Be Category-Famous and Accelerate Social Trust

What 1500 B2B marketers told us about how to build a successful B2B brand

2025 B2B Marketing Benchmark: The Influence Report

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Table of contents

The B2B marketers' context

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Today's B2B marketers are navigating a complex, high-stakes landscape where pressure to prove that marketing investment is a fundamental driver of business growth continues to be a challenge: the buyer groups that marketers need to influence are getting bigger and the additional functions within them are trying to minimize both organizational and career risk. The iconic phrase ***"Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM"*** might have been coined in the last century, but the underlying buyer anxiety that marketers need to address remains.

In this environment, marketers are under pressure to do more than just build brand awareness with individual decision-makers. They have to create **collective confidence in their brand** across diverse buying groups—including with many stakeholders who may not be product experts at all.

In our most recent annual survey of B2B marketers conducted with Ipsos, we saw very positive signs: for instance we saw that B2B marketers feel that they are winning the battle for brand investment: almost 70% of B2B marketers across our global survey said that their brand awareness budget had increased over the past year, with almost one in five (19%) saying it had increased by more than 25%.

But when it comes to understanding the strategic levers that drive actual confidence to buy, we wanted to dig deeper into what marketers really believe drives business growth. What drives business growth and purchase behavior? Which marketing levers work best and how do they rank? Where do marketers trip up and what opportunities could we surface?

We have assembled detailed insights from a global survey of marketers so that other marketers will be able to benchmark their own experiences against a global peer set. Our report draws on insights from 1500 B2B marketing decision-makers. It explores **what** marketers think makes a brand successful, **how** those perceptions influence brand-building strategies, and **which** marketing levers drive those results today.

Key findings

Across 1,500 global marketing decision-makers, a clear story emerged:

Being a brand that is recognised, understood, talked about and visible amongst peers is even more consequential than being a household name: trust in a B2B brand is more effectively constructed from social validation within the category, than from fame outside it.

Marketers believe that social validation from customers and peers has more influence on whether brands are trusted than product attributes, price competitiveness or brand awareness. Whether given broad choices or narrow ones, marketers consistently value customer and peer endorsements over signals that drive visibility or transactional benefit.

When asked explicitly, marketers undervalue category relevance as an objective. But indirectly, they overwhelmingly pick activities that implicitly drive category relevance as the ones they believe drive business growth. There is a clear opportunity to define "category relevance" as a core marketing objective, executed through a new focus on peer advocacy, social proof, advocacy and relatable validation.

Building collective confidence and trusted brands is a full-funnel marketing activity: It requires building category relevance at the top, validation in the middle, and better lead-scoring measures at the bottom.

Marketers want leads scored for value, not volume. Marketers believe that more intelligent lead scoring based on better qualification would close more deals even if the volume of leads was less.

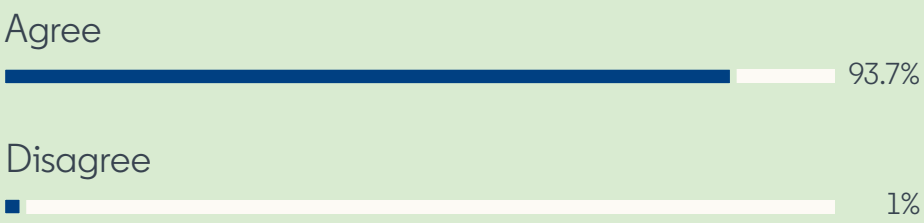
Building trust in a B2B brand isn't just a tactic. It's the strategy.

Trust is not a soft outcome. It is the foundation of brand success.

We began by asking a straightforward but powerful five-point scale question: ***"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: 'Building trust is the most important factor for achieving success as a B2B brand'?"***

The answer was overwhelming. 93.7% of marketers agreed or strongly agreed that trust was the most important factor in building a successful B2B brand. In fact, only 1% of our sample disagreed with the statement outright.

'Building trust is the most important factor for achieving success as a B2B brand'



93.7%

of marketers agreed or strongly agreed

That gave us a compass: in the eyes of today's marketing leaders, trust isn't a soft or secondary outcome, it is no longer a "nice-to-have" or a brand halo effect. In the eyes of today's marketing leaders, building trust is an absolute foundation of brand success. It is the key to influence, growth and strategic success.

