The B2B marketer's guide to digital branding in 2024 - a whitepaper



Lovable software for beautiful content.



The world today is essentially digital.

How to do digital branding right and get long-term sales and revenue? In this whitepaper, let's get to the bottom of how to make digital branding work for B2B businesses.



What is digital branding?

Why is digital branding important for a B2B business?

Over the past years, most B2B businesses focused their efforts on product-building and sales. But to-day's truth is different:

B2B branding has taken over from B2B sales. And online branding has taken over from offline branding.



- Emotional brand messages are critical for building lasting relationships with B2B buyers.
- B2B buyers spend most of their time online. Businesses that wish to get constant subscription renewals need to keep them engaged throughout the customer journey.

What is digital branding?

Digital branding is the art and sci- for most professionals. ence of branding a business on digital channels such as websites, • Large scale digital transformation social media platforms, and mobile apps. It entails the use of digital channels to communicate a brand's positioning and its USPs to cus- • The global pandemic restricted tomers and stakeholders.

Chief Marketing Officers agreed, that B2B marketing had become more complicated in the last 12-14 months*.

Whether buying a product or finding a job, the internet is the go-to place

- has ensured lesser entry barriers and much higher competition in the B2B landscape.
- the movement of people and ensured that things like product research/purchase and work-fromhome became the new normal.

And not surprisingly, the pandemic added to this complexity as 80% of these marketers had to find alternatives to physical events.

Many Millennials now occupy decision-making positions in B2B companies, and they expect businesses to offer personalized brand experiences.



align with**.

- Traditional marketing techniques are giving way to online branding that helps serve the needs of an evolving B2B buyer.
- Moreover, digital branding easily adapts to the needs of multiple B2B and agencies.

What do these trends mean for B2B businesses?

The new normal implies that most potential customers, existing customers, and stakeholders actively use digital media platforms. That's why these are the channels where businesses can reach out to their target audience.



In the post-pandemic world, digital branding isn't just important but an essential way to build a strong B2B brand. Let's now take a look at some of the key benefits of digital branding.

Benefits of digital branding for B2B businesses

Today, there are a multitude of online platforms where internet users can research for and buy products. From search engines to social media platforms to review sites, the discerning customer of the day has got a plethora of choices.

The importance of digital branding for a B2B business?

Most B2B businesses today are essentially digital. They offer products and services online.

Also, a large percentage of B2B buyers spend most of their time online.

* https://renegade.com/b2b-brand-strategy-report/ ** https://www.americanexpress.com/content/dam/amex/uk/staticassets/pdf/AmexBusinesstheMillennialWay.pdf

company stakeholders, including employees, partners, distributors,

> Digital branding helps a B2B business to reach an audience that's scattered across digital platforms.
> Online branding helps B2B marketers to interact with prospects, employees, and stakeholders through online media.
> Strategic digital branding enables businesses to offer on-brand and cohesive B2B digital experiences across online channels and platforms.
> The strategy is helpful in creating awareness about the business and making it stand out from other B2B businesses in the niche.
> Digital branding is the best way to consistently generate leads and revenue for a B2B business.
> With the help of digital branding, a B2B business can establish thought-leadership in their industry.



For digital branding to work, it's essential to have a solid brand strategy in place.

And for that let's understand what exactly is a brand strategy and what are some of its key components.



What is a brand strategy?

Most B2B buyers prefer to work with their favorite brands. It is because they feel a deep sense of emotional resonance and connection with those brands. But how did those B2B brands get there? The world's biggest B2B brands of today have worked diligently on implementing a unique brand strategy.

An effective B2B brand strategy:

Engages with the ideal prospective customers

Builds trust with B2B buyers

Helps fetch new and loyal customers

Helps in building a positive brand reputation









Only 38%

of the CMOs believe their marketing is substantially different from their competitors competitors and only

41%

can summarize their brand story in 8 or fewer words*.

What is brand strategy?

A brand strategy is a roadmap to help a brand to go from point A to point B. It lays out a plan of action for a business to grow and become an influential entity in a business niche.

