LinkedIn | The B2B Institute

Better, Bolder B2B Branding: How To Unlock The Biggest Opportunity In B2B

By Kate Newstead

LinkedIn

Table of Contents

Foreword

What began as an experimental research project with some unusual measurement technologies turned into a landmark study with richer and more practical insights than we ever imagined. Thank you to our partners at MediaScience for helping us create new intelligence and actionable proof points for the B2B marketing community.

This white paper is the culmination of numerous studies the B2B Institute has commissioned into brand building over recent years. Our mission to empower B2B marketers to grow their brands and their business would not be possible without our strategic partnerships including MediaScience, Distinctive BAT, System1 and the Ehrenberg Bass Institute.

A special thank you to everyone at LinkedIn who has contributed to this body of work. The combined forces of our Sales, Customer Science, and Marketing colleagues was the perfect catalyst for robust, actionable and commercially relevant marketing intel that empowers marketers to invest strategically and maximize value from their budgets.

With gratitude, authors and key contributors are featured on the following page.

LinkedIn | The B2B Institute

Author

Kate Newstead

Marketing Science Lead, The B2B Institute, LinkedIn

As the Marketing Science Lead at The B2B Institute, Kate's focus is on translating buyer behavior intelligence into marketing decisions that drive financial results. Kate helps LinkedIn's clients implement practical marketing solutions to grow their market share and their profits. Prior to LinkedIn, Kate worked in a range of marketing, sales, media and research roles, learning from some of the best in the business including The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, Mars, Mondelez, and Coty. Kate has a unique blend of skills – as both an accomplished marketer for some of the world's most loved brands, and also as a rigorous academic marketing researcher. Kate speaks regularly at marketing and business forums around the world, has served as a judge for marketing effectiveness awards and published numerous papers in academic and industry marketing journals. For the last 10 years she has contributed to the Journal of Advertising research, the flagship publication of the Advertising Research Foundation in NYC as an editorial board member.

Contributing Authors

Derek Yueh

Partnership Lead,
LinkedIn's B2B Institute

Mimi Turner

Head of Marketplace Innovation,
LinkedIn

Amy Rask

Ph.D., Chief Operating Officer,
MediaScience

Steve Bellman

MediaScience Research Professor,
Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for
Marketing Science

Phillip Lomax

Executive Vice President, Business
Development, MediaScience

Partners And Sponsors

Rachel Abbe

Industry Research Lead,
The B2B Institute, LinkedIn

Haley Pierce

Market Engagement Lead,
The B2B Institute, LinkedIn

Ty Heath

Director of Market Engagement,
The B2B Institute, LinkedIn

Matt Ovington

Director of Research,
Distinctive BAT

Cathal Gillen

Co-Founder & Head
of Strategy, Distinctive BAT

Ann Lundberg

Senior Director, Strategic
Accounts, LinkedIn

Partners And Sponsors

Ed Coz

Senior Sales Manager,
Strategic Accounts, LinkedIn

Megan Anderle

Senior Marketing Consultant,
LinkedIn

Jeff Berger

Strategic Insights Analyst,
LinkedIn

Nick Sotolongo

Strategic Insights Analyst,
LinkedIn

Allison Schoer

Director, Market Research & Insights,
LinkedIn

Introduction

No matter where you start, all roads lead to brand. A wide range of sources, from decades of academic neuroscience research to today's financial market data consistently highlight that better branding is fundamental to unlocking growth in B2B business. And while the emphasis on brand marketing is only just dawning in B2B, ripe with opportunity for savvy marketers to exploit, our research indicates that B2B marketers alarmingly underleverage their brands, especially when it comes to advertising. Too often, already too-tight budgets are wasted on ineffective advertising, hampering the marketing team's ability to contribute to company growth.

The Question: Creative is the greatest driver of advertising effectiveness, but how effective is B2B creative?

At the B2B Institute, we've long maintained that B2B creativity is a huge whitespace opportunity for the future – largely because it's sorely lacking today. But also, because Creative is the largest driver of advertising effectiveness. Nielsen Catalina's classic study examining the sales effects of 500 campaigns found that creative accounts for half of the effectiveness of the sales results[1]. Extensive independent academic work with single-source data since the 1960s showed that when advertising influences sales, creative is the largest driver of effectiveness, with great creative able to drive 10-20x more sales than mediocre creative[2]. And more recently within the Marketing Industry, large-scale studies by creative benchmarking giant System 1 and WARC[3] drawing on thousands of campaigns illustrated the correlation between creative quality and advertising ROI. Collectively, the marketing industry and academia are aligned: great creative is worth it.

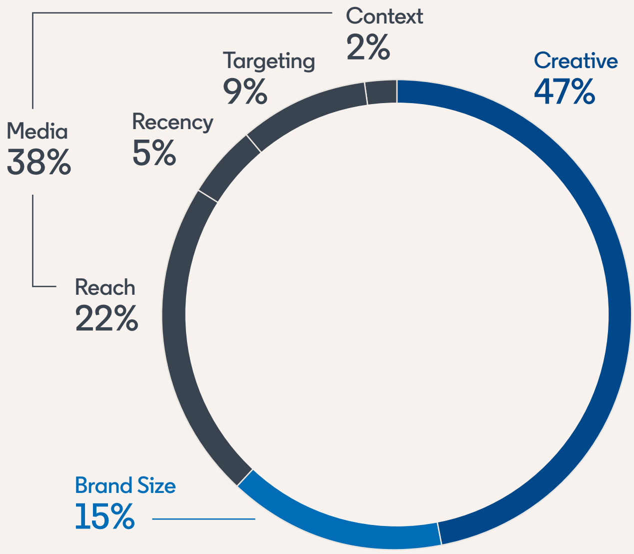
1 Nielsen Catalina Solutions, 'When it comes to advertising effectiveness, what is key?', 2017, https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2018/webinar-five-keys-to-advertising-effectiveness/

2 Wood, L., 'Short-Term Effects of Advertising: Some Well-Established Empirical Law-Like Patterns', Journal of Advertising Research, June 2009; Hartnett, N., Kennedy, R., Sharp, B., & Greenacre, L. (2015). Creative That Sells: How Advertising Execution Affects Sales. Journal of Advertising, 45(1), 102–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2015.1077491

3 WARC X System 1, 'How Creativity boosts ROI', https://system1group.com/how-creativity-boosts-roi

The Key Drivers Of Advertising Effectiveness

Creative (47%) and Media (38%) are the two key inputs that contribute to advertising performance.



Source: Nielsen Catalina Solutions 2017, 500 Campaigns Across All Media

We wanted to better understand how professionals react to advertising creative on the LinkedIn platform. Specifically, we wanted to understand how well ads grab attention and drive brand recall. And, when ads are effective, why is this so? What do effective ads do differently from ineffective ads? There's no better way to capture these insights than to go straight to the source: with real professionals on real LinkedIn feeds.

The Methodology

In 2023 we partnered with MediaScience to pioneer a landmark B2B advertising effectiveness study, leveraging their advanced eye-tracking and biometric measurement technology to see how LinkedIn users interact with ads in a real feed environment.

This study, one of the biggest and most robust of its kind, examined the in-feed performance of 109 real B2B ads, across 770 regular users of the LinkedIn platform in MediaScience's labs. Ads were interspersed in a real LinkedIn feed that respondents scrolled on a mobile device, while we tracked their eye fixations, electrodermal activity and heart rate reactions at a micro-second level. At the end of the 10-minute scrolling session, we prompted respondents with de-branded stills of the ads to assess their ability to recognize and identify the advertising brand.

MediaScience Study Setup and Metrics

N = 770 LinkedIn Members (50% employed in Manager+ Jobs)

Objective	Active Measurement	Passive Measurement	
Methodology	Custom Survey	Neurometric Tracking	Eye Tracking
Metrics	• **Ad Recognition:** Does the viewer remember seeing my ad? • **Correct Brand ID:** Does the viewer attribute the ad to my brand? • **Likeability:** Did the viewer like my ad?	• **Electrodermal Activity:** Is the viewer engaged with a stimulus? • **Cardiac Deceleration:** Is the viewer paying cognitive attention, or processing information?	• **Viewed Ad:** Did the viewer look my ad (Y/N)? • **Gaze Time:** How long did the viewer look at my ad relative to the time it was onscreen? • **Fixation Time:** How much of the gaze time was continuous (at least 100ms)?

The 50 B2B Brands Included In The Study

accenture, aetna dental, AIG, amazon, aws, American Express
AT&T, BlackRock, Capital One, Cartier, Credit Suisse, CVS Health
Dell EMC, Deloitte., EY, Fidelity Investments, Goldman Sachs, intuit quickbooks
IBM, hp, Google, Invesco, iShares by BlackRock, J.P.Morgan
Johnson & Johnson, KPMG, Lexus, LinkedIn, mastercard, Marriott International
Meta, Microsoft, Morgan Stanley, Oracle, PayPal, Pfizer
pwc, salesforce, SAP, Samsung, sas, shopify
Tiffany & Co., servicenow, T Mobile, United, T.Rowe Price
UnitedHealth Group, verizon, VISA, Volvo, workday, YouTube

The Results: 81% of B2B ads fail to gain adequate attention or drive recall.

