

HOW TO MAINTAIN GROWTH DURING ECONOMIC SOFTENING:

A 3-STEP PLAYBOOK

Generate demand and leads without resorting
to budget cuts or layoffs

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IN THIS 3-STEP PLAYBOOK, we explore a variety of techniques for preparing your business for an economic softening:



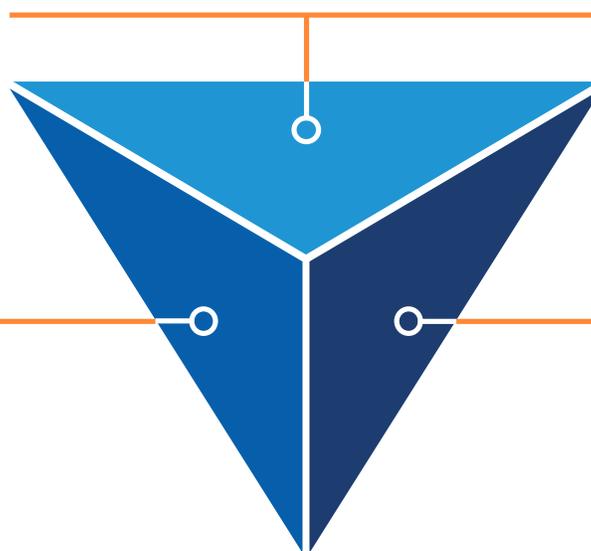
What you should focus on
in your business now



Marketing tactics to
maintain business health



How to **futureproof your business**
to grow during the economic softening



Introduction

Trending news and thought pieces on the economy have always had the power to influence or direct business decisions for better or for worse. Indeed, from headlines alone, the prevailing message that drives clicks is often one of doom and gloom, which while understandable, is not constructive for your company and its future growth.

To combat the overwhelming sense of negativity in the B2B space and help you empower your growth, our demand strategists have outlined key tactics in this **3-step playbook** for tackling current and future challenges.

However, before we dive into the playbook itself, **here is a brief overview of the economy in 2022 below:**

The causes of the 2022 recession

Economic analysts, C-suites, and investors are uncertain about the economy this year and beyond. What many believe we are experiencing currently, is an economic softening. In other words, an economy that grows slower than usual due to inflation and high interest rates.

Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and the War in Ukraine have contributed to this recession. Another clear indicator of this trend is the [historical news of the Euro and Dollar parity for the first time in 20 years](#).

However, as a B2B business, it is always important to remember that **the results from campaigns starting now will only be seen in six months or possibly years later.**

Therefore, as counterintuitive as it sounds, budgets should be maintained regardless of an economic softening to take steps to foster growth. In doing so, you will be able to secure a competitive advantage on your competitors who have reduced spending on their marketing campaigns, when the economy kicks back.



3-step playbook to tackle an economic softening

This B2B playbook for an economic softening breaks down strategies for your operations into three parts:



First,

identify the processes that are being overlooked at your company and that **can no longer be ignored** to guarantee operational efficiency during an economic softening.



Second,

tactics you should continue at your business to maintain a steady pipeline of leads and sales opportunities.



Third,

strategies you should implement to stimulate business growth as you adapt to changing demands in the marketplace.

1. Four aspects of your business to refocus on during an economic softening

The first part of the playbook covers the parts of your business that you should make sure to prioritize, given their importance in combating the economic adjustment. Rather than “business as usual,” consider refocusing your organization around the four items below:



1. Listen to your sales team

Sales and marketing alignment should always be a priority—the need for synchronizing teams itself can be an indicator of issues that are holding you back. If alignment has always been a goal on your agenda, now is the time to act upon it. Sales need to be heard and their concerns should shape your marketing and the direction of your business.

After all, the sales team is:

- On the front line, getting feedback from leads on the value of your offerings. The most common objections by clients should inform how you market your brand moving forward and how you develop new products to meet emerging challenges.
- Interacting with [marketing-qualified leads](#) (MQLs) and seeing success (or not) based on your criteria. Their feedback collected from interacting with leads will help you either refine your MQL qualification process or even revisit your Ideal Client Profile (ICP).



