Fitting Round Pegs in Square Holes – a.k.a. Using B2B Marketing Automation tools for your B2C requirements

Many marketers are still trying to achieve their B2C Marketing objectives by using tools or platforms intended for the B2B environment. Either this, or they end up discounting the benefits of Marketing Automation altogether for their B2C use case. This whitepaper endeavors to highlight the difference between the two and provide tips on how to select a right B2C Marketing Automation partner for your business.

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Introduction

Customers today are evolving. They are looking at engaging or interacting with a brand across multiple channels, multiple touchpoints. And the brands are understandably trying to keep pace. Gone are the days when the customer would have only an option to calling you on the customer relationship center number you have designated and expect a resolution to his query. Now if he is not satisfied with your product, he will in all likelihood rant on social media along with pursue multiple modes of communication with you for a quick resolution for his concern. How a brand is able to ensure that it is able to maintain a consistent communication across all channels of the customer's choosing and manage the reactions that come from it.

Marketing today is driven on the belief that the practice of marketing to the average consumer is a fallacy. While some brands would still like to create personas and try and group customers on basis of their transaction patterns, their demography, or other such attributes, the fact is that customers do not like being classified as a 'cohort'. As a consumer, I do not wish for any brand to treat me as part of a larger cohort but rather connect with me as a 'human'. While this is a real problem even in the B2B space, the audience is typically more forgiving since you are interacting with them in the context of their brand. But this becomes exemplified in case of B2C where you are dealing with millions of individual customers, across a wide geography, each wanting to be treated as unique in exchange of their loyalty. And this is where many brands are now realizing that traditional B2B marketing tools fail to impress when it comes to dealing with unnamed customer interactions, gathered from millions of individual touchpoints generated across a variety of channels.

Evolution of Marketing Automation

When Marketing Automation came around as the new tool on the block, it was cumbersome, expensive, and integrations with your legacy systems could effectively wipe out any ROI you expected from deploying the said platform. But in the recent years, marketing automation platforms have seen some exponential adoption, starting from enterprises and slowly permeating within the SMB segment globally. Even now though

The digital channels of interaction has also undergone a transformation from being a one size fits all kind of approach to looking at hyper personalization. But companies are trying to figure out where to draw the line at hyper personalization for a narrow, well defined targeting parameters and ensuring they have a large enough sample set for their marketing campaigns.

A decade ago, customers had limited channels through which they could connect with a brand and vice versa. This was the era where websites were basic, social media was yet unexplored by brands, and customers would wait in call queues to be connected to a product expert to help resolve their concerns. But as they say, that was then and this is now. Today, a customer has a lot more options whether they wish to use Snapchat or Facebook, call the brand or complain via a tweet, give a missed call for a call back or drop a note on their website, and we have barely begun to scratch the surface. The onus shifts to brands to ensure that their marketing strategy across channels is in sync, to ensure an optimal customer experience, irrespective of the marketing channel used by the customer.

B2B versus B2C marketing: Understanding the difference

Take your marketing hat off and think as a typical consumer. Last time you ordered a beer, did you conduct a detailed analysis to justify the ROI of the activity, or when you bathed with a particular bar of soap this morning, did you do so believing that the brand you have chosen has a deeper understanding of the personal care category compared to its competitors?

Sector expertise is not the pertinent criteria that consumers use while making a brand choice for personal use, while the same consumer in a different context like B2B purchase will behave much more rationally. So what triggers this change in the same individual?

B2B buyers choose a product or solution that drives a particular objective for them. B2C buyers on the other hand choose a product that satisfies their immediate need – both physical and emotional.

For B2C marketers, the objective is to excite your consumers and enable them to aspire to and consumer your product versus the competition. For B2B marketers, the objective is to provide their customers with enough information about the benefits or your product, and have a conversation on the value the said product or service will provide to fulfill the customers'

