

The B2B website planning handbook

A business growth guide by

gorilla76

Table of contents

3	The purpose of this handbook
4	Five things a B2B website is not
8	The critical components of a B2B website
16	Six things to do before you start building
20	How to choose a web-design agency
28	Strategic planning worksheet
35	Who is Gorilla 76?

The purpose of this handbook

You can find many technical website-build check-lists online. This is not one of them. This handbook instead guides the planning of a strategy-driven B2B website that will produce new business for your company. Period.

You'll learn how to build a website that will target your audience(s), generate traffic and turn that traffic into real leads. At the end, we've included a planning worksheet for you to complete and hand off to your web design team to assure they get the job done right.

g76

Five things
a B2B website
is not

Five things a B2B website is NOT

Welcome to a new era of marketing

Business executives today protect their budgets more than ever before. CMOs expect visible results from marketing investments (as they should). Readily-available numbers demonstrate successful and unsuccessful marketing initiatives. Marketing automation has stormed onto the scene. Social media no longer sparkles as a shiny new object. Along with this, the modern B2B website has staked out its claim in the business development world. This website sets out not to brag about the superiority of your fantastic company, but to serve your prospective and existing customers. It works as a business tool designed to attract qualified prospects, provide utility in their search for a vendor/partner, and convert them into real leads with names and phone numbers. This modern B2B website also serves as your partner in nurturing leads until they become paying customers.

As an introduction to what a successful B2B website IS in today's business environment, let's first look at five things it is NOT.

1. A website is NOT a brochure

In the early 2000s, the B2B website existed to demonstrate a professional brand image, describe your products or services, preach your greatness to visitors and list a contact phone number. But that was

more than ten years ago. This “online capabilities brochure” retired from the business development world, and a much savvier successor has stepped in. Today’s B2B website boasts search-engine-optimized content, rooted in keyword research around real search engine data. As a result, it attracts YOUR audience in their Google searches. When your audience arrives, compelling content provides value as they research and learn about potential partners like you. That content demonstrates your undeniable expertise and positions you as the expert in your field. Most importantly, this modern B2B website initiates conversation by asking your visitors to take action.

2. A website is NOT a job for your IT team

A website involves technology. So does your washing machine. Neither require the hands of your IT team. Your website is a marketing and business development tool and must be conceptualized, developed and managed by marketing and business development professionals.

3. A website is NOT a project with an end date

The modern B2B website grows and evolves endlessly. If you nurture your website, your website will nurture your audience. This means consistently feeding your audience new blog content, white papers, buyer’s guides, case studies, videos and other content designed to provide utility. A healthy, growing B2B website establishes trust, enhances knowledge of your product or service and moves your audience further into their buying process, all in the absence of obnoxious sales messages.

4. A website is NOT the sole solution to your marketing problems

A B2B website takes center stage inside a much bigger online lead development infrastructure. It needs a supporting cast of strong tools to achieve success. This cast includes a seamlessly integrated marketing database to extract and store visitor information via website forms. It includes a marketing automation system to score the viability and credentials of new leads and initiate automated email campaigns to nurture them. It also includes a CRM (customer relationship management) system for your sales professionals to track interaction with prospects throughout their buying process.

5. A website is NOT a \$5000 graphic design job

A business-generating website capable of demonstrating a positive ROI simply cannot be constructed for \$5000. A website requires meticulous planning, sound strategy and the insights of your marketing and sales professionals. It's not just a graphic design job. I repeat – it is not just a graphic design job. As you'll learn throughout this handbook, success will require not only a financial commitment, but commitments in the form of time, energy and brain power from you and the key players within your business. If you're ready to take on the challenge, continue reading.

g76

The critical components of a B2B website

The critical components of a B2B website

Professional design and copywriting

As a company with pride, you care about your team's appearance. You dress appropriately, tuck in shirts, shave and look presentable. You care about the appearance of your office in the presence of customers. So why not give the same level of care to the most visible and visited asset you own — your company's website? Customers will often make their first point of contact with your company online, through your website. If your site turns them off, this interaction might just be their last. A successful B2B website boasts clean, mobile-friendly design and bursts with professionally crafted copy written for your current and prospective buyers.