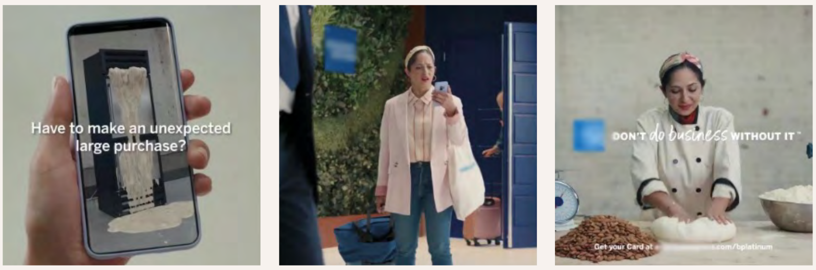
The results of this landmark study were astounding: we found that that 81% of ad campaigns are wasted. They either do not grab enough attention, or they do not drive brand recall, or fail on both fronts.

On average, 53% of audience members exposed to the ad could recognize it, and of those, only 36% could correctly identify the brand. Alarmingly, on average only 19% of an ad's audience both noticed the ad and attributed it to the correct brand. Said another way, 81% of the time, the creative and media dollars behind a campaign are wasted on ads that fail to achieve two of the most fundamental objectives of advertising. With roughly $30 billion spent annually on B2B advertising in the US[4] alone, this highlights a significant opportunity to improve the value from the investment.

B2B Ad Recognition And Correct Branding Results

53% x 36% = on average only 19% of the audience both noticed and correctly branded the ad.

1. Do you remember seeing this specific ad?



→ **53%** Ad Recogition

2. What brand was this ad promoting? ________________

→ **36%** Correct Brand Identification

Source: B2B Institute DBAT Distinctive Assets Study, Business Insurance, 2023, Geo: US

4 Statista B2B ad spend in the US 2020-2024: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1388720/b2b-ad-spend-us/#:~:text=B2B%20ad%20spend%20in%20the%20U.S.%202020%2D2024&text=In%202022%2C%20business%2Dto%2D,dollars%20in%20the%20previous%20year.

In parallel, we uncovered another worrying fact. The average B2B brand is supported with 15+ creatives (and the corresponding paid media investment) per year, according to 700 B2B marketers in LinkedIn's Macroeconomic Quarterly Pulse survey[5], per year. Anecdotally, we see some clients investing in hundreds of different ads each year. How many of these ads are great ads? How many are achieving the basic objectives of paid advertising? **How much money, time, and resources are wasted on the hamster wheel of mediocre ad creation? And how is this damaging long term brand value?**

The Solution: Better, Bolder B2B branding improves ad outcomes and marketing ROI.

It was the sobering statistics above that prompted this paper – a two-part call to the B2B marketing industry to update our dialogue about optimization and the financial value of marketing and creative; and the crucial role better branding plays in doing so.

Part I outlines the 'why' of B2B branding: a summary of the wealth of evidence supporting the value of bolder branding in B2B business. We arm marketers with the language and evidence to convince the boardroom that investing to strengthen their brand is the path to short- & long-term financial results and sustained competitive advantage.

Part II articulates 'how' to do brand in B2B, including several immediate actions marketers can implement tomorrow to level-up their brand game and generate more value from their marketing budgets. Simply putting the brand logo in the ad is not 'job done', there are important nuances in both the long term and short-term execution of branding to create real financial value.

With this intelligence, B2B marketers can stop wasting money on tactics that don't work, shift the dialogue about ROI on their budget, and demonstrate value to both customers and the C-suite.

5 LinkedIn's Macroeconomic DM Pulse (June 2023). Geo: US, UK, India, Australia, France, Germany, Brazil. N=727. "To the best of your knowledge, approximately how many individual creatives did your brand support with paid media in the last 12 months?"

Part I:

Why Better Branding Is Key To Better Marketing Results

Brands provide safe passage past the brain's bouncer.

Instinct and emotion are in the driver's seat for most decisions, including what we purchase and what we pay attention to. The reptilian brain, the limbic system, and the social norms of 'the tribe' are the human traits that kept us safe in our prehistoric caves, and they persist to this day - profoundly influencing all B2B purchase decisions. Brands are mental short cuts the reptilian brain and the B2B buyer tribe depend on.

Our research collaboration with Bain & Company[6] into the buying motivations of B2B purchases illustrates that being well known or familiar to the buyer group is a strong predictor of which brand gets chosen in a B2B purchase scenario. The majority of B2B buyers agree that a better-known brand is more likely to be the chosen solution, even when that brand has an inferior product, or is more expensive. Not just a pretty logo and a signature color, brands are powerful tools to instigate choice and action. These facts are the marketing manifestation of automatic programming and satisficing behaviours that guides our species.

Researchers in the medical and social sciences space generally agree that the logical brain (our neocortex) play a minor role in decision making[7]. Instead, we rely heavily on the reptilian brain (the brainstem and cerebrum, the most primitive part of the human brain). The reptilian brain is responsible for keeping us safe from danger and is the first responder to stimuli; and the limbic system (hippocampus, hypothalamus and amygdala) is the home of emotions, memories and actions.

Emotions And Instinct Are Stronger Than Logic In Human Decision Making

6 Forthcoming Research White paper, launching October 2024, LinkedIn B2B Institute, Bain & Company, Why B2B marketing is really Buyer Group Marketing and how reaching Hidden Buyers will lead to more closed deals, Mimi Turner, Jann Schwarz, Jamie Cleghorn, Andrew Pierce.

7 Damasio, A. R. (1994). Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons; Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

A natural and automated optimization engine, our brain scans our environment constantly, screening out things it finds unessential, including the majority of marketing efforts which fail to make it through the relevance filter. Sending a message to a potential buyer does not mean that the message is received: success is measured at the hippocampus of the receiver, not at the mouse-click of the sender. Hacking the hippocampus is the only way an ad makes it past the brain's bouncer.

Which ads do successfully make it past the brain's bouncer? Humans are naturally programmed to gravitate to things we know and like, things that feel safe and familiar, and things that trigger emotions and memories. The implication for marketers is that logical arguments, such as focusing on product features or rational reasons are the wrong tools to persuade the most influential parts of the brain. Instead, cultivating a well-known (i.e. familiar) brand, and using emotional and 'safe' messaging is more likely to permit the marketing stimulus to get past the brain's filtering system. Empirical research into response bias of advertising awareness by Professor Jenni Romaniuk shows that brand users are typically 2x more likely to notice advertising for the brands they already use[8]. This is a core tenant of how mental availability (the ability of the brand to come to mind in a purchase situation) works.

Brands convince the B2B buyer group 'tribe.'

Beyond the intricacies of the brain, the B2B buyer is also beholden to the influence of the 'tribe' aka the buying group: a collection of individuals tasked with choosing and buying a B2B product on behalf of their organization. Buyers of B2B products and services are primarily motivated to choose brands that their peers and superiors will approve of. Best said by Matt Dixon and Ted McKenna in "The Jolt Effect," The fear of mucking up (fomu), far out weights the fear of missing out (fomo).

A social species, humans typically don't live (or work) as segregated individuals. Rather, we exist in complex communities with norms, hierarchies and rituals governing how we interact and collaborate. Our innate desire for social harmony, approval and connection with our tribe influences what we say, do and even what we believe.

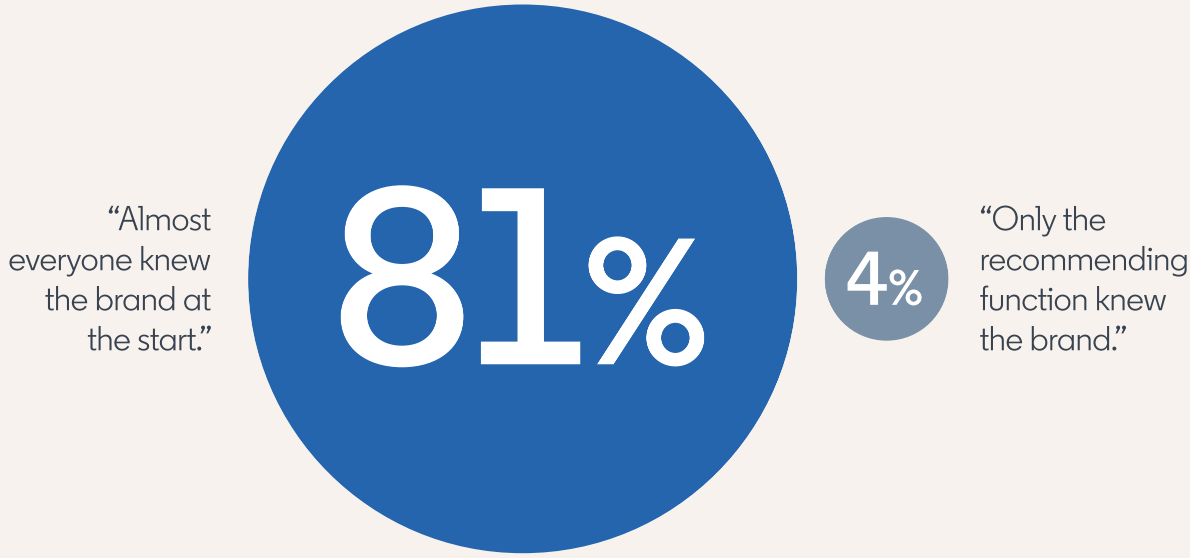
One of the fundamental implications for marketers, already successfully leveraged for decades in the luxury category, is the ability of the brand to bestow social proof. Hermès handbags are a chic status symbol not because I think so, but because the tribe agrees. In B2B marketing, brands can symbolize important cues that matter to the B2B buying tribe. Brands that are thought to be trustworthy, well known, good value for money, or something the C-Suite (our tribal leaders) would approve of have advantageous social proof that guides the buyer group tribe. It is precisely this social proof that permits buying groups to reach the collective confidence required to agree. Without collective confidence, an estimated 40-60% of B2B purchases get stuck and are abandoned because the B2B buyer group couldn't agree[9].

