

Navigating Economic Shifts:

How B2B Marketers Can Thrive Amidst Change

In recent years, economic tailwinds have led big investors to pour money into B2B startups with high expectations for high returns, leading to a "spend, spend, spend" attitude in marketing.

Marketers shifted from careful testing to throwing money into less proven and ambitious campaigns. **The only risk was not spending enough.**

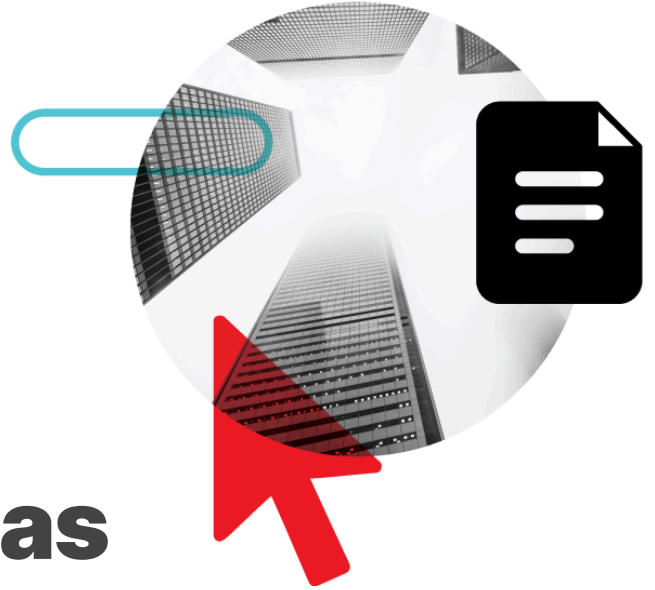
That era of big spending was brief. Its downfall came from several factors, including the end of near-zero borrowing costs and lingering inflation. Interest rates and capital costs have increased, putting pressure on companies to scrutinize every dollar spent. B2B SaaS companies especially felt the pinch, having overspent on customer acquisition during the rosier days.

Marketing budgets got slashed, forcing a focus on efficiency. A Gartner survey found that marketing budgets fell to 7.7% of overall company revenue in 2024, a new low since 2021.

It's no longer feasible to invest in every potential growth avenue; instead, organizations must identify and prioritize the campaigns and channels that deliver the greatest returns. While cost-effective strategies are the name of the game, it doesn't mean that marketers have to struggle to reach prospective customers and retain existing ones.

A recent Forrester study found that 47% of B2B marketing executives expect budget increases of just 1% to 4%, and only 35% expect more than 5% in 2025. Factoring in inflation, that's not much of a gain.

Marketers must return to the basics:
targeting the right customers with the
right message at the right time.



In the face of headwinds, branding is still as important as ever

There is often pressure during challenging times to prioritize performance marketing, especially with longer decision windows, but brand building is still important, especially for B2Bs. While marketers feel pressure to focus on lower-funnel targets, they cannot forget brand marketing.

A [6sense survey](#) found that buyers initiate contact with sellers 82% of the time. And when they start the process, they know 3.5 out of the 4.5 vendors they contact. If the buyer doesn't know about a company's brand when they begin to start a search in earnest, they don't stand a chance.

So while getting the right performance message in front of the right buyer or buyers at the right time is important, it doesn't work as well if the brand building didn't precede it.

In 2023, Gartner research found that [60% of marketers](#) of software buyers eventually regretted their purchase, with nearly 25% of those "regretful buyers" opting to cancel their contract. This also highlights the need for a strong brand and buyer trust.

We're also battling an elongated buyer journey

A 2024 [LinkedIn/Edelman survey](#) found that nearly 90% of global buyers said they took longer to make purchase decisions year-over-year.

In the [6sense buyer experience study](#), which surveyed employees involved in purchasing decisions valued at \$10,000 or more annually over the past 24 months, the findings revealed that buying teams typically consisted of 11 members and that each journey involved an average of 840 vendor interactions.

Budgets are tight for buyers as well. They don't have as much discretionary funds as before and are willing to shop around or wait for deals. They are also less brand loyal than in the past.

Balancing Act: Enter the new era of sustainable growth

Marketers need to balance short-term results with long-term brand building.