Resourceful business blog

Data from the customer base (over 10,000 businesses) of marketing software company HubSpot shows that “customers who write just 3-4 blog posts per month get 20 more monthly lead submissions, get 800 more monthly site visits, have 60 more Twitter followers, and have 50 more Facebook likes than customers who only write 2 blog posts per month.” But why does blogging work? [Here's why.](#)

Blogging strategy is rooted in keyword research, where individual blog posts are crafted to satisfy search engine results for topics related to your products or services. Click-throughs to your website produce

engaged readers who want more of your content because it offers them value. Visitors explore other areas of your site that expose them to lead-capture opportunities, and they enter your sales funnel voluntarily. A constantly-growing business blog is absolutely critical to a B2B company's success in search engine optimization, qualified traffic generation and lead conversion.

Strategic conversion paths

A new lead follows a simple and logical path from stranger to website visitor to lead. Remarkably, though, a majority of B2B companies completely miss the boat on visitor attraction and conversion. We just introduced a blog's role in attracting and engaging an audience. Once your website initiates engagement, the planned conversation path goes to work, transforming visitors into real leads.

Four key components define a website's conversion path:

1. Premium content offer

According to a study by KISS metrics, 96 percent of website visitors are not ready to buy. So what are they doing? To quote Google,

“Our research has shown that, on average, business buyers do not contact suppliers directly until 57 percent of the purchase process is complete. That means for nearly two thirds of the buying process, your customers are out in the ether: Forming opinions, learning technical specifications, building requirements lists, and narrowing down their options,

all on their own, with minimal influence from you.”

Website visitors come to learn, not to be “salesmanned.” They seek value, not an advertising message screaming:

“BUY FROM ME NOW!”

As a result, B2B companies become teachers that must educate their audience and earn their trust. Premium content offers exist for that exact purpose – to “sell” your audience value in exchange for the right to contact them. And just like a product or service, if the content is garbage, no one will pay for it.

Premium content offers come in many forms:

- White papers
- ebooks
- Case studies
- Buyer’s guides
- Webinars
- Recorded videos
- Product demos
- Manuals or handbooks

Publish premium content that makes the most sense for your particular audience. Write white papers and informational guides (like the one you’re reading right now) that appeal to those in the exploratory stages of their buying process. Write others that appeal to those closer

to a buying decision. Develop a buyer's guide for CEOs and a separate buyer's guide for project managers. Host a live webinar targeting one key vertical and another webinar targeting a different vertical. Cover all key audiences by creating valuable resources just for them and your lead-capture ability will skyrocket. Remember that every buyer is different. Not all of these tactics make sense for everyone, so pick and choose those you feel add the most value for your audience segments.

2. Call-to-action

Ask and you shall receive. But as we just explored, don't only ask for the big sale. With content offers now established for your audience, exposure to those offers takes priority. Calls-to-action define the success of every individual page of your website. Think strategically and put yourself in the shoes of your audience. Consider the make-up and needs of visitors for every page, and think about their likely place in the buying process when they visit any given page. Include at least one call-to-action on each page for those in their research phase ("download our white paper to learn more about our philosophy on this topic") and one call-to-action for those closer to buying ("download our case study to see how we helped another customer succeed"). This approach targets different individuals and their different needs rather than shouting at them to buy now.

3. Landing page

"Landing page" in marketer speak means "lead-capture page." Any given call-to-action on your website should drive a visitor to a landing page that serves one purpose alone: capturing that visitor's information. Think of landing pages as the checkout aisles of your website. The transaction happens here — your premium content is exchanged

for your prospect's contact info. Landing pages require a unique design compared to other pages on a website. Plan to strip away exit points from that page so your visitors focus only on completing the page's information-collection form in exchange for your offer. Remove the top navigation and other prompts that might drive them away from the page. In terms of page content, focus on briefly summarizing the offer at hand. If you offer a case study download, include a one-paragraph summary of the case study and a few bullet points about results. Next to the summary, include your info-collection form with a clear reinforcement: "Download now." To view a sample landing page, [click here](#) to revisit the page where we offered you this handbook.

4. Form

Don't under-think the forms that live on your landing pages. Collect the basics of course: name, company, phone number, email address. But then get creative. Ask questions that will prepare you or your team for a sales call — information that will help qualify your prospect as a good or bad lead. Ask visitors about their biggest challenges and what services they would find helpful. Ask about their industry and the size of their company. Ask if they'd be interested in talking to a sales rep or if they're just researching. And ask what type of content they'd find valuable from a list of four or five topics so you can cater your email marketing approach toward each prospect accordingly.

