2017

7 Trends In B2B Marketing

Think Like Disney And 6 Other Strategies

LinkedIn

Welcome To Our B2B Trends eBook

The world of B2B marketing is undergoing rapid change, with technological solutions proliferating at a dizzying rate. Recognizing strategic opportunities amidst all the tactical noise is an ongoing challenge.

Having spent the past decade working in many different roles in B2B marketing, both client-side (General Electric), agency-side (WPP), and platform-side (LinkedIn), we've had the opportunity to observe a number of very successful B2B campaigns, and we couldn't help but notice a few recurring patterns.

The following eBook is an attempt to document those patterns, and distill our collective experiences into some practical advice for B2B marketers. As strategists with LinkedIn Marketing Solutions, we've spent the last few years testing these theories in the wild, and we're excited to share our findings with you.

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7 Trends In B2B Marketing

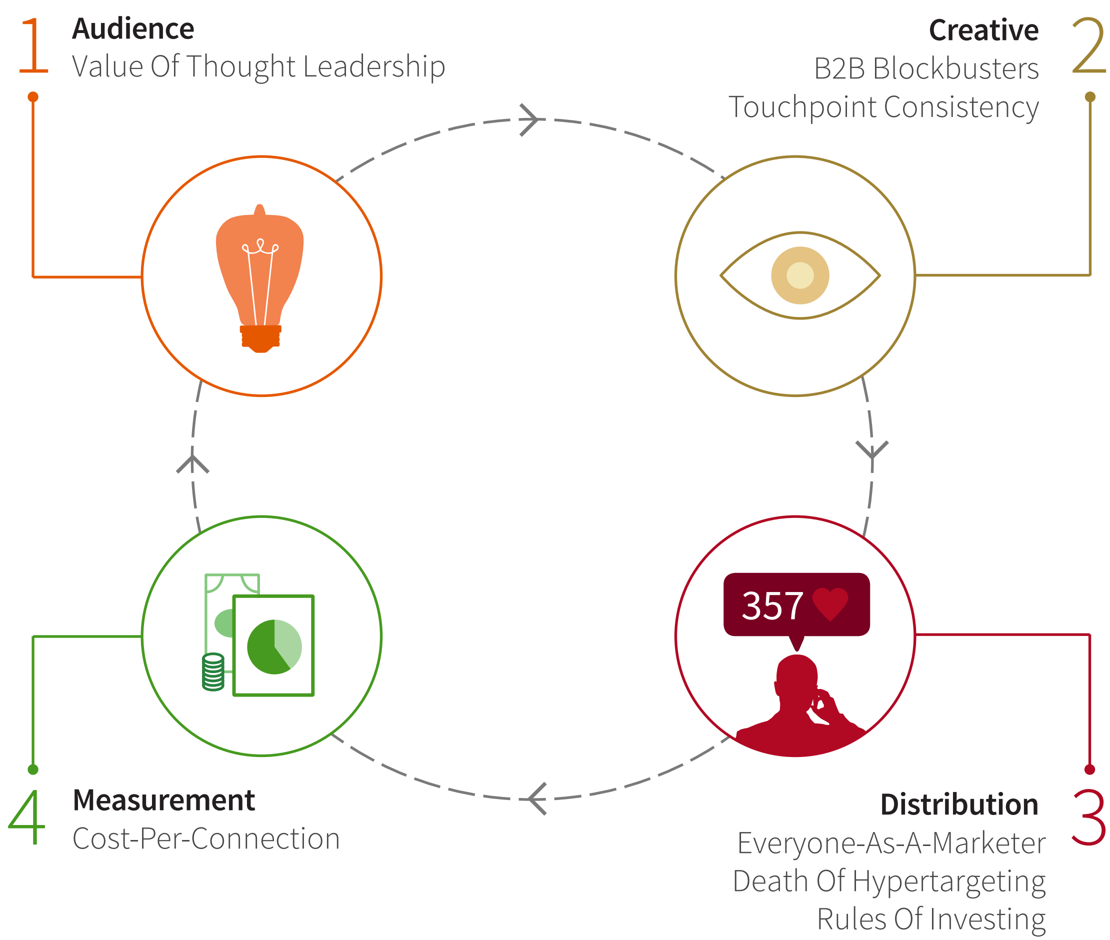
This eBook will cover seven emerging trends in B2B marketing. Some of these trends are based on our proprietary data and research, some are based on third-party research, and some are really just observations we've had after working closely with many of the top B2B marketers in the world.

These trends are not futuristic – we're not talking about B2B marketing in the next five to ten years. Instead, we're talking about trends that we're already starting to see in market. And all of these trends ladder up to services that we are actually starting to offer to our partners. We want to provide you with actionable best practices that you can try today.

We're going to walk you through these trends in a very particular order. All seven trends are interrelated, and so we'll explore them sequentially, using this traditional marketing framework.

So, without further ado, let's get started.

Our 7 Trends Are Sequential And Inter-Related



TREND 1

The True Value of Thought Leadership

Our first trend is around the "true value" of thought leadership, and the key phrase here is "true value." Thought leadership may sound like a vague and fluffy concept, but it drives real business impact, and B2B marketers are getting better at articulating that impact.

So what makes thought leadership valuable?

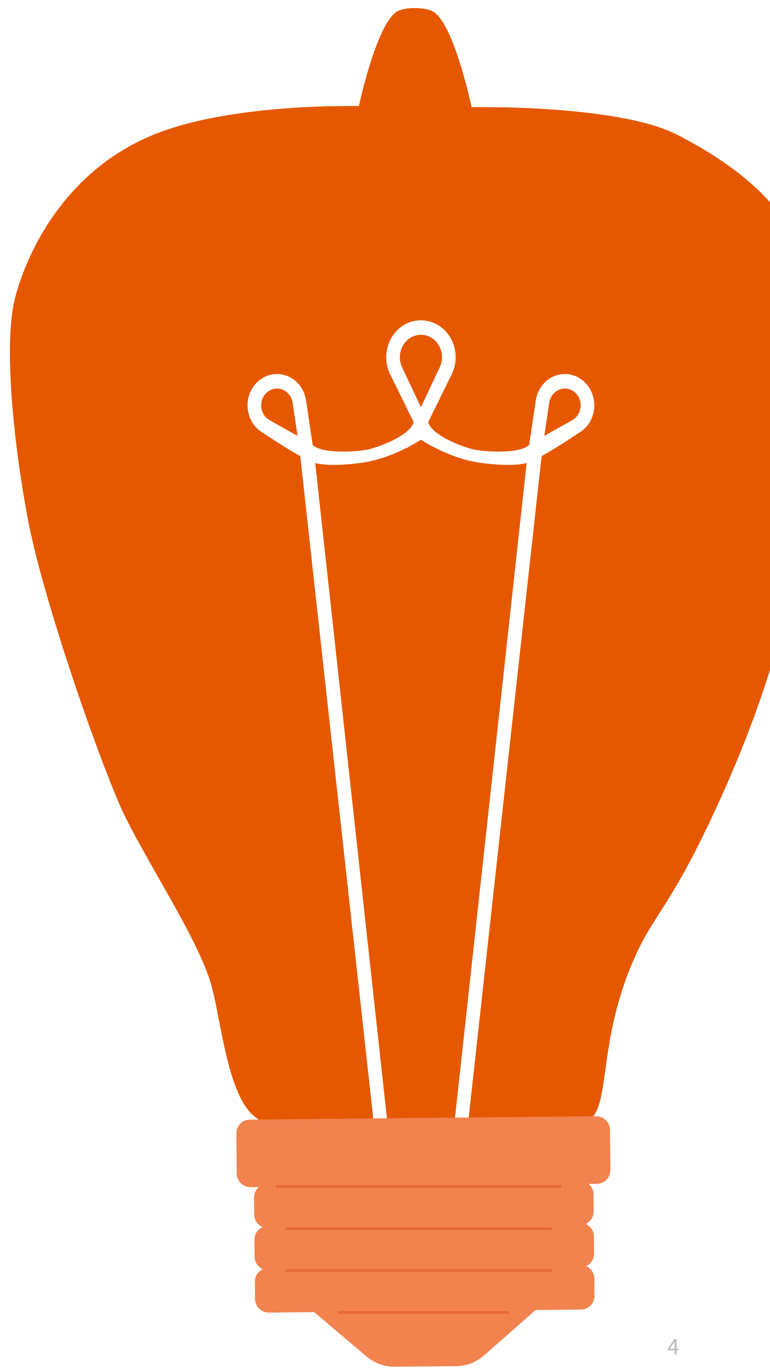
Well, let's start with a simple insight: B2B buyers are scared. There's this common misperception in the market that B2B is "rational," while B2C is "emotional." You buy Coke because you want to "open happiness," but you buy IBM after years of analysis – vendor research, product reviews, pricing and implementation details. According to this narrative, B2B buyers are cold, Spock-like automatons.

But as Jon Miller, a co-founder of Marketo, points out, that narrative doesn't make any sense. In fact, the opposite is probably true – B2B is much more emotional than B2C.

Why? Because making a bad decision in B2B can be disastrous to your career. That IBM deal? Millions of dollars are riding on it. If you mess up, you could lose your job, and your salary, which impacts your family (hence, "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM"). It doesn't get much more emotional than that. Meanwhile, if you don't like the $1 can of Coke you bought, you throw it out, and move on with your life. No harm, no foul.

> "Nobody ever got fired for buying IBM."

Don Draper
Creative Director
Sterling Cooper & Partners



The point here is that buyers are fundamentally risk-adverse. And that's where thought leadership comes into the equation. Thought leadership is valuable because it removes risk from the buying process. It gives your buyers confidence that you know what you're doing – that you are the foremost topical expert in whatever they are trying to buy.

In a word, thought leadership builds trust.

We've recently done some research on this with one of our partners, Edelman. Together, we surveyed creators of thought leadership (aka B2B marketers) and business decision-makers (aka buyers) to determine the true value of thought leadership. The first thing we asked was about "trust," and we found that a gap exists between the perceived value of thought leadership and its actual value.

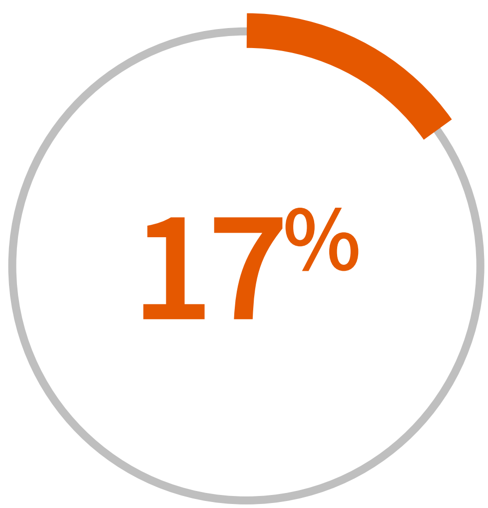
About 50 percent of B2B marketers believe their thought leadership builds trust in their organization. But among actual buyers, that number is more like 83 percent. In other words, marketers are massively underestimating the impact that thought leadership can have on buyer's confidence in their company.

But "trust" is an abstract concept. What B2B marketers really care about is sales, so we asked about that too, and once again, we found a Grand Canyon-sized gap between the beliefs of marketers and buyers.

When surveyed, only about 17 percent of B2B marketers believed their thought leadership gets their company on more RFPs from potential buyers.

