

THE FUTURE OF B2B: ADAPTIVE GTM

A practical guide to a B2B marketing system
that works – and keeps working

Ogilvy Consulting



PROLOGUE

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In our original piece, *The Future of B2B: The Adaptive Business*, we identified the Adaptive Era of B2B. We posited that B2B marketers, emerging from the technological transformation of the past decade and the accelerated period of change during the global pandemic, would need to reorganize around new customer buying dynamics.



Read more at:
<https://www.ogilvy.com/ideas/future-b2b-adaptive-business>

Since that time, we've worked alongside marketers and business executives to make practical shifts and move their organizations toward this future. Yet there is still work to do. Gartner has since identified that "only 29% of strategists say their organization pivots effectively in the face of disruption," and they need guidance to build a plan that "allows your business to *adapt*."⁰¹ Did someone say "adapt"?

While validation is appreciated, we're more interested in how we move forward. Based on our work, we've been able to articulate a new type of planning system that is built around adaptive dynamics. Allowing B2B marketers

to continually evolve with their buyers and the marketplace at large.

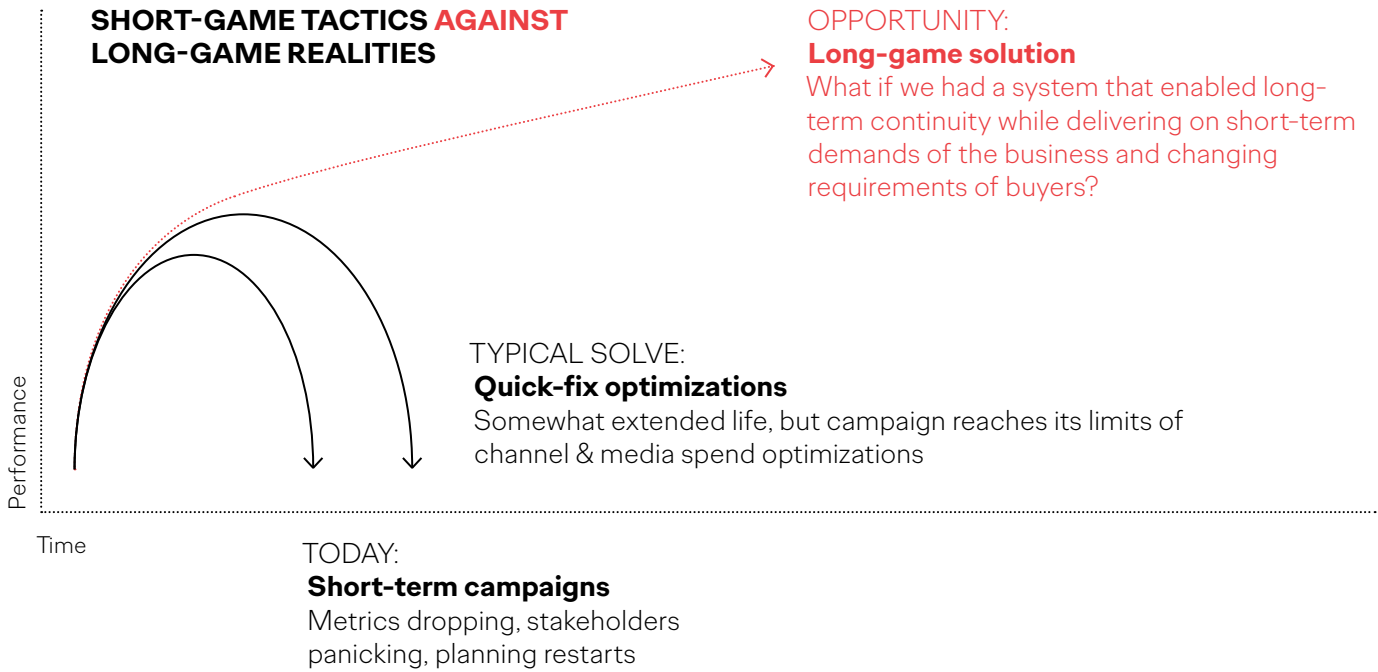
A system, or more properly a go-to-market (GTM) planning system for advertising and marketing, that is made for this Adaptive Era.

Let's start with why it matters.

Less than 25% of all marketing campaigns run for more than six months at a time.

B2B sales is a long game, so why is marketing a short game?

