(Reading Time: 3 Minutes)

Capturing Qualified B2B Website Visitors:
Is there an Ultimate Call-to-Action?

What is the "Ultimate Call to Action"?

All business to business (B2B) marketers, especially those who work for technology vendors, are familiar with Calls to Action (CTAs) used to motivate a visiting website prospect to act. Typical web CTAs are offers for things like Whitepapers, Webinars, Free Trials, etc. The problem with most CTAs, however, is that they are weak and non-discriminate; prospects rarely have a problem finding the resources elsewhere. Efforts to up the ante by providing higher-quality content rarely lead to finding and capturing highly-qualified prospects which is what sales really needs.

How can marketing fix this? The first step is to determine what constitutes a good CTA for our specific organization. For the purposes of this paper we will focus on a product vendor that sells enterprise class products, not commodities. Unlike a commodity (B2C) website that uses a shopping cart as its ultimate call to action, a B2B website is generally trying to find and capture the contact information of high-quality prospects. Sales cycles are long so we are simply trying to identify the best prospects. So, what will motivate the qualified prospects to show themselves? A well thought out CTA for a B2B technology vendor should, at a minimum, satisfy the following:

1. It must have high-value to the prospect
2. It should only be available on the vendor's website (scarcity)
3. It should appeal more to a highly-qualified prospect than a non-qualified prospect
4. It should appeal to prospects in the early or "research" phase of a project when the vendor's value proposition has the most impact
5. It must be easy for the prospect to act on

Typical CTAs satisfy portions of this list. Item #1 (high-value) is hard to determine because most prospects realize that most CTAs, especially whitepapers and webinars, are simply warmed-over sales pitches. Scarcity (#2) is an issue with the ubiquitous nature of the internet; most white papers can be found with a simple search.

Items 3, 4 and 5 represent the true sweet spot for a successful CTA because the combination will ensure high-quality prospects that can be influenced early in the sales cycle.

The Sales Cycle

To analyze and find strong CTAs it helps to understand what prospects are looking for during the sales cycle. The typical B2B complex sales cycle is broken down into four (4) major stages: Awareness, Research, Negotiation and Purchase. So what are prospects looking for in these various stages? According to a study done by Enquiro and MarketingSherpa, we have the following:

Sales Stage	Online Activity
Awareness Is there a solution?	General search to see if solution exists, quick qualification visit to website.
Research Product Info, Comparisons, Evaluation Criteria, *Budget Fit*	General search to establish competitive landscape, visit to preferred vendor site, use online resources to define evaluation criteria. Assemble information for RFQ/RFPs.
Negotiation Defined Pricing, Delivery, Support, Defined Feature Set	Heavy interaction with vendor sites and a lot of back and forth, potentially through a “marketplace enable” (i.e. directory or vertical search).
Purchase Corporate “fit”, Customer Service, Implementation, Final Procurement Info	See if this is the best corporate partnership. Also, last minute details needed to finalize purchase.

Source: MarketingSherpa and Enquiro “What are B2B Purchasers Looking For?” September 2007

Figure 1 – The Sales Cycle depends on early Awareness and Research phases for success

In the complex B2B sale, the key to winning business is being engaged in the early phases to ensure we are chosen at the end, or Purchase phase, of the process. To have a successful outcome relies heavily on influencing the customer’s expectations and requirements, especially during the Research phase. B2B marketers understand this fully and that is why the majority of CTAs focus on this area.

Closer examination of Figure 1 shows 4 distinct things prospects are looking for during the Research phase: 1) Product information, 2) Comparisons, 3) Evaluation Criteria and 4) Budget fit. Of the four, marketing easily handles 1 through 3 and tends to spend 100% of its time on “convincing” the prospect that their product is best.

What’s missing?

B2B marketers never address #4, budget fit. This table clearly shows that budget fit is required during the research phase for a prospect to successfully understand the offering so why don’t marketers offer it? The short answer is they do not have a mechanism to do so.

A Stronger Call-to-Action…Budgetary Pricing

Since budgetary pricing is the one, vital piece of information that is generally not available on a vendor's website and **is needed during the research phase**, why don't we use it as a CTA? Most organizations immediately dismiss this idea because they assume it would cause any number of the following problems:

1. Our competitors could see our pricing, we would have no way to control it
2. Different sales channels and customers get different pricing
3. Pricing on the web would allow prospects to ignore the sales team even more
4. Solution configurations may be complex and/or detailed
5. Sales and Marketing do not have the IT resources to manage the process

So how do we solve the above issues and use budgetary pricing as the ultimate call-to-action? The answer lies in using a self-service budgetary quote process. Figure 2 shows how a self-service budgetary quote solution would solve each of the issues while at the same time empower the prospect.

