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Category Entry Points In A B2B World

Linking Buying Situations To Brand Sales

By Professor Jenni Romaniuk

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Foreword

"The most important search engine is still the one in your mind."

This statement makes a profound point all marketers should internalize about buyer behavior: most purchases start not by searching Google, but by searching our memory.

If you believe most buyer behavior starts with memory, it then follows that the primary job of marketing is not to generate clicks, but instead to generate memories.

Professor John Dawes articulated the competitive advantage "brand-relevant memories" offer a brand in his paper on "The 95-5 Rule," writing:

> *Advertising mainly works by building and refreshing memory links to the brand. These memory links activate when buyers do come into the market. So, if your advertising is better at building brand-relevant memories, your brand becomes more competitive.*

At the B2B Institute, we're always on the search for "contrarian and right ideas" that can give our clients a durable competitive advantage. The idea that marketing mainly works via memory and not clicks is so tantalizingly contrarian – and the evidence indicates right – we simply knew we had to bring it to our clients.

However, we also recognize that moving from clicks to memories is a massive paradigm shift for marketers, requiring a how to guide on building and measuring "brand-relevant memories." When it comes to explaining "brand-relevant memories," there is no one better than Professor Jenni Romaniuk, who wrote the book on what she calls "Category Entry Points" (CEPs). In the following paper, Professor Romaniuk introduces CEPs to B2B – detailing why CEPs are important, and showing how to identify, prioritize, and build CEPs. Professor Romaniuk also models how to turn CEPs into "Mental Availability Metrics" which demonstrate how linking your main brand messages to key buying situations leads to increased customer acquisition and customer retention.

The study of CEPs fits squarely into a broader ambition of the B2B Institute: helping marketers better align with finance to measure and report on the commercial benefits of brand building. In developing this research, we were reminded of a financial concept called capital allocation, whereby CEOs allocate capital to only the most financially and strategically attractive projects. We see CEPs as capital allocation for marketing and advertising – specifically for messaging.

Today, we see massive fragmentation in messaging, with brands often running hundreds or thousands of ads a year. Such a fragmented approach makes it extremely difficult to build strong links between your brand the most commercially valuable buying situations, limiting prospects for growth. Employing a CEP-led marketing approach ensures marketers allocate capital only to ads that link to the key buying situations a brand should want to dominate commercially.

We'll close with one of our favorite marketing one-liners: 'the brand that gets remembered is the brand that gets bought.' We hope this paper makes clear just how true that is, as well as just how important it is to demonstrate that building memories today contributes to a steady stream of cash flows tomorrow.

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The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science

Based at the University of South Australia, the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute is the world's largest centre for research into marketing. The Institute's large team of marketing scientists are advancing marketing knowledge and busting pseudo-science and marketing myths. Through books, specialist research services and the Corporate Sponsorship Program, the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute is helping marketers all over the world to develop and benefit from a culture of evidence-based marketing.

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Category Entry Points In A B2B World

Background And Value

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Category Entry Points In A B2B World

Growing Sales

In B2B, as B2C, the evidence suggests the path to company growth requires building mental and physical availability (see prior report 'The Double Jeopardy Law in B2B shows the way to grow'). *Mental Availability* is about being easily thought of in buying situations, while *Physical Availability* is about being easy to buy.

Category Entry Points (CEPs) are the cues that category buyers use to access their memories when faced with a buying situation and can include any internal cues (e.g., motives, emotions) and external cues (e.g., location, time of day) that affect any buying situation. While each category buyer and each buying situation is unique, there are common recurring themes which we call CEPs. CEPs influence which brands are initially mentally available in decision-maker memory – and form the list of initial 'go to' options. Understanding CEPs helps you build useful associations between your brand and the category's core buying situations. Therefore when a buyer enters the category, your brand has a greater chance of being mentally available, which is the first step to being bought.

Category Entry Points (CEPs) are the cues that category buyers use to access their memories when faced with a buying situation.

This paper explains why CEPs are important, as well as how to identify, prioritise and build CEPs. This paper also shows how to turn CEPs into Mental Availability Metrics to measure effectiveness over time. For consistency the term 'decision-maker' will be used to describe the buyer whose memory we want to influence.

Background To Category Entry Points

When entering a buying situation, a category buyer first draws on existing memories to identify potential brands for purchase. These memory-generated brands are the starting point for the buying process. Other sources and search engines (e.g., google, colleagues) are usually only consulted if the memory-generated options are insufficient. And, even when consultation does occur, buyers still show a bias for the brands they already know.

Memory-generated brands are the starting point for the buying process.

Each buying situation is shaped by its own combination of internal and/or external factors. CEPs represent these internal/external factors that guide memory retrieval. While the specific CEPs may change, buyers in B2C or B2B environments go through similar memory processes - because all buyers draw on the same brain. In a B2C situation, a buyer might use her memory to identify possible restaurants for a Valentine's Day meal, and the CEPs might be *somewhere romantic* and *has a good vegan menu*. In a B2B situation, a buyer might use her memory to identify possible catering companies for a client function on Friday, and the CEPs could be *has good vegan options* and *can also provide staff to serve*.

Building Wider, Fresher Memory Networks

It is a competitive advantage for a brand to be easily retrievable when any CEP is activated because a brand that comes to mind is more likely to be bought than one that does not. The way to make links more easily retrievable, or 'fresher', is to have the brand share the page/screen/audio moment with a CEP. This process of memory building is called '**co-presentation**'.

