B2D Marketing: The ultimate guide on marketing to developers

As a business owner or marketer, we're sure you've heard of different business models like B2B, B2C, and even D2C. But have you heard of B2D?

If you're in the SaaS industry, it's a relatively common term—but outside of this space, not so much.

We've created an in-depth guide on the specifics of **B2D marketing** and how marketers are leveraging it to generate millions of $$$ for their companies.

What is B2D Marketing?

Business-to-developer or B2D is a business model focused solely on selling to developers. Developers are a huge source of revenue for many product-focused companies—and the market only seems to be growing.

Brands like Snyk have raised $530 million in their Series F round, valued at $8.5 billion. More popular companies like Stripe stand tall at a $95 billion valuation (as of June 2022).

All these companies have one thing in common. Instead of selling to C-suite executives or other business leaders, they centered their efforts on developers who would use their services.

More often than not, one of the first questions that pop up is, "Why B2D?" The answer is simple. Developers are the backbone of the tech world—and they have their own problems—which means there's a huge market waiting to be tapped into.

A 2020 study indicated that the global developer population will increase to 28.7 million by 2024. Also, the 2020 Developer Survey published by Stack Overflow revealed that 57% of developers have some influence on IT purchasing decisions.

So, why beat around the bush by targeting C-suite executives when they're not the decision-makers here?

The difference between B2D vs. B2C vs. B2D

Now that we know why B2D is gaining prevalence in the world of technology let's look at the key difference between popular business models like:

- Business-to-business (B2B)

- Business-to-consumer (B2C)
- Business-to-developer (B2D)

B2D vs. B2B vs. B2C — What differentiates each of them?

Factors	B2D	B2B	B2C
Goal of the marketing efforts	Drive leads & sales	Drive leads	Drives sales
Audience	Developers	Decision-makers	Consumers
Role of the audience	Direct users	Direct & indirect users	Direct users
Market demand	Direct demand	Derived demand	Direct demand
Market structure	Fewer buyers but larger investments	Fewer buyers but larger investments	More buyers but smaller investments
Buying units	Small DMUs	Large DMUs	Small DMUs
Decision type	Formal buying process	Formal buying process	Informal buying process
Relationship building	Long-term	Long-term	Short-term

While most people assume that B2D marketing resembles B2B, that's not necessarily true. Instead, it's more of a combination of B2B and B2C marketing.

The reason is that the developer audience is a highly segmented one. While it seems like you can group them under one segment—the technical team, there are several roles to account for with that segment.

'Developer' is a broad term

Contrary to popular belief, "Developers" does not always refer to one kind of role.

[This image can be recreated with ContentLab's branding - Source]

Here's a breakdown of what it entails:

1. **Engineers**
   These individuals build the tools that you're using. They're the ones behind it, be it a digital product, a SaaS tool, computer games, complex databases, and whatnot.

   From a B2D perspective, they're always looking for tools or resources to help them troubleshoot the problems they run into while building these products.

Example job titles:

- Software engineer
- Full-stack developer
- Mobile developer
- Web developer
- Site reliability engineer

2. **Data Scientists**

These individuals don't create the product—but analyze the data within it. Ideally, their primary focus is making sense of their data and curating insights to uncover business value.

They're also responsible for creating algorithms that do the heavy lifting to decode all the raw datasets available.

Example job titles:

- Data scientist
- Data analyst
- Data engineer
- Machine learning specialist

3. **Data Architects**

While engineers build the product, architects plan its infrastructure. Without the basic foundations, it's hard to create a viable product—and that's where they come in.

They're involved in the project's planning phase, where they work on things like deciding what frameworks to use, how to link different components of the product, and more.

Example job titles:

- Web architect
- Technical Architect
- Solutions Architect
- Software architect
- Database administrator

4. **DevOps**

Any individual under this realm is responsible for handling all the developer operations. It means right from planning to deployment; they have some role to play—and oversee all aspects of the operations.

Their job is to ensure that the products their team creates align with the business's objectives.

Example job titles:

- DevOps engineer
- Systems engineer
- Network engineer
- Release Manager
- Build Engineer

5. **DevSecOps**

   These engineers focus on combining application security with the entire software development life cycle.

   Previously, it was more of an afterthought, and they implemented security measures after building the product. Now, that's not the case. They're actively involved in the product creation process—and are an essential part of the team.