At the most fundamental level, being a brand that is more widely known by the buyer group is itself a form of social proof. The forthcoming B2Bi & Bain and Company & Newton X Buyer Group study confirms this, with 81% of B2B buyers reporting that at the start of the purchase process, "everyone" or "almost everyone" knew the brand that was eventually bought. Conversely only 4% said their company bought a product that "only the recommending function" knew of.

8 Romaniuk, J., & Wight, S. (2009). The Influences of Brand Usage on Response to Advertising Awareness Measures. International Journal of Market Research, 51(2), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/147078530905100213

9 The JOLT Effect: How High Performers Overcome Customer Indecision, – September 20, 2022, by Matthew Dixon and Ted McKenna

Knowledge Of Bought Brand Amongst The B2B Buyer Group



Source: Buyer Group research, The B2B Institute, Bain & Company and Newton X, Forthcoming B2Bi white paper (Oct 2024)

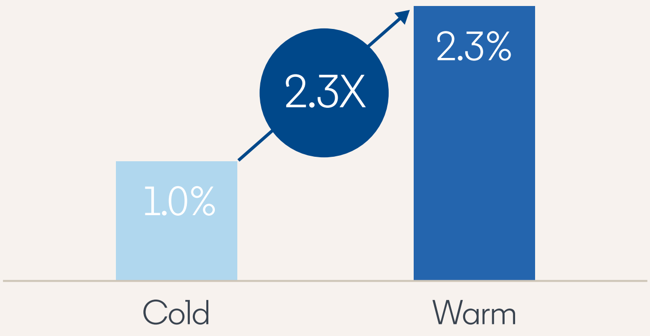
Branding improves the bottom-of-funnel activities that deliver this quarter's quota.

Propelling in-market buyers towards a closed deal is the typical objective for bottom-funnel marketing activities such as lead generation, conversion campaigns and Search Engine marketing. Numerous best practices in these spaces already exist (and are beyond the scope of this paper). However, the specific role of better, bolder branding as a marketing tool can have a key role in delivering better demand generation ROI.

On the LinkedIn platform, we routinely see the results of conversion orientated campaigns improve when audience members are initially 'warmed up' by brand and awareness orientated campaigns, before being served a conversion message. For example, conversion campaigns targeted at Tech Buyer audience achieved a 2.3x increase in conversion from audience members who first saw brand messages versus those who saw only the demand generation conversion message.

Bottom-Funnel Response Rates With And Without Prior Brand Messaging

Strong brands have fatter pipelines. Brand marketing delivered against a broad target audience improves demand gen outcomes.

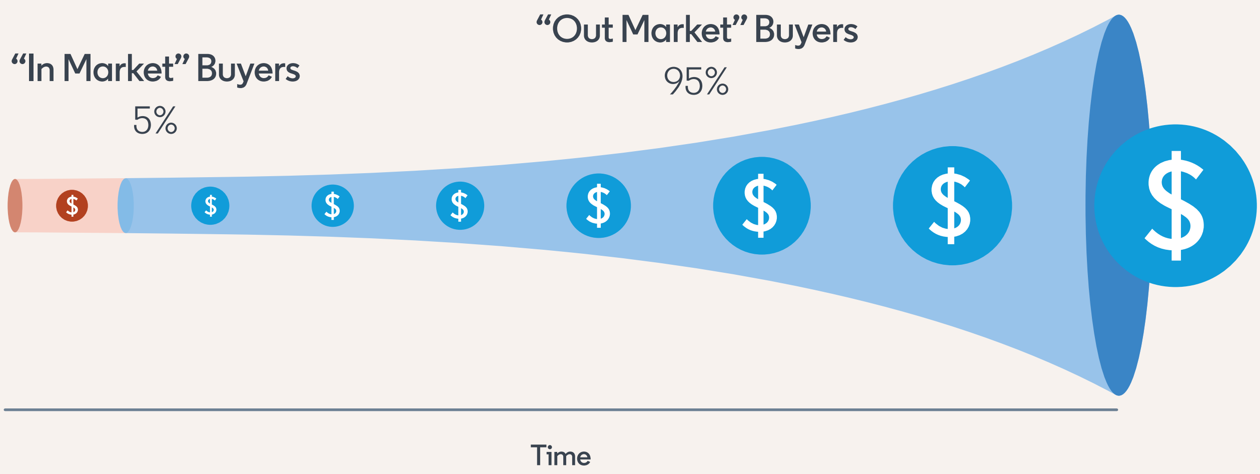


Source: LinkedIn internal data. All campaigns targeted to Tech Buyer (BDM+ITDM) audience in North America for the year of 2022.

Branding impacts the 95% of the market who make up next year's revenue pipeline.

B2B marketers are adept at optimizing to the 5% of buyers in market now; routinely chasing fractions of percentage-point increases across countless bottom-of-funnel results to prove the impact of marketing. Affecting the 95% typically receives far less attention, which significantly undervalues the impact of marketing on business performance. Chasing leads or conversions is a worthy endeavor, but the scale of success is capped, simply because the majority of any brand's available customers are not in the market right now and won't be for many months or years. This reality is demonstrated by the 95:5 rule, pioneered by Professor John Dawes.

The 95-5 Rule



10 What B2Bs Need to Know About Their Buyers, by Saber Sherrard, Rishi Dave, and Mollie Parker MacGregor, HBR, September 20, 2022

In any given month or quarter, only a small fraction (e.g. 5%) of potential buyers are 'in market' and available to convert, while the majority (e.g. 95%) are 'out of market' and only available over a much longer horizon - typically many months and years.

So, while the majority of customers who see an ad or marketing activity from a brand will not convert, they may still be impacted by the marketing touchpoint. The intended outcome of marketing investments that reach the 95% of 'out market' buyers is not to convert them, but to lay the foundations for a brand conversion in the future. Specifically: to make the brand memorable or mentally available so that it comes to mind at a future moment when an out-market buyer becomes an in-market buyer and must evaluate and choose a brand to satisfy their purchase requirement.

Well-known brands are more likely to be shortlisted.

A buyer forms a shortlist when they transition from out-market to in-market. This is the most crucial moment for marketers to ensure their brand 'rises to the top'. A survey by Bain and Google of 1,208 B2B buyers[10] showed that 86% of B2B buyers begin a purchasing process with a "Day One" list of brands in mind, and 92% of the time the brand eventually chosen is from that day 1 list.

Only brands on the shortlist have a chance to be chosen and the shortlist is very short: typically, less than a handful of brands. In our research with the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute in 3 B2B categories, we found that the average buyer considers only 2 or 3 brands[11].

The Size Of the Average 'Day 1' List In B2B

Brand	Average Number of Brands Considered
Business Banking	2.6
Office Hardware	2.6
Cyber Security	2.9
Average	2.8

Source: B2B Institute & Ehrenberg Bass Institute Category Entry Point Studies: Business Banking (2023), Office Hardware (2023), Cyber Security (2022). Geo: USA

Which brands make it onto the short list? Those that are fast to mind and relevant to the buying situation. Our research with the Ehrenberg Bass Institute into 7 B2B categories consistently demonstrates that the biggest and most well-known brands, and/or those which are associated to contexts relevant to the buyer's purchase situation are most likely to come to mind.

10 What B2Bs Need to Know About Their Buyers, by Saber Sherrard, Rishi Dave, and Mollie Parker MacGregor, HBR, September 20, 2022
11 "Category Entry Points In A B2B World," published by the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute and the B2B Institute at LinkedIn: https://business.linkedin.com/marketing-solutions/b2b-institute/cep-in-b2b

Only brands on the shortlist have a chance to be chosen, and the shortlist is very short.

Brand building is incredibly valuable in this effort, as brands with relevant memory structures are the most likely to be featured in buyers' consideration set.

An important caveat: Most B2B buyers choose a brand from their 'Day 1 List,' so you need to make sure you market your brand to them before day 1. When an in-market buyer is forming their short-list, it is largely 'too late' to start building credibility and associations that will link the brand to the purchasing moment. The shortlist is generated primarily by the search engine in our heads, which is filled with brands we already know, recognize and associate with buying cues. At the moment when the buyer enters the market, the window for marketers to influence has almost closed.

Strong brands create business outcomes that both CMOs and CFOs care about.

Better branding increases the ROI of the marketing budget.