A successful brand strategy helps marketers to improve brand awareness and loyalty among existing and potential customers.

Why is brand strategy essential for a B2B business?

A B2B business's identity depends on how the audiences perceive it as a set of unique emotions. **That identity is a brand.**

 Without a brand strategy, a business would lack a distinct and cohesive brand identity.



A brand strategy is an essential document that pins together the actions that lead a product or service to become a known brand.
A strategic brand direction helps

to communicate how a B2B business is different from the competition. It enables the audience to know why they should buy products and services from a specific vendor.

A brand strategy is a core business strategy and an integral part of ensuring consistent and steady business growth.

A coherent brand strategy helps to explore the larger purpose of the business and talk about it to prospects and company stakeholders.

People buy from businesses they trust. A brand strategy lays the foundation for building that assurance with prospects, customers, and stakeholders.

Similarly, it's a brand culture that attracts the right customers and employees to an organization.



**https://www.hello-adience.com/blog/how-to/how-to-build-a-strong-b2b-brand-using-marketing-research/

Brand strategy vs. marketing strategy

What's the key difference between A profitable brand strategy defines how to brand a business. What are brand strategy and marketing some of the key parts of an effective strategy? B2B brand strategy?

A brand strategy offers to build a unique identity for a business. At the same time, marketing strategy has everything to do with bringing people into the values. marketing funnel.

- ✓ Branding provides a distinct conveys passion for collaboration. flavour to how a B2B business communicates with customers and stakeholders.
- \checkmark Marketing, on the other hand, is a product promotion plan aimed at a predefined audience.
- ✓ Marketing is a shorter-term strategy to meet the sales goals of an organization. On the other hand, a brand strategy creates and executes a company's longer-term vision and mission.

Although different from each other, both brand strategy and marketing strategy are crucial parts of a winning B2B business strategy.

Let's now take a step further and learn about the key elements inside a company's brand strategy.

Elements of a successful B2B brand strategy

Values and emotions

People don't buy products and services; they buy emotions and

For instance, Slack is a brand that

MailChimp, on the other hand, is known for its straight-faced and subtle humor in its brand communication. And, Apple is known for values like design innovation, freedom, and aspiration.

- Every big brand exudes a feeling or a set of emotional values. It could be humour or happiness, or a sense of adventure. It could be a combination of two or three such sentiments.
- ✓ What emotional triggers would attract people to a brand? How does a B2B business intend to build a deeper emotional resonance with customers, employees. and stakeholders?

The best way is to answer these vital questions. And then put them inside the brand strategy document.

What's your WHY?

People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe.

Simon Sinek

Larger purpose

Every business has a larger purpose of existence, a goal that goes beyond sales and profits.

- How would a business bring about change in the lives of customers, employees, stakeholders, and society at large?
- In short, how does a business intend to add value to all the concerned parties?
- What is the WHY of a business, and how to incorporate it in a piece of brand communication?

successful B2B brand

comprises the promises it makes and keeps. And that is why it's essential to incorporate a brand's purpose and long-term goals into a brand strategy.

Audience persona

How to build an audience persona for a B2B business?

- > An audience persona is a character sketch of the ideal customer. It lays out the customer's demographics and psychographics.
- > An audience persona helps to know a brand's target audience on a deeper level.

The audience persona is a critical component of the brand strategy plan. It helps to deliver brand messages in a way that appeals to pros-

lt's vital to document and learn about the target audience of major competitors



Competition mapping

Another thing that's a core component of a B2B brand strategy document is a thorough competitive analysis.

- > For instance, it's essential to put down the brand voice and the purpose of competing brands.
- > Plus, it's vital to document and learn about the target audience of major competitors.
- > How have competitors positioned themselves in the niche?

These details are helpful for B2B brand marketers to create a unique brand positioning for their business. It gives them critical clues on how to make their brand stand out and also learn if they're going after the right set of potential customers.

A framework for consistency

Winning B2B brands are about consistent communication. Hence, it's necessary to create a framework to ensure all branded content is cohesive and speaks in a single voice.

