Six Things B2B Gets Wrong About Marketing

The Insight
COLLECTIVE

CROSS-INDUSTRY INSIGHTS
FOR CMOs READY TO
CHALLENGE CONVENTION.

Cross-industry insights for CMOs ready to challenge convention

AMANDA HILL

Collective Strategist
Brand & Customer Experience

Having spent decades in the high-octane world of consumer marketing, I've learned to be skeptical of tidy rules about what "works."

So when I stepped into B2B as an advisor and newly minted non-executive director, I was curious to see whether it really was as different as people claim – a realm ruled by rationality and relentless short-term sales pressure.

In some ways, B2B is a different animal: longer sales cycles, complex buying committees, and niche audiences. But what struck me were the parallels between B2B and the world of consumer marketing I knew so well – and how often B2B marketing overlooks them in favour of outdated assumptions and familiar "best practices."

In this guide, I explore six deeply held assumptions in B2B marketing that limit its effectiveness. These insights blend my first-hand observations with current research, aiming to offer B2B CMOs and agency leaders a fresh perspective on what actually drives results.

Let's start with an overview of the six assumptions, then deconstruct each in detail.

The Six Assumptions Holding B2B Marketing Back

1. ***B2B Buyers Are Primarily Rational Actors***
   B2B buyers may wear business suits, but underneath they're driven by more than spreadsheets. Emotional messaging isn't a luxury in B2B – it's essential for campaigns that stick. Marketers who understand this stand to gain an edge.

2. ***Creativity Doesn't Really Work in B2B***
   Reports of B2B's creative death are greatly exaggerated, though it often wears a disguise. Bold ideas – from imaginative campaigns to engaging storytelling – can deliver outsized impact in B2B when marketers have the courage to try them.

3. ***Complex Buying Committees Are Obstacles***
   B2B decisions may involve labyrinthine committees and lengthy sales cycles, but this complexity can work in a marketer's favor. Vendors who help stakeholders navigate the process can actually secure larger, longer-term wins.

4. ***B2B Customer Experience Can't Match B2C***
   B2B customer experience often lags behind rising expectations. Instead of bemoaning this gap, leading firms see it as an opportunity. Those who deliver consumer-grade ease, transparency, and support reap rewards in loyalty and revenue.

5. ***Short-Term Tactics Deliver Better ROI***
   Under quarterly sales pressure, many organizations prioritize short-term marketing tactics at the expense of brand health. The smarter play – proven by research – is patience. Sustainable growth comes from balancing brand-building with activation.

6. ***Brand is a Nice-to-Have in B2B***
   When a business purchase could affect someone's career, trust and reputation carry immense weight. Just as in B2C, a strong brand in B2B is a company's greatest asset – arguably even more so – and the data confirms it.

1. B2B Buyers Are Primarily Rational Actors

When I first made the transition to B2B, I assumed I was entering a more dispassionate arena. B2B decisions, I thought, would be made by procurement committees analyzing spec sheets and ROI calculators – surely a far cry from the emotion-laden world of B2C.

It didn't take long for that illusion to crumble. In a heated boardroom discussion on a major software investment, I saw fear, excitement, ego, and hope swirling just beneath the surface.

The truth hit me: human emotion drives B2B too – every bit as much as in consumer markets. Research bears this out.

Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman found that most decisions are made using fast, intuitive "System 1" thinking – shaped by emotion and gut instinct – while slower, analytical "System 2" reasoning often plays a much smaller role than we assume. B2B buyers are no exception. They may justify their decisions with data, but subconscious feelings often guide their first leanings.

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute and other research centers have confirmed that emotions play a critical role in B2B purchase decisions. This shouldn't surprise us. After all, B2B buyers are people with careers, reputations, and risk on the line – all tied to the choices they make.

> **"Up to 95% of purchase decision-making takes place in the subconscious."**
>
> *Gerald Zaltman*
>
> *Professor, Harvard Business School*

THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL MARKETING

The popular maxim “nobody ever got fired for buying IBM” exists precisely because choosing a trusted brand feels safer on an emotional level – it reduces anxiety about the outcome. Thus, appealing to emotions like trust, confidence, and fear of missing out can strongly influence B2B outcomes.