Marketing communications plays a major role in building wider, fresher, memory networks for the brand. When properly utilized, marketing communications can:

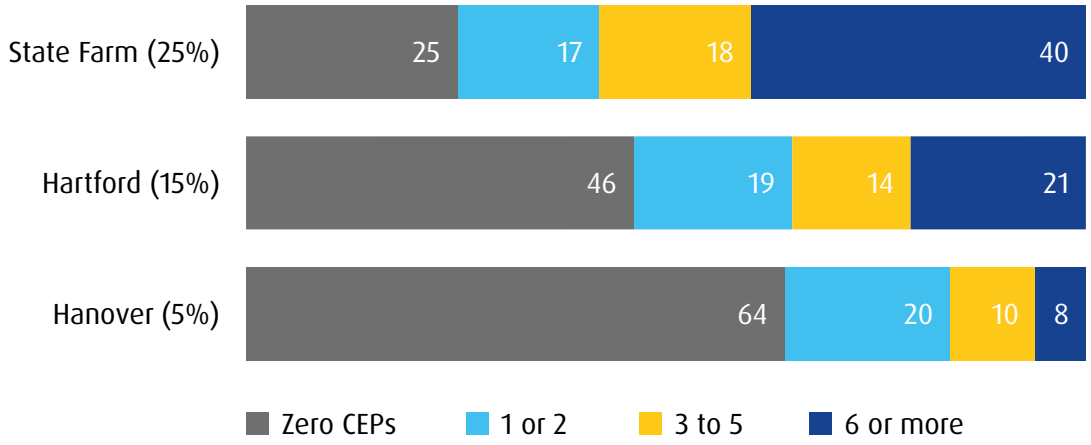
1. Create the opportunity to build CEP-Brand links by showing decision-makers advertisng that links CEPs to the brand.
2. Scale the reach of these CEP-Brand link building opportunities through a wide reaching media plan, so more decision-makers can quickly build links between brands and CEPs.
3. Refresh the brand's links to CEPs in the minds of decision-makers in the face of decay and competitive activity.
4. Repeat this process for different CEPs over time (as budgets allow) to widen, as well as freshen, the brands' memory networks.

Over time, and as different CEPs are messaged, this scaled, repeated, co-presentation process will help the brand build wider, fresher memory networks amongst as many category buyers as possible. This wider, fresher, network of likely retrieval cues helps the brand be more mentally available and, along with good physical availability, win more sales.

The Value Of Building CEPs

The outcome of wider, fresher network of CEPs is highlighted by comparisons of bigger and smaller brands in the same category. Bigger brands/companies have more people who have linked more CEPs to the brand than smaller brands – this is what we mean by wider, fresher networks. For example, in Figure 1 from the US Business Insurance category, State Farm, with 25% penetration, has more decision-makers with six or more CEPs and fewer with zero CEPs than smaller brands Hartford and Hanover. If you want to grow, you need to grow the CEP network too.

Figure 1: Comparison of Number of CEPs linked to bigger brands versus smaller brands, Business Insurance customers in the USA (n=606)



To highlight the value of building CEPs, here is a test of the relationship between the number of CEPs B2B customers hold about a brand, and the probability of switching from their business insurance supplier for a specific business insurance product at next renewal. The full analysis was across 17 insurance products.

To estimate the probability of switching we use the Juster scale, which is a well validated scale for buyers to estimate future behaviour (Wright and MacRae, 2007, Juster, 1966). In this approach, buyers assign a number on a verbally anchored 11-point scale. For this research, B2B Insurance decision makers assigned a probability of switching providers for each of the Insurance products they currently owned.