- ✓ B2B Marketers need to train teams about the importance of strategic brand building.
- They need to work towards creating a plan that aligns the company culture with its core brand values.
- ✓ Every B2B business should invest in software that will assist in the process of mak-

The idea is to create a blueprint that helps achieve brand consistency across marketing channels and company collateral.



ing every piece of communication on-brand.



is about creating lasting relationships with professional buyers and decision-makers.

How is B2B branding different from B2C branding?

While building a B2B brand strategy, a marketer should be aware of the differences between a B2B brand and a B2C one.

- B2B buyers usually take longer to make the buying decision. They evaluate the features and pricing products in greater details as opposed to B2C buyers.
- A B2B brand is a promise of delivery, functionality, exceptional after-sales support, and a habit of solving problems.

What makes a strong B2B brand?

Times today have changed, and the formal B2B sales pitch has become a redundant process. Building a B2B brand is about creating lasting relationships with professional buyers and decision-makers.

Trusted B2B brands are seen as collaborative partners by B2B buyers.



- > Building a reputable B2B brand is about creating consistent value for the target audience.
- B2B brands that do well are known to perform well and build enduring customer relationships.
- B2B brands work continuously towards offering innovative products and services. At the same time, they work towards communicating that value to prospects and customers.



Going digital with B2B brand strategy

(O)

As discussed earlier, online branding now needs to have a more significant share in a business's overall branding efforts. That's because most customers and stakeholders are active on digital media platforms. Hence, successful digital branding is about implementing a company's brand strategy on digital channels.

- > The idea is to select the digital channels where a business's target audience, customers, and stakeholders are most active.
- > The next step is to align brand communication across all these online platforms.
- A B2B marketer must ensure a holistic digital brand experience on all the online channels relevant to the business.

In the upcoming sections, let's look at the tools and techniques for implementing a winning digital branding strategy.





What are brand guidelines?



Brand guidelines help in laying down benchmarks and directives for all internal and external B2B brand communications.

The brand guidelines document works as a ready reckoner for employees and stakeholders like agencies to understand how to develop company collateral or any piece of communication.

Many B2B businesses do not have standardized brand guidelines for their business.

> 31% of the B2B marketing and sales professionals don't have uniform brand guidelines in place*.

o B2B business

Here comes the burning question: why are brand guidelines important? Does a B2B business need them?

- to a new employee.
- and positive B2B brand reputation.

brand guideline document.



* https://www.emarketer.com/chart/244598/reasons-that-us-b2b-marketing-sales-professionals-say-challeng-ing-integrate-brand-identity-marketing-sales-collateral-feb-2021-of-respondents%20Insights:

Importance of having brand guidelines for

Building a strong-trustworthy B2B brand is about telling an authentic brand story through consistent communication. It's about sticking with the brand's core values.

Brand guidelines help a business to have complete control over each piece of brand communication, be it a hoarding or a social media ad, or an introductory email

The brand guidelines document empowers every employee in a company and can help build a robust company culture. A brand-driven company culture attracts the ideal customers, talent, and stakeholders to a business.

A set of comprehensive brand guidelines helps create a consistent brand voice essential for building a strong

In a world with many digital touchpoints, the key to business success lies in how well a B2B marketer takes care of each digital touchpoint. A brand guideline strategy helps to delight the target audience through consistent and on-brand experiences on all digital touchpoints.

Let's now learn about the process of creating a

How to create brand guidelines?

The idea of a brand guideline document is to summarize a B2B brand's look, feel, and style. Here are some necessary inclusions:

1 - It's vital to include a brand's overarching purpose. For example, what difference does a brand intend to bring in the lives of its target audience?

> 2 - It's critical to write the brand persona, voice, and tone. The idea is to think about the brand as a human being and enlist all her characteristics and style.

3 - Through his popular Golden Circle model*, Simon Senek explains how brands can differentiate themselves by understanding and communicating WHY they are doing what they are doing. Using the model can help businesses make a list of traits that make a brand unique from its competitors.

