

# The Emotional Side to B2B Marketing



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# “Of course it works - trust us!” Make sure your content meets the emotional needs of B2B customers

In today’s hyper-connect sales environment, industry experts<sup>1-3</sup> estimate that a B2B buyer is 50%-80% down the purchase funnel by the time they reach out to a potential service provider. Therefore, content plays a huge role in determining the success of a sales opportunity. Good B2B content addresses more than just rational needs.

In this article, we will discuss the hidden power of B2B content that marketers might be overlooking in their planning: its emotional power.

Long before content started helping B2C marketers sell cars, computers and packaged goods, B2B marketers were already using content to inform customers—with the most effective content geared to meet their emotional needs.

#### Sidebar:

The specific solution aside (NetVista: Google that one, kids), IBM could have published a “lead story” like this one on a content hub last week. Referencing scientists (for credibility) and schoolchildren (for emotional connection), it succeeds in moving the reader from feeling intimidated to confident about the solution. But this example of B2B storytelling actually appeared back in December 1996.



## Wiring the classroom



The Internet is a gold mine for students, but its innate complexity can turn what could be a powerful learning tool into educational quicksand. At the IBM Research Division, computer scientists have teamed with cognitive psychologists to tackle the problem from the user side out.

The result was [NetVista](#), a user-friendly application that lets students and teachers use Internet tools such as the Web, newsgroups, e-mail, and file transfer protocol (FTP) from an interface that makes accessing the Net far more fun and a lot less intimidating.

[Read on](#) to find out how IBM Research developed far-reaching solutions for wiring classrooms to the Internet.

*Courtesy of the Wayback Machine, accessed Oct 28, 2015*

Yes, *emotional* needs. When people research a purchase decision, they seek information that satisfies needs originating from both sides of the brain: the rational and the emotional.

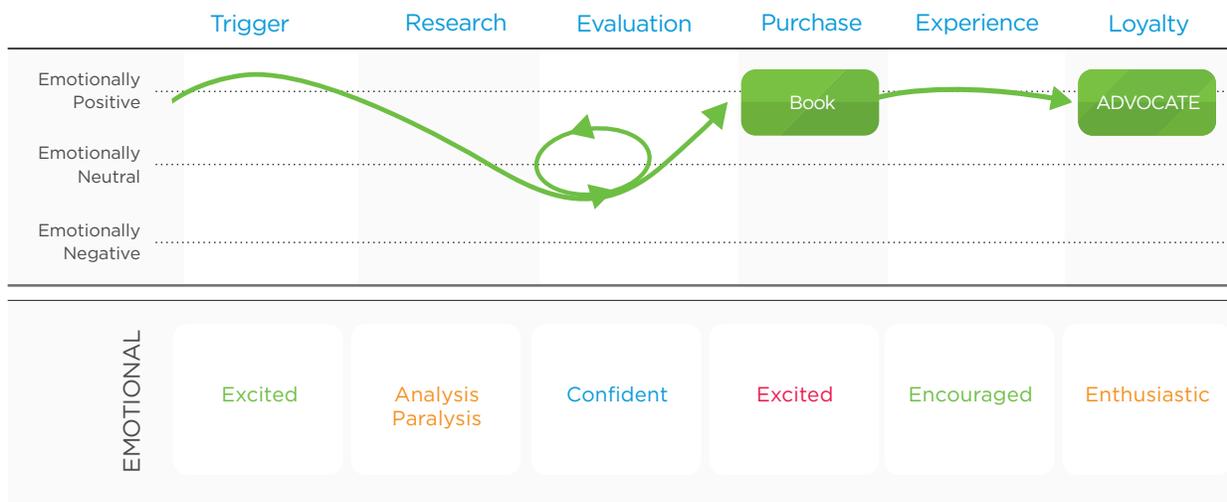
Do not fall into the trap of thinking B2B purchasing decisions are made purely on rational evidence. That is what people outside the industry often think, because business is not supposed to be “personal.” But emotions play an enormous role in business purchases; in fact, it can often be the driving role.

When consumers make a bad purchase, the stakes are usually fairly low. Even a high-ticket item can often be reversed through return or resale. But for B2B customers, the stakes related to making a mistake are weighty.

Remember the expression, “no one gets fired for hiring IBM?” It comes from an actual marketing effort by IBM in the 1960s to plant doubt in the minds of buyers who were considering going with a start-up competitor rather than the giant. It underscores the truism that the easiest way to minimize risk is to avoid the new and stick with the known.

Fifty years later, fear, uncertainty and doubt are still potent levers in the B2B space. A study by the Executive Board<sup>4</sup> found that about half of B2B decision makers have wanted to buy a new solution, but did not speak up for fear of taking the risk. People have not fundamentally changed, nor has the emotional component of the purchase.

If anything, this phenomenon is heightened in today’s post-recession business climate. Potential consequences of a bad decision—job loss, stakeholder wrath—have left leaders even more risk averse.



