

THE VERTO BRIEF

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The Mysterious Case of the
Vanishing Buyer



Why Changing Buyers are a Threat to Your Business & What to do About it.

In the shadow of COVID -19, we are likely to witness a serious change in the make-up of our buyer markets in B2B. Furloughs will become permanent layoffs; companies will re-organize, and technology adoption will move into high gear resulting in more workforce upheaval. As Peggy Noonan pointed out in the [WSJ article dated June 12, 2020](#): “Thirty million have filed for unemployment. Here is a fear-based on the vibrations coming from CEOs and other captains of great entities: They'll use the 2020 crash as cover to do things they've long wanted to do, which is get rid of costly people in their corporations, especially in the middle levels. Some will speed up artificial intelligence and robotics. They'll announce they're "redefining their mission." They'll be shaking off people they've wanted to shake off.

In a similar vein, James Allen of Bain & Company writes of the same outcome in “The Coronavirus May Inspire a Great Retooling - What the CEOs of the 2020s can learn from the business leaders of the 1940s as they confront Covid-19.” Allen says that “A firm’s purpose has always been to manage three great conflicts and make the right trade-offs for customers: scale vs. customer intimacy, routines vs. disruption and short-term planning vs. long-term planning. CEOs are retooling their firms to manage these conflicts digitally. Leaders recognize that their companies will live or die based on the speed at which they adopt new technologies and new mindsets.”

The extent and specifics of these possibilities remain uncertain. What is certain is that these changes will cause a reorganization of your buying audience.

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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE B2B LEADER

All the work you have undertaken to painstakingly identify, gather, enhance, manage, and communicate with that target audience will need to be re-worked as the target audience gets rebuilt. Estimates vary as to the scale of changes in the workforce, but some economists predict that 42% of workers furloughed will never return. To make the situation more challenging, those that do get replaced by other humans will be replaced by members of a younger demographic group. According to Merit, – "73% of millennial workers are involved in decisions to purchase products or services for their companies". And according to Trust Radius, "over 45% of B2B technology buyers are 25 to 34 year old's making them the single largest demographic followed by 30% in the 35 to 44-year-old age group." Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse on this one, Gartner reminds us that "In a typical firm with 100 to 500 employees an average of seven people are involved in most buying decisions."

Here's the problem then:

- The composition of your target market is changing. You have to rebuild this data. In other words, a large percentage of those pesky contact records in your CRM is "yesterday's news." You'll need the new names, email addresses, phone numbers, LinkedIn profiles, etc.
- You don't just need the new names and contact information; you need to realize that the buyer's habits and preferences are changing. New buyer - new demographic – new habits – new preferences, which means you'll probably need to re-think your approach.
- You need to do this quickly. Remember what James Allen said above, "...companies will live or die based on the speed at which they adopt new technologies and new mindsets."



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THE BEAT GOES ON - WELL KNOWN STATS ON THE "BUYER JOURNEY."

We already know the stats on the buyer's journey, so popularized over the last ten years.

- 67% of the buyer's journey is now done digitally.
- 63% of consumers need to hear company claims three to five times before they actually believe it.
- B2B buyers are typically 57% of the way to a buying decision before actively engaging with sales

Some of these statistics seem unclear and contradictory. What is clear is that buying behavior has and continues to move online, and the new group of buyers you're going to be dealing expect to be communicated within that digital domain.

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CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC

This new group of buyers doesn't have the same hang-ups as their predecessors did. Their habits are different, as are their tolerances. They know that in the words of Rockwell (with backing vocals by Michael Jackson), "Somebody's Watching Me." And they don't care. Millennial and Gen Z buyers have proven time and time again that they are prepared to trade privacy for convenience. According to [Waqas Baig in Security Today](#), May 20, 2020, "approximately 6% of online users have damaged their reputation, and 1% of them have to resign from their jobs and leave their careers just because of the online world." Members of the Millennial and Gen Z groups clearly see the risk of being compromised as pretty low.

