

Trust Me

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As we looked for inspiration on the theme of “trust” and its relationship to marketing, we scoured the image banks such as iStockphoto and others. We found the expected “handsome businessman shaking hands with experienced male executive” photos as well as sports images (“two adventurers climbing a rocky face”). Not exactly what we had in mind.

What we didn’t find was an image that conveyed the answer to “how does an organization become a **‘trusted advisor’** to customers and prospects?” Is it a marketing strategy that can be created? Part of the corporate culture? Both? Hang on...we’re not ready to reveal the answer yet.

MARKETING AND THE TRUSTED ADVISOR STATUS

How can marketing help engender trust? Oh...let us count the ways!

Social Media

According to a report published by Toolbox.com*, more than 55 percent of IT professionals “use social media to make better decisions based on insights from like-minded professionals.” In another survey conducted by Knowledge Storm, 69 percent of B2B technology purchasers are active in social networks.

It’s clear that social networks can and are being used to help guide or validate purchasing decisions, and that makes them a great place to showcase your knowledge and stand out as a **trusted advisor**. How can you take advantage of this powerful vehicle?

- » **Go where your prospects are.** Take time to identify where people in your target industry are congregating, and then join those groups. Use a social tool (such as Butterfly Publisher) to monitor the postings so you don’t miss an opportunity to share your brilliance. Start your search by visiting pertinent publications and associations and finding the groups they are participating in. For example: Modern Distribution Management magazine (mdm.com) lists Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook groups on their home page.
- » **Consider the network.** Some networks are simply better for engaging with business decision makers – think LinkedIn versus Facebook.



- » **Be relevant.** If you have been creating great thought leadership content and a question in the group relates to a piece you've written, you can link to that when you answer the question. But be VERY careful. If the question is – *I have a small business, and I'm thinking of investing in a CRM system, but I'm really concerned with the rollout time and investment from my staff.* – your whitepaper on “Why You Need CRM” is NOT the answer to that question.
- » **Be helpful, be genuine.** This is not the time for promotion. Keep the “about me” out of it. In most social media networks, your profile will tell people all they need to know. If that option isn't available, then provide no more than one or two lines on your background: *I've been advising companies on B2B marketing strategies starting in 1991 with Microsoft Corporation, and* then answer the question.

Consumers are doing their own research online, searching for advisors they can trust and call upon when they do have questions and/or are ready to buy.

Blogging

Blogging is a wonderful tactic to become a trusted advisor with prospects and customers because it's informal, engaging, and indirect. The Internet has dramatically changed the way people make purchase decisions, and sometimes it doesn't include a salesperson calling (and calling) the decision maker. Consumers are doing their own research online, searching for advisors they can trust and call upon when they do have questions and/or are ready to buy.

A good blogging strategy is essential to this new online buying behavior. Here are three ways to fine-tune your blogging strategy and become a **trusted advisor**:

- » **Consistent knowledge sharing.** In addition to blogging consistently (at least one to two times per week), you are expected to share your expertise, providing educational value in your content. If you stay away from promotional messaging (no, it's not all about you), you're much more likely to catch the reader's attention and keep it.
- » **Group blogging.** Group blogs (see sidebar resources for a complete list) help an industry leader maintain consistent messaging without all the leg work. By joining a community of industry experts, you're also setting the stage for that first impression, making an impact on those who find you. Group blogs see double the traffic of personal blogs, therefore making it much more likely prospects will find you.
- » **Engage with readers.** Blogging is much more effective if you push to engage your readers. If you get creative with calls to action and entice people to comment on your articles, you're creating an environment for everyone, not just your “number one fans” (although it's always good to have those, too).

Do Partners Agree?

Aimee Agnew does! How does Arctic Information Technology build trust? Aimee, marketing and communications manager at Arctic IT, says...

“We build trust amongst our clients and potential customers by being as transparent as possible. We try to be incredibly honest and straightforward with the way that we engage in conversation and share our professional insights...no sales pitch here...simply understanding what their needs are and then offering our best, most practical advice...much like someone would have a genuine dialogue with a trusted friend.

In terms of marketing tactics that build trust, we are consistent and reliable. We make sure our clients and prospects know that our doors are open and we are available to advise, help educate, or simply discuss current scenarios. We accomplish this by hosting many recurring monthly luncheons and training sessions so that we can regularly meet and engage in some type of interaction. We also host a few larger events throughout the year which allows us to meet up with our clients and prospects while we educate them on the latest in technology in a fun social setting. For our local clients and prospects, we always invite them back to our office for 1:1 meetings so we can really engage in an in-depth conversation.

Another tactic we rely on is gathering testimonials from existing clients and referrals. Nothing makes a more powerful statement than an existing client advising others on why they chose your company. We trust the recommendations of people we know, so we encourage our clients to share our information with others.”

Do ISVs Agree?

Marleen De Winter, director of marketing at Integrity Data, notes that as a non-selling ISV, channel Partners are their customers and prospects.