Emotional marketing isn’t just touchy-feely fluff; it delivers results. Les Binet and Peter Field’s extensive research for LinkedIn’s B2B Institute concluded that emotional messaging is more effective for long-term growth, whereas rational campaigns mostly drive short-term spikes.

Emotional storytelling helps brands stick in memory – which is vital because the brand that’s remembered is often the brand that’s bought.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

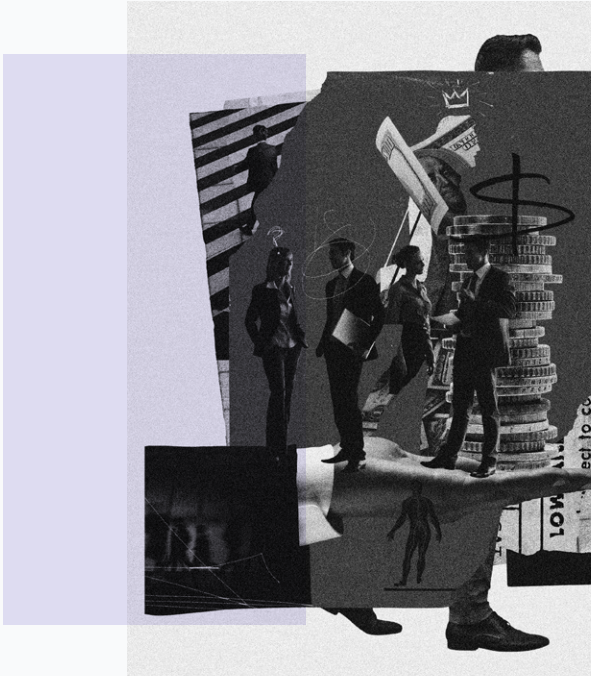
B2B marketers must embrace emotional drivers, not avoid them.

Whether it’s tapping into pride in improvement, fear of failure, or hope for a better future, framing your value proposition in human terms makes it more compelling. Some of the most effective B2B marketing I’ve seen appeals to deeply human themes – how it feels to achieve a goal or avoid a painful risk – instead of just touting a product’s technical specs.

By forging an emotional connection, you elevate your marketing from a comparative spreadsheet exercise to a persuasive brand experience. Business buyers are human buyers, and winning their hearts is a prerequisite to winning their budgets.

2. Creativity Doesn't Really Work in B2B

In my early B2B meetings, I noticed a stark absence of the flamboyant creativity I was used to – no viral stunts, edgy taglines, or Super Bowl ads. B2B marketing, it seemed, wore a conservative suit and tie.



As I dug deeper, I realized that creativity is actually very much alive in B2B – it's simply disguised in more understated forms. In a landscape of technical whitepapers and sales decks, creative thinking operates between the lines, finding clever ways to engage hard-to-impress audiences.

> "B2B brands power much of the world's economy, and creativity is an economic multiplier."
>
> *Kevin Frank*
>
> *Former Executive Creative Director, LinkedIn*

A NEW ERA OF CREATIVITY IN B2B MARKETING

The perception that B2B advertising must be strictly rational or boring is thankfully fading. While many B2B ads do lean on facts and features, the best campaigns prove you can blend logic with vivid storytelling.

Why, then, do we say creativity is “disguised” in B2B? It’s because these elements often hide within things like thought leadership content, webinars, or data-driven personalization. Unlike flashy consumer ads, B2B campaigns might show ingenuity through novel insights or compelling metaphors that help reframe a problem.

The latitude for creativity is absolutely there – the challenge is that many B2B organizations optimize for efficiency over originality. We tend to manage what we can measure, and it’s easier to measure clicks and leads than the impact of an ingenious idea. The result? A “crisis of creativity” where safe, forgettable content proliferates.

Marketers need to realize that actually, a forgettable brand can be far more dangerous to their bottom line.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Make room for ***creative*** risk in your B2B strategy – it pays off.

Creativity is alive and well in B2B – our job as leaders is to unmask it, champion it, and reap the rewards of truly differentiated marketing.