Obstacle	Approval Based, Budgetary Quotes
Our competitors could see our pricing	All quote requests require approval before a quote is delivered
Different channels and customers get different pricing	Smart Pricing Programs would allow custom, budgetary quotes to be delivered based on email identity
Pricing on the web would allow prospects to ignore the sales team even more	Quote requests must be approved by sales, tying them in at the critical research point of a project
Solution configurations are complex and/or detailed	Kits and "Advice" methods can lead customers to correct configurations; the sales team should be able to correct on the fly
Sales and Marketing do not have the IT resources for such a process	Outsource the service

Figure 2 – An approval based approach solves most self-service budgetary quote issues

Figure 3 shows how a "Self-Service Budgetary Quote" mechanism on a B2B website would work. An interested prospect that needs budgetary pricing could access the Self-Service Quote portal, empowering him to select and receive a custom, budgetary quote within minutes while tying in the sales team for approval. The end result is a happy, self-qualifying prospect that is easy to engage by the alerted sales team member. A simple follow-up phone call is all that is needed to begin a high-value conversation.

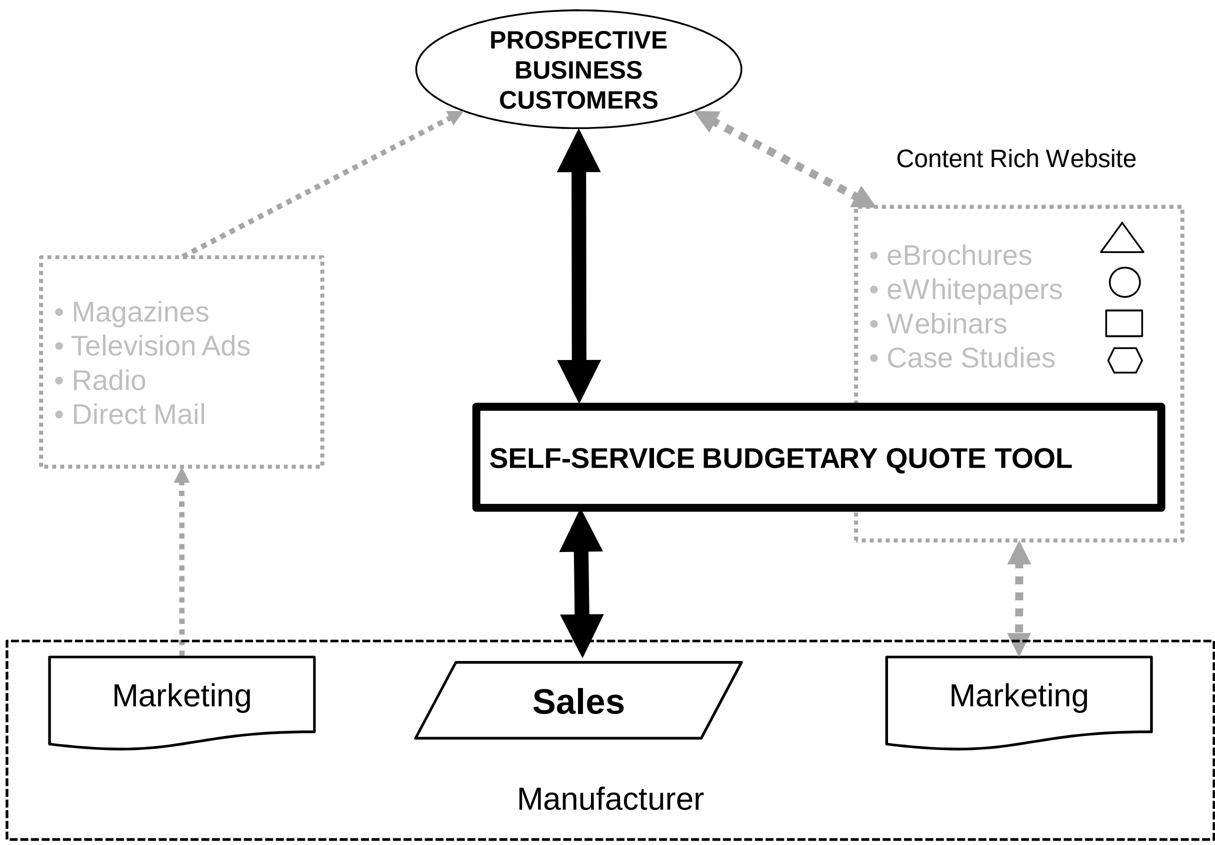

Figure 3 – A Self-Service, Budgetary Quote Tool empowers both the prospect and sales team at the same time

