Really.

B2B MARKETING



How Really B2B won Silver for 'Best corporate decision-maker-targeted campaign' at the B2B Marketing Awards for their work with Arden University

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On a recent episode of *The B2B Marketing Podcast*, Angie Coombe, client services director at Really B2B, sat down with Lucy Gillman, deputy editor at B2B Marketing, to unpack the secrets behind a stand-out campaign.

You'll find insight from their discussion throughout the report. If you want to listen to the full podcast episode, click here.



1. Introducing Arden University and Really B2B

1.1. ARDEN UNIVERSITY

Arden University has been championing digital learning since 1990, providing bespoke learning solutions to +20,000 students and access to seven study centres across Europe.

Having already achieved brand salience and success in B2C with their apprenticeship and remote learning programmes, Arden wanted to replicate that success in B2B. They already had a strong foot in the market with several smaller B2B clients, but wanted to expand their presence to capitalise and drive exponential growth. To do this, Arden needed to reshape their corporate client portfolio, targeting household brands with +10,000 employees who would send +20 learners onto a specific programme annually.

"The overall business objective was ultimately to attract fewer, but much higher volume B2B clients and really focus on those larger corporate enterprises"

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"In order to help Arden achieve their overall business objective, what we needed to do was position them as a corporate learning and degree apprenticeship partner of choice for those larger corporate businesses," Angie explains. "We needed to do this by creating a relevant and compelling messaging strategy that resonated with this target audience and ultimately to reach those decision-makers using the right channels to build brand affinity ahead of those key academic dates."

And who better to help them than award-winning B2B Agency, Really B2B?

1.2. REALLY B2B

With over a decade of B2B experience under their belt, Really B2B was the perfect fit to help Arden sink their teeth into the corporate market and re-establish themselves as the go to player. Together, they kicked off a social campaign that's nothing short of a masterclass in creating carefully crafted, flexible messaging.

The result? A campaign that generated nearly 500% of pipeline revenue, 154% against original MQL targets, one very happy client and a shiny new B2B Marketing Award to their already extensive trophy case.

Let's take a look at how they did it.

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2. Challenges and broader business issues faced

So, Arden and Really B2B had their goal in mind. But what were some of the challenges they faced?

2.1. INCREASED DEMAND

For risk of stating the obvious, during the pandemic the demand for online and blended learning skyrocketed. This rise in demand (and supply) was a double-edged sword for Arden – their solutions became more attractive than ever and they had the opportunity to capitalise on this demand, but they had to compete with new, fierce competition.

To help Arden navigate this congested space, Really B2B led a comprehensive analysis of the corporate market, seeking to get an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by HR and L&D professionals.

"We knew more and more companies like Arden were offering this blended learning approach. So we needed to understand what it was [that] employees really needed from a learning solution for their employees in this post-Covid world. And by doing this, we could then identify the unique elements of Arden's proposition against the competition and against where they were positioned in the market," Angie explains.

By taking Arden's USPs and matching them against other blended learning solution providers in the market, Really B2B were able to identify the 'true whitespace' Arden operated in; "this then formed the basis of our big idea for the campaign, providing a really distinct position for Arden in the B2B market where their offering could really shine through," Angie continues.

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2.2. RESHAPING PORTFOLIO

In line with their five-year plan, Arden needed to reshape their corporate client portfolio by attracting fewer, but higher volume B2B clients.

Angie explains: "[Arden] knew that the biggest opportunity was around maximising their apprenticeship programme for multiple employees within one business. And Arden's unique proposition is that they have a huge support network that sits behind their blended learning approach. So actually an employer that has multiple employees on their programme is much more beneficial for the employer – and that's part of what Arden wanted to go and talk to these businesses about."

2.3. PARTNER OF CHOICE

To benefit from these opportunities, Arden needed to increase the awareness of their blended learning solutions amongst large household brands and position themselves as the go-to university for employers seeking an innovative learning partner.

But Arden were facing both a brand awareness challenge and general knowledge around the benefits of blended learning for both employers and employees: "What was really interesting is that we found both hesitation and resistance to invest in those mid-level apprenticeships for various reasons. A large part of it was due to a lack of resources and, from the employer side of things, not really knowing how to get started. But also there was a big knowledge gap on the benefits to both employees and employers and how those mid-level apprenticeships could really benefit those employees. But on top of that, the government levy is available to employees to help support these mid-level apprenticeships there," Angie continues.

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'Being able to understand where those challenges were for businesses to help maximise their spend and generate positive ROI by using the maximum amount of the government levy available to them was really important."

