

HOW TO DO B2B MARKETING IN CHINA

**TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES FOR
B2B BUSINESSES IN 2020**



ASHLEY GALINA DUDARENOK

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PRACTICES FOR
B2B BUSINESSES
IN 2020**

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Ashley Galina Dudarenok is the founder of Alarice and ChoZan.

ChoZan - your business school for digital China.

- Presenter of the world's top 2-day Chinese digital marketing training program for entrepreneurs and teams
- Keynote speaker on topics related to modern Chinese consumers, digital marketing and New Retail
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- Chinese social media marketing project execution

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Introduction

There's a belief among some that marketing only works for B2C companies. B2B marketing looks and feels different from B2C marketing but it's been around forever and is even more necessary in a world full of increasing disruptions and challenges.

As one of the world's largest economies and a world centre for manufacturing, China provides ample opportunities for B2C and B2B brands alike. However, B2B marketing in China is a bit different from the West.

Traditional trade shows, conference calls and meetings are irreplaceable aspects of B2B marketing now and in the future. However, a digital presence is important and has a strong effect when establishing business relationships. Most Chinese B2B companies also prefer a B2C selling approach and there are cultural differences in

business etiquette and the dealmaking process that can't be ignored.

Flexibility, patience, a willingness to learn and adapting to local culture and practices is also necessary. Part of that adaptation involves lots of talking over dinners, understanding the negotiation process and being optimized for the mobile internet. Technology and personal interactions meld and overlap in China and for B2B businesses, one can't replace the other.

We've created this mini book for B2B companies in order to help them understand cultural differences, the Chinese digital marketing landscape and best practices. So if you have questions about getting attention from Chinese businesses, this book will help you to find your answers and create your B2B digital marketing strategy.

In the past 8 years, I've worked with over 300 brands helping them tap into China. Since 2016, I've been a speaker at over 90 events and run my signature Chinese social media masterclasses across Asia, Europe and the Middle East. You're in safe hands.

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CHAPTER 1

The Ins and Outs of B2B Marketing in China

Just as in the West, meeting people face to face and establishing relationships at trade shows, conferences, exhibitions, dinners and industry events, is the cornerstone of B2B marketing. It plays a crucial role in China. The personal touch and discussions over meals are important. People need to know they're dealing with experts in their field with good products and services that they can trust over the long term.

But nothing happens in China without also happening on the mobile web. China is a tech savvy country that's optimized for smartphones with

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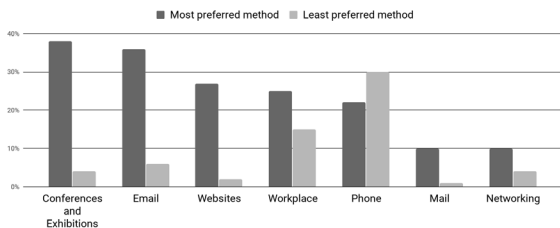
platforms and apps that cater specifically to businesses. There will be emails, websites, social media, QR codes, workplace visits and phone calls.

Trade Fairs, Expos and Exhibitions

There are more than 500 trade shows, exhibitions and conferences all over China every year. As one of the world's top manufacturing hubs and a country with a deep history of trade, China is home to some of the world's largest, oldest and most popular trade fairs and industry expos. Whatever your industry, China likely has a trade fair for you. There's even a B2B marketing conference. The World B2B Marketing Chief Congress is in Shanghai on January 8th-10th, 2020 if you're interested.

These events are the most preferred method of connection for Chinese businesses.

How do Chinese companies want to be contacted?



Source: B2B International

The most active months for events are March, June and September and the most common locations are Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing.

The larger exhibitions cover multiple industry sectors but many smaller ones are for specific industries. While the bigger trade shows in Tier 1 cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are more international in scope, those in Tier 2 and 3 cities are more likely to have smaller local companies. Exhibitions located near industry clusters are also more likely to have key industry players.

The size and scope of each conference is different and some have remarkably similar names so do your research and check exhibitor lists from previous years before deciding which exhibitions to attend.

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Exhibitions are an indirect form of marketing that allow personal contact, basic assessments and putting a face to a brand, but they rarely result in immediate sales or leads in the short term. This can be frustrating, but failing to attend the right events means lost opportunities and bad impressions. It can seem like you're not willing to make the effort, lack commitment or aren't legitimate.

Here are some of China's biggest and best known trade fairs.

1 The Canton Fair

Also known as the China Import and Export Fair, it's held in Guangzhou. It started in the spring of 1957 and is the biggest, oldest, most comprehensive trade fair in China and one of the most important trade fairs in the world.

It's held twice a year, in the spring and fall, and has 3 phases that are scheduled one after the other. The spring session dates are April 15th – 19th (Phase 1), April 23rd – 27th (Phase 2) and May 1st – 5th (Phase 3). The fall session dates are October 15th – 19th (Phase 1), October 23rd – 27th (Phase 2) and October 31 – November 4 (Phase 3).

There are about 25,000 exhibitors, 60,000 booths and 190,000 buyers per session. Business turnover is around 30 billion USD per session. Phase 1 focuses on electronics and automobiles. Phase 2 is for consumer goods and gifts and Phase 3 is all about clothing, health products and recreational items.

Most of the buyers are from around Asia but it's designed to be an international event and buyers from Europe, the US and Russia each make up about 10% of the buyers and multilingual help is available.

