

A blurred, high-speed photograph of a city street with tall buildings on either side, creating a sense of rapid movement. The image is dark and teal-toned.

# How retailers choose technology – and how to get them to choose you

Fast Forward the Conversation



If you had a better understanding of how retailers specify and buy technology today, you'd market and sell to them differently. Your future growth depends on it.

The way retailers browse, specify, buy, implement and manage technology has changed dramatically, and many vendors have failed to keep up with these changes.

# The buying process has changed

The decision maker is no longer principally IT, but now includes operations, ecommerce, merchandising, marketing, finance and CEOs – as well as an emerging group of decision makers, which include the digital agencies - the cracks in traditional 'one-size-fits-all' marketing are starting to widen.

It's clear that the people choosing whether to buy from you are from different parts of the business, with different backgrounds, and different ways of thinking and responding. In fact, they are often connected in ways that you may have missed; through internal groups, industry bodies, social media forums and partner ecosystems, for example.

In a competitive market, where your rivals have dramatically improved their content, communications and networking, you're going to spend a whole lot more time on the outside looking in - unless you change your communications and marketing strategy.

Starting right  
from this  
moment.

## Internal groups



## Industry bodies



## Social media



## Ecosystems





“Technology vendors like to think that ‘push’ mechanisms are the best way to sell me stuff, but I tend to identify where there are pinch points in the customer journey, and then I’ll go and find a solution provider that can help me. No-one will sell me something that I haven’t already thought about.”

SEAN MCKEE,

*Head of Ecommerce and Customer Service, [schuh.co.uk](https://www.schuh.co.uk)*

# Why **you** have to **act now**

Retailers may find you, they may not. How many times have you wondered why you didn't even get invited to pitch? Or why they chose someone you knew couldn't do the job?

**80%** of B2B purchasing cycles are completed before the buyer considers contacting the vendor. That means they are using the Internet incognito, leaving no footprint to tell you what you need to be doing.

And they are not just looking at your usual competitors. The community now includes creative agencies, social media companies and marketing agencies, all of whom are selling into retailers with technology - or products and services underpinned by technology.

Many retailers are also doing their own thing. In response to a combination of frustration with the often outdated sales and marketing techniques of many vendors, and a desire to catch up to the fast rate of innovation, they are taking greater control of their IT destiny with Google Apps, for instance. Could this be a better way to engage with retailers?



# Retailers doing it **their way**

## John Lewis

John Lewis has created JLAB - a kind of Dragons' Den for start-ups. Micro-location technology provider, Localz, scooped the inaugural prize last year, while Space Lounges, Qudini, Peeple, Ikinen and Alfred Smart Home have been shortlisted this year.

## TESCO

Tesco uses internal resources to innovate; its Globe'athon event brings together 350 employees from across the world to come up with a new business concept within 24 hours.

## Argos

Argos opened a 'digital hub' in London last year to attract greater forward-thinking, tech-savvy talent into its business.

## watsons

In Italy, UK, Hong Kong and China, A.S. Watson, a large health and beauty retail group, has created an 'eLab' to develop its ecommerce and digital capabilities, in keeping with the evolving health and beauty customer.



# What does this mean for you?

The fact that retailers are no longer leaving it all to vendors to develop and manage innovation is having two major impacts.

Firstly, retailers want to be **closer, more open and collaborative with technology companies**. We know this because, as an agency at the heart of industry conversations, Fieldworks spoke to key decision makers directly about their changing priorities.

The survey we conducted found that the **majority of retailers** are working with at least one major new supplier in 2019, and at least three smaller ones.

However, this will inevitably affect those current suppliers who are not investing in relationships; the retailers we interviewed agreed that they will stop working with an existing supplier before the year is out.

Secondly, suppliers will need to become much clearer in their messaging and communications, with greater differentiation from the competition **to reach retailers who are changing the rules of engagement**.



# Relationships used to be important; now they are everything

In a crowded, competitive environment, it's not easy for retailers to know who to talk to. Some leave it to procurement or an external consultant – but you know what a time-consuming lottery that can be.

## How will they find you?

We quizzed retailers on where they look for inspiration when seeking new technologies, and you may be surprised to find the top answers were:

1. Other retailers



2. Trade shows



3. Trade media, such as Retail Week



4. Digital media, such as Internet Retailing or Econsultancy



5. Colleagues





# It's all about you - not just your technology

Most retailers are in agreement about one thing, however; the retailer's technology procurement process takes too long. 43% of B2B companies say their sales cycle has lengthened in the past 12 months, while the majority of those who participated in our survey believe there are too many boxes to tick.

