



Marketing to Technical Buyers  
WHITE PAPER



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*This white paper introduces important considerations for marketing efforts designed to reach B2B technical buyers. It will present the pressures and difficulties that technical buyers encounter in their business environments. It also will discuss some basic truths about this decision-making group and will present recommendations about how new suppliers can reach this audience.*

## **TYPES OF BUYERS**

B2B organizations typically have up to four different types<sup>1</sup> of buyers involved in purchasing decisions.

They are:

- Economic buyer – controls the budget and has veto power on anything that requires spending
- User buyer – ultimately ends up using / implementing the purchased solution
- Coach – has a vested interest in moving the process along
- Technical buyer – ensures a purchase meets technical requirements of the company

It is important to note that a single person can assume multiple roles. There can be many people (up to 21 according to MarketingSherpa) who are participating in formal or informal committees with the responsibility of making purchasing decisions.

## **WHY THE TECHNICAL BUYER IS IMPORTANT**

From the buying organization's point of view, the typical business-to-business purchasing process consists of four stages: (1) problem identification and definition; (2) product/vendor research, data gathering and vetting; (3) vendor finalization; and (4) purchase. As troubleshooters, designers and project managers, technical buyers are typically responsible for researching possible solutions. In fact, nearly 60% of technical buyers surveyed stated they are most actively involved in stages 1 and 2 of the purchase decision.<sup>1</sup>

Simply put, if the seller cannot make it through this second phase of the sales cycle, there is no hope for a sale. If the solution won't work in the eyes of the technical buyer, it won't be purchased. The technical buyer (whether an individual or a committee) is the ultimate filter.

At the risk of stating the obvious, to be considered in the purchase of a technical product or service, sellers of technical products must:

- Be found by the technical buyer
- Be qualified by the technical buyer

## **PRESSURES AND TENDENCIES OF TECHNICAL BUYERS**

Before diving into recommendations on how to market to this audience, it is important to understand the environment in which the average technical buyer operates. Consider his or her typical responsibilities:

- Completing projects on time and within budget<sup>2</sup>
- Producing designs that result in easily produced, cost-competitive products or services
- Managing processes and resources to minimize time to market

Whether a software engineer, design engineer, scientist or technologist, a technical buyer faces significant pressures. Understanding these pressures and what the most prevalent business pains for technical buyers are should help marketers tailor strategies to better align with this audience's needs. A recent TriComB2B survey of technical buyers and engineers confirmed that this audience is concerned first with completing projects on time and second with resource allocation. One engineer noted, "It is difficult to make people understand that as you take on additional projects or tasks, the completion dates of the original projects will be impacted."

The same survey also revealed that 75% of the technical buyers spend anywhere from two to eight hours per week searching for solutions from outside suppliers. Most importantly, the survey provided an indication as to their preferred means of identifying potential new suppliers. In order of importance, the responses included:

1. Internet search by product category or brand
2. Direct solicitation from a supplier
3. Referral from a colleague

### **GREAT – NOW WHAT?**

While the previous information is helpful in understanding the pressures, roles and behavior of technical buyers, by no means does it provide a silver bullet for effectively marketing to this audience. However, by looking at three simple truths about this group, a marketing program can be tailored for optimum effectiveness.

### **TRUTH #1 – TECHNICAL BUYERS WILL FIND YOU BEFORE YOU FIND THEM**

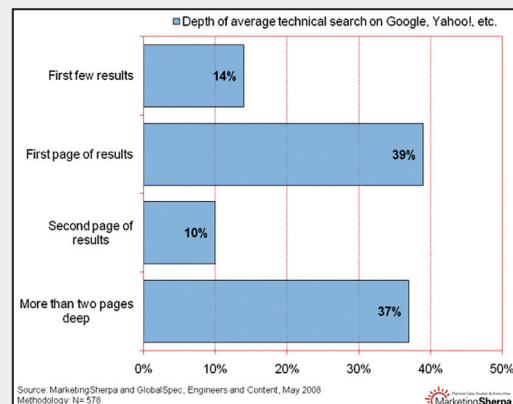
In TriComB2B's survey, 82% of the technical buyers stated they located their most trusted suppliers on their own. Similar studies also have estimated that 80% of technical buyers identify new suppliers without solicitation from prospects. Does this mean get rid of your sales force and stop calling potential customers? Absolutely not. But it does mean that business development efforts that rely solely on direct sales efforts will come up short.

So where is the technical buyer looking for new suppliers? A 2007 survey from Enquiro entitled "Business to Business Survey 2007: Marketing to a B2B Technical Buyer"<sup>1</sup> found online influencers such as vendor websites and search engines outperformed offline influencers like trade shows and even paid consultants.