2.4. MISSING INSIGHTS

In order to hit these goals, Arden needed to expand their customer base knowledge. To create a stand-out lead gen strategy, Arden needed to expand their focus from solely B2C and get to grips with what was keeping their B2B audience up at night.

3. Target audience

3.1. RESEARCH AND INSIGHTS

With this in mind, Really B2B and Arden set out to paint an in-depth picture of the market, the decision-makers they were targeting, and the messages that would hit home.

So, they ran several methodologies to build a comprehensive and representative picture of the market, the challenges target audiences face and how that aligned, or didn't align, with audience expectations in view of the market. Their tactics include:

> Five discovery sessions with Arden stakeholders to uncover strengths, weaknesses, USPs, common objectives, main competitors and aspirational brand associations.

> Five interviews with decision-makers at brands like Autotrader and Mars to establish current structures and perceptions of their L&D function, existing suppliers and key challenges.

> Desk-based research which included competitor analysis, highlighting trends in HR and DiSC Profiling.

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"Taking all that together, we knew we needed a messaging plan that provided a real depth of information that provided reassurance against the target audiences' pain points, and had really relevant rationale based on the current market position,"

Angie elaborates

'Through identifying some of these insights, we [knew that] we needed to find a way of targeting a time poor audience [who] needed a fast and quick solution to help improve employee success. But who also needed a really high, in-depth level of information and rationale to help support their decision-making. And so [from there] we understood that there were some conflicting personality traits and requirements of those L&D professionals."

3.2. SEGMENTATION BY JOB FUNCTION

Using these insights, Really B2B broke down their target audience into three distinct segments:

- Primary decision-makers: Those that manage existing apprenticeship programmes or online learning programmes within the business.
- Secondary target audience: The broader job professionals who work in human resources and have an element of training or learning and development as part of their job role, but isn't a core function.
- Influencer group: A broad range of individuals across businesses with 500 employees or more who could help feed Arden's messaging through the wider network to those who would actually likely be attending apprenticeship programmes.

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Within these segmented job functions, Really B2B were able to identify personality traits to create a messaging and content plan that resonated with the challenges and priorities of L&D professionals.

This formed the spine of their 'big idea', seeking to reinforce Arden's position as the go to partner of choice and focusing on the benefits of investing in employee learning from driving productivity to increasing morale and staff retention.

With this goal in mind, Really B2B set out to deliver this message in a multi-layered, multi-channel approach based on the different target audience segments. Let's take a look at how they did that. would actually likely be attending apprenticeship programmes.

4. Media, channels or techniques used

4.1. WEBSITE AUDIT

So, Really B2B reviewed Arden's website and provided recommendations to improve UX and reduce bounce rates. They highlighted opportunities to increase organic search rankings for B2B related phrases, like 'employee training', with more online content and landing pages.

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4.2. INTERACTIVE CONTENT

"From experience of working with other clients and targeting other similar audiences who are time poor, we knew that interactive content was the right route to go down," Angie begins. "The big question then was what type of interactive content [was] going to drive not only the core message of the apprenticeship programme for Arden, but also really build that profile and brand awareness."

The answer? Two pieces of interactive content – a top of funnel quiz and a more in-depth, middle of funnel e-book.

QUIZ

Users answered several questions relating to professional learning, with a clear CTA encouraging them to explore more content/make an inquiry. A commentary was provided throughout to explain the correct answer in more detail.

"The quiz enabled us to deliver that really hard hitting message, but also deliver key insights from the benefits of apprenticeship learning and Arden's proposition, but keep the user engaged, enabling them to have snackable content at their own pace and their own level,"

Angie explains.

Key results: A page view frequency of 2.4 per prospect.

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E-BOOK

As the campaign developed in conjunction with audience positioning and brand awareness becoming stronger, Really B2B launched How managers hold the key to success – an interactive e-book that drew attention to the importance of effective development for mid-level managers and introduced Arden as the superior learning partner of choice.

"[This] was a perfect blend of information for both the I and D personality types because we were able to zip up sections within the e-book," Angie explains.

Key results: 5:16 minute session duration against a 3:26 minute benchmark.

As Angie outlines, this mix of different types of content allowed Really B2B to meet prospects at their different needs: "For those D personality types who want information very quickly and want to read something in the shortest period possible, the hard hitting headlines and intro paragraphs gave them everything they needed. But for the Is who need that extra depth of information, we were able to offer them a way to engage with as much of the content as they needed to at different times and sections.'

