



# INSPIRE

4.2

**B2B**

AN INSPIRING BRAND IS ALWAYS  
ON THE CONSIDERATION LIST

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# fore word



**A couple of years ago** I was presenting to a room of CEOs in Sweden about the human experience and why thinking about a business audience as “people” rather than “customers” would be more effective for them. They were very hospitable, and the coffee was amazing. At the end, following some polite applause, the most important of this group of particularly important people said:

*“This is all very interesting, but, of course, irrelevant for us as we only deal with businesspeople—we only operate in B2B markets.”*

“But aren’t businesspeople still humans?” I asked.

A room full of CEOs laughed at my apparent joke, complimented me on my British humor, and bade me farewell.

In a career of confusing encounters, this was one of the more confusing. Why wouldn’t an organization think about its business audience in the same way others would think about their customer audience? Were they really so different? And was my suggested approach to think of them and the brand in more human terms (creating a shared sense of purpose, trust, respect and advocacy) so naïve?

Then, late in 2020, I arrived at Wunderman Thompson and was introduced to some of the smartest thinkers I have ever met. One of the first things they asked for my point of view on was B2B and how to think about business audiences.

*Oh blimey, I thought, here we go again. Better ask them what the agency view is first before I show my ignorance.*

“Well,” they said, “we reckon the B2B world has been misled into believing that businesspeople don’t think and act like regular consumers and that for some weird reason they don’t respond to communication in the same way. You see, they are humans, just like in the B2C space.”

It was at this point I knew I had found my new home.

This paper is an attempt to right some wrongs and clear up some misunderstandings. By using some of the agency’s latest proprietary Inspire research, those smart thinkers will explain how the B2B world has been misled for so many years. Because the truth is that the way in which businesspeople think about brands and communication and opportunities to buy is the same way that people—people think and

buy. If anything, the ideas of “brand” and “emotion” and the need to feel “inspired” are even more important for those looking to secure the services of other businesses, in what often amounts to significant, critically important investments. Put simply, if you are interested in a more effective way to communicate your business, this paper will tell you how.

I hope you enjoy what you read and wish only that it inspires you to see the B2B opportunity differently. Many often think of marketing people as deeply risk-averse and conservative when creating communication for fellow businesspeople. I disagree. If reading the evidence over the next few pages does not change the way you think and act, then you are one of the bravest people I know. Brave because, if you pursue a typical B2B approach, you will be flying in the face of some of the best reasoned and evidenced arguments I have yet seen. Personally, I would rather avoid the risks and embrace the human.

Enjoy!

**Sid McGrath**

UK chief strategy officer, Wunderman Thompson

## “But aren’t businesspeople still humans?”



+intio

The background features a complex geometric pattern of radiating lines in various colors (yellow, orange, green, blue) from the top left, converging towards the center. A large, thin-lined circle is centered in the middle ground, intersected by several horizontal and vertical dashed lines. The overall effect is a sense of depth and motion.

## An inspiring brand is always on the consideration list. What does that mean? Well, it means there has never been a better time to be a B2B marketer.

The rise of technology-based B2B brands offering digital services—accounting, web services, payments, et cetera—has driven the emergence of a kind of hybrid brand: B2B, but focused on SMEs, so needing to use the tools of the B2C trade—broadcast advertising, press, awareness driving digital, and so forth.

This begs the question: what works in B2B? What is the most effective way to use these channels? Taking a fresh look at the evidence, the answers are both surprising and obvious. As, indeed, all the best strategies are.

A strong brand has an advantage in B2B, just as much as it does in B2C. But B2B brands traditionally spend very little on building their brand. B2B is a graveyard for creativity and inspiration. That needs to change. Here, we argue that B2B brands should be as inspiring as B2C—because when they are, they win.

But B2B brands will still need unique skills. Making a sale is a complex, multilayered process. B2B marketers have excelled at activation and lead

generation, leveraging sophisticated technology to create ever more focused, targeted, efficient marketing machines.

Yet not everyone is as efficient as we thought, and the death of the cookie may well force a rethink for many. However, disruption brings opportunity. As such, we will outline a new operating model for B2B marketing, moving away from the creation and deployment of assets in campaigns, towards a digitally enabled, intent-driven, automated system. When delivery is automated, your teams can focus on building more valuable capabilities.

In this paper we will break down a new way to think about B2B marketing. An inspiring brand gives you an edge—and who does not want an edge? Once you are on the consideration list, a new, customer-centric operating model extends the advantage.

