Easy to Find: Being Where B2B Buying Happens

By Professor Magda Nenycz-Thiel & Professor Jenni Romaniuk

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Foreword

Imagine you're shopping for dinner. You walk into the grocery store, scan the aisle, and almost without thinking, your hand reaches for a familiar brand. It feels simple, instinctive, universal. But that decision was made long before you stepped through the door — memory and familiarity did the work; the shelf just made it visible.

B2B works the same way, only without the neat row of shelves and carefully curated items competing side by side. You don't stroll down an aisle of neatly lined CRM platforms or grab a cybersecurity solution with your carton of milk. Instead, buyers wind their way through a labyrinth of digital touchpoints, events, sales interactions, and purchase cycles that stretch months and often even years. These are not casual decisions made in days or weeks. And in that maze, over space and time, it's the brand they remember that becomes the brand they choose.

The best B2B marketing plans start with a map of this messy, fragmented, real-world buying journey. And while many marketers understand the importance of being remembered when a buyer finally enters the market, fewer give equal weight to being physically available, being easy to encounter and easy to buy, across the touchpoints where buyers spend their time.

And that's a problem.

Physical availability ensures your brand isn't just remembered, it's reliably within reach when someone is ready to buy. In a digital world, that means being discoverable and accessible across the online environments where business buying actually happens — from search results to professional networks like LinkedIn, and your own website experience that makes purchasing seamless. Without that presence, you risk being on the list but out of stock, unavailable — technically considered, but impossible to choose.

And that's what this report aims to change. Just like shelf space is key to being purchased in B2C, B2B growth depends on maintaining a consistent, credible, and contextual presence across both digital and human touchpoints. Drawing on the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute's research and LinkedIn's experience with thousands of global B2B advertisers, the following pages detail why physical availability shouldn't be treated as a nice-to-have, tacked on at the end of planning, but instead as a critical component of growth. And, we're not just making the case, we're pointing marketers to where they should focus.

Through the lenses of presence (being in the right places), prominence (owning visibility with distinctive brand assets), and portfolio (aligning core products with category entry points), this research translates into applied insights that sharpen media choices, break through creative clutter, improve ROI, and ultimately elevate marketing's role from order-taker to growth driver.

As we worked on this research, socializing it with clients and stakeholders, I was reminded of my early days in marketing when "being remembered" felt like the holy grail. But I've since learned that being memorable isn't enough if you're absent from the critical moments when buyers are ready to purchase. Physical availability, being present and accessible across all the touchpoints where decisions happen, is what transforms brand recall into revenue.

This report resonates because it connects marketing theory to the commercial reality at the heart of every CFO's agenda: profitable growth. Physical availability is the bridge, whether that's the booth location that draws traffic, the website experience that makes buying effortless, the sales access that opens the right doors, or the trusted environments throughout a buyer's journey.. It's what ensures awareness doesn't just sit on a slide deck but translates into actual sales.

Frank Cooper III, Visa's CMO, captures this perfectly:

"Commercial activity does not happen in a vacuum. It is influenced by ideas outside any individual business category, informed by behaviors forged in the broader culture, shaped by evolving needs and expectations of people. I believe marketers must continue to apply the "traditional" aspects of marketing. However, to remain effective, marketers must also adapt them to the evolutionary currents that shift people's perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. For today's world, marketers need to build both commercial and cultural fluency."

Frank Cooper III
Chief Marketing Officer, Visa

VISA

Physical availability forces us out of that comfortable turf and "traditional aspects" of marketing that Frank mentioned and into the messy, essential work of ensuring our brands show up everywhere our customers are looking.

This is our rally cry for B2B marketers: Be easy to find.

We hope the ideas presented here spark lively conversations across your teams, functions, and boardrooms. More importantly, we hope they give you the conviction to act.

Because in B2B marketing, you can create the most incredible product in the world: craft the perfect brand, develop the most innovative solution, create the most compelling messaging. But if your product or service isn't available where your enterprise customers are looking, all that investment goes untapped.

Foreword

This report reflects the work of many minds, our colleagues at the LinkedIn B2B Institute, our partners at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, and the authors who brought this academic principle to life, Professors Jenni Romaniuk and Magda Nenycz-Thiel. Most importantly, it is shaped by the marketers and customers whose experiences inspired these insights. We are deeply grateful to everyone whose contributions made this research possible.

And the conversation doesn't stop here. I invite you to continue exploring these ideas with me and The B2B Institute on LinkedIn, where we'll share more insights and welcome your perspectives.