Today, marketing automation software such as [Hubspot](#) elevates the collection of lead intelligence to another level. The term "progressive profiling" refers to a marketing automation system's ability to gather different information from any given visitor every time he or she fills out a new form on your site. So while you might only ask for name,

company, phone number and email address upon the first white paper or case study download, your website will recognize return visits and skip those questions in lieu of more insightful ones the second time around. Over time, the marketing profiles of individuals in your database become more robust. New information helps you score and segment leads and allows you to market accordingly to them moving forward. As a bonus, your sales team will love you for the intelligence you've provided before they ever make their first calls to prospects.

Marketing database and CRM integration

The best lead-generating B2B websites tie directly into a business development infrastructure. The website itself houses valuable content and conversion paths to convert strangers into visitors into leads. But then what? When integrated with a marketing database and/or CRM (customer relationship management) software, your website becomes a real part of your sales process.

We just looked at forms and their role in the conversion path. After forms pull contact information from visitors, a marketing database (ideally a marketing automation system) can track that visitor's activity on your site moving forward. This function enables lead monitoring and as a result, better email marketing.

To go a step further, syncing a marketing database and CRM system like Salesforce allows lead information to pass directly into the hands of a company's sales team. Lead intelligence gathered through forms provide background and context before sales calls, and allow sales professionals to document their ongoing touch points with leads.

Website analytics

Nielson ratings or estimated ad impressions have no home in online media. Thanks to tools like Google Analytics, we now have cold, hard numbers — always up-to-date, accurate and readily available. Today, as a result, much less guesswork inhibits our marketing success than in years past.

Use your analytics software to measure success and failure. Are qualified visitors finding you in search engines, on LinkedIn or through industry websites? What content on your site (specific blog posts and pages) drive the most visitors to lead-capture pages? What promotion channels convert the most visitors to leads? Email? Social media? Examine your data not only to self-validate your efforts, but to adjust strategy. Let the data drive your future marketing decisions. Proceed by doing less of what fails and more of what works.

g76

Six things to do before you start building

Six things to do before you start building

Set concrete goals

Before you begin planning content, before you start searching for an agency, before you think about design or photography and before you approach your CEO with a proposed budget, set concrete goals. What motivation drives this rebuild in the first place? “Our site is really outdated and just doesn’t look professional” will not make your decision makers bite, even if that statement rings true. Bring the subjects of lead generation and customer acquisition to the table instead, and they will listen. Set real goals around these topics. By how much do you want to increase website traffic? How many leads do you want your website to produce over the next quarter and year? How many existing leads can this website move closer to a buying decision? When concrete goals come first, the strategy for your website build naturally follows.

Define your audience segments

Your website isn’t for you. It’s for your customer. Know exactly who that person is. If you’re targeting multiple audiences or verticals, know exactly what they are. Think about your audience at the company level. What size? What location? What industry? Think about them at the personal level. They’re real people after all. Who at these companies do you wish to attract? The CEO? A purchasing agent? A project manager? What problems consume them? Why should they want your

product or service? Finally, think about your audience in terms of their buying cycle stage. Are they just researching? Are they actively looking to make a buying decision? Probably some of both, so be sure to appeal to both mindsets.

Define what your website visitors should do

Your website should think like a salesman, always asking your visitor to take action. Ask for white paper downloads and newsletter subscriptions from those researching. Ask for case study and buyer's guide downloads from those evaluating. And ask for free consultations or product demo sign-ups from those closer to buying.

Examine existing website data

Before you start this process, gain an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your current website. If you haven't yet, install [Google Analytics](#) today. It will take your IT guy or programmer five minutes to set up. At the very least, you'll learn what pages attract the most visitors and what marketing channels (search, social, email, etc.) drive the most traffic. Go one small step further and install [Google Webmaster Tools](#) so you can learn what keywords currently expose prospects to your website in Google searches. This very basic intelligence will go a long way when planning content for your new website.

Evaluate competitor websites

Note the content and pages on your competitors' websites that you find useful. Consider opportunities you believe their sites miss. Observe which competitors have business blogs and which particular blog posts your common audience probably finds valuable. Jot down the keywords that make up headlines in those blog posts. Search those

keywords in Google and note whether or not their websites show up in the search results. If their sites don't show up, note whose do. You probably know a lot about your competition already, so learn equally as much about their online marketing strategy. Then, go beat them.

