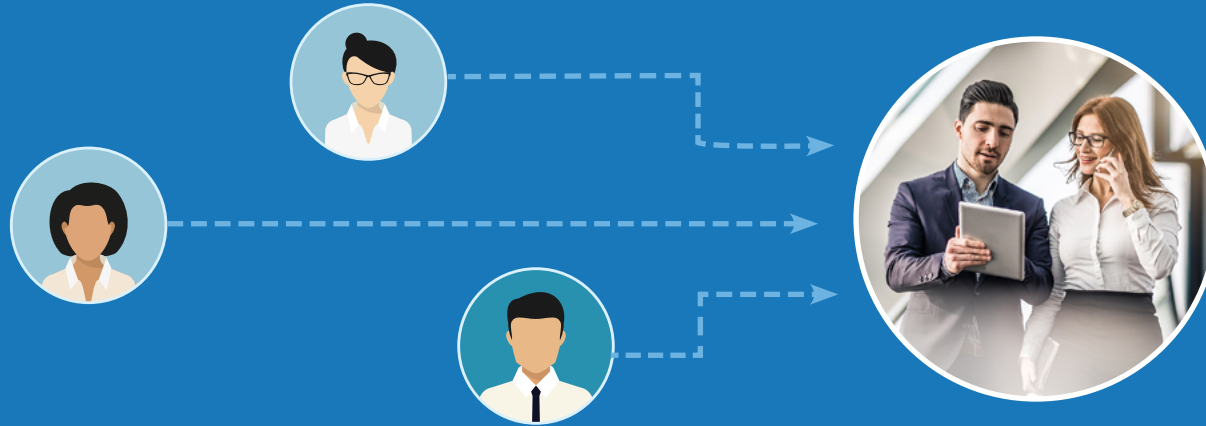




# From Stranger to Prospect: Break the Ice



## What's Inside?

**Page 3** -----> Who is your ideal buyer?

**Page 4** -----> Why will the buyer buy from you?

**Page 5** -----> What will you say?

**Page 6** -----> Where will you have the conversation?

**Page 8** -----> How will you put your campaign together

**Page 9** -----> How will you measure results?

## Three Marketing Quick Guides for Revenue Building

1

### From Stranger to Prospect – Break the Ice

Before you can engage in demand-building conversations with prospective buyers, you must first persuade them to identify themselves and give their consent to talk about your solutions. *This Smart Partner Marketing Quick Guide gives you that recipe.*

2

### From Prospect to Customer – Earn the Right to Sell

Once you've got their interest now its time to start learning more about your prospects by mapping out the data you need and how you're going to get it. Find that Smart Partner Marketing Quick Guide [here](#).

3

### From Customer to Champion – Mentor Customers for Life

The customer journey is a loop, not a line. To gain the most from customer relationships and assure their support in gaining the next customers, marketers must focus on life-time value – the job doesn't stop with a lead or a sale. Find that Smart Partner Marketing Quick Guide [here](#).

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU??



**Find New Customers:** Current customers are a great source of additional revenue. But you'll need new customers to open new markets, replace churn, and beat competitors' growth rates.



**Gain an Unfair Advantage:** Position your company as a thought-leader before the competition gets up in the morning. Many times, buyers have already made up their mind who to buy from before they contact resellers.



**Impress Your Partners:** Tech companies such as Microsoft depend on their channel partners to build new business. They invest in partners willing and able to make markets

# BREAK THE ICE *[at-a-glance]*

When it comes to technology, trust matters. No one buys an important service or system from a stranger! Marketing's first job is to "turn strangers into friends" (to quote marketing guru, Seth Godin). Once strangers become friends, you've broken the ice and can start to earn the right to build demand and sell to these prospects.



## Strangers don't know you.

**Your first job:** *Get noticed. Become familiar and memorable*



## Strangers don't care about you.

**Your first job:** *Build interest and curiosity*



## Strangers don't trust you.

**Your first job:** *Establish your credentials*



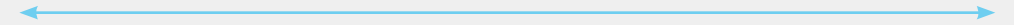
## Strangers don't want to talk to you.

