

CELEBRATING MILESTONES!

B2B International is celebrating its 10th birthday this year. Founder and Director Nick Hague says, "It's interesting to look back at some of the highlights since 1998 – becoming a truly global agency with



Directors Carol-Ann Morgan, Nick Hague and Paul Hague cutting B2B's birthday cake

the opening of offices in Beijing and New York, managing more than 1,000 market research projects over the decade, and recently welcoming our 1,000th employee."

To commemorate the birthday, staff from all three offices wined and dined on the L.S. Lowry cruise boat on the Manchester Ship Canal – Manchester roots, Manchester sights!

Upon reaching the milestone 1,000th employee – which includes both consultants in the global research teams and those working in the telephone interviewing units – in June 2008, Operations Manager Peter Mullarkey commented on the cosmopolitan work environment, saying, "Whilst there is obviously a large proportion of English-speaking interviewers in our midst, B2B does at times feel like an advert for the United Nations! Due to our international client base, we employ people of many nationalities and up to 35 languages are spoken at any one time. Indeed, this year alone, we have conducted research in geographies as diverse as Australia, Canada, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Russia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, and Ukraine."



Operations Manager Peter Mullarkey congratulates B2B's 1,000th employee, Leah Fletcher



B2B International's New York office

U.S. CLIENTS MOVE FOCUS TO EASTERN ECONOMIES

Over the past year, B2B International has observed a sea change in clients' global research and intelligence requirements

Clients who previously were asking us to research the UK, USA and France are now increasingly asking us to look at Eastern Europe, Central Asia and East Asia. The number of different countries we have researched over the past year has grown by around 40%, with Russia, China and Ukraine seen as particular growth areas. Four new geographies were researched for the first time by our team – Libya, Mozambique, Tanzania and Azerbaijan.

This huge growth in emphasis on developing economies has been led by our US clients. Since the start of the year, we have researched over 60 different countries for American companies, particularly manufacturers whose domestic markets have often matured and who are therefore seeking to grow their client bases amongst the rapidly industrialising Eastern countries.

According to Director of International Operations Matthew Harrison, "Approximately half of all research B2B International undertakes

looks at local and national markets; however, it is among our multinational clients where we have seen the real shift in trends. Globally we have implemented a huge variety of research techniques in developing geographies, but by far the most common are market assessment and competitive intelligence studies.

This reflects the rapidly changing nature of so many Eastern markets and our clients' recognition that their market intelligence must constantly be refreshed."

Whilst these may be challenging markets to research, they certainly add interest to the job and also differentiate B2B International. After all, how many research agencies are genuinely capable of obtaining information from Libyan Government officials or mine owners in Azerbaijan!

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MORE SECURITY HOLDS THE KEY FOR DOOR-ENTRY PRODUCTS

A new survey examines the increasing demand for security at the front door

Commissioned by Friedland, B2B International has researched the market perception and position of door-entry security within the wholesale channel in France and Germany.

Findings indicate a growing demand for security products in general and for new door-entry products in particular; therefore, for the future, companies will need to revise their offerings to meet different market segments. What we see is that brand is important and gives installers reassurance that they will be getting a reputable product.

Research looked at three different product ranges – door chimes, security lighting and alarm systems.

Door chimes

The market for door chimes in Europe is in decline due to the increased demand for audio/video intercoms for door entry. Installers are the key decision makers on what doorbell is fitted, though German homeowners have more say in the decision than their French counterparts. Quality, reliability and functionality are the key requisites that installers look for from a door chime.

Security lighting

The market for security lighting is in ascendancy because of a heightened demand for greater security, with the annual market growing at between 4% (Germany) and 5% (France). Quality and reliability of product are key drivers when choosing security lighting, with price playing a larger part in the decision in France than in Germany.



Security alarms

Like the market for security lighting, security alarms are in great – and increasing – demand. At present, wired security alarms are more popular than their wire-free counterparts, but a shift in this trend is expected.

In addition to confirming very high awareness levels of Friedland among installers, the study also underlined the company's strengths as being product range, availability and delivery. This research has enabled Friedland to position itself as an innovator and leader, and to develop new security products – in other words, to become more than just a door chime company.

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NEWSFLASH...new, off-the-shelf tracker available

B2B International has launched a security systems monitor (the first tracker survey in this market) to enable manufacturers of intruder alarms and CCTV systems to track installers' views on their brands over time and to assess the changing requirements of their target market. It is now available for £2,750.

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ENSURING A HAPPY WORKFORCE

Measuring and developing job satisfaction – are your staff engaged or happily complacent?