Collect assets

Your website should burst with the knowledge that occupies the brains of your company's best. Existing sales decks, white papers and presentations from your team will prove invaluable as you begin the rebuild process. Survey your company's assets now and gather them in an organized manner. You'll hit the ground running when it's time to get started.

g76

How to choose a web-design agency

How to choose a web-design agency

Should you hire an agency to build your website, use this section as a guide for evaluating their must-have characteristics.

Experienced

Experience refers not to the length of resumes or the impressiveness of a LinkedIn profile, but real-world online marketing experience. The idea of a marketing agency isn't a new one — anyone who's seen *Mad Men* knows that. But while Don Draper can write the heck out of a giant piece of body copy or craft the perfect print headline, what would he know about interface design, SEO-friendly copy, an efficient CMS (content management system) or on-site lead-conversion? Well, it's your job to find out. And it's your job to stay away from the traditional agency that now labels itself as a digital shop because its existence depends upon it.

Questions to ask include:

- What is your breakdown of work between traditional and online?
- What content management systems do you use? Are they proprietary or open-source?
- Tell me about how you market your own business?
- What role does content marketing play in your strategy?

- How would you compare writing for print to writing for web?
- Show me what your agency has done for on-site SEO on your clients' websites.
- Show me how you've designed visitor-to-lead conversion paths on other clients' websites
- Do you integrate marketing automation software into your website builds?
- What makes you different?

In fewer words, if they don't have experience, don't give them a chance. Unless you want to be their guinea pig of course.

Sales-oriented

Long gone are the days of the brochure website. Or, at least they should be. Today, so much is possible online. Marketing automation works hard to link marketing and sales. The readily-available data and insights about your audience will make your head swim. It can all be overwhelming. And that's why we believe it's your agency's job to help you through the process.

Questions to ask include:

- How can you help us bridge the gap between our marketing team and our sales team?
- How do you assist your clients with list segmentation?
- Do you have relationships with the sales or business development teams at other clients' businesses? How do you work together?
- Do you have experience with marketing automation? If so, what software platform do you prefer? Why that platform?
- Do your clients use CRM (customer relationship management)

software like Salesforce? If so, how do you help them sync contacts they generate through their website with contacts in that sales database?

- After website builds are complete and lead generation kicks in, do you consult on lead-nurturing to help close more leads as customers?

Qualifying whether or not an agency is sales-oriented is a very important step. It's often what will determine if your marketing is going to work hard for you, or hardly work.

Creative

Do they value creativity? This will be apparent from the moment you visit their own website. While a trophy case of awards isn't necessary, it's important that the agency values creative work. Agencies that fit this mold will help you develop a brand that connects with customers.

Questions to ask include:

- Who will be my designer? Can I see some other projects he or she has designed?
- How do you believe web design differs from other forms of design?
- Who will be my writer? What is his or her background? What is his or her experience writing for print vs. web?
- Will I have direct access to the writer and designer?
- How do strong writing and design translate to increased sales?

Happy clients

Any agency worth their price has a list of clients (past and current) that will vouch for them. Request references from a few clients. Don't

worry about intruding, it's your money. If the agency wants it bad enough, they'll be more than happy to provide names, phone numbers and email addresses. Note: if you notice that your contact at the agency has the same last name as one of the references, beware.

Questions to ask include:

- Has the agency been easy or difficult to work with?
- What was their process like and how involved were you in that process?
- Were they timely?
- Were they on-budget?
- Did they include any technical support post launch? Has that been helpful or have you felt like an after thought?
- Describe the actual team you worked with.
- Did they work to understand your business objectives? Or was it just a design project for them?
- Did they focus on improving your bottom line?
- Describe one thing you wish they had done differently.
- Would you hire them again?

Accountable

Today, all facets of online marketing are measurable, and as a result, agencies can and must be held accountable. Learn how your prospective agencies measure the success of a website.

Questions to ask agencies include:

- When and how will I know if this site has demonstrated a positive return on my investment?

- How specifically do you measure the success of a website build?
- What metrics do you find most valuable and why?
- Can you tell me what the visitor-to-lead conversion rates are for other client websites you've built?
- What advice can you provide me on measuring the website's effectiveness into the future, after the job is complete?
- How do you evaluate your own website's success?

