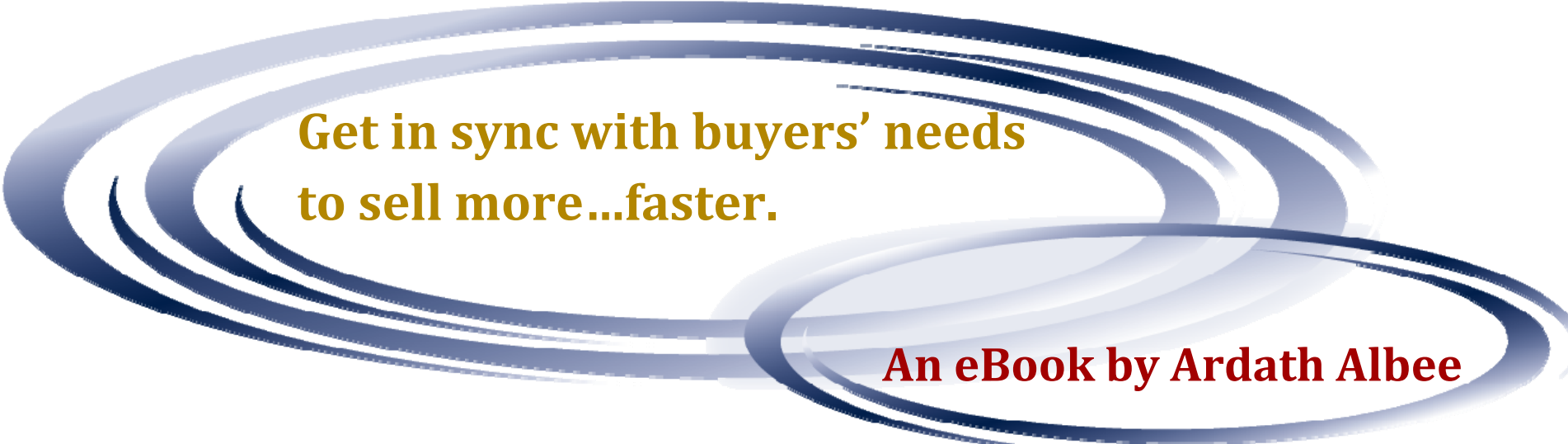


Tune Up Your Customer Focus



**Get in sync with buyers' needs
to sell more...faster.**

An eBook by Ardath Albee

*An expansion on The Customer Focus Tune-Up Exercise in Ardath's book, *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale*, on sale now.

We all know that people buy from people they *know and trust*. B2B marketers need to use the best methods available to accelerate building the level of rapport needed to increase prospect momentum and shorten time to complex purchase decisions.

The buying process includes a number of stages your customers must traverse to arrive at a confident purchase decision. With a refined customer focus, your prospects will be more than ready to take each progressive step toward that purchase from you. This is because their questions will be answered and their confidence about making the best (least risky) decision will naturally lead them to choose your services.

Delivering the right information at the right time is the benchmark for developing heightened levels of buyer interest. Buyers are now exercising control over the timing of sales activities. The graphic below shows the impact of this change for sellers.

The Buying Process for a Complex Purchase



Notice the content gap created by buyers pushing sales activities farther into the buying process.

When you know your customers well, you can create compelling content that delivers the information and dialogues your prospects need during each stage of consideration.

You'll see I've also called out Step Backs. They've always been there, just not thought of specifically as a buying stage. If these hesitations aren't addressed, you can lose sales you'd otherwise win.

Each stage of the buying process creates specific informational needs. In this E-book, you'll discover how tuning up your customer focus helps you answer those needs at the right time to make buying from you the obvious choice.



Take the Customer Focus Challenge

This exercise is designed to help flip your focus away from your company and services to your prospect's perspective and develop content designed to engage prospective customers incrementally at each stage of the buying process. To do this exercise correctly, you must put yourself into your prospect's shoes. Answering the questions from your company's perspective will not produce the best results.

Buyers say salespeople—

Know their products – **88%**

Know buyers' industry – **55%**

Know buyers' role & responsibility – **34%**

Know buyers' specific business – **29%**

Forrester Research

The Customer Focus Tune-up is designed to help you generate an outline for an overarching story that matches your buyers' perspective. This process will help to reveal the foundational insights you need to design content, interactions, and conversations that address each stage of their buying journey. People don't always think linearly to reach a complex purchase decision. Each of your prospects may vary in the ways they access and ingest information and the timing of conversations, but all the questions and concerns they have must be answered before they will commit to a purchase decision.

When you address your prospects' needs logically, you'll build credibility as a specialist focused on solving their problems in a way that matches how they think about them. This high level of engagement enables you to move prospects farther through the pipeline in less time and produce more qualified sales opportunities.