> 4 - The following crucial component is the brand colors and their usage. Also vital is the latest version of the brand logos and brief instructions on their use.

5 - Visual guidelines include details about iconography, typography, and the use of images.

> 6 - The brand guidelines need to include the editorial style guidelines as well. These are relevant for content marketing and any written communication that teams exchange within or outside the business.

How are brand guidelines used?

The idea behind creating a brand identity guideline document is to get teams and stakeholders to use them:

- A B2B marketer needs to distribute the company's brand guidelines to all functional departments in the organization.
- She needs to organize training sessions for different departments to align them with the company's brand guidelines.
- Plus, it's essential to communicate the importance of following a set of brand standards in each internal and external communication piece.
- It's vital to discuss the dos and don'ts regarding using branded content assets and brand colors in brand communication.
- document helps in improving the document further.

In the next section, let's learn about branded content and some of its key advantages.

• Lastly, gathering team feedback on the guideline



What is branded content?

The right strategy to build a strong B2B brand is to create helpful and engaging content for a targeted audience.

According to a study by Content Marketing Institute*, B2B marketing teams with the highest success rate, allocate 40 percent of their marketing budget to content marketing.

 Creating search-friendly and onbrand content helps a B2B business to get in front of its target audience.

* https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2018-b2b-research-final.pdf ** https://www.the-future-of-commerce.com/2018/08/02/the-power-of-b2b-branded-content/ 90% of a prospect's journey may be complete before they reach out to a salesperson**.

Branded content helps a B2B business to create a foundation for lasting relationships with prospects and customers.

 It helps build a loyal audience for a B2B business that's aiming to get recurring sales and conversions.

What is branded content?

Branded content is the craft of publishing content that's in sync with a brand's core values. Besides being infotainment for the target audience, it reflects the brand's personality.

It could be humorous and fun, or it could be authoritative and straightforward.

It follows the brand's color palette and other style guidelines.

When someone comes across a piece of branded content, they know it's coming from a specific brand. That's because it exudes that distinct aroma and flavour.



What is an example of branded content?

What is it about the uniqueness of content produced by brands like **Red Bull**, **Coca-Cola, Starbucks** and **Apple**? These brands have, over the years, sailed along consistently with their core values. They've used powerful brand identities and infused them with their content marketing strategy.

Redbull's content stands for extreme sports and adventure.

Coca-Cola produces content that showcases its values around happiness.

Starbucks sticks with warmth and belongingness.

> Apple's branded content conveys creative innovation.

Branded content paves the way for a B2B marketer to make content stand out from the competition. It helps to make prospects notice a business.

But branded content isn't a form of advertising. So let's learn about it in the next section.





Branded content vs. native advertising

Well, branded content and advertising are not the same. Here's how:

> The focus of advertising is to promote specific products and services. An advertising message highlights the key USPs of any product or service.

On the other hand, branded content helps to educate the target audience to solve their problems. This way, branded content enables a B2B business to build a relationship with prospective customers.

> Advertising is an intrusive form of brand communication, while branded content is non-invasive and user-friendly. In addition, branded content attracts audience loyalty towards a business.

Let's now take a peek into the key differences between branded content and content marketing.



Branded content vs. content marketing

Although branded content is a part of the overall concept of content marketing, it's what makes content marketing a lot more relevant in today's times.

- Branded content entails that each piece of online content aligns with the brand's unique voice.
- It is branded content that makes content marketing authentic and trustworthy. It distinguishes branded content in a crowded content landscape.





Advantages of branded content for a B2B business

When marketers consistently publish and promote branded content, it becomes the key to getting more conversions.

1 - Branded content, unlike ads, is something that the audience consumes willfully. So whether they subscribe to the company's newsletter or its YouTube channel, the potential customers start taking an active interest in the brand and its content.

2 - Branded content attracts more and relevant website traffic adding more B2B buyers to the sales funnel.

In short, branded content creates a strong identity in the minds of customers, employees, and stakeholders. A winning digital branding strategy is about creating on-brand content consistently across digital media platforms.

