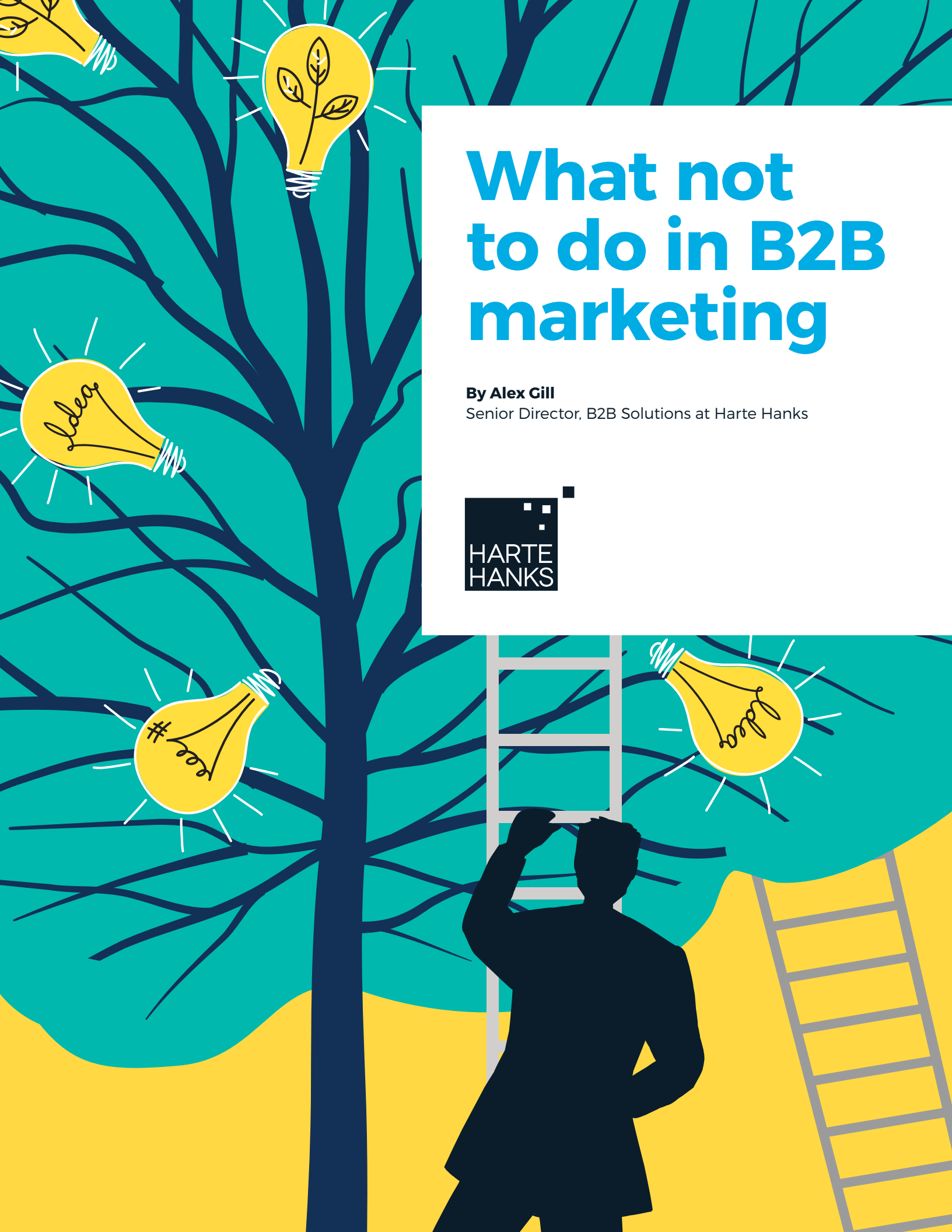


What not to do in B2B marketing

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Are you planning anything different to **improve your marketing performance this year?**

Avoid these three things if you want to succeed: one-size-fits-all campaigns, skimping on data management and jumping on the visual content bandwagon without proper planning.