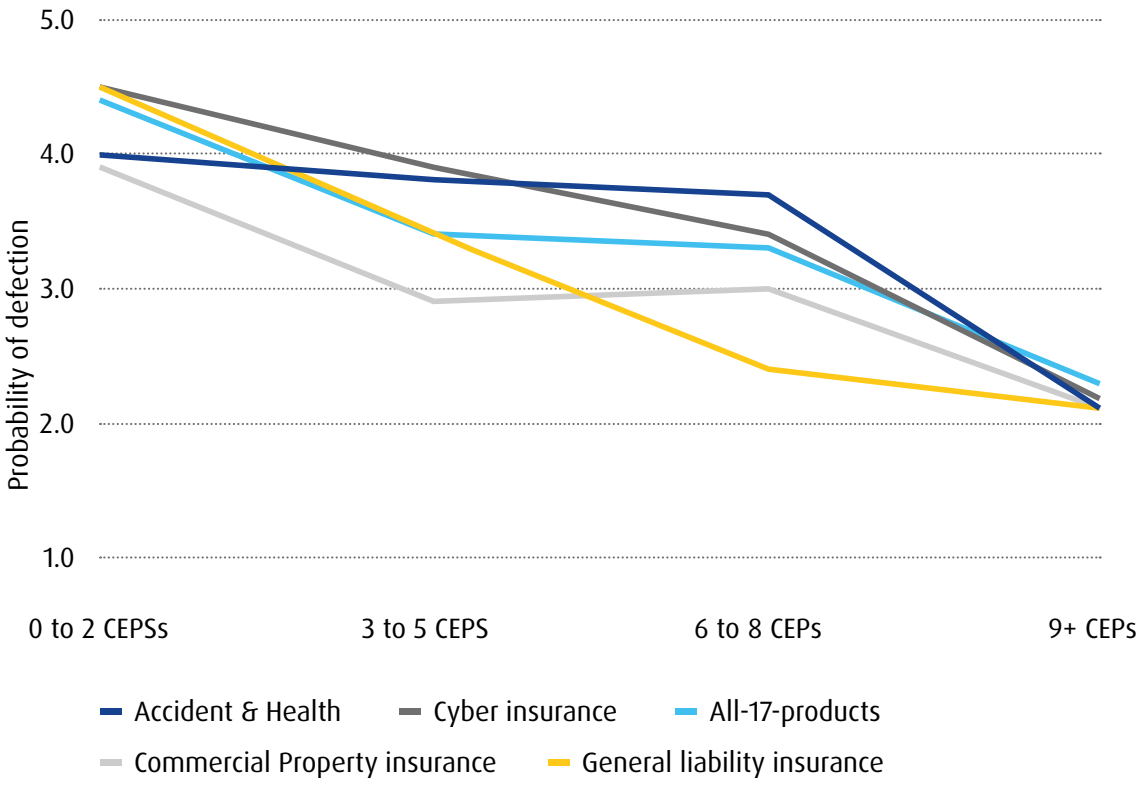
Figure 2: The Juster Scale

No chance, almost no chance [1 chance in 100]	0
Very slight possibility [1 chance in 10]	1
Slight possibility [2 chances in 10]	2
Some possibility [3 chances in 10]	3
Fair possibility [4 chances in 10]	4
Fairly good possibility [5 chances in 10]	5
Good possibility [6 chances in 10]	6
Probable [7 chances in 10]	7
Very probably [8 chances in 10]	8
Almost sure [9 chances in 10]	9
Certain, practically certain [99 chances in 100]	10

Figure 3 shows the negative relationship between the number of CEPs attached to a brand and the probability of switching business insurance providers on average and for four specific business insurance products.

- **The fewer the CEPs** that a customer links to a brand/company, t**he greater the likelihood of switching** from that brand/company for an insurance product held.
- Regression modelling across 17 products finds a significant relationship between a customers' probability of defection and the number of CEPs in 16 of 17 product categories (at $p<0.05$ level[1]).
- The average slope of a regression line is -0.2. As the average baseline probability of defection for someone with 0-2 CEPs is 4.4 (average across 17 categories), this suggests that in this category, for each additional CEP a customer has linked to the brand in memory, probability of defection lowers by 5%[2].

Figure 3: Examples of the relationship between Number of CEPs and Probability of Defection across four Business Insurance products



1 the exception was travel insurance, just failing to meet the threshold p=0.10

2 While the Juster scale has been found to have a good relationship with actual future behaviour and a better predictor than standard purchase intention verbally-anchored scales such as Definitely will, probably Will etc WRIGHT, M. & MACRAE, M. 2007. Bias and variability in purchase intention scales Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 35, 617-624., it should be noted that not everyone with a high probability of defection actually, switches brands and some people with a low probability of defection still switch.

This relationship replicates results from past research in B2C telecommunication services and B2B banking services using both probability of switching and actual switching behaviour (e.g., Romaniuk and Sharp, 2003). Importantly for acquisition, the number of CEPs also increases the likelihood that your brand will be the one selected when a company switches (Romaniuk and Sharp 2000; Romaniuk 2001).

The importance of wider, fresher, memory networks suggests we need to separate out the single execution goal versus long term brand messaging objectives. In each advertising execution, a single, clear message is more easily remembered than multiple or complex messages. Therefore to effectively build CEP memories, we need to focus on one CEP per execution.

However over time, the evidence tells us that a brand needs to build linkages to more CEPs (wider networks). Therefore the long-term message strategy needs to build brand links to different CEPs, rather than just continuously focusing on only one CEP. Your creative and media budget determines if the brand can have multiple executions that message different CEPs to advertise more than one CEP concurrently, or whether the number of CEPs in messages is slowly built over time because you need to wait til the next budget period to develop a new execution for a different CEP. This change of CEP focus widens the decision-maker's memory network for the brand.

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The CEP Roadmap

Four Steps To Building A Winning B2B Marketing Strategy

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Working With CEPs

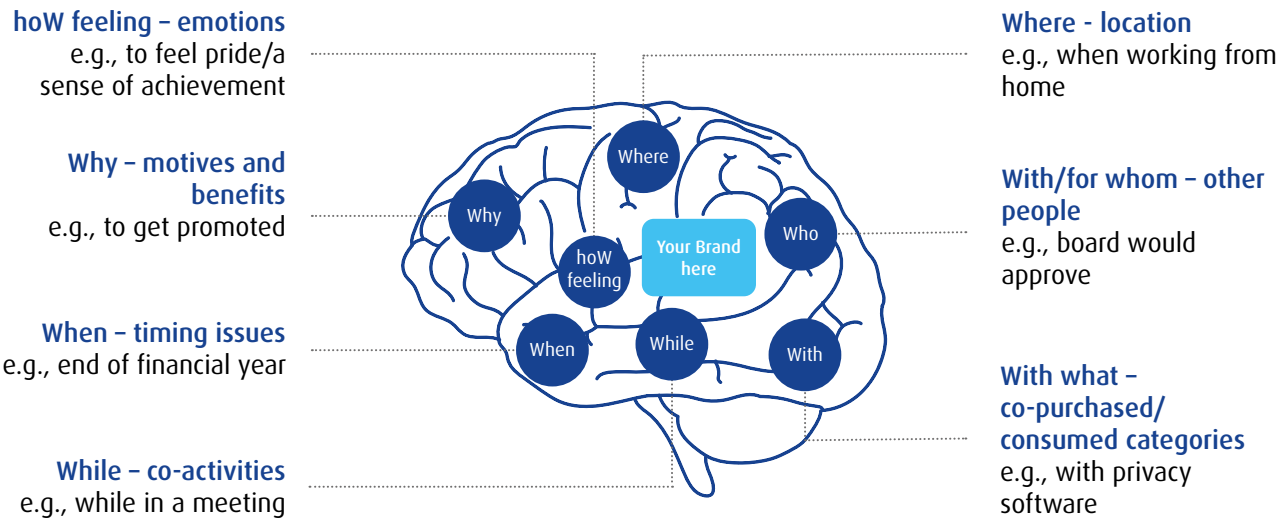
Here are four steps to help you work with CEPs:

1. **Identify** CEPs in the category
2. **Prioritise** CEPs for your brand/company/portfolio
3. **Build** CEPs into your marketing communications
4. **Measure** how effectively your brand is linking to those CEPs in category buyer memory

Step 1 - Identifying CEPs In B2B markets

How do we find a category's CEPs? This is about discovering the retrieval cues category buyers use to evoke brands – or rather what would fit at the end of this question: 'Looking for a brand that...<insert CEP>' The W's framework can give some structure to CEPs generation, and can ensure we get diversity across buyers and time.

Figure 4: Diagram of the W's



CEPs come from category buyers, marketers and/or (if available) sales teams. The W's act as prompts to help achieve a comprehensive list of CEPs. In B2B categories, the process is enhanced if we also consider each W from two perspectives:

The Business

The decision-maker can have business objectives in mind, as well as business characteristics such as size or length of time in the market.

The Professional

In addition to the role as a decision-maker, we need to think about the professional as a person with their own desires and ambitions too, such as making a splash to help get promoted, demonstrating skills, or even just not getting fired.

The W's For B2B Contexts

Here are each of the W's in more depth, with example questions and CEPs. These questions can be developed into a survey to ask your customers, or used as prompts in brainstorming sessions for marketing and/or sales staff.

When

When means thinking about the influence of timing on CEPs. This can be the timing of the buying situation, such as morning versus evening, during the weekday versus out-of-work hours, summer versus winter. It can also relate to the time taken to do something, such as when something needs to be done quickly, or there is time for a more in-depth process.

Possible '**W**hen' questions:

- Are there any times of the day when your business is more likely to <buy/use the category>?
- How does your business' <category buying/ usage> vary in summer versus winter?

Possible '**W**hen' CEP examples:

- Can help us cope with increased demand in the summertime
- Need to quickly borrow funds for a new purchase
- To achieve a quick resolution

Where

Where encourages you to think about the influence of physical locations on category experiences. In a business context this can include the location of the business, such as head office versus regional offices; it can be the location of the workforce, such as employees working from home; it can also be the location of their business' customers, that is whether they are local, interstate or international.

Possible '**W**here' questions:

- Where do your staff use <insert category>?
- How do the category requirements for <insert category> vary when your staff work from home versus are in the office?

Possible '**W**here' CEP examples:

- For staff that are working at home
- For international reach

While

While refers to the influence of activities that occur before, after or during category buying or usage. While these activities are not the act of buying, they influence the options likely to be suitable for the buying act. For example, if launching a new product, a decision maker might not want to take additional risks and may opt for a 'safer' supplier. However, if no other big events are happening, a decision maker might be happier to explore more options.

This can also include the anticipation of potential relevant activities, such as speculated interest rate rises making borrowing money more expensive, which could impact capital expenditure.

Possible '**W**hile' questions:

- What were you doing before you experienced a need for <insert category buying/usage>?
- Are there any business activities that coincide with <insert category buying/usage>?
- After you finished <insert category buying/usage>, what did you do?

Possible '**W**hile' CEP examples:

- To cope with increased demand after an advertising campaign
- To use during a digital transformation
- To help launch a new product/service to our customers
- To enable the business to adapt when external factors change unexpectedly

with **W**hat

With what leads us to consider the other products and services that complement/influence the category experiences. This is particularly relevant for products/services that need to integrate with other parts (machines, software) the business already uses.

Possible 'with **W**hat' question**:**

- What other products do you use with <insert category>?
- How do these products/services interact with each other?

Possible 'with **W**hat' examples:

- To integrate easily with our financial reporting software
- To be securely used by a wide range of devices
- To be bundled with Microsoft Office

Why

Why encourages us to examine the influence of the decision maker's motivations which could be personal, such as improving their own job performance, or for the business, such as helping a business achieve sustainability goals, or improving staff retention.

Possible '**W**hy' questions:

- Why does your business buy <insert product/service>?
- Which business objectives does your <insert product/service> advance?
- How does <insert product/service> affect your job?

Possible '**W**hy' examples:

- To increase productivity
- For a safer workplace
- Help demonstrate the company is a good corporate citizen
- Makes a tedious task easier to do

ho**W** feeling

How feeling covers the influence of emotions on which companies are suitable. Influential emotions experienced prior to buying or using the category, such as negative emotion to be alleviated (e.g., frustration, boredom), emotions experienced during buying/usage process, or desired emotional outcomes post buying/usage. These emotions can be experienced by the decision-maker, other people in their organisation, or their customers.

Possible ho**W** feeling questions:

- How did you feel before you bought/used <insert product/service>? What words or phrases would you use to describe your emotions?
- After buying/using <insert product/service> how do you feel?