'We were able to offer that real flexibility of content consumption across both those content pieces that could really showcase audience propositions and Arden's blended learning solutions."

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4.3. THOUGHT-LEADERSHIP BLOGS

Blogs were shared via LinkedIn and Arden's content hub, positioning them as an industry expert and thought leader. CTAs drove readers to explore more content or enquire, with these results being optimised based on performance.

4.4. SPONSORED LINKEDIN

"As part of that initial discovery phase, we really needed to understand where the target audience were consuming information and where they were seeing out their own level of insights on blended learning solutions and apprenticeship programmes – [and] we found that LinkedIn was one of the highest used social media platforms for that target audience," Angie explains.

"We used a really high level of sponsored posts [and] we sent out case studies when we were getting to that bottom of funnel message – we're talking about a really high level messaging to that target audience at the time that made most sense for them," she continues. "We also utilised lead gen forms and really tried to capture that level of detail throughout LinkedIn at the same time."

Key results: 640,712 impressions and a campaign high of 0.67% CTR.

4.5. PERSONALISED EMAILS

Two lead generation emails sent per month to a database of 6,500 contacts – which were segmented into three target markets – to encourage prospects to learn more about/enquire into employee apprenticeships.

Key results: 20% open rate, 6% above benchmark; 18% CTR, 12% above benchmark.

We sent two lead generation emails per month to a database of 6,500 contacts, segmented into our three target markets, to encourage prospects to learn more/enquire into employee apprenticeships.

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4.6. HTML EMAILS

"We weren't surprised, but we're always pleased to see the great results that interactive content generates for us. But this campaign in particular far outstripped our expectations," Angie states. With 154% of MQL targets to date, 500% pipeline ROI, and generating opportunities with household names like New Look, Co-op and Mitie, it's safe to say that her words ring true.prospects to learn more/ enquire into employee apprenticeships.

"Really B2B have been integral in helping us establish Arden University as a learning partner of choice in the corporate market. Theircreativity, excitement and laser focus has been refreshing and reassuring. We are confident the results from this campaign will propel us further into the B2B space!" – Stacey Allen, director of corporate partnerships, Arden

The key takeaway for Angie? Don't underestimate the power of the value of research.

"Research can seem like a really high cost, particularly when you're looking to deliver a report on target audience or markets. And actually those key takeaways may only be five bullet points (…) but it's those nuggets of insight that deliver a hugely successful campaign. We wouldn't have been able to create such an impactful, creative, visual campaign or deliver those hard hitting messages without it," she explains.

"Winning Silver was an absolute highlight of the year [as was] being able to bring our clients with us to share in their success. This campaign was only successful as it was because of the collaboration between us and Arden," she concludes.

An agency client match made in corporate heaven that saw stand-out results and a Silver win. What more could you ask for?

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About

B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing was founded in 2004, starting life as a print magazine. It has since evolved into the world's go-to resource for B2B marketers looking to become best-in-class at what they do, and place themselves at the forefront of marketing evolution.

B2B Marketing produces a number of products, including: insight reports; interviews with the best minds in the business; The B2B Marketing Podcast; webinars; conferences; and Awards programmes.

The latest product in B2B Marketing's extensive portfolio is Propolis – an exclusive community for B2B marketers. Propolis gives you instant access to unbiased experts, training, technical resources, research and peer-to-peer learning, all supported by a dedicated customer success manager.

Want to learn more about B2B Marketing or Propolis specifically? Just get in touch using the contact details below and start your journey with us today.

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ReallyB2B is an B2B marketing solutions agency - blending emotional understanding and extensive marketing expertise to uncover insights, create engaging content, and help customers grow with results-driven campaigns.

We help brands to improve their understanding of the B2B market and become better connected with their audiences - to maximise sales opportunities & achieve business growth.

With expertise and a relentless focus on creatively igniting conversations between you and your audience, we passionately support and empower your team to achieve their goals.

We have since spent 15+ years refining our strategies and specialisations to build the industry's strongest and most capable team of B2B marketing experts.

Whether prospects are looking to identify new audiences, ignite conversations with new or existing customers, or highly focus their efforts in an ABM campaign, we have the best people for the job.

By blending emotional understanding and extensive expertise, we've not only supported and empowered global brands to accelerate their business growth, but we've also retained their partnerships thanks to our award-winning capabilities in strategy and research, content & creative, and data & delivery. ReallyB2B is the award-winning B2B marketing solutions agency.

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