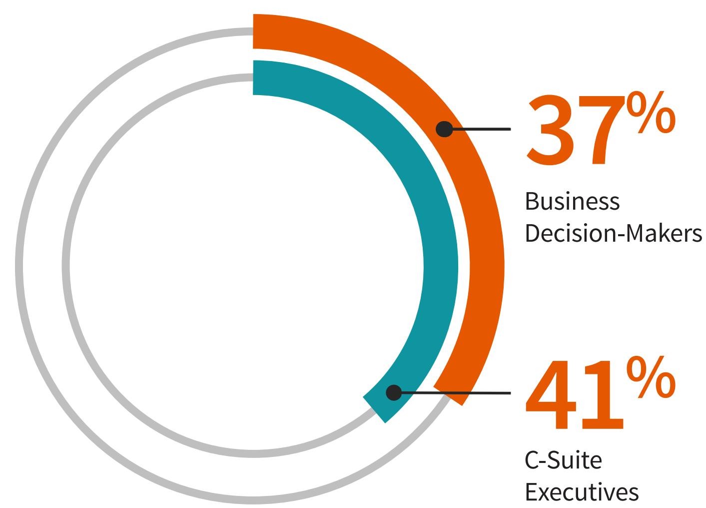
But when you ask buyers, that number jumps to 41%. In other words, **the people who are paid to create thought leadership severely underestimate the sales impact of their efforts**. But that's starting to change, as more and more research confirms its true value.

Among B2B Marketers



believe thought leadership results in more RFPs.

But Among Actual Buyers...



have RFP'd a vendor because of their thought leadership.

TREND 2

The Rise Of The B2B BLOCKBUSTER

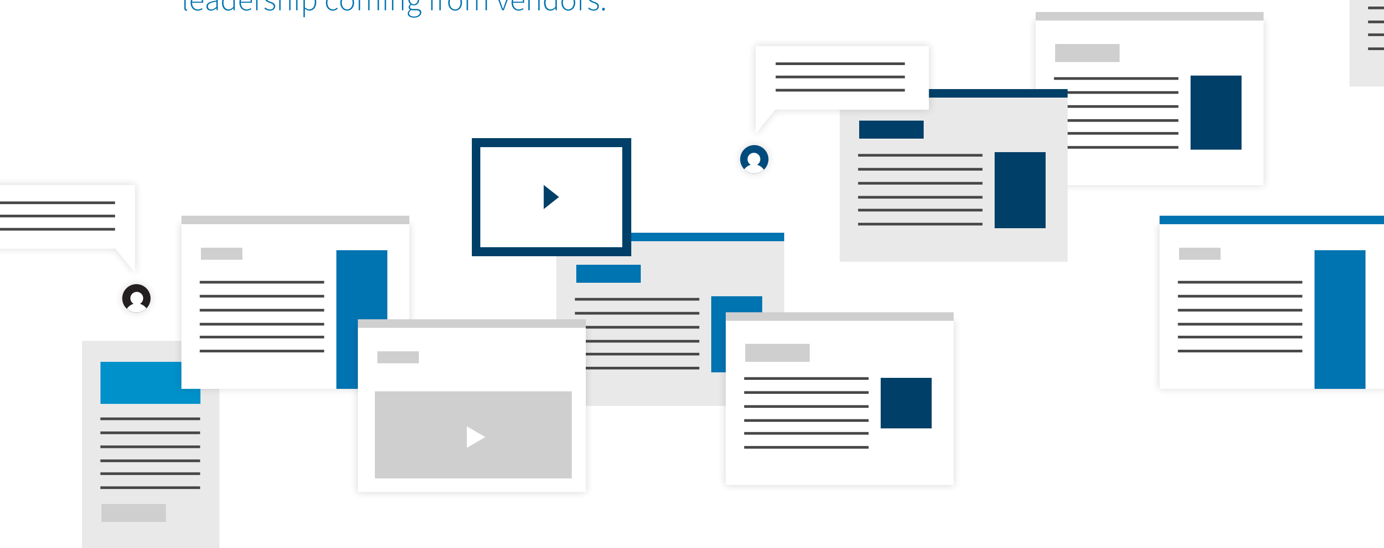
Now let's move on to our second trend. So maybe we've convinced you that thought leadership drives real business impact, but the logical next question is: "How do I create thought leadership in a sustainable and profitable way?" Traditionally, marketers have not had a great answer to that question. And that's because the way they produce thought leadership today is all wrong.

But don't take our word for it. Pretty much any survey will tell you that B2B marketers think they don't have enough content or that what they have isn't very good. And that's coming from the people who created it! Our research also shows that about 50 percent of B2B buyers are disappointed with the quality of thought leadership coming from vendors.

All this tells us that something is fundamentally broken. Why are B2B marketers spending enormous amounts of money churning out low-quality content? What explains the sorry state of thought leadership content marketing? Well, we have a theory that we'd like to share with you.

It goes like this:

For the past 10 years or so, marketers have been told to imitate newspapers and "think like publishers." And they've taken this advice literally, setting up "brand newsrooms" staffed by armies of "brand journalists" cranking out real-time, lightweight content. Articles, listicles, blog posts, tweets.



Here's the problem with that approach.

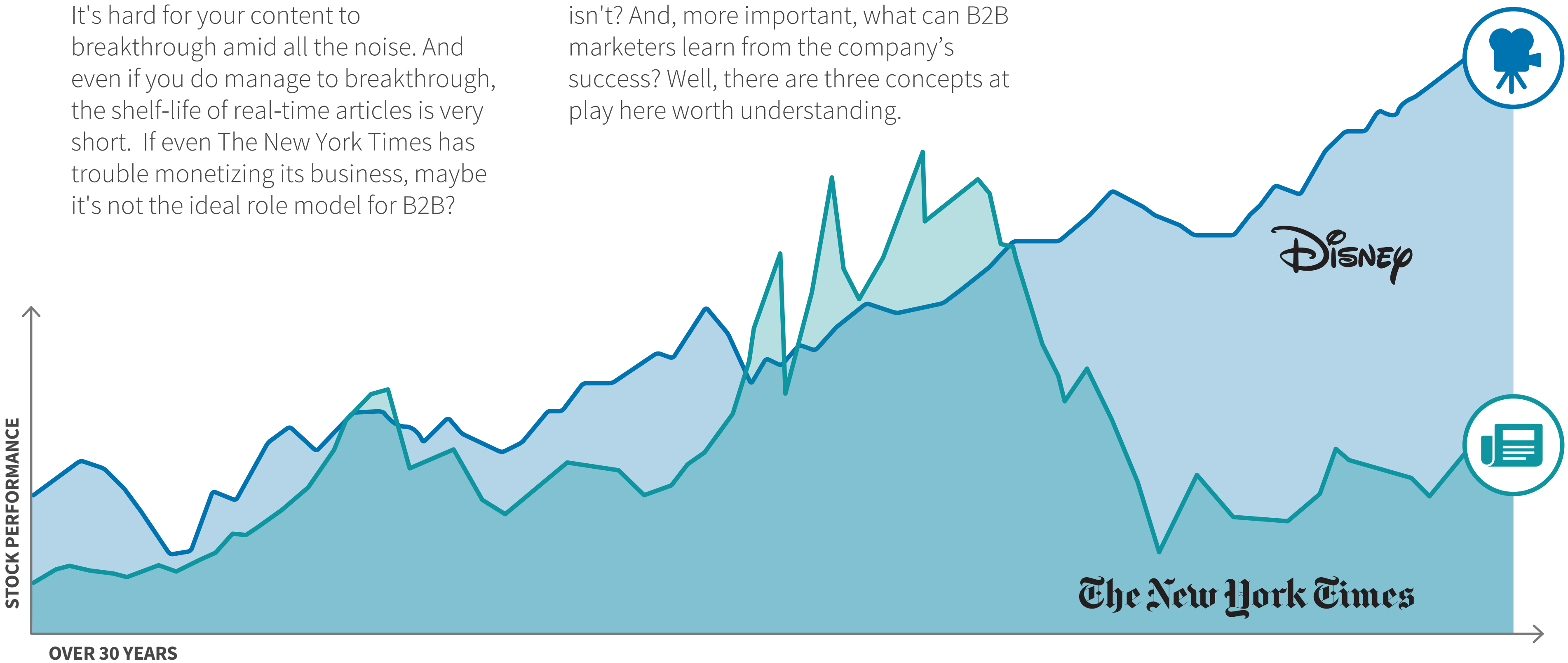
It's very difficult to be a newspaper in a world where anyone can publish a 500 word article. Check out The New York Times stock price if you don't believe us.

The newsroom model is tough --- it requires a huge amount of effort, including a large staff of writers, constantly churning out timely stories. It's hard for your content to breakthrough amid all the noise. And even if you do manage to breakthrough, the shelf-life of real-time articles is very short. If even The New York Times has trouble monetizing its business, maybe it's not the ideal role model for B2B?

Luckily, there is a different approach to content that makes much more sense – the Hollywood model.

The Walt Disney Company has thrived in the new digital ecosystem. Disney is the first studio in Hollywood history to make $7 billion in a single year. Studio revenue is up around 60 percent, and Disney's stock is hitting all-time highs. So what's Disney doing that the New York Times isn't? And, more important, what can B2B marketers learn from the company's success? Well, there are three concepts at play here worth understanding.

The first concept is focus. Disney is not producing a million different movies, hoping one of them is a hit. Instead, the company is making really big bets on fewer and fewer films. Disney made around 13 movies last year, and most of those record-breaking box office results came from just five film. In Hollywood, it's all about doing less, better, and bigger.



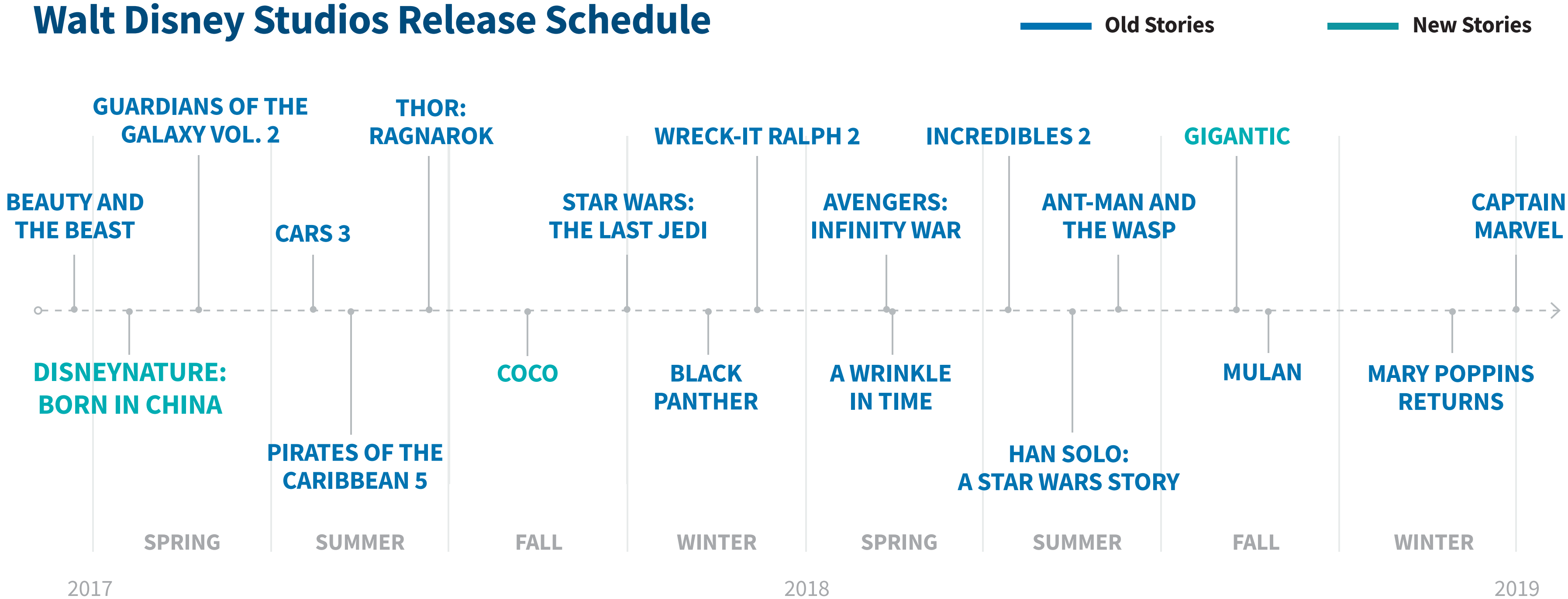
The second concept is familiarity. If you look at Disney's content calendar, you'll see a lot of Star Wars, Marvel, and Pixar. Almost none of these films are net-new assets. Disney is producing content that everyone has already heard of. As Derek Thompson explains in his book, "Hit Makers," in the past 16 years, the 15 top performing movies have all been remakes of old movies or books.