Possible ho**W** feeling examples:

- To feel like I am excelling at my job
- To help staff enjoy being in the office
- To give confidence to someone feeling a bit anxious
- Would help reassure customers about their choice

with/for **W**hom

With whom is especially important in B2B, where the complex nature of buying committees heavily influences the buying situation. Here are some key people to consider:

- *Senior management* - in line with the old adage 'no one ever got fired for buying IBM', B2B decision makers can have senior management reaction to a supplier in mind. For some products/services, bigger, well-established options might be more suitable. In other products/services, a newer, more exciting company might reflect better on the decision-maker.
- *Peers* - relationships with peers can be complex. On one hand they can be a source of support, and respect, on the other hand they can be competitors for organisational support and future promotions.
- *Junior staff* - some decisions impact junior staff, such as buying business software. Therefore, anticipation of the reaction, adoption challenges, and level of support needed for ongoing training of junior staff can shape decision-makers thoughts about suppliers.
- *Their customers* - if you supply a business with an input that it needs to service its own customers, then they will likely have their own customers' anticipated needs in mind.

Possible with/for **W**hom questions:

- Are senior management involved in the process of buying <insert category/service>? If so, how?
- How does <insert category/service> affect the work practices of junior staff in the organisation?
- How does <insert category/service> affect your own customers' experiences with your business?

Possible with/for **W**hom examples:

- A company that the board would respect
- Junior staff would find it easy to use
- Allows me to show my expertise to customers
- Allows someone to demonstrate they can bring innovation into the business

Step 2 - Prioritising CEPs In B2B Markets

Even after removing duplications and combining like-minded CEPs, there will likely be a long list to consider. Therefore we need to strip away the CEPs that are less useful choices, to see the more valuable opportunities that remain. Choosing the CEPs to invest in is a process of elimination: eliminate the CEPs that are poor choices for your brand, so that the possible ones remain.

We can draw on three forces, which we call The 3C's, that influence whether a CEP has value for a company/brand.

Credibility captures the influence of the brand's historical and current (perceived) product range. You want to find out if there are less viable options because of your brand's past or current product range and remove those.

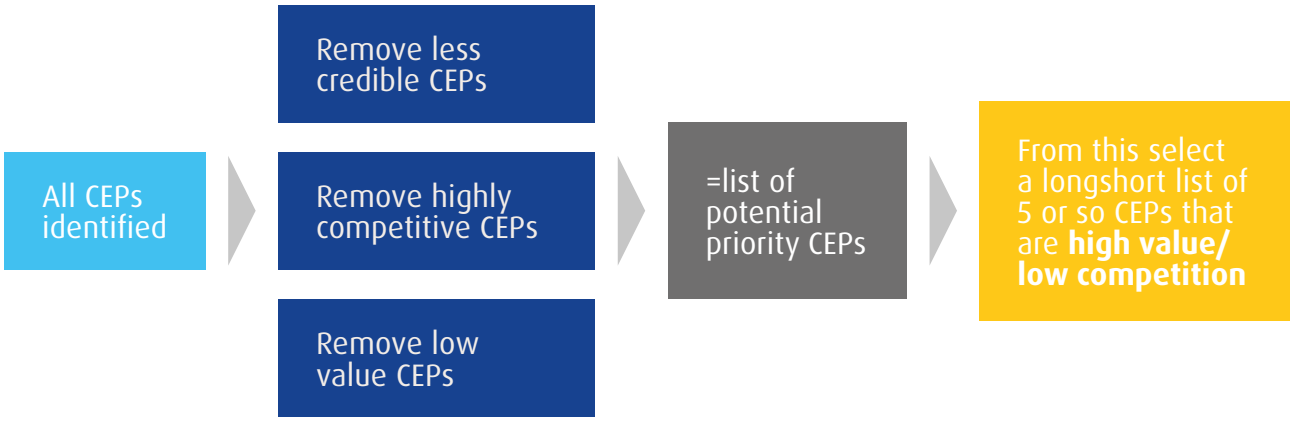
Competitiveness captures the influence of the competitors, their historical marketing activities, and their perceived product range. You want to find CEPs that are cluttered mental spaces with lots of competitors advertising that message, and so can be eliminated as priority CEP options.

Commonality captures the influence of sales from each CEP, and that some CEPs are less valuable because they are less often relevant and/or generate lower revenue. These CEPs can be downgraded as priorities when compared to more valuable CEPs.

Choosing the CEPs to invest in is a process of elimination: eliminate the CEPs that are poor choices for your brand, so that the possible ones remain.

The search for priority CEPs in B2B categories can be illustrated via Figure 5.

Figure 5: Process for identifying Priority CEPs



Credibility

Credibility is about the brand's ability to deliver a product/service that is suitable for the CEP. It is part internal (what products can you sell?) and part external (what do customers perceive you can/do sell?). Therefore we need to pass CEPs through two credibility filters.

The first filter draws on customer perceptions. The linkage between brands and CEPs is measured using a free choice, pick any approach where the CEP is presented with a set of brands/companies underneath with a 'none' button. Customers indicate which companies/brands they link with each CEP and can name as many or as few as they like.

Table 1-3 is a truncated, blinded example from n=311 online advertising decision-makers in the United States, run on behalf of LinkedIn Marketing Solutions. The example is a truncated table of nine brands and 11 CEPs, with the number of responses for each platform on each CEP (see Table 1). You will see that the columns and rows are organised by column and row totals. This is to reveal the two underlying patterns in the data.

- Larger brands (e.g., Companies A and B) have more responses than brands with fewer buyers (e.g., Companies G and H).
- Some CEPs have more responses for all brands (e.g., *Build a bigger online/social media community)* than other CEPs *(e.g., Main goal is ROI, conversion rate or cost per lead*).