One in five employees has had sex in the workplace, one in three has taken Class A drugs at work, and one in six admits to 'constantly' surfing the web on matters totally unrelated to work, according to David Bolchover's book "The Living Dead".

However, few would argue that the most valuable resource of any organisation is its people. Staff well-being and their level of satisfaction has been found to directly impact on organisational performance and ultimately organisational success.

A new White Paper by B2B International Director Carol-Ann Morgan, 'Employee Satisfaction: Understanding and Developing Your (People) Assets', explores employee satisfaction at work and looks at approaches to measuring and addressing the issues raised.

In it, Carol-Ann studies models of satisfaction, engagement and motivation, and assesses what we can all learn from these. She also highlights research which suggests that people who are very satisfied at work are not necessarily high performers; in fact, employees who are too content feel less inclined to seek improvements or change, which, in today's climate, tends not to be good for any business.

In an increasingly competitive world, the ability to find and keep good people will often be the deciding factor between organisational success and failure. Employers are seeking a workforce which is more than just good at the job it does; they are seeking employees who are both engaged with their organisation, and who "buy in" to the company mission and goals.

Employee research is the first step in undertaking a programme to improve the working experience of staff and, with it, the user experience of customers. By giving employees a 'voice', it enables areas of dissatisfaction

to be identified. The findings can be used to develop the strategy for building a committed workforce who will contribute to the well-being and future success of the organisation.



To learn more about employee satisfaction and view Carol-Ann's White Paper in full, please visit www.b2binternational.com/library/whitepapers

THE WORST THING YOU CAN DO WHEN TIMES ARE HARD...IS NOTHING!



There is no doubt that the current state of the economy impacts on our marketing and market research behaviour. Wider economic factors may be beyond our control, but that doesn't mean we have no control over our own destiny.

In the following articles B2B International Directors Paul and Nick Hague offer some advice on possible ways to ride an economic downturn.

Market research requirements change during times of high and low growth. In high growth periods, companies tend to be feeling more optimistic, looking for new markets and new products. Market assessment and product development are

usually high on the agenda. However, in low growth times, there is an even greater need to understand our customers, meet their needs, keep them satisfied and build loyalty, and this is reflected in the type of research requests received.

THE MARKETING MESSAGE – TRUTH, EXAGGERATION OR LIES?

Calling someone a liar is a real insult - yet Seth Godin accused us all of this offence in his book 'All Marketers Are Liars'

Of course Godin is making a dramatic point, one that causes us to sit up and take notice. All marketers have to put their best face forward. They have to choose something about their product or service that appeals to customers and they have to talk about it. He quotes the example of someone who makes expensive wine glasses. Wine could just as easily be drunk from plastic cups, but it would not seem the same.

By promoting the glasses as the perfect complement to a good wine which will enhance its taste, the marketer is being truthful. No one is pointing out that you could save a few quid and drink the same wine from a plastic cup – and why should they? It is up to the plastic cup manufacturers to give us their reasons for buying their products.

Does this make us liars? Of course not. Godin gets very worked up about the small number of marketers that do mislead or lie about their products to persuade us to buy them. Since there is a fine line between highlighting the virtues of a product and exaggerating them beyond reality, marketing draws in and encourages the quick buck snake oil salesperson.

Culturally, the British tend to under-sell and over-prove. This is fine if you have 100 years to wait for word-of-mouth to do the rounds and to do the promotion for you. However, if you need to move the metal quickly, you have to find some message to hit your customers with. Make sure it is a big one. And don't lie!

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IS BEING GREEN THE UNTAPPED USP FOR THE B2B SECTOR?

There is no doubting that differentiation, of either a product or service, is a source of competitive advantage. As the offering becomes more different, categorisation becomes more difficult and hence draws fewer comparisons with its competition. This, therefore, creates a huge opportunity by allowing you to up-sell your product and not compete primarily on price.

There can be few people who remain unconvinced of the need to reduce our harmful impact on the environment. Until a few years ago the environment was

a small dot on the radar screen. Today that dot has grown in size and influence and is becoming an increasing necessity to prove when pitching for new clients, sourcing suppliers or selling to customers.

'Green' claims are not uncommon in today's consumer markets, but within business-to-business markets this is relatively untapped territory.

Sustainability and the environmental friendliness of b2b companies is destined to grow much more in the years to come and, indeed, in the last year B2B International has

carried out an array of positioning studies for a diverse range of our clients in the industrial gases, construction and chemicals sectors.

Whoever can build a unique and strong position, taking the environmental high ground in a particular market, will definitely differentiate themselves. However, all our research has shown that companies shouldn't fly the green flag just because it is fashionable. All initiatives and statements need to be substantiated and not just used as another marketing tool. In other words, 'greenwashing'

(misleading customers about a company's environmental practices) should be avoided.