The idea here is that Disney is monetizing its "back catalog." That's something Hollywood can do, which newspapers can't – the New York Times doesn't have a back catalog. News has to be new by definition, or else we would call it "Olds." Disney can keep making money off Star Wars, which was created in 1977, but the New York Times can't re-monetize an article from 1977. That's the problem with lightweight real-time content – even if it works, you can't replicate your success.

So now that we have talked about focus and familiarity, **let's discuss the third concept – extensibility**. And we'll stick with the B2C Star Wars example because it's easy to understand.

Once Disney has a piece of familiar IP, the company doesn't move to the next thing. Star Wars is not just a movie. It's a video game, a lunchbox, an action figure. When new formats emerge, like drones or virtual reality, Disney easily takes existing content and monetizes it in new channels. It's a much more profitable approach than creating one-off pieces of content, like a newsroom.

Walt Disney Studios Release Schedule



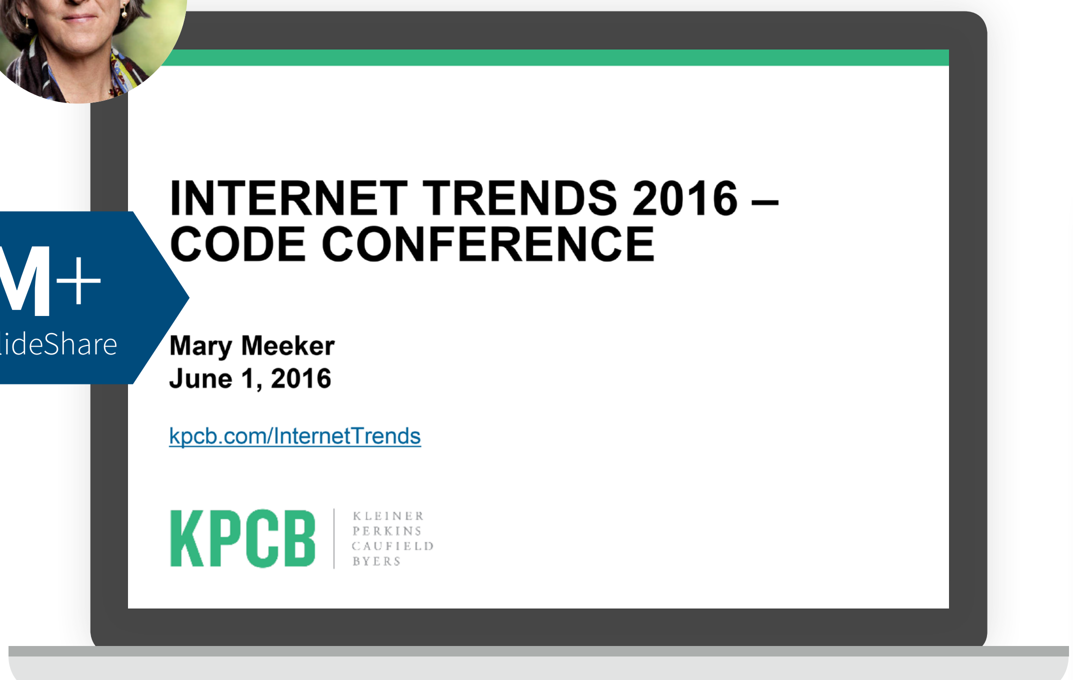
So, where are we going with this elaborate analysis of Disney? Well, we believe that just as there are blockbusters in the entertainment industry, there are also blockbusters in B2B marketing. It's a bit different, of course, in that Disney is selling entertainment, and B2B marketers are selling topical expertise, but the same three principles still apply – focus, familiarity, and extensibility.

Consider, for instance, Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report, perhaps the greatest blockbuster in all of B2B. Kleiner Perkins puts out the Trends Report every year – it's basically all they do from a marketing standpoint. That's **focus** (one thing per year), and that's **familiarity** (every year). The end result is that every time the Trends Report comes out, it breaks the internet. It is the single most viewed piece of content on SlideShare (10 million+ views) every year. And brand awareness makes the report progressively easier to market.

It's a familiar franchise, like Star Wars, but geekier (if such a thing is possible).

Salesforce has a blockbuster for every single line of business – Sales, CRM, Analytics – which shows you how a more complex organization can execute the same **strategy**(one blockbuster per LoB). Marketo has "The Definitive Guide To Lead Generation," which has been the company's top source of revenue for eight years in a row. That's a **sustainable** approach to content development.

Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report



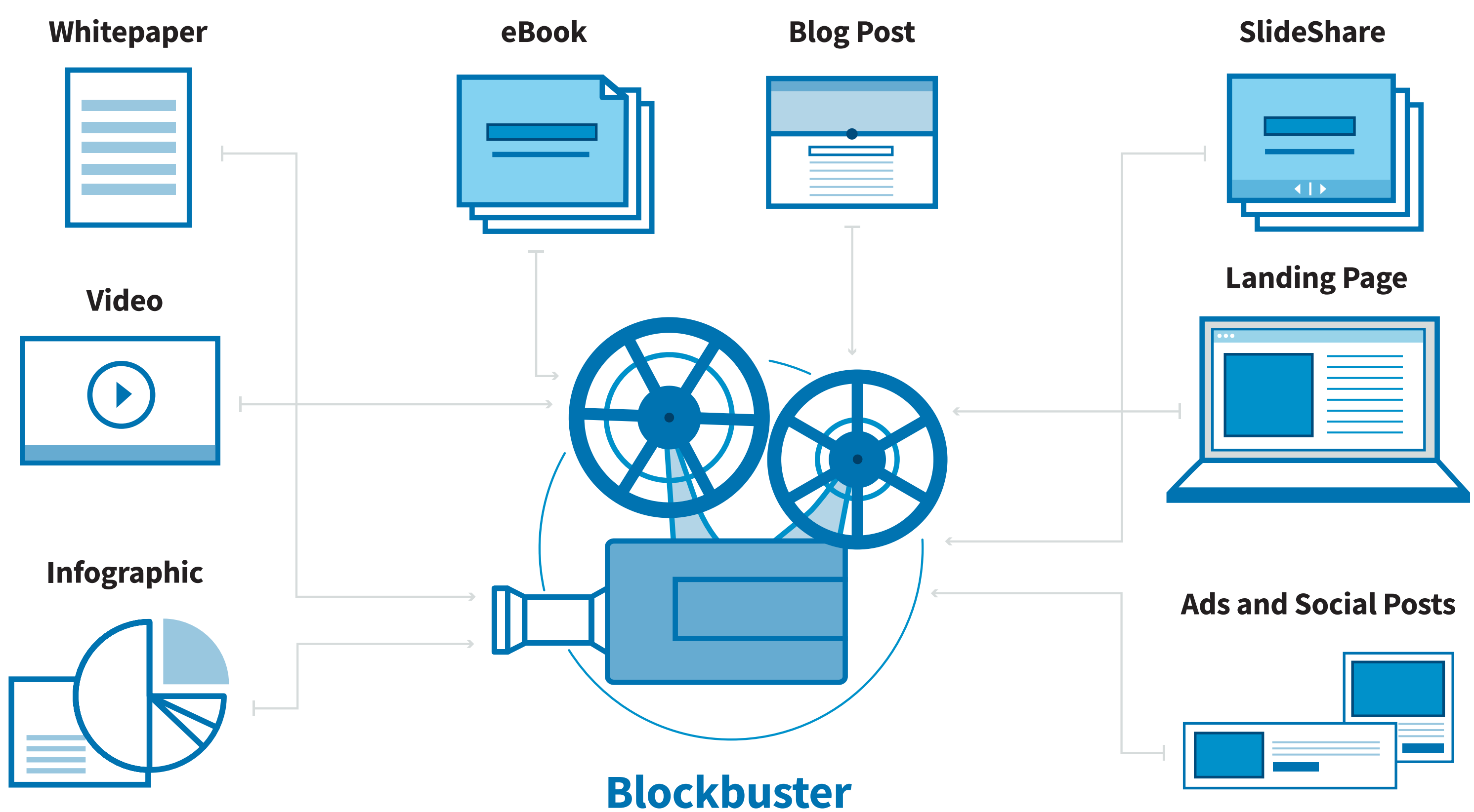
10M+
Views on SlideShare

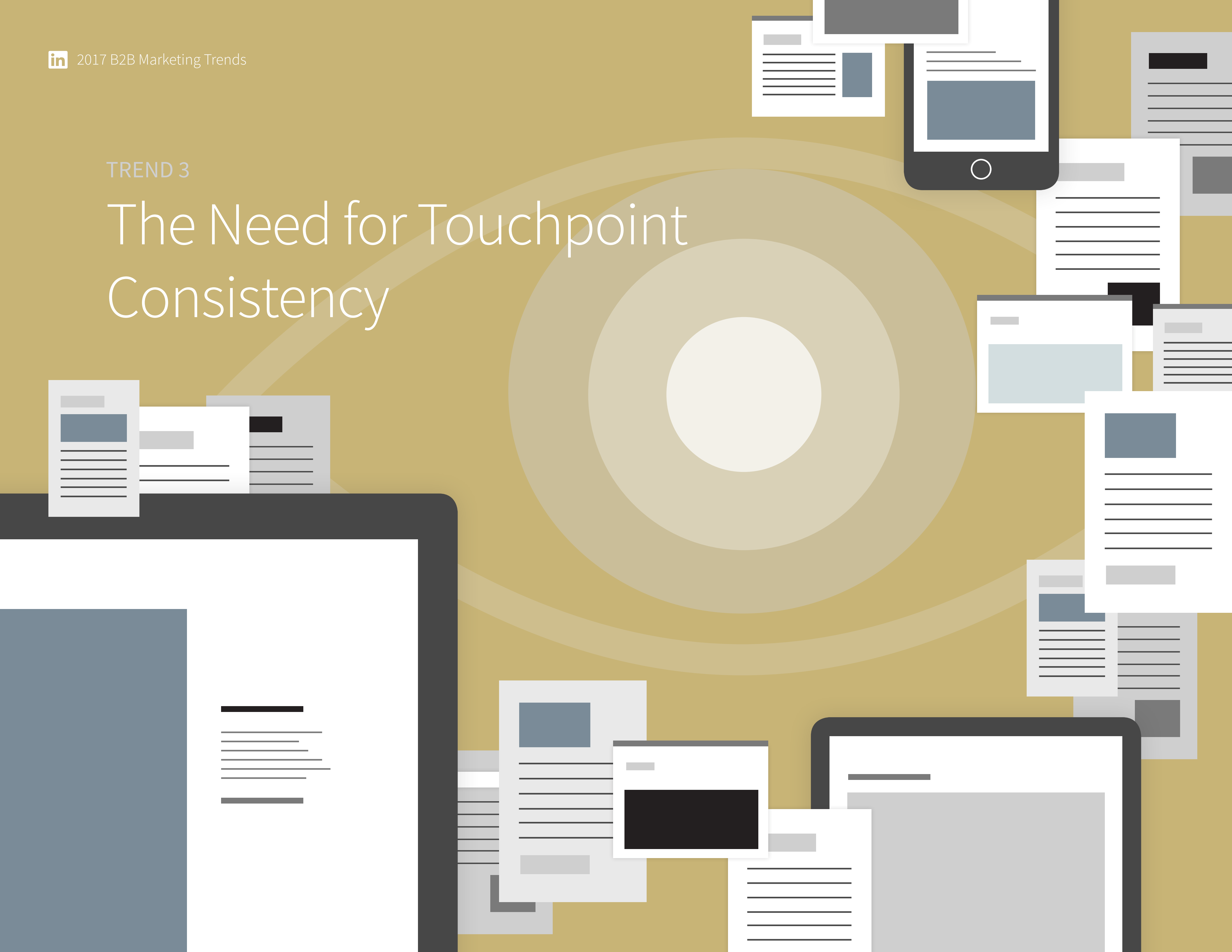
Salesforce State of Marketing

Marketo The Definitive Guide To Lead Generation

LinkedIn also has a blockbuster, "The Sophisticated Marketer's Guide To LinkedIn." Because it's so valuable to us (our top source of revenue for three years now), we've adapted the thought leadership into an eBook, a webinar, an infographic, a podcast, blog posts, etc. These are the B2B equivalents of action figures and lunchboxes – extensibility at work. That's how a blockbuster can fuel always-on, cross-platform marketing, without you having to set up a 50-person brand newsroom.