The column and row totals can be seen in the table through the bigger numbers in the top left-hand corner, to the smaller numbers in the bottom righthand corner[3]. The interaction between these two patterns is what enables us to calculate an expected value for every brand on every CEP[4]. We can then compare the actual survey response for each brand on each CEP against the 'expected' value for the same brand on each CEP. This data allows us to evaluate, from a customer perspective, the company/brand's CEP performance relative to competitors.

Once we know the actual and expected values, we can then classify our brand on each CEP as having:

Mental advantage – with a positive deviation on this CEP, the brand/company is more likely to be thought of than expected. It usually comes from past marketing communications combined with the portfolio the company/brand is known to offer.

Mental disadvantage - the brand/company has a negative deviation on this CEP, and therefore is less likely to be thought of as an option when this CEP is a retrieval cue. This means this CEP message currently lacks credibility, either because of a deficit in the brand, or at least one competitor dominates so much that other brands are at a large disadvantage. Remedial action is needed before it could be a credible message, but it may also make sense not to message where you have a mental disadvantage.

As expected - the brand scores close to zero, and therefore lacks any mental advantage or disadvantage when that CEP is used. This is an externally credible message that needs to be mapped against internal credibility assessments before becoming a priority CEP.

A sensible threshold is +/-5pp deviation for a mental advantage/disadvantage classification. If a brand/company is between the +5 and -5pp then its score is classified 'as expected'.

3 For more on the background to this approach see: Romaniuk, J. and B. Sharp (2000). "Using known patterns in image data to determine brand positioning." International Journal of Market Research 42(2): 219-230.

4 This pattern holds for all image attributes, not just CEPs

Table 1: Actual n scores for each brand on each CEP

	A	B	C	D	E	F	LinkedIn	G	H	Row Sum
Building brand awareness is the goal	134	114	120	104	110	102	94	63	55	**896**
Expanding to new markets, incl. international	136	120	117	132	98	91	85	60	47	**886**
Appear in an environment that is a good fit with brand	125	113	112	119	112	108	92	56	48	**885**
Confident your advertising will be noticed/cut through	133	117	109	97	103	96	86	69	65	**875**
Objective is to generate sales/leads	120	111	115	141	94	81	85	59	55	**861**
Communicate a more complex message	123	117	108	101	108	82	81	65	69	**854**
Objective is keep customers/ build loyalty	133	103	102	119	111	81	92	56	51	**848**
The board/senior management would approve	121	105	115	112	87	89	114	52	53	**848**
Reach a tightly defined/very specific target	133	100	111	98	99	88	78	82	55	**844**
Want to feel in control over advertising delivery	131	118	100	101	95	93	73	63	49	**823**
When the stakes are high, and someone is nervous	121	106	114	107	80	79	79	62	51	**799**
Column Sum	**1410**	**1224**	**1223**	**1231**	**1097**	**990**	**959**	**687**	**598**	**9419**

To calculate the expected responses, we use a the following equation from Romaniuk & Sharp (2000):
Expected score = (Column total*Row total)/Total total

Let's take LinkedIn and *Building brand awareness is the goal* as an example:

- 94 out of 311 online advertising decision makers connected LinkedIn to this CEP.
- To calculate the expected score for LinkedIn on, we use the LinkedIn column total (959) and the Building brand awareness is the goal row total (896).
- This leads to the equation = (959*896)/9419 = 91 (see Table 2)

Table 2: The expected n scores for each brand on each CEP

	A	B	C	D	E	F	LinkedIn	G	H
Building brand awareness is the goal	134	116	116	117	104	94	91	65	57
Expanding to new markets, incl. international	133	115	115	116	103	93	90	65	56
Appear in an environment that is a good fit with brand	132	115	115	116	103	93	90	65	56
Confident your advertising will be noticed/cut through	131	114	114	114	102	92	89	64	56
Objective is to generate sales/leads	129	112	112	113	100	90	88	63	55
Communicate a more complex message	128	111	111	112	99	90	87	62	54
Objective is keep customers/ build loyalty	127	110	110	111	99	89	86	62	54
The board/senior management would approve	127	110	110	111	99	89	86	62	54
Reach a tightly defined/very specific target	126	110	110	110	98	89	86	62	54
Want to feel in control over advertising delivery	123	107	107	108	96	87	84	60	52
When the stakes are high, and someone is nervous	120	104	104	104	93	84	81	58	51

From the actual and expected scores we calculate the difference, which is the size of the mental advantage (if positive) or mental disadvantage (if negative). Continuing with our example:

- the actual score for **LinkedIn** on *Building brand awareness is the goal* = 94
- the expected score = 91
- Therefore the percentage point difference is ((94-91)/311)*100 = +1pp.

Table 3 shows the deviations from expected values for the whole table. Most brands score very close to expected on all CEPs. Out of the 99 possible brand-CEP deviations, 93% score as expected (within the +/-5pp band). Of the deviations of note, six are mental advantages including Linkedin on *The board/senior management would approve* (+9pp) and Company G for *Reach a tightly defined/very specific target* (+7pp). There is only one is a mental disadvantage, and scores lower than -6 (Company D on *Confident your advertising will be noticed/cut through*).