   Example job titles:

   - Product manager
   - Security architect
   - Cloud security architect
   - SysOps administrator
   - Chief information officer

B2D marketing: An umbrella term for DevRel & Developer Marketing

The essence of B2D marketing lies in both—Developer Marketing and Developer Relations. Developer Marketing refers to strategies used to market to developers specifically. In this case, by "market," we mean encouraging the adoption and advocacy of different software tools and databases.

Developers are an extremely skeptical audience—which is why marketing to them directly never works. Any marketer in this space can attest to this fact as developers simply do not respond to traditional marketing strategies.

In all honesty, they hate being marketed to more than other audiences. They can identify marketing jargon from a mile away, which will turn them off in a split second.

> *“The best approach to market to developers is to not market to them. It is well established reasoning in the industry that developers hate marketing tactics.*
>
> *Instead, push your developer ahead to build a relationship with other developers in the market. On Twitter, Reddit, and Stack Exchange -- the developers engage in various discourses. A developer from a company should be there to participate and earn respect from fellow developers.*

> *Promote the product among developers by promoting product developers. They will attract the developers more than the product itself."*
>
> — **Faizan Fahim, Growth Hacker, Breeze**

Instead, you should focus on developer education. You need to engage them meaningfully—and the easiest way to do so is to create content that speaks to their problems.

Developers are avid learners—making them a primed audience for binge content consumption. If you have a treasure trove of resources discussing developer-focused problems, you'll have a higher chance of getting through to them.

On the other hand, Developer Relations (DevRel) is focused on building healthy and engaging relationships with developers. Similar to community building programs in B2B, developers also look forward to engaging with fellow developers in their field.

While marketing brings developers into the funnel, DevRel is about nurturing those leads and buyers. They work in tandem with each other, creating a solid developer community that will trust you to solve their problems and advocate for you in related communities.

Why does B2D marketing matter?

Increasing a developer's productivity is the "in thing" now, and many investors and founders are jumping on this bandwagon. Developer-focused companies like Snowflake and UiPath have raised over $1 billion in 2021. Chloe Dorman from Paddle describes it as the "Developer Tools Gold Rush," and we agree.

If B2D marketers struggle to communicate how developer marketing builds value within their company, these numbers can prove their point.

Software is eating the world—literally. So many products are launched every year or quarter that it's becoming hard to keep up. It's why B2D marketing matters. Because if you don't invest in marketing to developers, you'll get lost in a sea of tech products.

Focus on getting developer buy-in

Many sales are lost simply because the internal team fails to get developer buy-in. You'll have a better chance of increasing conversions—and retention by marketing to developers directly.

The idea is that you need to convince them to use your product. It can be done using a free trial or a discounted trial period.

Once developers adopt your product and are confident that you can solve their problems, they're more likely to advocate for you in public and within communities.

Developers are inherently community-driven and love hanging out in niche communities and groups which are relevant to them. They value useful and transparent products—and if you can achieve that, they'll be happy to advocate for you. It creates a funnel of leads that might be interested in your product in the future.

There are several challenges in B2D marketing too. Some of them include:

- Creating awareness for your product in the right communities
- Creating a flexible and adaptable GTM strategy
- Building a team that truly understands the nuances of B2D marketing
- Implementing the right scaling strategy for paid plans

Most of these challenges boil down to truly understanding the target market—and being willing to adapt as you grow. Here are a few examples of companies who've been there and done that:

1. CircleCI

CircleCI is a continuous integration and delivery platform that helps developers test their code using intelligent automation. They found they needed technical content that's a mix of leadership-focused and practical developer-related content to support their customers.

After hiring ContentLab, they could fill the gap of finding niche writers with expertise in this area and could build a strategy that helped them reach their target audience. Using this strategy, they created content that ranked so well on Google that it beat some of their biggest competitors.

Out of the guest posts they published on The News Stack, six performed better than 91% of all the platforms' articles.

It has made them the go-to company for developer-focused content—only because they created content around their pain points and distributed it in the right networks.

> *"I love the collaborative nature of our brainstorming sessions. No matter what shape my ideas are in, from a few scattered keywords to fully-fledged outlines, ContentLab consistently offers valuable insights and perspectives that demonstrate a deep understanding of the developer experience and the technologies shaping the future of DevOps."*
>
> **— Ron Powell, Manager, Marketing Insights and Strategy, CircleCI**

2. **Stripe**

   Before Stripe came into being, developers had to build code and the underlying infrastructure for simple issues like accepting payments worldwide. Stripe recognized this problem and created a product that eliminated that issue.