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Professor Professor Magda Nenycz-Thiel is a Senior Marketing Scientist at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute. Before her current role as Industry Growth Professor, Magda was Mars Professor of Marketing, a Chair funded by Mars Incorporated. Prior to this she led the Institute's Mars Marketing Lab, a R&D initiative funded by Mars Incorporated from 2013-2016. As Industry Growth Professor, Magda, together with a research team at the Institute, pioneers research into category growth and leads the Industry Growth Initiative which focuses on applying discoveries to improve the ways that growth investments are made within organisations.

Magda's core areas of expertise are category and industry growth, physical availability, e-commerce and neuromarketing. Her work has been published widely including in the Journal of Advertising Research, European Journal of Marketing and Journal of Business Research. She is also the author of two chapters in How Brands Grow Part 2, "Building Physical Availability" and "Online shopping – is it different?" and the "What about Physical Availability" chapter in Better Brand Health.

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Professor Jenni Romaniuk is a Research Professor of Marketing and Associate Director (International) at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute. Jenni is the key architect behind the Ehrenberg-Bass approaches to Distinctive Asset, Category Entry Point and Mental Availability measurement. She has written three books: Building Distinctive Brand Assets, which helps marketers to future-proof their brand's identity, How Brands Grow Part 2 which builds on the knowledge revolution started in How Brands Grow and Better Brand Health provides a valuable resource for those looking to get the most out of their brand health tracking. A past editor of the Journal of Advertising Research, Jenni now sits on the Journal's Senior Advisory Board.

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This project is testament to what happens when a tribe of top marketing minds from all sorts of backgrounds and all corners of the globe convene in the name of moving our industry forward. With a shared appreciation for both evidence and practice, and a healthy dose of envelope pushing mentality, we've combined academic marketing principles and practical applications to today's real b2b marketing problems. At the B2B Institute we call this kind of collaboration the magic of scenius, and wish to acknowledge the many hands that shaped this work.

To Magda and Jenni at the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for opening our eyes to the importance of Physical Availability in B2B. Your commitment to evidence-based marketing helps us sort facts from fad and focus marketers on what they can control in the name of business growth. Thank you for your leadership .

To all our industry and client partners, especially Tom, Craig, Grace, James and Frank, who expect and inspire excellence in B2B marketing - the generosity of your time and expertise adds a rich layer of practical application to this work. Thanks for sharing our hunger for real ideas that encourage our industry to break new ground.

To my LinkedIn and B2B Institute crew, there is no better melting pot of big opinions, bold ambitions and cookie metaphors I'd rather work with on a project like this. The many hours and brain cells you've all devoted to ensuring this reached the high standards we set ourselves is truly appreciated. Thank you for being awesome.

To the handful of original Physical Availability believers who have moved on to new adventures - I hope you see your efforts reflected here and like where this one ended up. Thanks for continuing to cheer us on from the sidelines.

Most importantly, to B2B marketers everywhere, thanks for supporting us in our mission to make B2B marketing better. Your daily grind inspires work like this. As you explore our take on why making brands easy to find and buy is foundational to business growth, please tell us what you think, and what made you think. The challenges you face and the tough questions you grapple with are exactly the conversations we at the B2B Institute want to be a part of.

With big thanks,

Kate Newstead
Marketing Science Lead
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Physical Availability in B2B

Linked in | The B2B Institute

University of South Australia | Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science

Summary

A wealth of empirical evidence shows B2B brands grow by expanding the size of their customer base. This means a growing B2B brand attracts many more buyers who buy slightly more often (the famous Double Jeopardy pattern). From this body of research, we get two growth levers: Mental Availability, which is about the brand being easily thought of in buying situations; and Physical Availability, which is about the brand being easy to find and buy.

In B2B, Physical Availability involves improving the brand's chance of being found and bought. This often involves making (expensive) decisions across channel types such as internal sales staff, third-party distributors, or trade shows, with major repercussions for people's time and budgets. Therefore, a key aim of this paper is to highlight how to make better Physical Availability investments. These improvements will help you better reap the benefits from building the brand's Mental Availability.

We also want this report to be a 'rallying cry' to get B2B marketers to have input into all areas relevant to brand growth, including areas that are currently often the domain of sales, product design, engineering or IT. Our framework for Physical Availability helps you understand what questions to ask and which decisions matter, with the goal of getting the brand visibly well-placed for buyers to buy.

Background

Prior B2B reports from the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute have covered how:

• B2B brands grow by getting more customers, and therefore increasing brand penetration is the key sales KPI;

• Your brand's biggest competitors are (other) big brands, you will typically gain and lose more customers to them than smaller brands;

• Brand rejection is low and rarely a barrier to growth.

• Mental Availability drives growth, through Category Entry Points.

However, even if all this knowledge is integrated into your marketing efforts, shortcomings in Physical Availability will hamper your ability to get the sale.