From our vantage point, we see that smart B2B marketers are using their analytics to identify successful "back catalog" IP that can be turned into blockbusters – repeatable, tent pole thought leadership assets. Ideally, you will have a content calendar that looks like Disney's: 75% familiar franchises that are guaranteed to work, and 25% net-new, experimental content that can become your next big blockbuster.





TREND 3

The Need for Touchpoint Consistency

Our third trend centers around "Touchpoint Consistency." We've told you that you need thought leadership to drive sales, and we've told you to package your thought leadership into blockbusters that get distributed into multiple formats and channels. But the unfortunate side effect of exploding channels is brand inconsistency, and B2B marketers are slowly waking up to the costs of inconsistency.

So why is consistency important in the first place? Well, consider the fact that the average consumer sees something like 5,000 ads a day, a number that was only 500, 30 years ago. All of us are inundated with an endless stream of information, and the end result is that no one remembers anything. Just consider these depressing statistics on the state of brand awareness on the internet, and try to hold back your tears: only 14 percent of people can remember the last ad they saw; just 8 percent have any idea what company or product was associated with that ad; and only 3 percent think the ad actually had anything to do with them.

The moral of the story is that achieving ad recall is insanely difficult.

Fortunately, there's a solution to this problem. Just as trust is the antidote to fear, repetition is the cure to forgetfulness. **The only way to drive ad recall is through pattern recognition.** That's a fancy term for "showing people the same exact thing over and over until they remember it."

Q: Want to see the power of touchpoint consistency? See if you can identify these brands just by looking at a single letter.

A: Adobe, Bose, Campbell's, Disney, EY, Facebook, Google, Hulu,Intel, KitKat, LinkedIn, Motorola, Netflix, Oakley, Pez, Quora, Ray-Ban, Suzuki.

This is a very well understood concept in the consumer packaged goods industry. If you see a red soda can, you can tell that it came from Coke, even if the logo has been removed. Through endless repetition, you've been conditioned to associate "red" with Coca-Cola. But B2B marketers are starting to appreciate how these same dynamics can help improve recall of their products and services too.

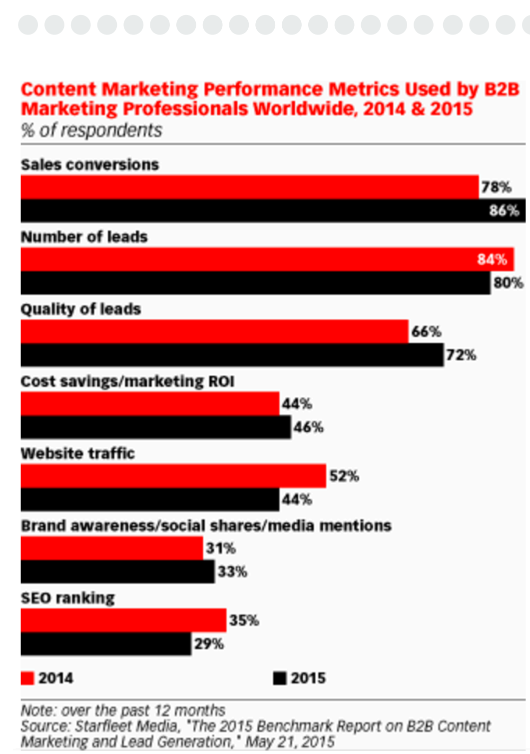
As an example, take a close look at the chart on the right. It's from a marketing intelligence company. The logo has been removed, but can you figure out what brand produced the chart? In our experience, around 85 percent of marketers can correctly identify this chart as having come from eMarketer.

Think of how powerful that is. eMarketer has basically built an entire business on the back of pattern recognition. Think of all the different charts you've seen about digital marketing over your career, and yet, you can still pick an eMarketer chart out of a lineup. And although this seems quite tactical, the business impact is profound. Because the next time you need a stat about digital marketing, there's a good chance eMarketer will come to mind first, because you remember their content.

So the next time your client wants you to put a bar chart in a newsfeed ad, ask yourself whether it looks just like every other chart this client has produced. Ask if it looks just like all of the client's advertising, and all of their products and services. Ask if the buyer will immediately be able to associate it with the client's brand, just through its design, without even having to look at the logo.

> Ask if the buyer will immediately be able to associate the chart with the client's brand, just through its design, without even having to look at the logo.

Q: Can you identify the brand that produced this chart?



A: eMarketer

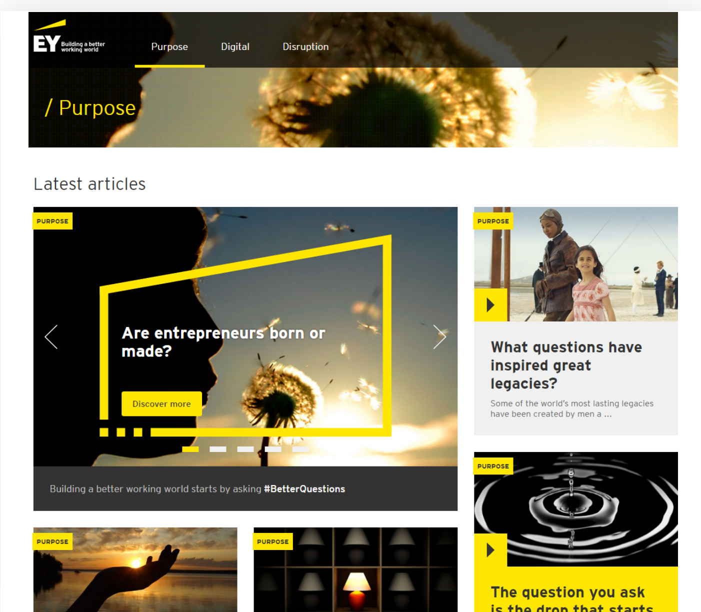
The idea of touchpoint consistency is one more reason why we are so bullish on blockbusters – they enable consistency. If you look at most B2B brands, you'll see that almost none of their touchpoints look the same (only around ~5 percent of clients have touchpoint consistency, in our anecdotal experience). And that's because it's extremely difficult to maintain a consistent identity if you are churning out 100 lightweight, real-time articles every day. It becomes too expensive and burdensome to invest in custom design, and it becomes impossible to quality control all the content that's shipped out the door.

But if you have a focused approach, where you produce one big asset a quarter, it's much easier to control your brand in an exploding number of channels and formats.

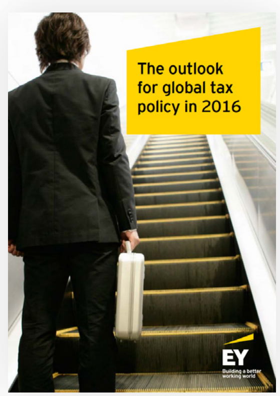
EY is best-in-class when it comes to touchpoint consistency. Check out these examples below, and you'll see that all of EY's content – their website, blockbusters, SlideShares, and Status Updates, all look exactly the same. The brand is both consistent (black and yellow, trapezoidal shape) and differentiated (it doesn't look anything like Accenture, PwC or Deloitte's advertising).

> Make it easy for your customers to remember you, and you will be remembered.