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So, it doesn't matter to them that their browsing habits are available to be seen; they are cooked to death with AI algorithms gathering information and learning patterns about their behavior. These new buyers will expect you to "keep up." So, you might want to shelve all those broadcast fax marketing programs.

IS THE RELATIONSHIP TRAIN RUNNING OUT OF STEAM?

If the composition of my target market is changing, and the habits and preferences within it are also shifting, how significant is this for how we sell to them? The answer is in the question. It represents a significant departure to how you currently sell and market. Add to this, the dynamic of less physical contact (not because of CV-19, but because it's cheaper to do everything on video calls), and the implications for those all-important business relationships are compelling.


On the one hand, some people argue that the business relationship of yesteryear has been under siege for some years as buyers try to ensure more dispassionate, objective decision making through rigorous and formalized buying processes. Others argue that people are people and that for social, even neurological reasons, relationships, and the ability to build and manage them will remain important in business. Technological and generational evolution might change how we build and manage relationships forever, or they might just be blips in the regular cycles of human behavior.

The modern business relationship displays fascinating contradictions as it evolves:


- Digital natives grow up with an entirely different view of relationships and are more technologically savvy than their predecessors claiming they don't need the "hand-holding" part of B2B relationships. This doesn't mean they don't need any form of relationship; they just need a different form.
- Modern companies' approach to changing relationship needs, was to create the "Customer Success" role. But they then overloaded these reps, causing them to show up late to calls, jumping off calls prematurely and always reminding you how busy they are with other customers. That's just what customers DON'T want to hear.
- "Self-guided" buyers claim to increasingly buy based on "feature superiority" which would imply they are relationship agnostic. Yet according to CSO Insights "45% of B2B buyers want to hear new ideas at the beginning of the sales conversation." Sellers need to resist the temptation to jump into demo's prematurely. Modern buyers need guidance in an increasingly confusing product and service landscape.
- Relationship management will increasingly be a "remote" activity. Less visits and more video. Firms will benefit financially as the move to "inside" sales roles accelerates. Enduring relationships are built on trust and its hard to achieve that over the phone and via video call. Pre pandemic statistics from CSO Insights revealed that; "65% of B2B buyers said that they found value in discussing their situations with salespeople" implying that buyers still find value in trusted relationships.

THE VERDICT

These are uncertain, confusing times, and fortune will favor the brave. Here are some suggestions to enable you to at least preserve, if not grow, and help you and your team resist giving back what you've built over the last few years.





Rebuild your target market now, don't delay. This is basic stuff, so don't let missing the basics let you down. If you use some of the emerging buyer intent and social listening technology, you'll find it's not as painful as it used to be.



Line up with the habits and preferences of those new buyers. They care less about the "niceties" of previous sales thinking. They know they're "being watched." They know that you know where they've been, and engaging with them, as a result, won't offend anyone. This is not an excuse to rush into clumsy sales pursuits, but you can't stay on the sidelines either.

Spend time evaluating the *demand type* you are dealing with, as defined by Sirius. You must be ruthless here. Most companies suffer from two problems.

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- A. They are reluctant to confine themselves to one category as they think this will reduce their market opportunity. Forget that – you must have a maniacal focus in times like these.
 - B. They are the victims of vanity and aspiration. They want to appear more sophisticated than they are. Forget that as well. You should have plans and a business development road map for the future, but you also have to "know yourself." This can be a life's journey for most of us, but you just don't have that much time.



Concede which type of demand your sales teams and marketing teams can handle. Can they "create" demand, or can they just handle "existing or active" demand. Most salespeople will claim to be the former when, in fact, they are the latter. Most salespeople are either unwilling or unable to "create" demand. If there's nothing going on in an account, they prefer to move on down the street in search of "active demand."

**MINDING THE GAPS IN B2B SALES AND
MARKETING INVOLVES FINDING THEM FIRST**

The gaps in sales and marketing have gotten wider thanks to the “new” normal. As a result - B2B leaders needs to do *more* with *less*. Demand generation, digital marketing, and sales enablement should work together, be simpler, cost less, and produce more.

We make it happen.

