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B2B And B2C Companies Face Similar Hurdles With Complex Buyer Journeys

Cross-Channel Marketing Capabilities Help
Companies Meet Their Goals

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Companies struggle to track customers throughout the entire buyer journey.

Executive Summary

Today's B2C and B2B purchase journeys share more similarities than differences. Both are data-driven, self-directed, and set a high bar for emotional and contextual engagement. To meet customers' changing needs and expectations, B2B and B2C marketers need to learn from each other's experiences — and adapt with a new set of strategies, tactics, and enabling technologies.

In February 2019, Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to explore similarities between business and consumer purchase journeys and to identify cross-collaborative learning opportunities for B2B and B2C marketers and evaluate how marketing technologies can help. Forrester conducted an online survey with 552 manager level and above B2B and B2C marketers that are involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection to explore this topic. We found that many of the characteristics that traditionally separated B2C consumers from B2B buyers are now migrating in either direction across those artificial barriers.

KEY FINDINGS

- › **Business buyers and consumers have similar behaviors and needs.** Fifty-two percent of companies agree that they've seen similarities in the way their business buyers and consumers behave. Both types of customers have changing needs and expectations. B2B and B2C marketers can both benefit from cross-collaboration to navigate this new normal.
- › **Companies struggle to create holistic marketing experiences and track customers throughout the entire journey.** B2B and B2C companies face challenges with siloed data and deploying cross-channel marketing. Shockingly, only 7% of B2C and 6% of B2B companies create custom marketing journeys based on customer interactions consistently across all channels, brands, and lines of business.
- › **Cross-channel tracking capabilities can help companies navigate complex buyer journeys.** B2B and B2C marketers believe that cross-channel marketing capabilities will drive an increase in sales (with B2B, 59%, and B2C, 70%) and an increase in the quality of customer data received (with B2B, 64%, and B2C, 59%).

Cross-channel marketing capabilities can help companies navigate complex buyer journeys.

B2C Buyers And B2B Consumers Behave Similarly, Creating Opportunities For Cross-Collaboration

Rising customer expectations, and the desire for data-driven decision making, have forever changed B2B and B2C purchase journeys. Many of the characteristics that traditionally separated B2C consumers from B2B buyers are now migrating across artificial barriers—in both directions. The new faces of “B2B consumers” and “B2C buyers” share: 1) the desire to remain anonymous; 2) the tendency to seek input and opinions from other users before making a purchase; and 3) the amount of emotions involved in the decision making (see Figure 1).¹ For example, one way in which consumers are reflecting B2B buyers is by taking more time and using more data to make even the simplest purchase decisions, such as where to have dinner or what movie to see. On the other hand, many B2B purchase journeys are becoming less complex, with eCommerce options being available even for highly considered purchases.



The walls between B2B and B2C marketing journeys are crumbling as the behaviors become more similar over time. Now, more than ever, it's critical for B2B and B2C marketing teams to collaborate and learn from one another in order to meet customer expectations at all levels of the complex journeys.

Figure 1: The Needs And Behaviors Of Consumers And Business Buyers Are Converging

Traditional B2B buyer

- Known
- Rational
- Interdependent
- Considered
- Loyal



New B2B consumer

- Anonymous
- Emotional
- Interdependent
- Considered
- Fickle



Traditional B2C consumer

- Anonymous
- Emotional
- Independent
- Transactional
- Fickle



New B2C buyer

- Anonymous
- Rational
- Interdependent
- Considered
- Fickle



Source: “The Birth of the B2B Consumer,” Forrester Research Inc., October 5, 2017