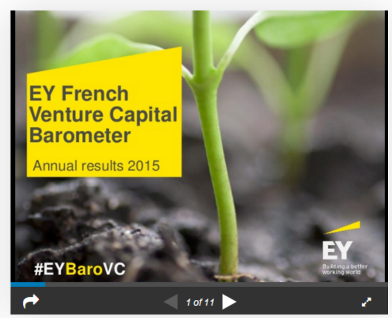
EY's Website



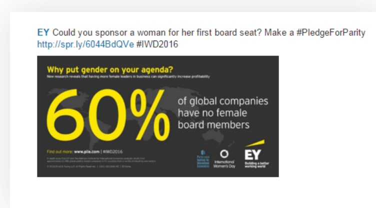
EY's Blockbuster



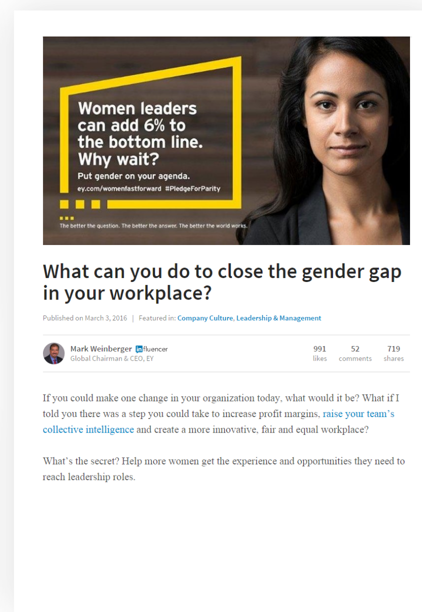
EY's SlideShare



EY's Status Update

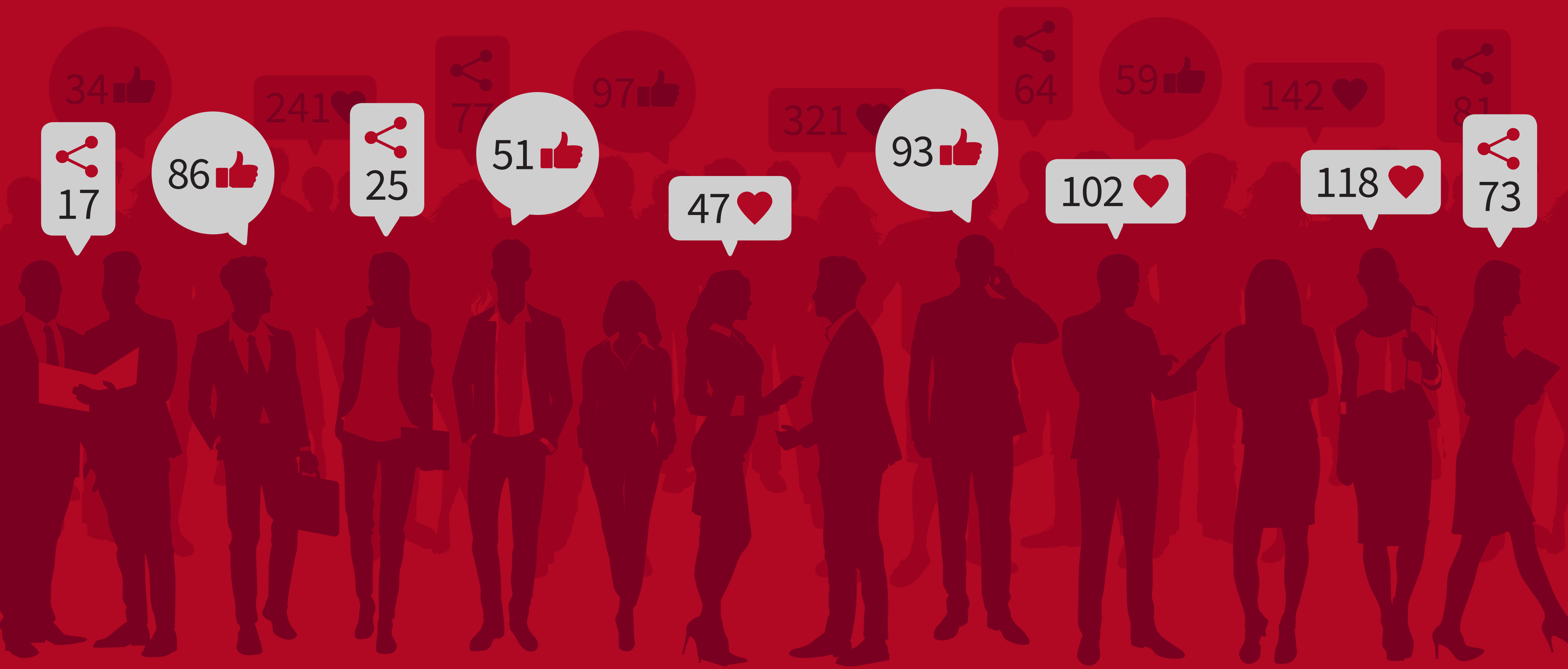


EY's Influencer Post



TREND 4

The Arrival of Everyone-As-A-Marketer

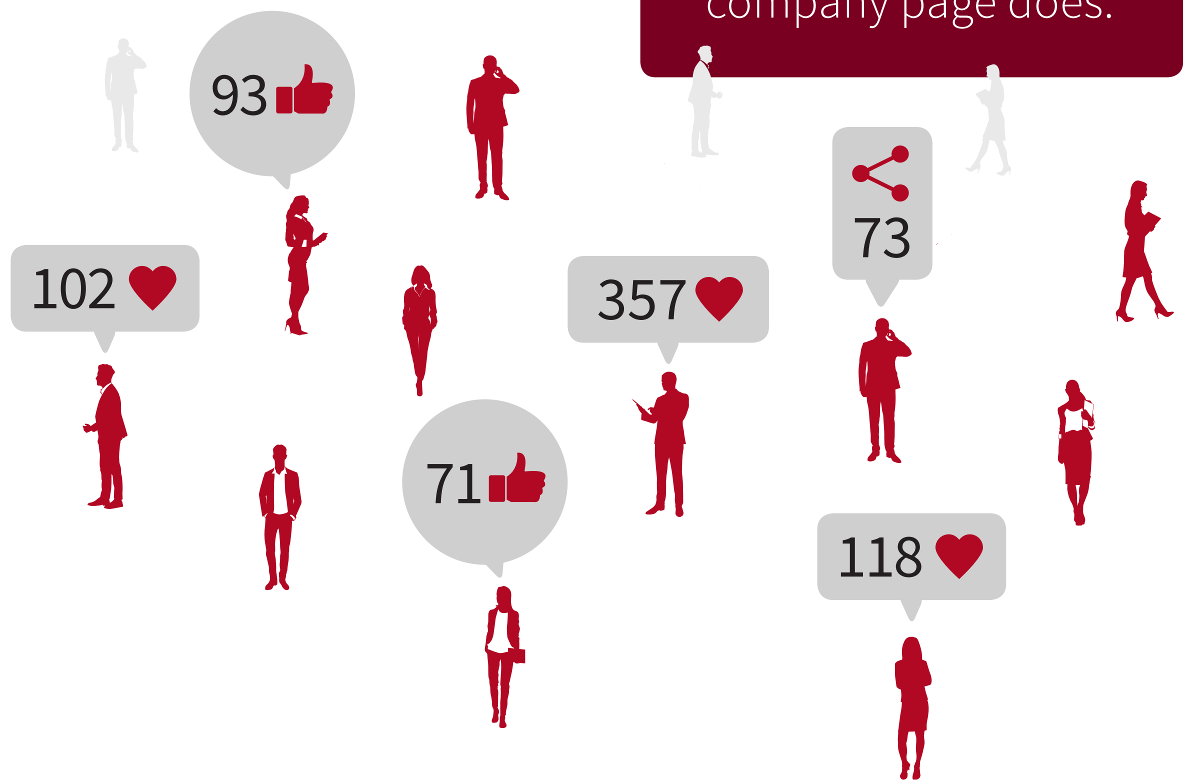


We call our fourth trend "Everyone-As-A-Marketer," and it's related to the idea of touchpoints. The thinking here is this: not all marketing touchpoints are created equally, and one could argue that **employees are actually your single most valuable touchpoint**. And that's because they are trusted.

We've already talked about the power of trust and how it drives sales, and the same dynamic is at play here. The Edelman Trust Barometer (another great example of a B2B Blockbuster) shows that on any given topic, buyers trust people like themselves – subject matter experts, peers. They don't want to hear from faceless corporations, they want to hear from humans. Remember, it's Mary Meeker's Internet Trends Report, not Kleiner Perkins' Trends Report, and that's not a coincidence.

Because people are trusted, they can deliver outsized impact as a touchpoint. Your people, your employees, can provide massive reach and engagement for your brand, even more so than marketing that just comes from the brand itself. Our data, for instance, shows that on average, employees have 10 times the reach of their employer's LinkedIn Company Page. And it's not just about sheer volume of impressions either. Those impressions also generate better engagement.

LinkedIn data shows that, on average, your employees have 10x the connections (reach) that your company page does.



Our data shows that content shared by employees has 2 times the engagement rate of content shared by a company.

The lesson here is that you need a "people-first" strategy. That means your executives and subject-matter experts should be blogging about your thought leadership and driving referral traffic to your blockbuster. It means your employees should host webinars to share your thought leadership. All great stories are character-driven, and B2B content marketing is not an exception.

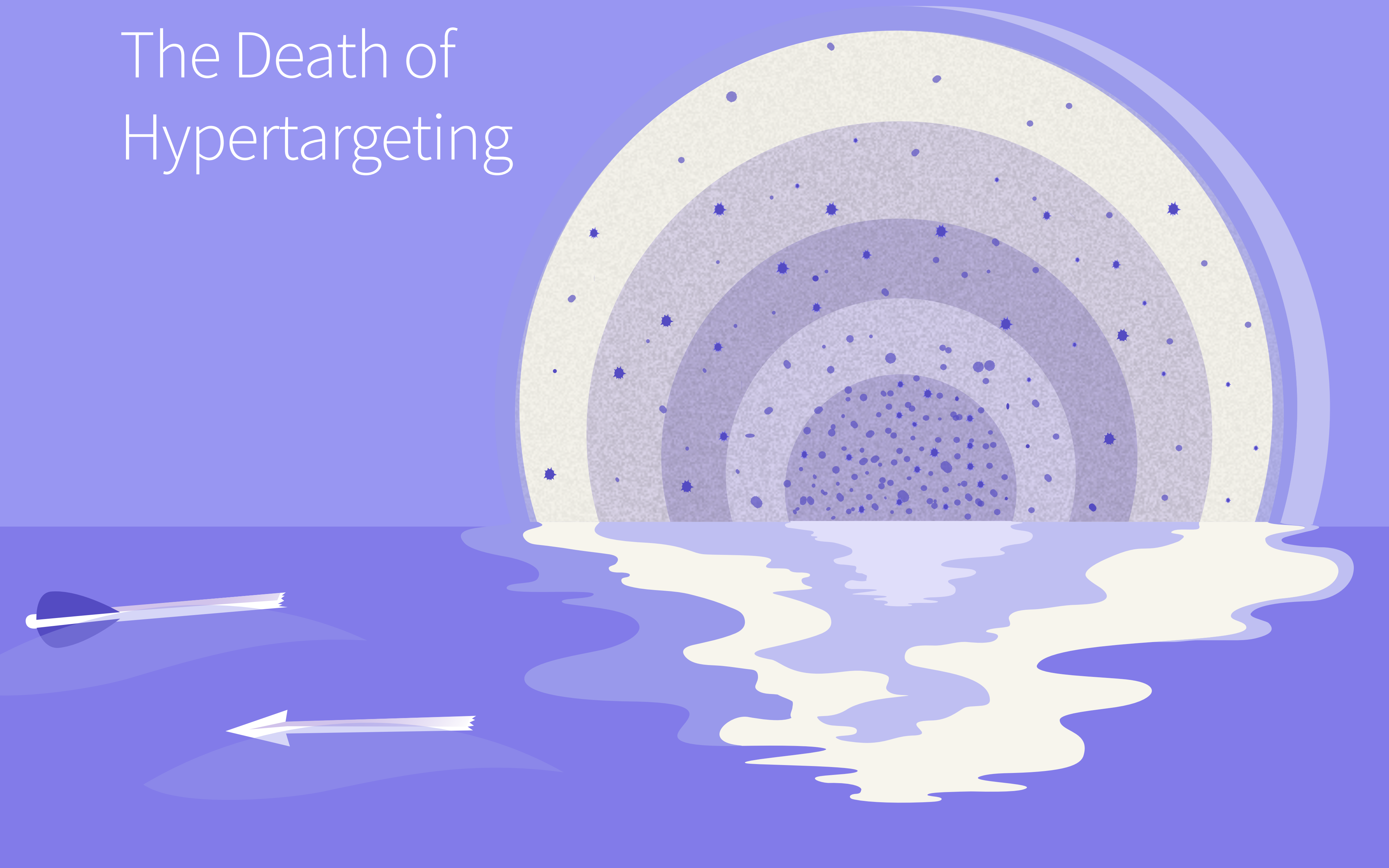
For a very tactical example of a "people first" strategy, let us tell you about a recent experience of ours. We wanted to promote a webinar version of this B2B Trends eBook (extensibility!) and sent inMails to a list of senior B2B marketers. As you may know, inMails can come from a brand (in this case, LinkedIn) or from a person (in this case, Peter Weinberg).

The inMails that came from a person performed about 5X better than the ones there were sent by the brand. In fact, inMail had the lowest CPL of any tactic we used ($0.60, which is pretty sweet).

That's just one example of how leading with people on the "front end" drives business impact. On the "back end," your employees must push out your thought leadership to their networks, like LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, in order to drive earned reach and enjoy those higher engagement rates.

TREND 5

The Death of Hypertargeting



So we've talked about how to approach your buyers (with thought leadership) and how to structure your creative (in blockbusters that deliver touchpoint consistency and feature your brand characters). Now we're going to talk about trends in distribution – how you actually reach your buyers. And that brings us to our next trend, the "Death of Hypertargeting."

Sounds terrifying, doesn't it? Don't be scared, it's just advertising.

Let's start with a pretty "duh" observation: brands are obsessed with ad targeting, and digital publishers have tried their best to take advantage of this obsession, portraying traditional media like TV and radio as wasteful and inefficient. Spend in digital, we say, where you can hypertarget only the right buyers.

Here's the thing though – **hypertargeting can be more detrimental to a brand than "wasted" impressions.** Why? Well, simply put, because hypertargeting excludes potential buyers. It drives up your costs (CPMs, CPCs, CPLs), limits your reach, and limits your sales.

Smart B2C marketers have started to wake up to this expensive truth. You may have seen, for instance, that Procter & Gamble decided to scale back its targeting on Facebook after realizing that brands like Crest don't need to pay extra for ad targeting when anyone with teeth is qualified to buy their products.

