# New brand, new website: the B2B Marketing case study

As the industry's flagship publication, B2B Marketing is a well-known brand amongst the B2B community. So when it underwent a brand-refresh in 2011, it needed to do it properly to impress an expert audience. Here is how it happened.

Written by Base One

# The challenge of re-branding in an increasingly digital world...

**Even those brands developed in the last ten years must continue to evolve if they are to fit in with the ever-shifting digital landscape. In the case of B2B Marketing, it was part of a fundamental shift in the industry: but while they made the transition to online publishing more adeptly than many publishers, their brand still had to change...**

It took a year to do, but it was definitely worth it.

Since the spring of 2010, Base One has been working with the team at B2B Marketing to create a new brand identity, and to plan and build the new website using the new brand and featuring a series of advanced community functions. The project has involved almost half of the agency at one point or another, and for some it was a full-time job for several months. It has definitely taught us a huge amount, and offers a perfect opportunity to pass on our learnings.

This whitepaper reflects on the experience, and looks at three critical elements to consider when rebranding and relaunching, a process that is more complex for many established B2B brands as they need to equip their brands to work online as much as offline.

The three areas we focus on in this piece are:

1. Usability - the challenge of minimising frustration and optimising the user experience
2. Look and feel - what were the visual challenges and how were they solved?
3. Search - how to ensure a smooth transition when launching a new site with a new URL

The aim of this whitepaper is not to document the entire process, but to share learnings on what we saw to be three of the central challenges that apply to marketers who are looking into digital rebranding projects. We hope you find it useful.

## A little advance thinking...

"So - we're rebranding and rebuilding the website. What are the most important factors to bear in mind?"

This is the first question to ask of course. It's easy to sprint into the obvious tactical issues like domain names, home page design and compiling a long list of 'nice-to-haves'. But it's important to step back and prioritise. Every brand is different, as is every website, but here are some tips that should apply to all those who decide to take on this ambitious undertaking:

- Your brand needs to live off and on-line. The web may have been around for nearly 20 years, but many brands still seem to forget that what works in print does not necessarily work on screen. This is well known - in fact, so well known that the reverse advice is almost more apposite these days. Don't be fooled into thinking that every brand is purely digital. As social media has taught us, this is not so much the digital age, as the age when we realise that everything we do needs to be geared to human usage and interaction. The brand may need to live in real, three-dimensional 'protein form'. And when it does it needs to be as strong as possible.

- Your new brand needs to be an evolution of your current one if you want to take your customers with you. Even if they can see that you've changed, don't make it hard for them to see that it's still the you they love below the surface. Whatever the colours, typeface or design elements you choose, the personality should be a reassuring constant.

- Remember that your new site will involve a new user experience. Your regular visitors will be used to browsing certain pieces of information in certain ways, and they will need to change their habits. Make sure that all visitors receive the maximum amount of help in getting to know the new site and its new features.

***"However you change the colour or font, the personality should be a reassuring constant."***

- Don't forget that your online identity changes everywhere, and not just on the site. If you're using social media, for instance, make sure to change your logo/avatar on Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, etc, and don't forget little things like your email signatures.

- Timing is everything. Everything needs to change at the same moment in order to avoid confusion. Plan your switch-over carefully and in detail. With thousands of visitors coming into contact with you on your site, via several different touch-points, it's crucial to ensure that everything is neatly co-ordinated.

> ***"If you mess up, be prepared for a major dip in business."***

- Keep search considerations high on the agenda. Any successful site receives over 50% of its traffic from natural search, and you need to be sure that you have a detailed plan of action for the switch-over or you can literally lose thousands of visits for several months. In the case of B2B Marketing, this task was made harder still by the change in URL from b2bm.biz to the more relevant b2bmarketing.net. Every page needs correct forwarding, and this process must be followed for a lengthy period after relaunch.

- Referring sites (sites that talk about you and link to your site) are a key source of traffic but also act as providers of free advertising, promoting you to their visitors. Take the time to contact key referrers and help them update the information they provide on you as well as the way they link to you.

