

**ACCELERANT**

by Chris Leger, CEO Bython

ISSUE #4

**bython**  
we're on it!

# Accountability in B2B Demand Generation: High Expectations Create Opportunities



There's a laser focus these days on "accountability" for B2B demand generation campaigns. Every dollar spent on B2B marketing is expected to generate a positive return on investment. If it doesn't, the source, channel, and marketer who requested the budget is going to be held accountable.

From our perspective as a B2B demand generation provider, the practical definition of “accountability” is pretty straightforward – it’s a function of quality and transparency, both of which we take very seriously here at Bython. Our customers hold us accountable for delivering opportunities that meet the criteria we’ve agreed to, and they want clear, actionable updates about their results.

That’s if everything goes to plan, which it usually does.

But there’s a third dimension of “accountability” that I think often gets overlooked in the broad conversation about ROI and performance metrics.

I recently had a conversation with an agency customer, and in addition to the obvious questions about audience size and internal rejection rates, they asked point blank: “If we need to contact you, will something happen?”

If unexpected challenges do arise, how do you respond? Do you hide from the issue, or do you take steps to correct the problem and ensure it doesn’t happen again? And if what you’re doing isn’t ultimately resulting in sales calls and closed deals, how do you adjust to meet the ultimate goal of growing revenue?

The real world is unpredictable, and B2B marketers need to be sure their demand generation partners will be accountable before, during, and after the campaign is complete. We consider this level of accountability a big part of our value proposition.

Again, let me be clear – we don’t have an issue on every contract. But when we do, we look at it as an opportunity to learn more about the customer and build a stronger relationship.

## ***Accountability = Credibility = Results***

The call for accountability in B2B marketing is definitely coming from inside the house.

In the three years since the pandemic, digital marketing budgets have come under intense scrutiny. ([This piece at Medium](#) provides a pretty solid overview of the insistence for demonstrable ROI from digital budgets these days.) That pressure has definitely rolled downhill to marketing partners, including B2B demand generation providers.

## ABOUT OUR CEO



### CHRIS LEGER

*Chief Executive Officer Bython*

Chris joined Bython in May of 2022. He quickly added marketing agency partners to the Bython community and expanded Bython into the UK and Asia.

Chris was recently named to the Forbes “Top 10 Innovators Shaping Industry in 2023.” For over 20 years Chris has been a noteworthy leader in the global marketing and sales industry. You may know him from his work as the Senior Vice President and General Manager for Merkle B2B which quickly became an agency powerhouse in the tech industry. Chris is credited in-part with Merkle ranking #2 on LinkedIn’s list of top companies for marketing and advertising, and named the “Fastest Growing B2B Agency in B2B Marketing’s 2020 US Benchmarking Report.

Chris Leger’s background includes performance media, content syndication, demand generation, and global marketing. He is known for creating trusting partnerships that enable the innovative services that he brings to market.

Chris holds a Bachelor of Science in Business Management from the Boston College Carroll School of Business.

It's incumbent on us to make sure that our customers are successful. So if a minor issue arises, we'll often replace an opportunity mid-campaign just to keep the program moving to a successful conclusion.

At the close of a campaign, we'll go back and take a closer look at:



The parameters we set;



Where issues may have popped up, and;



How can we tweak future campaigns based on customer feedback.

We take a data-driven approach to this issue resolution – we want to find the right answer, not just issue a quick make-good. We gather and evaluate feedback from our customers' entire organization, not just the marketing team. Everybody in the revenue pipeline has a say in the perceived value of our deliverables. And like any business, we rely on happy customers.

It boils down to forging long-term relationships with customers who see you as a trusted partner, not just a mill that cranks out leads. That means building credibility, and you do that by showing that you are ready to own any issues or challenges that arise.

*We gather and evaluate feedback from our customers' entire organization, not just the marketing team.*

## Digital is here to stay, but it still has to prove itself

We are so committed to accountability because we know that scrutiny of our customers' B2B demand generation budgets is only going to increase. One of the more interesting data points I've seen recently is that [85 percent of marketers said they are more interested in profitability than growth](#). And Gartner's 2023 CMI survey found that [76% of enterprise marketing teams are being asked to do more with less](#). ROI is king.

Most observers point to economic uncertainty as the main driver for this laser focus on revenue. Another major factor, I think, is marketing's pandemic-era shift away from physical events to digital content experiences and webinars. There's a lingering misconception that digital spend is supposed to produce exactly the kinds of opportunities as a trade show booth. That's just not how it works.

Digital can result in amazing ROI, because it scales seamlessly and can reach prospects who otherwise are off your radar. And digital is here to stay. Gartner's 2022 marketing budget report says that while traditional channels are making something of a comeback, digital still accounts for 56 percent of B2B budgets. And lead generation remains the dominant priority for B2B marketers in pretty much every survey.

But, events are incredibly tangible – you can map a sales-ready opportunity directly to a conversation at your booth, and somebody from sales is often involved. You get to ask all kinds of specific, deep-dive questions you just can't fit on a conversion form. And, most importantly, everybody is onboard that the opportunity is ready for sales.

The misconception that digital can replicate that level of engagement and hierarchy is a big factor in the pressure on marketing teams – particularly from sales people who just know that every digital opportunity is not ending up on their calendar as a 30-minute Zoom call.

I'm definitely talking to a lot of CMOs who are investing in analytics and attribution platforms to prove the value of their digital demand generation strategies. Continuing fears of a recession will fuel the demand for even more accountability on every marketing dollar spent. This may well include an increased push for centralized Revenue Operations teams and more seamless automation of sales and marketing operations.