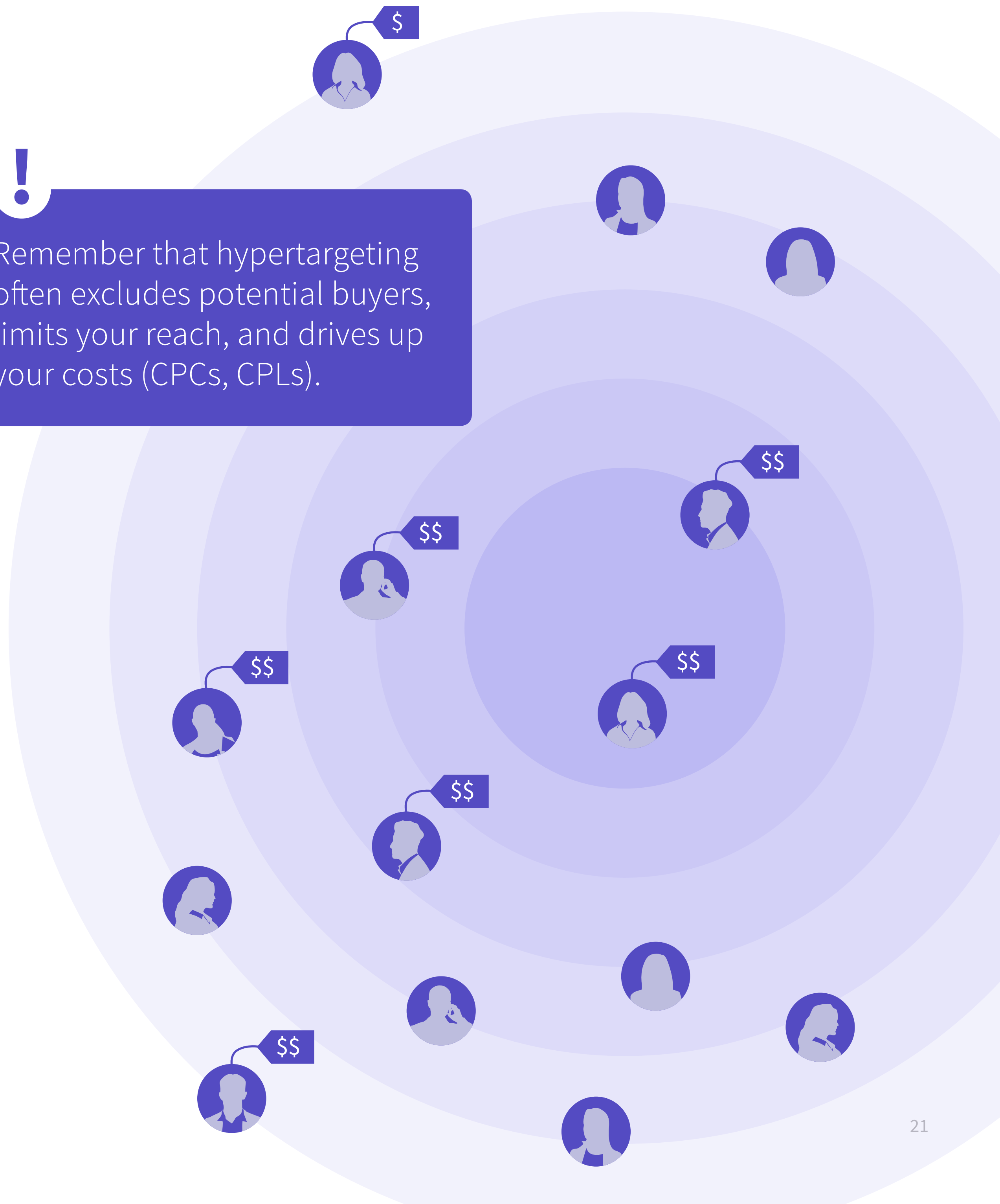
This renewed focus on "reach" as the most important KPI is in part inspired by a great book called, "How Brands Grow," by marketing guru Byron Sharp.

As a B2B marketer, you might be tempted to ignore Procter & Gamble's move away from hypertargeting. B2C and B2B are very different, of course. B2B marketers need to reach a very particular set of professionals, because only those professionals are qualified to hire Deloitte, for example.

But we would argue that you ignore P&G at your own peril, because a lot of the same dynamics that are driving Procter & Gamble to scale back targeting affect B2B marketers too. Hypertargeting, in general, drives up costs, limits reach, and limits sales. **Even if going broader means you waste a few impressions on the wrong buyers, you still end up reaching more of the right people, at a much better price point.** We've seen clients who have reduced their Cost Per Lead from \$300 to \$10 by optimizing towards broader targeting segments, without compromising lead quality. In the end, it's a math argument.

Don't get us wrong. We are not saying you shouldn't use targeting. Of course you should, if you are a B2B marketer. What we're suggesting is that you shouldn't "overuse" targeting.

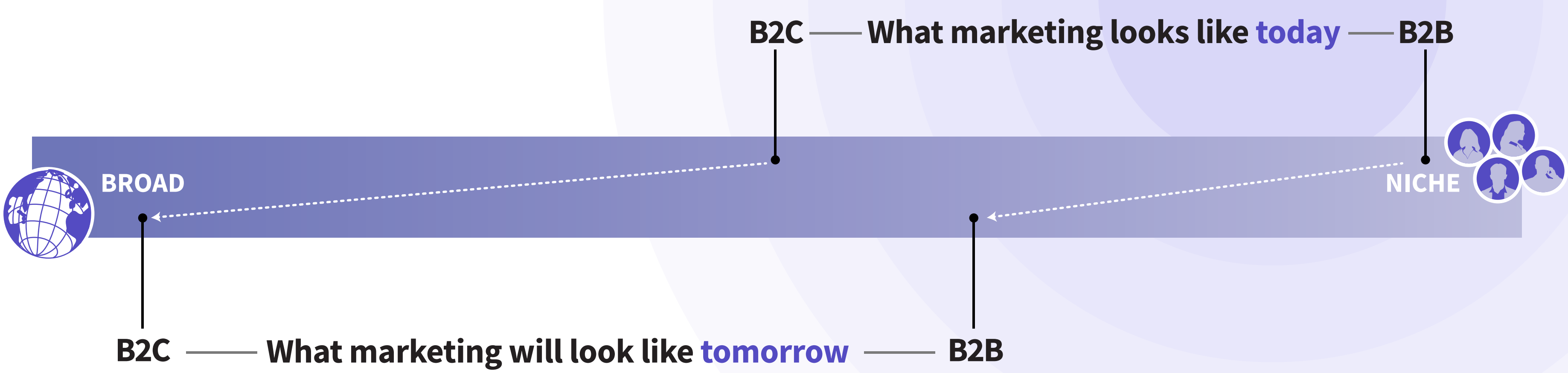
! Remember that hypertargeting often excludes potential buyers, limits your reach, and drives up your costs (CPCs, CPLs).



Think of targeting as a spectrum. On one end you have extremely broad targeting – everyone with a pulse on Planet Earth. On the other end you have super-niche targeting – CEOs at Fortune 10 companies.

B2C is moving from the middle of the spectrum to the left, to go as broad as possible. B2B marketers need to move leftwards as well, but not quite as far – from super-niche to pseudo-niche. Instead of using LinkedIn to target CXOs at pharmaceutical companies with 10,000-plus employees (three layers of targeting), try focusing on just seniority targeting (one layer of targeting), and watch all of your costs go down without a dip in performance. Choose whatever layer will most guarantee creative relevance – chances are your content is not personalized to all three layers anyway.

Use The Bare Minimum Targeting That Will Get You Relevant Reach



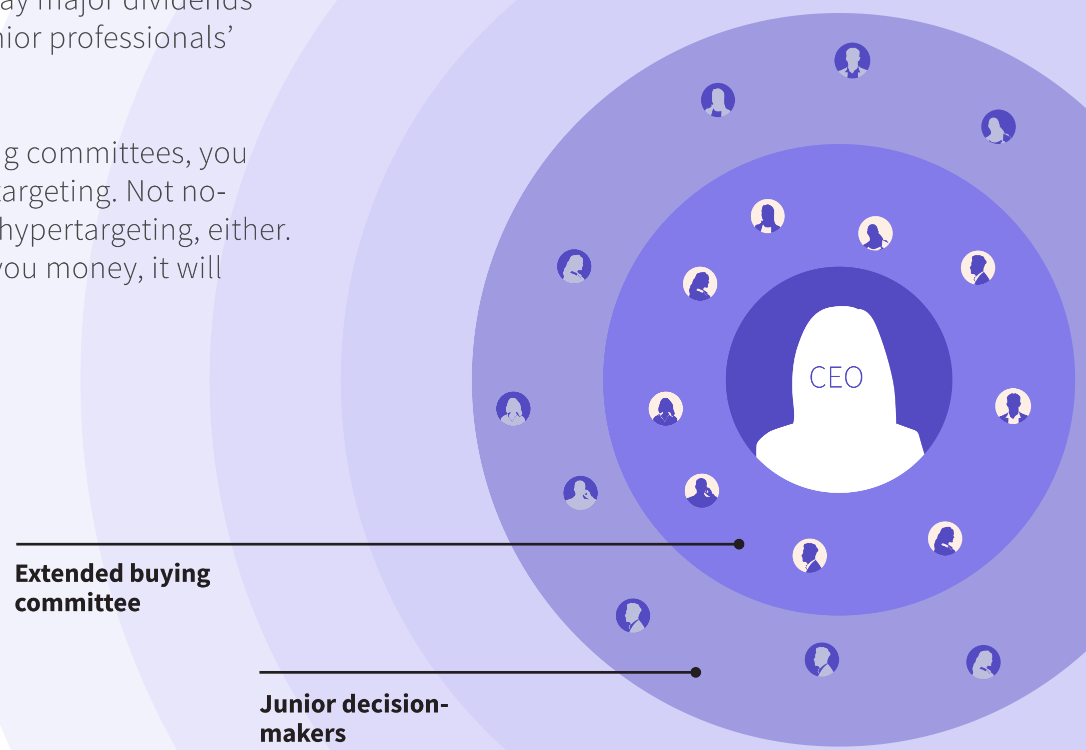
If the economic argument doesn't sway you, consider this: in B2B, all buying decisions are increasingly being done by committee, and those committees are expanding all the time. It's not just the CXO signing off on a business decision, it's an army of cross-functional partners. In tech, as many as 18 professionals sign off on any given buying decision.

So in reality, you don't just need to reach the CEO, you need to reach the professionals around the CEO. The professionals who advise the CEO, the ones who meet with vendors and do the research, the ones who will be responsible for implementation. As you may have noticed at your own company, no business decisions are made in a vacuum.

And you don't just need to reach today's buying committee. If you're building a brand for the long term, you also need to reach tomorrow's buying committee. In other words, junior decision-makers who will grow up to become senior decision-makers. We know from our data, for instance, that junior IT professionals become senior IT professionals in less than three years on average. And as an added benefit, junior IT professionals are 3X cheaper to reach than senior ones. It's no surprise that some of our wisest clients are making long-term value investment in under-served audiences, knowing those investments will pay major dividends later on, as the junior professionals' careers advance.

To influence buying committees, you need fairly broad targeting. Not no-targeting, but not hypertargeting, either. It won't just save you money, it will make you money.