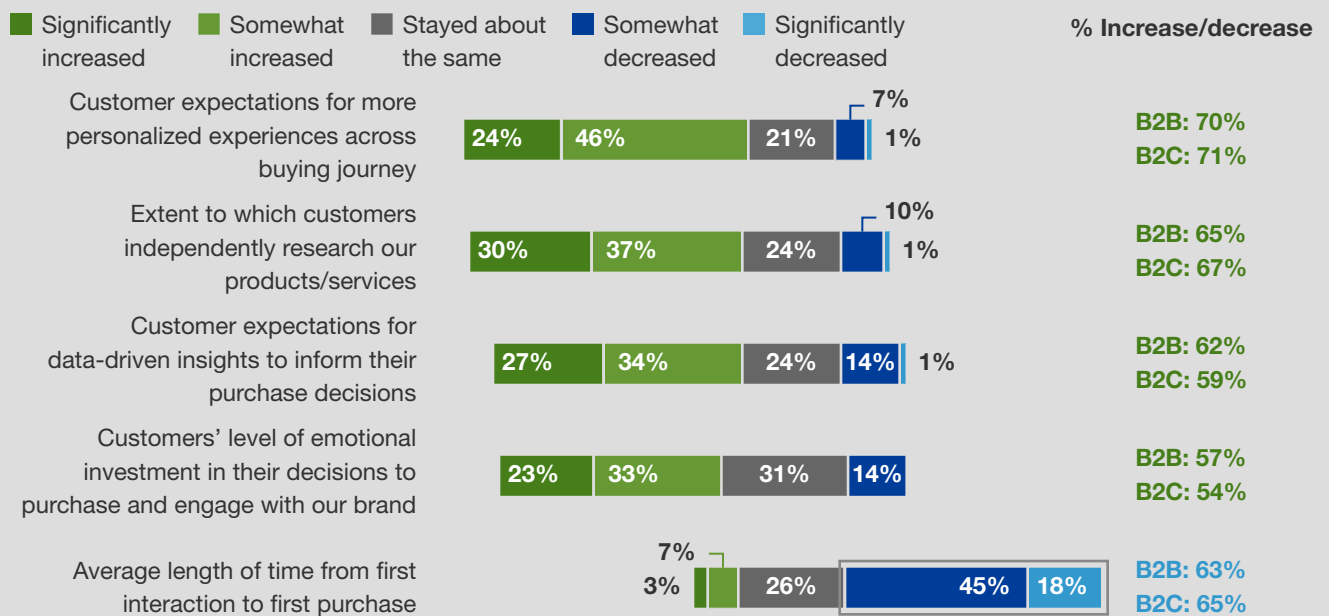
In surveying B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection, we found that:

- › **Business buyers and consumers behave similarly.** In fact, 52% of companies agree or strongly agree that they have seen more similarities in the way their business buyers and consumers behave in the past two years. For example, customers expect more effective interactions in less time (see Figure 2). Customers have increased their amount of independent research, their expectations of data-driven insights and personalized buying experiences, and their levels of emotional investment in decisions (spending less time between first interaction and first purchase). This leaves B2B and B2C businesses alike with less time to deliver more personalized insights before a purchase is made. It is critical for B2B and B2C companies to finely tune their marketing strategies as both consumer and business buyers expect more effective interactions in a short amount of time. The increasing similarities among business buyers and consumers yield themselves to many opportunities for shared best practices and learnings.

52% agree they have seen more similarities in the way their B2B and B2C customers behave in the past two years.

Figure 2

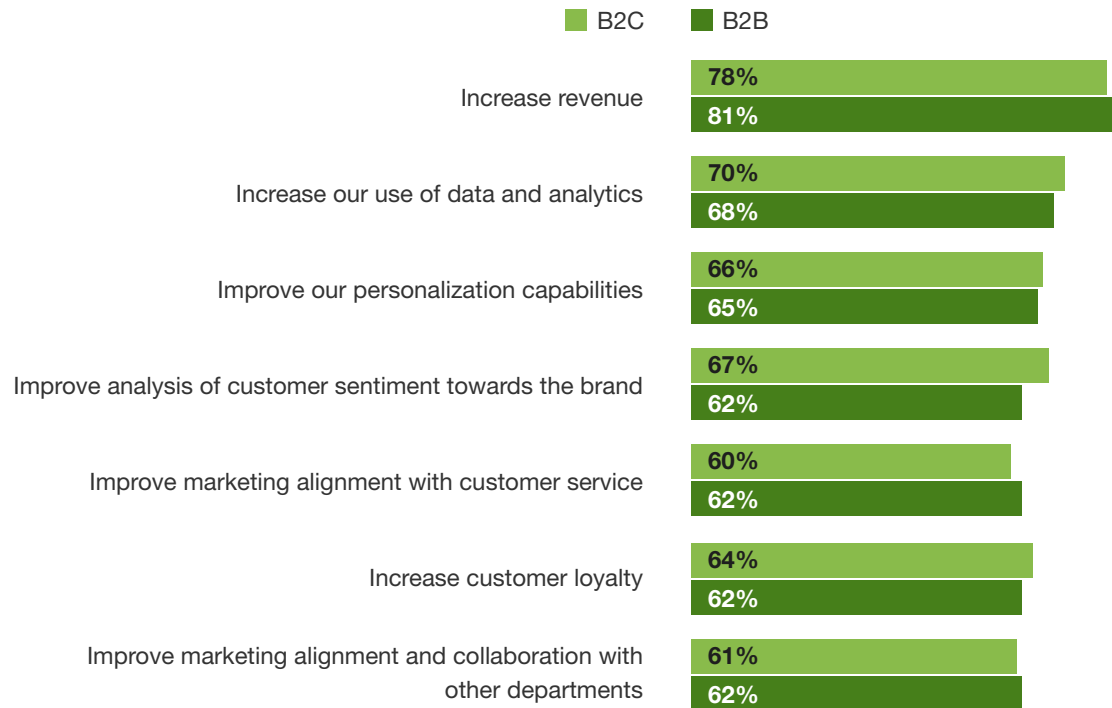
“How have the following elements of your customers’ buying journey changed over the past two years?”



Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

- › **B2B and B2C companies also prioritize the same marketing initiatives.** Marketers' top priority over the next 12 months is to increase revenue, with the next four priorities supporting the first: 1) increasing or improving their use of data and analytics; 2) improving personalization capabilities; 3) analyzing customer sentiment; and 4) driving customer loyalty (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Top Marketing Initiatives Over The Next 12 Months



Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

- › **B2B and B2C marketers can benefit from collaborating and learning from each other to navigate this new normal.** Twenty-eight percent of surveyed companies serve both businesses and consumers — they are also already benefitting from the expertise of their B2B/B2C counterparts. The vast majority have fostered moderate to full coordination with B2B and B2C marketing strategy teams (92%) and marketing operations teams (82%). As a result, 83% of companies that serve both audiences agree that their B2B and B2C marketing teams have benefited from cross-team collaboration, and 75% agree that their B2B and B2C marketing teams learn valuable insights from one another. For example, B2C marketers are learning to focus more on nurturing and less on transactions, in order to meet the B2B-like levels of consideration that consumers are devoting to even the most simple purchases. B2B marketers, on the other hand, are learning how they can add more emotion to their marketing and create the kind of relationship that consumers expect from all of the companies they purchase from. The benefits experienced by this collaboration, within B2B/B2C and B2B2C companies, lays the framework for B2B companies and B2C companies to broaden their scope of influence and learn from other business types.

Tracking Customer Journeys Is A Top Challenge For B2B And B2C Companies

Both B2B and B2C companies face challenges when tracking the entire customer journey and connecting interactions, a critical component of creating a holistic marketing plan. For example, a consumer may find out about your brand while scrolling through a social feed on mobile, investigating further on a tablet, and then finally shopping and making a purchase on a work laptop. Similarly, a business buyer may hop back and forth between personal and work accounts or devices in a single buying journey. Both of these scenarios involve a complex tracking journey, where serving the right content at the right time for both B2B and B2C companies is of utmost concern. In an analysis of customer journeys, we found that:

- › **B2B and B2C companies struggle to create holistic experiences when customer insights are limited or disconnected.** Two of the top challenges when tracking customer journeys is connecting traditional marketing efforts with digital marketing efforts (with B2B, 66%, and B2C, 62%) and connecting the insights/data from all members of the buying process (with B2B, 60%, and B2C, 64%). To adapt to the changing needs of customers, businesses must focus on cross-platform, integrated marketing. However, few are doing what it takes to engage customers effectively throughout the journey. Only 7% of B2C companies and 6% of B2B companies create customer marketing journeys based on customer interactions consistently across all brands and lines of business. Given that companies need to provide more insightful interactions in a short amount of time, using AI to trigger outreach events and harnessing data-driven insights through journey tracking is critical to marketing success.
- › **Companies face numerous data and cross-channel challenges when attempting to achieve marketing priorities.** The presence of data siloes keeps both B2B and B2C companies from creating the types of cross-channel marketing experiences they need to be successful (see Figure 4).

Two-thirds of companies are unable to get real-time reporting, which is critical to meeting the shortened buyer journey window.