**Your first job:** *Cultivate consent to engage in demand conversations*



## Answer These Questions

**to Break the Ice with Future Customers**



**who**

### *is your ideal buyer?*

Marketing is most effective when you converse with people already inclined to be interested. Find your promising buyer segments, build a database, and create personas to make your marketing come alive.

**why**

### *will the buyer buy?*

Interested strangers expect a compelling reason to engage before they will share their identity and give consent to deeper conversation. Your value proposition explaining "why you, why now" will form the foundation for marketing messages and campaigns.

**what**

### *will you say?*

Buyers are 10x more interested in themselves than they are in you. In your first encounters, let your helpful expertise and cool stories speak for you. Keep solution details until later when you've built trust and interest. Inspire them about the possibilities of change and position yourself as the ideal guide.

**where**

### *will you have the conversation?*

If you want to meet new people, go to where they hang out. Show up at the "watering holes" where your ideal customers go for inspiration about how to be better. If you capture a stranger's interest, they'll check you out online. Make sure your "home base" delivers an awesome experience.

**How**

### *you put your campaign together?*

In the digital world, ABC means – Always Be Connecting! Promote your content by sharing it in your ideal buyers' favorite places. Lead them back to your home-base by linking content to even more content and to your website. Ensure your story will always be available whenever buyers start to look.

**How**

### *will you measure results?*

Linking marketing actions to results will be challenging for this first stage since available data has so many gaps. Collect clues, predictors, and early indicators that you can analyze and link to downstream success.

# Who Is Your Ideal Buyer?

Marketing is most effective when you converse with people already inclined to be interested. Find your promising buyer segments, build a database, and create personas to make your marketing come alive.

## Focus on a Few Segments



A market segment is a group that shares one or more relevant characteristics. Marketing is most effective and efficient when you focus on a narrow group. Don't fall into the trap of claiming "our solution serves everyone!". Technically, that might be true, but "spray and pray" is a disastrous marketing strategy.



**Go vertical:** For B2B companies, popular segment characteristics are location, industry, company size, and functional role (e.g. Chief Data Officer, Head of HR). For some solutions, technical characteristics will also be key.



**Mine your current customers:** Your current customer list will deliver insight on who is most likely to buy from you. Your most recent new customers will be especially useful.



**Expand—but carefully:** It's perfectly okay to go after new segments. Just remember that plowing new ground requires lots of time and treasure.



**Build your database:** Collect information on the people or companies in your segments to use in targeted marketing campaigns. You may be able to buy lists or use data services to enrich your own.



## Create Personas



No segment ever bought anything. It's people that make buying decisions. But in this early stage, you don't know specific people. To avoid dry, boring content that doesn't hit the mark, develop a persona, a realistic sketch of the prototypical buyer in your segment.



**Get real:** For The best persona information comes from actual buyers. Ask a few customers for typical titles and roles. Personas are primarily defined by motivation. What was the burning pain that brought them to you? What challenges were they facing? Where are their favorite "watering holes", the places they go to learn about trends and technology?



**Start with two:** Identify a business buyer persona (the person most likely to get promoted if they solve the business problem you can help them with) and a technical persona (the person the business buyer will depend on to solve technical challenges).



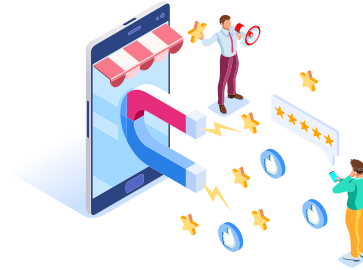
**Make personas come alive:** Give each persona an imaginary name, a photo, and a back-story. Creating content for Charles the Chief Data Officer will be much more compelling than writing for a sea of empty faces.

## Voice of the Partner:

*"We create targeted email campaigns for business audiences, and often consider vertical solutions for specific industries, or a special landing page based on role. LinkedIn is excellent for that; we use it to campaign with different messages for different roles instead of having one global message for all audiences."*

– Sieben

# Why Will the Buyer Buy from You?



Interested strangers expect a compelling reason to engage before they will share their identity and give consent to deeper conversation. Your value proposition explaining “why you, why now” will form the foundation for marketing messages and campaigns.