But what exactly builds that trust? What do marketers think makes a brand influential? And how does that influence get built up across the buyer journey?

Brand trust comes through connection even more than from exposure.

1 Prioritizing influence factors

We asked marketers to rate a series of brand attributes based on how influential they were in building a successful brand. The list included peer recommendations, customer endorsements, product features, fame, and price.

To be clear, we intentionally chose a series of familiar marketing attributes/objectives that we knew were important from their existing relevance. This was not an exercise in working out what was important vs what was not. We wanted to find out, from a list of already important attributes, which were the most influential in the minds of marketers.

This question was asked as a **progressive grid**, so each respondent was shown all options and asked to select their influence level on a five-point scale. This gave us a clear sense of how these elements are prioritized in an unconstrained evaluation. Even marginal differences would give us a map of significant differences in priorities.

We found that:

Customer Recommendations

1.25x
proved more influential than price competitiveness

1.27x
were more important than being a household name

1.20x
proved more influential than having advanced features or unique offerings

Peer Recommendations

1.20x
were more influential than price

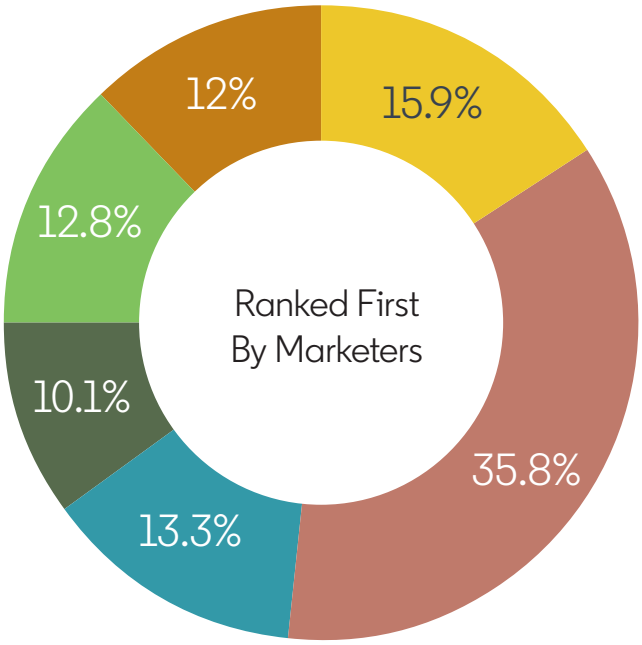
1.22x
were more influential than being a household name

1.15x
proved more influential than having advanced features or unique offerings

Q. How influential are the following in building a successful brand? (Base: Total = 1500)

2 How do these attributes stack up against each other?

Having surfaced the idea of social validation as something marketers define as a core dimension of influence, next we wanted to re-evaluate these answers through a ranking lens. In other words, to take the open choices we gave marketers (as above) but this time constrain them into a strict ranking framework where marketers told us exactly how important they thought these attributes were, ranked against each other. In this exercise, marketers had to make relative tradeoffs, making their selection process even more focused.



Q. Below is a list of factors that can influence how trusted a brand is perceived to be. Please rank these factors in order of importance, with 1 being the most influential and 6 being the least influential in building brand success. (Base: Total = 1500)

This chart gives us an even more detailed view:

Being recommended by customers is 3x as influential as being competitive on price.

When asked specifically, Marketers said that peer and customer recommendations are relatively more influential than fame, product and price competitiveness put together.

Interestingly, when marketers are explicitly asked to rank category fame as an attribute, they score it relatively poorly (10.1%) . But when asked to rank the most important attributes that they believe make a brand successful, they overwhelmingly choose signals of category relevance as the most important attributes (peer and customer recommendations totalling 51.7% are signals of relevance within the category much more than outside it). There is a clear opportunity to reframe the importance of strategies that explicitly build category fame through advocacy and validation.

Recommended by customers is

3x

as influential as being competitive on price

3 And finally, what happens when marketers are forced to pick a winner?

Finally, we stepped up the pressure, this time asking marketers to consider a range of elements that foster trust in a B2B brand. This time we used the device of forced-choice tradeoffs where we asked marketers to pick one of two possible options. We wanted to surface what marketers chose when two meaningful—and valuable—elements were in direct conflict.