Transparent

Transparency is almost a buzzword now. Companies are told to be transparent. People are told to be transparent. But what does that really mean? How does that apply to your web-design agency?

An agency should be transparent in all of its dealings. It should be very open from the get-go about costs, how they work, who will work on your project and quite a bit more. If the agency is unwilling to share such intel, be leery.

Questions to ask include:

- Describe the breakdown of this project's costs.
- How long will this project take? How do you set milestones?
- Describe your development process in short.
- Who is my team, will I have access to them and how often will I meet with them?
- What are YOUR goals as an agency for this initiative?

Versatile

You know by now that a website is not the end-all-be-all of online

marketing success. The website is instead the center of a more comprehensive online business development infrastructure. You also now understand that a website is never complete. It must grow and adapt to keep up with competitors from the standpoints of search engine optimization, content offering and lead-conversion ability. Ideally, your web-design agency possesses the experience and ability to assist you into the future as you grow your business through online media.

Questions to ask:

- Are you strictly a web design agency? Or do you offer other online marketing services?
- What retainer packages do you offer to achieve results in traffic generation, lead generation and lead nurturing?
- What are the services included in those packages? (example: SEO, blogging, white papers, case studies, social media marketing, marketing automation, email marketing).
- What percentage of your website clients are now on retainer agreements?
- How long has the average client remained on a retainer agreement?
- How often do you meet with your retainer clients?
- How do you measure success of their ongoing marketing efforts?
- Can you show me results from some of these clients' marketing initiatives?

Beerable

Last, but not least, would you actually want to grab a beer with them at the end of the day when work is over? Or are you going to dread ev-

ery meeting you ever have? If the latter, mark my words, the work and your business will suffer.

Questions to ask:

- Do you prefer domestic beers or imports? Just kidding.

g76

Strategic planning worksheet

Strategic planning worksheet

You wouldn't build a house without a blueprint. Likewise, a website build will fail without a strategic plan.

We've created this planning worksheet to guide both you and your agency through the website planning process. You may not be able to answer every question, but do your best to fill them in. Keep this by your side throughout the process and you'll find yourself on the track to success.

Goal setting

Why are you considering a website rebuild in the first place?

What are three to five primary objectives you need to accomplish with your new site to consider it a success?

How much monthly traffic do you want to generate on your new website?

How many monthly leads do you want to capture for your sales team?

Audience identification

(Fill out one of these sheets for each primary audience segment.)

Industry:

Size of company:

Geographic location:

Who at the company are you targeting (job title)?

What challenges does this person face?

How can your product or service help this person address those challenges?

How long is this person's buying process and what does it look like?

Does this person conduct significant research before buying?
Or does he or she buy quickly?

Content planning

What are the top-level content areas needed on your website? Examine some of your competitors' sites to help generate ideas.

What are the most important keywords that you'll want to rank for in Google searches? Again, examine your competitors' sites as a starting point.

What existing company assets such as sales presentations, brochures, sell sheets or other materials are available that may translate to website content?

Who at your company can play a role in developing valuable content for your audience?

Conversion path planning

What actions do you want a visitor to take once he or she arrives on your website?

What offers can you provide in exchange for a visitor's contact information? (For example, downloadable white papers, case studies, free trials, buyer's guides and webinars)

Nurturing new leads

What will happen after someone fills out a contact form? Who will be alerted? Will he or she be added directly to a database?

How will new leads be nurtured over time so your company can build trust and remain top of mind?

Who is Gorilla 76?

We're a St. Louis-based marketing agency. We help B2B companies (particularly industrial companies) generate traffic, leads and customers through their websites and other online media. From our blog to our downloadable guides, we're committed to being the ultimate marketing resource in the B2B industrial space.

Is your website generating real leads?

A hardworking B2B website converts at least two percent of traffic into real leads with names, phone numbers, email addresses and company names. Is your website delivering? Gorilla 76 offers a free, 30-minute website consultation for B2B companies to evaluate your website and online lead generation strategy. [Click here to sign up for a free consultation now.](#)

Other downloadable guides by Gorilla

[The Hardworking Web-Marketing Guide for B2B Industrial Companies](#)

[Measuring Online Marketing ROI: A Manual for B2B Companies](#)

[Enhancing Business Development with Marketing Automation](#)

Let's talk

Joe Sullivan, Partner
314.332.1020 x1
joe@gorilla76.com