Does this sound familiar to you? Your teams are fast at work producing a fresh set of deliverables that are reminiscent of the campaign you just launched a few months ago. Targeting the same audiences as before, with the same goals to achieve. Whether spurred by a fresh set of internal priorities, a change in leadership, or the seemingly constant pressure to demonstrate value, it can seem like the only answer is to clear the slate and create new work.



If so, you're not alone. Less than 25% of all marketing campaigns run for more than six months at a time.⁰² Creating a cycle of inefficiency and seemingly never-ending work for marketers while risking a fragmented message and experience for your potential buyers.

Short-lived efforts and midflight optimizations never struck us as the best way to adapt to changing business priorities and market conditions. And actually, case research has shown that organizations that take a long-term

approach to their marketing campaigns see double the growth of organizations that don't.^{02,03}

But even putting empirical proof aside, the logic tracks: B2B sales cycles are often long, with prospects bouncing back and forth between self-guided research and personal interaction with sellers. A long sales cycle is fundamentally at odds with a shortsighted marketing effort.

“Buyers value more than six types of interactions in each phase of the buying cycle, split between self-guided and personal interaction.”

Add to this that on average, only 5% of your target buyers are in the market to purchase at any moment during the life of your campaign. This now infamous fact from the industry experts at the LinkedIn B2B Institute and the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science⁰⁵ means you could be targeting 100% of your prospects with the dollars you're spending, but 95% of them aren't ready to act. Yet 96% of B2B marketers expect to see campaign results within two weeks.⁰³ This has led to plenty of great thinking about the long game of branding and creating the memory structures to ensure you'll be top of mind— but is that all? How do you win with the active buyers?

How do you balance giving your marketing the long-term investment and runway to do its job while delivering the short term results your business needs?

Short-Game tactics against long-game realities

If you're like most of the B2B marketers we speak with, you're looking for how to best identify and engage active buyers, in coordination with your brand efforts, while under immense pressure to deliver results back to the business. But these short term expectations force you into using short-game B2B tactics against long-game realities. It's a no-win situation for you, for the business, and for the buyers who are seeking out solutions.

So how do you balance giving your marketing the long-term investment and runway to do its job while delivering the short term results your business needs?

If you're us, you start by leaving behind the old models of lead funnels and experience loops. Creating a new system based on what we have actually observed works for B2B marketers and designed around the strategic insights that deliver meaningful impact —without losing the bias toward continuous action that our stakeholders will always crave.

We call this new system **Adaptive GTM.**

ADAP- TIVE GTM

It's time for a system that adapts as your market does

What do we want to achieve from a more adaptive GTM — one that throws out the limitations of traditional GTM pressures and the resulting outcomes? We've identified four key shifts that inform a new system:

The goal here is to treat marketing like fielding any sports team. You wouldn't put a new team on the field every season with a brand-new playbook. You take the best of what you have, investigate and analyze what you can do around it, and bring the players and plays that help you realize those opportunities. Adjusting to win every game based on what you're facing. It's about building an adaptive system that ensures you always have what you need to succeed. Now let's take a look at the model that helps us do exactly that, but for marketing.