This might mean using storytelling techniques, humor, or emotional appeal where your competitors stick strictly to facts, or employing visually creative campaigns that break the mold of traditional whitepaper marketing.

Once you find a creative strategy that works, commit to it over time. Great creative concepts in B2B don’t wear out quickly; they actually “wear in,” becoming more effective as they build familiarity.

3. Complex Buying Committees Are Obstacles

One of the starkest contrasts between B2C and B2B is just how complex the decision-making process can be.

In consumer markets, a motivated individual can decide to buy in seconds. In B2B, purchasing processes can resemble a marathon relay – multiple stakeholders handing off the baton, each running their own leg with distinct priorities and concerns.

Research by 6sense found that buying groups typically involve at least 9-12 decision-makers, each armed with their own research and agenda. I've sat through meetings where an end-user, an IT manager, a procurement officer, a finance exec, and a VP all had to align on a purchase – it's the norm rather than the exception.

Initially, this seemed like a nightmare: "How does anything ever get done?" I wondered. But what I've come to understand is that B2B's very complexity can be turned into a strategic advantage by savvy marketers.

> **B2B buyers who feel confident navigating their purchase decision are 2.6x more likely to expand the relationship with that supplier.**
>
> *Gartner*
> *Elevating Marketing's Role in B2B Account Growth*

COMPLEXITY BREEDS COMMITMENT

First, let's understand the challenge. B2B buying isn't just longer; it's non-linear and arduous. According to Gartner, 77% of B2B buyers described their last purchase as "extremely complex or difficult." That aligns with what I've seen: consensus-building is hard, and the risk of a stalled deal is high if stakeholders aren't equally informed and confident.

However, within that challenge lies opportunity. Research shows that buyers whose suppliers provide enablement content demonstrate 4x higher decision confidence – and that confidence translates directly to business outcomes.

In other words, if you can be the guide through the complexity – anticipating questions, providing tailored content, aligning diverse interests – you not only win the deal, you often win a bigger deal with more long-term value. Complexity, managed well, breeds commitment.

Moreover, the more complex the decision, the higher the switching costs and inertia once a choice is made. While this can be a barrier to initial purchase, it also means that if you win, you create a moat. A buying committee that has finally agreed on your solution has invested political and intellectual capital in that decision – they're unlikely to re-run that gauntlet anytime soon.

This is why the best B2B marketers don't stop at the close. They continue engaging those same stakeholders post-sale, using the relationships and trust built during the buying process to identify expansion opportunities and prevent churn.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Rather than lamenting the complexity of B2B decisions, *leverage* it.

- **Map the entire decision ecosystem** – not just the "economic buyer." Address the needs of technical evaluators, end-users, and the CFO's office to build wide-ranging consensus
- **Equip each stakeholder with targeted resources** – ROI calculators for finance, integration case studies for IT, user testimonials for operators
- **Invest in buyer enablement content** – provide the right information through the right channels to make each critical task easier
- **Train sales teams as consensus facilitators** – not just product pitchers. Help them guide buying groups toward confident decisions

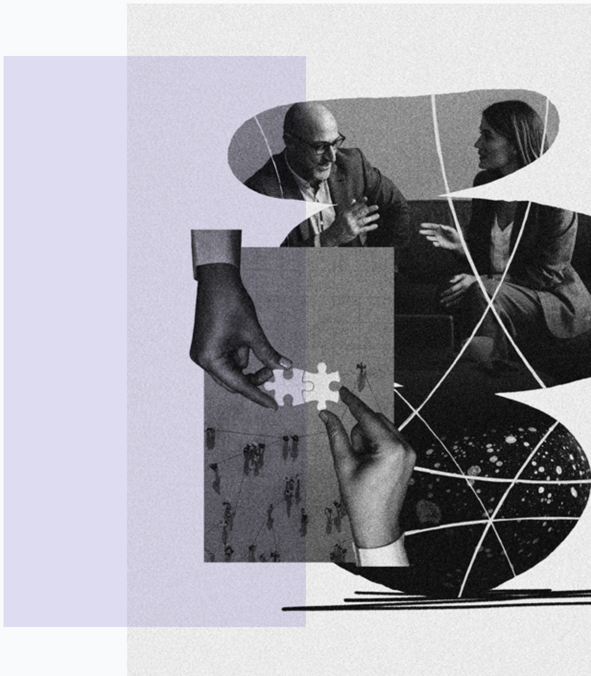
With this approach, you turn a potential disadvantage – many cooks in the kitchen – into competitive strength by creating multiple champions within the organization.