	B2B Marketing	B2C Marketing
Language	Industry focused, expert	As simple as possible
Buying motivators	Solving specific issue or achieving a particular stated objective	Need fulfillment – physical and emotional
Key Influencers	Industry experts, Analyst	Friends and family
Marketer challenges	Creation of relevant, high quality content	Dissemination of relevant, high value content
Buying cycle time	Can span several months	Short term or immediate
Contract period	Multi year	Short term
Deal size	Large	Comparatively smaller
Content	Highly detailed and benefit oriented	Shareable snippet
Discovery platform	Own website, offline (cold calls, events and conferences, PR)	Own website, social media, word of mouth, ATL advertising, highly targeted BTL an exception
Brand Focus	Lead qualification, prospect management and nurturing	Brand building, effective communication
Platform Features	Email and SMS Marketing, Marketing Automation, CRM Integration	All as in B2B + Social media management, Offline data integrations, gamification/ loyalty engine
Scale of operations	A few 100 leads/ prospects at a time	Depending on the brand and target audience, scale could span a few thousand prospects to tens of millions in some cases
Key vendors in the space	Marketo, Hubspot, SalesForce Marketing Cloud (Pardot)	IBM Unica, ExactTarget, Adobe Marketing Cloud, FirstHive

B2B versus B2C Marketing & Sales cycle

While the sales cycle for a B2B and B2C cycle would comprise of similar steps, the complexities would differ greatly. The brand's endeavor in both cases would remain pushing the customer from a prospect to becoming an advocate, but the means of approaching the same would also differ greatly. Let's consider each stage to appreciate the differences.
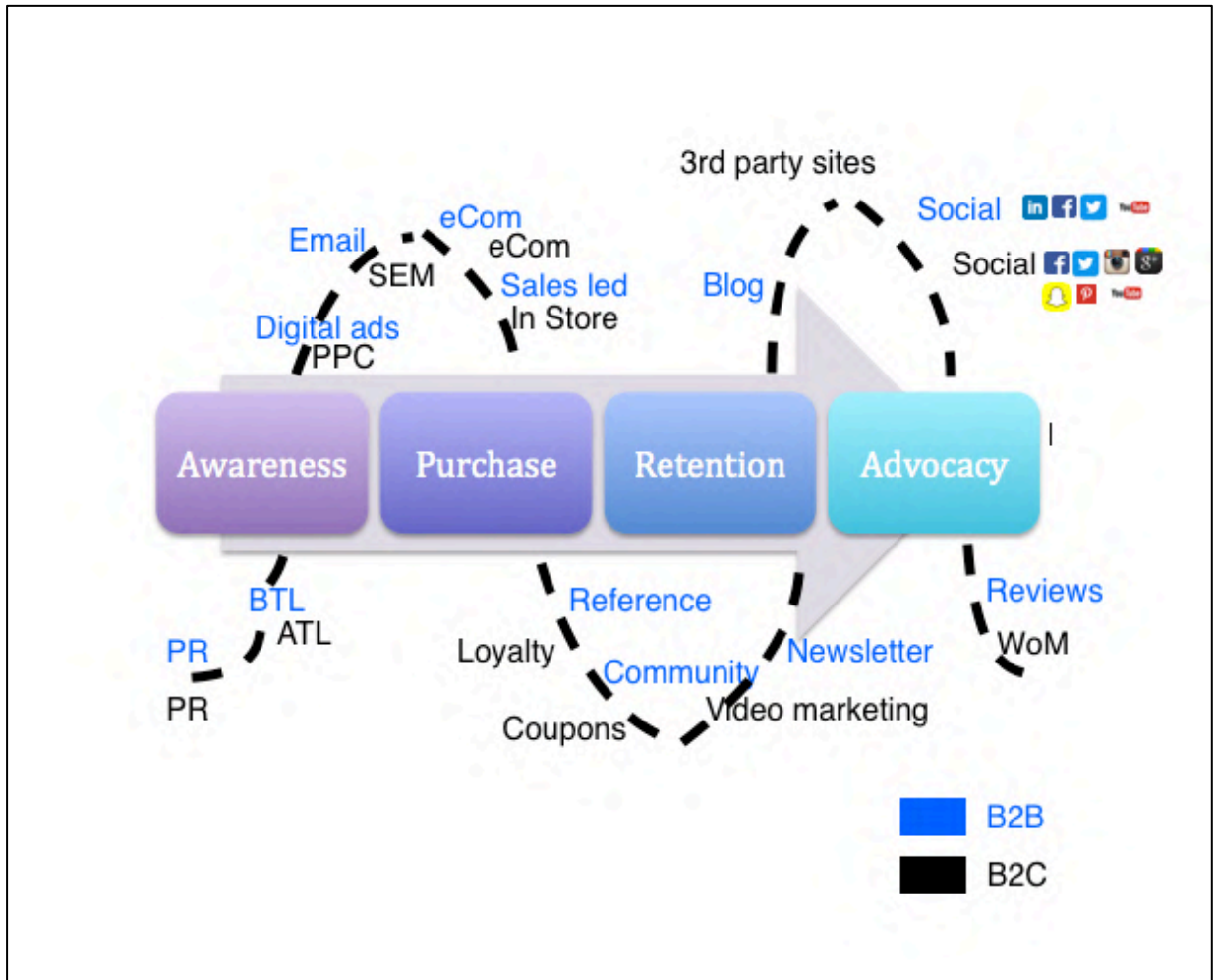
Awareness:

Ensuring your GTM is tuned in line with your brand positioning and your prospects are aware of your brand is the starting point for any marketer. However, while the B2B marketer typically starts off by marketing to a set of named prospects, the B2C marketer is more focused on ATL channels like TV, print, and radio.

Email marketing, a prime weapon in the B2B marketer's arsenal is severely underused in the B2C scenario, who depend more on PPC and SEM based ads to create awareness of their brand and attract visitors.

Purchase:

The sales fulfillment also typically varies in a B2B versus a B2C scenario. After all, buying a bar of soap on your way home, or choosing your favorite beer in your corner pub is not the same as deciding on the ideal software partner for your business. The focus of companies also vary at this stage, depending on the sector.

On account of the target market size and the media channels chosen, B2C companies typically spend most of their marketing budgets for driving the initial product/ brand awareness as well as triggering repurchase. (think back to how you made a particular choice of beverage last time you picked up a drink) While B2B companies spend more on the actual sales process and in the retention stage as opposed to the initial awareness and advocacy building.
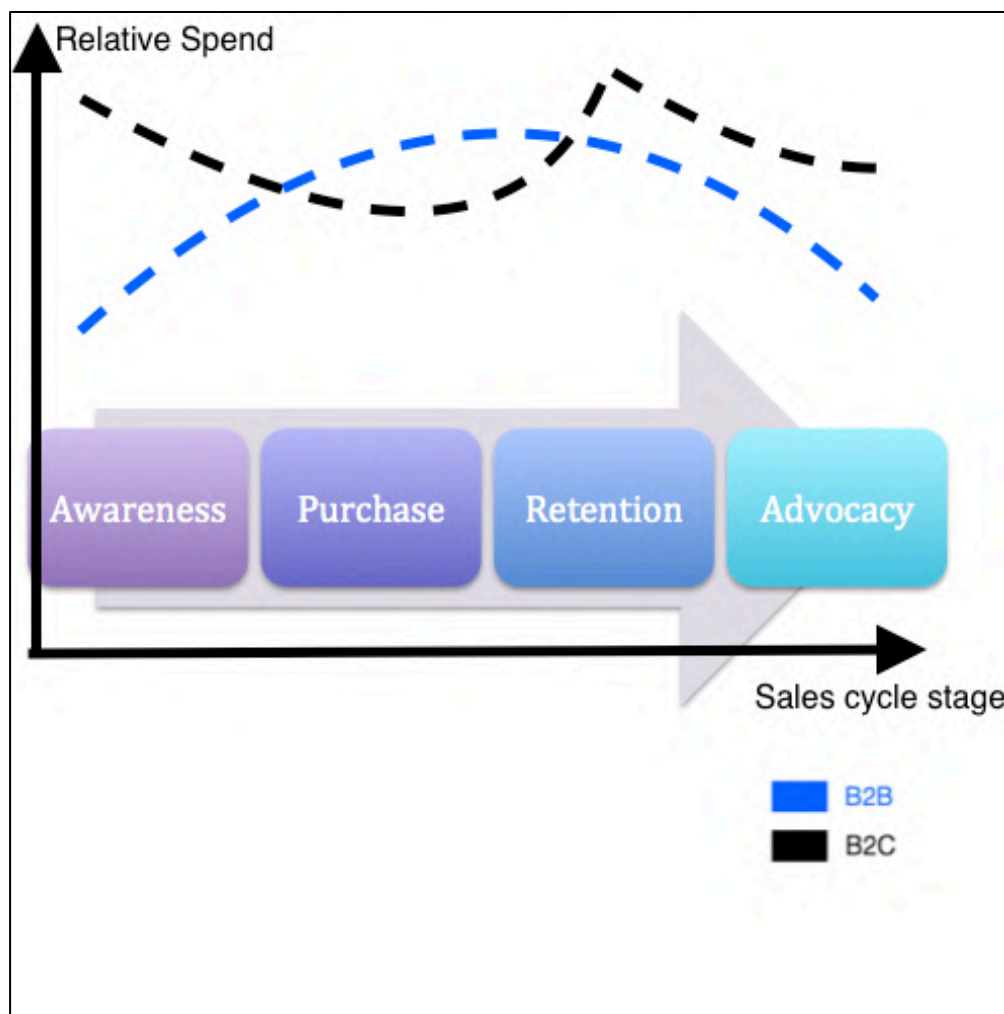
Retention