## Give Them a Reason to Care



Come on. Why should any stranger bother to give you the time of day? They’ve got lots of choices, lots of ways to spend their precious time. You’ll have to work hard to attract their attention, inspire curiosity, and convince them to listen. Marketers call this justification a value proposition. First, write these up for internal education. Then, use them in content for your web and sales team.



**Elevator Pitch:** Short, pitchy, statement of unique value that a sales person could memorize and a customer could remember



**Solution Summary:** One-half to 1-page cheat sheet on what the customer will buy



**Business Drivers & Trends:** A couple of short paragraphs on 3-5 situations that will cause strangers to pay attention to what you have to say and offer (examples: move to the cloud, regulatory changes, business best practices and more.)



**Why We Win:** Collect the strongest reasons that you win deals. Provide evidence to back these up in customer case studies. (The cooler the customer stories and killer facts you can get your hands on, the better!)



## Differentiate Your Company

Great value propositions incorporate what’s most important and what’s most likely to get the conversation started. Best practice is to highlight why you offer the best customer experience.



**Aim high:** Create a value proposition at the company level – one that serves as an umbrella for your solutions portfolio. Link reasons for “Why you? Why now” to the current business drivers and trends that make you relevant to your ideal buyer.



**But not too high:** Your value proposition must encompass your most important offerings but not be so vague that people don’t know what you do. Good: “For financial services companies, XYZ Company is the Microsoft Partner that best delivers trusted, personalized, cloud support because only XYZ Company is the only company in the Tri-City area with more than a decade of experience.” Poor: “XYZ Company, an IT partner you can count on!”



**Get specific:** You’ll eventually need more specific value propositions for all your offerings. But at this stage of the game, you are trying to get attention. People don’t care enough to want to know everything you do.

## Voice of the Partner:

*“The number-one reason customers chose us is our customer support. It’s second to none. They love the hand holding they get from the company. That then spreads to the accountants because they know if they recommend our software, they don’t get any grief.”*

*–Big Red Cloud*

# What Will You Say?

It's all about the customer: Customers are 10x more interested in themselves than they are in you. In your first encounters, let your helpful expertise and cool stories speak for you. Keep the details until later when you've built trust and interest.

## Position Your Company as the Ideal Guide

When they begin their decision-journey, buyers dwell on their problem. Is the pain bad enough? Is the gain good enough? Before they think seriously about solution alternatives, they want to be confident that breaking the status quo has more upside than risks. Inspire them to move forward with you.

### Questions Buyers Are Asking

### Answers They Are Looking For

Do I have a current unmet need? Can I be better than I am today? Am I headed for a problem?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas for improving my business</li> <li>Technology trends and perspectives in my business</li> </ul>
What are other companies like me doing about this challenge?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stories about companies that have solved this problem</li> </ul>
Where do I stand compared to others? Compared against what benchmark?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Methods for comparison such as maturity frameworks and data points</li> </ul>
Why do I want to solve this problem? What's in it for me (company & individual)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insight into both benefits and risks</li> </ul>
What alternatives of potential solutions exist in the market place? How are they different? How are they the same?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective solution comparison as a high level (details come later)</li> <li>Information to make them a more educated buyer</li> </ul>
Who are the suppliers for this option?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brief examples of how you've solved problems like this</li> <li>Your credentials</li> </ul>



## Content You Will Need



**Educate your audience:** Great marketing starts with a compelling foundation that combines your value proposition with trends, facts, and examples.



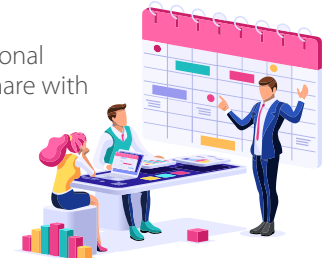
**Be complete:** First, create a long-form educational piece (e.g. white papers, ebooks). Develop a new educational piece 2-3 times a year and build a library on your website.