Figure 4: Top Five Challenges For Achieving Marketing Priorities

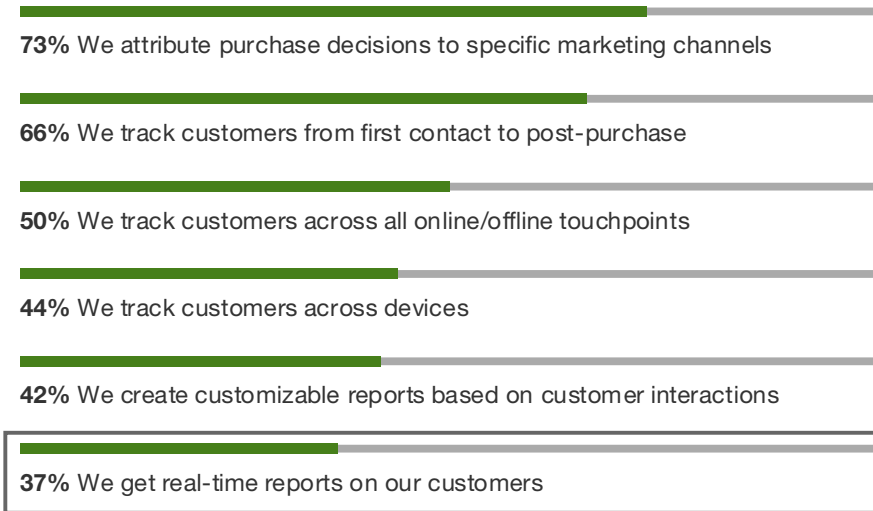
1 Aggregating siloed marketing data and content from multiple systems	B2B: 70% B2C: 66%
2 Creating cross-channel marketing experiences	B2B: 68% B2C: 71%
3 Difficulty carrying out marketing automation at scale	B2B: 66% B2C: 60%
4 Lacking required technology to perform tasks	B2B: 64% B2C: 62%
5 Having poor quality, inconsistent, or inaccessible customer data	B2B: 61% B2C: 63%

Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

› **Tracking customer journeys in real time is key to delivering on customer expectations, yet most lack this capability.** Various aspects of customer journey tracking are challenging, with fewer than half of companies confident in both their cross-device tracking and real-time customer insights capabilities (see Figure 5). AI-powered journey management could give companies the ability to track customers across devices and trigger touchpoints to deliver the right message/content in real time.

Figure 5

“Which of the following reflect your company’s current capabilities for tracking customer journeys?”



Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

BUYER JOURNEY COMPLEXITY CAN IMPACT THE WAY BUSINESSES TRACK CUSTOMER JOURNEYS

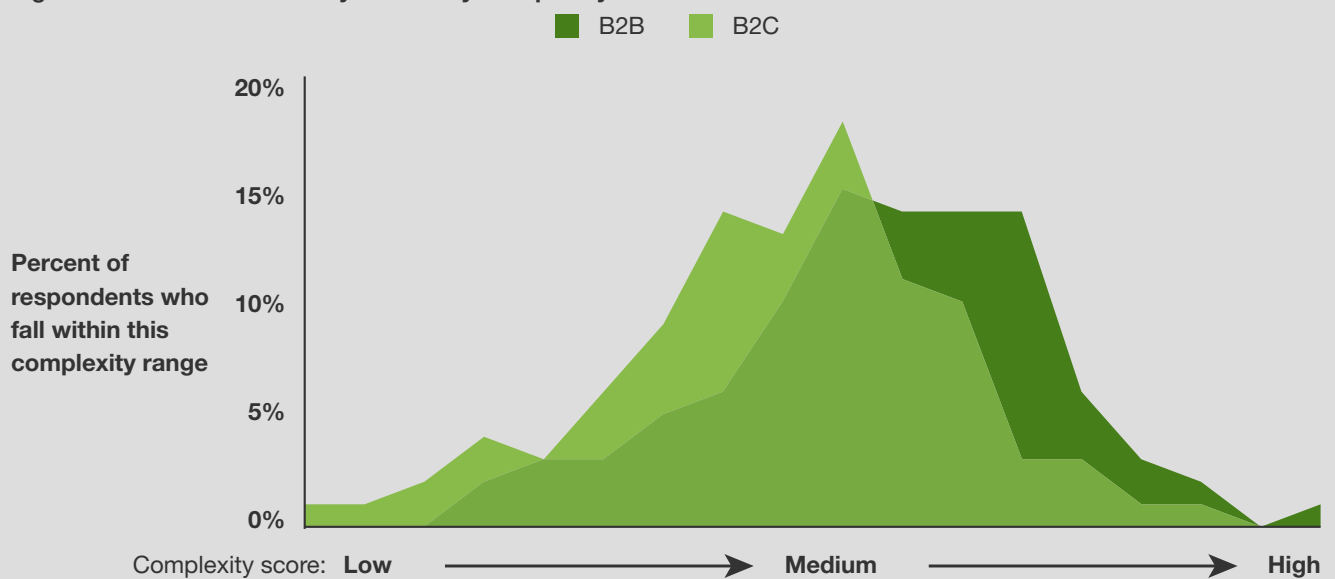
Understanding the complexity of buyer journeys helps to address gaps in key components of the processes. A complex web of touchpoints, stakeholders, and decision criteria guide B2B and B2C purchases.