**We will say it again—there has never been a better time to be a B2B marketer.**



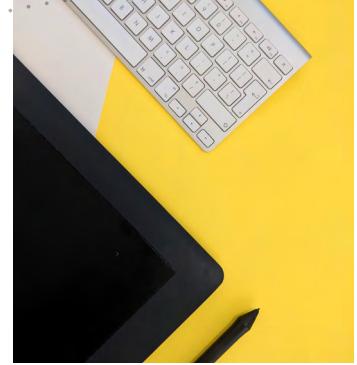
THINGS ARE ABOUT TO GET

exciting

PART ONE

# +inSPIRE

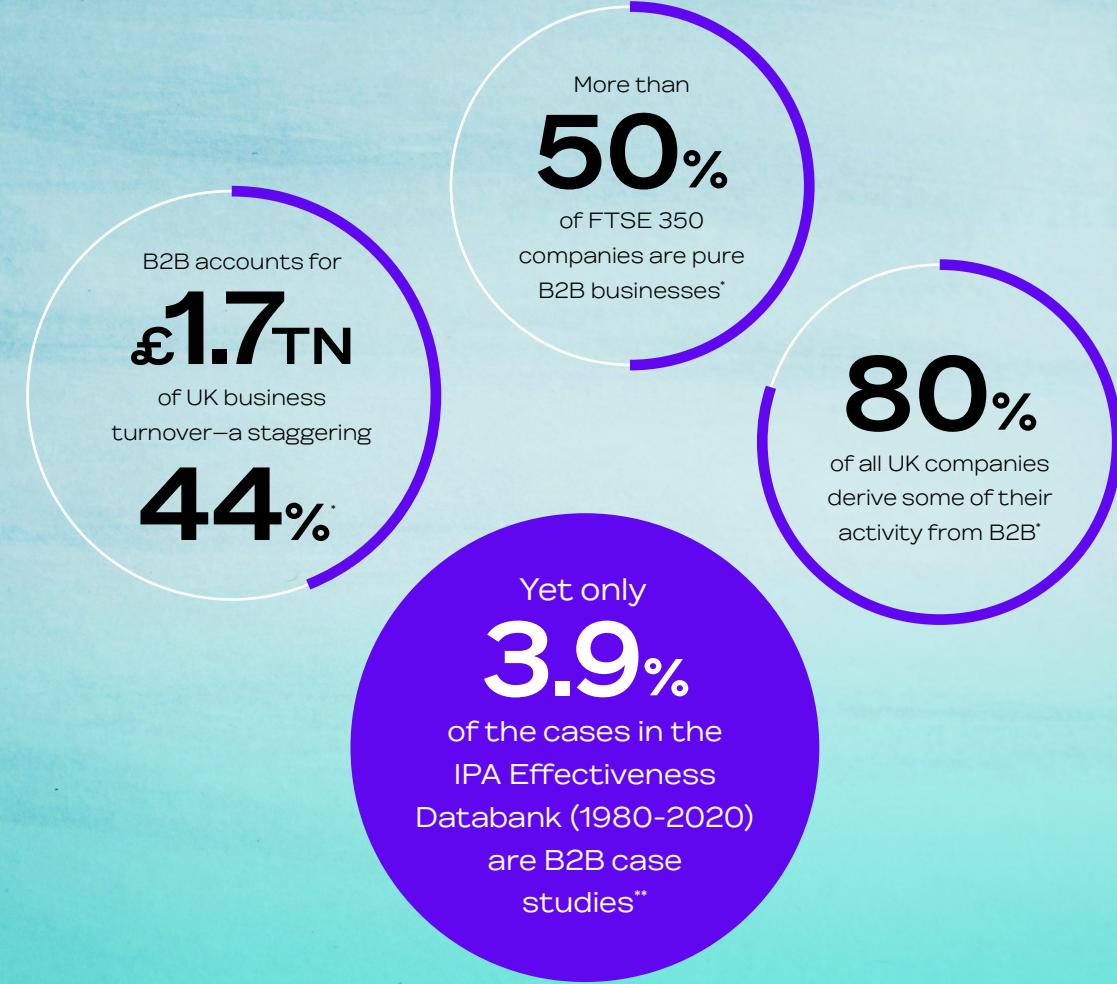
## CHAPTER



### SMILING MEN WITH BEARDS

Come with me, as Willy Wonka said, and you will see a world of pure imagination. Take my hand and we will enter a strange parallel world. It is a world that seems to have a lot of men in it. They are smartly dressed, though there are not as many ties as there used to be. Watch as people eagerly cluster around a modern piece of furniture with a laptop on it—silver, like a Mac, but not actually a Mac for legal and competitive reasons. On the laptop screen, stylish, simple graphics scream modernity. Look, a dashboard! Look, a single bar chart with two columns—that solves everything. A spider chart! There is a disposable coffee cup. A man and a woman shake hands—they have synergized. A solution is delivered. Over here are a plant and an exposed brick wall because that's the kind of space where people innovate.

Welcome to the world of B2B advertising.  
A world we all live in, apparently.

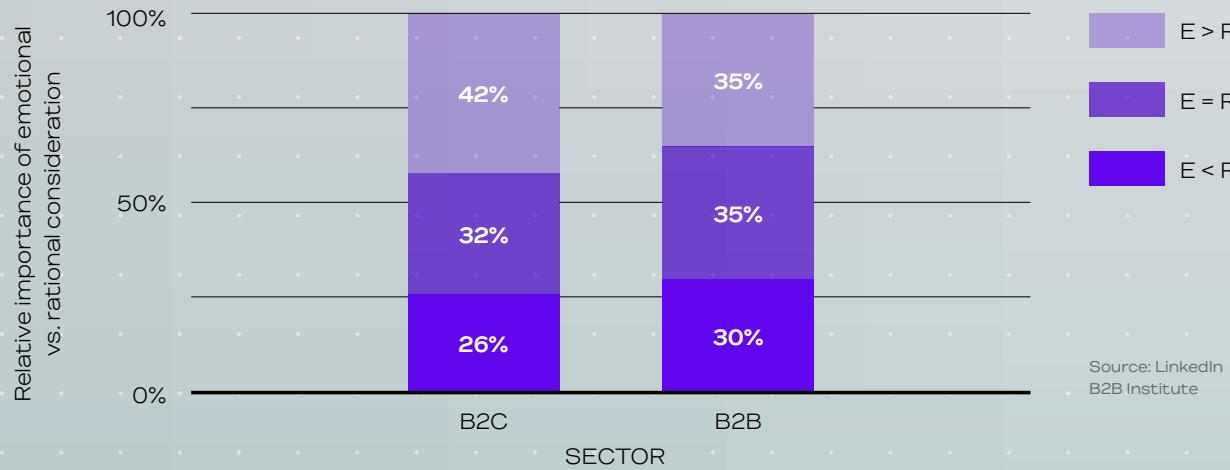


That is 58. Just 58! Barely one and a bit effective campaigns a year for 40 years\*. We don't know about you but we see an