**Keep the snacks coming:** Turn elements of the long-form piece into short "snackable" offers that audiences can quickly consume. (e.g. blog posts, videos, placed articles, downloadable tools) Link these to your long-form piece and to your website.



**Help them share:** Create 2-3 hyper-short promotional headlines with links you can track for everyone to share with their social networks (e.g. tweets, LinkedIn shares)



### Voice of the Partner:

*"The calendar is the metronome for the entire team. (It) allows everybody to know what we are doing, what their peers are doing, and look for the intersection points where we can get the most bang for our buck. We use that to drive people down a content learning journey to create a signal we can use for outbound marketing."*

– Chef

# Where Will You Have the Conversation?

## Ace Your Home Base

When an interested prospect decides to learn more, they'll seek you out. You control what people find at your online home. Will they get a great experience? Will they be intrigued and confident in you? Will they find information consistent with your value proposition? Will it be easy for them to take the next step? The answer must be a resounding "yes!".

## 4 Online Home Bases to Ace:



**Company Website:** Use your website for branding, search engine optimization, and to provide company and solution information and tell company stories. Once a visitor hits your site, you can start to gather identification and behavioral information. Design your site around customer challenges and topics of interest to your ideal customers.



**Company Blog:** Blogs are a must-have to demonstrate thought-leadership, showcase subject matter expertise, and help with search results. When you claim to be the expert, people expect to depend on you for valuable insights and information. The primary agenda for your blog must be quality content.



**Social Media Profile Pages:** Your social media pages are your digital home-away-from-home. Create a page for any social media you actively use. Keep it up to date.



**Your Company Events:** With so many events available and so little time, it's a challenge to get strangers to attend all but the most prestigious. The best use of your company events is for prospects with whom you are already engaged and for your existing customers. However, a stranger on the brink of becoming a prospect may show up. Be ready for them.

## Technology You Can Use

Don't overinvest in tech for this early stage of the game. Basics you'll need are:

- Website
- Social media accounts
- An email provider



You'll find search engine marketing tools, a list or database service, and some basic analytics to be helpful. Many Microsoft partners work with local marketing agencies to outsource some or all of their early efforts at establishing and optimizing their online presence.

## Voice of the Partner:

*"We noticed that paid traffic sent to generic pages ended up in most cases not converting because they didn't exactly find what they were looking for. We are constantly testing the pages and seeing how they are performing and then changing things around. In three months, we tripled the conversion rates."*

– LSRetail

# Where Will You Have the Conversation?

*(continued)*

If you want to meet new people, go to where they hang out. Once you capture a stranger's interest with your content, they'll check you out online and if things go right, start a deeper conversation. Find the "watering holes" where your ideal customers look for inspiration about how to be better.

## Show Up at these Watering Holes



**Search:** Content drives search traffic so be sure to create your content based on your ideal customer: challenges they face, title, role, type and size of company, location, and as many other details you can think of.



**Word-of-Mouth:** The most powerful marketing engine is what other people say about you. Arm your customers, partners, experts, and employees with cool stories and killer facts that support your value proposition. Help the crowd market for you.



**Social Media:** Use LinkedIn to connect with influencers, map relationships between decision-makers, and collect info about your prospects. Post content and make comments. YouTube is a great way to showcase your expertise with rich video. Use Twitter to promote your content, find influencers, and expand your reach. Concentrate on quality rather than quantity so you don't spend more time than you should on social.



**Industry events:** Be seen at important events that your ideal buyers attend. Industry events are opportunities to connect face-to-face and share real-life "samples" of your company and solutions. Choose events that carefully curate their audiences to match your ideal customer. Submit speaking proposals and generally speak more, travel less.



**Business and technical websites and communities:** Tech buyers are avid seekers of information. They read and watch a lot of content on technology, industry-specific, and general business media sites. Look like the expert you are. Submit articles. Contribute blogs. If you are going to advertise, do it here.