Step 1: Narrow Your Scope

1. Select one target market. Define this target as tightly as possible. The more focused you are, the closer you can get. Take a look at the two examples below to see the difference between a wide-angle lens and a laser-targeted approach.
 - a. *Directors of IT in hospitals.*
 - b. *Directors of IT in hospitals who need to ensure end users securely manage patient records, while at the same time increasing the quality of patient care in a physician/nurse community greater than 300 people.*

2. Choose and define a problem that you know the selected target market is encountering. As in example B, above, if you're able to really define your target market in relation to the value you provide, you'll get really close. Now enlarge the statement to include priority validation.

*"Basically, the overwhelming majority of executive level buyers tell us that **how** a vendor engages with them **differentiates them a lot more** than what their products and services are or do."*

Scott Santucci, Forrester Research

Directors of IT in hospitals are under pressure to improve informational access while meeting stringent security compliance requirements for patient records. It takes more than technology to create processes designed to be easily adopted by end users. Although securing patient records can be addressed by a number of software solutions, they don't necessarily inspire end users to adopt them in a consistent and efficient manner. Change is just one more thing the hospital staff would rather not have interrupt them from their patients. After all, the old way works and they know what to expect, even if it's not optimal.

Improving care delivery is a prioritized quality initiative for hospital-patient and community relationships. Your process for change management is proven to generate higher rates of adoption for hospital staff resulting in operational efficiencies that noticeably impact the bottom line—in addition to boosting the quality of patient care. Your secret sauce is a process for change designed to help end users absorb the change as a natural shift to the ways in which they work today—making that change more embraceable and less disruptive.

Once you get started brainstorming about how to focus from the perspective of the target segment, you'll probably find a lot of issues bubbling to the surface that provide different topical angles you can explore. Go back through your problem definition and make sure you've gotten deep enough to uncover related business objectives as well as underlying issues that could be affecting the buyers' ability to make a decision. Explore peripheral impacts. This means taking a look at what else can be affected by the goal your buyer has, or in the way he can choose to solve the problem. This is not one-size-fits-all thinking. Most complex problems are not solved by a straight-line approach.

Step 2: Determine What Customers Need to Know to Buy

Your responsibility as a marketer extends farther in each direction of the buying process than it ever has before. It begins with the status quo, and it continues until the prospect commits to buying and beyond. There are critical knowledge points your prospect must feel confident about to make that final decision. By identifying these points, you can map the components of required knowledge for each buying stage.

Begin by asking yourself and your team what the people involved in the purchase will need to know to think strategically about solving the problem you defined in step two. Don't discount any ideas. Put them all on the list. Stay focused on solving this problem.

This process requires you to challenge each informational need with a follow-on question. When you do this, you're able to continue expanding the original idea to get to the deepest issues underneath the surface. Sometimes what you "see" on the surface is not the real problem from the customer's perspective. Keep probing to go deeper.

An example might be:

The Director of IT is challenged to get end users (physicians and nurses) to adopt the security processes faithfully.

Why?

Nurses in Seattle have heavier workloads given the shortage of qualified nurses, so they need fast and simple—not a 7-step process to get to information.

Why is the process 7 steps?

Is the issue difficulty or time, or both?

Could it be something else?

What costs are incurred by not following the 7-step security process?

When asked to rate their organization's ability to use data or marketing database capabilities to drive highly effective interactions with customers and prospects, only 37% of the firms surveyed rated themselves as good or excellent.

CSO Insights

**Address Catch Factors
to Increase Relevance**

Urgency: *Why now?*

Impact: *What will improve,
increase or change?*

Effort: *How hard will it be to get
the desired outcome?*

Reputation: *Why should they
believe you?*

Intent: *What's in it for them?*

Can the process steps be consolidated or reduced without losing effectiveness?

What might that look like?

What kind of process training is both feasible and highly retained by these harried professionals?

What are the differences between nurses and physicians in comparison to other hospital staff charged with adopting the 7-step process?

What methods are they using to gain process compliance now and at what costs? (e.g., incentives – financial costs, threats – lower morale)

The above example is about dissecting the 7-step process you've identified as the problem. By researching and investigating this process you can arrive at a storyline that can help the Director of IT influence stakeholders by learning how to discuss solving the adoption issue with confidence. You won't always be in the room during crucial business discussions that could result in a purchase decision. In fact, you likely won't.

In order to gain an even higher level of buy-in, you need to make sure you dissect the issue from the Director of IT's overall perspective.

His stake in the game is not only implementing the technology and providing it as a service to his end users, but to increase operational efficiency and produce bottom-line improvements from the use of that technology. His stated goal may be to get higher end-user adoption of the new security process, but he'll be more highly swayed with information that helps him accomplish additional benefits that improve his professional standing as well as impress his CFO. Especially come budget time.