# opportunity

# HOW DID WE END UP HERE?

**FIG.1 EMOTIONS ARE IMPORTANT IN B2B DECISIONMAKING AS WELL**

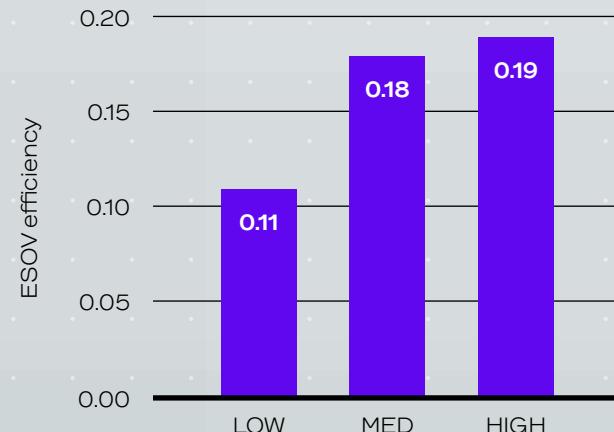


A large part of the blame lies with viewing the B2B buyer as a job title, not a human; B2B buyers are seen as rational automatons, performing their job function emotionlessly. This is a hangover from an attitude to work that is a bit old fashioned—the need to be “professional,” taking emotion out of the workplace and behaving in a way that signals serious intent and focus.

And, yes: on the face of it, a six- or seven-figure purchase should be a completely rational decision. Particularly if it is not your own money you are spending, but money you are empowered to spend on behalf of a larger entity. But, as we explain, this emotionless view of the B2B buyer overlooks the complexity of emotions tied up in making a million-pound decision at work. At the very least, we can all agree that it is stressful.

**FIG.2 DECISION PROCESS AFFECTS ESOV EFFICIENCY**

EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATION



Source: LinkedIn B2B Institute

Yet just because something is stressful, or emotional, does not mean that the decision can't be a rational one. We collectively make a huge mental effort at work to think, behave and communicate in a rational way. Alas, the data would suggest we are not making much headway.

In 2019, IPA marketing effectiveness researchers Les Binet and Peter Field revisited their seminal work on emotion in advertising, taking a particular focus on B2B. Their conclusion was that B2B decisionmaking is only slightly less emotionally driven than B2C (fig.1).

Binet and Field recommend that “advertisers should spend more on brand advertising in rational categories, not less.”

RATIONAL CONSIDERATION



Source: LinkedIn B2B Institute

Going one step further, the more we get buyers to think rationally about our products, the less effective our advertising becomes. Our first job as B2B marketers is to make our buyers have an emotional reaction and excite them (fig.2).

Let us not get ahead of ourselves—brand consultant Mark Ritson has described this need for a less rational approach as “emotion with a small ‘e.’” It is not necessarily about tugging the heartstrings and reducing CEOs to tears.

It is about building and leveraging one of the most powerful B2B sales tools we have—the brand. The changing nature of the B2B buyer is only making the brand more important.



## CHAPTER

# 02

## UNLESS YOU ACT NOW, YOU WILL GET LEFT BEHIND

While we can demonstrate that B2B marketing would be more effective if it engaged emotionally and invested more in brand, we cannot say that it is not effective. The current activation and product-focused, rational, RTB-led approach keeps the tills ringing. At a higher cost and effort than needed, yes, but leads and sales are there.

However, some broad trends affecting the B2B buying journey are changing the game and making an inspiring brand a necessity.

### THE CONTINUING EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital transformation: you are bored with it; we are bored with it. Nonetheless, transformation continues and accelerates. In 2020, some of the last habits of the analog age were swept away as we collectively tackled an unprecedented global challenge.

Digital moved a lot of power to B2B buyers. They can research digitally—68% of buyers prefer to research online rather than contact the vendor and most



journeys start with a simple generic search. This leads to one of the reasons B2B underinvests in brand. Brands with low awareness can deliver high consideration with a well-optimized customer journey. This can fool one into thinking that the clever way to use budget is to maximize your impact on those buyers in the market, rather than talking to the whole market, which feels very inefficient. This situation is wrong, and we will explain why.

For many years, events and conferences were the mainstays of B2B marketing. Buyers and vendors can connect, sales teams can see the whites of the customers' eyes, marketers can harvest email addresses and warm leads. COVID-19 put a stop to that, and the effect will reverberate for years to come. A McKinsey study shows that 70-80% of buyers do not want to return to "normal" after the pandemic.

The customer journey has changed.

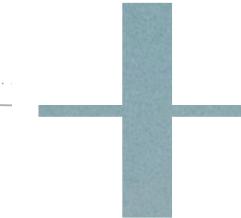
Added to this are two other effects of digital transformation: a broader buying group and more complex products.