2 The East China Fair

Also known as the East China Import and Export Commodity Fair or ECF, it has a 30 year history and is held in Shanghai. It's China's largest regional fair. In 2020, it'll be from March 1st - 4th. It features clothes, textiles, consumer goods, gifts and art. There are about 4,000 exhibitors and 6,500 booths available. Of the 37,000 buyers and visitors, around 22,000 are foreign, from over 100 different countries, and 14,600 are Chinese. Around 2.24 billion USD in business turnover happens there.

3 Automechanika Shanghai

China is the world's largest car market and the

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world's largest car manufacturer so it stands to reason that the Asia's most important automotive trade fair happens there. The exhibition is in its 15th year.

Its dates change each year but it happens at the end of November and beginning of December. In 2018, it was November 28th - December 1st and in 2019, it took place from December 3rd - 6th.

It features industry players from the entire automotive supply chain. There are about 6,320 exhibitors and over 160,000 buyers from around the world in 350,000 sqm of exhibition space.

There are pavilions for brands, such as BASF and Toshiba, automakers, such as Hyundai and KIA, and for developing and established auto markets such as France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea and more.

4 The China International Beauty Expo

China is the largest beauty market in the world and also a major beauty product exporter so it's only logical that it hosts the world's largest beauty industry trade fair. The 30 year old event is held twice a year in Guangzhou in March and September. It uses the same venue as the

Canton Fair. It's also held in Beijing in July and Shanghai in May.

There are around 3,800 exhibitors and 910,000 visitors who are mostly from Asia, Europe and the United States. The event features skin care products, cosmetics, hair care items, natural health and nail products, salon equipment and tools, accessories, perfumes as well as raw materials and packaging. There are also keynote speeches and education sessions.

5 The Guangzhou International Lighting Exhibition

Now 25 years old, it's from June 9th - 12th in the same venue as the Canton Fair and the International Beauty Expo. In 2019, there were 172,856 visitors from 133 countries and regions and 2,626 exhibitors from 22 countries and regions. It's the largest and most important exhibition for the LED and lighting industry. 2019's fair focused on smart and connected lighting, LED miniaturisation and human-centric lighting.

Changes in the industry mean that vendors don't just sell light bulbs but lighting-as-a-service based on IoT connectivity. The fair also covers a wide range of lighting applications such as automotive LEDs, street lights, workplace lighting

and horticultural light systems.

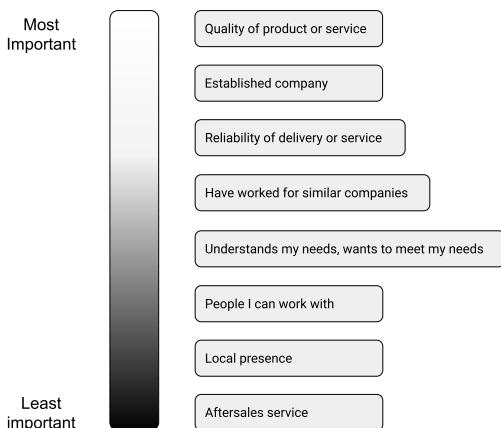
Websites that list exhibitions in China and around the world are listed in the Resources section at the back of the book, as are some of China's biggest manufacturing clusters to help you identify the industrial hubs related to your products and raw materials.

What Are The Priorities for Chinese Business People?

While it's true that a personal connection and trust are supremely important in China, Guangxi and low prices aren't all that Chinese business people are looking for. Quality, reliability and expertise are at the top of the list.

Winning in the quality stakes is getting more and more difficult for foreign companies. There's an increasing number of foreign companies in competition, local product quality is improving and with more localized management at international companies, there may be a greater tendency to source domestically.

Main Chinese requirements from Western businesses (other than price)



Source: B2B International

But once quality has been established, then personal relationships and communication come into play and, along with them, cultural differences and misunderstandings.

For example, in China, meals with a current or potential business partner are a generous courtesy where relationships are assessed and solidified, tough details of deals are ironed out and future plans are made. They're very important.

However, many Westerners see meal invitations as optional occasions for low key socializing or

distraction after work is over. Needing a break after a long day or having made other plans for the evening, they often head back to their hotel. At best, it's a missed opportunity. At worst, it causes offence. Either way, it's the kind of mistake that can torpedo a deal.

Another communication problem that can occur is that Chinese communication styles may mean that concerns are expressed in understated or vague ways that are missed or misinterpreted by Westerners as throwaway comments or small issues.

Even when needs are expressed more clearly, there can be an attitude of "We know best," from Westerners who see themselves as experts in their field or see it as a question looking for a simple informed answer rather than a deep concern.

Sometimes Westerners also fail to see that a concern about something superficial is really a worry about something deep that requires a line of questioning to dig it out. They may not understand how to conduct this process and don't know which questions to ask to get there.

These problems can result in feelings on both

sides that they are not listened to, resulting in damage to the relationship.

Doing good business in China is about finding the right people and asking the right questions.

The Decision Making Process

In general, decision making processes in Western businesses are fairly structured and linear. A need for a product or service is identified, a brief or spec is created, it's discussed internally, refined, suppliers are sought, proposals are prepared, negotiations commence and then decisions are made. There are procedures, steps and regulations to follow and supervisors to be consulted.

In Chinese companies, many stages of the decision-making process overlap or occur at a different stage than in the West. Initial contact with potential suppliers can happen at such an early stage that the business isn't even certain that they truly require the product or service they're looking for or fully understand what they are looking for. Suppliers that can help their counterpart define their needs and understand their issues more fully have a good chance of winning some business.

Once final deals are being locked down, there can be a substantial amount of negotiating. This can seem strange to Westerners who may feel their Chinese counterparts are departing from procedure. It can also make the Chinese side appear disorganized, chaotic or unprepared. Even factors that are decided at very early stages and considered unchangeable in the West can be open to revision based on circumstances or new information. It can be doubly difficult when terms under potential revision are ones that can't be changed or that the marketer doesn't have the authority to change.