   But to truly get the developers to buy in, they had to ensure they could try the product first and then see how it fits into their workflows. They did this by offering instant free sign-ups and the API to test the integration.

   Developers could play around and see how it works for their use case. If it's a particularly complex use case, it bodes well for Stripe—because it differentiates their product.

   An important aspect is that they waited for developers to reach out to them first. It helps them get better user feedback and directly support their customers for the exact problems they're looking to solve. Using this information, they bettered their product over time—increasing product adoption rates and revenue.

3. **Twilio**

   When Twilio started, it knew its target audience and what it needed. Since developers would use their products, they didn't waste time reaching out to senior leadership. Instead, they built relationships with developers and treated them as the customer.

   At one such conference Jeff Lawson, CEO & Founder of Twilio, decided to show their product in action. He knew that was the only way to get their attention—so he dove straight to the point.

   [Optional video embed: https://youtu.be/-VuXIgp9S7o]

   Plus, every employee must learn how to code and build an application to truly understand what developers go through. It inculcates a culture of empathy, which resonates with how they market their company. Even their content library is chock full of use cases for different industries, customer stories, tutorials, documentation, and more.

   That’s how they’ve built a business that successfully sells to 10 million developers!

What does the B2D buyer journey look like?

The buyer journey in B2D is very different from what we see in B2B or B2C. Here, you're not focused on selling full-service products that serve the end user's goals. Instead, you're selling products that form a small part of the puzzle. These products act as an intermediary to the end goal.

For example, suppose developers are concerned about the security of their applications, or they want to deploy their code in a safe testing environment. In that case, these are specific applications that can help with that. An excellent example of this service would be Atlassian's BitBucket.

To understand the B2D buyer's journey, we need to look at why they're a buyer in the first place.

The pain points of the typical B2D buyer

1. **They already have a lot of technical issues to solve**

   Developers run into technical problems all the time. In a competitive market, they must deploy, test, iterate, and finalize quickly. With leadership wanting them to innovate faster and as efficiently as possible, they're always looking for products that can help them get there.

   Developers are looking for practical solutions to their problems—meaning they know what they want. Most of them are already problem-aware, and since they're builders, they'll prefer building it.

   It's important to remember that if your product directly speaks to their pain points and is easy to use—you'll have a higher chance of converting them.

2. **They want to improve their productivity**

   With the constant need to stay on top of competitors, every employer wants their engineering teams to create products faster. It means they need to increase their productivity levels for every working hour.

   As taxing as it sounds, developers are humans too. If they can find products that help them do what they're doing in half the time, they will lean towards buying it.

3. **Decision-makers rely on developers to make technical decisions**

   Decision-makers don't know what their engineering teams need—only developers and their immediate leadership do. It puts them in a unique position of power where they make critical decisions about what the company uses—and, eventually, their client company uses.

   Reports such as the recent 2020 Developer Survey by Stack Overflow and an older one, the 2017 Developer Marketing Survey by Evans Corporation show that this is not a passing trend. C-suite executives are not the decision-makers—developers are.

Plus, the more specific their job title is, the higher the chance they're actively involved in the purchasing decision process. It's also why we recommend targeting niche developers as they're not just a niche target audience—but once your product proves its worth, the word spreads.

4. **There's an overload of products in the market**

   There's no shortage of opportunities in the B2D sector—companies like Hashicorp, Shippable, Snyk, and more keep proving this. Since developer tools bridge the gap between IT and software development teams and eliminate friction in the development process, they've become a massive hit in the industry.

   That also means as more companies want in on this market, there will be an uptick in the number of available products. So, how do developers make these critical decisions?

   The easiest way to do this is to create content—and market it like there's no tomorrow. But, more on that later.

The common objections of the B2D buyer

1. **The marketed tool doesn't fit their purpose**

   Developers have particular needs—and if your tool can't convince them that it can solve them, you've lost their interest. A prevalent problem is the inability of new tools to support current standards.

   For example, if you say they can integrate APIs of certain applications within your product, you need to be specific about which ones. Creating tutorials and documentation around the integration process is more likely to develop trust in the developer's mind—and they'll purchase from you.