While both models would work on targeted content marketing strategies to ensure that their customers do not experience any post purchase dissonance, the models used would typically vary.

B2C brands may employ a loyalty program or run a direct marketing campaign, while B2B brands try and build a community around their product.

Advocacy

To enable conversion of their loyal customers to advocates, B2B brands would typically follow a more structured approach by dealing with set of identified influencers who would act as reference customers in targeted forums. While B2C marketers would also look at cultivating a set of influencer relationships for their brands, successful B2C marketers would ensure that their actual customers advocate the brands to their friends and relatives, thereby growing the tribe.

Let's also take the social channels in play as an example – while both the models would employ social to engage the customer and promote brand advocacy, B2B marketers would probably choose channels like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, a B2C marketer would employ those in conjunction with Snapchat, Instagram, and Pinterest, to name a few.

B2B versus B2C automation

As is evident from the notes above, if the focus and modalities followed for B2B marketing differ so greatly from B2C marketing, it stands to reason that the tools used to nurture leads in either scenario cannot be the same.

A key difference in B2B versus B2C marketing automation is in terms of the channels used, as well as the scale of operations. Let's explore a few differences that brands need to be wary of:

	B2B Automation	B2C Automation
Addition of contact in system	Contact starts off as a named entity with known contact vectors	Contact starts off with a unnamed, anonymous persona (depicted by channel Id), mapped to a particular channel interaction
Channels to track	Channels including email, SMS, website act as lead sources	Also includes social channels in addition to mobile apps and Point of sale transaction data mapping
Unified view	Data is unified from the named information (typically email and phone)	Data unified from multiple sources through a algorithmic, probabilistic model
Cross Channel view	Cross channel activity possible across named channels (email, SMS, phone)	Cross channel activity possible across named and unnamed channels
Access and data provisioning	Named user data fed to teams/ channels	Interaction history and channel access provided to teams or external agencies
Key Focus	Feeds into a System of Record (SoR)	Is a System of Engagement (SoE)

# Choosing the right B2C Automation partner

The Annual Marketing Technology Landscape report published by ChiefMartec showcases 3,874 Marketing Technology (MarTech) players in 2016, globally. The number of MarTech players have been doubling year on year, on an average. In this scenario, the choice of a right partner is of paramount importance for brands across the spectrum.

A major reason for this crowded market space is the increasing acceptance and adoption of such platforms by marketers, across the globe. IDC forecasted the marketing technology spends to exceed $32 Bn annually by 2018. The table below showcases an excerpt from a 2015 research where over 80% of marketers did not dispute the benefits that could be accrued by a Marketing Automation platform, and had already implemented or had plans to implement a platform in their organization.

