Forrester Decisions for B2B Marketing Executives service is designed to help leaders tackle urgent priorities, including:

- Formulate marketing strategy and drive transformation
- Develop the annual marketing and investment plan
- Shape the brand experience
- Develop a corporate communications strategy
- Design and implement an integrated campaign strategy
- Demonstrate marketing’s value to the business
- Create marketing structure and operating models that optimize performance