THE MISSING X FACTOR IN TECHNOLOGY
Marketing

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When you're marketing technology, especially in a B2B model, you've got plenty of messaging that shows how your product/service/company helps businesses succeed. If you're one step further in your marketing, you're also able to say how your product/service/company helps different roles and personas within the business succeed.

That's all fine and good, and it's important messaging to have. But, it's not enough. Not today.

We've said it many times before: When you are marketing something like software and services that can be purchased just as easily through other Partners or competitors, you need an X factor that makes you stand out. And figuring out what that is can be very, very hard to do.

FINDING YOUR X FACTOR

There's a reason so many business, marketing – and even tech – articles out there right now focus on customer centricity, customer engagement, customer experience, and customer relationships. Thanks to the internet, mobile devices, and social media, we are more connected and engaged and conversational than ever.

Even in business, we are seeing decision makers place higher value on relationships and experience. We write a lot of case studies and hear directly from clients why they choose working with a Partner over the software publisher, or why they choose one Partner over another. Hint: It's rarely based on price.

Your clients choose you for your people, your expertise, your service, and your understanding. They praise consultants for going above and beyond. They feel like you have, and will continue to have, their back.

They aren't just choosing your product, they are choosing your culture.

And that is your X factor.

No two companies share an identical culture, and that's the beauty of it! There are many things that make up your unique culture. It's a powerful differentiator, and it absolutely deserves a place in your marketing strategy.

DEFINING YOUR CULTURE

First, you need to define your culture, and that can be difficult when it seems intangible. Merriam-Webster's definition of culture is "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization." I would add that your culture simply is "who" you are, not "what" you are.

You need to give your culture life. I suggest asking these questions to start:

» If your business had a personality, what would it be?

» What is your mission for your employees and clients (not the business)? How do you support it?

» How do you make people's lives better professionally and personally?

» Who are the exceptional people in your organization and why?

» Are you involved in the community or professional/personal causes?

» How do employees go above and beyond?

Ask your employees and colleagues to weigh in on how they would describe your company's culture. It's a great exercise for any business, and you might be surprised by the different answers and perspectives you get.

SHARING YOUR CULTURE

Once you've defined your culture, you need to define how you will communicate it. How do you weave it into your marketing in a way that invites your clients in and makes them feel like a part of it?

Here are some ideas to get started:

» **Invest in customer stories.** This isn't a new tactic by any means, but what better way to convey the value of your culture than by having one of your clients explain to your prospects why they should trust you.

» **Showcase your employees.** And I don't mean the same old corporate bio. If I went to your website right now, I would probably learn about your CEO, but can I get to know who I will actually be working with, such as my consultant or tech support team? You probably use customer testimonials, but have you considered also using employee testimonials? Did an employee earn a new degree or certification, volunteer for a community event, publish an article, or have a baby? Congratulate them publicly!

» **Socialize your events.** Whether your team is at an industry trade show, building houses for Habitat for Humanity, or at the company holiday party, let us in. Take pictures. Post them socially. We want to see you as people doing real people things outside the office. You don't just sit around coding software. Prove it.

» **Get involved.** If you're not actively involved in anything but your business, maybe it's time to find a community, industry, or nonprofit program to get involved with as a group. Encourage employees to participate, and give them time off to do it. It's good for the soul, you're helping others, and – although it shouldn't be your sole motivation – it's an excellent marketing opportunity.

» **Align your branding.** Does your branding match your culture? Your logo, your slogan, your website, your tone, and even your color choices all say something about your personality. If you want to be modern and bold, but your branding is beige and brown, it's time for a refresh. Try a new color, a new font, a new layout, or something to change things up. We are visual creatures and, like it or not, your branding is often our first impression of your culture.

» **Share on social media.** While LinkedIn can be more "stuffy" than other social platforms, Twitter and Facebook are excellent platforms to share your culture. Share your photos and news, start conversations, interact with your prospects and clients, and have a personality. If you don't have a social strategy in place, get started on one.

» **Think video.** Because video is automatically engaging, it's a great way to put a face on your culture. You could do a video "brochure" in your office with the whole team or customer case study videos. Record speaking engagements at seminars or live presentations to share on your YouTube channel.

HAVING FUN WITH IT

The best advice I can give is don't be afraid to let your personality shine through – something most technology companies struggle with. Southwest Airlines is often cited as an excellent example when it comes to culture and customer service. They are fun, relatable, and sometimes silly, yet that doesn't make us think their pilots or engineers are any less qualified because of it. You don't have to be "gimmicky" to be interesting.

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