   So, make sure your tool fixes the specific problems of your target audience—and if it doesn't have the capabilities yet—let them know.

2. **They are technical decision-makers—but your content doesn't discuss it**

   Developers are a technical crowd, meaning they're not looking for high-level content. They want to know how your product helps them, and they want to see the nitty-gritty of it. It means everything from the underlying code to its applications.

   So, it won't work out if existing content doesn't discuss it and meets them where they're at in the buyer journey. Hear it from a developer himself.

   > *"What I appreciate the most about companies that market to me as a developer is that these companies create genuinely informative content at a technical level that communicates well to me as a developer without including unnecessary fluff,*

> *thereby helping me to easily find and utilize the tools/resources I need to solve my problems."*
>
> **— Victor Ikechukwu, Technical Writer and Developer**

3. **The marketed tool is a poor use case fit**

   While B2D companies target a niche audience, that doesn't mean you can use their products for one specific purpose. So, it's essential to market it that way too.

   Create content around different use cases—as many as you find possible. It will help developers and senior leadership decide whether it's the right fit. Sometimes it's not about a bad product but rather a bad use case fit—which means they're not your target audience.

Why the "top-down" model doesn't work here

The usual marketing approach is to identify a macro market and narrow your target audience based on several factors like purchasing power, awareness level, etc. This approach is commonly known as the "top-down model."

While this model might work in traditional marketing sectors, in B2D, it doesn't. You've already narrowed down the target audience based on needs, pain points, potential revenue, and more.

> "*The top-down approach doesn't work in B2D audiences because it is already a specialized audience. That makes it challenging to pool the complete customer potential to target. The best approach is to start off targeting certain developers in the beginning.*"
>
> — **Baruch Labunski, CEO, Rank Secure**

In this case, developers are decision-makers, and C-suite-level executives rely on their input to make purchase decisions—and not the other way around. Another critical point to note is that they're looking for solutions to specific problems that don't even apply to another team within the company.

[We could model a picture like this? Source]

Also, when we look at the typical sales funnel, the conversion phase is not the primary focus—instead, the retention phase is. The higher the satisfaction rate, the faster the word spreads in the developer community—resulting in increased ROI over time.

What channels does B2D marketing do best with?

As for the marketing channels that work best for B2D marketing—there's plenty to go around. Developers are avid learners, as we've already established. It means if you create valuable

content that meets them where they're at, you will have a higher chance of getting through to them.

[Graphic of previous webinars and a screenshot or two of well-performing articles.]

Here are a few examples:

1. Written content

It's one of the easiest ways to grab their attention. Developers love developing code; just below that, they love reading about it. Create a lot of written content in the form of:

- **Blogs:** Educate and rank for relevant keywords. Developers Google, too, you know!
  *"Here's one B2D content marketing secret that I've seen *multiple* marketers have success with: Rank for your competitors' error messages.*

  When developers run into issues with a competitor's product (i.e., a perfect time to pitch your solution), they'll naturally turn to Google. As a marketer, you can often rank for these high-intent, low-competition phrases with short articles to address the problem—and introduce your own solution as a lower-friction alternative. Done right, these pages can convert 5-10%+ of search visitors into sign-ups."

  — **Zachary Grove, Growth Advisor for VC-funded companies**

- **Tutorials:** In-depth how-to type content with screenshots of code and are great for sales enablement. They can directly access these on your website or dedicated resource center—and work on it themselves (which they prefer).

- **Technical documentation:** Such content can cover detailed information about your product—for example, API documentation, web or mobile specific details, and more.

- **Use cases & guides:** If you're creating a tool that can integrate within business workflows, the chances are that you don't serve a particular industry (at least not in the later stages). Create use cases for specific industries and related verticals, so developers and senior leadership are convinced about its utility.

- **Social content:** Social media has recently become an important marketing channel. You can use it to post short snippets from your existing resource library or run ads for ungated assets—to increase developer adoption.

2. Video content

Video content is taking over all marketing channels, with many actively promoting it through their algorithms. It seems like the best time to invest in thoughtful video content to increase developer engagement.

Here are a few ways you can do that:

- **Webinars:** Webinars are a great way to engage developers and make them feel like you care. Conduct webinars on some of the most pressing issues affecting developers instead of keeping it product focused. It gives you room to understand their issues in-depth with live feedback.