## A DIVERSE BUYING GROUP

As digital has transformed almost every function within a business, the buying group has increased. A technology purchase is no longer made by an IT team according to requirements gathered. Many functions are involved. This means your organization is being considered by a broader group in the business. In 2017, *Harvard Business Review* discovered that in just two years the average number of buyers in a B2B decision grew from 5.4 to 6.8. Gartner estimates six to 10 people are involved in a complex decision.

Finally, there are the buyers themselves. Increasingly their world has undergone a digital transformation. They have Alexa or Google Home. They track their exercise with an Apple Watch or Strava. They order groceries and takeaways online. They are inspired by the possibilities these online services and brands are opening up. In our 2020 proprietary list of the world's most inspiring brands, Amazon, Samsung and Apple fill the top three. Add Google, LG and Huawei and six of the top 10 are technology brands.

Your buyers are listening to Spotify one moment, ordering on Amazon the next, then filling out their procurement spreadsheet. All on the same device. The lines are ever more blurred between work and home life. B2B brands are being judged against this standard of customer centricity—and they are falling short.



## INSPIRE THE CATEGORY

So we have a customer who is increasingly holding you at arm's length, and more people involved in making more complex purchase decisions, surrounded by experiences and products that inspire and delight them.

### WHAT TO DO?

The answer is not to double down and hunt the opportunities with ever more granular targeting and hyper-managed journeys. You will quickly reach the limits of your data, your budget, and your understanding of what is happening. The answer is to invest in influencing the whole market—current buyers, future buyers, influencers and consultants. In their B2B report, Binet and Field recommend 50% of your budget should go towards building the brand and 50% towards activating those in market. This does not mean inspiring the entire population. LinkedIn describes this approach as "category reach": getting in front of all those who might buy or influence the purchase of your brand at any point, not just this quarter.

TO INFLUENCE THE WHOLE CATEGORY,  
TAP INTO THEIR EMOTIONAL NEEDS.

+INSPIRE THEM



# CHAPTER



## WHY AN INSPIRING BRAND ALWAYS WINS



4.2

### INTRODUCING INSPIRE FOR B2B BRANDS

Our changing understanding of the B2B buyer goes hand in hand with a changing understanding of B2B brands. In 2020, Wunderman Thompson launched Inspire, a global proprietary study that seeks to understand what it means to be an inspiring brand.

Inspiring brands outperform peers on two key metrics—they grow market share faster, and they can charge at higher price points. Digging into the data, we can see that this is as true for B2B brands as it is in the B2C world. Again, we are not isolated in seeing this correlation. Work done by Binet and Field, LinkedIn Research and Marketing Week has all identified that B2B brands that drive “fame” are just as successful as B2C brands.

**The proof is in the pudding—among B2B buyers, the most inspiring B2B brands are:**

**2.2x**

more likely to be remembered  
when buyers are in market

**16%**

more likely to be  
recommended by buyers

**2.7x**

more likely to be rated as having  
better products/services

**2x**

more likely to be strongly  
considered by buyers

**20%**

more trusted as brands

**5.3x**

more likely to be buyers'  
first choice

So what does it mean to be an inspiring B2B brand? In a personal context, it is easy to characterize inspiration—the feeling that new possibilities are in front of us and that we can make a change or do something exciting and personally meaningful. But an inspiring brand is more complex.

Our methodology involved a three-phase approach. In the first phase, we used academic research to determine the three core characteristics of inspiring brands: Elevating, Magnetic and Motivating. We then used the proprietary BrandZ data set, which covers 33,000 brands in 183 categories across 45 markets over the past six years, to quantify the strength of brand inspiration and its impact on growth. To deepen our understanding, we also undertook a SONAR™ study with 4,000 respondents.

# 3 FACTORS THAT DEFINE +INSPIRING BRANDS

— 4.2 —

## ELEVATING

Elevating brands help customers build their aspirations by “providing content that inspires” and “creating inspirational experiences.” In doing this, they enable businesses to raise their expectations, connect with their values, and commit to realizing their ideals.

## MAGNETIC

Magnetic brands are “leading the way” and are ones that people “hear good things about.” They draw customers towards them by “broadening their horizons” and “stimulating their imaginations.”

## MOTIVATING

Brands are Motivating when they give customers clear and compelling reasons to act. These reasons help customers make purchasing decisions and take steps towards reaching broader life objectives. As a result, Motivating brands are associated with attributes such as “brings me new suggestions/ideas,” “helps me discover new things,” “shakes things up,” and “stands for something unique.”



“Microsoft products have motivated me to work harder—they have made academic work more appealing and productive.”

(UK consumer)

# INSPIRING BRANDS IGNITE change

INSPIRING BRANDS IGNITE

9.0

They make people see new possibilities and compel them to act on new ideas and perspectives. They offer a clear benefit to their audience, motivating people to expand—and reach—their personal goals. As result, their customers adopt new behaviors that make them feel good about themselves.

We find that B2B brands tend to do very well at Motivating. This chimes with the rational, feature/benefit approach that characterizes much of B2B.

But the best business relationships are partnerships. Businesses are inspired by other businesses, both at the cultural level and through individuals in the businesses. Consider Amazon's

purchase of Zappos; Amazon acknowledged that the Zappos culture was not something it could copy from outside, so it had to absorb Zappos entirely. Consider how thought leaders such as Richard Branson and David Edelman inspire change in businesses large and small. Or consider how thought leadership strategies from McKinsey, Forrester and Gartner are shared, discussed and disseminated throughout an organization.