For Westerners, it can be seen as a lengthy, unnecessary and confusing step right before the finish line or after they thought they'd already crossed the finish line.

As a result, many walk away at this stage feeling blindsided or that there are sudden unexpected issues that are irreconcilable. Repeated experiences like this can also lead to a refusal to negotiate. In China, where the first price mentioned is never the final one and deals are seen as ongoing and flexible, a refusal to enter this process is usually a deal death knell.

It's best to prepare for this negotiation stage be-

fore first contact with potential leads by building in wiggle room where you can and communicating at a very early stage which items can and cannot be negotiated. Marketers and sales staff must also be empowered to make certain adjustments on their own and have a system to bring in others quickly and smoothly once negotiations are underway.

It may also be instructive to look into the level of flexibility and adjustment that Chinese suppliers are willing and able to engage in to work with customers and explore the processes they use to enable this level of flexibility. Adapting some of these methods could result in substantially improved relations and increased business not just in China, but across the board.

Making and Maintaining Contact

The best sequence and methods for making contact are generally as follows:

- 1) Regular, strategic attendance at exhibitions, trade fairs and conferences is best for establishing initial contact, maintaining brand awareness and building industry stature.
- 2) Email is best to introduce the company, its products and services and for ongoing updates

once a relationship has been established. It's not good for complicated details, hammering out negotiations or hard sell approaches.

3) Dinners and meals are important. Accept invitations to meals with any businesses that you hope to work with or learn more about and offer dinners in return if you see potential partnerships. Meals are generous offers of hospitality where deals and agreements are informally finalized, solutions are found to tricky issues and future plans are made. It can also help you to assess potential partners. In the past, heavy drinking also played a role with shots of baijiu - China's tequila - being downed in successive and excessive toasts. This behaviour has toned down of late but may still present itself from time to time.

4) A clear, nicely designed, easy to understand website is essential. It helps confirm that your company is legitimate and well-established and serves as a helpful reference during the sales process. A Chinese language option or a simplified version of the site in Chinese is recommended. You should expect the same of your counterpart. They should have a professional looking website with all the necessary information, although you'll need the assistance of translators or trans-

lation tools. It's a good idea to use Google's Chrome browser which has the ability to translate entire webpages into English.

5) Your business's presence on sites and apps like LinkedIn, Maimai (China's LinkedIn), WeChat, Zhihu, Alibaba.com, 1688.com, Globalsources.com, blogs and more can be used for product promotion, education and to gauge market feedback.

6) Meeting in person is necessary to move things forward once initial contact has been made and interest has been shown. Final deals are almost always closed in person. Phone calls aren't best for initial contact or an early hard sell approach. The phone can be used between key meetings to clarify urgent issues, have informal discussions and to stay in contact. Once a business relationship has been firmly established, conference calls can be used to meet over distance.

Western businesses, especially newly established ones, hoping to do B2B marketing in China must do their research on the needs and habits of their end consumers as well as the businesses they hope to work with. Be prepared to do site visits and inspections and verify information. They should also make sure they understand commu-

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nication styles and business etiquette in China before they begin.

If you're wondering how to get into the China B2B market, have urgent questions about B2B marketing in China or want to hone your digital media presence in China, contact us at natalia@alarice.com.hk to schedule a consultation.

CHAPTER 2

The Digital Channels You Need to Know

In 1999, near the start of China's digital transformation, a group of people led by Jack Ma, started a B2B website called Alibaba.com. It was an English-language B2B website aimed at small businesses around the world that wanted to connect with manufacturers and suppliers in China. Its next website, also launched in 1999, was 1688.com, a Chinese-language B2B marketplace for domestic companies.

We all know how that went. Today, Alibaba is one of the world's largest tech companies. It has expanded into financial technology, cloud stor-

age systems, entertainment, media and offline grocery stores. And it all started with B2B.

According to a July 2019 interview with John Caplan, head of North American B2B at Alibaba Group, “B2B e-commerce is a \$23.9 trillion market — six times larger than B2C e-commerce.” So let’s get started with a list of digital channels for B2B in China that you need to know. It starts with one that everyone already knows.

1 Alibaba.com

The granddaddy of them all. Jack Ma chose Alibaba as the name for the first site after the character Ali Baba from the folktale. He tested the name while he was in San Francisco and found it was recognized by people from all over the world.

Alibaba.com is a huge multi-language portal for small businesses world-wide who are looking for suppliers and manufacturers. While most of the suppliers on the site are from China, international companies are also represented.

Menus on the homepage allow for 15 different languages, regional settings and for prices to be indicated in currencies from all over the globe.

The category menu on the homepage lists 9

product categories and the full menu lists 12 more with countless subgroups that include everything from firefighting supplies to balloons. You can buy everything from a single toy to crude oil (500,000 barrels is the minimum buy). It's fair to say that whatever your size or industry, there's something here for you.

A wide range of international payment options are available such as Visa, Mastercard, Western Union, Boletto, telegraphic transfers and more. This is unlike many Chinese e-commerce sites, which are optimized for local payment systems and often don't accept international ones. One of the options, "Pay Later", is available for US customers only. Alibaba.com's partner is Atlanta-based fintech company Kabbage which operates via an app and specializes in funding and credit lines of up to \$250,000 for small businesses.

The site has a section for trade shows which lists about 20 important ones from around the world in chronological order. Suppliers with a presence on Alibaba who will be at the shows are listed.