Some of these complex components include:

- › Average number of touchpoints before a lead becomes a sale (with B2B, 7.9, and B2C, 8.3).
- › Amount of consideration given to the purchase (%med-high to high with B2B, 82%, and B2C, 77%).
- › Information needed before a purchase (%med-high to high, with B2B, 76%, and B2C, 76%).
- › Average number of people involved in the purchase decision (with B2B, 5.0, and B2C, 2.6).

Marketers need to quickly meet these complex customer needs because many purchase decisions are made in less than a week. To get a complete picture of buyer complexity, B2C and B2B marketers ranked the complexity of their typical buyer based on thirteen factors.² Those factors were compiled into a Buyer Journey Complexity Scale ranging from low to high complexity (see Figure 6). Based on this buyer journey complexity scale, low-end B2B purchases and a high-end B2C purchases overlap in the medium complexity zone. This means that a more complex consumer purchase (e.g., the purchase of a home or a college decision) represents similar traits as a less complex business purchase (e.g., refreshing models of office PCs).

Figure 6: B2B Versus B2C Buyer Journey Complexity

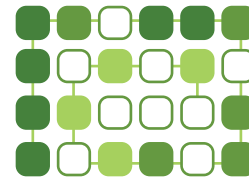


Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

The complexity of interactions can impact the way that marketers interact and track the customer journey. For example:

- › **Companies have more effective ways to track and measure customer engagements when buyer journeys are less complex.** Companies that have highly complex buyer journeys have a harder time tracking the entire customer journey across devices and through online and offline touchpoints, as well as creating customizable interactions. For example, 73% of companies with low complexity journeys, compared to 63% of companies with high complexity journeys, can track and measure the entire customer journey from first contact to post-purchase. Although this is easier for lower complexity engagements, the higher complexity buyer journeys may be where these types of insights are most needed.
- › **Companies struggle to track across channels when customer buyer journeys are complex.** One-third of companies (37% of B2C and 32% of B2B) are still struggling to track and measure the entire customer journey. Companies have more effective ways to track and measure customer engagements when buyer journeys are less complex. Roughly one in 10 companies (9%) with high complexity buyer journeys are not able to track marketing effectiveness, compared to only 3% of companies with low and medium complexity journeys.

High complexity buyer journeys are more difficult for companies to track and measure.



One in 10 companies (9%) with high complexity buyer journeys are not able to track marketing effectiveness.

Cross-Channel Capabilities Help Businesses Achieve Marketing Goals

B2B and B2C organizations recognize the need for creating holistic marketing journeys. B2C companies have shifted their focus from a transactional-based sales funnel to a relationship-based sales cycle that relies on information about the customer journey.³ B2B companies have to combat the new desire of anonymity among buyers and a shortened purchasing cycle. As a result, companies are implementing marketing technologies with cross-channel capabilities to fill these gaps. Our survey showed that:



- › **B2B and B2C marketers look to cross-channel campaign management and marketing automation to achieve their goals.** As companies are struggling with cross-channel marketing and siloed reporting, they are either planning to implement or have already implemented marketing technology software to alleviate some of their major pain points. Adoption of cross-channel campaign management and marketing automation technologies is poised to nearly double in the next year as many companies plan to implement in the next twelve months (see Figure 7).
- › **Cross-channel capabilities top the list for critical marketing automation software capabilities.** The most important criteria for both B2B and B2C organizations when selecting marketing automation software are cross-channel marketing capabilities (see Figure 8). As customers bounce around between multiple channels, there are countless opportunities to interact with the right messaging at the right time. Understanding the stage that an individual or business has had with your brand across other platforms allows marketers to have a more comprehensive view of the customers, enabling them to serve more effective, insightful content in the right moments.