For example: do marketers think peer credibility matters more—or less—than brand awareness? How do they value testimonials vs innovation? Or analyst opinions vs customer opinions?

Again, these relative values have to be seen in the context of asking marketers to choose between two attractive things, not one good thing and one bad thing. And in the context of not giving marketers a free choice of everything! But we wanted to tap into the real sensitivities: just like when the dentist taps on the tooth that has been aching to diagnose the next steps, we wanted to do the same to the questions that marketers worry about.

Across five binary comparisons, marketers repeatedly prioritized signals of credibility over those of scale or innovation. They said:

#1 Being recognised as a brand is **4x more** influential than being competitive on price.

#2 Peer credibility/recommendations are **1.65x more** important than high brand awareness.

#3 Customer endorsements are **2.2x more** valued than cutting-edge innovation that doesn't have as much in the way of endorsements.

#4 Customer endorsements are marginally more valued than analyst/expert endorsement, but both are very valued.

#5 Long term relationships are more trusted than newer entrants with opportunistic terms.

Q. Considering the elements that foster trust in a B2B brand, please select the option you believe contributes more to establishing trust within each of the following pairs. Please select one option for each pair. (Base: Total = 1500)

Recognition vs Price

Marketers overwhelmingly favor being widely recognized over being most cost-effective.

Brand reputation is seen as more than 4x more defensible than price competitiveness.

A brand that is widely recognized across the industry — 80.7%

A brand that is the most cost-effective in the industry — 19.3%

Peer Recommendation vs High Awareness

62.3% value being recommended as reliable by peers over simply having high brand awareness.

Peer credibility beats general fame.

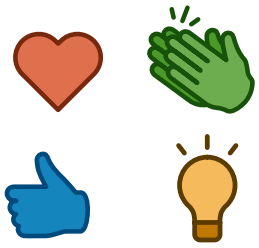
A brand that is recommended by peers as reliable — 62.3%

A brand that has high awareness — 37.7%

Endorsements vs Innovation

68.7% prefer strong endorsements/ testimonials over cutting-edge innovation with less proof.

Proof beats novelty. Marketers would rather have credible endorsements than unproven innovation.



A brand with many strong customer endorsements and testimonials — 68.7%

A brand known for cutting-edge innovation but with fewer endorsements — 31.3%

Customer vs Analyst Endorsement

58.1% of marketers said that being endorsed by customers was more valuable than being endorsed by experts/analysts.

Buyers trust other customers more than institutional experts.

A brand that was highly recommended by its customers

58.1%

A brand endorsed by industry experts and analysts

41.9%

Relationships vs Financial Flexibility

71.7% prefer long-term customer relationships over flexible terms from a new market entrant.

Relational trust matters more than opportunistic terms.