That is why content supporting emotional needs at each stage of the journey—from trigger to post-sale—is critical. But it does not happen by accident. These states need to be identified and specifically addressed in the appropriate content strategy.

### When the relationship goes digital

Content plays another key role in today’s purchase process: laying the groundwork for successful business relationships.

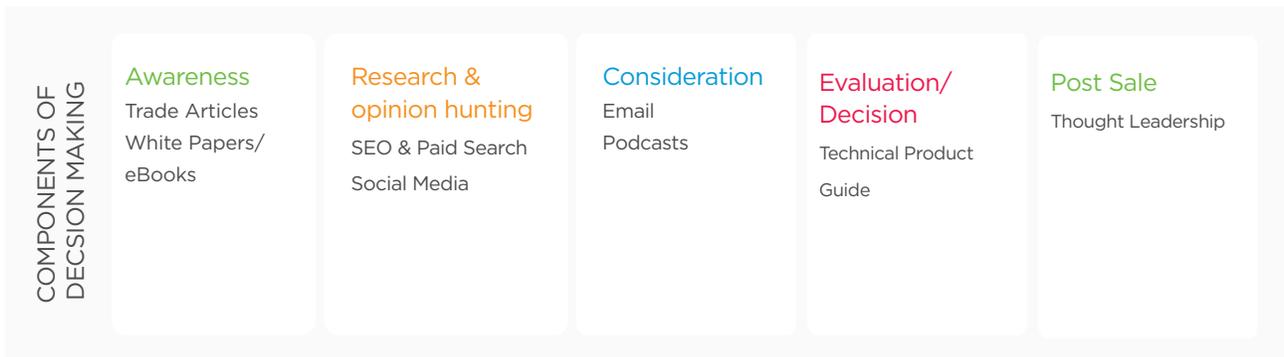
Before buyers had 24/7 access to comparison tools, videos, testimonials, white papers and other artifacts, they depended more heavily on direct dialogue with sales representatives for information. The best representatives earn trust and confidence by assessing buyer needs, understanding pain points and introducing the right solutions. Through their knowledge and experience, they can satisfy their customers’ emotional and rational decision-making needs.

However, many buyers are choosing to skip this business courtship. Research by the Executive Board suggests that buyers are well through their research process before they even want to talk to a sales rep<sup>5</sup>. We live in a Match.com world: Many buyers and sellers “meet” for the first time online. In fact, the entire purchase process may start and end without a single face-to-face interaction.

This means content must not only inform, but also build emotional equity and trust in a company’s solution. What will engage buyers to take the next step and reach out to a brand?

### Content with emotional & rational impact

As a customer’s purchase journey is mapped, marketers should consider how content can provide the emotional reassurance that their buyers crave. In other words, remember that customers are real people! Good content can appear in many channels or formats, but here is how some specific content types may resonate:



## Awareness

**Trade articles:** Surface a need potential customers were not aware they had, or tackle a common problem in a creative way.

**Emotional payoff:** Third-party publishing lends credibility, and demonstrates an understanding of their business.

**White papers/eBooks:** The best ones quickly educate readers on important topics or new technology in a concise, objective way.

**Emotional payoff:** Generates good will by sharing expertise and showing empathy for their situation or challenge.

## Research and opinion hunting

**SEO and paid search:** For even some of the biggest purchase decisions, research today starts with Google.

**Emotional payoff:** Buyers expect to find brands. If a company does not show up in search results, it may seem less legitimate and will not be taken into consideration.

**Social media:** Buyers find their way to social media platforms and digital forums/communities for advice and recommendations from colleagues.

**Emotional payoff:** Ratings and reviews offer social proof and validate a brand's value proposition, and takes much less effort to create than full case studies.

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## Consideration

**Email:** Mobile has breathed new life into email—the B2B content channel we still spend hours with each day.

**Emotional payoff:** If done right (i.e., mobile optimized, personalized, relevant and concise), email is an opportunity for brands to demonstrate they know what customers need.

**Podcasts:** Maximizes customers' commuting time to tell them the brand's story, literally.

**Emotional payoff:** The human voice makes it feel like a personal, one-on-one conversation with subject matter experts.

## Evaluation/Decision

**Technical product guide:** This is the point where specs become important as a comparative tool—but often, it is where companies start the conversation, instead.

**Emotional payoff:** Buyers appreciate help in quickly winnowing their consideration set.

## Post-sale

**Thought leadership:** Product updates are important, but according to Eccolo Media, 36% of the content buyers consume after the sale is connected to smart thinking related to their challenges and the product<sup>6</sup>.

**Emotional payoff:** Buyers want reassurance that they made the right choice and selected an industry leader.

As 2016 unfolds, marketers should audit their content to determine whether it is as effective as it can be. They should have a healthy balance of information and solutions targeting emotional needs as well as rational ones. While customers may not always express their appreciation, marketers should still work to earn their hard-won trust.

# References

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