The EchoQuote™ web tool provides approval based, self-service budgetary quotes. It was designed to help businesses increase their sales funnel by reducing site abandonment and capturing qualified opportunities early during the research phase of a project. It allows vendors to safely provide budgetary pricing and engage the prospective business customer. By simply adding a URL link to EchoQuote™ from a vendor's website you connect the Sales team to the prospective customer.

Quote Approval Process

The quote approval process ensures that only legitimate prospects approved by the manufacturer's sales team (or any designated personnel) receive the pricing. Figure 4 shows the process flow for a prospective customer's quote request. Note that not all quote requests will require approval but for those that do EchoQuote™ is designed to handle the requests quickly. The entire process from approval request to the delivery of the quote can be completed in less than 3 minutes. Studies show that responses greater than 5 minutes drastically reduce the chances of a meaningful exchange with the prospect (MarketingSherpa Summit track).

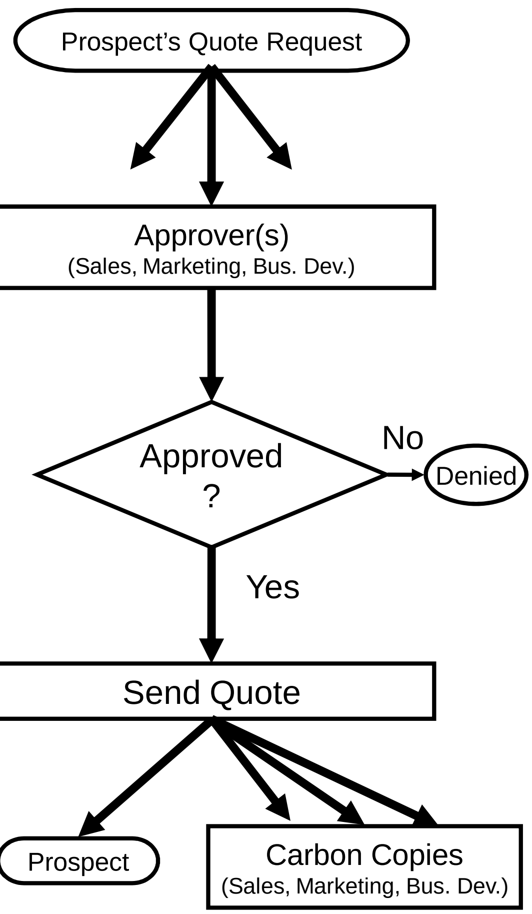

Figure 4 – The EchoQuote™ backend system manages approvals and budgetary quote delivery

Summary

To attract and capture highly-qualified B2B prospects in today's competitive business environment takes a comprehensive approach to understand what prospects need and when they need it. In the lengthy B2B sales cycle, prospects need budgetary pricing early as part of the Research phase. There are several obstacles that make it difficult to provide budgetary pricing including 1) identity of the requestor, 2) different pricing levels for different customers and sales channels, 3) complex product configurations, 4) engaging the sales team, and 5) it may require extensive IT resources to manage.

EchoQuote™ was designed to overcome all of these obstacles and more. Using the Self-Service Budgetary Quote portal, prospects can now select and receive within minutes a custom budgetary quote. This process immediately ties in the sales team and puts the vendor back in charge of the sales process. What is unique about this approach is that it meets all of the criteria for a strong Call to Action; possibly even the "Ultimate Call to Action" because of its uniqueness.

EchoQuote™ can be used in a variety of ways for different business types but is best suited for small to medium vendors with technically savvy sales teams and partners. Vendors can use it to help drive new business through multiple sales channels like government, resellers, integrators and major accounts.

To learn more about EchoQuote™ visiting www.echoquote.com .

If you are interested in getting a Self-Service Budgetary Quote for the EchoQuote™ service, click below:

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