The best businesses do not just provide a product or service, they offer an example to follow.

Let us look more closely at some inspiring B2B brands.



TOP 50 MOST

# + inspiring

B2B BRANDS IN THE WORLD



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## CASE STUDY: DHL

**Delivery and logistics firms dominate the top of our first list of inspiring B2B brands, a reflection of the sector's increasing importance in a digital, on-demand world, and of the simple joy a delivered item can bring.**

DHL, set up in San Francisco (like so many inspiring brands) in 1969 and owned by Deutsche Post since 2002, today delivers over 1.5 billion parcels per year.

DHL's success lies in a simple promise, consistently delivered, underpinned by a deep understanding of the impact that its operation has on the lives and livelihoods of its millions of customers.

CEO Frank Appel has spoken of being "driven by making the lives of the customers easier by highly engaged employees."

This results in a unique appreciation of the different motivations that drive a successful organization, and ultimately, an inspirational brand.

DHL's approach to innovation results from consistent, "magnetic" initiatives—the company's own fleet of electric vehicles, its use of drones. It also benefits from a genuinely global presence, with associated global brand properties. DHL sponsorship of Formula 1 stretches back nearly 40 years, and multiple sports sponsorships, including a partnership with Manchester United, elevate the brand. And it's not just sport—the company's position at the center of global commerce means it can also leverage culture and fashion.

Finally, DHL motivates by helping its customers succeed, both in their core businesses and by helping them maximize the possibilities of a global logistics partner. The DHL Discover project gives businesses advice on a range of subjects, from ethics to ecommerce, positioning DHL as a partner for growth, not just a delivery firm.

"We cannot say, 'Listen, our strategy is to make money and if we have time left then we'll do something which is good for the society.' Our job is to do something good for the society, and to do that, we have to make money, otherwise we can't continue to invest."

Frank Appel, CEO, DHL

Source: Financial Times

“In B2B you connect yourself more to business metrics—savings, control, transparency, optimization. Whereas in consumer you are focused on relevancy, feelings, emotion, experience.”

Alicia Tillman, former CMO, SAP

## CASE STUDY: SAP

**The first non-logistics business on our list is SAP, founded in 1972 by five IBM engineers who decided to set up their own business rather than abandon the project they were working on. Today, SAP is the world’s largest non-US software company, with €27.5 billion in total revenue.**

For many years, SAP has used “The Best Run” campaign to anchor its marketing. Focused on its customers’ successes, “The Best Run” is a great example of an endorsement strategy, using the voice of existing customers to motivate new customers. In recent years, SAP has moved the strategy forward with two key changes.

Alicia Tillman, CMO of the company from 2015 to February 2021, oversaw a change of focus, from “classic” B2B marketing to something more emotionally driven and engaging.

In B2B, says Tillman, “you connect yourself more to business metrics—savings, control, transparency, optimization. Whereas in consumer you are focused on relevancy, feelings, emotion, experience. I find that is what B2B marketing needs to become and is so much of the journey we have been on at SAP for the past two years.”

The KPI that SAP focuses on is the BrandZ index of most valuable brands (a key data source for our own inspiration score). In shifting the dial for the brand, the company changed the focus of “The Best Run” from stories of success to stories of innovation, sustainability and positive impact.

In tandem, initiatives such as Kode with Klossy, partnering with Karlie Kloss’s foundation to get more girls interested in STEM subjects, give the brand a strong elevating score.

In addition to the focus on elevating, SAP provides motivational and magnetic content through a world-class content marketing program. Its Digitalist Magazine delivered thought-leadership content over a range of subjects, driving millions of page views and search equity to the business. In 2020 SAP created SAP Insights, focusing on helping executives make transformational decisions.

## CASE STUDY: SBI

## The Indian banking sector performs well in our global survey of inspiring brands, with four banks appearing in the top 25.

An immature capital market means banks remain the primary source of credit in the Indian economy. As such, their key role at the heart of Indian business gives them all strong “magnetic” scores—which correlates with statements like “I hear a lot about them.” The State Bank of India comes in at 17 in our top 20 inspiring B2B brands, demonstrating its powerful role as a market pacesetter with its transformation of the Indian banking system. With nearly 25% of the financial market, SBI is the largest Indian bank and an important contributor to the nation’s economic advancement.

SBI originated in 1806 as the Bank of Calcutta, which later became the Imperial Bank of India, and its longevity and integrity have given it pre-eminence in the country’s economic life. In 1955, the Imperial Bank of India became the state-partnered and state-sponsored State Bank of India. It continues to lead the Indian banking system in national development. Today, with its vision to be “the bank of choice for a

transforming India,” SBI continues to inspire consumers by redefining the country’s banking.

As such, it has taken a leading role in digital transformation, reflecting the wider digitization of the Indian economy. This places it in a good position to inspire other businesses to also embrace technology in this way. It also inspires through continuous product innovation—SBI has dramatically transformed the corporate banking landscape with vast improvements in access to finance and transactional services.

It has played a large role in increasing the number of ATMs across India, and now has a network of over 58,500 machines—a very physical example of a brand inspiring change in an economy.

A steady stream of technology-driven innovations allows SBI to deliver new-age banking to a transforming India. Its Yono (You Only Need One) Business app, for example, is designed to meet all the banking needs of its corporate customers.