Like any investment, the annual marketing budget is expected to payback by demonstrating delivery of desired outcomes in an efficient manner. While it is generally accepted that long-term metrics like brand health tracking are 'fair' representations of the gradual and long-term impact of marketing, the industry is simultaneously obsessed with measuring immediate, short-term impact. Many B2B marketers are wholly dependent on click through or conversion rates to demonstrate their contribution to delivering this quarter's leads quota.

There is already much focus on optimizing bottom funnel campaigns, but there is another far more sizeable opportunity to step change in ROI that is commonly overlooked. Let me explain.

CTR or Lead-Gen completion rates are typically deemed a success when only a small fraction of the audience served the ad took the desired action. However, a 5% CTR means that for every 5 audience members who clicked, there were 95 who didn't; and the marketer still pays for the eyeballs of all 100 audience members.

The biggest upside in improving bottom-funnel campaign performance is to ensure that these campaigns are also optimized to build mental availability for the brand. Better B2B branding is equally relevant for the traditional 'brand equity' campaigns, and the daily 'conversion' campaigns.

Stronger bands protect their company's financial value.

Strategic brand management helps companies achieve key financial performance objectives such as revenue growth, margin expansion, and risk reduction. In partnership with Jonathon Knowles, our recent white paper explores the marketing-finance interface, detailing the 3 specific contributions marketers make to company financial value.

Marketing investments that diligently create associations between the brand and relevant buying situations (i.e. building mental availability) increase the chance the brand will be shortlisted and bought by more customers in more buying situations. More customers shortlisting and buying the brand means more current and future revenue. The financial implication is significant, since net customer recruitment is the primary source of growth and therefore cash flow generation for any business.

Furthermore, strong brands typically have higher perceived value, allowing them to command higher prices, in turn expanding profit margins. Similar to the social proof and human brain concepts discussed in part I section 1, customers often see well-known brands as 'worth paying more for'. Strong brands protect companies against having to offer price discounts to justify brand purchase.

Beyond revenue generation and profit margin expansion, brands provide financial benefits that can be seen directly in hard financial metrics such as capital access and company valuations. A recent IPA study found that companies with strong brands are deemed more reliable investments by investment analysts; with 'brand strength' the top factor in their appraisal of a business[12].

Companies with strong brands are generally more resilient during adverse market conditions[13], as investors expect the company's earnings to be more resilient than peer companies with weaker brands. Strong brands aid in lower stock price volatility, which has the added benefit of lowering the cost of capital.

In Summary, The 'Why' Is Three-Fold:

Brands are crucial mental short cuts B2B buyers depend on.

Brands influence and win customers today and tomorrow.

Brands are fundamental tools in delivering tangible financial results.

The What is better bolder branding in B2B. Now let's dive into The How.

12 Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. "New Evidence in the Case for Marketing Is an Investment," December 2023. Accessed 5th August, 2024.

13 Madden, Thomas J. et al. "Brand Matter: An Empirical Investigation of Brand-Building Activities and the Creation of Shareholder Value." Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science 34(2): 224-235. April 2006.

Part II:

How To Do Better, Bolder B2B Branding

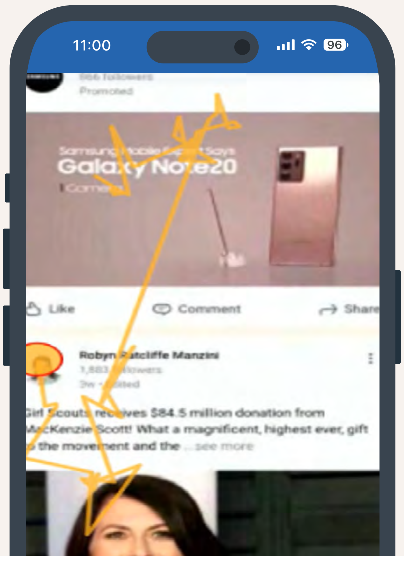
Let's dive into the 4 key insights on how to build robust brands, and the marketing decisions that support and inhibit this objective. Part II of this paper includes specific tangible recommendations for how to win in the B2B Brand Building Era, both immediate actions you can start implementing tomorrow, and long-term compounding investments that secure the future.

Recommendation #1: First, capture precious, fleeting audience attention. Then, avoid squandering it.

Capturing attention has never been harder. Most of the content we are exposed to each day fails to make it past the brain's bouncer. With this in mind, we set out to understand how humans react to B2B advertising when they do not click or take an action that implies interest. We wanted to go beyond standard campaign evaluation metrics, to understand the subconscious and involuntary reactions that the audience member cannot articulate and often doesn't realize is happening. As respondents scrolled through a LinkedIn feed interspersed with test ads, we used eye tracking technology to record the movement of the eyes at micro second level, as well as heart rate and electrodermal activity. All ads in the study were video format and all were real ads that advertisers ran on the LinkedIn platform. This data yielded more than 350 hours' worth of data, a rich source of passive measurement to understand ad attention in-situ.

Our key findings are that attention is fleeting and fragmented. Test ads were on screen for an average of 12.3 seconds, however the viewer only paid attention to an ad for an average of 3.7 seconds. And that 3.7 seconds is rarely 3.7 seconds watched in a row. Viewers switch focus to/from the ad on average 2.4 times. For example, they may watch 0.5 seconds near the beginning of the ad, then glance back up to the previous piece of content, then back to the ad for 0.9 seconds, then sneak ahead to read the headline of the following post and revert back to the ad to linger for another 1.7 seconds, before abandoning the ad completely.

Finding #1: Attention Is Fleeting And Fragmented.



The yellow line on the phone screen image is an example of a respondent's eye movement as recorded in MediaScience's proprietary eye-tracking tool.

Ad On-screen for	Buyer pays attention	Buyer switches focus
12.3s*	3.7s	2.4x

*defined by MRC standard: 50% of ad pixels in view

Source: LinkedIn's B2Bi & MediaScience B2B Creative Effectiveness Study, April 2023, N=770, Geo: US

With a wide variety of creative styles used in the test ads, it was not possible to identify a specific type of creative that guarantees attention. There is no creative 'silver bullet' for grabbing attention, but previous academic literature would suggest that emotion, humor, relevance, and triggers of fear/safety generally fare better in breaking past the brain's bouncer. Nevertheless, great attention-grabbing advertising is still somewhat an 'art'. Leveraging emotion, human, relevance or 'story telling' in a way that is 'easy to notice' is the trick.

We recommend avoiding lengthy, elaborate ads that require high cognition and complex concepts, since key points in the story are easily missed and most viewers won't bother to concentrate to fill in the missing parts. The fundamental implication for marketers is that attention is precious, and it's critical to leverage that attention on the most important part of the marketing message: the brand. There is weighty evidence to suggest great creativity is a must, which we do not dispute. However, if the goal is to maximize value from the advertising and creative budget, we would add that the brand must always be the star, never the supporting act of the creative.

Recommendation #2: The logo is not enough to stand out in the sea of sameness. Use the tactics that are more likely to deliver memory and attention goals.

In our B2B advertising effectiveness study we looked at what great performing ads had in common, and what they did differently from the worst performers. We identified three core tactics to design creative that works: brand early and often, use shorter and more succinct brand-centric messages, use sound strategically.

Brand early and often.

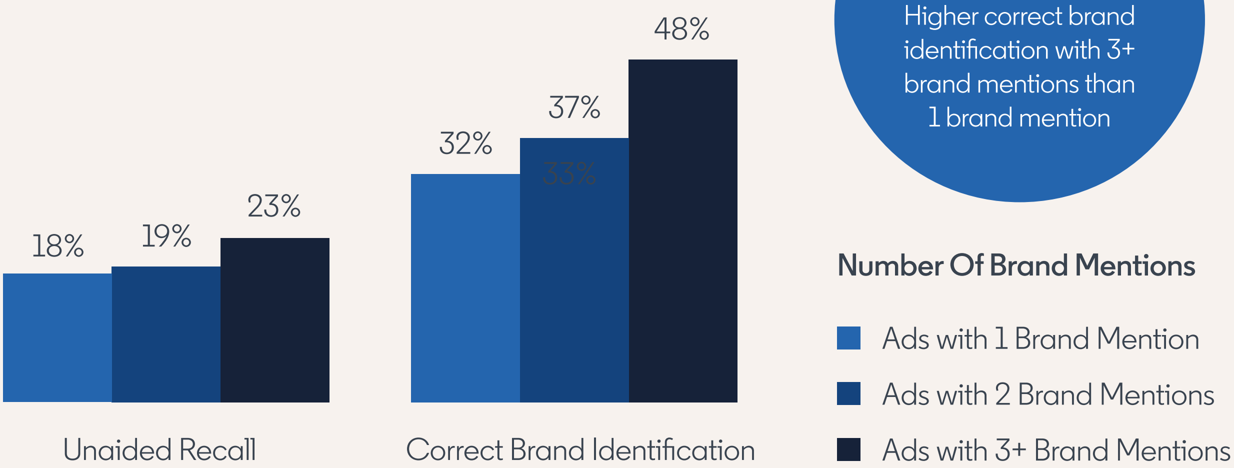
Frequently mentioning the brand is linked to better recognition and correct brand identification. Ads with 3+ brand mentions achieved an average of 48% correct brand identification versus 32% for ads with just 1 brand mention. The amount of branding had no notable negative impact on any of the attention or biometric results, meaning that there is no such thing as over-branding an ad. In fact, the data suggests that more branding is a good thing for audience engagement: ads with branding present for 60-100% or 100% of the ad duration received likeability scores of 5.5 and 5.3 respectively, versus 4.9 for ads with branding present in only 20% of the ad duration.