It's Distribution Jim, But Not As We Know It…

A common misconception is that Physical availability is just about building distribution. Yes, distribution is important, but building Physical Availability means working out where and how to efficiently distribute the brand as widely as possible, in an omni-channel world. It also involves maximizing the probability the brand can take advantage of wherever it is distributed, by being easy to find and having the right portfolio mix.

Physical Availability Covers The Following Three Dimensions:

1. Presence	2. Prominence	3. Portfolio
Be where buying happens (or could happen).	Be easy to find in sales environments.	Sell a product that effectively and efficiently addresses both current and future buyer needs.

We now highlight the opportunities/challenges that each area represents and provide questions to help you assess if your brand's Physical Availability tactics are aligned with evidence-based marketing.

Part 1:
Presence

Presence: Get Coverage Across Both Buyers And Buying

A 'presence' strategy is to determine if the brand is available to be bought. Sales can occur through a sales representative, a brick-and-mortar store, visiting a website or trade show, using an app, or calling a phone number. While it's easy to say just be present everywhere, all the time, each channel has set up and running costs. A smart brand presence means first covering channels that contribute to as much current revenue and as many current customers as possible, as cost-effectively as you can.

However, we also need to think about the future and the right time to invest in future sales channel opportunities. Enter too early and we risk investing in the wrong channels; but enter too late and the sales landscape becomes crowded and expensive. Therefore, our Presence strategy needs to anticipate the future, but not move too quickly towards it, so we can change course if channel expectations are not met.

In B2B, sales representatives are typically the vanguard of presence. Having direct contact with the customer means sales staff are indeed a valuable source of information on tactical efforts to win business. However, growth in digital transactions limits a sales representative's view of the category and leads to the risk that Product or Engineering departments will take over the important decisions about digital sales channels. Neither sales reps nor product/engineering teams have a full customer view, therefore decisions about where to sell should be the role of the marketing department, who have visibility across all sales channels.

In a survey of over 500 B2B marketers in the USA and UK, the average number of sales channels they used was between three and four channels (M=3.7). There are obviously many more than four possible sales channels - so how do you know what to add, and what to miss?

To answer that question, we need to cover two key areas: revenue and customers.

Covering Revenue

Covering revenue means establishing presence in line with the channel's value contribution to category transactions. Compare the revenue of the total category business that comes through each sales channel to the share of your brand's business that comes through that channel. For example, if 30% of category revenue comes via brand websites, then your brand should have 30% of its revenue via its website. Detecting discrepancies can help identify channels where there is scope for improvement. For example, if 20% of category revenue comes via mobile apps, but only 12% of your brand's revenue comes via mobile apps, you have scope for improvement.

This information, combined with the category sales dynamics for each channel, helps determine if channel investments need to be higher or lower. For example, if category sales via mobile apps are also growing, it's even more important to improve performance here.

Covering Customers

Covering customers means assessing presence based on the number of customers that transact in each sales channel. The more people that buy via that channel, the greater your presence should be. If you profile sales channel users, you can detect shortfalls in customer types. For example, you might identify the brand is underperforming in professional services firms, or mid-sized businesses. Understanding which, and how many customers shop across channels in the category helps maximise the number of customers with a chance of buying your brand.

Getting the balance between costs, revenue and customers can be a tricky calculation. This is where LLM models could be employed to identify gaps, overinvestments and opportunities, provided you have the appropriate input data.

Establishing Presence

The channels used by more customers and/or getting more revenue are obviously the most attractive, so start with the bigger channels, where you can. This is because typically channels sell to the same type of customers. For example, Table 1 shows that for a B2B software product, most channels sell to the same customer profile.

However, the next best option might be a smaller, specialist channel that gets you incremental sales because you access customers or revenue you would not otherwise reach (e.g., in a specific geographical location or industry sector). Before selecting that smaller, specialist channel, check it lives up to its promises. A common trap is to make unfounded assumptions about channel users (e.g., face-to-face channels are used more by older customers).

We recommend profiling channel users to check any claims about catering to a specialist customer base, and do the calculations to assess the size of the segment reached. For example, Table 1 shows that for a B2B CRM product, the mobile app is used by more female category buyers than the website (33% versus 26%). However, visiting the website is 2.5x[1] more common than using a mobile app and so is used by more women in total. This means if you aim to improve Physical Availability for female category buyers, boosting access to the website is a better avenue.