TODAY

TRADITIONAL GTM

Pressure for immediate results

LOOKS LIKE

Squeezing leads from a stone

TRADITIONAL GTM

Changing internal priorities

LOOKS LIKE

Short campaign bursts

TRADITIONAL GTM

Hub-and-spoke campaign planning model

LOOKS LIKE

In-and-out stakeholder engagement

TRADITIONAL GTM

Marketing as a series of campaigns

LOOKS LIKE

“Set it and forget it” executional model

SHIFT

ADAPTIVE GTM

Long term investment, short term results

LOOKS LIKE

Mixed-model KPIs for holistic impact

ADAPTIVE GTM

Evolving with the business and market

LOOKS LIKE

Always-on activity, continuous evaluation

ADAPTIVE GTM

Marketing as an ongoing team sport

LOOKS LIKE

Horizontally oriented holistic teams

ADAPTIVE GTM

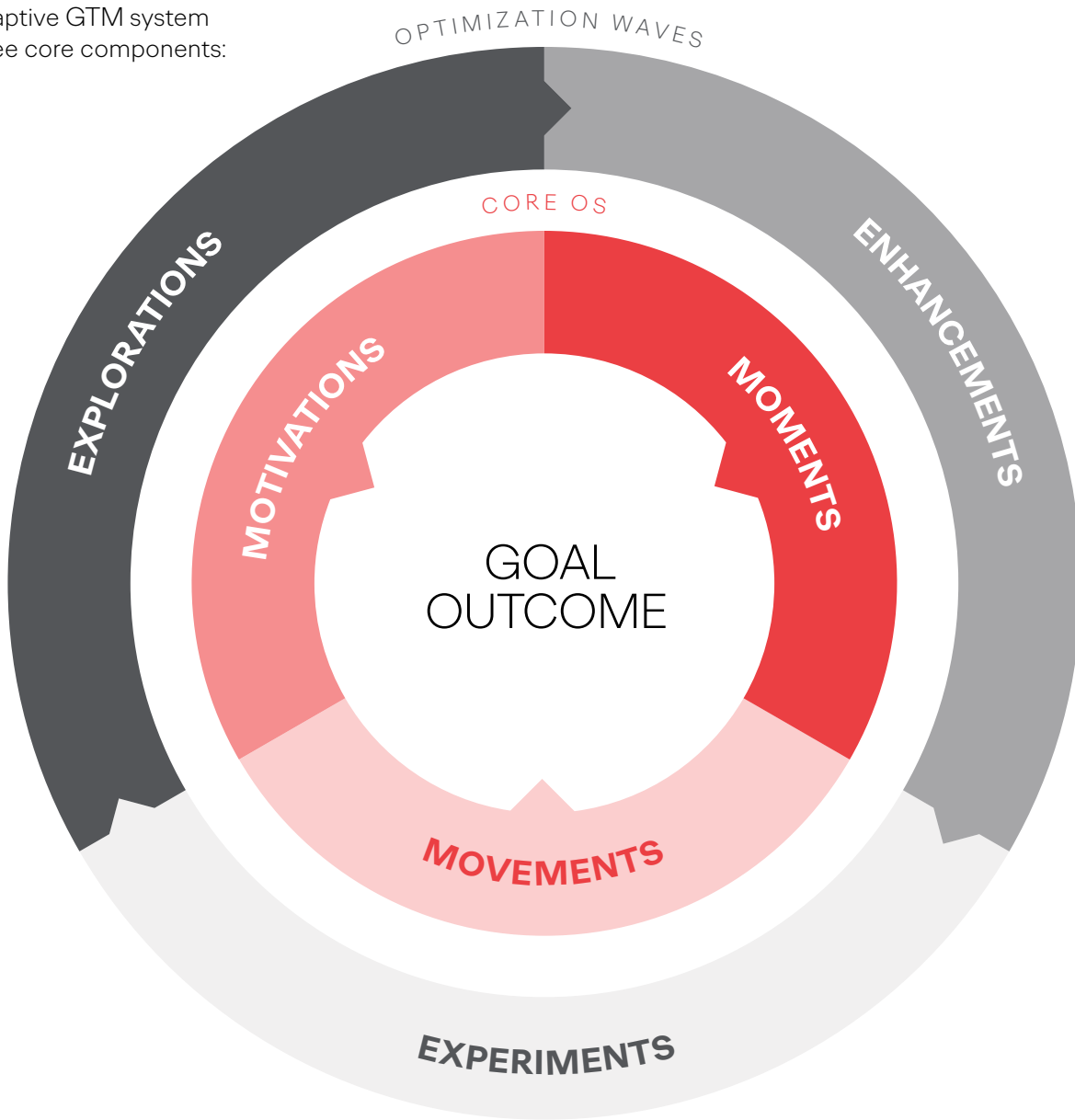
Marketing as a system of programs

LOOKS LIKE

“Launch it and love it” growth model

The Adaptive GTM System

The Adaptive GTM system has three core components:



Goal Outcome

Specific and Measurable

At the heart of the system is a specific, clearly defined, marketing outcome.

Core OS

Motivations, Movements, and Moments

A proactive approach to audience planning designed around the adaptive (rather than static) insights that deliver meaningful impact.

Optimization Waves:

Explorations, Experiments, and Enhancements

A cyclical series of actions designed to activate an adaptive system and reflect the bias toward action of the system.



GOAL OUTCOME

Goal Outcome

Before we talk OS and Waves, the first question is – what will ultimately turn interest and engagement into active sales conversations? Is it a demo? An “innovation session”? An “ROI calculator”? When you’re clear what you’re driving towards, your Core OS is tuned toward a clear and singular objective.

MOTIVATIONS

Motivations

We classically think about target audiences in terms of roles, industries, decision-making authority — a variety of mainly demographic characteristics.