- **Training modules/ Courses:** The tutorials you publish can be repurposed in different ways. Create video snippets of different stages of the problem—or even better, create an onboarding guide. These mini-training sessions can help them with a smooth transition.

- **Social content:** It's well established that video content performs exceptionally well on social channels like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. So, take advantage of it while you can.

3. Sponsored events

A little swag and relationship building goes a long way in B2D. Invite developers for webinars, workshops, and any other community-focused event. You can get attention by offering them free products like souvenirs, limited-time subscriptions, etc.

A few event options include:

- **Conferences:** Developers are notorious for keeping up with the latest trends in the industry. If you're hosting relevant conferences with key spokespeople who are knowledgeable in their fields, it's very likely developers would be more attuned to attending them.

- **Workshops:** Taking it a little further, you can host workshops around product usage for those on the verge of signing up. It clarifies how your product works—and what it can do for them.

4. Niche communities

Developers are community focused—which is why there are so many communities targeted towards them. It's why we recommend that you live where they live. Find where your product's community is and go there first. Learn the lingo, listen in.

> *“Talk to existing customers to understand their jobs-to-be-done, figure out what their days look like and how a product or service fits into it; zero in on the problem/s they were facing when they first looked at your product as a potential solution.*
>
> *By doing this, you will be able to understand not just the kind of content or information they need, but also which formats to use—in some cases, people will Google for an answer so SEO will make sense as a distribution method; in other cases, folks might point you to Stack Overflow, their go-to Slack channels, or other forums. You will need to find them where they are.”*
>
> — **Fio Dossetto, Editorial Lead at Postmark, and Editor in Chief at contentfolks**

Here are a few examples of such communities:

- GitHub
- Stack Overflow
- HackerNoon
- Hashnode
- Dev.to
- Reddit
- Facebook
- Twitter

What kind of content do developers like?

Developers love educational content, and many marketers have observed that it works the best. Content needs to be solution-focused—and use multiple formats like the ones listed above. Anything that walks them through their problem in a language they understand works, which is why code snippets are common in such content.

[Sample graphic: Can we do a graphic like this for B2D marketing? Maybe compare it to B2B instead? It would include TOFU blog posts, how-to guides, courses & webinars, case studies, reviews, free trials, paid conversion]

The easier it is to access, the better

Gating assets is a standard lead generation method—but in B2D—it definitely won't work. Even in other sectors, it tends to add unqualified leads to the pipeline. It's why ungated assets are the best option—as developers prefer open-source resources.

It offers them a frictionless journey, and they can absorb all the information they need—at their own pace. It increases the chances of turning them into a free customer—and soon, a paid one.

Your content needs to move them down the funnel so they would eventually like to explore the paid features you offer. For this purpose, usage-based trials are a safe bet because they must sign up and try your product.

> *"I appreciate companies that offer me value before asking for me to give them more of my attention or to try their product. Value might come from a great tutorial, an introduction to new technology, or even a downloadable asset like an eBook. It makes me feel that the company is treating me like a professional whose time is precious - much better than other companies who hammer me with a pushy sales pitch as soon as I land on their website."*
>
> **— Ryan Peden, Senior Software Developer**

Clarity is key—and so is honesty

Developers are well-trained professionals and are a key part of any technical team. Gimmicking them into making a purchase won't work as they're clear on their issues & what can solve them. They're also equipped with the technical expertise to make that decision.

Being forthcoming about the product's limitations would go a long way because word-of-mouth is a huge factor in B2D marketing. Having technically accurate content is critical too.

Any errors in content can make a developer lose trust in an instant. It's crucial to have a peer-review or technical review process, a step that doesn't exist in most B2B or B2C content production workflows.

In conclusion

With the recent rise in developer tools, B2D marketing has become its own market segment. Because of the niche audience we're marketing to, it's essential to adopt newer strategies to entice, educate, and engage developers.

From a content perspective, there's so much that you can do. From blog articles to thought leadership pieces to practical product-focused content—there's a lot of space to experiment and see what works.

If you want to nurture this audience regularly, you can conduct webinars and workshops to keep them engaged with your company—and champion it in niche communities. All in all, B2D marketing is not easy—but not impossible.

If you're looking for help with marketing to developers and creating a community of product ambassadors, get in touch with ContentLab today!