There's also a Google Chrome extension called Source Now which allows users to take screenshots of items they see on a digital device and au-

tomatically feed them into Alibaba.com to bring up similar items.

Alibaba offers logistics services and trade assurance which allows those who've paid through the site to get their money back should they have problems with their supplier. Alibaba also has verified suppliers that have been inspected by the company.

As of July, 2019, the site had more than 150 million registered members, upwards of 10 million active buyers and greater than 150,000 sellers.

2 1688.com

Set up in 1999, this was Alibaba's second website. This huge B2B website with a Chinese interface is aimed at China's domestic market.

Why is it called 1688? In the early stages of the Chinese internet, numbered URLs were very common because English / pinyin URLs were harder for the average person to remember. There's also a lot of number symbolism, as well as puns and slang in Chinese because numbers are short syllables that sound like other words with slightly different sounds or tones.

"1688" in Chinese conveys the idea of having a

stream of riches or having good fortune for a long time. 8 is a very lucky number for its association with wealth, so you'll often see phone numbers, addresses or prices that feature 8s. 6s and 3s are also lucky.

As a quick side note, 4 is unlucky because it sounds like the word "death" in Chinese. If your company is called "444 Forklifts", if your phone number or address has a lot of 4s in it, for China business purposes, you should consider altering them and adding as many 8s, 6s and 3s as you can manage.

How does 1688 work? It's similar to Alibaba.com with stiffer competition, lower prices and a faster pace. There's no English interface, although there are a few English words, like "Live Now".

Live streaming has taken the Chinese internet by storm and in addition to all the usual B2B e-commerce functions, there's a constant rotation of live streams featured on the homepage. Suppliers stream from their factory, warehouse or office modelling apparel, showcasing their products, answering questions submitted in text comments and talking about the key features of their products. Previous live streams and a large selection of other videos are also available on the site.

There are 3 useful features for international B2B businesses on 1688.com.

Businesses can establish a flagship store on the site to establish a better relationship with local buyers in China and make it easier for them to do business in their own language. This is most useful for large companies that have branches in China and companies like Merck, 3M, BASF and Dow have established flagship stores on the site. Certain products, such as baby milk powder, beauty products and organic foods, are also sought from overseas suppliers so businesses specializing in these areas could consider establishing a local branch and a presence on 1688.

For smaller businesses, it can allow price comparisons between the local and international price. This can help give an idea of how much room for price negotiations there might be. This is because many of the same companies list on Alibaba.com and 1688.com. But, it should be kept in mind that the price differential for local and international clients likely comes along with a quality differential with the higher quality items being for international clients.

For those doing research on companies, the videos and live streams on the site can be used

to assess the products and the level of professionalism of potential partners. If you have staff who can type in Chinese, they could also submit questions during a live stream.

If you want to contact 1688 suppliers or establish a presence on the site, you either need an agent, need Chinese staff or need to learn Mandarin. Payments and arranging for exports out of the country would also be challenging and would require an agent or staff on the ground in China.

3 Globalsources.com

Globalsources is one of the oldest B2B forums in Asia. In English, it started in 1971 as Asian Sources magazine. It became Asian Sources Online in 1995, 4 years before Alibaba.com existed. Now based primarily in Shenzhen, Guangzhou and Hong Kong, it also sponsors trade shows in the region.

Globalsources reputation is that it has fewer suppliers and factories in its database than Alibaba.com but they're higher quality and more reputable. It's seen as more selective and as having done more rigorous checking.

The site shows prices, has a margin calculator, a sample request function, credit check and credit

insurance services available to help reduce risks and protect buyers and sellers and tips and resources to help educate new businesses. It also offers private sourcing services to save client's time finding the right partners and arranges of-line events and summits where potential partners can meet.

Although most companies on the site's database are based in China, there are some from Vietnam, India, the Philippines and South Korea.

4 Matchory.com

German-based Matchory.com focuses on matching small brands that want to make custom products to the world's best factories. As China is a huge manufacturing base, many of the factories on the site are based in China but it also has facilities from Europe and other manufacturing centres.

The company claims to have 3,000,000 audited manufacturers in its database. It uses the responses from submitted forms and AI to help match audited manufacturers to companies with the best fit and price. It operates more as an agent for manufacturer matching and supply chains rather than as a search engine as the previously listed sites do.

There are also some key social media channels that can be used by B2B brands, such as LinkedIn, Zhihu, WeChat and Weibo, which we'll cover in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 3

How to Use Chinese Social Media For B2B Purposes

B^{2C} companies face consumers who they can make a connection with built on an emotional foundation. B2B businesses must build the same bond, but on a foundation of education, expertise, trust and quality. A company name, a logo and the nitty gritty details of product specs and prices can't do that work on their own.

In a social media world populated with influencers and thought leaders, a name, a face and a figure of expertise are required online as much

as offline. With online conversion rates of B2B companies decreasing from 50% to 12% in 2019, an urgent update is required.

Social media is one of the best ways for B2B brands to establish brand recognition in China and the following apps and sites are the most powerful channels for the job.

1 Zhihu.com

The Q&A app Zhihu is China's answer to Quora and a great place for B2B enterprises to build their profile. With a verified official brand account, or better yet, a VIP membership, the brand's thought leaders can field industry-related questions, showcase their expertise and connect with other companies.

For example, Siemens set up its official account on Zhihu and talked about how cutting edge the manufacturing industry is in a Zhihu column. The article got more than 1,400 likes and 755 comments.