We don't want to remove this input, but to maximize relevance, the adaptive system prioritizes the audiences' motivations - the goals they're chasing, the outcomes they're seeking, the barriers they might need to overcome.

Designing first for these things allows us to start the conversation on the audience's terms — according to what matters to them — which will always be relevant, as opposed to the product or solutions we want to sell, which become relevant once we've demonstrated we understand what's driving them.

The other important element in defining our audience is where they are in their buying journey. As we know, only 5% are in the market at any given time. So we want to also define signals that will tell us which buyers are at which point in their journey — from not having started straight through to being actively ready to buy. This way we can engage them around their motivation in the context of where they are in the journey, at the right time.

We classically think about target audiences in terms of demographic characteristics to maximize relevance, the adaptive system prioritizes the audiences' motivations

Movements CORE OS

Similarly, we classically think about tactics in terms of a “hard-coded” set of channels based on their potential to reach the broadest swaths of a demographically defined audience (the “spray and pray” approach). In the adaptive model, we aim to create movement, not reach.

This means we choose activities based on their ability to have an orchestrated impact: what are the right tools for the job, at the right points in the conversation, to create the right actions? Sometimes these things are pre-programmed. Sometimes they’re triggered based on targetable activity and behavior. Sometimes they’re activated by an individual to follow up on client behavior. The point is to find the right vehicles, orchestrated to deliver the right part of the conversation, when the audience needs it, to create movement toward the outcome we’re seeking.

MOVEMENTS

In the adaptive model, we aim to create movement, not reach. This means we choose activities based on their ability to have an orchestrated impact

EXPLORATIONS

ENHANCEMENTS

CORE OS

MOTIVATIONS

MOMENTS

Moments

In a traditional campaign, we typically have a predefined beginning and an end — a finite and specific timeframe for when our tactics show up in market. But as we’ve discussed, our audiences don’t have a pre-defined beginning and end to when they need consultation and solutions. So in an adaptive model, we think about time in terms of opportune moments that fall into three buckets:

Audiences don’t have a pre-defined beginning and end to when they need consultation and solutions.

Brand moments
Key announcements, proprietary events, etc.

Cultural moments
Industry events, seasonal industry spikes, etc.

Customer moments
Quarterly earnings, annual planning, etc.

MOVEMENTS

The system still works in an orchestrated manner, but we plan for higher investment around moments when we believe there will be more activity and interest based on specific things that make the conversation we want to have with our audience more relevant.

EXPERIMENTS

OPTIMIZATION WAVES

Optimization waves

Once we have the Core OS, we could be ready to execute our GTM. But rather than plan for a single launch, we also plan for Optimization Waves that maximize the OS's effectiveness on an ongoing basis, in tune with the changing dynamics of the market. Like waves at the beach, these waves can vary in cadence and intensity, but they are a consistent presence and constantly remake the shoreline in the right way.

The Optimization Waves are how the system reflects a bias toward action.

GOAL OUTCOME

Goal Outcome

It's important to note that optimization does not mean changing your defined outcome. The goal outcome should be the most fixed variable in your equation, but the idea is to test the variables around it to find the right values.

EXPLORATIONS

ENHANCEMENTS

CORE OS

Explorations

Defining your waves starts with identifying the variables that impact your program's success. These variables can include:

Creative:
the messages you're putting in market and ways you're bringing them to life

Content:
the articles, videos, whitepapers, etc. that you're using across a customer journey

Experience:
specifically the digital experience you've designed on your .com (and, critically, any virtual demos or trials, calculators / simulators, or other utilities)

Clusters:
the audience motivations you're designing your creative to deliver on

Triggers:
the behaviors and activity you're targeting in order to deliver your creative

Moments:
the relevant time frames during which you're amping up your spend

MOVEMENTS

EXPERIMENTS



Experiments

So if you want to improve a specific variable, what are the ways you can try in order to do that? During this step, you would map out any ways in which you think you might be able to improve that variable's performance, and then prioritize the one to three things you want to actively test in market. This step is critical to determining what will help you deliver continuous, short-term results to the business versus what is contributing to longer-term relationship building and customer experience.



Enhancements

And then it's a matter of evaluating the impact of each experiment and deciding how to evolve the way you've designed the variable you were exploring.

Optimization Waves Drive Long-Term Impact

A common question in this system is when to perform optimization waves. The answer will depend on your unique needs, but a good rule of thumb is quarterly (every 90 days) to account for both market activity and changing internal needs.

An easy way to think about this is similar to how an operating system deploys releases in a series of updates: 1.XX versions for “minor” updates and X.0 versions for “major” updates.

