

a guide to brilliant B2B marketing



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breaking the mould in B2B

When compared to B2C marketing, B2B marketing can get a bad rap. There are a lot of preconceptions about what B2B marketers can do, and how they should do it, which can lead B2B organisations to limit themselves unnecessarily when it comes to their marketing. Here are just a few (false) statements that we hear often:

- B2B customers are completely different to B2C customers
- Social media only works in B2C
- There's no point in writing a blog

It's these notions that lead many to draw the conclusion that to be successful, marketing in the B2B space must follow the same old tried-and-tested techniques that have been rolled out by marketing teams for decades.

We disagree. In the digital world we live in, where 90% of a B2B buyers' journey is already complete by the time they reach out to your business, you need to make sure that your brand stands out from your competitors'. And while B2B buyers are buying on behalf of a business, they are ultimately human – they're just as likely to be swayed by interesting, relevant and timely marketing as B2C customers are.

That's great news for us B2B marketers, as it means we can be just as creative and innovative in our campaigns as our friends in the B2C space. We're not saying you need to forget everything you know – building a strong brand is just as crucial as it's always been, for example – but if you're trying to reach new customers, a new approach could be just what you need.

We've spent more years in B2B than we'd like to admit, both in-house and agency-side, and we've learnt a lot along the way. Sharing is caring, as they say, so in this book you'll find all our top tips on a number of key elements of your marketing toolkit – we hope you find them useful!

Jenny Hughes and Jodie Williams Founders of The Marketing Pod B2B marketing is becoming as brave, creative and innovative as its B2C counterpart

developing a brand that differentiates

First among the key themes we have selected to help your business break the mould and get ahead of its competitors, is branding.

Standing out in a crowded space

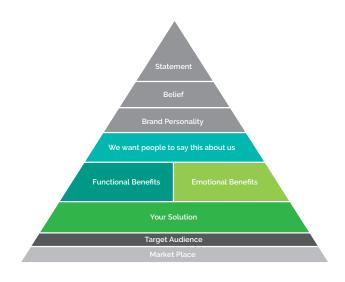
In the consumer space, brand is BIG. We see businesses invest big money in building and developing brands that resonate with their audience, from engaging websites and stand-out logos to multi-channel marketing activity that strikes just the right tone. So why do we see the brand as any less valuable in B2B marketing?

Remember that people buy from people. The B2B buyer engages with a brand on the same emotional level as they do with consumer brands – they just have a different frame of reference. Their expectation, requirements and overall motivations might be different, but their need for the brand to deliver on what it says it will is no different.

Marketing doesn't need to be complicated

The very nature of B2B means that products and services can often be technical or complex... but that doesn't mean that marketing should be.

The B2B buyer might be a specialist, but their motivation is finding a brand to help them get to where they want to be. That doesn't mean they need a highly technical explanation – simply something that responds to their emotional needs: 'What can it solve for me?' and 'Can it do what I need it to?'. With an unprecedented volume of marketing messages received daily, to win the tiny fraction of mind space a B2B buyer can give you, your brand and organisation needs to stand out.



A strong brand

- Knows itself
- Has traits and values that resonate with its audience
- Is consistent, from service through to sales
- Is built on truth

There's a simple process to follow to uncover your personality and build a compelling brand – a Brand Pyramid tool. Follow these steps to make the most of the Brand Pyramid tool.

Step one: understanding your market, your audience and where you fit

Map out the marketplace you are operating in. Detail out the space you operate in, from market trends to anything that impacts your customers (such as new legislation or changing end user requirements). Don't forget your competitors here: add in their strategies, strengths and weaknesses – particularly as you want to make sure you develop a brand that differentiates itself from the rest of the pack!

Know your audience.

Which customer segments do you want to grow – and what do you want to sell to them? What are their traits, from size and spend to their pain points and current/future needs?

Your solutions.

What solutions do you offer today that meet these customer needs? Where are the gaps to be addressed?

Step two: defining your functional and emotional benefits

The next stage is to consider how your organisation impacts customers – from how you help them to how you make them feel.

Functional benefits are the easy part: how are you helping your customers? From cost savings to process improvements, capture how your products and expertise benefit them.

You should also think about the emotional benefits you can offer your customers. How does your product make your customers feel? Does it give them peace of mind? Confidence? Asking them directly through independent research is the best way to find this out.