Reach The Entire Buying Committee - Current and Future Budget Holders



TREND 6

The Rules of Brand Investing

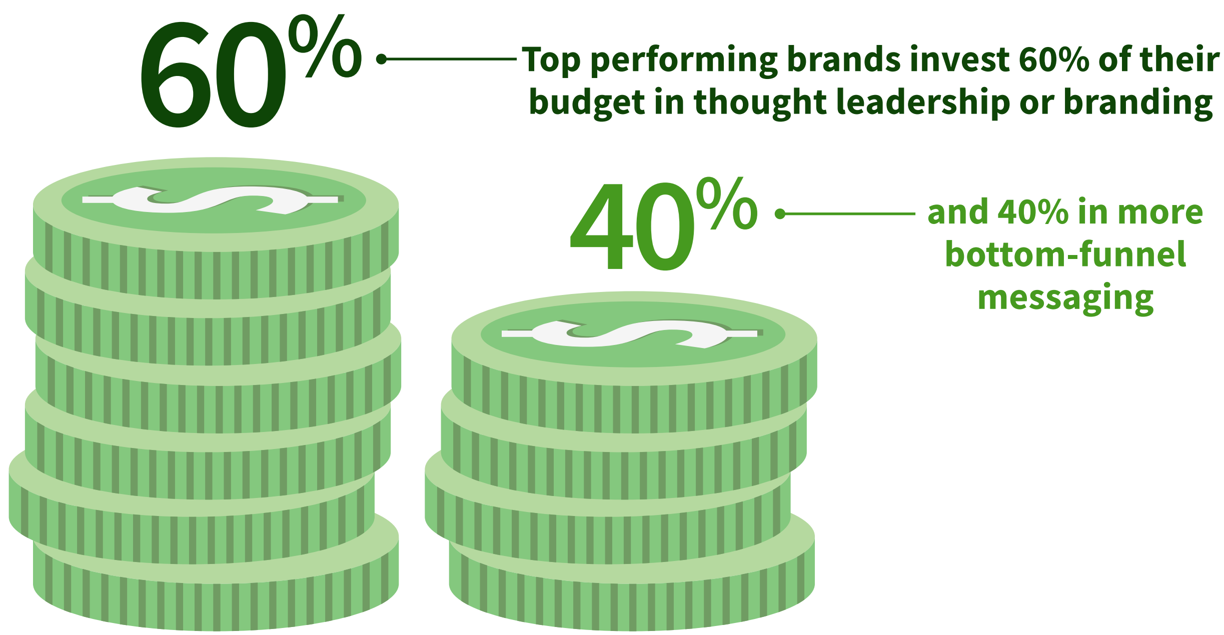
Our next trend is also about distribution, and we call it the "Rules of Brand Investing." Historically, digital media planning/buying has been more of an art than a science. But B2B marketers are starting to realize that there may be a few ironclad, quantitative rules for distribution – rules that need to be followed to maximize ROI. There are three rules in particular that we'd like to share with you.

First up is the "60/40 Rule."

This rule is based on some heavy-hitting research called "The Long And The Short Of It." That longitudinal study of about 10,000 brands, examined over 30 years, grouped brands into high-performing and low-performing categories. The study found that high-performing brands invest about 60 percent of their budget in thought leadership or branding, and 40 percent in more bottom-funnel messaging --- what the researchers call "commercial activation," and we call "buy now!" advertising.

We told you in Trend 1 that thought leadership is important, but how does that translate into media spend? Well, if you follow the 60/40 rule, you should spend 60 percent of your budget driving awareness and engagement with your "blockbuster," and 40 percent of your budget following up with the buyers who were exposed to your thought leadership, raising consideration of your products and services.

We suspect that this would be a major change for most organizations. In our experience, most clients seem to be following the 10/90 rule instead, where the majority of budget goes to direct-response, which may result in short-term sales lifts, but ultimately offers diminishing returns compared to branding. And we're starting to see the pendulum swing in the opposite direction, a positive trend for marketers and buyers, who need your brand's topical expertise to succeed in their careers.



The second principle is called the "The 10:1 Rule."

The 10:1 Rule indicates that for every $1 spent on creative development, $10 should be spent on distribution. The logic behind the rule looks like this: in today's content marketplace, where competition is infinite and no one remembers anything, it's just not enough to have great creative. Think back to Star Wars for a minute.

Star Wars probably has the greatest organic following of any piece of content in the history of mankind. It has 100 percent brand awareness (if you know someone who has never heard of Star Wars, please let us know so we can study him for science). And yet, Disney spent well over $500 million advertising Star Wars, both with traditional media and push-the-envelope digital integrations, like an X-Wing picking you up in Uber. If Disney needs to spend $500 million advertising a blockbuster that everyone has already heard of, imagine how much money you need to spend to turn your unfamiliar brand franchise into a familiar one.

We understand that "spend an enormous amount of money on media" is not a message anyone wants to hear, but unfortunately, there's no reliable alternative if you want to break through in a world where anyone with a phone can create content.

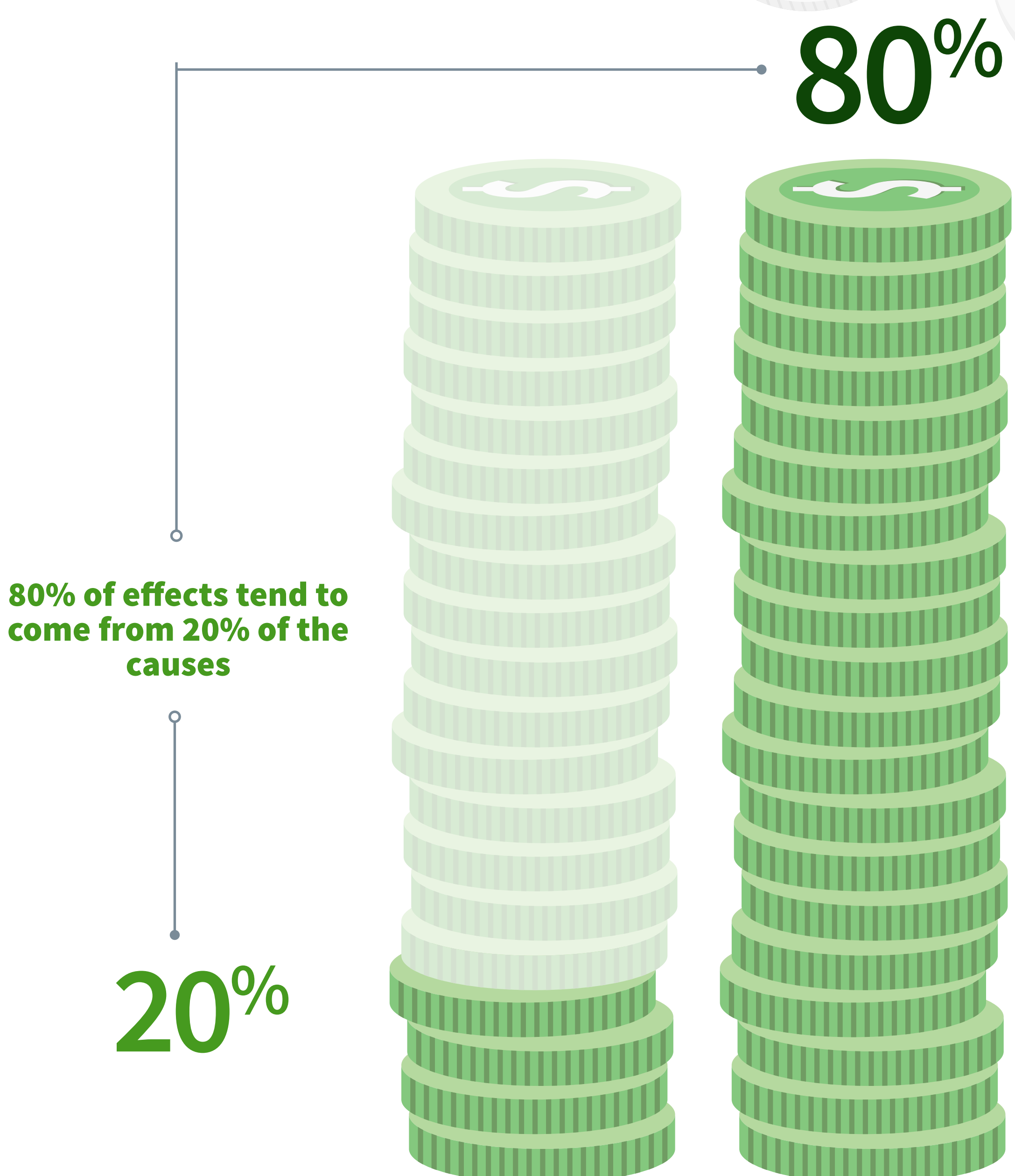
The 10:1 Rule
Every dollar spent on creative, spend $10 on distribution

The good news is that if you take a more focused approach to content creation – a Hollywood approach, instead of a newspaper one – you can reduce your content development costs, freeing up funds that can be used to put your content in front of as many buyers as possible.

The third and final principle is called "The 80/20 Rule," also known as Power Laws.

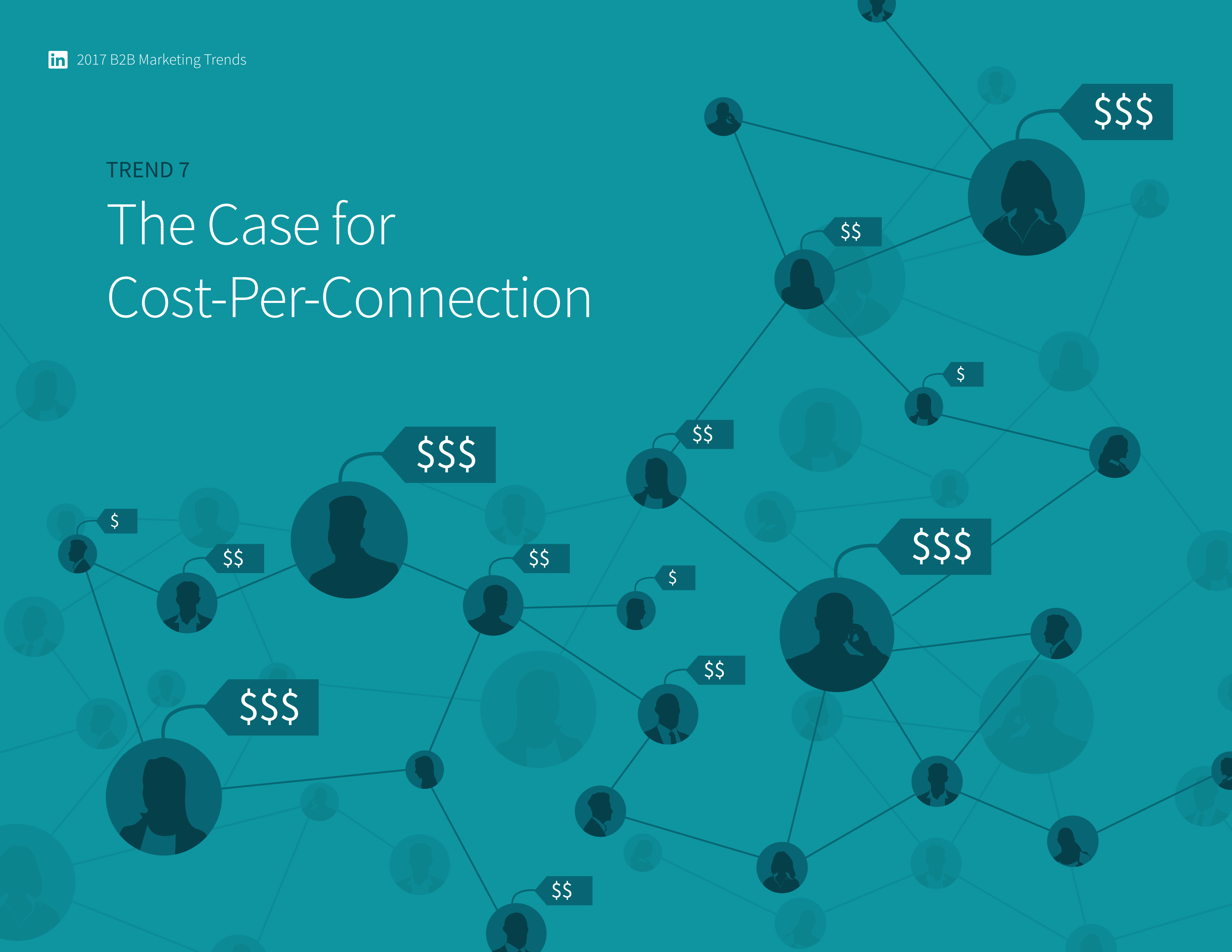
It's been around since 1896, when Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto first observed that 80 percent of effects tend to come from 20 percent of the causes (Pareto realized, for instance, that 80 percent of land was owned by 20 percent of the population). The 80/20 rule has been applied to almost every business, most recently in the world of venture capital. VC firms know that around 80 percent of their returns will come from just 20 percent of their investments, so they invest in many different companies.

But B2B marketers are starting to apply the 80/20 rule to their media planning efforts. What does that look like? Well, if you apply the 80/20 rule to your marketing, you'll invest in a lot of content and a lot of channels, while keeping in mind that only 20 percent of your investments will deliver 80 percent of your returns. And you'll be prepared to spend the majority of your budget on the 20% of tactics that deliver exceptional returns.



