

Clearing the creative hurdles:

An approach to marketing B2B products

When it comes to developing and evaluating the creative approach for your products, you probably look at things from several angles. Is the approach unique? Does it differentiate your product? Does it get your product noticed? These are questions applicable to the creative for any product, but they are particularly driven by the traditional creative development process for selling consumer brands.

If you are selling a B2B product, though, there are two more key questions your creative should answer: Does it help my audience understand the product? Does it get them to agree to buy the product? To answer these questions, effective B2B creative emphasizes substance to go along with the style, for an approach that achieves consumer marketing appeal with the depth of understanding needed for a B2B purchase.

Quad creative model

An approach to evaluate the effectiveness of your marketing creative.

Beyond the persuasive effort to gain attention and interest, B2B and B2B_C* have additional hurdles in steps 3 and 4. These steps are critical to B2B and B2B_C buyers who require more and varied information to complete the considered, possibly complex, purchase process.



1. Grabbing attention:

Often called “stopping power,” the creative has to first get the audience to turn their heads and take a look.

Supported by:

- Memorable visuals
- Catchy copy

2. Creating interest:

Once the audience has stopped for a look, the creative has to generate interest, and really, “self-interest”: *What will this product do for me?*

Supported by:

- Audience wants
- Audience pain points

3. Developing understanding:

Creative for B2B products has significant challenges here. The audience has to gain an understanding of what the product does, who it’s for and why it’s good for them.

Supported by:

- Features, benefits, economics, data
- Demonstrated relevance (to business or application)

4. Gaining agreement:

Here’s where the creative has to get convincing: *I understand what you’re selling, I agree that it is right for me and it is a good business decision.*

Supported by:

- Sources of authority (expert opinion, peer testimonials)
- Metrics

Consumer buyers:

- Make more purchases that are low-consideration/low-risk
- Usually already know features and benefits (at least by category), or don’t emphasize them much in decision process
- May already agree this is a product they want

B2B buyers:

- Take time reviewing/researching products
- Look to vendors to be subject matter experts and consultants¹
- Weigh economic, operational and business consequences of purchases
- Purchase as a team: 4+ groups may be involved in buying decision¹

*B2B_C refers to business-to-business products that are branded and packaged in a way that’s similar to a B2C model. B2B_C products either have thousands of possible buyers requiring mass communications to create demand, or have large sales forces wanting consistency of presentation to the market. These products require the same in-depth understanding and agreement to successfully complete the considered purchase.

Understanding and agreement are creative, too

Steps 3 and 4—developing understanding and gaining agreement—are often left out of the creative expression of B2B brands and instead left in the hands of sales people. Often, the information needed for these steps is deemed too complicated to be presented creatively, or is simply considered the domain of the face-to-face sales team. But with today's B2B buyers making the majority of their purchase decision before engaging sales people,² leaving these steps out of creative can be a costly mistake. With the right approach and a creative partner who has an expert understanding of your product and customers, even complex information can be communicated in ways that are succinct and engaging, allowing you to retain the necessary information to help drive your sales process to the close, without sacrificing gains in attention and interest.



Does your marketing clear the creative hurdles?

Examine a recent ad, detailer, brochure or website for one of your products with the Quad Creative Model in mind and weigh the execution of each quality.

Does your B2B creative:

- Get the audience to stop and pay attention? **(Step 1 - Attention)**
- Pique prospects' interest? **(Step 2 - Interest)**
- Lean too heavily on technical information, appealing only to experts? **(Step 3 - Understanding)**
- Treat details too lightly, making it unclear what the product does, who it's for, or why it's a good business decision? **(Step 3 - Understanding)**
- Follow through to convince customers to buy? **(Step 4 - Agreement)**

The **Quad Creative Model** is a good guide for evaluating your approach. When you leverage all the steps in your creative execution, you may soon find more sales heading in your direction.

¹ LinkedIn. Jan. 2016. Rethink the B2B Buyer's Journey. Retrieved from: <https://business.linkedin.com/en-uk/marketing-solutions/c/16/2/rethinking-the-b2b-buyers>.

² Mull, Corey. Feb. 2013. B2B's Digital Evolution. Retrieved from: https://ssl.gstatic.com/think/docs/b2b-digital-evolution_articles.pdf.