In another example, Mercer, the global human resources consulting firm, is known for answering questions on the site related to jobs, salaries and careers. One user asked, "Where should we live if we want the same salaries as Beijing,

Shenzhen and Shanghai”. In their answer, they referenced their Annual Quality of Living Rankings report with a playful tone and provided users with a comprehensive answer. By constantly responding to relevant topics with high-quality answers, they demonstrate their expertise and have built a good reputation on the site.

Another pressing reason to establish clearly authoritative and verified accounts is that your brand may already have an account on Zhihu. It may have been registered by a fan of the brand, staff at a subsidiary or someone operating with bad intent. Registering your account officially, and investigating other accounts claiming to represent your brand, gives you control of your company name on the site and allows coordination and alignment of accounts that may have been set up by various branches or departments in the past.

Zhihu’s users are an attractive group as they are young, educated and overwhelmingly from Tier 1 cities. They’re looking for authentic, useful, thorough content with personality. Q&A participation is very important and also serves to drive traffic to the brand’s account page. Brands can also write articles and columns. Focus on providing information rather than pushing

brand messages.

Brands can be featured in Zhihu Weekly (知乎周刊), an e-magazine collection of high-quality answers. To get featured, an account has to be upgraded to a higher-level of VIP membership and must publish high-quality content on an on-going basis.

The platform also has live streaming, webinar and live chat capabilities for selected brands. They're great opportunities to discuss industry-specific topics and interact with the audience. Live streams are very popular in China and there's been a lot of demand for professional content. They can be free or fee-paying.

2 WeChat

WeChat is a valuable channel because, in China, it's everywhere and used by everyone. It's like Facebook but with many more capabilities. Monthly active users are estimated to be over 800 million.

The platform is a semi-closed social network so B2B businesses can't take a traditional approach, but it's a mistake to think that it can't be used for B2B marketing at all.

Brands first need to establish their verified official account on the platform. Since it's optimized for personal connections and key opinion leaders, it's a good platform for the brand's own KOL. The brand's key opinion leader (or leaders) should be relatable, have expertise and answer questions about the industry, the brand and its products.

For B2B companies, KOL promotion is a long-term plan with consistent, recognizable personnel that helps to establish trust and thought leadership. KOLs could be senior consultants with industry experience, business management experts, analysts in specific industry sectors or knowledgeable former workers.

B2B brands can also consider being represented by key opinion consumers (KOC). Key opinion consumers, a popular new role in China, can be clients who know the company well or people who function as client allies. If they are client allies, they can help potential and current partners with enquiries, complaints, quotations, orders, schedules and other client relationship tasks.

Brands can develop mini programs. These apps within WeChat can be designed to let clients to make orders or allow potential clients to explore

the company's distribution channels, products or market.

WeChat is also a good forum for private traffic. According to data from Chinese data analysis organization BesChannels, 86% of B2B companies agreed that word-of-mouth is the best way to get clients. Companies can create WeChat groups and communities to strengthen brand relationships and educate.

3 Weibo

Weibo is an open public social network, similar to Twitter, that is extremely popular. It has an estimated 500 million monthly active users.

Once again, a verified official brand account is the first step. Then B2B brands can deploy their content, KOLs and KOCs on the platform. Brands must still deliver high-quality, professional, useful content but on Weibo, more thought must be given to making it engaging, interactive and connected to hot topics and trends of the day if it's to get any attention from this fast-moving app's young audience.

The content must focus on compelling visuals and well-crafted short videos that target clients, potential clients and industry leaders. Regular

posting schedules, engagement and interaction are of prime importance on Weibo. Pose questions, answer comments and repost quality user-generated content and questions. Engage in creative campaigns and remember that the strategic and creative use of hashtags is a requirement.

Engaging in advertising on both WeChat and Weibo is an option but requires a serious budget which may be better spent elsewhere unless it's very specifically and strategically targeted.

4 LinkedIn.com / Maimai.cn / Zhaopin.com

China's localized version of LinkedIn has done well but new versions of profession-based social networks - Maimai and Zhaopin - have popped up in recent years and are now overtaking LinkedIn in some respects.

For example, Maimai claims to have over 50 million users and according to research firm Analysys, has a user penetration rate of 83.8% compared to LinkedIn China's 11.8%. Maimai has gradually gained an upper hand with localized features like anonymous chat, mobile-first design, real-name registration, and partnerships with Chinese corporations.

These are primary channels for connections within the business community and establishing influence and thought leadership. Since each site is localized and in Chinese, the face of the brand and the company's emblem of expertise, must have an assistant who can translate their communications or be able to read and write in simplified Chinese themselves.

Keep in mind that all China-based tech platforms are subject to tight state regulations as well as their own internal rules.

If you want to increase your expertise about WeChat and how it can be used for B2B marketing at your own pace in your own location, you can take our certificate video course online at:

<https://chinamarketingmasterclass.com/p/wechat>.

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CHAPTER 4

B2B Public Relations and Chinese Search Engine Optimization

B2C companies face consumers who they can make a connection with built on an emotional foundation. B2B businesses must build the same bond, but on a foundation of education, expertise, trust and quality. A company name, a logo and the nitty gritty details of product specs and prices can't do that work on their own.

It's still important to do traditional public relations and to optimize your brand so that it can be found on Chinese search engines. Let's get into those now.

B2B Public Relations

In addition to showing up at trade fairs, exhibitions and conferences, it's important to stay on top of trends in China and make an impression with industry-related bodies in the country.