- If you have a customer database, make sure it transfers smoothly. Don't make it difficult for customers to sign into the new site or they won't bother. You decided to make the change, not them, and you need to ensure they find it a positive not a negative experience.

A rebrand is always a big task, but when combined with the launch of a brand new site the transfer plan is as important as everything that leads up to it. If done right, you will keep your current traffic levels and hopefully increase them. If you mess up, be prepared for a major dip in traffic and therefore business.

## The usability perspective

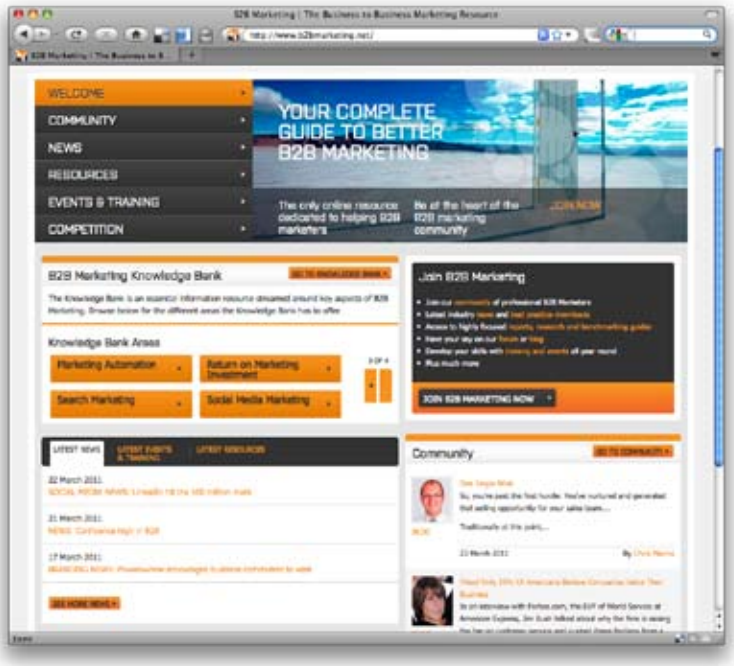
The clear goal when re-building B2B Marketing was to create a site that encouraged greater user participation in both function & design. To achieve this goal we needed to recognise two distinct B2B audiences: anonymous users hunting for information and loyal members wanting to communicate with their peers to share expertise.

### Navigating the maze

All good sites start with a clearly structured navigation and for a site that has as much content as B2B Marketing does it is essential.

The decision to make the second level of navigation visible on every page was taken so users could quickly grasp the size and scope of the site - experience told us that understanding gives users confidence. A first-time user with a specific goal should be able to navigate to it easily. Improving understanding was also behind the move to reduce jargon on the site and specifically in the navigation: the phrases "Premium Content" and the "Download Centre" were merged to sit under the heading "Resources" on the new site for this reason.

The term "Knowledge Bank" also came under a lot of scrutiny: was there a better name to explain what content it contained? The final decision was "No" but because it is a somewhat generic term the decision was made to reduce the focus on the concept of the Knowledge Bank and allow the unambiguous area names to clarify the content they contain. Usability was also improved by rolling out Knowledge Bank categorisation to community content - ensuring that terminology is consistent across the entire site.



## Personalised dashboards

The addition of a personalised dashboard for members means the homepage does not need to equally service new and loyal users - as after logging in members are automatically redirected to the dashboard. With this knowledge the highest priority item on the homepage can be an overview of site content - aimed at new users who are more likely to land on the homepage and require information on what the site is about.

The personalised dashboard itself became a valuable accelerator, giving returning users quick access to content that can be specifically tailored to their requirements. For ease and consistency the categories for email alerts are also used to populate the dashboard and a link to the dashboard is on every page for quick access.
User activity on the old site guided the placement of other items on the homepage. Heavy traffic areas like the Knowledge Bank sit higher up the page, alongside a potentially revenue generating membership message, while News was moved further down the page as it is easily understandable from the main navigation and more than two thirds of users will deep link into a specific news item rather than land on than the main page.