One-size-fits-all campaigns

There has been a lot of talk recently about the 'death of the campaign'. However, most people joining the debate are simply playing devil's advocate. Of course there's still a place for campaigns in B2B marketing, they just need to be used as a tactic instead of being mistaken for a strategy in themselves.

Best-in-class marketers understand that there has been an irrevocable shift from vendor-led to prospect-driven buyer journeys. In this environment, there is no place for blanket campaigns promoting vendors' products and services. Traditional marketing has been turned on its head, so that prospects' needs come first and vendor messages second.

Successful B2B marketers have cottoned on to the power of highly-tailored 'mini campaigns' within long-term buyer relationships. All activity – from creative-led assets to telemarketing – is geared towards specific audience segments, personalised and tailored to the prospects' stage in the buyer journey.

Here's something to try:

1. Segment your target audience and create personas based on their needs, ambitions and pain points. Think of these as pen portraits of the key job roles you target.
2. Use this insight as a platform to create smaller, focused activities that sit within a long-term communications framework.
3. Think about every interaction with prospects throughout the buyer journey. Ensure the activity can work cohesively and iteratively to achieve long-term engagement.

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Skimping on data maintenance and management

An unfortunate truth of data is that management and maintenance are often neglected in busy marketing departments. It is easily deprioritised in favour of more visible activity that gets immediate attention from wider stakeholders in the business.

However, as we know, data accuracy is permanently on a downward spiral. Unless time is regularly dedicated to shoring it up, data quality can become a limiting factor that puts a stranglehold on marketing success. Moreover, as privacy rules evolve, especially in Europe, quality data, and maintaining permissions to market to customers and prospects, becomes increasingly important.

If you want your marketing to be intelligent, perceptive and relevant, it needs to be firmly rooted in data. Marketing automation, predictive analytics and targeted content creation are all reliant on it. Unless time and effort is dedicated to fundamental aspects of data quality, none of these activities can operate at full power.

When it comes to data, there is always room for improvement. If you do just one thing better in 2016, make sure it's data.

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This checklist might help:

1. Ensure basic data quality is on the agenda all year round. Little and often is key, and overall responsibility should be allocated to a dependable individual or team.
2. Set realistic targets. If your entire database is a mess, select one or two priority segments to focus on. Improve them, put measures in place for their ongoing maintenance, then move on to the next segments.
3. Shout about the importance of data quality. If senior managers and board members don't understand the value of data, build a clear case for it, showing the commercial impact of good versus poor data.

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Jumping into video, infographics, Instagram or any other visual media...

There has been a sea change in B2B in recent years, with more and more brands investing in visual content. These assets can be hugely engaging and effective when used in the right way for the right reasons. But unfortunately, the internet is littered with B2B videos and infographics that don't quite hit the spot.

The problem is that too many brands jump straight in at the deep end without thinking properly about how these assets need to function. Outcomes can be ineffective at best and excruciating at worst; have you ever been subjected to a video that essentially consists of animated brochure content?

Visual assets can be a powerful tactic. But if you're planning to use them in 2016, accept that they require adequate investment and planning.

Delivering tangible ROI is set to continue as the biggest marketing challenge in 2016.

Avoiding these three pitfalls will help you make strides towards it. B2B marketers need to make every customer interaction count. Achieving this requires effective, relevant communications underpinned by long-term, data-driven strategies that make effective use of marketing technologies.

Critical success factors for visual assets:

1. Think like a prospect – if someone's at the top of the funnel, do they really need the minutiae about your products and services? Consider what matters to them, and find a creative way to engage while conveying your messages implicitly.
2. Be wary of operating on a shoestring. Production and image quality are vital in a world where we're used to high-spec B2C videos and visuals. Cut your cloth to suit your budget – don't try to spread it too thin.
3. Measure success. Marketing automation and content delivery platforms enable you to see which videos, infographics or images were opened and whether users clicked to learn more. Evaluate and adjust your content based on these metrics to enhance effectiveness.
4. Think local. Content needs to work in each market you operate in, and can work against you if not localised or tailored to local culture and language needs.

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