Today, with its vision to be “the bank of choice for a transforming India,” SBI continues to inspire consumers by redefining the country’s banking.

# WHAT IS THE opportunity FOR B2B BRANDS?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution—that is the beauty of Inspire. Using our proprietary data set we can review your brand's Inspire Score and compare it to others in the sector to identify opportunities. This will allow you to focus on how your overall experience delivers a blend of inspiration—elevating in word and deed, doing things worth talking about to become magnetic, bringing motivational new ideas to the market.



But do we see a broad trend in B2B? We have consistently underestimated the power of elevation and magnetism in B2B. We assume that buyers are rational, and that, even if they are not, there is a committee that is rational. We can see that the most successful brands—the ones that grow fast and that drive price premiums—give their customers more than rational benefits. They make them feel something. They make them talk, they inspire them to act and share, and to make a change in their working lives.

If there is an opportunity in B2B, it is to build elevating, magnetic experiences alongside your solid propositions. We can see that people want to be inspired. We know that we do not shed our emotions at the door of the (home) office.

In many ways, we are defined by the work that we do. Brands that meet those needs will grow faster and grow better.



PART TWO

ON THE  
consideration  
LIST



## HOW DO YOU CHANNEL THAT GOOD FEELING, THAT SWELL OF INSPIRATION, INTO ACTION?

Thus far, we have focused on how B2B brands can gain major competitive advantage by inspiring the whole market. We endorse Binet and Field's broad recommendation that 50% of your budget should go towards long-term brand-building activity.

But what of the other 50%? We have established that there are only minor differences between how B2B and B2C purchasers are influenced to make a decision. The major difference is how they then make the purchase.

There is no single way a customer buys a B2B product. An SME can convert as quickly as a consumer, a multinational regularly takes more than a year. Let us therefore take the median example for simplicity—a drawn-out purchase, involving several decisionmakers, at a reasonable cost.

One thing that we do know is that only a small proportion of the B2B market is ready to buy when a brand is ready to sell. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute estimates that only 5-10% of customers are in market at any given time.

We have spoken about inspiring the 90-95%, but how do we make sure we are converting those in market as effectively as possible?

Traditional account-based marketing (ABM) segmentation focuses on functional attributes like demographics and behaviors—for example, targeting the C-suite or decisionmakers within the ABM segments. This strategy misses the wider picture—the support teams that inform and advise the C-suite or decisionmakers.

Understanding buyer motivations and showing up in a personally relevant way for an individual is the best and most efficient way to influence and inspire.

Brands can accomplish this by focusing on robust data foundations and an identity resolution network. As a buyer interacts with a seller's digital marketing activity, it allows the seller to stitch the various attributes to a specific account.

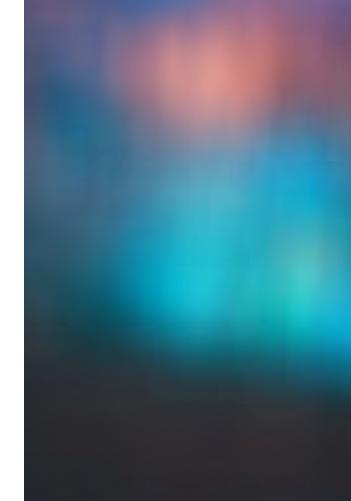
We look at three factors:

- 1. Understanding intent**
- 2. Understanding motivations**
- 3. Inspiring across the whole journey**



## UNDER STANDING

# intent



The vast majority of buying journeys are digitally enabled, and 100% of journeys involve digital at some point. The wonderful thing about this is that people leave a trail of data when they move through the digital world. These signals allow us to understand not only what they are looking for, but also their wider need state and what stage of the journey they are at.

As opposed to hypertargeting an imagined audience, with all the uncertainty involved, we hypertarget observed behavior.

The straightforward way to think about this is winning in search. Many journeys start with a generic search, then a narrower search, then a specific search, then searches to explore a topic or product. Each of these searches is a signal about what the user wants, why they want it, and how far down the decisionmaking path they are.

In a world without third-party cookies, meeting these needs with targeted content will be the first piece of the puzzle. First-party engagement with your content, on or off your website, is going to play a major part in the journey.

And please note—content can be just as inspiring as advertising. In fact, it can be more inspiring in the B2B world. Through our partnership with BT Enterprise, we have seen brand-building thought-leadership content shifting perceptions to the same extent as great advertising.

EVOCATION  
INDEX  
214.78

# UNDERSTANDING motivations



We use a specialized research methodology and advanced analytic methods to identify functional and innate needs that drive decisionmaking (motivations). We can identify how the market differs in decisionmaking—translating those insights into data signals that help us better prioritize, target and personalize.

Combining insight around intent and motivation means that we can deliver the most inspiring content to the customer at a given stage of their journey.





# +inspiring

## ACROSS THE WHOLE JOURNEY

But here is the nub—all that insight is next to useless if you cannot respond to it. You need the right mix of inspiring and activating content, and you need to be able to deliver it at the right moment.