Step three: writing your brand manifesto

A brand manifesto summarises your business, backed up with proof points. It should explain who you are, what you believe in, and what you do differently to others. It has to be cemented within your core foundations and relate back to what your target audience needs from you both today and tomorrow.

This manifesto – detailing who you are and your aspirations – will help you to choose the right personality for your brand. Bear in mind that being aspirational is good, but make sure you don't make claims you can't substantiate. Nothing destroys a brand's credibility faster than a failure to deliver against its promises.

Top tip: Emotional benefits really do matter in the B2B space! 80% of B2B Executives say customer experience has a major impact on their purchasing decision, so don't underestimate its importance.

Step four: defining your brand personality

Your manifesto pulls together both your foundations and aspirations, making it easier to identify a clear brand personality. Businesses that successfully align themselves to a specific personality have a strong sense of identity – and in turn, businesses are more likely to buy from brands that have a strong sense of who they are, with a consistent external positioning. We use the archetypes tool to help businesses define the key traits that resonate with their audience.

First, we determine a business' core motivation from one of the four quadrants, then identify how their brand aspirations map against the archetypes within that quadrant (from the 'Everyman' used by brands such as Tesco, to the humour of the 'Jester' used by the likes of Paddy Power). Map in your competitors too - where do they sit? A 'me too' personality is unlikely to make your brand stand out in a crowded market space.

There's no such thing as the 'best' archetype – it's more important to make sure that the chosen personality is the best fit for your brand.

Step five: summarising your brand

Now that you've determined your personality, your aspirations and your core foundations, what's your key reason to exist? That might be an aim to be the market leader by 2020, or the trusted partner of a specific segment. Defining that gives your brand clear direction and purpose.

Last but not least, you need a brand statement: a single sentence that summarises your offer to your customers: this encapsulates your key proposition, which is often for internal use only.

Creatively executing your brand

You need to fully understand your brand, its personality and your key proposition before you can move on to creative execution.

You need to understand what emotions to engender and the key traits to portray to connect with your audience for real cut through.

When you can articulate what you do, why you do it, and the benefit it brings, all communications hang off a consistent thread.



Getting your brand right is important. Why not call in a little expert help?

The Marketing Pod can help to get you started with a branding workshop, before handing over to your internal teams - or taking the journey with you to ensure your brand personality shines through in everything you do.

creating compelling content

Next in your marketing toolkit is content - but before we look at our tried and tested methods for creating compelling content and explore how to make content marketing work for your business, let's talk about what it actually is...

"A strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience"

- The Content Marketing Institute

Content marketing may be the latest industry buzz word, but it's actually a method that has been evolving over time, as the platforms and formats available to us broaden and change. The objectives of content marketing will be very familiar and, just like any other marketing approach, gaining an indepth knowledge of your audience will be a vital first step.

Familiar goals, new techniques

All marketing activity, whether B2B or B2C, will have three common goals: to reach your target audience, to appeal to your prospects and to convert your prospects into sales, or renew existing customers.

Whilst these goals are nothing new, how you work towards them is something which is continually evolving. Marketing is no longer about a monologue, with brands relentlessly pushing messages out to their clients. Now, businesses must create a dialogue with their target audience, with the focus always on providing useful, relevant and targeted information.

As a result of this new relationship, content marketing has become an integral part of the marketing mix; with 84% of customers expecting brands to create content.



How is content being used in 2018?

Content marketing is a popular and growing tool, and for good reason – 95% of B2B buyers see content as trustworthy when evaluating a company and its products and services.

Images and videos now play as crucial a role as copy, and conversations often take place in real time, across multiple channels. The opportunities for reaching your audience are plenty, but so are the challenges.

The variety of content available to audiences is also ever-growing and increasingly integrated, so that e-shots inform customers of events, and the output of events is distributed through blogs those blogs then containing videos and linking to white papers.

Whatever form your content takes, it should be appropriately modified and distributed across all of the channels and communications that you have identified as suitable for your target audience. This ensures that you can deliver a clear and consistent message to your target audience.

Creating engaging content

Whilst there is a diverse range of methods for sharing your content, simply distributing it widely won't guarantee that it will be successful. Every piece of content you create must meet three key principles:

- It has to be timely
- It has to be relevant
- It has to be engaging

In an increasingly competitive marketplace, truly creative and original content can set you apart from the crowd. If you are struggling to know how to begin, there are a series of practical steps that you can follow as you begin your journey to more compelling content.