TREND 7

The Case for Cost-Per-Connection

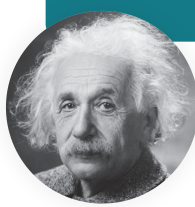


Our final trend is around measurement, and we call it, drumroll please … "The Case for Cost-Per-Connection." We already told you that marketer's content model is broken, but what if we told you that our measurement models are just as broken. Our guess is that you wouldn't disagree. A few of our most advanced clients are measuring lifetime customer value, but the vast majority of us are tracking superficial metrics like CTR (click-through rate) and CPC (cost per click) and even CPL (cost per lead), which can be just as superficial as CTR if you are not measuring lead quality.

The problem is that research has shown things like CTR don't actually correlate with purchase intent, and most of us know that intuitively (when was the last time you clicked on an ad? Statistically speaking, you are more likely to complete Navy Seal training). We are measuring things that don't matter. It reminds us of this classic (and apocryphal) Albert Einstein quote: "Just because something can be counted doesn't necessarily mean it counts."

If Einstein had been a marketer, he might have said:

> "Just because clicks can be counted doesn't mean they count.



Albert Einstein
If He Were A B2B Marketer

Increasingly, we meet marketers who believe that cutting-edge measurement needs to reflect the real world and marry online metrics with offline metrics. There's been a few promising efforts towards this in the B2C world. Facebook, for instance, teamed up a while ago with Datalogix to track in-store purchasing based on online ad exposure. But where are the B2B equivalents? Correlating online metrics with offline activity is even more important in B2B, where the majority of sales activities happen offline, in meetings, on the golf course, at swanky cocktail bars, etc.

> We have an idea for a new media metric – a metric that we're starting to track for top clients. We call it "Connection Density."

Are there online B2B metrics that correlate with offline B2B sales activities? We have an idea for one such metric – a metric that we're starting to track for top clients. We call it "Connection Density."

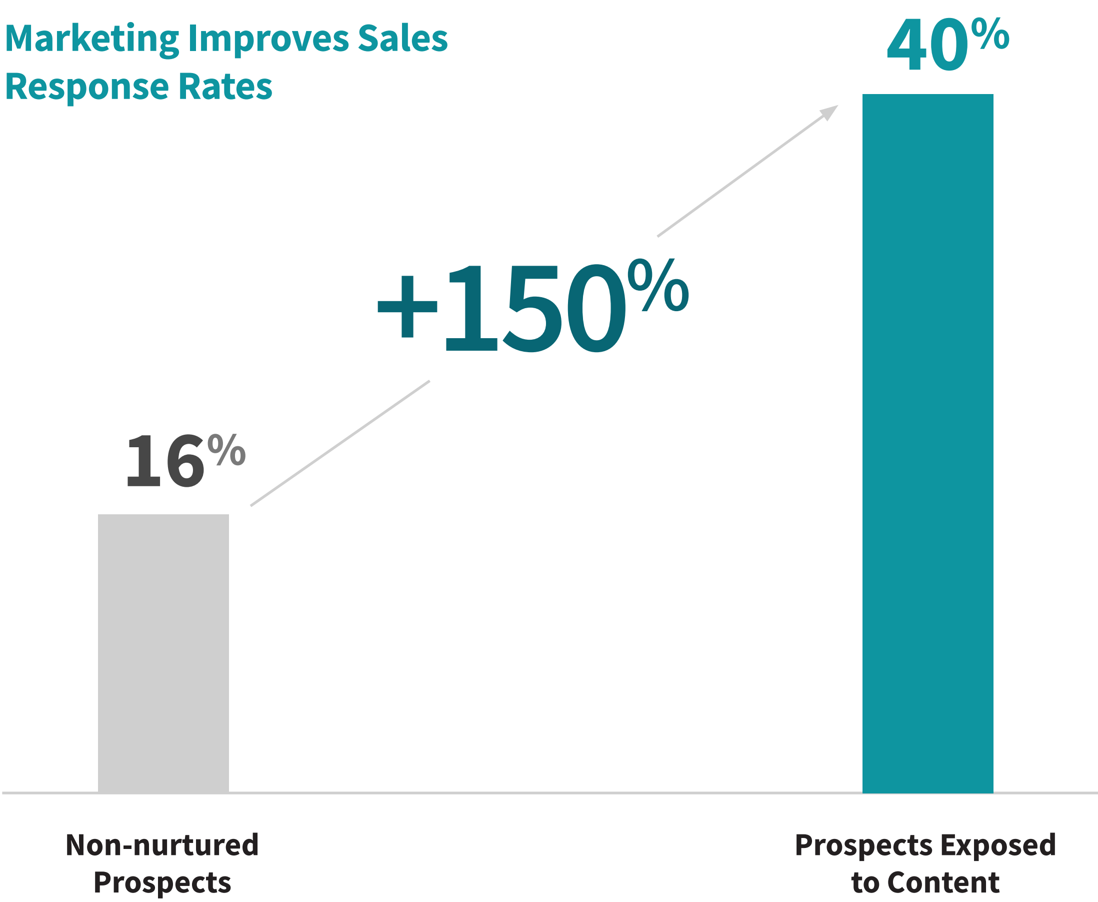
So, what is Connection Density? **Connection Density measures how connected certain groups of professionals are.** For instance, how many connections are there between your sales force and your prospective buyers/ clients? Are they densely connected, or sparesly connected?

It turns out that unlike CTR, Connection Density is actually a leading indicator of sales. At a macro level, for instance, our economic research has proven that metropolitan areas where professionals are closely connected enjoy faster job growth. But on the micro level, at the brand level, a few of our clients have discovered that their marketing activities indirectly result in LinkedIn connections for their sales people, and that a "connection" occurring is predictive of revenue. More connections, more money.

And although some of our clients have been using our data to track Connection Density for a while, they're now realizing that they can directly influence connectivity, instead of just measuring it as an accidental side effect of their marketing activities. We're starting to see clients using account-based marketing, a relatively new offering, to "prime" buyers with content. They then have their sales colleagues reach out to those same nurtured prospects.

Our internal data shows how powerful marketing can be at driving connectivity. We've seen, for instance, that if a salesperson sends an InMail to a prospect who was not exposed to content, they get a 16 percent response rate on average. But if that prospect is exposed to thought leadership, there is a 150 percent lift – and the response rate jumps to 40 percent. So, increasingly, our clients are not only tracking connectivity and "Cost-Per-Connection," but also reorienting their efforts to ensure that marketing activities result in connections for their sales partners.

Marketing Improves Sales Response Rates



RECAP

Great, So How Can I Take Advantage Of These Trends Today?

We promised to walk you through our seven trends, and we do hope that you've enjoyed the stroll. But we also promised you that all of these trends were actionable, and we'd like to deliver on that promise, too. Now we did our best not to try to sell you anything in this eBook, but we will tell you, hypothetically, what we would sell you if you wanted to take advantage of any of these trends today.

CHECKLIST

How To Take Action

- [ ] 1. Invest in **thought leadership** to drive sales
- [ ] 2. Package your thought leadership into **"blockbusters"**
- [ ] 3. Use your blockbuster to achieve **touchpoint consistency**
- [ ] 4. **Amplify** your blockbuster via employees
- [ ] 5. Reach the **entire buying committee** with your blockbuster
- [ ] 6. **Distribute** according to the 60/40, 10:1, and 80/20 rules
- [ ] 7. Start measuring **"Cost-Per-Connections"**

TREND 1

The True Value of Thought Leadership

Our first trend described the true value of thought leadership, and how it drives sales. LinkedIn can help here in a few different ways. First of all, we offer you a platform where buyers actively seek thought leadership, a platform where 500M professionals go to find topical expertise that will help them advance their careers. But more tactically, for active clients, we can use our data to tell you what topics your buyers care most about, and that, in turn, can inform your content creation efforts. We call this “Trending Content,” and it functions like an in-house social listening tool. If you’d like to see that data, you should connect with an Account Executive (and rest assured, we will track the connection!).

TREND 2

The Rise of the B2B Blockbuster

The second trend we covered was “Blockbuster Marketing,” a new and better way to monetize content – not like a newspaper, with 100 lightweight, real-time articles, but like Disney, with one heavyweight asset per quarter, an asset that achieves familiarity and fuels extensibility. This is the trend we are the most bullish on. Our Brand Strategy Team has spent the past six months dissecting all the blockbusters in B2B in an effort to demystify the process. The result of that work is what we call “Blockbusters-As-A-Service,” where we partner with top clients to actually develop these blockbusters, end-to-end, in exchange for a media commitment. If you’re intrigued, please reach out to us on LinkedIn.

TREND 3

The Need for Touchpoint Consistency

The third trend is touchpoint consistency, and LinkedIn has more of a supporting role here. Ultimately, only the brand itself can ensure touchpoint consistency. To build recall through pattern recognition, a brand needs visual guidelines that are easy to follow, rigorously enforced by a “Brand Czar,” and differentiated from the aesthetics of their competitors. LinkedIn is just one of many channels, but we do our best to counsel clients on these best practices and point out inconsistencies in design. When we build “blockbusters” for clients, we ensure that they follow brand guidelines in a variety of formats.

TREND 4

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The Arrival of Everyone-As-A-Marketer

Our fourth trend concerned employees, who we believe are a brand’s most valuable touchpoint. LinkedIn’s role here is manifold. We give brands a platform for featuring their brand characters. Your executives and subject matter experts can write long-form thought leadership via the Open Publishing Platform and short-form status updates. You can link to your employees’ profiles in your blockbusters, like we’ve done here, and you can send inMails from employee profiles to drive webinar or event attendance.

We’ve also invested in an employee engagement tool called Elevate, which allows employees to seamlessly share company content to their social networks. If you’d like to learn more about Elevate, please connect with an Account Executive.

TREND 5

The Death of Hypertargeting

Our fifth trend described the downside of overtargeting, and the benefits of “bare minimum” targeting in B2B. Here LinkedIn’s role is obvious – we have the best B2B data set in the history of the human race. We have 1st party, self-declared data derived from 500M professional profiles that you can use to put your thought leadership in front of the right audiences. Ideally you will stick to one “layer” of targeting (like seniority or skills) instead of hypertargeting CXOs in Cincinnati at video game companies with 100 employees.

TREND 6

The Rules of Brand Investing

The sixth trend detailed the three rules of brand investing: the 60/40 rule, which balances brand with demand, the 10:1 ratio, which balances creative with distribution, and the 80/20 rule, which ensures that 80 percent of your money gets allocated to the top 20 percent of your content.

LinkedIn’s role in the sixth trend is largely operational – when we run pay media campaigns, we structure them to adhere to these rules, and our product set makes that possible. You can use Sponsored Updates to push thought leadership, and use retargeting, CRM match, and 1-click Lead Gen Ads to drive leads from buyers exposed to that thought leadership. You can use rigorous A/B testing to determine your top 20 percent content, and use our Campaign Manager Tool to allocate 80 percent of the budget to those hits. To learn more about any of these campaign best practices or how to leverage our products, reach out to an Account Executive, who will be delighted to talk to you.

TREND 7

The Case for Cost-Per-Connection

Finally, our seventh trend dealt with “Cost-Per-Connection,” as the new KPI – a KPI that is more meaningful than vanity metrics like CTR and CPCs. This is our most “futuristic” trend in that it’s not totally ready for prime time. What you can do today is run Account Based Marketing campaigns and synchronize them with your sales team’s outreach to drive higher connection rates. For top clients, we can use custom reporting to track those connection rates, and even back into a “Cost-Per-Connection.” Eventually, we hope that reporting becomes a standard offering, and that tracking Cost-Per-Connection becomes a priority for forward-thinking marketing organizations.

We hope you had a wonderful time learning about our seven trends. If you'd like to chat about any of them, or give us your opinion on trends we missed, please feel free to reach out to us on LinkedIn.

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