Table 3: Actual (Table 1) - Expected (Table 2) scores, converted to percentage points

	A	B	C	D	E	F	LinkedIn	G	H
Building brand awareness is the goal	0	-1	1	-4	2	3	1	-1	-1
Expanding to new markets, incl. international	1	2	1	5	-2	-1	-2	-1	-3
Appear in an environment that is a good fit with brand	-2	-1	-1	1	3	5	1	-3	-3
Confident your advertising will be noticed/cut through	1	1	-1	-6	0	1	-1	2	3
Objective is to generate sales/leads	-3	0	1	9	-2	-3	-1	-1	0
Communicate a more complex message	-2	2	-1	-3	3	-2	-2	1	5
Objective is keep customers/ build loyalty	2	-2	-3	3	4	-3	2	-2	-1
The board/senior management would approve	-2	-2	2	0	-4	0	9	-3	0
Reach a tightly defined/very specific target	2	-3	0	-4	0	0	-3	7	0
Want to feel in control over advertising delivery	3	4	-2	-2	0	2	-3	1	-1
When the stakes are high, and someone is nervous	0	1	3	1	-4	-2	-1	1	0

Once CEPs that lack external credibility are identified, the remaining CEPs need to undergo the second filter, which is an internal credibility assessment. Here you can check the CEP requirements against the product portfolio and innovation pipeline to see if the company can offer options that would be relevant to the CEP. If the gap between company capability and CEP requirements is unbridgeable in the near future, this is not a sensible CEP to prioritise.

Competitiveness

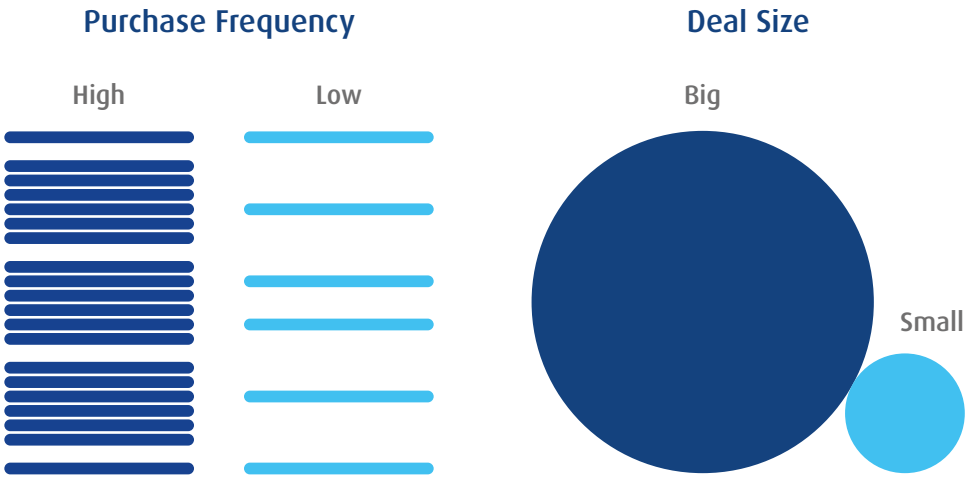
A second force that impacts whether a CEP is a sensible messaging option is its level of mental competition - which is how many other brands have a mental advantage on the CEP. This can be quantified by comparing the credibility results across all brands for each CEP.

- CEPs with more brands with mental advantages have higher mental competition.
- CEPs with few or no brands with mental advantages have lower mental competition.

Remember: linking a brand to a CEP is not a 'one and done' task. Memories need to be consistently refreshed to combat decay. Having other brands with similar messaging makes this task even more challenging, on top of the normal difficulties gaining cut-through/audience attention.

Commonality/Currency

Figure 6: Size Up The Commercial Value Of Each Buying Situation



In B2C markets, looking at how often a situation comes up can be a useful approach to determine the future value of a CEP. This also works for many B2B categories, particularly those largely aimed at a wide SME market. This can be determined by asking customers about the incidence of past encounters with each CEP.

For some B2B categories, or customer segments, the value of a single order can vary quite dramatically. In these cases, we recommend a 'currency' approach and use accompanying methods to quantify the value of the opportunity and adjust for the fact that two CEPs can have the same number of customers using it to retrieve brands but can have very different $ value outcomes.

The long-short list is the 5-8 CEPs that present messaging opportunities for the brand/company over time.

Long-Short List

The long-short list is the 5-8 CEPs that present messaging opportunities for the brand/company over time. This list gives the company/brand options to achieve the long-term goal to build wider, fresher networks. Once the credible, low competition and high common/currency CEPs have been identified, then these can be incorporated into marketing activities including advertising, sales scripts, thought leadership, and social media activity.

The aim is to give the brand/company CEP messaging options in the short, medium and longer term.

Step 3: Building CEPs

Brand associations are built by someone experiencing the brand and the source of the association, at the same time. This process freshens memories and builds new ones. Therefore if you want to build any CEPs, these CEPs need to be incorporated into marketing activity that reaches customers. **By illustrating a core buying situation with your messaging, and branding effectively, you can start to link your brand to that CEP in buyers' memories**. This building/refreshing of memory increases the odds that buyers will recall your brand when they enter the market to buy your category in the future.

Once you have decided on the CEPs you want to build, look for opportunities to:

- Link them to the brand in customer touchpoints, such as advertising, websites or brochures.
- Highlight them for sales and service staff to incorporate into their conversations with current and potential customers.

Remember we want to build wider, fresher memory networks of CEPs linked to the brand. This means when building CEPs in marketing communications, there are three dimensions to consider:

More decision makers - achieved by improved reach, cut-through and/or branding

More CEPs - achieved by varying messaging and/or product range across different campaigns

Relative to competitors - retrieval from memory is a competitive process – you want more linkages than competitors in the memory of category buyers

Step 4 – Measuring The Effectiveness Of Building CEPs

If you have successfully built Mental Availability, you should be able to see evidence in the CEP memories that customers link to your brand.