One thing that emerged clearly, however, is that **chemistry matters**. Retailers are not just interested in your solutions – they are interested in you, your company, what you stand for and where you fit within your community. And, when they finally come to choose a technology partner, most retail businesses find it easy to secure internal agreement on the selection of the successful vendor.



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## Chemistry matters

# Are you **only giving** your prospects **rational reasons** to buy from you?

You wouldn't believe what retailers say about some of our clients. One said, *"Your client is really arrogant; they do a good job, but we'd never let them talk to the board. We need to keep them at arms' length."* And this is a client trying to get up the food chain!

Particularly with the ever increasing buying cycle, **technology vendors must start appealing to retailers emotionally**, as well as outlining the business benefits of their solution. Marketing should focus on enabling you to start and **sustain strong relationships** with decision makers and their influencers.

Retailers don't have feelings about companies; **they have feelings about people**. Therefore, your products and services are increasingly less likely to win the day, unless you are the lowest-cost option - and no one wants to go down the discounting road.

I can't say exactly why I chose those guys, I just had a feeling they were going to do a good job.

Emotion

Relationship

Benefits

Appeal

Feelings

Personal

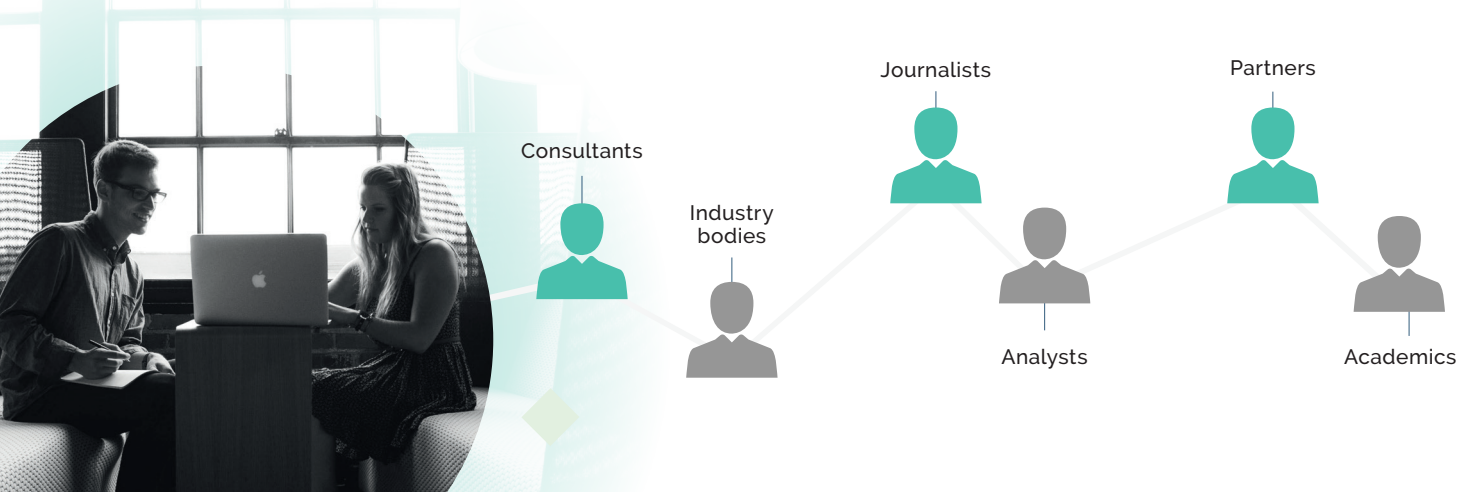
# It's **who, what** and why you know

Saying you need to reach 'decision makers and their influencers' is one thing, but who actually are these individuals?

As we touched on at the beginning of this report, the number of people involved in the procurement of technology within an organisation is increasing. However, this picture becomes even more complex when you consider that they are surrounded by a whole circle of influential sources – **partners, consultants, journalists, analysts, industry bodies** and **academics**.

You need to be reaching and influencing **all of them**, and – like many retailers – they are not interested in your products but in who you are, how you see the world, and what you think needs to change.

They don't want to talk to salesmen, but mentors, innovators, inspirational thinkers, educators and industry experts. **Are you ready to play these roles?** Are you that person or does that person even exist within your business? If not, get hiring – there are thousands of charismatic graduates spilling out of university as we speak.



# Questions to ask yourself

Can you honestly say marketing is at the centre of your business network?

Do you know who all your hot prospect decision makers are?

Are you seen as a motivator or a follower?

Do you have a vision and a roadmap, and is it up to date?

Is your messaging attuned to what is happening in the market?

How well known is your brand - what visibility do you have at C-level?

How are you perceived by your partners – and how do you manage your relationships with them?