Empower your team by making sure to hold frequent meetings (at least weekly) to field their input to inform your marketing strategy. Since ICPs can change frequently during an economic softening, it is important to schedule regular meetings to discuss this.

Provide sales with an enablement toolkit and continually update this asset to continuously meet the changing needs of your leads. This is essential for the sales team to craft engaging outreach. Avoid outdated content, and make sure to create new materials for your representatives to use in their lead nurturing touches and sales pitches that speak to new pain points or needs.

Discover our VP of Strategic Accounts, [Jeff Cleasby](#), [4-chapter story in search of the perfect ICP and how to build your own](#) →





2. Nurture long-term clients

When resources are drying up, the temptation is to focus solely on bringing in new clients to maintain cash flow. However, this critical mistake is responsible for a common phenomenon during an economic softening—churn.

Even the most loyal of clients churn if they believe your solution does not meet their current needs. Therefore, make sure to nurture these long-term relationships with valuable resources that provide insights on how to solve their new challenges. Tailor your messaging to focus on the features of your existing products fit for the current times and field feedback from clients to help inform product marketing and the development of new solutions.

Be sure to make your Client Success team readily available, and remind your clients that you are here for their needs and will stand by them. Maintaining a healthy relationship with clients is not only essential for retention but also helps to increase client lifetime value (CLTV) as you will have more opportunities to demonstrate the value of your other solutions.

Out of adversity comes opportunity, and this can be the perfect time to test out new marketing approaches with loyal clients to strengthen relationships by helping them grow alongside your brand.



3. Maintain pipeline and ad spend

Make sure your lead pipeline is healthy and prepped for growth. You want to make sure lead generation continues and is supported by multichannel initiatives such as programmatic ads, so that your brand gains enough opportunities to sustain its growth.

Many companies cut lead generation budgets when they notice a decrease in leads during an economic softening. However, now is the time to maintain or even increase your budget for lead generation. Any limitations you set in terms of budget, will have a detrimental effect on the amount of new opportunities you are able to gain.



4. Reassess content and campaigns

Pause your campaigns and evaluate them to guarantee their messaging is relevant to the current challenges of your leads. As frustrating as it may be, campaigns that you have carefully built over months may quickly become irrelevant as the economy shifts, so it is important to assess what needs to be adjusted, or discarded altogether.

Create new content, with ideas and messaging carefully tailored to the new pain points and needs of your leads. This will make your content resonate better with them, and position your solutions as more fitting for their new demands.

2. Maintain business health: 5 marketing tactics to keep the organization running smoothly

You may already be conducting these activities, but now is the time to direct more attention at them and find room for improvement.



1. Leverage Human-to-Human marketing (H2H)

This leans on an already apparent [trend of B2B marketing becoming more similar to B2C](#). In other words, the concept of B2B buying and sales processes being entirely “rational” and devoid of emotional motivations is false.

Human-to-Human marketing (H2H) is a method of **humanizing your brand by making the people behind your business the main champion of your solutions**.

By creating an emphasis on real human interaction and relationships, your audience is more likely to associate certain professionals with your products, which pairs well with thought leadership and employee branding.



HOW TO IMPLEMENT H2H AT YOUR BUSINESS:



Position your C-suite as approachable thought leaders:

Go beyond regular thought leadership content, by establishing your business leaders as close allies of your clients. For example, have a director promote a case study in their own words rather than through regular corporate promotion.

Encourage leaders to add a personal touch to posts and to publish their own articles on their LinkedIn profiles that talk about products and business challenges. As your C-suite holds more authority in your space, and often wields a larger following on their personal profiles, they are a prime candidate for demonstrating your company's commitment to client needs in a relatable manner.



Start employee branding:

Your team is your best marketing. And not just salespeople, but the operations team, the engineers, and financial analysts. When “non-marketing” people talk about their brand, it feels more genuine (and convincing).

Align your team to promote your brand either with internal communications, prize raffles, blog posts with their insights, and spotlights on individuals’ contributions to the business and clients.



Get non-salespeople on calls with clients:

Most times, only sales is on the phone. You should, however, loop in the people responsible for the products on these calls (such as engineers and product designers).