Drawing from how we build Mental Availability, there are three key Mental Availability metrics (see Table 4 for an example from the US Business Banking sector):

1. **Mental Market Share** - This is the brand's share of CEP-Brand linkages in the category = **(n linkages for a brand) / (total linkages for all brands across all CEPs)**

   For example Barclays gets 3,732 linkages out of a total of 37,948, which equals 9.8%. In contrast RBS has 1,670 linkages out of 37,948, which equals 4.4%.

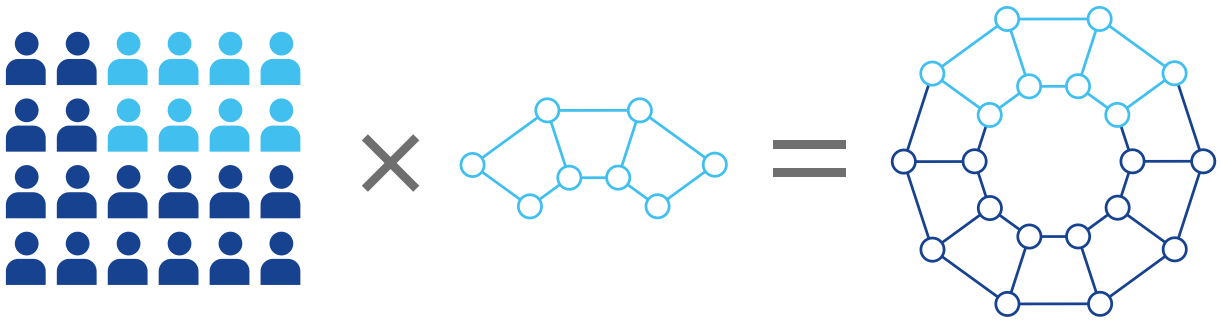
2. **Mental Penetration** - This measures if the brand is present in memory, such that it has any chance of being retrieved = **(n category buyers with linkages for a brand) / (total sample size)**

   Out of the 609 business customers surveyed, 472 linked Barclays with at least one CEP. Therefore, mental penetration is 472/609 or 78%. RBS has only 321 business customers linking them to one CEP, which is a mental penetration of 53% (321/609).

3. **Network Size** - This is the measure of how wide the memory network is, amongst those with mental penetration = **(n linkages for a brand) / (n category buyers with linkages for the brand)**

   For example Barclays network size is 7.9 (=3,742/472), while RBS is 5.2 (=1670/321)

Figure 7: Three Key Mental Availability Metrics



Mental Penetration
% of the category with at least one CEP link

Network Size
Average number of CEP links among those with Mental Penetration

Mental Market Share
Brand's total % share of CEP-Brand linkages in the category

Table 4: Example of Mental Availability Metrics for Business Banking in the UK (n=609)

Brands over 5% Customers	Total N of linkages across all customers and CEPs (Column 1)	Mental Market Share (Column 1/ Sum all brands)	N of customers with at least one CEP linkage (Column 2)	Mental Pen. (N of customers/ total sample size)	(Column 1/ Column2)	Network Size
Barclays	3732	9.8	472	78	=3742/472	7.9
HSBC	3220	8.5	427	70	=3220/427	7.5
Lloyds	2893	7.6	433	71	=2893/433	6.7
Natwest	2788	7.3	410	67	=2788/410	6.8
Nationwide	2615	6.9	400	66	=2615/400	6.5
Santander	2594	6.8	402	66	=2594/402	6.5
Halifax	2481	6.5	390	64	=2481/390	6.4
TSB	1711	4.5	346	57	=1711/346	4.9
RBS	1670	4.4	321	53	=1670/321	5.2
Metro	1319	3.5	288	47	=1319/288	4.6
JP Morgan	1254	3.3	280	46	=1254/280	4.5
Citibank	1149	3.0	266	44	=1149/266	4.3
Deutsche Bank	1088	2.9	250	41	=1088/250	4.4
BNP Paribas	818	2.2	210	34	=818/210	3.9
Credit Agricole	754	2.0	205	34	=754/205	3.7
Other brands	7,862	21.7	-	-		
Sum (all brands)	**37,948**	**100**	**-**	**-**		

We can plot a brand's path to growth in Mental Availability Metrics. For example if RBS wants to grow to Santander level (from 4.4 to 6.8, or 55% increase), it's Mental Penetration would grow around 13pp while its Network Size would grow from 5.2 to around 6.5. More customers thinking of the brand in more Business Banking situations.

Conclusion

If we understand Category Entry Points, we can build memories that make it more likely the brand will be thought of in buying situations – in line with the long-term goal of creating wider, fresher, useful, brand memories.

CEPs can be implemented in creative across customer touchpoints, with each execution aimed at building/freshening a single CEP. Think of it as single execution = single message; but with the aim to build up a portfolio of different executions, each with a different message. Importantly, each message is relevant to a substantive enough number of category buyers to create commercial value. And each of those messages requires sustained investment over time to first build links amongst as many decision-makers as possible, and then second, to keep these valuable memory structures fresh.

Finally, understanding CEPs can help identify gaps in the company's product/service portfolio that innovation could fill to make sure the product range aligns with the messaging in marketing communications. This takes us into the realm of Physical Availability, which is about making the brand easy to find and buy in buying situations.

For more on Physical Availability, stay tuned for the report "Physical Availability for B2B marketers" coming soon.

Importantly, each message is relevant to a substantive enough number of category buyers to create commercial value. And each of those messages requires sustained investment over time.

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