For example, environmental issues are a high priority with both the average person and the government in China. They're concerns that aren't going to go away any time soon. If you're in the packaging industry, for example, it would be wise to get up to speed on China's new recycling and waste sorting efforts in major cities like Shanghai. Staying compliant with current regulations is one aspect to master but designing packaging that is both eco-friendly and easy for end consumers to sort according to the current protocols is another. On top of that, gaining accreditation from the China Environmental United Certification Center (CEC) would also be a good idea.

Even if you're in an industry that doesn't seem to be directly related to environmental concerns, it's still good to feature any aspects of your products, services or supplies that benefit the environment or aid your partners and consumers in their efforts to reduce any harm to nature.

Contributing to industry journals, magazines, specialty websites and mainstream newspapers, both inside and outside of China, are all important. When doing this, keep the focus on key people who are the names and faces behind the brand's B2B efforts. This will aid brand recognition, establish thought leadership, ease the personal relationships necessary to conduct business in China and let your brand stand out from the crowd with a trusted, authentic personality.

Some prominent aggregation and specialty news websites that should be targeted are Toutiao (今日头条), Huxiu News (虎嗅新闻), Penpai News (澎湃新闻) and 36kr (首页_36氪). Mainstream news outlets include publications like China Daily and Caixin. Brands can also post public relations videos in Chinese or with subtitles on their official Chinese website or to a brand account on Youku (China's YouTube).

In your messaging, include a mix of brand stories and current topics and trends. Let people know the concepts behind your company, its products, services and history, including the story of the company's founders. In addition to building brand awareness, this helps establish the company as legitimate, trusted and principled. Find ways to touch on trending topics, especially ones

that are related to your brand, and use hashtags strategically on platforms like Weibo. This will show that your brand is aware, involved, listening and concerned about being a good corporate citizen.

Search Engine Optimization

Baidu is China's most popular search engine. Similar to Google search, your brand can appear on Baidu in ads or organically. Results from ads can create instant traffic but the quality of the traffic isn't assured. Organic traffic generated from optimization is the most powerful and effective. However, it takes time and good strategy to increase rankings organically and is part of a long-term operation in combination with other digital marketing channels.

As mentioned before, your brand should have a China-friendly website. Ideally, it should be in simplified Chinese, locally hosted in China to ensure fast loading, have localized content and end with ".cn". This will mean a China-based or China fluent web designer and Chinese writers to translate and create content.

The mobile web and smartphones are the primary access method for most Chinese people and Baidu also prioritizes mobile. Display and

loading speeds on mobile devices are crucial for Baidu so for search engine optimization, mobile-friendly websites are top priority.

Social media apps also function as search engines of sorts as people look for comments and recommendations so stay active to answer concerns, complaints and questions and to minimize any negative mentions.

And here, finally, is where Zhihu comes into play again. Due to its reliable, high-quality content, Zhihu posts show up near the top of the page for organic searches on Chinese search engines. They often rank even higher than a brand's own website.

Strategic management of Q&A content on Zhihu can leverage organic results for certain keywords and phrases. This kind of attention can help brands receive exposure on multiple search platforms without spending more on search advertisements. Zhihu articles can also link users to the brand's official website, driving traffic and yielding better results.

If you want to stay up to date on the latest trends, updates and changes in the mainland digital world and the world of Chinese B2B, subscribe to the China

Marketing Circle. It's a private WhatsApp / WeChat group that delivers curated news, updates, trends and case studies to China watchers, entrepreneurs and marketing professionals. Send an email to cmc@chozan.co mentioning this book for an extended free trial of 1 month.

CHAPTER 5

Best Practices

So, what are the best practices when you're doing B2B marketing in China? We've outlined a lot of them as we've gone along. We'll summarize them here and add a few more. Many are straightforward and common sense.

Hire Chinese Staff and Study China

Hire knowledgeable, capable Chinese staff.

At the very minimum, you'll need them to help you with written or spoken translations. There are new graduates emerging from universities every year who are comfortable speaking in English, tech savvy, learn quickly and who are very familiar with Chinese social media. They can help with translations, web design, creative content, social media marketing and much more.

At the other end of the spectrum, you may want to hire someone experienced in sales and marketing with a proven track record and an existing network in the Chinese market to work with your team. There are plenty of older, more experienced candidates who are better suited to management level roles with highly developed people skills and cultural knowledge. People in this age group are likely to have weaker English skills however. They would require higher salaries, more senior positions and would need to be wooed from current positions with other companies.

It would also be wise for any China B2B marketers who aren't Chinese to study spoken Mandarin to at least a basic conversational level. Study Chinese culture and spend time in different parts of the country to get up to speed on how things work there. Talk to B2B marketers in China or learn from them online. It's not necessary to become experts in each of these areas but a grounding in them is useful and will help to understand China better.

If you're a small operation and decide not to hire any permanent Chinese staff, get ready to learn some Mandarin yourself to at least an upper intermediate level. Focus on spoken Mandarin,

pinyin and recognizing some key simplified Chinese characters. Learning to write in simplified Chinese characters will impress people but it's a pretty hefty task and not a skill you'll need. Google Translate is your friend and the Google Chrome browser can translate entire webpages. Translations done with software will not be perfect but will usually be understandable. You can hire translators and guides when you make trips to China.

Make a Chinese Website and Establish Yourself on Key Chinese Platforms

Make a Chinese-friendly website that contains key information about your company and products. It should be optimized for viewing on mobile phones and search engines in China. Ideally, it should end with “.cn” and use servers based in mainland China.

Make an account and company page on Alibaba.com, Matchory.com and similar platforms. Register for an account on Zhihu and start answering questions and interacting. Register for an official WeChat account. Do the same for Weibo. Start building your presence online in China with a focus on the face of the brand, the thought leader, who will be doing the marketing.