Not only can they glean insights from technical data outside of the expertise of your sales team, but they can also question the clients directly on their problems and execute a plan to address those issues without having to be briefed later on. Moreover, bringing in the real humans directly responsible for the results being promised helps your clients to connect with your brand and put faces to names.



Increase personalization:

Blanket messaging can be particularly destructive for your brand image as it implies a lack of care. Avoid burning through leads by taking the time to get to know each contact as your relationship develops with them.

After all, connecting on a more real, personal level is at the core of H2H. Even something as simple as small talk at the beginning of a call helps to show genuine care that clients and prospects alike will value.

Learn the power of H2H in our [3-step strategy for delivering demand performance for our agency clients](#) by Natasha Matthewman, EMEA Agency Director →



2. Continue hiring and developing talent

Most companies lay off staff as soon as a crisis hits (as we saw in 2020 with the start of the pandemic). However, while this knee-jerk reaction is logical for the short-term, this is not the best approach to guarantee long-term growth.

The Great Resignation is partly due to these layoffs at scale, with companies firing staff and then requiring it as soon as the economy in 2021 started to bounce back—only to find themselves competing in a tight market for talent.

In the remainder of 2022, this phenomenon will likely repeat itself, and you would fare far better to maintain your talent and provide the support it needs to grow alongside your brand.

Regularly upskill your team members to meet the changing needs of your business, giving them the opportunity to boost their own development while aligned with overall business goals. Fostering personal growth even in uncertain times is essential for maintaining morale and improving staff retention—look after your people and they will look after you.

Cultivate skills that are integral to growing your strategy in both the short and long term. Not only does this maximize the value of staff for your company, but most importantly, it boosts morale and creates a company culture that will feed into the hiring of highly skilled employees.



3. Be transparent

In times of economic softening, transparency is a must. It is always best to accept challenges as they are and create strategies to overcome them rather than downplay their implications.

Utilize internal communications, such as email or newsletters to keep the entire organization up to date on the state of the business. This will help to align your teams on the single goal of overcoming shaky economic conditions as one. Avoiding commenting on the challenges being faced may have unintended consequences and legal implications depending on the gravity of the situation (i.e. partners and investors not being informed of the economic standing of their business).

Be honest, accept challenges, and use these moments of transparency to demonstrate your resilience to your teams in the face of the economic softening—and how your brand will continue to be profitable.



4. Cross-sell and optimize your channel mix

Marketing tends to be one of the first departments in a business to get a budget cut during an economic readjustment. Optimizing your channel mix and boosting cross-sells is a way to prove to stakeholders that your budget should be maintained and that it can generate the ROI they are looking for.

How to optimize your channels for economic efficiency:



Leverage [performance marketing](#): Since performance marketing is measured by actual engagement (metrics such as CPM, CPC, or CPA), it is one of the most-effective ways of distributing content. You pay per result, meaning nothing leaves your budget if the campaign does not deliver on its promise.



Measure engagement per channel and adjust your priorities: Omnichannel marketing is a priority, but in a time of constrained budgets, you should measure efficiency and shuffle your priorities. This does not mean abandoning channels, but focusing your attention where you will gain the best results. Creative work is probably one of the most time-consuming tasks of your marketing department, so be mindful of where their precious work should be directed.

The art of cross-selling lies in personalization. Showcase the value and specific relevance of your other offerings to leads and clients, rather than pitching data or jargon that may be conceived as generic. Prospects and clients alike will appreciate genuine care for improving their results with products they would actually benefit from.

Here are some ways to boost cross-selling:



Create a cross-sell nurturing cadence: Create a cadence with at least three emails that follow the “problem-results-offer” format for your target audience’s pain points. For example, you could cross-sell a content creation service by highlighting the problem of producing content at scale in the first email, the results you already delivered to clients in the second, and finally an email with a discount to acquire the solution.



Personalize cross-sell bundles for your target accounts: Offering a discounted bundle in the build up to finalizing a contract might be enough of an incentive to seal the deal with some added offerings. While the idea is to increase the return per contract, keep it relevant to the goals the client wants to achieve and do not try to hard sell. Doing so may result in the buying committee booking a meeting to evaluate, delaying the buying process and calling into question the worth of the bundle.