The convergence of strategies supported by marketing automation and cross-channel marketing software will yield richer metrics and enable marketers to better measure journeys.

Figure 7: Current And Planned Adoption Of Marketing Technologies

	Current Adoption Level		Planned Adoption Growth Over Next Year		Adoption Level In One Year	
	B2B	B2C	B2B	B2C	B2B	B2C
Cross-channel campaign management technology	35%	32%	+34%	+30%	69%	62%
Marketing automation technology	40%	38%	+27%	+27%	67%	65%

Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

› **Companies seek automation software that easily enables customized journeys and rules-based interactions.** B2B and B2C companies alike prioritize marketing automation software that allows them to easily customize customer journeys, as well as the ability to create unique, rules-based campaigns and programs (see Figure 8). Customers are spending less time interacting with businesses before making a purchase decision, so reaching digitally empowered audiences with relevant content, that guides them through the customer journey, is critical for marketers.

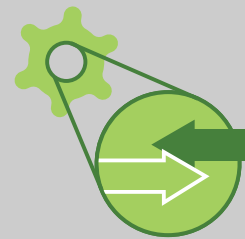
Figure 8

“When selecting marketing automation software, how important are the following features and capabilities?”

(Important or Critical Requirements Shown)



Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

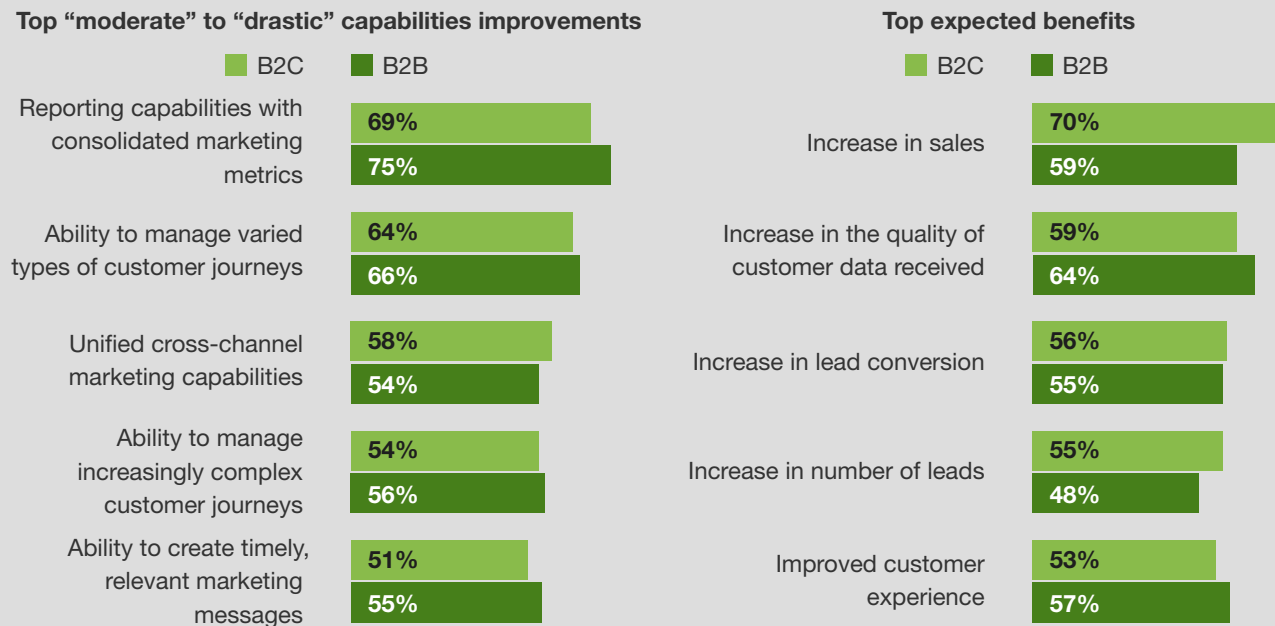


B2B and B2C companies view cross-channel marketing capabilities as the most important criteria when selecting marketing automation software.