The same thinking applies here, where “minor” updates are optimizations of the Core OS component parts and “major” updates are rethinking the system’s foundation itself. Examples include:

Minor updates: New motivations to target, updated digital experience, new channel tactics

Major updates: New goal outcome, changed priority product, new key audience

Supporting GTM Artifacts

You may have noticed by now that we have not prescribed how to construct typical “planning artifacts” like audience journeys, media plans, creative briefs – take your pick. Today most marketers already have a system for these artifacts, and we aren’t seeking to reinvent them. Instead, we are focused on driving better (and continuous) planning inputs.

Too often we see that GTM planning occurs around these marketing artifacts. The marketing equivalent of the tail wagging the dog. Instead, consider the Adaptive GTM system as “programming” and your marketing artifacts as programmed tools to assist execution.

OK, now let’s look at an example of the system in practice.

CASE EXAMPLE

Activating the system

Let's take the case of an enterprise material company's marketing team, responsible for engaging manufacturing leaders around a fairly complex solution, with a 6- to 12-month average sales cycle, focused on scheduling 100 personalized demos for a leading but specialized product offering.

Motivations

To build their system, the marketing team has decided to create audience clusters around the following motivations: customer experience, employee experience, and operational efficiency – where each of its solutions will have a story.

Exploration(s)

After launching their Core OS during the first quarter in market, they're starting to think about the first Optimization Cycle. They've decided to focus initially on their virtual demo experience. This is where they are ultimately trying to drive audiences to generate leads, and they really want to nail the experience in order to maximize their ability to do so. It also ensures that the business sees more immediate impact as pent-up demand builds towards actual revenue.

Movements

They've then prioritized the following activities and behaviors as critical for moving their prospects forward:

- Engaging with relevant content on LinkedIn
- “How to” searches for use cases where their solution is the answer

Experiments

They've brainstormed several hypotheses about how to make it the best it can be, and have settled on a singular experiment to determine whether it's better to allow the audience to choose their own path through the demo or to make it a guided experience.

If the guided experience shows better engagement (more people spending more time going deeper into the demo) and, most importantly, better “conversion” (more people compelled to schedule a personalized demo with an expert), they plan to make this version of the demo the primary way the experience works.

Moments

And they're focusing on the key periods of 30–45 days before retail spikes as times when manufacturing will be at a fever pitch and hence their audience might be experiencing the highs and lows that will make a conversation around their solution ultrarelevant.

Enhancements

It turns out their hypothesis was right; the guided experience saw better conversion, so they will make that the primary experience. And with a strong linchpin to generate leads, they decide to focus their next Optimization Wave on their triggers – specifically, the triggers they're using to first engage with prospects – to make sure they're maximizing their chances to make that crucial first connection and impression.

WHAT'S NEXT?

**Making the Adaptive GTM
system work for you.**

Adopting a living marketing system

We live in the real world with you, so we don't expect you to throw out your old models and start from scratch overnight. When we work with marketers to transform their GTM approach, there are three broad categories we work within, each on a time table that makes sense for them:

The Future of B2B is adaptive, and that includes marketing that will adapt to the on-demand world and market. Welcome to the Adaptive Era.

1 Personalize your OS

Define the singular outcome you want marketing to drive

Design customer motivations and GTM value props

Develop the OS of movements and moments that will maximize impact

2 Set your course

Define the timeframe that works for you

Design an agenda, outlining which components you will prioritize

Develop your process for diagnosing problems and measuring success

3 Ready your teams

Define the roles you need teams and individuals to play in your new system

Design jointly the way you and your partners want to work

Develop a holistic playbook that helps everyone understand the shifts

ABOUT US

OGILVY CONSULTING

We help design growth answers for business and brands by unlocking insights for short and long term impact — with an unusual combination of rigor and creativity.

OGILVY CONSULTING B2B PRACTICE

B2B is in the midst of a transformation arising from the evolution of buyer expectations and the near-constant flux in supplier dynamics. The only constant is constant change.

We partner with B2B leaders to guide the scope and scale of this transformation and identify new growth pathways for their businesses.

ENDNOTES

- 01 "Adapt your business strategy in the face of disruption," Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/en/podcasts/thinkcast/adapt-your-business-strategy-in-the-face-of-disruption>
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- 03 "95-5 Rule", LinkedIn B2B Institute. <https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/b2b-institute/b2b-research/trends/95-5-rule>
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