Step one: The WHAT

Putting the customer at the heart of your content doesn't mean losing sight of your overall business objectives. It's important to always be delivering against these objectives, and to make sure the content works towards what you are trying to achieve.

Start by clearly identifying your leads - you might be hoping for increased brand awareness, higher web traffic or to nurture leads, for example.

The delivery mechanism of your content will differ depending on your desired outcome, so it's important to outline what you would like to achieve upfront.

Successful content planning will be dependent upon a thorough understanding of what your business will define as success, and how it will be measured.

Step two: The WHO

Once you have a firm grasp of your objectives, the next step will be to identify your target audience. Getting a clear oversight of the people, or "clusters" of people who you hope to engage with your content will enable you to map out what is happening in their world.

You should aim to have oversight not only of what is relevant to their business and to them as a professional, but also to get an idea of what will appeal to and resonate with them in a personal sense. Retaining the knowledge that you are speaking always to individuals, to people, will ensure you achieve cut through in an overpopulated marketplace.



Step three: The BUILD

Once you have your objectives and audience in your sights, you can begin to map out how content and people will fit together, and begin to build strategic blocks of relevant content. The result of this will be the creation of a visual 'content map'.

How to begin:

Start with a blank sheet of paper. On the right hand side, add in blocks for your audience's pain points, and break down what's happening in the world of your audience right now. Include key times and dates, important issues and factors, and other influencing elements.

Next, on the left hand side, list your offerings in terms of support, your services, things you can inform and educate on. Include information on how those products deliver a service to your audience – what do your products 'do' for them?

It's vital to remember that your products and services exist to fulfil a genuine need, and this is the point at which you must return to that need and comprehend it in full.

Finally, draw a line from the blocks on the right to those on the left; connecting the need with how you can help. Some blocks may have several lines, some may only have one. Once you've identified the key blocks of content which add real value and insight to your customers' worlds, you'll have the building blocks of a customer-centric content marketing plan.

Step four: The HOW?

Now that you've outlined which stage your customer/prospect is at within the sales funnel, and which channels your audience engages with, it's time to move to implementation and execution of your plan. Varying types of information carry more weight when they appear in different channels or are presented by varying influential people or organisations.

The chart opposite provides a useful breakdown of how it is possible to meet customer needs through a range of different content types.

BUYERS STAGES	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION / NURTURE	DECISION / ACTION
Behaviour/Actions	Expect that a problem or opportunity exists	Have defined the problem or opportunity	Know their plan of action for solving a problem or creating an opportunity
Research	Looking for information that confirms their expectations through non-promotional, neutral content	Searching for the best plan of action to solving a problem or creating the opportunity	Finding testimonials, benchmarks and data that help to support their decision
Content Method	eBooks eGuide White papers / PR Expert advice Educational blog content Industry research Analyst reports	Comparison sheets Webinars Events Video chat or podcast Expert guides	Vendor comparison sheets Product brochures Case studies Free trials Demos Assessment Consultation



Planning for success

Your content plan might be short, medium or long term – but always remember, the world changes, so don't think too far ahead! Being responsive to the changing needs of audiences is where content marketing comes into its own; reactive content is just as strategically important as planned content.

A 90 day rolling plan is a good place to start. Your plan can be built out from there at a macro level, but within a 90 day timeframe you can realistically address your audience's direct sphere of interest and provide real time, helpful information.

If you want to create a content plan but are struggling to get started, or if you know what you want to say but need help making sure your content packs a punch, call on us! The Pod has experienced marketing and copy writing experts who can help.

enhancing customer experience

In this section, we focus on how to enhance customer experience and use your relationship with customers to ensure your business has what it takes to survive in a hyper-competitive marketplace.

Begin by understanding

It's important for your business to have a good understanding of customer sentiment and to monitor it closely, to ensure that your customer communications are really hitting the mark. By refining your customer experience, your business will create credible marketing proof points that really resonate with your audience.