The key is to look beyond the obvious goal to the underlying goals that—added together—can be used to make you a more appealing choice than any alternatives. By becoming a specialist who understands the roles and responsibilities of your buyers beyond their stated goals, you'll be able to create more personalized and valuable

interactions. And, since recent research by Forrester found that buyers say only 34% of salespeople understand their roles and responsibilities, there's a huge opportunity for you to gain the advantage over competitors by tuning up your customer focus.

Take each problem idea you identify and assess why it's important and to whom it's most important. You may find ideas that relate more to influencers and stakeholders than to the primary buyer. One of the biggest mistakes marketers and salespeople make is only focusing on the decision maker. Complex purchases are made by consensus. This means uncovering the needs of all involved and answering them appropriate to that person's perspective and stake in solving the problem.

Step 3: Map “*Need to Knows*” to Buying Stages

Below are critical questions designed to help you take your problem dissection work in Step 2 and apply informational “need to knows” to each stage of the buying journey. Remember to answer the questions from the target segment's viewpoint—not yours.

Status quo to priority shift:

- Why should I change?
- What will happen if I don't?
- What triggers would force me to need to solve this issue?
- How is the issue impacting my industry?
- How are my peers and competitors addressing the issue?

Research to options:

- What do I need to know to think strategically about solving the problem?
- Are there best practices I can refer to?
- Who's got the expertise to add the most value to the project?
- What are the periphery impacts I need to consider?
- What options and alternatives are available?

Step backs to options:

- Which risk probabilities would make me falter?
- Whose disagreement could cost me the decision to move forward?
- Which stakeholder's objectives might not get addressed by an option?
- What if my end users won't adopt the solution?
- How will I manage realigning the business processes the solution affects?

Validation to choice:

- Why should I trust your company to help me solve my issue?
- Beyond the initial project budget, what's the total cost of ownership?
- What's the return on investment, and how long will it take to realize?
- What will happen when my needs scale and extend to meet new objectives?
- How are people/companies like me/mine finding success with this choice?
- In what ways will choosing this solution affect my professional status?

By answering each of these questions, you'll build a picture of the thinking process this type of customer may experience as she works through the buying process to build a business case. Inviting your salespeople to participate in this exercise can help to flesh out the answers. They have valuable face-to-face insights from customers that marketing doesn't have ready access to. Additionally, involving your frontline customer service and support people can provide answers to several of the questions in the later stages from Step Backs to Choice.

Be open to adding new questions under each stage as they come up in discussions with sales, support, and service people. This list is only a starting point. Building a customer consensus with input from all the people who play roles in acquiring, retaining, and growing your customer base ultimately will contribute to alignment and consistency across your customer-facing departments. Armed with this knowledge, your marketing programs will have a much higher impact on moving prospects more quickly to sales readiness.

Step 4: Map Content to Persona Needs for Each Stage

Use your answers to the questions in Step 3 to help you map relevant content resources to each buying stage. This process will tell you definitively how well your current content is designed to appeal to this target segment buyer as he tries to solve the selected problem. It also points to content you'll need to create to fill in the gaps or ways in which you can modify existing content to answer defined needs in different stages. Considering that it takes upward of 10-to-12 touches during a complex sale before your prospects feel comfortable enough to ask for sales conversations, being prepared to address what they need at each stage helps your potential customers build momentum in their buying process, shortening your time to revenues.

Content Map Outline Sample

Status Quo	Priority Shift	Research	Options	Validation	Step Backs	Choice
Why should I change?	What do I need to know?	Best Practices	Who should I consider?	How are my peers doing this?	Uh oh, I forgot about this...	I'm confident in my decision.
Content Article	Video(s)	White Paper	Analyst report	Customer Story	Proof Points	Proposal
Blog Post Series	Content Article	How to Guide	Customer Story	White Paper	Customer Story	Company Info

This map is an example of some of the types of content that are effective across the buying process. In addition to type, enter a brief description of each content resource to check the storyline you're building across all the buying stages for consistency. Identify holes and fill them. And remember, it's not the format so much as the content itself.

Storyline Tips:

- Address a problem from different angles, but make sure your story is consistent.
- Reactions to content help determine your customer's stage in the buying process.
- Your storyline should help buyers build a business case for purchase decisions.
- Perfection isn't likely. Continuous refinement from new insights is the key.



Put Your Customer Focus Tune-Up to Work

Once you've completed the Customer Focus Tune-Up exercise, you've got insights you can use across a variety of content and communication programs. The beauty of delving deeply into your potential customers by segment is that you'll become proficient at talking about the things they need to know in a way they relate to more easily.