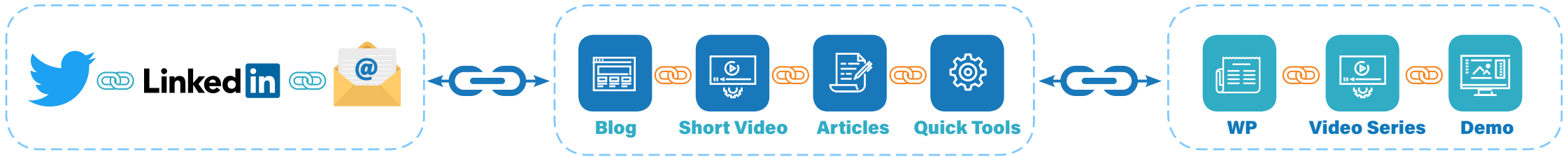
### Voice of the Partner:

*"It's important for us to be at in-person events. We've worked pretty hard on the technology to make sure that we walk away with great leads, and not just scan (badges) and hope for the best. ... All that data flows right back into our CRM so those leads that are loaded and ready to go for post-conference."*

– PowerObjects

# How Will You Put Your Campaign Together?

In the digital world, "ABC" means "Always Be Connecting!" Promote your content by sharing it in your ideal buyers' favorite places. Lead them back to your home-base by linking content to even more content and to your website. Ensure your story will always be available whenever buyers start to look.



## Promote Your Snackables

Place links to your short-form content **everywhere** your idea buyers hang out (LinkedIn is the most recommended place!) so buyers have the best chance of finding you. **Never stop promoting something.** You never know when a buyer will become interested.

## Snackables make it easy to learn about you.

A calendar of interesting snackables will increase **familiarity and build interest and credibility.** Keep snackables un-gated and free to encourage bingeing and sharing. Include your contact links and call to action in every asset for those people who may be ready to talk now. **Link each snackable to the long-form story on your website** to encourage deeper dialog for those who need more information.

## When they ask for your long-form, you ask for something in return.

Once someone demonstrates interest in your most valuable content, that's the time to ask for something more in return. **Start with basic contact information and build up a progressive profile over time.**



### Voice of the Partner:

*"Social media amplifies brand awareness when we have good resources. It amplifies great relationships, or things that are happening with press releases for awards. It works really, really well for that. It's like brushing your teeth. In this day and age, you just have to do it."*

- Media Valet

**You are ready to turn prospects into customers**





# How Will You Measure Success?



Linking marketing actions to results will be challenging for this first stage since available data has so many gaps. Collect clues, predictors, and early indicators that you can analyze and link to downstream success.

## Best Metrics for the Early Stage



### Conversions and Outcomes

Data that demonstrate that your audience is showing increasing interest and willingness to engage:

- Click-throughs from social media to snackables or from snackables to longer-form content, to your website, or to a call-form.
- Quality time with your company representatives at an event.



### Relevance

Are you hitting the mark with segments you care about? Get useful hints about which topics and times are most valuable.

- Top key words from search
- Bounce rates
- Time spent
- Content shares and retweets
- Mentions by experts and key partners

## Useless Metrics for the Early Stage

Vanity metrics are those data that are easy to measure but have little meaningful value.

- General clicks or page counts
- Number of friends or followers



## Useful Metrics for the Early Stage

Start tracking these elements so you can see your improvements.

- Top referrers
- Unique visitors
- Traffic
- Campaign responses

**Watch for consent.** Strangers are not sales leads. In today's social and legal environment, until someone specifically agrees to learn more about a possible purchase, engage at a respectful distance

**Work towards advanced analytics.** Marketers are getting more visibility about early stage audience behavior as more data and data services become available.

### Voice of the Partner:

*"In theory, we measure everything. But it's difficult because brand exposure and a lot of what we've done... has been creating awareness. And that's difficult to measure, but it's critical. Visits, leads, engagement—we try to measure everything. Can we all the time? Not really, to be honest."*

– Qorus

# Message from the Sponsor

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All marketing resources for Microsoft partners: [aka.ms/smartmarketing](https://aka.ms/smartmarketing)

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