While competitors struggle to navigate this complexity, you become the vendor who makes buying easy: you win not by simplifying the product, but by simplifying the path to purchase and binding customers through a superior buying experience.

4. B2B Customer Experience Can't Match B2C

Another notable gap between B2C and B2B became clear when I tried to purchase a business service online – and felt like I'd stepped 10 years back in time. The clunky interface, the opaque pricing, the lack of follow-up… it was a far cry from the seamless eCommerce experiences I was used to as a consumer.

This wasn't an isolated incident, either. There's a significant customer experience (CX) gap in many B2B industries, where buyer expectations are leaping ahead of what vendors provide. But rather than seeing this gap as a frustration, I've come to view it as a massive growth opportunity.



> **Inaccurate pricing and shipping costs (40%), slow website load times (29%) and poor customer support (28%) are B2B buyers' main pain points during the purchasing process.**
>
> *BigCommerce*
>
> *Global B2B Buyer Behavior Report, 2023*

B2B AND B2C ARE CONVERGING

The scale of this shift is striking. BigCommerce research shows that 74% of B2B buyers now use online platforms to make purchases for their business, and they increasingly expect the same experience they get as consumers – mobile-responsive digital journeys, transparent pricing, and frictionless purchasing.

In other words, brands like Amazon, Apple, and Uber have trained all of us – including enterprise procurement officers – to demand fast, easy, and digital-first interactions.

And this goes beyond transactions: Sana Commerce found that 87% of B2B buyers now identify new suppliers online – up from 78% before the pandemic. Digital channels have now become the dominant way to research and evaluate options.

The message is clear: B2B firms that lag in digital CX will lose customers to those who deliver convenience and clarity.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Make ***superior*** customer experience your growth strategy.

- **Map your B2B customer journey end to end** – identify friction points like delayed responses, confusing websites, and rigid processes where you can differentiate
- **Start with basic fixes** – real-time pricing and inventory information, mobile-optimized sites, and transparent processes yield immediate satisfaction gains and address common buyer complaints
- **Borrow tactics from B2C** – live chat support, intuitive recommendation engines, and self-service portals

Remember that B2B buyers often have to interact with your company repeatedly (for renewal, support, upsells) – every interaction is a chance to build goodwill or create frustration. By closing the CX gap, you not only win new customers but also deepen relationships with existing ones, driving retention and cross-sell.

Treat B2B CX as an ongoing opportunity to delight. Many of your competitors aren't, so this can become a sustainable advantage that fuels growth.

5. Short-Term Tactics Deliver Better ROI

I frequently witness what I call “pipeline panic” – the urgent scramble for leads, now, to hit the quarter’s targets.

B2B marketing teams face intense pressure for immediate ROI. Sales needs something to feed on this month, not next year. Coming from B2C, where I was accustomed to investing in brand campaigns that might not pay off for a while, this short-termism was jarring.

The pressure is real and understandable. But what I’ve consistently observed is how decisively the long game wins when you have the courage to play it. Time and again, I’ve seen that exercising brand patience beats pipeline panic in delivering sustainable growth.

WHY LONG-TERM BRAND BUILDING PAYS OFF

Let’s start with evidence. Les Binet and Peter Field’s analysis of B2B marketing effectiveness shows that marketers should split their efforts roughly 50/50 between long-term brand building and short-term sales activation. Around half of any B2B marketing strategy should therefore be devoted to brand – creating mental availability, trust, and familiarity that drive sales over time.

Why? Because share of voice drives share of market. If you persistently promote your brand more than your market share would suggest, you tend to grow. If you go dark on brand, you shrink – maybe not immediately, but inevitably. Brand investment isn’t optional; it’s the engine of sustainable growth.