## Protecting privacy

Improving the community raised user issues around privacy - how to allow users to participate on the site without forcing them to declare personal details? Member profiles were tailored to allow users varying levels of anonymity - the ability to create your username (which may not be instantly identifiable), to hide company name and job title. As these details are easily modifiable by the user it would be hoped that users who might start by hiding their details could grant access to them at a later date.

With so much activity on the site, error prevention is an unglamorous but essential usability goal. Adding a pop-up to each resource's download button for anonymous users not only makes it clear to users that they need to login or register to get content but also gives them links to do so. A similar tactic is employed at the top of the cart page to remind members who have not yet logged in that they should do.

However, improving the usability of a site is a lengthy process and we're just at the start. User feedback is already being fed in to an extensive list of requested improvements to the site.

***"Error prevention is an unglamorous but essential usability goal."***

## Designing the look and feel

While B2B Marketing has enjoyed terrific success over the last decade, their visual identity had suffered.

It was generally accepted that it had become outdated and was doing very little to help with the growth of the brand. Apart from the name, there was very little to connect the brand between offline and online media. They needed a visual identity that would make them instantly recognisable to their audience.

In this digital age, people want information delivered to them as quickly as possible, so it is no surprise that the B2B website had become the most important 'delivery method' for their content, with visitors to the site easily outnumbering subscribers to the magazine. It was their website, however, that was hindering their identity and how people viewed the brand. Quite simply, the wealth of information was becoming detrimental to how that content was communicated. It had become cluttered, content-heavy and inconvenient for the user.

Fixing this conundrum was our priority, and although usability was a large part of this, the visual identity needed to help so that the B2B Marketing brand became more engaging. Of course, the beauty of digital media is the interactivity it enables. B2B Marketing wanted to harness this interactivity, and shift away from being solely a news source and towards being a community for marketing professionals to interact with each other.




We embraced this fact, and made community the foundation for the whole visual identity - from the logo and the icons to the colour scheme.

Our first task was to carry out some competitor research. Most of the competitor brands used blues and reds so we chose orange, black and white to stand out. These colours also represented the expert, open, equal and energetic aspects of their brand personality.

The logo uses a series of circles housed within a larger circle to represent each B2B marketing professional within the wider B2B Marketing community. The closeness between the circles represents the close relationships between those members. This feeling of community was at the heart of everything we designed for the new brand.




These circles can be used throughout the visual styling. They can be manipulated to fit different collateral or to create icons whenever needed. But, as always, simplicity was key to creating a successful, recognisable visual identity so, although there was some room for manoeuvre, the key elements of the brand like the logo and the word mark would always remain the same.



Feedback so far has been very positive. Many people have already commented that they prefer the new visual style, that it stands out far more and makes the website much easier to navigate. The brand now stands out in the B2B marketing arena and there is a strong feeling of unity between all their publications.

## Moving to a new domain - the SEO perspective

The Base One search team had two simple aims:

- To make the transition invisible and seamless to the user
- To ensure the site's Google performance was unimpaired

For a large, content-rich, information-led site like B2B marketing, organic traffic is crucial, and generates a large percentage of monthly visits. Developing a new site and changing domain name at the same time brings about a major challenge: how to ensure that search engines - above all Google - 'follow' the move of over 10,000 pages from one site to another, and from one URL to another. If the process is not carried out correctly, the site could literally 'vanish' from search engine results for a period, along with the traffic they bring.




In order to ensure a totally smooth transfer, the search team at Base One focused on the following 7 key points:

### 1. Sitemap

Before starting any tasks, it is key to have a clear picture of the site structure and the number of pages that the website currently has. This is especially important for big websites that may have thousands of web pages, for example websites where content is generated by users or a pool of authors. Exporting your sitemap into a spreadsheet will give a clear view of the whole website. Xenu Link Sleuth is very useful for this task. Analysing the number of incoming links to the domain, and the important pages is very useful, since this will help to compare the number of incoming links before and after the move.

## 2. Test before moving

It is recommended to test the move process by only moving the contents of one directory or subdomain (if any). This will help flagging any issues in the moving process. It is important to use a 301 redirect to permanently redirect pages from the old site to the new one. Hence telling search engines that the site has permanently moved to a new domain. Retaining the same file paths on the new domain (ie URL-by-URL) makes 301 redirects much simpler, hence making the site less vulnerable to technical errors.