Do you have evidence in the form of case studies?

What have you done in the past year that demonstrates an understanding of how the market is changing?

Where are the gaps in your business offer? Do you have partners that can help you fill them?

Which of your partnerships are strategic and which are dead?

Do you invest enough in relationships, and have enough well-connected people working for you?

Is your thought leadership so elevated that no one can really understand what you actually deliver – or, at the other end, is your solution so technical that it cannot appeal to a C-level audience?

# Turning words into actions

Some of you may be reading this thinking that your marketing model isn't currently working in light of the changing procurement process; others may be feeling quietly confident that you're influencing the wide spectrum of retail influencers.

However, marketing is only half the battle won. The relationship marketers have with sales personnel is critical to converting opportunities, but there is a serious disconnect between these departments in most technology companies.

As Gartner notes, **up to 70% of sales leads are not properly leveraged or completely ignored** – which is incredibly high when you consider the wealth of tools and strategies available to integrate sales and marketing activities.



# What success looks like – the tip of the iceberg

Fieldworks' marketing model for reaching and influencing retailers is structurally simple and highly effective.

For those ready to embrace a new marketing strategy, here are our six fundamental principles for success:

Content



Email marketing



Social media



PR





1. Understand - no, *really* understand - the market
2. Find the right person(s)
3. Market one to one (or at least in small segments)
4. Also market big...
5. Measure how you are doing
6. Involve sales early, often and continuously

# 1. Understand – no, really understand – the market

The intelligence that most suppliers use to start conversations with retailers is generally superficial and no different from what everyone else is saying. Retailers have complained for many years that technology vendors simply don't understand them, so a good place to start is in research.

While general information is available on the Internet, you will have to dig deeper to get an understanding of what it all means. For instance, we know that **retailers think customer experience in store is important**, but do we know if they are actually investing in it? Before you waste time trying to sell something for which there is little or no budget, do your homework.

Use the market insight you've gained to get close to targeted opportunities, rather than firing off communications to a giant database. Making generalisations about retail has launched a thousand

email campaigns and will no doubt launch a thousand more, but actually getting a response depends on knowing **what motivates individual retailers**.

This requires real leg work; work that many suppliers are simply not prepared to put in because they are in too much of a hurry to start marketing. Work with all your stakeholders, partners and internal resources to dig deep beneath the surface of a small and manageable set of prospects. **It's better to target 50 retailers that you know something about than approach 1,000 you don't.**

Research



Market insight



Stakeholders



## 2. Find the right person(s)

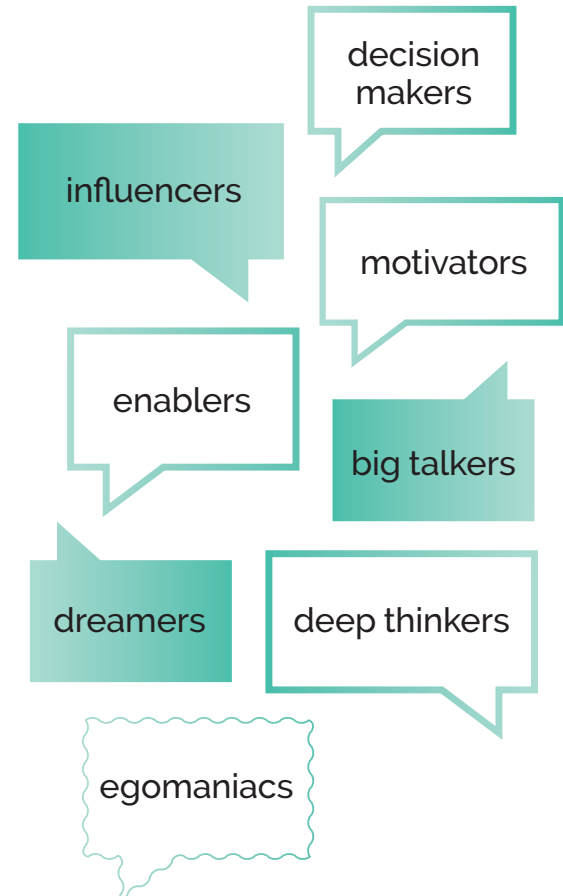
Decision makers, influencers, motivators, enablers, big talkers, dreamers, egomaniacs, deep thinkers – retail has them all, and you need to know them all.

Take the knowledge you have gained into each business prospect and find both the person who actually makes decisions, and who they listen to. This is the depth of insight that sales used to invest in but generally no longer does, leaving it instead to marketing.

## 3. Market one to one (or at least in small segments)

Personalise your communications based on some unique understanding of your target's particular challenges. Spend time in their stores or on their website to see things from the point of view of the customer, staff or store manager.