- › **Marketers believe cross-channel marketing automation tools will improve data quality, resulting in boosted sales.** As demonstrated earlier, increasing revenue and increasing the use of data and analytics are marketers' top two priorities for the next twelve months (see Figure 9). The benefits of using marketing automation software that includes cross-channel marketing capabilities directly map to these goals. Most marketers expect that these solutions will drive an increase in sales (with B2B, 59%, and B2C, 70%) and an increase in the quality of customer data received (with B2B, 64%, and B2C, 59%). Even though companies may already be receiving a large quantity of data from various marketing platforms, companies believe that the quality of that data, coming from a marketing automation tool with cross-channel capabilities, will be much higher than with previous methods of data procurement.
- › **Companies expect an improvement in their marketing capabilities as a result of using cross-channel marketing software.** The convergence of strategies supported by marketing automation and cross-channel marketing software will yield richer metrics and enable marketers to better measure journeys (see Figure 9). These solutions will further help marketers track and manage complex customer journeys, while reducing the amount of disjointed messaging that results from siloed marketing data.

Cross-channel marketing capabilities are critical to both B2B and B2C companies as they attempt to market effectively in a short amount of time and understand the entirety of the buyer's journey.

Figure 9: The Convergence Of Cross-Channel Campaign Management With Marketing Automation Software Will Yield Significant Capabilities Improvements And Business Benefits



Base: Variable manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management and marketing technology selection
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019

Key Recommendations

Forrester's in-depth survey of B2C and B2B marketers about the changing behaviors and preferences of their buyers yielded several key recommendations:



Help the buyer buy. Access to information, whether pricing, peer reviews, or product specs, has forever tipped the balance of power from company to customer. Modern buyers are in total control of their buying journeys, and they know it. To be successful, B2B and B2C companies will need to embrace that change and put these newly empowered customers at the center of everything they do. The jobs of marketers have changed from convincing customers to buy to helping them buy, by removing friction or adding value throughout their journeys.



Get comfortable with anonymity. Most of the people using an online dating service to find a life partner — one of the most important decisions anyone can make in their personal lives — start that journey anonymously. He or she wants to control the process and only reveal certain aspects of their identity once they've done enough research of the other person to feel comfortable and confident in doing so. B2B consumers act the same way in their professional lives, for the same reasons. B2B marketers need to give their customers the same courtesy and respect by allowing them to remain anonymous when they are doing their initial research to determine whether or not to buy from you.



Start more conversations. Many of the simplest B2C buying decisions — such as which movie to see or where to eat — have become the kind of data-driven, high-consideration purchase journeys once solely typical of a six-figure software purchase. Because of this, B2C marketers need to be prepared to educate and inform their customers at every step of the way in an extended, contextual conversation. Making this shift from quick transactions to long-term relationships will require B2C marketers to redouble their commitment to understanding and staying engaged throughout the purchase journey.