SaaS marketers need to redefine the balance between speed and strategic alignment, focusing on the most impactful channels and refining messaging to speak directly to the heightened pain points of their audience (e.g., cost-cutting and operational efficiency).

So what does sustainable growth mean for SaaS providers? Capital efficiency and customer centricity are the pillars. Marketers must align with sales, product, and customer success teams to build integrated strategies that deliver both short-term performance and long-term brand value.

That means that building credibility, trust, and expertise is as important as ever.

Sustainable growth for SaaS providers in the current economic climate means focusing on capital efficiency and customer-centricity.



Capital efficiency

Making the most of available resources and avoiding wasteful spending. Marketers may find there is less institutional appetite for tools and personnel. They may encounter reduced budgets that limit their ability to lean too heavily on scale to drive results. They are undoubtedly going to be measured by more incisive metrics that take into account the spending that drove the results they can show.

Customer centricity

Prioritizing the needs and wants of customers to build strong relationships and loyalty. While listening and catering to customers seems like an obvious point, companies can sometimes stray away from it when chasing growth. A return to customer centricity helps marketers focus on efficiency - only targeting the customers and prospects that are likely to convert and prioritizing messages that appeal directly to them.



Account-Based Marketing: an especially powerful strategy in lean times

Marketers have a smart, simple, and effective strategy at their disposal to address both capital efficiency and customer centricity: Account-Based Marketing (ABM). ABM involves targeting specific high-value accounts and the committee of people with purchase decision power within target industries.

Marketers need a marketing strategy and solution that appeals to different companies in multiple industries, reaching diverse personas. It can be complicated if not handled correctly.

The first key is to create a big, all-encompassing campaign, which you then boil down into segments so you can speak very clearly and credibly to each market, to each company, and even down to each individual.



How to develop a winning ABM strategy

Establish the right framework

Whether B2B marketers create their own framework or use one built by their marketing partners, it is imperative to have a regimented approach to one's marketing strategy.

The right framework serves several purposes:

- Translating business goals into easy-to-activate messaging
- Selecting the types of people you are trying to reach in the most valuable industries
- Identifying behaviors and motivations throughout the customer journey, including where they get information
- Connecting the right content to the right audiences on the right platforms

Develop the right personas

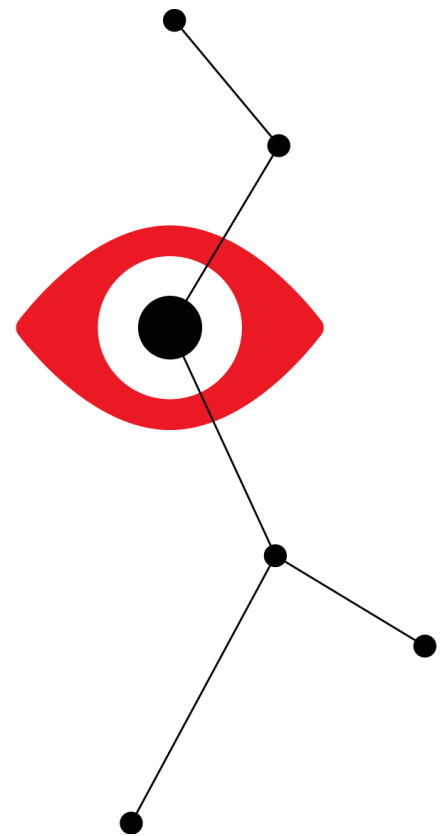
Building an effective, personalized enterprise approach requires creating robust individual personas that resonate at every stage of the customer journey.

Few companies can boil the ocean by going after every company in every industry. So they need to lean into their customer insights data to decide which targets are most valuable and will drive the most profitability, then work to understand everything they can about them.

This requires organizations to conduct first-party research through surveys or have direct conversations with customers to derive valuable insights that uncover behavioral motivators. Understanding what motivates people has a significant impact on overall creative, targeting, and platforms.

IMM develops personas using a proprietary methodology that seeks to understand each persona's motivations and blockers to action and dig into how we can provide value. Crafting accurate personas requires asking the right questions and understanding the intent behind any particular answer.

For example, knowing where each persona is most likely to go to receive and consume information creates the opportunity to reach them with campaign activations in the environments they're naturally habitating.