Do you plan to implement marketing automation software?
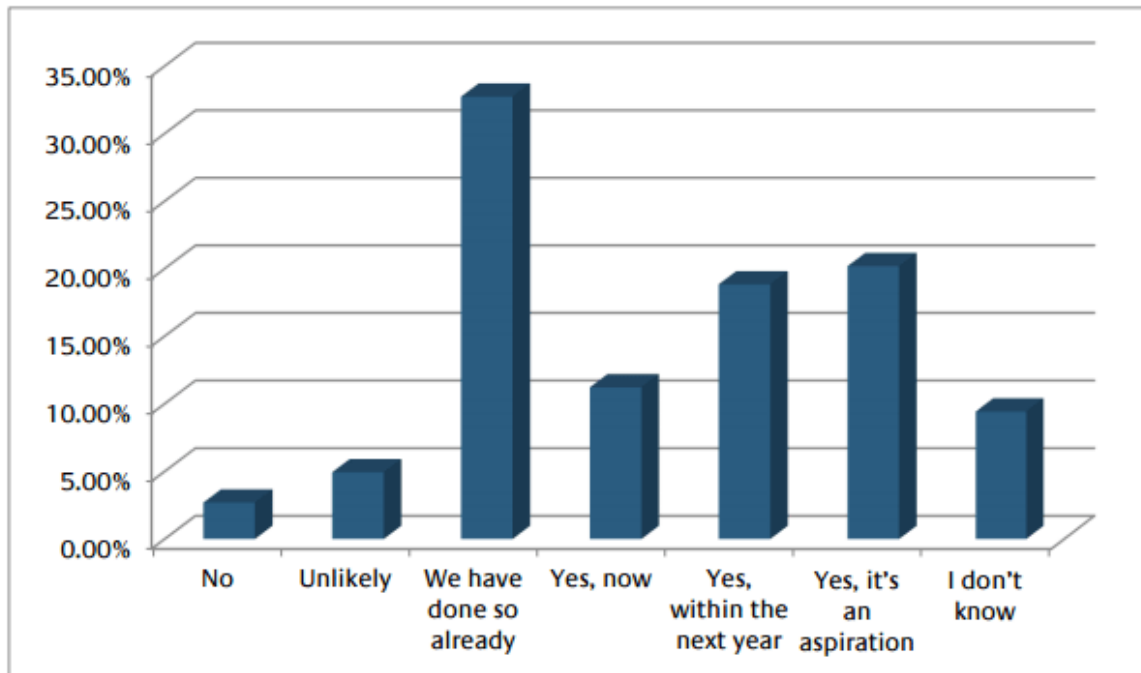
Source: *Apteco Ltd* "Trend Report Data driven marketing" (2015)

In light of this growing acceptance of marketing automation platforms, there have been plenty of interesting companies who have launched their marketing automation platforms. So how do you choose the platform best suited to your business?

1. **Define your brand's use case – are you looking for a B2B platform or a B2C platform?**

Is your brand positioned towards businesses or consumers? Do you deal with a few hundred leads on a monthly basis or are you trying to engage with hundreds of thousands of customers on a monthly basis? If your response is the latter, then the customer record based pricing of platforms in the B2B space may quickly get prohibitive for your business. Time to look at alternates like FirstHive.

2 **Look for tight integration with social**

Does your business sell or engage with customers across social channels? If so, you will need to look at a platform with push and pull capabilities across social channels. You would need to ensure that your marketing platform supports the social channels that are of relevant interest to you. Whether it can pull your wall's content including posts, comments and likes, enabling you to manage your

social profiles from a single interface will become pertinent when your customers expect real-time responses to their comments on your wall.

3 Pricing matters

And how much are you willing to pay for such a platform? What is the ROI you are expecting from such a platform and are your internal teams and processes aligned to enable you to track the same effectively? Be sure you have these metrics in place before a purchase decision is made.

4 Ease of use

Does not matter whether you are a marketing novice or run large scale marketing campaigns for a living, if you are sitting in your office at 9 pm on a Friday evening trying to ensure your brand engagement across channels is optimal and giving you maximum bang for your buck, you better choose a platform with beautiful dashboards and an intuitive UI, for that is when you will realize the value of the UX the most.

5 Support structure

What is the level of support you expect from your marketing platform? Are you looking for a dedicated account manager to help you configure your campaigns, or are you more a do-it-yourself kinda marketer who prefers a low contact email or chat support. Keep in mind that your choices impact the value you can derive from the platforms, and may also have an impact on the price or ROI driven.

FirstHive is a proprietary, patent pending, SaaS based cross channel marketing platform. Some of the world's largest brands are using FirstHive to drive their sales and marketing objectives. FirstHive™ is an all-in-one marketing platform that the marketers get access to; enabling them to put forward and execute very focused, customer centric marketing strategies.

FirstHive enables the enterprises to get a 360 degree view of each individual customer of theirs. It does so by capturing the interactions of the customers across channels, analysing the interaction data and providing intelligent consumer and business insights to the brands. It brings in multiple functionalities to help solve business problems – Data capture and management, analytics, campaign management, digital marketing, inbound marketing, and social media management. While traditionally this product was exclusive to the domain of very large global brands, with the launch of the Beta of the FirstHive DIY (Do It Yourself) product in the year 2016, the same technology is now available for SMBs globally.