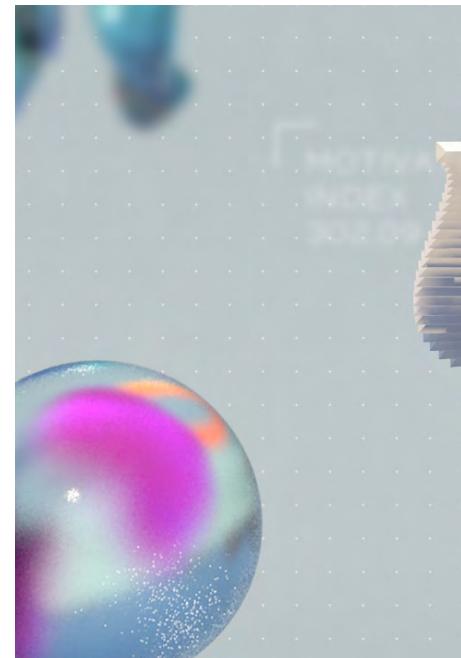
This means you must alter how your marketing organization operates, including one substantial change—you won't be running any more campaigns.

As we have outlined, activation campaigns focus 100% of your budget on 10% of your customers, and assume that you can locate and convert that 10%. There was a time when this was the best that you could do. That time is long past.

The technology exists to identify potential buyers through their behavior. We can see what they are looking for; we can see where they are on their journey. We can identify what might be motivating them. We have already inspired them through our brand work.

So, what are you going to do if they happen to be displaying all those signals outside of the quarter when you are running a campaign?

Well, ideally, you will do nothing—because the response will be automated.





# A NEW operating MODEL

Instead of having a team focused on creating things, have them build capabilities—optimization, automation, analytics, segmentation. Your vertical or product portfolio marketing teams will act as “squads,” orchestrating these capabilities to create experiences across all channels and touchpoints.

The good news here is that leaps have been taken in digital data and technology. We have the ability to know more about our customers and to rapidly learn and adapt. In terms of organizational processes, however, people and structures do not act on the data and technology that is at their fingertips, and trail far behind.

This is not only an organizational change, but a cultural change as well. It's a move from traditional comms development and delivery to digitally enabled, customer-centric communications.

Inspiration is such a powerful tool because it motivates action. We have demonstrated here why we believe that an inspiring brand will win. And in B2B, the brand doesn't just inspire at the top of the funnel, it inspires throughout, motivating action and change in all its potential customers.

If you want to win in B2B in 2021 and beyond, an inspirational brand is a must. If you want to convert that inspiration into even more sales, a new model for delivering across the funnel should be something you're thinking deeply about.

Traditionally, marketers make things. An email. A press ad. A display ad. The thing itself, and the content that it carries are operationally indistinguishable. They are the same deliverable.

In a world of automated, data-driven response, content and delivery are separate. Instead of building assets, you create content in a modular system, which can then be picked up and delivered. You may have the beginnings of this in the form of nurture paths or triggered emails. But these are most likely still individually created items that require constant monitoring and updating. In a modular world, updates can be automatically rolled out across all assets at the touch of a button.

# KEY takeaways FOR BRANDS

**See the B2B buyer as a human, not a job title**  
The B2B buyer is as fully formed as a classic brand consumer and can be as engaged in the same way. This should not be a mystery: B2B buyers are simply people looking for information and inspiration. It is becoming increasingly clear that the best, most effective way to communicate to them—and therefore the best and most effective way to position and communicate your brand and business—is around the pursuit of emotional response. The good news here is that a huge amount of the work—and evidence—produced for consumer thinking is now applicable to business buyers, enabling you to identify the best ways to engage emotionally with confidence.

## Embracing inspiration is a smart blue-ocean strategy

Your competitors are overfishing in the red ocean—using functional, information-heavy communication that lacks distinction and, we are beginning to realize, effectiveness. The unfished blue ocean recognizes the importance and potential that comes from inspiring buyers, not just informing them. Critically, it is currently free from competitor activity (well, until they read this paper, anyway). The good news here is that B2B brands can be inspiring. Our Inspire evidence maps out the best way to build a B2B brand and communication strategy to give you the best chance of success. It is a remarkably straightforward formula: find ways to elevate the brand by creating inspirational experiences; become increasingly magnetic by simply doing things worth talking about (rather than be dismissed or ignored); and be more motivating by bringing new ideas to market. All are surprisingly straightforward to do, but are largely ignored by your competitors and the B2B category.

## Recognize the B2B sales journey has changed, possibly for ever

The move to digital and virtual interactions places even more importance on the concept of both brand and experience trust, so investment here is critical. Gone are the days when a business could rely solely on face-to-face interaction, fancy events, partnerships, and sponsorships to drive sales. With fear of going out (FOGO) replacing fear of missing out (FOMO), every business needs to deliver its sales pitch with the persuasiveness and adaptability of the time-honored face-to-face handshaking approach. It is likely there are more people involved in the buying experience now than previously, which has consequences for your communication planning. The need now is for your B2B efforts to reach and influence a much broader audience—future buyers and opinion formers as well as current buyers—and the most effective way of doing that is by tapping into a broad set of unifying emotional and attitudinal needs.

## Shorten the sales cycle

It is important that you resist the received wisdom that a B2B sale takes 18 months or more. In truth, buyers enter the sales cycle at different points, not always at the beginning. Very few will follow a traditional sales funnel approach and the smart thing is to ensure your brand and your business have a memorable

impact on potential buyers before they even start the buying process. With only 5-10% of people in buying mode at any one time—and this includes B2B as well as most consumer markets—you simply cannot afford to wait. We have found that the greater the level of inspiration a brand has, the greater its level of awareness and understanding when buyers begin their sales journey, ensuring a better overall experience that speeds them through the sales cycle.