Once you have identified your customer personas, you need a comprehensive plan to address each persona's needs at every stage of the customer journey. This data-driven segmentation ensures that each marketing message resonates with its target audience and drives conversions.

Our focus on data analysis, performance measurement, and real-time reporting empowers us to develop highly targeted marketing campaigns that deliver measurable results.

For instance, a B2B company targeting a retailer must recognize that the motivations of franchise owners and store managers can differ significantly. A franchise owner might be primarily interested in how a solution increases profitability, while a store manager could be more concerned with how it simplifies daily operations.

Similarly, a software provider catering to both healthcare and technology sectors may find that healthcare companies prioritize security, whereas technology companies are more focused on enhancing average revenue per user (ARPU).

The right message at the right time matters more than ever.

Marketers need to develop a plan to address individual persona needs at every stage of the journey. They also need the right automation and optimization strategies to maximize the value of these platforms.

Content is King, But Quality Counts

Content is the foundation of any modern B2B marketing campaign. **A Gartner study found that the average B2B buyer consults four to 10 pieces of content before making a purchase decision.** Whether it's an email, a white paper, or a blog post, each provides marketers with an opportunity to persuade a target audience.

But as more companies invest in and prioritize the content they create, the stakes have risen. **Nearly 3 in 4 B2B decision-makers did not find any meaningful insights in over half of the branded thought leadership they consumed, according to Gartner.**

The need to iterate quickly is clear: In recent years, several clients have asked us to rethink their overall content strategy to produce, approve, publish, and distribute content more efficiently. They struggled with the approval process—each piece of content had to go through a brand team QA before going live. While this step remained essential, we partnered with the creative team to develop a series of approved content templates that could be easily customized at the final stage to resonate with each persona. This approach eliminated the bottleneck and allowed the team to produce more content quickly.

Drive the right omnichannel strategy

On average, B2B buyers interact with companies across ten different channels, such as email, LinkedIn, websites, mobile apps, and paid media. Marketers need tailored messages for each channel to ensure they reach prospects where they are getting information.

For example, over 80% of B2B buyers use mobile at work. Optimizing for mobile is no longer optional but essential for engaging B2B buyers.

According to SageFrog, only 26% of B2B marketers plan to implement a mobile-first strategy. By leveraging data-driven insights to develop such a strategy, you'll position yourself ahead of 74% of your competitors.

Omnichannel targeting is becoming more challenging as the industry moves away from third-party cookies. Although Google has postponed the complete deprecation of third-party cookie support in Chrome, the shift toward cookieless tracking is accelerating.

To maintain effective programmatic advertising, marketers are increasingly relying on alternative identifiers and targeting methods. Meanwhile, channels like paid search and social media continue to drive significant activations, and emerging platforms such as CTV and retail media are gaining prominence. In this evolving landscape, the strategic value of first-party data is paramount.

Establish the right KPIs

Marketers often struggle to demonstrate the tangible impact of their initiatives due to long and complex sales cycles. It is always important to make that connection, but doubly so when there is downward pressure on budgets.

Modern marketers are increasingly shifting away from traditional marketing qualified leads (MQLs) in favor of KPIs that align more closely with the collaborative nature of today's buying process—and that are actionable for sales leaders. While MQLs have long been a cornerstone of B2B marketing strategies, relying solely on individual lead metrics can miss the bigger picture.

In Forrester, [several analysts](#) made a convincing case to go beyond MQLs based on one simple fact: Few companies rely on one individual to make the purchasing decisions. Someone who signs up to access content may just be a fact-finder with no voice in the decision representing the larger group.

By focusing on and targeting buying groups, you can find patterns that demonstrate which leads represent a real opportunity and which ones are just doing research far from a purchase decision.

Modern purchasing decisions often involve multiple stakeholders, requiring a broader set of performance measures that capture team dynamics, pipeline progression, and overall revenue impact. By adopting KPIs that reflect collective

influence—such as multi-touch attribution, pipeline velocity, and conversion rates—marketing and sales can work together more effectively to drive business results.

But that’s not to say that MQLs are no longer relevant. They still serve an important role as a signal that could lead to sales.

As Lauren O'Bryan said in [Powered by Search](#), “In the SaaS industry, the customer data collected on leads is invaluable. This includes all the details you collect while figuring out who’s just browsing and who’s an MQL.”