Cross-sell after delivering results: Leverage the value of post-campaign results to drive renewals and promote another product that would be beneficial to the client. This tactic also applies to trials and the “show instead of tell” method. Demonstrating the benefits of a product, and by proxy, proving a client’s need for said product, is a great way of motivating cross-sells.



5. Build social proof with reviews

Generating social proof is an ongoing process for all organizations. However, in times of economic softening, featuring recent positive reviews on your website and social media is a must for positioning your brand and offerings.

Keep in touch with clients and incentivize reviews so you can keep ranking up on websites such as G2 and promote this social proof on LinkedIn. How you choose to motivate your clients to share feedback should depend on your audience and be personal. Get creative. Many companies offer gift cards, however, you may find you have better results offering clients something more specific to their individual interests.

3. Futureproof your brand: 7 strategies for fostering business growth even during an economic softening

This final part of the playbook is focused on what you should build to promote growth for years to come.



1. Create Client Councils

Also known as client advisory boards, these are groups of clients that regularly provide feedback on your services.

[User experience \(UX\)](#) has become increasingly important in B2B marketing. As a result, gaining insights directly from your clients on how to improve products, their experience, and processes is essential.

Although similar in some aspects, client councils are far more effective than surveys and interviews in the long term for boosting client retention. Building a council allows you to empower clients to interact with one another in real-time to discuss ideas on how to gain more value from your brand and shape the experience they receive.

In a client council your brand is not the spotlight, but rather actioning improvements to your brand UX for your entire client base.



How to organize a client council from scratch:



Have a sample of 6 - 12 clients that represent different buyer personas: Keep feedback unbiased and fair by having a sample of your entire audience in the client council. For example, if you are a B2B company that services 12 verticals, be sure to have a representative from each industry in the council.



Organize meetings every semester with an “action item”: Every six months is enough time to act upon feedback given by the last client council meeting, but not too long for discussions to be forgotten. Set a meeting per semester on the agenda of each member, and have them vote on a topic/action item for the upcoming discussion. This not only increases engagement, but makes members feel like they are actually being heard. Discussions can be in-person or online depending on the availability of each member.



Create a “UX board” or “client feedback board” to act upon discussions from the meetings: A common mistake is to hold the meeting, but not assign a team (UX or marketing, for example) to action the insights shared. Make sure to demonstrate that the proposed improvements have been made in a timely manner to make your council feel that their voice has power and is valued.



2. Gain (and clean) more client data

During an economic softening, the priorities of clients are likely to change, which may impact their behavior and how they use your products.

However, gauging the extent of these changes requires reliable client data. Make sure you have a 360° overview of client behavior, with a comprehensive martech stack supported by integrations. Even if fully tracking client behavior is impossible, it is crucial to account for as many sources as your capacity allows, including [invisible actions in the dark funnel](#).

Compiling this data may reveal insights about your ICP:

-  Your current clients are acting differently, in the sense they no longer qualify as an ICP, or;
-  Your clients are your ICP, but you are failing to meet their current demands.

Both scenarios require data-driven action to ensure that messaging and products can be adjusted accordingly for these new demands. Findings will also help you to optimize your marketing budget, as you reassess campaigns.

Consider transforming a member of your team to become “Chief Data Officer” (CDO)

As these challenges emerge, CDOs can plan out strategies with full oversight of data for your entire business. This role is already a requirement by some countries (such as [Singapore](#)) due to privacy compliance laws—making this change now will allow you to get a headstart and plan ahead, rather than having to hastily create the role as global legislation continues to evolve.



3. Reposition your brand

Armed with insights from your client council and behavioral data, it is time to utilize these findings to inform the repositioning of your brand.

As always, context is everything. **The success of any marketing or sales campaign often rides on its ability to tackle the influences from lifetime or current industry trends** as well as answer the current needs and pain points of your clients or prospects. Therefore, effective positioning to meet the state of the market is essential to ensuring consistent growth and the completion of your objectives.

Tackling an economic softening starts with brand repositioning. As the market shifts and realigns, so will your competitors. Take time to be introspective, assess your standing, and how your current strategy is performing.