Green policies and practice need to be treated with the seriousness the issue deserves.

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FUSING THE FACTS TOGETHER

We live in an age of information overload. There can hardly be an executive in the world who doesn't regularly type a question into Google and obtain thousands of answers within milliseconds. Our computerised systems at work hold thousands of files of data which we can access instantaneously.

And if this is not enough, we can turn to the market research community who will carry out a survey at a tenth of the cost in real terms of 30 years ago. In other words, when it comes to market intelligence we have never had it so good. So why, therefore, do we sometimes find it difficult to make business decisions?

One reason is that despite the enormous amount of information available to us, some of it is not clear and some of it is in conflict. This means that our judgement and interpretation of the data are

still vital. For example, most of us would intuitively believe that 'objective' external data is to be trusted more than data that has come from opinions inside the company. However, this may be a reckless assumption.

So the difficulty in using market intelligence is fusing data together and working out which bits are to be trusted and which are not. It is for this reason that the workshop approach to delivering findings has become so popular. The research agency is able to put the findings from their survey on the table and invite all participants at the workshop to share their own knowledge and help in its interpretation. In this way disputes as to the meaning and value of data can be resolved and actions can be agreed.

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B2B PEOPLE ALARIC FAIRBANKS



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Alaric, General Manager of B2B International China, runs our Asian operations and is permanently based at our Beijing office. With over 14 years' experience working in Asia Pacific, he joined the Group in 2006. He has extensive experience in conducting research across Asia, as well as delivering training programmes to some of the best known names in Chinese industry.

His previous role was with Durham Business School in the

UK, where, as Programmes Director, he delivered research and consultancy projects on private sector development in China and other emerging markets. He has worked closely with Chinese government departments at national and provincial levels and was awarded the status of "Excellent Foreign Consultant" by the government of Sichuan Province in 2002. Prior to this he worked in China for five years for ABB, first based in Xiamen and latterly in Beijing.

He has an MBA from Newcastle University Business School and speaks Chinese.

Alaric lives with his wife and two daughters in Beijing. He has a passion for Chinese cuisine and is close to being addicted to Sichuan hotpot! A former rugby player, he has recently taken up ice skating under the guidance of his four-year-old daughter, and is a fan of both Stockport County FC and Leigh Rugby League Club. On return visits to the UK, he enjoys the odd pint of Robinson's bitter!

B2B PEOPLE MOVES

- **Julia Cupman** has been appointed US Business Development Manager, working out of the New York office
- **Megan Yang** has joined B2B International in Beijing as Asian Research Manager
- **Debbie Davis** has been appointed Operations Manager for B2B Medical

- **David Ward** has joined the European team as Head of Data Processing
- **Jason Zhang** from our Beijing office recently spent two months in Manchester learning more about the UK research industry

CHINA BUSINESS CONFIDENCE SURVEY

CASE STUDY: ONLINE SURVEY
B2B International, on behalf of the British Chambers of Commerce in China, has carried out the first business confidence survey of UK-invested businesses in mainland China. The survey was commissioned by Chamber members in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and South West China. Covering all sectors and sizes of enterprise representing UK investment in China, this was carried out by means of an online survey and received an impressive response rate of over 10%.

Whilst the findings pointed to certain areas that could be improved, such as transparency of regulations, availability and retention of qualified staff, and banking and financial services, the overall results reflected a high level of confidence in the Chinese market. For example, 54% of respondents stated that further investment and expansion of their Chinese operations within the next three years was "definite". The detailed results will be used by the Chambers to feed into the UK-China strategic dialogue later this year, representing the views of UK business in China.



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GLOBAL TRAINING

If you're in New York or Beijing this autumn, don't miss our directors' masterclasses!

Paul Hague in New York
October 22nd-24th, 2008

Topics:

- Value-Based Marketing
- Segmentation and CVP Development in B-to-B Markets
- Branding in B-to-B Markets

Carol-Ann Morgan in Beijing
November 20th-21st, 2008

Topics:

- Value-Based Marketing
- Using Segmentation to Develop a Tailored B-to-B Offering

DON'T MISS THE WEEKLY B2B PODCAST

With years of experience in the industry, the B2B research team discusses a range of interesting issues. Our podcasts are available every Monday morning – so be sure to start your week with a dose of market research insight and discussion from experts in the field. There is an extensive archive of B2B International's collected thoughts on markets, research and everything in between, in a convenient, easy-to-digest MP3 format.

Visit www.themarketresearchpodcast.com to listen in.



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