A brand with long-term customer relationships

71.7%

A brand that offers more flexible financial terms but is newer to the market

28.3%

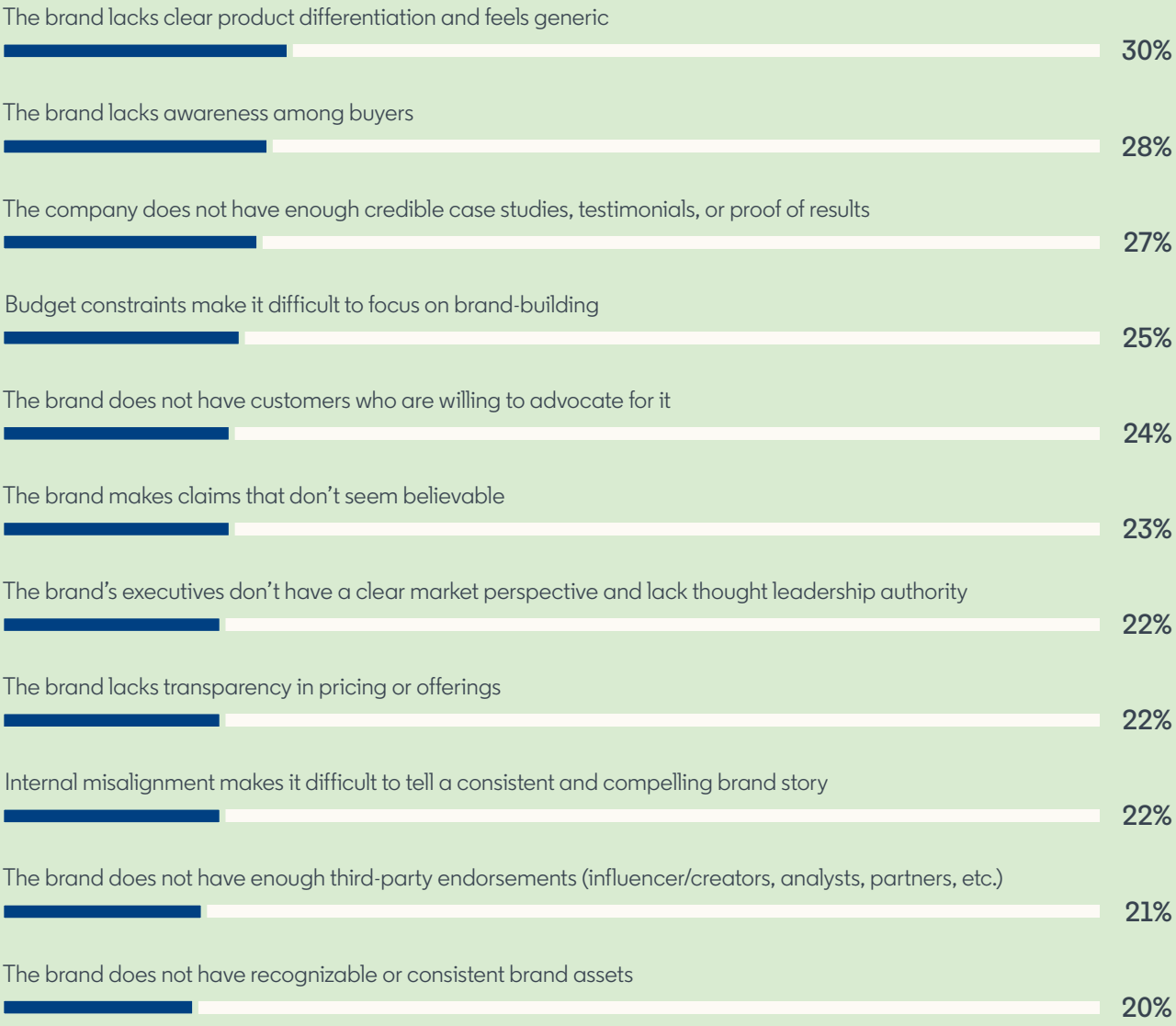
There's no such thing as being trusted in secret. Trust requires awareness and social proof.

Brands lacking category fame and endorsements fail to build trust

Having covered a lot of territory about what marketers believe makes up trust in a brand, we then wanted to ask the opposite question: *"What are the biggest obstacles to trust?"* Here, we asked marketers to **select up to three options** in a **multi-select question** format, surfacing what was a cluster of perceived limitations.

Perhaps what is most striking in our findings is that there are no clear winning or losing outliers. Rather, almost any incidence of not being visible and not being endorsed rang alarm bells.. Marketers not only believe in awareness and recommendations as a positive - they also believe that the absence of **either** category awareness, distinctiveness **or** validation is a liability.

Percentage vs Attribute



Q. What are the biggest barriers to building a trusted B2B brand? Please select up to three. (Base: Total = 1500)

Trust is a full-funnel activity powered by social, peer and expert validation.

How trust shows up across the funnel

Next, we asked marketers what would give them the edge over a close competitor at the different stages of the funnel.

TOFU: Category level fame matters more than TV fame.

Being known as a trusted and reliable brand in the category was the most important factor, in fact **more than 2x more important** than being a household name brand on TV.

Having a memorable, creative brand and being recognized by experts as innovative (even if not more widely known) were each **1.6x more important** than winning prizes for products and both more than **2x more important** than winning awards for company culture.

Being known and trusted was **1.25x more important** than being memorable or recognized as experts.

MOFU: Validation from impartial experts wins votes here.

Being named the top solution by analysts/industry experts got the biggest vote (37.9%), while customer testimonials (video: 34.3% and written: 34.1%) also stood out. Both were more valued than content produced by the company itself. In fact, endorsements from experts were **1.7x more likely** to give a brand the edge over a rival compared to written content from the company itself. Note to marketers, if you want to create explainer content for your own company, **video is 20% more effective** than the same content in written form.