Here are some key elements to consider making adjustments to or completely overhauling:

Unique value

In times of economic softening and an increased pressure for marketers to provide consistent ROI, many services will fall onto your clients' chopping block as fat to trim. It is at this point where it is imperative to re-establish the unique value your brand and solutions offer your existing clients and prospects.

In terms of your brand, this is a great opportunity to revisit the roots and legacy of your company, as well as your original positioning. Assessing the foundation of your brand allows you to get straight to the original value proposition of your company beyond your products and to decide how it compares to the context of today.

From this introspection, identify your core competitive edge and work to capitalize on it. **Considering your legacy will help you build a roadmap for the future** and inform the next step of your brand repositioning.

Your company message

Part of your brand positioning should include how you build your new company message. This should leverage your unique value while also addressing the current climate and pain points of prospects and clients with honesty.

Build out omnichannel campaigns for your new messaging to help boost brand awareness, reach, and your standing during this time. Rather than overconfident sales language, convey expertise. **Establish your brand and team members as consultants ready to help your prospects and existing clients tackle the challenges coming their way.**

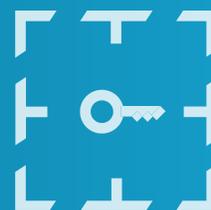
The point of your new message should not only be to convey integrity but also how your company stands by its clients and works in their best interests. Essentially, your prospects should see your brand as the answer to riding out the economic storm. This combined with a fierce thought leadership content marketing strategy will help lead the way for securing greater market share in your space.

Your website

As your channel hub, your website is the launch pad for your new strategy. Before implementing any costly changes, evaluate your site, the part it plays in your buyer journey, and whether there are any gaps to fill.

Use heat maps and dive into Google Analytics to identify user behavior and the pages that are performing the most. From these insights, you will be able to inform how best to develop your page to shape the user experience, boost your new message, and drive traffic to your offerings.

Empower your brand repositioning strategy with [7 key strategies from this article on Recession Marketing](#) by Victoria Albert, VP of Marketing at INFUSE →



4. Reposition your products

The other side of positioning is, of course, your products. After all, a lot of your company's unique value is the products that you offer your clients and prospects alike.

If the results of your products and their worth to your clients can be called into question, you will likely have more difficulty maintaining retention. Similarly, higher prices have the potential to be overlooked if the results heavily outweigh the cost involved.

It is without doubt that the best products are those that accurately reflect the needs of prospects and crucially, existing clients—all while helping you grow your business. Much like you should approach your brand image, re-examine the value of your products to identify features that still hold relevance or popularity.

During a time of economic softening, you either need to build out new products or revisit your most popular offerings and see what must change for them to continue to be popular solutions for common pain points as demands continue to shift for your clients.

Read the story on the award-winning [INFUSEmedia Free 100 & Business Reopening Program](#), which helped small and medium businesses worldwide during the pandemic →





5. Boost co-marketing with partners

Co-marketing is an effective strategy for collaborating with a brand that has a similar audience to yours to expand your outreach and optimize your budget.

[Content syndication](#) is a prime candidate for co-marketing, and involves brands partnering to publish content across both networks authored by thought leaders from each company. This strategy can include a whole range of content formats, from reports, to even creating [lead magnets](#) together to generate leads and share the pipeline between both parties.



6. Support your community and team

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) should always be an important focus for B2B organizations, however in the context of an economic readjustment, it is a necessity. When the economy is softening, CSR campaigns should become a key pillar of your branding—as both a recruitment and demand generation tactic to secure a positive culture at your company and elevate your mission statement.

After all, companies with a clear mission stand apart, particularly with Millennials and Gen Z. Establishing partnerships with nonprofits is not only a way to help your community, but also to build morale among team members and clients (you can even invite clients to participate).

Supporting the community and your team can go beyond financial aid, with actions such as:

- **A day off for voluntary work:** Your team can take a day off to help the community. This is a great moment for team building and allowing team members to help causes they care about, as well as to provide “hands-on” support beyond financial aid.
- **Free consultancy services:** Put your company know-how to good use and allow your experts to take time off to help a non-profit, whether it be with sales, IT, or even financial advice.