How can B2B businesses do that? Let's understand it in the upcoming sections.

3 - Branded content entertains the audience by telling them engaging stories. It helps to build a deeper emotional bond with the target group. B2B marketers can use branded content to create a community of those who resonate with the brand voice and have similar values. 4 - It's through branded content that a business can build a distinct brand positioning in a competitive market. Moreover, such positioning helps create a positive reputation, which fetches longterm sales and revenue.

5 - Content aligned with the brand voice helps a business engage with key stakeholders like employees, partners, agencies, and shareholders. In addition, it enables a business to build trust with all company stakeholders. Furthermore, it plays a vital role in attracting the right people to

the organization, those who share similar values and work towards making the brand's vision a success.



Strategies for on-brand communication across digital platforms

An impressive B2B content experience is about offering on-brand content across digital platforms.

- It's vital to map the customer and stakeholder journey to learn about their content needs on different digital platforms.
- B2B marketers need to track each digital platform and track the quality of experience.
- A CMO's goal should be to ensure that every piece of communication aligns with the brand's core values.

Consistent experiences lie at the heart of a winning B2B digital brand strategy.

How can B2B marketers lay the foundation for consistent brand communications across business functions and teams?

- \checkmark A marketer needs to ensure that the sales team is using the latest product photos and logos in webinars and presentations.
- ✓ Sales partners and distributors need to be able to access the updated version of the sales presentation.
- ✓ It's necessary to provide agency partners access to the latest branded content assets and logo files.
- ✓ A CMO needs to ensure that all functional heads of the organization have access to branded content assets whenever they need them.

Share with your partners Brand assets Agency * * * * Sales OOCHIAL OOCHIAL Logo Distributor Most big B2B brands work with global teams and have thousands of content assets. Most such brands know the importance of having a single online resource centre for all branded content assets.

That's why these B2B brands always have a platform where they store all of their media assets.

Let's now learn about how a brand portal can simplify the above seemingly complex process of creating consistent B2B content experiences.

What is a brand portal?

A brand portal stores all the relevant brand information and content assets that a marketer needs to share with different stakeholders.

It's a resource centre that stores branded content assets like brand style guides, videos, graphics, logos, marketing collateral, product and company photos, presentations, brand advertisements, and training manuals. Plus, it enables marketers to make content assets accessible to whoever may need them.





Why is a brand portal essential?

In a world where breaking through the digital noise remains a considerable challenge for most B2B businesses, staying on-brand is the best way to build trust with potential customers, employees, and business partners.

Let's learn about the advantages of • A brand portal helps create a brand portals for B2B businesses:

Every department in an organization needs brand assets to meet its communication objectives. The same holds for external partners such as advertising and digital media partners.

- How can a marketer ensure that all stakeholders access the precise brand content assets whenever they need them?
- How can marketing professionals keep tabs on what content assets are shared with whom and when?

A brand portal works as a hub of branded content assets. It creates the foundational efficiency in aligning a brand voice across internal and external communication.

Synchronizing brand communication is one of the key ways to get a business the desired level of sales. But, most marketing teams are exhausted with endless email threads 3 - Helps with new product and to designers, agencies, and other camaign launches departments. It gets worse when it's a global company whose teams A new product launch can give a need to collaborate over different CMO many sleepless nights. time zones. In that case, marketers need to put extra effort into send- • A marketer needs to collaboing the correct files to the right people at the right time. And on top of that, branded content assets are often disorganized and scattered.

- hub that stores the latest product photos, logos, ads, etc.
- A single place where marketers can store pre-approved content assets and make them accessible as and when required.

A brand portal works as a recipe kit with all the required ingredients.

- ready, they need to be sent to compliant the sales team, the distributors. and the press.
- It's vital to ensure that all these tasks are completed before the launch date.

A password-protected brand portal helps automate the process of sharing brand collateral with sales



rate with the agency partners to ensure all the new product collateral is in sync with the brand quidelines.

partners. Furthermore, with a really good Brand Portal solution, B2B marketers can tag media assets and decide which user group sees which media assets. So, for instance, if there is a set of content assets meant for the team in North America, it's only they who get access to it and not the European team and so on.