Q. Please select the following attributes that you feel would be most helpful in providing your company an edge over your closest competitors at the top/mid/bottom of the funnel? Please select up to three. (Base: Total = 1500)

BOFU: B2B Marketers pull on transactional levers, but what they really want is a more intelligent system for scoring leads.

The bottom of the funnel is where decisions happen, so it is not surprising that marketers put a level of faith in the basics: functional and risk-reducing levers like free trials and demos, personalized solutions (perhaps powered by AI) or content specifically designed to close deals rated reasonably well.

But what was surprising is that most marketers said that what they wanted even more than the basics, and what they wanted significantly more than *"more leads,"* was *"a more intelligent scoring system for leads."* What marketers really want when it comes to having an edge over their close competitors is a system that has better signals around things that really matter. This was what they believed would give them the maximum edge, even if they ended up with fewer leads.

Conclusions

Across 1,500 global marketing strategy decision-makers, almost all of whom had primary decision-making responsibility, a clear story emerges:

- Marketers overwhelmingly believe trust is the foundation of brand success.
- They consistently prioritize the relational proof and social validation of peer endorsements and customer advocacy over product features, fame, or price.
- Category confidence is more valuable than awareness: when forced to choose, marketers consistently value emotional safety and peer-backed certainty over signalsthat drive visibility or transactional benefit.
- Building confidence is a full-funnel marketing activity which requires building category relevance at the top, validation in the middle, and better lead-scoring measures at the bottom.

Three recommendations for B2B marketers

1

Be category famous, not household-name famous.

- Invest in building distinctiveness and trust within your category—through the voices of real decision-makers and insiders. Fame outside your category matters less than relatable recommendations inside it.

2

Accelerate social trust: advocacy is a brand investment, not a sales tactic.

- Prioritize customer testimonials, peer endorsements, and real success stories.
- Track earned credibility: number of peer endorsements, testimonials published, customer co-marketing.
- Educate internal stakeholders that trust is a leading indicator of sustainable growth—not a lagging metric.

3

Score leads according to value, not volume: marketers want more intelligent signals all the way down the funnel.

- **TOFU:** Establish reputation and insider credibility.
- **MOFU:** Provide concrete social proof and educational clarity.
- **BOFU:** Score leads according to value, not volume: marketers want a more intelligent lead-scoring system that surfaces: better quality leads even if there are fewer of them: marketers believe more intelligent lead-scoring will close more deals on fewer leads.

Methodology

This report examines key elements of brand success, focusing specifically on trust and influence as measured within this survey. It is important to acknowledge that additional factors contribute to brand success, and therefore, this data may not represent a comprehensive view of all contributing elements. The questions and answer options utilized in this study are not exhaustive and are informed by LinkedIn expertise on the topic of brand success.

The study employed a robust methodology to gather insights from B2B marketing strategy decision-makers, almost all of whom had primary decision-making responsibility across various industries. A sample of 1,500 participants was recruited by Ipsos using a strategic blend of 70% expert network sample and 30% B2B panel providers. Participants completed a 20-minute device-agnostic survey, accessible on both mobile and desktop platforms. The primary focus of the study was to explore and analyze the challenges faced by senior-level B2B marketers on a global scale. To ensure the relevance and quality of responses, strict eligibility criteria were applied. All respondents held positions of senior manager or above and were required to have direct input in marketing decisions within their respective organizations. The survey design was informed by extensive industry expertise and drew upon findings from previous LinkedIn research. The data is based on respondents from the survey and may or may not be representative of all marketing professionals.

The sample was distributed across countries as follows:
United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, India and Australia (n=250 each)

RESPONDENT PROFILE:

Job title: CMOs (n=344), *Other Marketing C-Suite—President, SVP, VP (n=400), Director/Manager (n=756)

Industries: Financial services (n=274), Tech (n=310), Agency (n=315), Professional Services (n=288), Health (n=60), Manufacturing (n=73) & Other (n=180)

Company Size: Small (10-49 employees) n=202, Medium (50-499 employees) n=719, and Large (500+ employees) Enterprises n=579