If you are starting out on the important mission of improving customer experience, we would recommend that you begin by gaining a full understanding of:

- Current customer sentiment
- · Reasons for any negative sentiment that exists
- The things that are really important and less important to your customers

Next, identify any internal barriers to improvement – these could include:

- Technical issues
- System related issues
- Process related issues
- Internal culture
- Management framework

Only once you have insight into these things will it become possible to plan steps for improvement.

experience is essential for the survival of your business

Accepting the Challenge

The marketplace that businesses are operating in is more competitive and more connected than ever before. Reputation amongst customers and end users is critical to remaining commercially successful and will also have an effect on business and stakeholder perception.

Many businesses will be looking for new ways to differentiate themselves from the competition. For some, a step change activity might be needed to turn the tide of a declining customer base or get ahead of the curve.

What you learn from your customer feedback should not only affect your systems and processes, but can also inform the way you communicate with – and market to – your target audience.

Identifying the issues

It is a common problem amongst businesses that customer dissatisfaction is rooted in disconnected internal processes. This is particularly true for long established businesses where processes have not been overhauled for some time.

Some common issues that businesses face include:

- Inconsistency in customer relations: a focus on key accounts with less effort made for smaller accounts.
- Sales and service teams that operate in silos, hampering productivity and leading to ineffective customer relationship management.
- A focus on perceived departmental performance rather than actual customer satisfaction, meaning company-wide cultural changes may be needed.

- KPI and targeting that does not prioritise the customer.
- Inability to get a clear view of customer needs and experience due to defensiveness of individuals or teams and fear of receiving blame.

Overcoming the hurdles

Raising customer satisfaction is one of the best ways to safeguard your business against a commercially uncertain future. Once you have a clear idea of where your problems occur, it's time to start making positive changes.

Here are our best-practice tips for addressing customer satisfaction issues head on:

1. Engaging decision makers

Endorsement from the top is vital wherever company-wide change is needed. Many businesses may find that they have commercially-driven people at the top who are not necessarily from a customer-facing background. It's important to carefully build the business case for change.



2. Establishing a meaningful customer feedback programme

A carefully structured and independently conducted customer feedback programme will enable your business to better identify desired customer outcomes as well as frustration points. This can then inform future process changes and shape the way you communicate with customers.

3. Leading from the front

It's vital for management teams to put departmental pride aside to fully get behind a customer-centric approach. This will instil confidence throughout departments and filter down to create a 'can do' attitude amongst all team members.

4. Removing the blame

Some of the customer feedback might be difficult to hear, but resist the urge to point fingers!

5. Creating champions

Establishing customer champion groups - with representation from across a range of departments - will help you to break down and review feedback. This group should use the feedback to agree specific actions - and commit to completing them.





Your action plan

If your business has made a commitment to enhancing customer experience, there are some essential techniques which will help you to get started (and keep up the momentum):

Let your customers know from the offset that you're committed to improvement, as communicating your plans demonstrates your dedication to their needs – and has the additional benefit of ensuring internal commitment!

Plan ahead

A comprehensive, ongoing customer research programme will allow your business to gain continuous feedback on proposed initiatives, new products or technologies, communication methods and almost anything else that affects your customers!

Immerse yourself

Customer immersion sessions help you to truly stand in your customers' shoes. Get to grips with the role your business plays in their world, what their pain points are and how you can better meet their needs. Involve a wide cross section from your business – from board level to back office – to make sure customers stay front of mind.

Keep comms regular

Communicating regularly keeps you fresh in your customer's mind. Plan content carefully and be sure to give them something targeted, relevant and useful.

Keep feedback regular

Always provide your customers with the chance to respond; enable feedback through regularly scheduled surveys and also put mechanisms in place so that they can let you know if they are unhappy (or happy!) about something whenever they need to in between.

Make internal communication important too

Always make sure your internal teams are up to date with progress. Ensure they know what your customers are receiving and keep them informed on action plans, so they know how to respond. By doing so, you will create a more consistent experience for customers and also improve team morale. Educate teams on how quickly they should expect feedback to improve and let them know when they are doing well.

Sometimes it can take an external team to provide an objective voice and help you get your internal processes right. If you need help with customer research or internal comms, The Marketing Pod can help. We've all worked in-house, so we've been in your shoes and understand the hurdles you may be facing!

the secret to social media

Social media is a marketing toolkit essential these days - and that's just as true for the majority of B2B businesses as it is for B2C.