Ultimately, the modern marketing world requires several levels of metrics across the buyer’s journey to truly understand how any campaign is performing at any given time. Below are some of the metrics we think are especially valuable to track in 2024 and beyond.

CATEGORY	KPI/METRIC	DESCRIPTION
Account Engagement	Account Coverage	% target accounts engaged through various touchpoints.
	Engagement Score	Composite score based on interactions with content & outreach.
	Avg. Time Spent on Content	Measure of time decision-makers spend interacting with tailored content.
Pipeline and Revenue	Pipeline Velocity	Speed at which target accounts move through the sales pipeline.
	Avg. Conversion Rate	% engaged accounts that convert into qualified opportunities or deals.
	Revenue from Target Accounts	Actual revenue generated from accounts within the ABM program.
Alignment	Lead-to-Account Match Rate	Accuracy in matching leads to their respective target accounts.

	Avg. Sales Cycle Length	Reduction in the sales cycle for accounts engaged in ABM efforts.
	Collaboration Index	Qualitative measure of sales and marketing team collaboration effectiveness.
Campaign Performance	Content Engagement	CTR, open rates, downloads.
	Response Rate to Outreach	% decision-makers who respond to personalized outreach efforts.
	Event Participation	# target accounts participating in webinars, roundtables, or ABM events.
ROI and Efficiency	Cost per Account Engaged	Average cost of engaging each target account.
	Return on Investment (ROI)	Overall return on ABM efforts in terms of revenue versus execution cost.
	Lifetime Value (LTV)	Long-term value of accounts acquired through ABM

Don't wait to leverage AI

Of course, no discussion of marketing in 2025 is complete without the topic of artificial intelligence (AI). There are widely varying opinions on what AI can do today and what it will achieve in the future to supercharge marketing efforts. Many of the ad tech products we use for planning, targeting, and optimizing campaigns already utilize AI under the hood to streamline workflows and improve efficiency.

Beyond content creation, AI is transforming how marketers analyze data, segment audiences, and personalize customer experiences. It's increasingly being used for real-time analytics, predictive modeling, and even automating routine tasks such as email personalization and ad bidding. These applications allow marketers to make more informed decisions and tailor their strategies based on actionable insights.

Marketers are also exploring AI's role in strategy and campaign development. Today, AI assists with preliminary research, offers creative visualizations for exploring different mockups, and even contributes to brainstorming campaign strategies and tactics. However, these AI-generated insights require the discernment of experienced professionals who can evaluate which ideas have real potential.

Ultimately, while AI is a powerful tool that enhances human capabilities across various facets of marketing—from content creation and data analysis to campaign planning and execution—it is not a replacement for creative thinking and strategic insight. AI should be seen as an enabler that supports and amplifies the unique expertise of marketing professionals.

Putting it all together

Facing high capital costs, cautious investors, and tightening marketing budgets, today's B2B companies must plan for long-term sustainability while meeting short-term growth targets. With buyers taking longer to decide and brand loyalty diminishing, the era of rapid, unchecked spending has given way to a disciplined, data-driven approach.

Embracing account-based marketing (ABM) and developing detailed personas are now fundamental practices. Coupled with the creation of customer-centric content and the establishment of clear KPIs—shifting focus from traditional MQLs to metrics that truly resonate with sales leaders—marketers can more effectively navigate a landscape where collaboration and multi-stakeholder decision-making dominate.

Mobile optimization and AI-powered insights further empower marketers to engage a mobile-first, digitally savvy audience while enhancing everything from strategic planning to real-time campaign optimization. These technologies are not replacements for creative thinking; instead, they serve as amplifiers that help teams work smarter and faster in an ever-evolving environment.

Recognizing that internal teams may struggle to keep pace with rapid changes and constrained budgets, the right agency partnership becomes indispensable. A proven agency not only implements a strategic framework that has consistently delivered results but also crafts targeted, meaningful experiences that create lasting value.

Ultimately, marketing remains the critical intersection between your customers and your brand. By balancing immediate growth with long-term strategic planning, remaining agile, and leveraging cutting-edge tools, marketers can transform challenges into opportunities and secure lasting success—even in times of economic adjustment.



**Learn more about how
IMM can help.**