The B2B Institute

How Salesforce's Trailblazer Campaign Builds Mental Availability

A Case Study By The B2B Institute

The Brand Unawareness Problem

Every brand has a brand awareness problem, but that is just the beginning.

Most marketers would find this statement hard to believe, or at the very least, easy to ignore. A recent LinkedIn survey shows that only 16% of B2B marketers list building brand awareness as a marketing objective. It seems most marketers, and especially marketers at large companies, take brand awareness for granted.

Brand unawareness may seem intuitive for small brands and startups, but you may wonder, “How could it be possible that the biggest, most famous brands in the world have awareness problems?” After all, isn’t fame just awareness at scale?

The story of Salesforce – one of the biggest brands in the world – helps to illustrate how.

Build Availability, Not Awareness

Everyone has heard of Salesforce.

Most people are familiar with some aspect of the Salesforce brand: the cloud logo, Salesforce Tower in San Francisco, or Dreamforce – the largest company conference in the world.

In other words, Salesforce is famous. It's famous today, and it was famous when Colin Fleming took the helm as SVP of Global Brand a few years ago.

Sales were climbing, and the once rebellious startup with the fiery "Die Software Die" campaign had established itself as the market leader in CRM. So when it came to brand building, it seemed like there was very little work to be done.

But for all its fame and market share growth, Salesforce had a pesky underlying issue hindering its next phase of growth: did people know what Salesforce actually sold?

The answer was no.

"We discovered most people had heard of Salesforce, but few people knew how we could help their business grow. ***We actually had an awareness problem."***

Colin Fleming, SVP of Global Brand, Salesforce

Despite its fame, Salesforce suffered from a very specific type of awareness problem: a deficit in situational awareness.

General awareness is great, but that alone won't build a brand. It's not about *what* people think of a brand – it's about *when*.

Brands grow when they readily come to a buyer's mind in as many buying situations as possible.

This situational awareness is called "mental availability" and, the more mental availability a brand builds, the more the brand grows.

How Building Mental Availability Grows Brands

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute defines mental availability as "the propensity of the brand to be thought of, or noticed, in buying situations." In other words, brands with high mental availability are "easy to mind" in relevant buying situations.

While this seems simple, this school of thought requires a radical reconfiguration in the way B2B marketers think about marketing. Specifically, mental availability requires marketers to become less brand-centric, and more customer-centric.

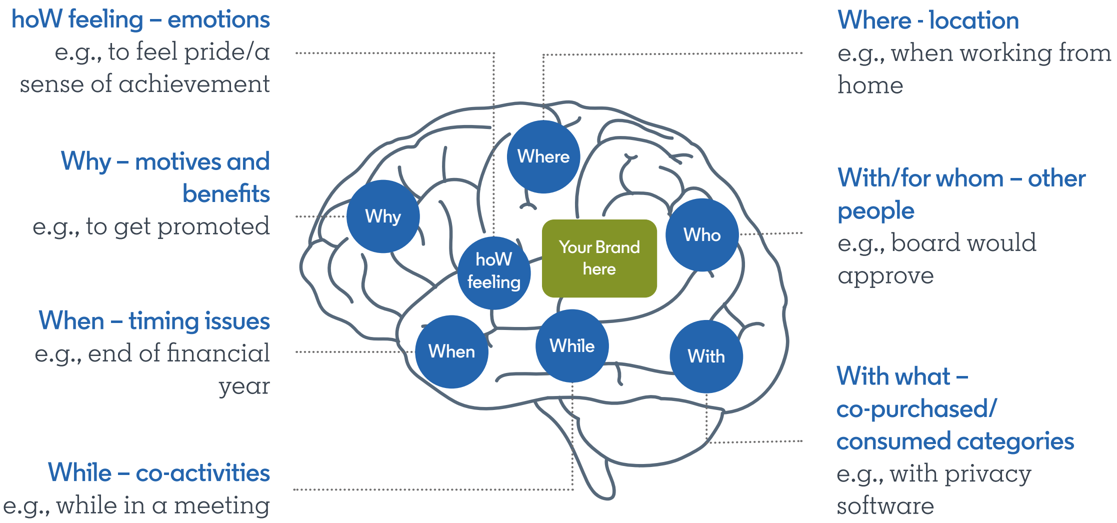
Brand-Centric Framing	Customer-Centric Framing
What do customers think of my brand?	**When do customers think of my brand?**
Ads generate demand.	**Needs generate demand.**
I define my competitive set based on target demographics and product attributes.	**Category Entry Points shape retrieval and define which brands we compete against at each choice context.**
My job is to move customers down the funnel.	**Most customers aren't even in a funnel, or in-market, at any given time.**
Customers are loyal to brands they love.	**Every brand has a 'normal' distribution of buyer feelings – a few that love the brand, a few that reject the brand and most that think it is good enough to buy on occasion.**