From hashtags and Stories to fake news and memes, the social media world is an everchanging and constantly challenging place, where marketers could be forgiven for feeling like it's impossible to keep pace. But falling behind simply isn't option; in today's 'always on' environment, customers expect businesses to be a part of the conversation, fast to respond and available 24/7, so it's vital that you're ahead of the game!

When done right, social media channels can enable you to create and maintain strong relationships with your customers, so don't let its fast-moving nature deter you. To get you started, we're taking a look at some of the key social media marketing trends and challenges we've seen in recent years, along with some ideas on how you can use them to give you a competitive edge.

Those Facebook changes

Facebook recently announced that they would be changing their algorithms, so posts from family and friends are now given priority over viral videos and clickbait headlines from Pages – sending social media marketers around the world into a spin.

Many businesses that rely on the Facebook newsfeed to drive organic traffic are concerned that the algorithm changes will have a negative impact on their organisation, but don't panic! If you adapt your strategy accordingly, you may find that you actually achieve more return on investment from the new algorithm.

Facebook's official advice is to encourage your followers towards the 'see first' feature, which allows users to choose which Pages and friends they want to see content from. While this will help to ensure your content continues to appear in their feeds, it may be difficult to convince your followers to do this.

The real trick is to make sure that your content is always relevant, timely and engaging to your audience. As the changes are intended to encourage 'meaningful interactions between people', content that resonates with your followers will attract the likes, shares and comments needed to ensure your posts are still reaching your audience. Follow the tips we give for creating compelling content in Chapter 2 before you get started.

It's not what you know, it's who you know...

Word of mouth and peer recommendation are some of the most effective forms of marketing, and social platforms offer the prime setting for both. But don't worry – gone are the days when a successful influencer marketing campaign meant blowing your budget on a single Instagram post from a household-name celebrity.

In fact, research has shown that 'micro influencers' – who have between 1,000 and 100,000 followers – have the maximum impact on social media. Developing a relationship with a micro-influencer will ensure that your brand reaches a sizeable audience, and they achieve an average 2.4% like rate on Instagram compared to a 1.7% like rate for users with over 1 million followers.

Add to this the fact that increasingly savvy – or perhaps cynical – social media users can sniff out a false celebrity endorsement at a thousand paces and it's easy to see why an authentic and relevant micro-influencer is a better choice for your brand.

B2B organisations may find that the best way to utilise influencers is by asking them to contribute content to their site. Technical and academic experts have emerged as the most credible sources for the general public, closely followed by people like themselves. Could you develop a relationship with an industry influencer and ask them to write a blog for your site? This could add real credibility to your brand and have the added benefit of enabling you to reach the influencer's network





The future is here

Artificial intelligence (AI) may seem like a tool for the future, and its true potential is yet to be fully realised, but AI is already helping businesses to reach their customers. When it comes to the 'social' experience, AI is no replacement for human interaction, but if speed of response or scaling up customer service operations are an issue for your business, there may be a place for AI alongside your flesh and bones team!

Marketers are increasingly turning to AI to improve customer experience and make their jobs (slightly!) easier. By 2021, it's predicted that over 50% of businesses will be spending more on bots and chatbots than mobile apps.

You can use chatbots to provide customer services that you might not have the resource to provide otherwise – bots can help customers to research or complete purchases and answer common questions, so your social media team can focus on developing customer relationships instead.

Break the internet

Creating the right social media strategy can be tricky, especially for B2B businesses, who may feel that social platforms are geared towards B2C organisations. But don't miss out on the huge opportunities that having a strong social presence could bring to your business!

Not sure if you can make social media work for your business? We can help you track down your ideal social audience and build a strategy for reaching them. Whether you're already on social but want a bigger share of voice or have always shied away from social and need help to get started, get in touch!

get the lowdown on ABM

We couldn't write a book on B2B marketing without talking about the hottest topic this year - Account Based Marketing (ABM).

ABM isn't just a flash in the pan - an overwhelming 80% of businesses expect their ABM activity to increase over the next 12 months.

It makes sense really, if you think about it. Some of the strongest trends in marketing include hyperpersonalisation, made possible by advances in technology, and the emergence of GDPR, which means that prospects can now quite literally switch you off if your communications aren't sufficiently compelling or relevant.