Relevance is critical. Your customers are so busy today that they just don't have time for one more communication that doesn't add value to their day. To add value, your content, communications and conversations must address a priority at the top of their to-do list. Otherwise it's just a nice-to-have that will be deleted to clear the decks for some other communication that helps them get something done better and faster than they could accomplish on their own.

Equipped with the knowledge from your tune-up exercise, you're now prepared to tell a story that your prospective customers will make time for. Below are some ideas about how you can put your highly-refined customer focus to work.

Customer Tune-Up Applications

- **Social Media Dialogues.** Online dialogues are the fastest growing participation experience available. Use key insights about your customers to post relevant Tweets, write more conversational blog posts and invite interactions within groups with similar interests on LinkedIn. Social media is similar to firing a shot across the bow. The idea is to draw people to respond by clicking a link you provide, answering a question you pose or commenting on views shared in a blog post.
- **Customer Stories.** Instead of generating generic customer stories, you now have insights to tune them to answer your target segment's questions, concerns and considerations. Peer insights are one of the most highly relevant sources of information consulted during the buying process. Your customers want to know not just how their peers have dealt successfully with a similar problem, but they want to get beyond the product focus to the meaty issues about what it really

takes to get the business objectives they want. Revisit your customer stories and refine the relevant ones to specifically address the problems from your buyers' perspective. Customer stories are not about your products as much as they're about validating that your company delivers on promises and impacts outcomes.

- **Content Series.** Use your content map to develop a series of related pieces to continuously engage buyers and build their confidence toward making a decision. Show buyers how they can become more successful, anchors your company as the expert that can help to get them there. Each time you elicit a response to your content, you've made another impression. Every impression adds weight to the reputation you hold in your prospects' minds.
- **Sales Conversations.** The Customer Focus Tune-Up also provides a foundation for creating sales presentations, collateral and conversational gambits that help your salespeople impress upon buyers that time spent with them is a value add. When sales reps walk into a meeting with strategic insights, buyers are willing to listen. Not only that, they'll decide to buy more quickly because you've eliminated the work they'd otherwise have to perform to discover a quality service provider.

It's All About Them

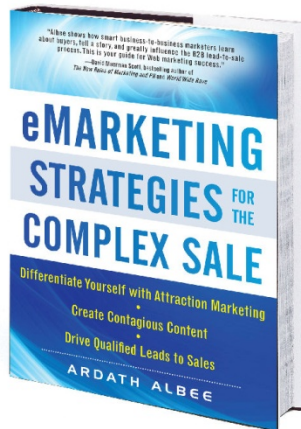
The sooner you recognize that selling is all about buyers buying, the better results your marketing and sales programs will produce. A Customer Focus Tune-Up serves to squarely focus on issues relevant to your buyers—and that leads to higher engagement. But, don't rest on your laurels. Your customer's business environment is continually shifting—just like yours. Staying tuned-in to your buyer's needs is a continual process. But, I assure you, your efforts will not be wasted. Try the Customer Focus Tune-Up on one segment to see for yourself. Then expand your efforts across your target segments. You'll see time-to-revenues shorten and the size of your won deals grow. You see, buyers are willing to pay for value. When you use a customer focus to showcase your expertise, you become a sought after specialist your buyers know they need to get the outcomes they want.



About the Author

B2B marketing strategist Ardath Albee helps companies increase their marketing effectiveness by generating more and better leads for their sales organization. She helps them develop contagious content and e-marketing strategies that catch the attention of website visitors and target markets, propelling them through the buying cycle until they are "sales ready."

Ardath has a unique ability to develop content strategies that work hand-in-glove with overall corporate and product positioning to deliver hard hitting e-marketing programs and tools that compel customers to buy. Her blog posts are referred to often by other industry leaders and her articles are syndicated by The Customer Collective, Alltop and Junta 42, and been published in university ezines, CRM Today, Selling Power, Rain Today Special Reports, Marketing Profs e-newsletters and Enterprise CRM News.



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Visit the Book Website: <http://www.emarketingstrategiesbook.com>

Read a review of *eMarketing Strategies for the Complex Sale*:

"It used to be so darned easy: Do a few tradeshow, maybe publish a white paper or two, and have the salespeople follow-up. But the always on, YouTube-infested, Twitter-centric world makes the B2B sale much more complex today. Ardath Albee shows how smart business-to-business marketers learn about buyers, tell a story, and greatly influence the B2B lead-to-sale process, driving significant new business as a result. If you manage a complex sales process, stop making excuses! E-Marketing Strategies for the Complex Sale is your guide for Web marketing success."

- David Meerman Scott, bestselling author of *The New Rules of Marketing & PR* and *World Wide Rave*