Now when it comes to supporting your team, make sure they have the outlets to voice their opinions, but also the resources they need to continue growing. Economic softening takes its toll on employees as not only the business reassesses its positioning, but team members’ own budgets are affected as the cost of living increases.

Therefore, providing resources for team members to thrive in this environment will set you apart from the competition and help to retain valuable employees. **This can include:**

- **Mental wellness support:** With access to therapists
- **Workshops:** To provide the tools and expertise needed for the new challenges of the business
- **Vouchers:** Gift cards, bonuses, and financial aid to soften the economic impact of the rise in cost of amenities



7. Focus on cross-departmental opportunities

As new ways of optimizing marketing emerge (such as [RevOps](#)), along with a greater need for marketing and sales alignment, B2B organizations are becoming increasingly focused on having a holistic view of their operations and with good reason.

This means moving away from a department-oriented business and pushing for greater budget optimization. Operations should be centered on revenue, with other metrics and goals serving to support this initiative.

With this revenue-oriented view, businesses will be able to focus on opportunities that all teams can collaborate on and grasp before competitors. Agility is essential, with streamlining management and sign-offs on projects becoming a must to seize and capitalize on opportunities quickly.

Final Takeaways

Based on all the recommendations in this playbook, here are the **four essential takeaways to remember as you prepare your business for an economic softening**:



1. Listen to sales and clients. Do not limit your lead generation pipeline

Encouraging active communication with your sales teams and clients is crucial when facing economic challenges.

Make yourself available for weekly meetings with sales to discuss the results from negotiations and lead nurturing to assess what should be improved. As for the clients, adapt your products for their current needs to avoid your brand becoming outdated as market demand changes.

Finally, for lead generation, make sure to maintain (or even increase) your budget and continue to promote your offerings with targeted ads that tap into the current challenges of your audience to keep your offerings top-of-mind.



2. Humanize your brand and build social proof

Implement H2H marketing to make your brand more approachable, and comment on the economic challenges of the economic softening with the faces of your team and thought leaders.

This makes your company stand out from competitors as innovative, timely, and considerate of what leads are facing now rather than what campaigns built a semester ago are still pushing out into the infosphere.

Being timely also ties in with the **last part of this second takeaway: social proof**. Make sure to keep in touch with loyal clients, as well as those you convert during the economic softening. This will help you garner a supply of recent reviews that attest to how you support your clients to build their success in the current environment, rather than a few quarters back when the economic challenges were different.



3. Collect client data and seize opportunities quickly

To futureproof your business, collect reliable data and feedback from clients to inform your marketing strategy and update your products. Client councils and collecting clean data are two essential components to inform the repositioning of your brand according to new economic challenges.

Agility is also a need, as acting upon new findings can quickly put you ahead of the competition. Support your team and adopt a cross-departmental (holistic) approach to align tasks for your team to capitalize on opportunities in a timely manner.



4. Reposition your organization for new economic challenges

Adjusting your marketing and offerings to the new economic climate is crucial to staying relevant in your industry.

As such, repositioning your brand (in terms of voice and messaging) as well as your products (in terms of unique benefits and value propositions) is essential to ensure you strike a chord with your prospects and clients.

Refocusing messaging and strategies on brand legacy and core value propositions can help to secure competitive positioning as a solution built to tackle current challenges. After all, companies still have problems to solve—they are just more wary of where to invest their money.

ACCELERATE YOUR GROWTH WITH HIGH-PERFORMANCE DEMAND

Coming out stronger from an economic softening relies on a well-structured plan and a team of experts ready to pivot to new challenges quickly.

Our [dedicated award-winning Client Success team](#) helps businesses large and small meet their demand generation goals, even during times of economic uncertainty.

Our INFUSE Demand Strategists are available on your schedule to craft a **high-performance demand program** to propel your growth.

All our demand programs are custom-tailored, and adjusted to cater to your specific economic needs as your audience's priorities change.



THE ECONOMY CHANGES, BUT YOUR KPIS DON'T

The INFUSEmedia team is experienced in helping businesses grow in times of economic softening. Since 2012, our Demand Strategists have launched hundreds of campaigns, all of them revenue-driven and personalized for each client's goals.

Let's futureproof your business together —>

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