Whilst marketing teams may be eager to embrace the ABM philosophy, for many the barrier is knowing how to get started. Here's a few pointers to get you on your way:

Embarking on your ABM journey

ABM is not a marketing activity – it's a collaborative piece of strategic work that is a true combination of sales and marketing. First and foremost, you must jointly prioritise your prospects, identifying those with the strongest opportunity for your organisation. Start small – this will be the start of an iterative learning process and in trying to cover too many prospects, you're likely to spread your resources too thinly.

Once you have identified your top two to three, it's time to enter your research and planning phase. The strength of your success hinges on your ability to resonate with your prospect, and that means taking the time to really understand them. Use all of the insight channels available to you; as well as

the classic market share and landscape reports, tactics such as social listening work really well!
Subscribe to market updates and news alerts too.
Both are great ways of tracking general industry updates, as well as company-specific information about your target organisation.

Identify the key stakeholders in your prospect's decision-making unit and consider the environments, pressures and desired outcomes for each of those stakeholders. This insight will start to inform your activity framework, from which you'll develop tailored messaging and execution formats relevant to the needs of your target individuals.

The strength of your success hinges on your ability to resonate with your prospects...



Start creating conversation

Creating bespoke messaging houses for your stakeholders is a great way of ensuring that your marketing messaging is rooted in their needs and interests, so your approach to them is meaningful. It also enables you to identify any gaps in your proposition or service that would make a big difference to your customer's role or organisation. Those messaging houses then become the basis for your communication strategy.

ABM is all about building relationships, dialogue and a closeness with your clients. Once you know who you want to talk to and what you want to say, you'll need to start creating opportunities for conversation. Your tactics will vary depending on the needs of the individuals you're targeting, but could include a blend of one-to-one meetings, innovation days, account-specific thought leadership, customised collateral and social engagement.

Face time is key, so you can talk directly, validate the assumptions formed during your research phase and refine your proposition and marketing. When it comes to events, think small and intimate. Think tanks and round tables will enable your prospects to make their voices heard more clearly than large-scale conferences, so you'll learn much more.

Trial, test, learn, repeat

ABM will be an enormous learning curve for everyone involved. As a team, you'll discover the research techniques, approaches, tactics and ways of working that are most effective for your prospects and your organisation. As your ABM activity becomes more established, you'll become more skilled. You'll be better able to grow the number of prospects you'd like to target, taking learnings from previous activities to inform your plans.



That said, by its very nature, ABM is bound to become harder. As more and more organisations start to implement the approach, the more you must elevate the quality of your marketing if you are to cut through to your prospects effectively. Really, the main difference lies in the research phase. By taking the time to understand your prospects' world – and recognising that ABM is a long game – you stand to make a stronger mark.

Tips for success

- 1. Get buy-in up front. ABM is no quick fix you'll need to invest for longer term results, and your organisation must be prepared to wait! While the results may be slower, they can be far more significant. It's vital that your sales team is fully on board too they'll be one of your primary sources of insight as well as a key execution channel, so without their buy-in, it won't work.
- 2. Set realistic timeframes. ABM is usually used as a means of engaging your high value strategic accounts, and as such will not produce overnight results. It's vital that as an organisation you set realistic timeframes this should include engagement milestones as well as long-term sales success.

- 3. Integrate ABM into your account planning process. ABM should be a company-wide, strategic business initiative not just a marketing campaign. As such, it must be committed to within sales account planning to avoid becoming a series of tactical actions.
- 4. Tell a story. As humans, we engage better with stories than a stream of facts. In constructing relevant narrative and story-telling techniques, your message stands a better chance of being heard and retained.

Finally, ABM is a brilliant tool in your marketing toolkit, but it's not the answer for your whole audience. Don't forget the other elements of your marketing plan for those prospects that don't fall into your chosen top few – they're still important! Be integrated in your approach and focus on content, and you may find that there are cross over opportunities throughout your wider marketing function.

Whether it's 1:1 or 1:few, the Pod team can help you plan and execute your ABM strategy, or step in to help at any point of the journey if you need more marketing resource to achieve the plans you've made. Chat to us about your ABM ambitions!



Any questions?

We've given you a whistle-stop tour through some of the pillars of any B2B marketing strategy, but if you'd like to talk to us about any of the topics we've covered in more detail, we'd love to hear from you!

Give us a call on 01564 742848 or email us at hello@themarketingpod.co.uk.