Whatever happens, we will stay in step to ensure that our demand generation campaigns meet our customers' expectations.



# Accountability for both immediate and long-term expectations

Accountability begins with understanding, in very clear terms, what success looks like for a demand generation campaign. I've discussed on this blog how setting realistic expectations is the foundation for demand generation quality ; that's equally true for accountability.

Page one is reacting when there's a clear problem with our delivered opportunities, based on contract parameters. If your inside sales team can't get through to the phone number we deliver, we own up to that and correct or replace that opportunity. I don't want to dwell on this aspect of accountability, because, frankly, it should be table stakes for any demand gen provider you work with. Mistakes occasionally happen; we fix them when they do. It's that simple.

Long-term accountability – and where I'm working to grow our customer relationships here at Bython – is embracing that the ultimate goal of any B2B demand generation strategy is booked revenue. That's the bar by which our opportunities are now measured. If we focus solely on delivering on exact job titles and campus geos spelled out for the current deal, we may not get the next contract.

## A data-driven, collaborative approach to accountability

Successful issue management is a consultative process between the customer and their B2B demand generation partner. Is the challenge a simple execution problem on our end; a miscommunication somewhere (you'd be surprised how often people simply forget significant conversations); or is it an internal issue with the customers' revenue operations?

As a general rule, we don't take immediate steps to address an issue until we've had a chance to dig in and find out what really happened. Simply slapping on a bandaid won't solve the underlying problem and will just damage the campaign and our ongoing relationship.

When I do get involved in issue resolution (and, again, it's not all that often – our fulfillment and delivery teams are knocking it out of the park), I don't assume there was a mistake on either side. We look at the data to understand what's going on, and we ask a lot of questions. Finding the answer may take a little bit of research.

If there is an issue, we'll usually see it on the first delivery. Obviously, that's what we prefer – these kinds of issues are usually pretty easy to identify and we can correct for the rest of the program.

In other cases, we often don't learn that opportunities are not performing as expected until a campaign is almost complete and sales has finished working the first wave of opportunities. Our research gets a little more complicated here. The variables that go into a multi-touch, content-rich demand gen campaign are complex. It's like all of marketing – you know 50% of it works, you just never know which 50%. But we dig in and find an answer.

This approach benefits both us and our customers. We recently had a miscue on taking delivery of a targeted account list. When I went back and looked at the data, we had actually over-delivered against that list anyway. There was no need for a make-good, and our audience selection process looked pretty good. Everybody came out ahead.

If we discover that the issue lies somewhere within the customer organization, things get a little more nuanced, shall we say. That's where our focus on building stronger strategic relationships with our customers really moves front and center.

## Clear communication is a must

I've said before that a lot of the feedback we get about our B2B demand generation campaigns is basically sentiment analysis from our customers' sales teams. So the questions we ask during an issue resolution process often boil down to determining why sales is not happy with the opportunities we've delivered, even if they hit the specifics of the current contract.

Was sales displeased with a big percentage of the opportunities we delivered, or were there actually just a handful that ended up being problematic? Do we really need to shift our efforts away from social, or did one salesperson just happen to have a really bad day calling on LinkedIn contacts?

Not surprisingly, we sometimes find that expectations were not clearly communicated between our customers' marketing and sales teams. If we're sending top-of-funnel content syndication opportunities, there's not a lot we can do about the sales team complaining that the contacts were not ready to schedule a sit-down call.

Demand gen providers have historically wanted to communicate directly with both marketing and sales about goals and expectations – I know that's my aspiration – but it's still pretty uncommon on most RFPs and contracts. Old habits are hard to break.

Maybe as the Revenue Operations org model becomes more prevalent, we'll gain greater visibility into the entire customer cycle. Until then, we can only respond by researching the cause of the issue, wherever it comes from, and implementing the correct solution.

## The key to Accountability: Opportunities vs. “Leads”

ROI is now the default measuring stick for B2B marketing, and that's not going to change. Digital is just so inherently measurable. I'd add that revenue attribution between opportunity delivery and closed business is still suspect in a lot of organizations, but nonetheless, ROI-or-bust is clearly where the industry is headed.

We have to embrace what our customers are really paying us for. And it's not just a name, email and campus location. A person is not a revenue opportunity; that's just a lead. An in-market company is an opportunity. So how do we hold ourselves accountable for delivering the company profiles and contacts within those companies that can really move the needle toward booked revenue?

I've been pushing us to start thinking about our own business not as Account Based Marketing or basic lead generation, but opportunity generation. Because that's our customers' ultimate goal. The immediate deliverable may be webinar attendees, and we've got that covered. But those deliverables need to come with the buying influence, purchase intent and appetite for more content that results in booked revenue.

That's the next big evolution in B2B demand generation, and the insistence on ROI for every campaign is going to drive any providers who don't recognize that level of accountability to extinction sooner rather than later.



# Accountability will build stronger B2B demand generation partnerships

Listen, everybody knows that taking a problem call is not the most positive engagement with a customer. But it is an engagement. It's an opportunity to add value. It's an opportunity to have a conversation and learn more about their business. I like to say it's a chance to become a little more "sticky."

We learn something every time there's an issue, whether it's a breakdown in the process or a matter of misaligned expectations. And, most importantly, embracing accountability for delivering the opportunities our customers need builds credibility and strengthens our relationship.