## You can inspire to action

It is possible for you to target beyond an imagined audience—it is possible to target well-observed and data-driven behavior instead. Content can be used not just to inform or educate, but also to entertain and inspire, resulting in longer-lasting memories, interest and consideration for your brand. This approach can seem like an onerous time- and cost-intensive task, but it is increasingly being automated. By building capabilities, not just campaigns, it is possible to create a new operating model to segment, analyze and optimize all your content and messaging output and buyer interaction in a completely automated manner. This means that your brand can inspire, you can win new buyers, and your business can grow quicker through a process that is faster, smarter and probably cheaper than your current approach.



# NEXT STEPS



This report and the data points discussed merely scratch the surface of what is possible within the B2B landscape and how we at Wunderman Thompson can support you with this transformation.

Using our proprietary Inspire Score dashboard, we can score just how inspiring your brand is and provide a roadmap to greater inspiration. Please reach out to your Wunderman Thompson contact to find out more.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## THANK YOU

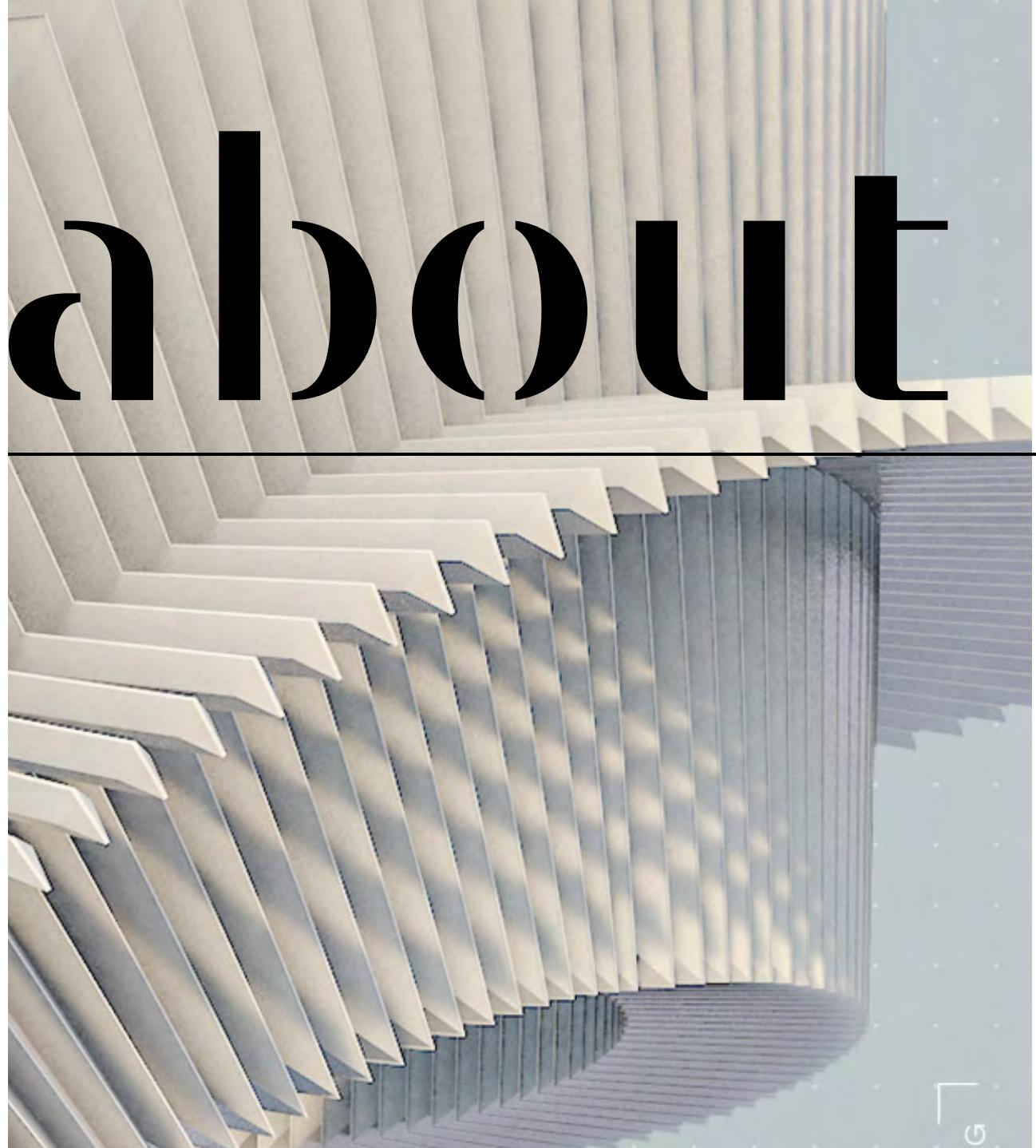
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# WUNDERMAN THOMPSON

At Wunderman Thompson we exist to inspire growth for ambitious brands. Part creative agency, part consultancy and part technology company, we provide expert end-to-end capabilities at a global scale to deliver inspiration across the entire brand and customer experience.

We are 20,000 strong in 90 markets around the world, where our people bring together creative storytelling, diverse perspectives, inclusive thinking, and highly specialized vertical capabilities to drive growth for our clients. We offer deep expertise across the entire customer journey, including communications, commerce, consultancy, CRM, CX, data, production and technology.

Wunderman Thompson is a WPP agency (NYSE: WPP).

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