## 3. Check for indexed pages and any issues

The next step will be to check whether search engines are picking up new pages and correctly indexing them. Ensuring that pages are correctly indexed is essential, any indexing issues could be easier to deal on a small scale (folder or subdomain) than on a whole website. Using Google Webmaster Tools helps to discover crawling errors, crawling rates and helps to configure robots.txt if needed. 404 errors can also be detected and corrected.

***"If mistakes are made, the site could literally vanish."***

## 4. Moving the entire site

If step 3 was performed successfully then the next step is to entirely move the website. It is not recommended to re-direct all pages to the homepage. Though this can avoid 404 errors, it is not very good for the user experience. A page-to-page redirect is recommended, users are thus transferred to the exact page on the new website or on a similar page.

## 5. Link checking

After moving the whole site, it is important to check both external and internal links to pages on the site. In an ideal world, we would contact the webmaster of each site that links to our website and ask them to update the links to point to the pages on the new domain. However this can be labour-intensive depending on the number of links that the site has. In the meantime ensuring that all pages with incoming links are 301-redirected to the new site is essential. Internal links need to be checked and updated (if needed) to point then to the new domain. This is especially important when your website has absolute URLs. A link checker like Xenu is again very helpful to make sure there are no broken legacy links on the site.

## 6. Google Webmaster tools

At this stage, the new site should be registered on Google Webmaster tools and verified. A sitemap should be generated and submitted to Google Webmaster Tools. The sitemap will help detect any errors and also help indexing the new pages more quickly.

Keeping both sites (old and new) in Google Webmaster Tools for a while is a good practice since it enables us to review crawl errors and also check whether the 301 re-directs on the old website are correctly working. It will also help to use the 'Change of Address' form to tell Google where the address of the new domain is. It is also useful to keep an eye on Google Analytics statistics on the old website, this will help understand if traffic is correctly being routed to the new domain.

## 7. Canonicalisation

Finally, it is essential to ensure that the new domain does not have any canonicalisation issues. What's canonicalisation, you ask? URL canonicalisation occurs when a page has several URLs loading the same page (with identical content), which confuses the search engines as they get confused on which page to index. Having duplicate web pages on the new website will clearly not help the new domain.

## Progress report

At the time of writing this paper - roughly two weeks after the launch of the site - it has transferred successfully to its new domain, and, most importantly, maintained its No. 1 ranking for the search term 'B2B marketing'. Not all of the new pages have been indexed at this point - a transfer of thousands of pages can take up to 2 months, but the number of pages found is increasing on a daily basis. Most importantly of all, traffic from search has remained constant, and we anticipate an increase over the next few months.

***"The brand has relocated successfully to its new home and, most importantly, maintained its No. 1 ranking for the search term 'B2B marketing'"***

## Summary

Overall feedback to the new site has been terrific. In this world of content overload, users are understandably loyal to sites that [a] they trust and [b] that they have become familiar with.

So the decision to change things, in order to improve the experience, is one that cannot be taken lightly. While the search experts may look at the challenges of transferring from one domain to another, the business challenge would be more accurately described as transferring trust, loyalty and advocacy between brand identities.

Early indicators suggest we have managed this. We believe that B2B Marketing is now well placed to consolidate its position at the heart of the industry of the same name. There are a lot of unknowns over the next five years, but the brand is better equipped than ever to succeed in an increasingly digital environment.

And we hope that some of the findings in this paper can help you achieve similar success for your brand.

**Facing online branding challenges of your own? If you like what you've read, and would like to talk to us about your own branding challenges, please get in touch or visit us online at baseone.co.uk.**

DISCLAIMER: It's perhaps a little unusual for publishers like B2B Marketing to release information about their own inner workings, in the way they do in this paper. But there is a growing spirit of openness and community in the digital world these days, and since these are qualities that they felt were core to the B2B Marketing brand, it seemed wrong not to share something that might be of help or interest to members of the community. And you've got to applaud them for that.

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