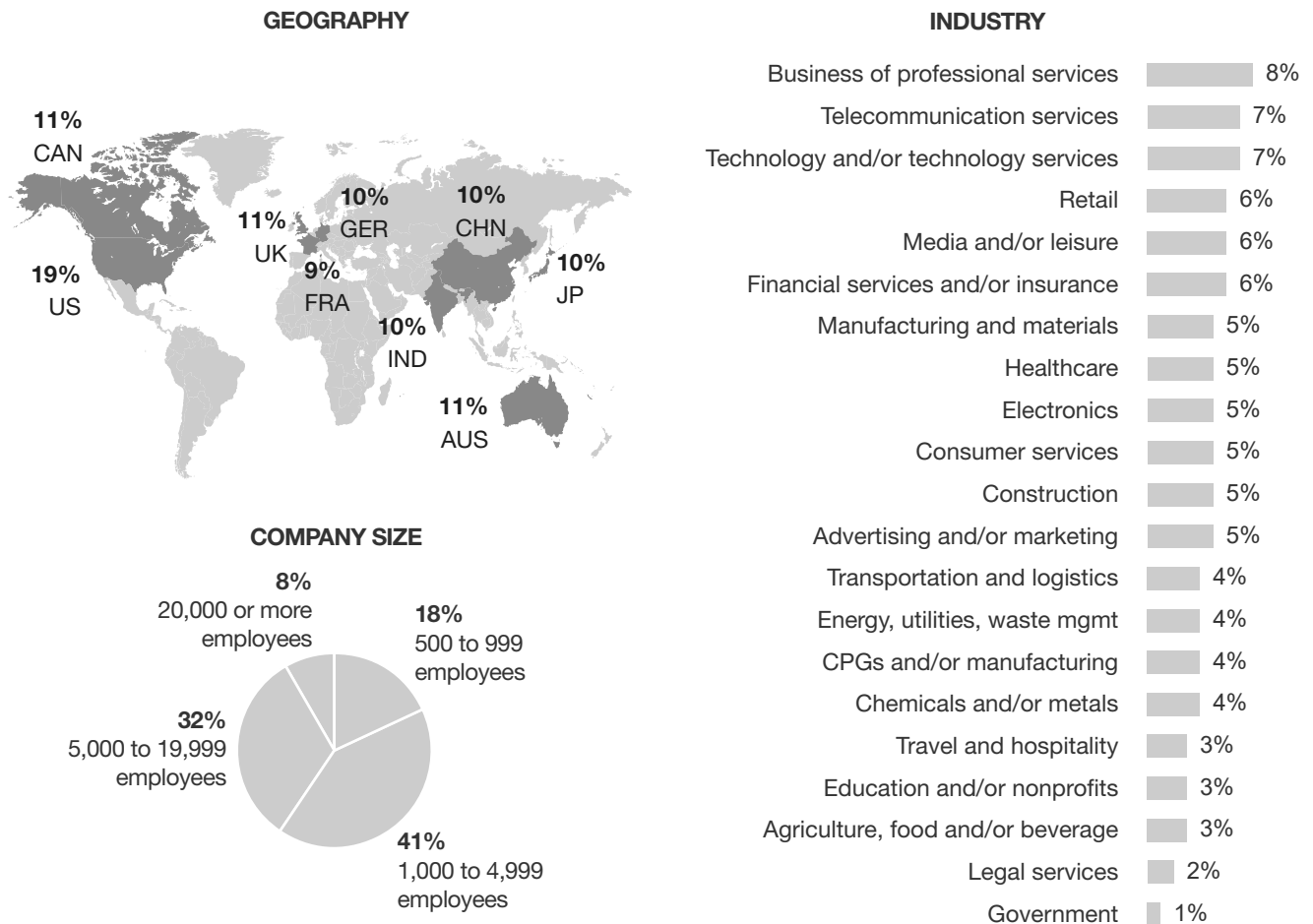


Aim to be omnipresent. All B2B buyers and B2C consumers share a common expectation today that the companies they purchase from will know who they are, what they want, and where they've been — regardless of where they are in the purchase journey at any particular moment. B2B and B2C marketers need to see this omnichannel challenge not as a problem to be solved, by being everywhere at once, but instead use the insights that can be gathered as the lens through which to see the customer's perspective, learning where they expect you to be at every step of their individual journey.

Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 552 cross-industry organizations in the US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, India, China, Japan, and Australia to evaluate the similarities of B2B and B2C purchase journeys. Survey participants included manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management/execution and marketing technology selection/purchases. The study was completed in February 2019.

Appendix B: Demographics/Data



Base: 552 manager+ B2B and B2C marketers involved in decisions related to campaign management/execution and marketing technology selection/purchases.

Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Adobe, February 2019.

Appendix C: Endnotes

¹ Source: “The Birth of the B2B Consumer,” Forrester Research, Inc. October 5, 2017.

² Thirteen factors of complexity were asked to all recipients. The scales for each question included five answer options, ranked from the lowest complexity (1) to the highest complexity (5). The sum of these values indicates the complexity of each respondent. The twelve components of complexity included: 1) average number of touchpoints before a prospect (individual or business with no prior contact) becomes a lead (direct interaction with company); 2) average number of touchpoints before a lead (first interaction with company) becomes a sale (makes purchase decision); 3) amount of consideration given to the purchase; 4) amount of financial risk involved in the decision; 5) amount of professional risk involved in the decision; 6) information the customer/prospect needs before purchase (minimal to significant); 7) emotional factor in target buyer’s purchase decision; 8) number of people involved in target buyer’s purchase decision; 9) level of impact that the decision has on others; 10) average number of purchases from one customer per year; 11) average order value in USD; 12) average length of time from first contact to purchase; and 13) average length of time between purchase.

³ Source: “Forget The Funnel: The B2B Marketing Process Drives Revenue Performance,” Forrester Research, Inc., February 5, 2018.