We recommend avoiding lengthy, elaborate ads that require high cognition and complex concepts.

Finding #2: Ad Effectiveness Increases As Number Of Brand Mentions Increases.

50%

Higher correct brand identification with 3+ brand mentions than 1 brand mention

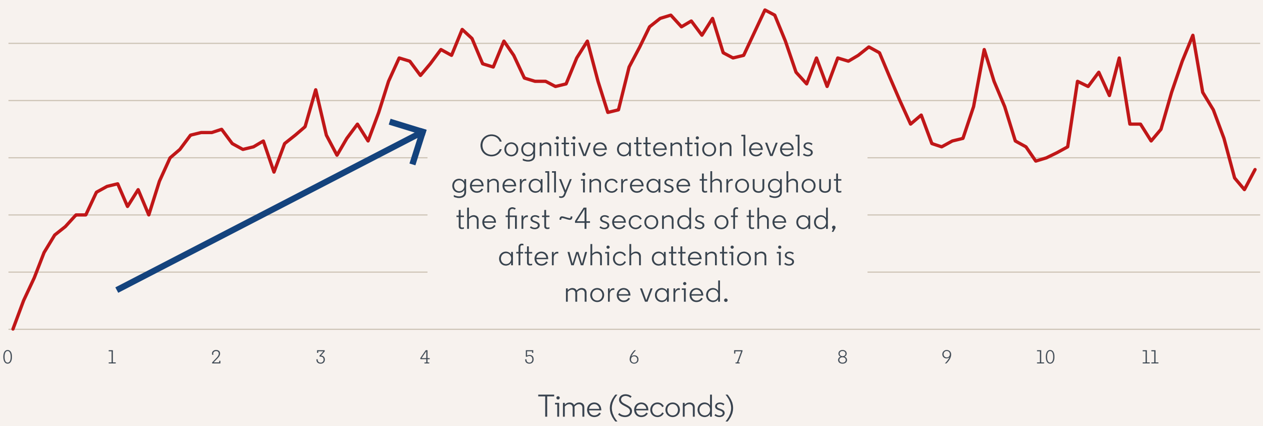


Source: LinkedIn's B2Bi & MediaScience B2B Creative Effectiveness Study, April 2023, N=770, Geo: US

The data also suggests that early brand mentions are important. While the amount and intensity of attention each audience member pays to each ad varies, it is typical to see higher levels of active attention at the start of the ad. Cognitive processing, measured by cardiac deceleration data, continues to increases during the first ~4 seconds of that ad, indicating viewers are looking at and more actively processing the ad. After 4 seconds we see more inconsistencies (i.e.: more ups and downs in the chart line) in attention and processing.

Finding #3: The First Few Seconds Of The Ad Are Crucial Moments To Leverage Attention.

Cardiac deceleration indicates heightened cognitive processing at the start of the ad.



Source: LinkedIn's B2Bi & MediaScience B2B Creative Effectiveness Study, April 2023, N=770, Geo: US

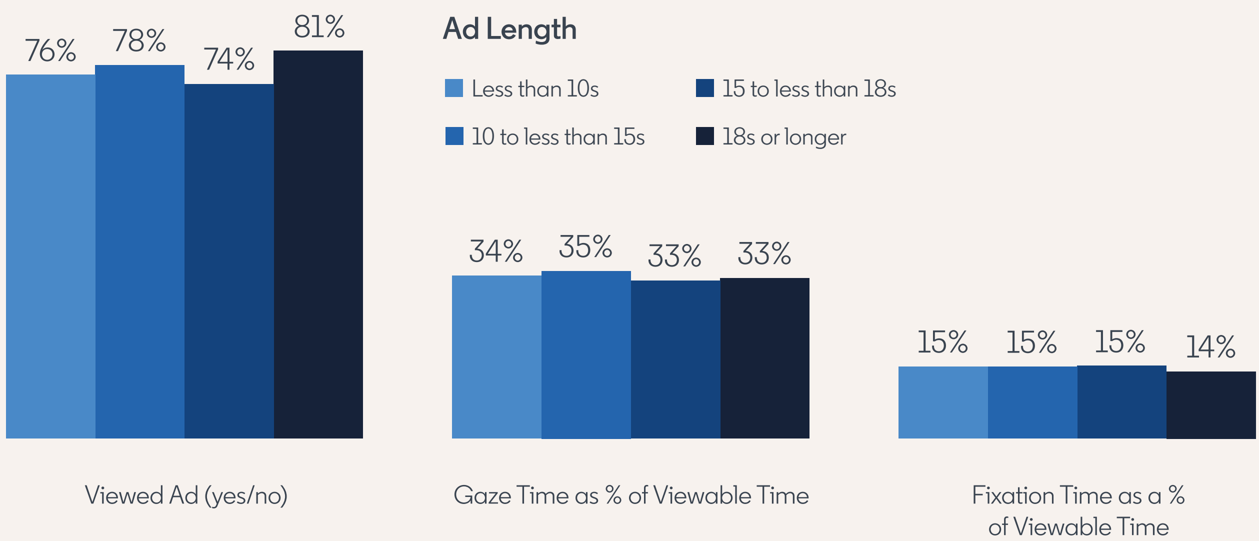
Coupled with the general attention challenges discussed in Finding #1, **we recommend mentioning the brand within the first few seconds and regularly through the ad**. And don't worry about possible negative effects of 'too much branding' – there is no such thing.

Use shorter and more succinct brand messages.

The amount of attention a viewer gives an ad is the same regardless of the ad's length. There were no notable differences in the probability to view the ad at all, the amount of gaze time, the number of fixations, or the ad likeability rating between longer versus shorter ads. Shorter ads were slightly more likely to record better scores, e.g. ads that were 10 seconds or less in length had 68% ad recognition, vs 59% for ads that were 18 seconds or more in length. These findings illustrate that audiences do not reward longer ads with better engagement, attention or brand identification. On a per second basis, shorter ads are better bang for their buck.

Finding #4: Longer Ads Are Not Rewarded With Higher Attention.

Ads of all lengths achieved the same average amount of viewer attention.



Highest is significantly higher than lowest for Viewed Ad only ($p < .05$).

Source: LinkedIn's B2Bi & MediaScience B2B Creative Effectiveness Study, April 2023, N=770, Geo: US

Our dataset included ads ranging from 6 to 180 seconds. And while we didn't arrive at a magic ad length number, our recommendation is to err towards shorter ads (~10 seconds). **We suspect that the findings regarding ad length results are in part driven by differences in creative discipline. With only 10 seconds to spare, a marketer must be ruthlessly focused on their communication priorities.** With 120 seconds, there is ample time for superfluous content to creep in and fill up valuable seconds, diluting the brand visibility and core message. This makes it even less likely that the human brain watching the ad will notice the most important content: the brand behind the ad.

Use sound strategically to give ads a competitive edge.

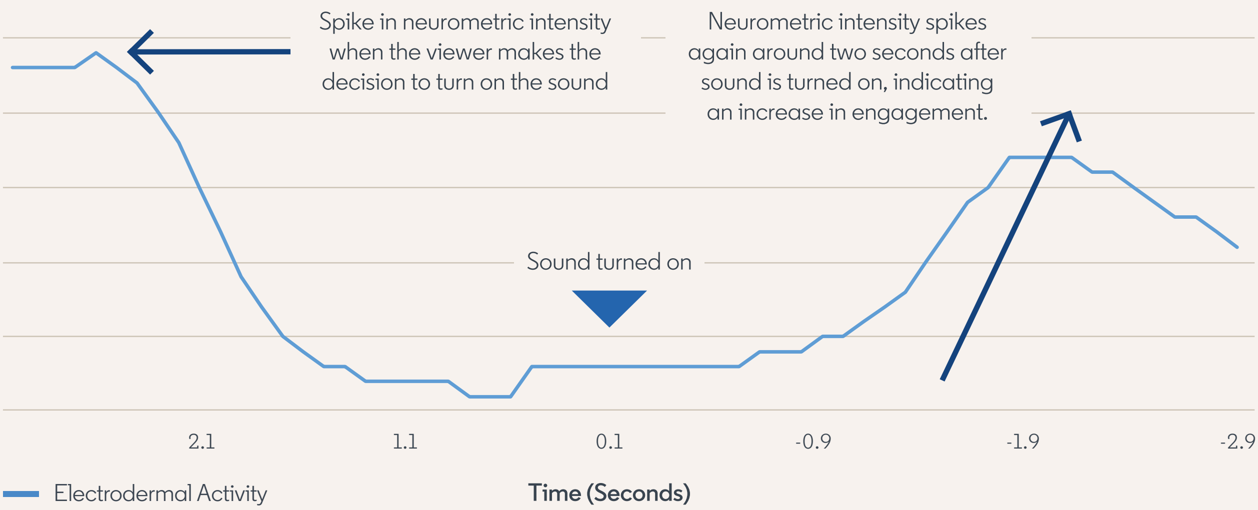
Including sound in ads may seem like a moot point since LinkedIn is a default sound-off environment. Many advertisers seemed to agree, since only 70% of our video ad sample included sound.