Putting yourself in the mind of your customer isn't easy, but it is essential to success. If you can understand the needs and triggers that cause your customers to enter the market – if you can identify those category entry points – you can use them to build mental availability.

A marketing strategy that optimizes for mental availability does so by building more awareness, across more buying situations, in the minds of more buyers.

Do this, and you will grow your customer base, your sales volume, and if you do it better than competitors, your market share.

The Relationship Between Category Entry Points and Mental Availability



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The Trailblazer Campaign: Moving From Awareness To Mental Availability

Salesforce's Trailblazer campaign, first introduced in 2019, is a best-in-class example of how brand marketers can build mental availability in B2B.

Interestingly, the main characters in the Trailblazer campaign – Astro, Codey, and friends – were originally developed for use in Trailhead, Salesforce's online learning environment. Over time, Fleming and his team observed that the Trailhead community was developing an affinity for these characters:

> *"You saw customers wearing Astro pins on their sweaters and backpacks, and it became pretty obvious there was an opportunity there. We needed to transform the brand, and these characters are a big part of that story … Astro and friends help us tell stories about our products and create an emotional connection with our customers."*

Astro and friends are powerful brand assets. They are famous and unique, and they help link Salesforce to several CRM buying situations – or category entry points – in a story-telling format that resonates with both in-market and out-market buyers. This helps the advertising effects linger long after exposure.

How To Build Mental Availability - Follow RMB To Stay Remembered

Reach
the whole category

Message
around several category entry points across your campaigns

Brand
everything

The Trailblazer Campaign is a best-in-class example in B2B because it follows the RMB Method:

- **Reach:** use broad segmentation to reach all buyers in the category.
- **Messaging:** use creative advertising with messaging that links to different category entry points.
- **Branding:** use distinctive brand assets with heavily branded messaging to build recall.

The Trailblazer Campaign built mental availability for Salesforce by linking it to key CRM buying situations, and it proved that mind share drives market share. By Fleming's own account,

> "Like any major company, we measure our brand metrics, and since adopting our new look-and-feel and the characters, our numbers have nearly doubled. For a year or two I was shunned from any strategic sales conversation – I was the guy bringing Astro and Codey the bear into the conversation. The dynamic has changed now that we've seen the results in our brand metrics and our business performance."

This success was hard-won. The buttoned-up corporate culture and short-term sales pressure typically found in B2B tend to extinguish any real prospects of building mental availability – which requires bold creativity and is built incrementally over time. In the world of B2B, a focus on low costs and fast results usually wins out.

But efficiency does not equal effectiveness, and advertising effectiveness is what drives long-term market share growth. To better understand the drivers of B2B marketing effectiveness, we partnered with the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute – the leading marketing science research university in the world.

Our findings can be distilled to one key idea: focus on building mental availability with your advertising, and don't get distracted by other advertising objectives.

We hope the following papers and ideas help you keep focus and grow share.

1 | **The 95-5 Rule:** Prime Future Buyers With Brand Ads To Grow.

2 | **B2B Brand Rejection:** Focus On Awareness, Not Perception, To Grow.

3 | **The Duplicate Purchase Law:** Steal Mindshare From Big Brands To Grow.

4 | **The Double Jeopardy Law:** Reach Future Customers To Grow.