Do Your Research

Talk to lots of people to get recommendations firsthand and do research online. Explore lots of options and make spreadsheets to compare them. Do your due diligence and really dig in.

Check into industry hubs and clusters in China. Keep wages and costs for those clusters and hubs in mind as you go forward as they'll be different from non-hub and cluster areas.

Put in the work at the beginning to determine costs, locations, sizes, quality and key characteristics. Have the information on hand that factories need to know if you're creating an original product. Decide if you'll be using NDAs. Formulate contracts and have key criteria in mind for when the negotiation stage rolls around.

Get good at negotiating. Understand that the process and the order of operations when negotiating will be different from what you're used to back home. Flexibility, understanding your partner's needs and working together to solve problems are the name of the game. Learn to ask questions to understand issues more clearly as they may be worded vaguely or in an understated way. Situations can also change quickly and may be beyond the control of the people you're negotiating with so patience is a virtue.

Best Practices for Alibaba.com

When searching for suppliers, under the “Supplier Types” option, tick the boxes for Trade Assurance and Verified Supplier to get better quality results.

Be clear about what you’re looking for and learn to distinguish between factories/manufacturers and trading companies who act as middlemen. Trading companies sell a variety of products while factories specialize narrowly.

If you’re looking for a factory, visiting each factory on your shortlist one by one could be a waste of time. It may be better to find a reliable agent to narrow down the list before you make any site visits yourself or use a supply chain management company. Site visits should be scheduled around the times that you’ll be attending exhibitions in China.

Attend Important Trade Fairs, Conferences and Industry Events in China

Start building your reputation as the face of your brand and a thought leader in person.

Do research online first before deciding which trade fairs to attend. Choose the most important ones for your company, then arrange your

schedule and allocate your budget accordingly. If there are companies that you want to meet, find out which fairs they'll be attending and prioritize those exhibitions.

It's a good idea to make initial contact with the companies you want to meet prior to the trade fair. This is best done by email. This first contact should be brief and clear. It should only introduce your company, provide a link to your Chinese website or WeChat account and indicate that you'd like to meet at the exhibition. This email is not for complicated product details or hard selling.

Give yourself 2-3 weeks after the fair to build relationships and do on the ground research. Talk to lots of potential partners and do lots of groundwork in the beginning or you'll pay for it later.

Remember to find a good fit for your company, your product and your requirements. For example, you might find a great factory for a small line of niche toys you want to manufacture. However, if this same factory regularly deals with huge last minute orders from major brands, your products are likely to be their lowest priority so they may not be the best partner for you.

Attend dinners with promising leads if you're invited. This is where your potential Chinese partners will get to know you and you'll get to know them. You'll also learn more about the industry and how things work, even if you don't work together in the end. If you do end up working together, dinners are where the wheeling and dealing is done. Heavy drinking may be encouraged, particularly for men, through rounds of toasts so be prepared with techniques that allow you to avoid drinking more than you're comfortable with while still being polite to your hosts.

Once partnerships have been established, make sure to reciprocate and invite your partners to lunches and dinners. To pay for the meal, you may have to sneak away as if you're going to the bathroom and pay the bill before it comes to the table. If the bill comes to the table, your partners may insist on paying it and you may have to be very persistent to be allowed to pay.

Use QR Codes

Make good use of QR codes. They're everywhere in China and people are used to scanning them with their phones. Put them at the end of articles to take people to your brand's official Chinese website, your Alibaba.com company page, your official Zhihu account or your official WeChat

account.

Make business cards that feature QR codes for your official website, Alibaba.com company page etc. Make sure the email address and phone number listed on the cards are ones that can handle spam email and calls. Make contact with companies you are interested in later from the email addresses and phone numbers that you use for business.

Put QR codes on posters and banners and in prominent places when you have booths at conferences. Make the codes large enough so that people can scan them from a distance.

If you're wondering how to improve your engagement with Chinese businesses, have urgent questions or want to hone your digital media presence in China, contact us at natalia@alarice.com.hk to schedule a consultation.

CHAPTER 6

A Step by Step Checklist

Step 1:

Do your research. Research your industry, China and potential partners.

Step 2:

Hire Chinese staff or learn to speak a functional level of Chinese. Make a mobile optimized, Chinese search engine optimized, Chinese-language version of your official company website.

Step 3:

Set up accounts and pages on key B2B platforms like Alibaba.com and Zhihu.com. Set up accounts on key social media apps like WeChat and Weibo. Focus on the personality and expertise of your brand's B2B marketer, establish con-

nections and take on a thought leadership role.

Step 4:

Attend selected trade fairs and exhibitions in China. Arrange to meet promising leads and make site visits to factories if necessary. Attend dinners and start building relationships. Don't expect immediate results. Take your time and continue your research.

Step 5:

When the time comes, be ready to negotiate. It's likely to be an extended process that may seem disorganized from a Western point of view. The final details will probably be decided over dinner. Be flexible, ask questions to increase clarity and be patient.

Step 6:

Maintain your online presence, maintain focus on the person doing your B2B marketing, increase their thought leadership stature and continue to attend exhibitions and fairs.

If you want to know more about B2B marketing in China, join my signature 2-day Chinese Digital Marketing Masterclass near you, or ask us to design a custom training for your organization. Email us at natalia@chozan.co for more information on my global

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training events or to schedule a custom training for your team.

Conclusion

B2B marketing in China means diving in and being hands on. It also means standing out from the crowd and demonstrating expertise, reliability and leadership. It means becoming the face and the voice of your brand.