But 8% of the ad views in our dataset were watched with sound on, indicating active attention on the respondent's part. When the sound was on, it was only audible while the ad was on-screen, for an average of 3-5 seconds, meaning the audio is rarely heard in full. While only a few people listen to ads, and only for a few seconds, sound can fundamentally enhance memory and engagement. This is because clicking to turn on the sound is an engaging activity, and once sound is audible, it is a more engaging experience for the viewer. Previous academic research supports this recommendation, with numerous studies indicating that ads with audio tend to receive better results than those without[14].

The chart below shows a typical example of the 'neurometric' activity in the fractions of seconds before and after a viewer turns sound on. High variations, rather than flat-lines, are indications of increased engagement. These results are highest when the viewer decides to turn the sound on, and immediately after the sound begins to play.

Finding #5: Attention Is Heightened Amongst Viewers Who Watch With Sound On.

Neurometric intensity spikes when a viewer decides to watch with sound on, and once they hear sound.



Source: LinkedIn's B2Bi & MediaScience B2B Creative Effectiveness Study, April 2023, N=770, Geo: US

14 Simmonds, L., Bogomolova, S., Kennedy, R., Nenycz-Thiel, M., & Bellman, S. (2020). A dual process model of how incorporating audio visual sensory cues in video advertising promotes active attention. Psychology & Marketing, 37(8), 1057-1067. (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/mar.21357); Wooley, B., Bellman, S., Hartnett, N., Rask, A., & Varan, D. (2022). Influence of dynamic content on visual attention during video advertisements. European Journal of Marketing, 56(13), 137-166. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/362120465_Influence_of_dynamic_content_on_visual_attention_during_video_advertisements)

The data on sound leads to three implications:

1) Video ads must work without sound, since most viewers won't turn on sound.
2) Video ads should always include sound, to maximize potential impact amongst the handful of viewers who do turn it on.
3) Sound elements, just like visual elements, have mere seconds to create impact. Focus audio on the most important element: the brand (i.e. with a jingle or slogan).

Not all branding tactics are created equally. The best performing ads tended to have early and frequent branding, succinct brand centric messaging and include sound for those who want to listen. We explored several other brand execution variables including the location of brand logo placement, the size of the logo, the method of branding (audio, verbal, visual), and the use of distinctive assets (if they existed). However, none had any notable impact on attention, engagement or memory outcomes. **Generally, we believe that more is more when it comes to branding. However, the three tactics – early and frequent branding, short-succinct brand messaging, and sound – are the ones that matter most.**

Recommendation #3: Be deliberate in designing useful Distinctive Brand Assets. The objective is twofold: brand stand-out and long-term creative freedom.

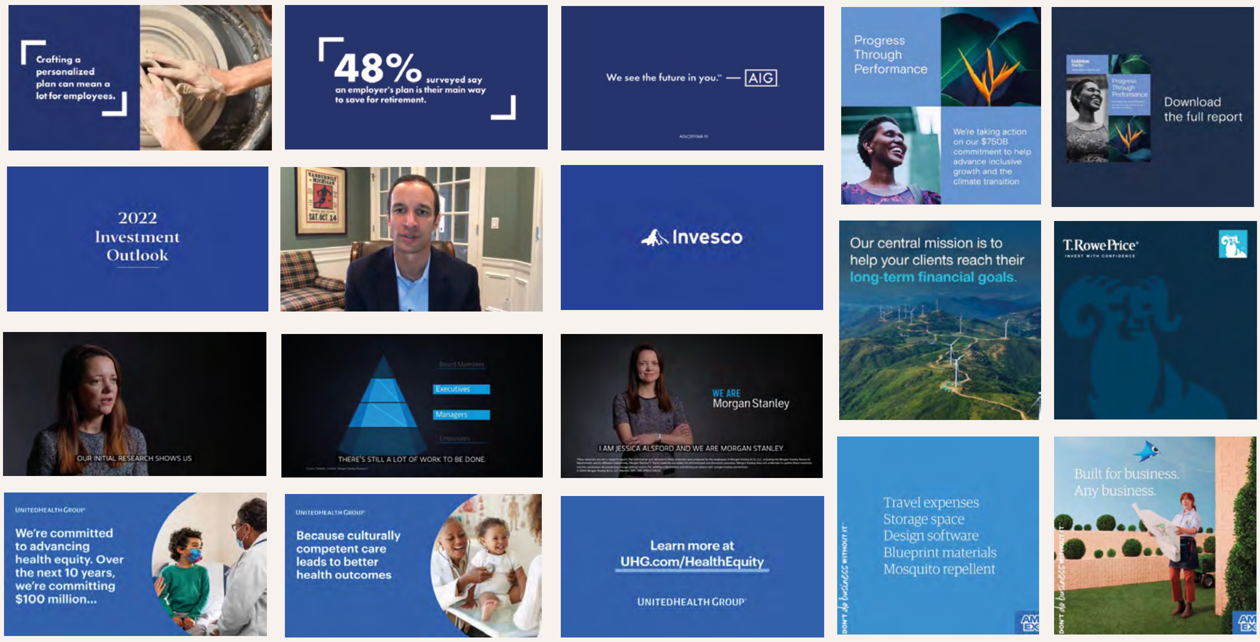
Distinctive brand assets (DBAs), a term pioneered by Professor Jenni Romaniuk of the Ehrenberg Bass Institute[15] are assets beyond the literal brand name, that cue the brand. A rich pallet of assets provides marketers with more creative options to communicate the brand and attract attention. Assets can take many forms including colors, shapes, logos, fonts, characters and sounds. The B2C world is filled with brands with strong distinctive assets, examples include the M&Ms characters, the Coca-Cola bottle shape, the Tiffany blue color, and the Netflix audio signature. However, for pure B2B brands, beyond colors and logos, distinctive assets are far rarer.

In our ad effectiveness study, we attempted to code and assess the impact of distinctive assets on ad performance, but with a handful of exceptions (such as the T-Mobile pink), few brands have colors or logos unique enough to affect advertising results. Those with assets do not always feature their assets consistently throughout the ad, missing opportunities to capture the average 3-4 seconds of attention a viewer pays to an ad. Screenshots of 7 ads in our study below show how difficult it is to own color.

15 Jenni Romaniuk, "Building Distinctive Brand Assets", published May 2018

The Sea Of Sameness In B2B

A selection of 7 ads included in our study demonstrate why color is difficult to own.



Color

Derek Yueh has been conducting proprietary distinctive brand asset audits in collaboration with Distinctive BAT for clients of our B2B Edge program since 2022, and all of his research confirms the ‘sea of sameness’: color is rarely unique to a brand. Most brands’ signature color is more likely to cue another, bigger brand. The data below is an example from our distinctive asset audit in the Business Intelligence and CRM categories. The Dell blue is correctly attributed to Dell 5% of the time, and misattributed to competitors 25% of the time (and to Microsoft specifically 10% of the time - twice as often as Dell!). Zoho and Monday.com signature colors are 4-6x more likely to be linked to a competitor than to their own brand.

Finding #6: Color Is Often Misattributed To Larger Competitor B2B Brands.

Example from the Business Intelligence and CRM Categories in the US.

	Business Intelligence		CRM	
	Dell Color	Cloudflare Color	Zoho Colors	Monday.com Colors
Brand Attribution	5%	0%	4%	6%
Misattribution	25%	23%	32%	24%
	Microsoft **10%** Amazon **3%** IBM **3%**	Amazon **10%**	Microsoft **26%** Google **4%**	Microsoft **6%** Amazon **4%** Google **4%**

Source: B2Bi Distinctive BAT Distinctive Asset Studies in Business Intelligence and CRM categories, 2022, Geo: US

Despite the ubiquity of blue in B2B branding, we would not recommend the Dell marketing team replace signature blue with fluorescent green or another new unique color, as this would wash away all existing brand equity. But it is also a bad strategy to depend on the Dell signature blue, without any supporting assets. Relying too heavily on color alone is like spending your money growing a competitor's market share.

Brand logos

Logos, when presented alone, are also typically too weak to cue the brand. In the example below of Business Intelligence Distinctive Assets, we looked at the extent to which buyers recognized and correctly linked the logo to the brand. We found that even the logos of major brands like Google Cloud are recognized and correctly attributed by only half of the respondents. Medium and small brands record even lower correct brand attribution scores for their logos and worryingly, many are more likely to be misattributed to a competitor than to their own brand. These findings are consistent across all B2B Distinctive asset studies categories Derek and Distinctive BAT have done to-date including Cloud, CRM, Business Insurance, Business Intelligence, Cyber Security etc.

Relying too heavily on color alone is like spending your money growing a competitor's market share.

Finding #7: Logos Are Commonly Recognized, But Rarely Attributed To The Brand.

Example from the Cloud category in the US.