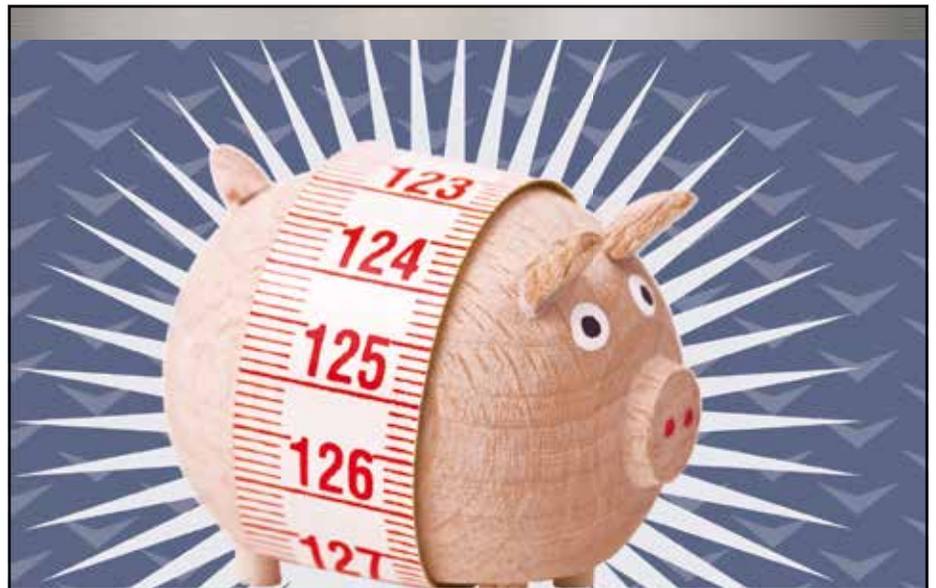
"We make sure each Partner has a designated Partner account manager (PAM) that can work with the Partner to establish and meet sales goals (good for the ISV, good for the Partner). To this end, the PAMs try to establish not only a joint sales plan, but also a marketing plan that can include co-marketing activities such as joint to-customer webinars, participating in their customer event, writing blurbs on the Partner's blog/newsletter, listing on their online marketplace, etc. For us as an ISV, if we get Partner commitment to truly work together and have a "partnership", we will put more effort and marketing money towards that Partner. PAMs are also always available to do a sales call/demo directly with a prospect on the Partner's behalf.

The marketing that we do is designed to build trust with the Partners – and certainly with their customers. We also market directly to end-users to...

- 1) Support the Partner so when they talk about us, the customer has seen our products somewhere else as well.*
- 2) Develop brand awareness by being at events such as GPUG® Summit, Convergence, and at Partners' customer-facing events. We place ads in GPUG Magazine, The Partner Channel Magazine, and in newsletters to our customers that are informational in nature and not just 'marketing fluff'."*

CUSTOMER EVIDENCE

We've grouped all types of customer-specific collateral (customer case studies, testimonials, video) into the phrase "customer evidence". Customer evidence has always been an extremely powerful marketing tool, and it has become even more critical as prospects "self-serve" their need for information on your website. It's not hard to be viewed as a **trusted advisor** by prospects if they know your customers already think of you that way.



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RELENTLESSLY MAKING **IT** OUR BUSINESS TO STABILIZE YOURS.

- » **Post customer evidence all over your website.** Don't just confine it to a single page. Make it easy for a prospect to realize, regardless of the page they're visiting, that your customers have a reason to sing your praises.
- » **Use customer stories consistently.** You can use testimonials on your website, in email campaigns, as part of your corporate brochure, in an e-book, or as part of your tradeshow materials. Write a blog about how you solved a customer's problem, and use social media to get the word out.
- » **Include your customers.** Invite a customer to speak at an event such as a Lunch 'n' Learn, an annual year-end user group meeting, an executive wine tasting for prospects, or a webinar. It shows the power of your relationship with the customer, and it allows prospects to hear how outstanding you are directly from the "horse's mouth".

SUMMARY

In the introduction, we asked if becoming a trusted advisor is a marketing strategy or if it is part of your corporate culture and brand or both. We're generally not shy about sharing our opinion, but in this case, let's hear what you have to say. Join the conversation on LinkedIn in The Partner Marketing Group's marketing group. (Join the group to get access to the discussion.) We can guarantee the answers will be interesting! 🌐

This article brought to you by the combined team talents of The Partner Marketing Group: Cheryl, Michelle, Andrew, Bethany, Barb, and Cheryl. (That's not a typo – there are two of us named Cheryl.) Visit ThePartnerMarketingGroup.com to view the client video, testimonials, and case studies from your peers – Microsoft Dynamics Partners and ISVs.

*<http://www.toolbox.com/news/pjasurvey>

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RESOURCES

SOCIAL MEDIA

- » Butterfly Publisher makes it easy to define and implement a social media strategy across blogs, e- newsletters, and social media with an intuitive content marketing platform for Microsoft Dynamics Partners. <http://www.thepartnermarketinggroup.com/butterfly-publisher/>
- » HootSuite helps teams engage with audiences and analyze campaigns across multiple social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google+ Pages from one secure web-based dashboard. <http://hootsuite.com/>

GROUP BLOGS

Joining a group blog can often ensure your thoughtfully written content gets a wider audience than the few people who happen to visit your website. Opportunities exist to join the blog sites below:

- » www.DistributionSoftwareBlog.com
- » www.ERPBloggers.com
- » www.GoERPCloud.com
- » www.ERPSoftwareBlog.com
- » www.CRMSoftwareBlog.com

BLOGGING

- » FeedBurner: Manage and consolidate your blog feeds with this tool. <https://feedburner.google.com>
- » Diigo: Use this tool to earmark content ideas for blog posts from your desktop, phone, or iPad/tablet. <https://www.diigo.com>

CUSTOMER EVIDENCE

Read these resources to learn how your customers can be your biggest advocates

- » “Brand Advocates: Turning Enthusiastic Customers into a Powerful Marketing Force” by Rob Fuggetta
- » “Word Of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking” by Andy Sernovitz



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