Assessing a retailer's performance in an area relevant to your solution will save a lot of time – particularly if you discover that they just bought something, or signed a new multi-year contract.



## 4. Also market big...

At the same time as focusing on a small segment of prospects using deep discovery, you must continue to educate the wider market and all of its influencers; there is still a profile-raising value to using mass communications techniques. Utilise all marketing channels in a mix that is appropriate to your audience.

With a short attention span and a short memory, it is inevitable that your audience will miss messages, which is why you need to **reinforce communications across multiple channels**. It also enables you to resonate with prospects in their most receptive channels.

Some senior decision makers are immune to email marketing, for example, but you can bet they read Retail Week. **Therefore PR remains one of the most effective ways to reach them.**

**Social media** is also effective at reaching large numbers of people, but make sure that you are reaching the right people. You may discover that you are a big player in the supplier community but are still not reaching decision making retailers. **Be realistic about what each channel can achieve for you.**

### ...and that includes big opinions

With **'big marketing'** it's vital to say something that will demonstrate your unique insight into your prospect's market and business, and show your value in solving this challenge. **The airwaves are crowded with 'me-too' messages** and content from a host of vendors, very little of which actually reaches its intended market.

Even those messages that often have no impact, because it simply repeats what is already known. For instance, did you know that most of the content that goes out on the future of retail is generally only consumed by other suppliers, marketers and creative agencies, who use the information to create their own business cases?

## 5. Measure how you are doing

Analysing the impact of your outreach, using a range of automation and manual techniques, is important to build up a picture of your engagement and judge just how interested your prospects are in you.

This will be the best way to determine which media are most **effective in generating lead engagement**, and therefore how communications through them should be blended and budgeted.

## 6. Involve sales early, often and continuously

As we've already mentioned, one of the biggest changes we have observed is in the relationship with sales, which traditionally was unequal, and often adversarial (and, the rest of time, frosty) towards marketing.

The fact that sales increasingly relies on marketing to **generate demand** is marketing's big opportunity. We are now equipped with the data, software and techniques to manage the entire sales journey from initial discovery, through pre-sales and beyond - **where advocacy and networking** come strongly into play.

Aligning marketing and sales can help your company deliver:



improvement in  
closing deals

# 108%

lead acceptance

# 209%

more revenue from marketing

Looking across 25 of Fieldworks' campaigns from the last two years, the direct contribution to sales pipeline has risen by 400% for no rise in overall marketing investment.



## Five things you can do now to reach retailers - and in what order

1.



Take a long, hard look at your database. Assuming that the data is current, clean and opted-in, start to consider what segments you need to create based on your company's sales targets and where you have 'sweet spots'

2.



Create a more detailed hierarchy of decision makers and influencers within these segments, including relationships where known

3.



Spend time with your team and anyone within your business that is close to your market, to determine what you collectively understand about where and how your customers and prospects operate

4.



Talk to sales and ask them how they would like to change the way marketing engages with them. It may already work well, it may be broken. Either way, you can both meet in the new middle called data


5.



Think about who is going to help you make these changes, both internally and externally



Lastly, consider this – if you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you always got. The market has managed to change without you, so it is only by working more closely and more collaboratively with your customers and prospects that you will become the people retailers turn to for a solution.

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a retail store interior. It shows shelves stocked with various items, possibly clothing or accessories, and a person is partially visible in the background. The overall color palette is dark and muted, with a teal tint.

Why should you take  
our word for it?

Fieldworks is the only agency dedicated to helping technology companies sell to retailers and brands. Our model, Demand Generator, will get you in the room with retail decision makers.



Build awareness based on a solid platform of thought leadership, product innovation and use cases



Reach the right market earlier using our unique analysis and insight programmes, benchmarked against retailer's buying behaviour



Start generating marketing qualified leads through hard-hitting campaigns



Create a continuous pipeline of leads through our nurture programmes



Generate qualified demand one to one from marketing right through inside sales, pre sales and pitches

Ready to fast forward your business conversations? Start by having a conversation with me.

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# Fieldworks creates business opportunities for tech companies with brands and retailers

We can do this because we're connected with retailers and brands, like no other agency.

We create highly tailored, agile marketing campaigns based on industry insight, to get our clients closer to their prospects, quickly. Each component is dynamically targeted to drive maximum return on investment - from building your brand through to direct prospect engagement.

Our 12,000 member retailer network, [www.retailconnections.co.uk](http://www.retailconnections.co.uk), engages with senior decision makers in every retail sector, enabling them to share insight and seek advice online and through our unique industry events.

## Get in touch:

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