Brand	Brand Assets	Asset Recognition	Brand Attribution	Misattribution
AWS		93%	67%	2%
Google		84%	56%	6%
Salesforce	salesforce	69%	36%	6%
Hubspot		69%	18%	11%
Cloudflare		63%	6%	18%
SAP		59%	18%	12%
Digital Ocean		59%	13%	13%
MicroStrategy		57%	5%	8%
SAS		51%	4%	14%
ServiceNow		51%	5%	9%
Oracle		50%	21%	5%
Qumulo		47%	1%	17%

Source: B2B Institute Distinctive DBAT Distinctive Assets Study, Cloud, 2023, Geo: US

Beyond color and logo, what other assets can marketers turn to? Taglines, sound signatures, celebrities and characters are common in B2B categories, but with mixed results.

Taglines

Taglines in B2B generally perform poorly. Our Distinctive BAT data shows that the average B2B tagline in is attributed to the correct brand just 5% of the time, and misattributed to a competitor 15% of the time. Taglines from some of the biggest B2B brands include: 'The World Works with_________', 'Grow Better', 'The bridge to possible'. How many of these three can you correctly link to the brand?[16] Taglines that can be so easily mistaken for competitors are not effective distinctive assets, but they can become more effective with adequate investment, and by being featured consistently in a brand's advertising and marketing materials over time.

16 Answer: The World Works with ServiceNow, Grow Better: Hubspot, The bridge to possible: Cisco

Sonic signatures

Sonic signatures, although rare in B2B, may hold more potential. In our analysis of distinctive assets within the Business Insurance category we found catchy jingles such as Farmers Insurance, and Liberty Mutual perform strongly in recognition and correct brand attribution. Legacy sound signatures such as the Microsoft Windows start up screen and the Intel-inside 4-beat sound are classic B2B examples which may also hold promise if reinstated and elevated as priority communication assets.

Celebrities, influencers and characters

These are common alternative assets that marketers turn to in an effort to stand out. While famous faces can command attention, they are problematic in driving mental availability for the brand. Usually, the celebrity endorser is a much bigger brand that eclipses attention from the host brand signing their cheques. In our Distinctive BAT analysis of the Business Banking and Business Insurance categories, we found that ads enlisting famous actors and sports stars were rarely attributed to the brand, except in cases where the brand/celebrity partnership was exclusive and over multiple years. In contrast, characters that were purpose-built by the brand performed much better.

The Liberty Mutual characters LiMu Emu and Doug are perhaps some of the best performing assets in the industry. At the time of data collection, Liberty Mutual had been using LiMu and Doug as brand assets for 4 years. Competitor insurance brand Allstate and their celebrity partner Dennis Haysbert scored on-par brand attribution, despite having had a 16-year head start on LiMu + Doug and Liberty Mutual.

Finding #8: Ownable Characters Are Stronger Brand Assets Than Celebrities.

Example from the Business Insurance Category in The US.

	Liberty Mutual	All State
Character or celebrity		
Correct brand attribution %	84%	83%
Partnership since	2019	2003

Source: B2B Institute DBAT Distinctive Assets Study, Business Insurance, 2023, Geo: US

Celebrities can be effective, but their fidelity is limited to their contract period, comes at a high price, and requires long term commitment. Characters that can be developed and owned by the brand are far more efficient investments; plus, they don't have any high maintenance talent agents to contend with.

Creative Freedom

The bar for highly recognizable and unique distinctive brand assets is low in B2B. Strong distinctive assets are uncommon, and misattribution is rife. Ads that look like your competitor are ads for your competitor. Create competitive advantage by looking as different as possible.

Distinctive assets deliver value by creating richer and stronger mental cues for your brand to capture the attention of the audience. Distinctive assets also provide an incredible space for on-brand creativity – a tour of the Liberty Mutual ad catalogue demonstrates how creativity and bold distinctive branding can coexist beautifully.

Ads that look like your competitor are ads for your competitor.

Tips For Building Unique And Useful Distinctive Brand Assets:

#1 **To strengthen existing brand assets,** consistently co-present the brand asset with the brand, in every possible brand touch point and over multiple years. Be overt, consistent and ensure the brand and the asset are the heroes, not the side act.

#2 **To build new assets,** choose assets that are as different to competitors as possible. This might mean a new business bank that is bright pink, or a CRM brand logo that looks like a banana. Meaning does not matter. Uniqueness does.

#3 **To choose the best assets,** deliberately build the assets that will enable stand out and creative freedom across all marketing touch points. Beyond advertising, consider where your brand must stand out: on a website, as an app icon on a cluttered smart phone, on company cars or employee uniforms, product packaging, etc. Pick the assets that are most relevant to those environments.

Recommendation #4: Practice ruthless self-control. Avoid the short term hit of 'something new now' in favor of true competitive advantage that comes from consistency.

This finding is rooted in Professor Walter Mischel's Marshmallow Test[17]: the shorthand name for decades of academic research into the psychology of self-control. What began in the Harvard psychology department as a test of children's ability to delay self-gratification is equally relevant to the temptations facing today's marketer.

The Marshmallow Test

A child is presented with a marshmallow and given a choice: Eat this one now or wait and enjoy two later. What will she do?

The CMO Test

Brand X gets a new CMO. She's presented with a set of existing brand assets and given a choice: rebrand now or wait and develop on the existing strength of these assets. What will she do?

The compounding value of Distinctive Brand Assets

With the average tenure of Fortune 500 CMOs at 4 years[18], and the mounting pressure to show visible results, marketers understandably feel the pressure to make fast or frequent changes to signal their impact. It is not always easy to prioritize delayed but greater rewards over smaller but immediate rewards. For the last 10-20 years, the various marketing leaders of AWS, Google and Microsoft have all resisted the temptation to change or 'refresh' their brand logos and have seen their value compound as a result.

17 Walter Mischel, The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self Control, First published September 23, 2014

18 Spencer Stuart CMO Tenure Study 2024: An Expanded View of CMO Tenure and Background, April 2024. https://www.spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/cmo-tenure-study-2024-an-expanded-view-of-cmo-tenure-and-background

Finding #9: The Longer Brand Logos Remain Untouched, The More Distinction They Can Achieve.

Example from the cloud category in the US.

Brand	Brand Assets	Year Introduced	Asset Recognition	Brand Attribution	Misattribution
AWS		2000	93%	74%	3%
Google Cloud		2016	91%	68%	5%
Google	Abcdef Abcde	2016	68%	57%	4%
Microsoft	Abcdefghi Abcde	2012	89%	67%	5%
Microsoft Azure		2021	61%	14%	13%

Source: Microsoft, Google and Amazon logo histories sourced from 1000Logos: https://1000logos.net/; Asset recognition and attribution scores from B2B Institute Distinctive BAT Distinctive Asset Studies (2022, 2023, USA).

The more a brand looks like itself, the more chance it will hack the human brain hardwiring that prefers familiar, safe, and known things. Marketers are the stewards of building, refreshing and leveraging the audience's collective knowledge of the brand, thereby creating immediate value from marketing investment and long-term competitive advantage. The lofty ambition is to build a brand that is so famous, with distinctive assets so unique and so unanimously associated to the brand, that no competitor would dare to look anything like it.

B2C parents: the unfair competitive advantage

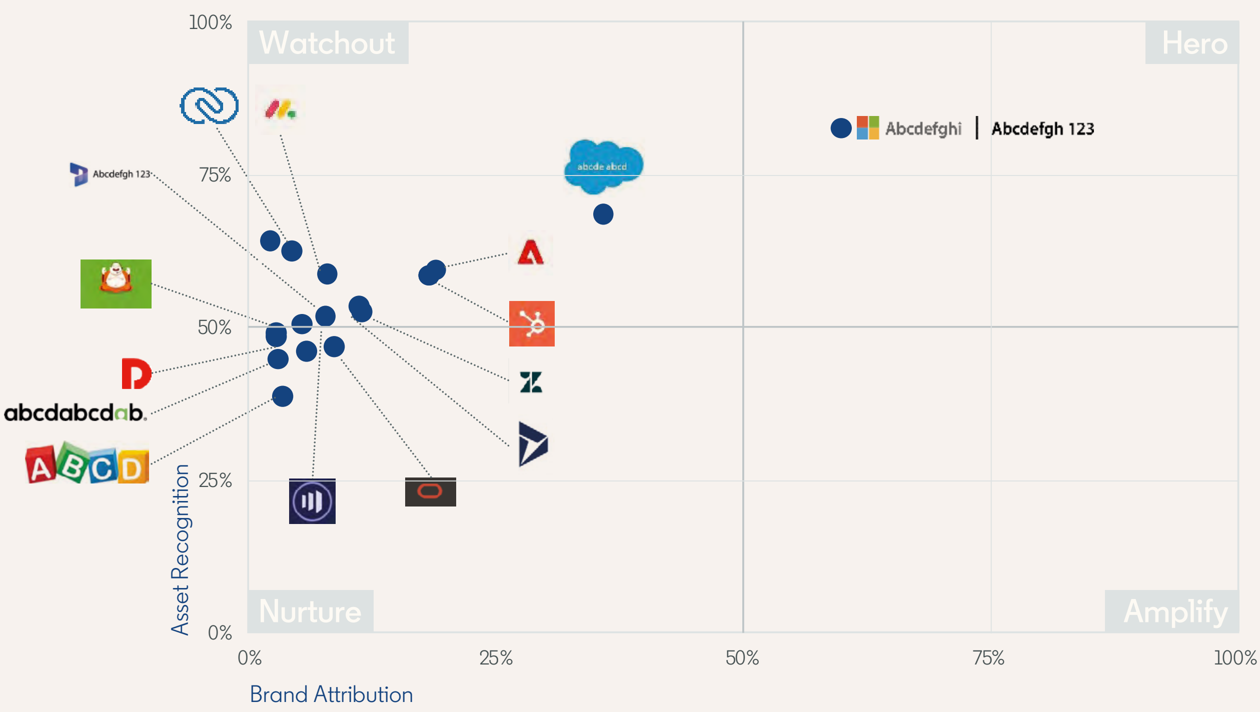
Marketers responsible for the B2B arm within a heritage B2C brand face additional temptations. Think of the Mastercard B2B marketing teams operating within the broader Mastercard organizations. The desire to stand out from the B2C arm of the business could inspire marketers to create alternative logos, use different color palettes, or even build a whole suite of new brand assets. Instead, we encourage B2B marketers with B2C heritage brands to appreciate their lineage for the advantage it is.