Diving in also means dealing with language barriers and cultural differences head on. It means travelling, shaking hands, making site visits, setting up booths and giving presentations. It means making videos and doing live streams. It also means being patient and putting in the work even when there aren't immediate results or the results you were hoping for.

It means getting to know people and trying to understand their position and pain points over a meal. It might mean some strategically placed bottles that allow you to swap out water for bai-jiu so that you can function the day after a 40

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toast evening. It could also mean an evening of karaoke.

It also means websites, B2B platforms, social media, prioritizing the mobile web, search engine optimization and lots and lots of QR codes.

Now, let's go get them!

Resources

The B2B Research Company
<https://www.b2binternational.com/>

Marketing and Selling to Chinese Businesses

Written by Matthew Harrison and Mark Hedley
2016

<https://www.b2binternational.com/publications/chinese-marketing-selling/>

**The World B2B Marketing Chief Congress,
Shanghai, January 8th-10th, 2020**

<http://cc.consignindex.com/>

**Trade Shows, Exhibitions, Conferences and
Business Events Worldwide**

<https://www.eventseye.com/>

Trade Shows in China

2020 - 2021

https://www.eventseye.com/fairs/c1_trade-

[shows_china.html](#)

Top 100 China Events

<https://10times.com/top100/china>

Conferences in China

<https://10times.com/china/conferences>

Map of China's Industry Clusters and Hubs

<http://www.chinasourcingblog.org/Industrial%20Clusters.png>

Hub and Cluster Map Search Tool

<https://www.made-in-china.com/industry-channels/>

B2B Platforms

www.alibaba.com

www.globalsources.com

www.1688.com

www.matchory.com - orders must be 3,000 USD or higher

Vlogs and Videos

Source Find Asia Vlog

Startup, Micro Business and Small Business Focus

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzyw4B-jt3qj23iec_IG3IcQ

Tips on how to find factories for small/micro manufacturers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRBWEB-G4nA8>

Canton Fair Advice:

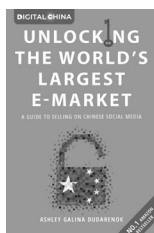
For small resellers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A35Qa-Sue_Sk

For those making original products

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf-pF_mr-1TA

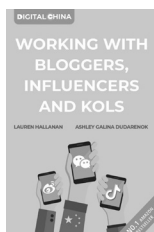
Don't forget our Digital China book series:



This extended and updated edition, expands the analysis of the booming technology scene in China, where two giants — Alibaba and Tencent — are engaged in an epic rivalry.

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- *New Retail and the Future of Commerce*
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- *Social Ranking 2020*
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- *The Most Influential KOL Platforms and How They Work*
- *How to Find and Select the Right Influencer*
- *The Ins and Outs of Effective KOL Campaigns*
- *KOLs in action: Revealing Case Studies*



A behind the scenes look at how, in only a few short years, Alibaba CEO Jack Ma's vision of "The New Retail", where 800 million consumers take for granted a world of convenience unimagined anywhere else, has become a reality. You'll discover:

- *Why New Retail is about ecosystems and habitats, not channels and e-commerce*
- *A deep dive on the New Retail models and ecosystems of Alibaba, JD, Tencent and others*
- *How New Retail is going global and why you should adopt it*



1. CMC - The China Marketing Circle

A private Whatsapp / WeChat group that delivers curated news, updates, trends, case studies and more related to digital marketing in China. Scan below for more information or send an email to cmc@chozan.co mentioning this book for an extended free trial of 1 month.



2. Chinese Digital Marketing Online Video Course

A certificate course for marketers to advance your career and improve your skills and knowledge about digital marketing in China. You can do it all from home. Scan the QR code below for more information and use [ASHLEY15] to get 15% off.

3. Chinese Social Media Marketing Consultations

If your marketing team has urgent questions or needs to hone its strategy or execution in China, contact us at natalia@chozan.co to schedule your consultation.

4. Chinese Digital Marketing Training

Does your marketing team need training to get up to speed on Chinese social media? We can help. For more information, contact us at the address below.

5. Chinese Digital Marketing Strategy

If you need an effective strategy for Chinese social media, we can help you develop it. For more information, contact us at the address below.

6. Keynote Speeches

For dynamic, energy-filled keynote speeches related to Chinese consumers, e-commerce, social media marketing and more, Ashley fits the bill. For more information, contact us at natalia@chozan.co.

If you have any questions, please get in touch with me directly at ashley@chozan.co or call (+852) 3709-2258.

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If you are a B2B company operating in China, this book is for you. Find out how to set yourself apart in the B2B space through the power of digital marketing and online platforms. In this book you'll learn:

- **Which Chinese digital channels B2B businesses use to enhance their thought leadership in China**
- **Which portals and platforms are used for B2B purposes**
- **How to promote yourself to and connect with businesses in mainland China**

“Great and relevant content! Professional and knowledgeable speaker with contagious energy.”

— **Michelle Ng, Harley-Davidson**

“Ashley opened our eyes to how the Chinese are leading innovation in the social media space, and how we can learn from them.”

— **Coen Tan, Lead Trainer at Ministry of Influence**

“Ashley doesn't only create content that's incredibly interesting and valuable, but also shares her inspiration and spreads knowledge of the fast-changing, growing economy that Westerners need to adapt to when expanding into China.”

— **Jia Song, China Enterprise Business Center**



Ashley Dudarenok is a serial entrepreneur, global keynote speaker, 3-times bestselling author, vlogger and podcaster.

As a marketer and social media agency head with more than twelve years of professional experience in Greater China, she's seen the transformation of China's online world firsthand.

Her specialties are China market entry, Chinese consumers and New Retail.