However, many firms remain stuck in a short-term mindset. In a 2024 Marketing Week survey of 600 B2B marketers, 50% said brand building was not a budget priority for their organization, while more than half (52%) said their company focuses on marketing goals with timelines of six months or less. Just 16% reported prioritizing long-term campaigns.

> **Strong brands consistently command prices up to 2x those of weaker competitors.**
>
> *Google & Kantar*
> *The Effectiveness Equation, 2024*

Over-weighting on immediate pipeline is like constantly harvesting without planting – the risks show up in subtle but severe ways:

- Lead costs rising as you exhaust the low-hanging fruit
- Sales cycles lengthening because buyers haven't heard of you
- Vulnerability to competitors with stronger brands

In one scenario I encountered, a company cut brand spend to almost zero for quick savings. Two years later, inbound leads had dried up and win rates plummeted – they had become a commodity provider, easy to ignore.

On the flip side, I've seen brand patience pay dividends. Investing in thought leadership, consistent messaging, and creative campaigns might not deliver a neat quarterly ROI – but it can build reputation and transform your pipeline quality over time. When a prospect has heard your name, read your articles, or seen your customers' success stories, they come to the table predisposed to trust you.

And great B2B marketing has compound interest: a strong creative platform or brand narrative gains effectiveness the longer you run it, as recognition grows and each exposure reinforces the last.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Resist the instinct to ***sacrifice*** brand-building on the altar of short-term leads.

We all have quarterly goals, but find ways to protect and justify your brand budget through those cycles.

- **Set clear long-term KPIs** – track brand awareness, preference, and share of voice alongside lead-gen metrics, and report on them with equal rigor
- **Educate stakeholders on brand ROI** – use data and case studies to show your board and sales leaders why brand investment matters
- **Maintain "always-on" brand marketing** – modest, continuous efforts outperform big one-off bursts followed by silence

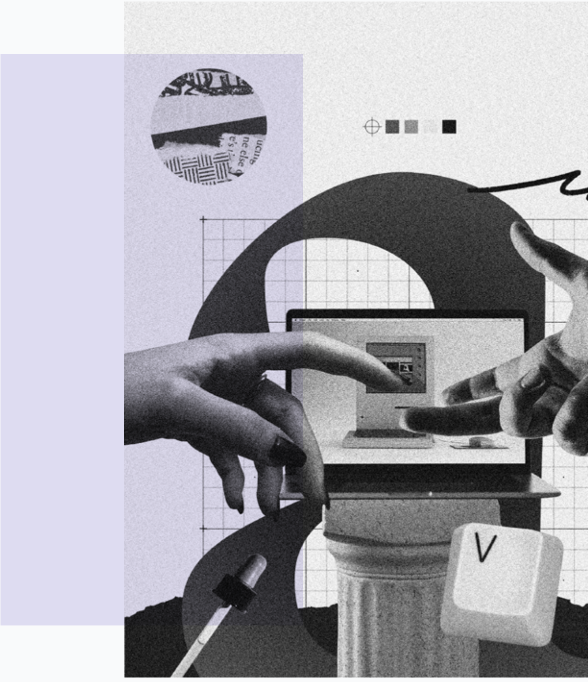
When the inevitable budget pressures come, remember: the surest way to build a pipeline for next year is to steadily build your brand today.

Brand patience isn't at odds with pipeline health – it creates a flywheel where strong brand equity feeds demand generation at lower cost and higher conversion.

6. Brand is a Nice-to-Have in B2B

If my years in consumer marketing taught me anything, it's that brand is a company's most precious asset – the ultimate driver of pricing power, customer loyalty, and market longevity. I suspected the same held true in B2B, and my experience confirms it: brand is still the most valuable asset, no matter the industry.

In fact, brand may matter even more in B2B, where purchase decisions carry significant professional risk, and relationships often outlast any single transaction.



> **The top 150 B2B brands grew 8% in brand value year-on-year in 2025, representing nearly $250 billion in increased value.**
>
> *Brand Finance*
>
> *Global Most Valuable B2B Brands Index*

WHY IS BRAND SO CRITICAL IN B2B?

A CIO choosing a cloud vendor isn't just spending company money; they're potentially betting their reputation and career on that choice. This tends to make buyers more conservative, taking refuge in known, trusted brands.