Once the collateral designs are 4 - Ensures everything is brand

A brand portal helps in offering consistent and on-brand digital experiences to all company employees and stakeholders. A portal helps a marketer to keep tabs on who has downloaded which content assets.

And it offers complete and real-time checks over every branded content asset, within and outside the organization.

A brand portal is a platform that offers the simplicity of access to a brand's corporate identity and all the relevant files associated with it.

- It's possible to use a brand portal alongside a Digital Asset Management system, ERP system, or web CMS. A portal ensures that all the branded content assets are available in a single place while, at the same time, fully aligned with the brand quidelines.
- teams, distributors, and agency It's possible to integrate a portal to commonly used tools and achieve brand synergy across platforms, devices, and teams.

By centralizing creative approvals, a brand portal allows marketing leaders and functional heads to create brand communication on the fly.



A digital marketers secret weapon: Brand Portal

Most businesses have little clue about how to use or implement a brand portal for their business. Some of them have talked to agencies and were surprised of how high the costs for such a brand portal can be.

Given the significant investment, companies have often decided against a brand portal. Sometimes they would have to exchange their usual DAM for another DAM solution. We don't need to emphasize that this isn't always well received either.

So, what do brands instead? To make their business communication on-brand, they depend on endless email threads that siphon vital marketing time and resources.



Still working with PDF brand guidelines?

A lot of medium-sized businesses have a large-sized (150 page) brand guideline.

What are the challenges businesses face with PDF brand guidelines?

- Every time an employee or a stakeholder needs to access the company's brand guidelines, they need to ask for the PDF file.
- ✓ Giving access to brand guidelines and the latest versions of the brand assets leads to an astounding number of email threads.



percent of the marketers said it has become challenging to collaborate across teams*.

✓ It becomes tough to understand and use a large and complex brand guideline document.

The brand assets are scattered everywhere in different file-sharing systems. And hence, chaos becomes an everyday business

Is building a brand portal a tedious process?

There are several options for businesses these days:

1 - You can opt for a DAM with Brand Portal extension. There are a few established DAM solution providers on the market. Prices can usually be found on their websites.

Benefits:

1 - With a good Content Activation Platform marketers can build a customized brand portal in a few easy steps.

> 2 - Businesses can switch to a brand portal with or without a DAM solution.

2 - If you are already using a DAM and do not necessarily want to change it, you can opt for software with Live Connection. So-called "Content Activation Platforms" activate your content and publish it in a content portal - such as a brand portal. The advantage here is obvious:

There is no need to switch DAM providers AND you can combine different sources. If, for example, you are using several DAMs or one DAM and Share-Point, your content always remains in the storage locations but is displayed in the portal thanks to the live connection, from all your sources.



3 - Depending on the solution provider, a brand portal can work as a tailor-made solution on top of an existing DAM solution, Cloud Storage or Enterprise Content Management..

Is a brand portal too complicated or technical?

Implementing a brand portal does not require technical knowledge. The project is easy to implement. A marketer does not need the support of an IT team to build and maintain a brand portal.



4 - You can bring together all your content silos and provide one central digital experience your users will love.



Conclusion

Digital branding helps a B2B business to get **visibility and conversions** on digital media platforms.

In the post-pandemic world, most **B2B buyers and stakeholders are online**. Hence digital branding is an essential marketing strategy for B2B businesses.

A set of **uniform brand guidelines** help a B2B business to develop a unique brand voice and positioning in a competitive marketplace.

 By publishing on-brand content across digital media platforms, a B2B business can build a strong digital brand.

For offering consistent and on-brand digital experiences, marketers need to **efficiently manage their branded content assets**.

A **brand portal** is a solution that helps B2B marketers to store and manage the company's brand guidelines and branded content assets in a single location. Firing a brand portal is a **quick and easy process**. It does not require big marketing budgets or technical knowledge.







Interested? Get in touch!



sayhi@smint.io <u>www.smint.io</u>