B2B brands with a B2C brand parent enjoy higher rates of ad recognition, correct brand identification and stronger distinctive assets. Much of this advantage is due to decades and millions, sometimes billions, of invested dollars into brand building – a competitive advantage that cannot quickly or cheaply be matched. In our B2B ad effectiveness study with MediaScience, most of the top 10 performers across all key metrics were brands with B2C heritage.

Even the Salesforce cloud logo, which is the #1 CRM in the world (but a purely B2B brand), can't compete against Microsoft's B2C Legacy.

Finding #10: B2B Companies With A B2C Parent Brand Tend To Have Stronger Distinctive Brand Assets.

Example from the CRM category in the US.



Source: B2B Institute Distinctive BAT Distinctive Assets Study, Business Insurance, 2023, Geo: US

The business playing field is rarely fair, and 'pure' B2B brands, without the luxury of a B2C parent, still compete against those with B2C heritage advantages. We regularly hear clients talk about how different B2B marketing is to B2C, and we do sympathize with this position. However, we strongly recommend B2B marketers do not ignore B2C neighbors, but rather keep them within their line of sight. Even if they are not direct competitors within your category, they are next door to you in almost every advertising environment, competing for the same fleeting human attention.

The best B2B marketers are those who play to their advantages, master self-control and take the long view. By compounding the value of brand assets with time, commitment and consistency, they leave their brands (and companies) in a better shape than when they started.

Conclusion

The B2B industry holds huge untapped potential: B2B marketers have significant headroom to better leverage their brands. Those who rise to this occasion stand to unlock competitive advantage, efficiency, ROI, company financial value, and career defining kudos.

Taking action to improve branding in B2B advertising (and in B2B marketing generally) will result in stronger B2B brands. This is one of the most important responsibilities of the marketing team and underscores the role marketing plays not only as the custodian of the brand, but as a driver of company growth and profitability.

Brands provide safe passage past the distracted human brain and social proof the B2B buyer group needs to agree and purchase. A brand's impact extends across the entire marketing funnel: driving today's conversions and shoring up tomorrow's future revenue stream. Not just a 'tool' for the marketing department, the brand is a powerful company asset that can deliver tangible financial value.

Executing better, bolder B2B branding is the path to realizing these significant opportunities.

Better branding helps marketers win today.

Too often 'branding' is cast as a long-term luxury for the few – a creative endeavor relevant only to those B2B marketers with Superbowl-size budgets, 'brand equity' objectives, and invitations to the South of France each June. Our position is that branding matters to every marketer, operating at every touch point, including (and especially) marketers who want to optimize value from bottom-funnel activities. The ROI conversation will be step-changed not by increasing CTR by 0.5%, but by maximizing the impact of the ad amongst the 90%+ of audience members who do not click on it.

Our B2B advertising effectiveness research revealed a handful of specific things marketers can start implementing immediately, to start shifting the dial on their advertising.

Key Takeaways: The Better Branding Checklist For B2B Marketers

Attention

Attention is fleeting and fragmented.

- ✓ **Avoid:** ads that require high cognition.
- ✓ **Keep it simple:** use messages that people 'get' no matter which few seconds they see.
- ✓ **Focus on what's most important:** the brand.

Branding

More is more.

- ✓ **More is more:** brand early and often.
- ✓ **Short and focused:** embrace the disciple of short ads.
- ✓ **Show it and say it:** leverage sound for strategic advantage.

Capturing attention has never been harder, and marketers have mere seconds to impart their message to the audience. The number one priority should always be the brand. It is naïve to assume ads are noticed and correctly attributed to the advertising brand, or that the brand logo or color is enough to do the job. A general rule of thumb when it comes to effective brand is 'more is more'. However, the tactics in the checklist above are the ones that matter most.

Better branding sets the stage for a profitable future.

Distinctive Brand Assets are not a new idea in marketing, but rather an underleveraged idea, especially for many B2B brands. DBAs have the potential to create strong mental footprints for the brand, open creative freedom for more compelling messages, and build financially valuable company assets. Consistency matters: this is a marathon, not a 100m sprint. Being deliberate also matters: design and invest in assets that are poised to help your brand win in the moments and touch points that matter.

Marketers are the stewards of the brand, a highly valuable company asset that drives customer acquisition, company revenue and profit margins. The best marketers, those who leave their companies and brands in better positions than when they started, are those who do two things:

1. Take full advantage of the assets they have, including any unfair advantages such as the equity of their B2C parent brands.
2. Double down on branding, while avoiding the temptation to unnecessarily 'tinker' and the risk washing away value.

The classics are classic for a reason, and both profitable companies and enviable career legacies can be built on 'staying the course'. Today's marketers have the opportunity to lead both their brands and their companies, and we are excited to see them rise to new heights as they take advantage of the huge B2B brand building opportunity.

Limitations And Areas For Future Research

In this section we outline some of the major limitations of the white paper and the key research studies within it. Outlining the edges of our current knowledge helps organize our priorities for future focus since there is always much more for us to learn about how marketing and B2B branding works.

The industry needs more fundamental research grounded in B2B categories.

The intent of this paper is to present our current knowledge on how brand decisions impact B2B advertising and marketing outcomes. Many of the fundamental academic research studies that underpin our understanding of how brands impact growth come from the B2C arena, where brand building, and marketing investment (and the analysis of both) benefits from a significant advantage over that of the B2B world. Though there are many reasons to assume similarities between B2C and B2B world – for example: all buyers have the same human brain and therefore subject to the same memory limitations – we continue to champion the need for more B2B datasets, case studies and research projects. Proving effectiveness and understanding nuances of the B2B marketing job remains a core need in our industry.

At the B2B Institute we are committed to continuing to fund such projects to advance the knowledge on brand building, and commercially impactful marketing for the B2B community. We know many others in the industry share our vision, and we are encouraged by the growing focus on research that advances B2B marketing practice.

Research studies are not perfect representations of reality.

No one research study is perfect, and the numerous studies we reference in this white paper are subject to their own methodological limitations. For example, in our Ad Effectiveness study with MediaScience, to make use of the cutting-edge passive measurement tools, all data was collected in a lab environment.

While respondents were not informed about the purpose of the study and were free to scroll through a generic LinkedIn feed on a mobile phone at their own pace, it's likely that an in-lab setting might alter their behavior compared to what might happen 'in the wild'. Our hypothesis is that in their natural setting, viewers would be even less attentive and even less likely to notice brands, but this remains unverified.

Likewise, in our numerous distinctive asset studies with Distinctive BAT, we do our best to balance the survey environment limitations with the practical and cost-efficiency requirements of our research budget.

The importance of Big Brand Effects.

Unless otherwise noted, we have taken care to present results and recommendations in consideration of the Double Jeopardy Law. Big brands are advantaged not only with more customers and higher loyalty rates, but also with better advertising results. We controlled for brand usage bias in our raw data before analyzing the effectiveness of branding tactics. Without implementing this control stage, we'd be recommending all advertisers make ads like Google, Amazon and Microsoft (i.e. the biggest brands) – which would not be particularly insightful or practical advice. In our opinion, the effect of brand usage and brand size on any brand and marketing research does not get enough attention, and we recommend all marketers pay this due consideration when commissioning their own market research.

Future Research Questions

We have a long list of questions for future research into the brand building effects on commercial results:

- How does brand building work over the long term? B2B purchase cycles are months or years – what measurement tools are appropriate (and accessible to marketers) to quantify effectiveness?
- How much investment is 'enough' to build adequate distinctive asset strength? For new brands starting out or scaling up, are there hacks or fast tracks?
- What are the most practical ways to manage a distinctive brand asset across portfolios of products? How far can assets realistically 'stretch'?
- Do the key brand advertising tactics identified in this study travel well to other environments? What adaptions might be needed to win in non-feed advertising environments, and across other marketing touch points?
- What role can AI play in advancing brand and advertising measurement and research? How can we use emerging technologies to extend our knowledge and engineer cost-effective solutions, as well as real world experiments to better understand marketing communications?

We welcome outreach from like-minded partners who are interested in exploring ways to tackle these ideas and advance our industry knowledge together.

First Published in September 2024 by The B2B Institute at LinkedIn

The B2B Institute at LinkedIn