According to The Insight Collective's 2024 B2B Tech Buying Behavior Report, over 85% of decision-makers are inclined to shortlist only vendors they recognize and trust, with 90% saying they're more likely to engage with content from brands they trust.

Even so, many B2B organizations underinvest in brand and marketing relative to their consumer counterparts.

This is slowly shifting as more B2B leaders wake up to the fact that brand is not a fluffy concept but a hard business asset. In fact, a strong brand:

- Commands pricing power (customers pay a premium for the safe choice)
- Reduces sales cycle friction (trust is pre-built)
- Attracts better partners and talent

In my advisory roles, whenever a strategic question arises – be it expansion, pricing, or M&A – I find myself asking: "how will this affect our brand equity?" Because in the long run, the strength of the brand determines the resilience and trajectory of the business.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Treat your brand as the invaluable asset it is – nurture it, protect it, and *leverage* it.

This means more than just consistent logos or messaging (though consistency is key). It means aligning your entire organization around delivering on the brand promise so that every customer touchpoint reinforces the reputation you want.

It also means investing in brand measurement – use tools to track brand health in the market, much as you track quarterly revenue. When making decisions, include brand impact in the ROI analysis, even if it's qualitative. For example, cutting corners on customer service might save costs now but erode your brand (and thus future revenue) – make that trade-off explicit.

Finally, champion brand-led thinking at the executive table. Strong brands have advocates internally; if you as a marketing leader don't evangelize the brand's value, who will?

The bottom line: products come and go, quarterly numbers rise and fall, but a trusted brand endures and multiplies value. In B2B, as in B2C, your brand truly is your business.

Closing Reflection

Be it B2B or B2C, we are still marketing to humans – navigating psychology, building relationships, and crafting stories that drive action. The context and tactics may differ, but the underlying principles rhyme.

For B2B CMOs and agency leaders: I hope these insights encourage you to challenge any lingering orthodoxies that hold your marketing back. B2B buyers don't leave their hearts at home when they arrive at work – humanize your approach. B2B brands need not be dull – be creatively courageous. Complexity isn't chaos – make it your leverage. And when others zig into short-term tactics, you can zag into long-term brand building with confidence that it will pay off.

The one constant is the supremacy of brand. If you remember that every lead, every deal, and every customer experience is either adding to or subtracting from your brand equity, you'll make better decisions.

My closing thought is one of optimism. B2B marketing is undergoing a renaissance, powered by data but also enriched by creativity and strategic thinking. As someone who has worked on both sides of the marketing divide, I'm excited by this convergence – a future where B2B marketing is just great marketing, period.

Tomorrow's leaders will be those who can blend the rigor of B2B with the flair of B2C, balance reason and emotion, and drive quarterly results while planting seeds for years to come. That's the journey I'm proud to be part of, and I invite you to lead it in your own organizations. After all, the surprises keep coming – and with them, opportunities to raise the bar for all of us in the marketing profession.

Further Reading

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AMANDA HILL

Collective Strategist
Brand & Customer Experience

Amanda Hill is a visionary leader with over 17 years' experience shaping global brands at the intersection of creativity, commerce, and impact. As founder of BBC Earth, she built a brand that reached over one billion people before serving as the BBC's first Global Chief Marketing Officer. She later led as Global CMO at A+E Networks in New York and as Chief Marketing & Customer Officer at Harrods, where she pioneered innovative approaches to luxury customer engagement. Beyond her executive career, Amanda champions purpose-driven leadership, mentorship, and education. She teaches marketing at Lewis & Clark, leads ventures in sustainability, and serves on several boards, including The Listening Planet Foundation.

At The Insight Collective, she brings deep expertise in brand transformation, customer strategy, and global growth, united by a strong belief in the power of creativity to deliver lasting impact.

See Beyond. Think Ahead.

We're not another lead gen vendor – we're your strategic effectiveness partner.

At The Insight Collective, we harness intelligence, collaboration, and human insight to turn marketing into measurable impact.

The Insight
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www.theinsightcollective.com

UK: +44 (0)800 161 5511 info@theinsightcollective.com US: +1-508-424-5330