According to more than 500 technical buyers surveyed by TriComB2B, the overwhelming first step in the research process is a broad Internet search by product category. In addition, studies indicate that users place a great deal more trust in natural or organic search results than paid advertisements and that more than 85% of technical researchers dig deeper than the first few results pages to find information.<sup>3</sup>

#### **WHY DIG DEEPER?**

*Google and Yahoo! search engines combine advertising and search results on their search results pages. The technical buyer, therefore, tends to be suspect of the first few entries in a search result, and will dig deeper for more reliable and relevant sources of information.*



## **RECOMMENDATION #1 – MAKE SURE YOU EXIST WHERE THEY ARE LOOKING**

Invest in a structured, ongoing plan to optimize your website for high ranking search engine results for the most common and relevant search terms for your solution. Don't be fooled into thinking this is a one-time expense. Search engine optimization is a program, not a project. Left unattended, rankings will decline as algorithms change and competitors adapt.

## **TRUTH #2 – THE TECHNICAL BUYER IS PRIMARILY INVOLVED IN RESEARCHING AND VETTING POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS**

Screening and recommending solutions requires facts – not hyperbole. Because technical buying decisions can involve significant capital expenditures, decisions must be rational, calculated, with no leaps of faith. An improper selection can have catastrophic results on a company's customers, stakeholders and employees. Save the catchy slogans and brand messaging for consumers and focus on the facts when communicating with technical buyers. If you want to win attention in B2B, compelling, fact-laden content that proves your value is most important. A 2007 Marketing Sherpa survey<sup>1</sup> of technical buyers backs this up. Four of the five highest ranking media read by technical buyers focused on factual content void of promotional messages. These included:

- White papers
- Case studies
- Articles from industry analysts
- Analyst reports

## **RECOMMENDATION #2 – FOCUS ON THE FACTS**

The technical buyer wants to learn how a specific product or solution will work and what business problem it can help solve. Credible proof statements in the form of white papers, case studies or third party commentary will go a long way in building credibility with this fact-oriented audience.

Beyond selecting the right media and messaging, what else can be done at this stage in the buying process? Consider a trial. Nothing says "I trust my solution to solve your problem" like a trial version or sample product. While not necessarily feasible with large capital equipment, many technology and some manufacturing companies have the luxury of providing trial versions. Offering trials also opens the door to a more collaborative relationship where suppliers can engage in meaningful Q&A, consultation and an easier path through the sales cycle.

### **WHAT ABOUT YOUTUBE?**

*If you can't be in the same room with someone during a trial of your product, then video is the next best thing and it can be surprisingly affordable. Video offers endless distribution channels, such as your own website, YouTube, sales presentations, sales call leave behinds, and even as a looping video in your office.*

*In considering video, bear in mind that Web-viewable video is much different from the corporate video quality that most B2B marketers have produced in the past. MarketingProf's "YouTube for Business" seminar maintains that YouTube offers big impact at low cost for B2B and video. For less than \$1,000 (camcorder purchase and production time) in an initial investment, a video acceptable for Web viewing can be created.*

### **TRUTH #3 – THE TECHNICAL BUYER IS SHORT ON TIME**

As indicated previously, the technical buyer's greatest task master is the clock. The pressure to complete a project on-time or minimize the time-to-market for product development is constant and intense. Understanding this pain point is a huge advantage when crafting marketing materials intended for technical audiences. Addressing the time problem will help make a good first impression. Continuing to provide concise, easy-to-understand information will help pave a smoother road through the supplier vetting process.

### **RECOMMENDATION #3 – BE CONCISE AND MAKE CONTENT EASY TO FIND**

Bring your results to the forefront. There is plenty of time for analysis discussion, charts, graphs, tables and history lessons AFTER the value of the solution has been defined. Whether you are writing case studies, white papers or articles, keep the end in mind. Start with what problem was solved and what result was achieved. Then dive into the details.

Secondly, don't hide the information. Knowing the technical buyer is a major influencer and / or decision maker, consider what kind of experience that individual will have on your website. Can the technical buyer find what he needs? Perhaps creating a customized experience on your website just for the technical buyer audience makes sense. By immediately communicating an understanding of technical buyers' issues and business pains, the likelihood of creating a deep visitor on your website will be enhanced. Avoid burying technical manuals, specifications, drawings and other technical data behind laborious search functions or generic links. Let technical buyers know you have what they need by providing direct links to this important information.

### **CONCLUSION**

Understanding technical buyers' needs and tendencies and following the strategies discussed in this white paper are vital when marketing to them. By emphasizing search engine optimization, focusing on facts and saving technical buyers' time as they search for information, you may find you've become an ally for this powerful decision-making audience.

### **RESOURCES**

1. "Business to Business Survey 2007 – Marketing to a B2B Technical Buyer" from Enquiro in association with SSI and MarketingSherpa
2. "Marketing to Engineers: 5 Must-Know Strategies Plus 2 Strategies" – from MarketingSherpa, June 8, 2005
3. "Business Technology Marketing – 2008/09 Benchmark Guide Excerpt" – from MarketingSherpa