[1]50% went to the company website versus 21% for Mobile App

Table 1: Demographic And Firmographic Profile Of Channel Users For A B2B CRM Software*

	Gender		Age				Years with the company		
	Male	Female	20 to 29 yrs	30 to 39 yrs	40 to 49 yrs	50 to 69 yrs	< 3 yrs	3 to 10 yrs	10+ yrs
Face to face with a sales rep	71	29	19	46	23	11	24	61	19
Talked to sales rep on phone	69	31	19	46	25	10	24	58	22
Conversed via email	72	28	18	47	27	7	22	62	20
Direct to a company website	74	26	20	38	26	15	23	57	22
Interacted on social media	75	25	21	49	26	4	20	70	12
Clicked on a social media post	72	28	13	59	22	7	25	64	15
Clicked on an online ad.	71	29	16	58	19	7	22	63	19
Online search	78	22	15	44	27	14	25	55	21
Mobile app	66	33	19	52	26	3	30	55	19
Conference or trade expo	88	12	13	45	29	14	27	55	23
Visit to office or retail outlet	85	15	15	55	15	15	15	60	28
Average	**75**	**25**	**17**	**49**	**24**	**10**	**23**	**60**	**20**

	Company Revenue				No of FTE employees			
	Under $1M	$1M to $10M	$10M to $100M	Over $100M	<50 FTE	50 to 200 FTE	200 to 1,000 FTE	1,000+ FTE
Face to face with a sales rep	9	20	42	28	15	21	35	29
Talked to sales rep on phone	17	22	34	27	19	18	32	30
Conversed via email	14	22	34	30	13	17	38	32
Direct to a company website	10	22	36	31	15	19	35	31
Interacted on social media	13	12	50	25	9	11	36	44
Clicked on a social media post	14	21	33	32	11	18	39	32
Clicked on an online ad.	9	21	40	30	7	16	40	38
Online search	14	23	30	33	16	19	32	33
Mobile app	17	22	33	28	18	11	39	33
Conference or trade expo	14	17	46	23	5	22	46	27
Visit to office or retail outlet	12	19	38	31	7	11	33	48
Average	**13**	**20**	**38**	**29**	**12**	**17**	**37**	**34**

Source: Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Survey conducted for Linkedin (USA n=415)
*deviations +/-10pp from average highlighted

Understanding Channel Interaction

We'd like to be present everywhere, all the time, but budget constraints mean 100% coverage is rarely possible. By drawing on the Duplication of Channel Shopping law, we can benchmark expected channel sharing levels. This variation on the well-known Duplication of Purchase law, says that channels share buyers in line with the other channels' penetration. Knowing how customers buy across channels helps you identify:

(a) Expansion opportunities - identify smaller channels that get the brand incremental sales by reaching additional buyers; and

(b) Rationalization opportunities – identify channels with higher overlap, such that removing one option frees up resources to be more efficiently deployed elsewhere.

Table 2 is an example from another B2B software category, where over 400 B2B category buyers were asked about channels bought through over the last three years. As highlighted in yellow, the average sharing between sales channels declines with channel penetration, as predicted by the Duplication of Channel Shopping law.

While customers don't use channels exclusively, they interact across channels predictably. For example, more customers who use any sales channel also engage with a sales rep on the phone than interact via mobile app or visit an office/retail outlet.

We can also see rationalization opportunities: Social media post & online ads (highlighted in blue); Social media post & Mobile app (highlighted in green); and Conference/trade expo & Visit to office/retail outlet (highlighted in orange). These channel pairs have higher customer overlap than they should (based on the benchmark). Therefore, if your brand is sold in one channel option of the two, the other is less necessary.

We can also see an expansion opportunity. Customers that have engaged face to face with a sales rep are less likely to engage with most general online channels such as search, online advertising, social media posts or mobile apps (shaded in red). These online and mobile options are natural complements to a sales team and are attractive for customers that don't want or need personal contact. This helps design a mix where channels work together to fill in each other's weaknesses and avoid wasting resources.

Each category has its own peculiarities. Therefore, we recommend you undertake this analysis for your category's channels to identify opportunities for rationalization or expansion.

Table 2: Sharing Of Customers Across Sales Channels For A B2B Financial Services Product (n=624)*

	Sales rep phone	Company website	Sales rep F2F	Email	Online search	Online ad.	Social media post	Mobile app	Social media interact	Conf. or trade expo	Visit to office/ retail outlet
% who also used this sales channel when buying this software product											
Talked to a salesrep on the phone	56		55	53	48	43	33	23	19	19	14	9
Went direct to a company website	50	61		44	44	54	35	22	21	24	15	12
Face to face with a sales rep	45	66	50		43	34	29	20	18	18	14	9
Conversed via email	42	63	52	45		38	38	27	24	23	12	6
Online search	42	57	65	36	38		37	23	27	22	17	12
Clicked on an online ad.	30	61	59	43	54	52		40	27	29	17	16
Clicked on a social media post	21	60	52	42	53	47	56		39	28	20	17
Mobile app	21	52	51	38	50	55	38	40		33	22	15
Interacted on social media	18	58	66	43	53	50	47	33	37		16	17
Conference or trade expo	13	59	57	45	38	54	38	32	34	21		23
Visit to office or retail outlet	10	53	60	43	28	53	50	38	33	33	33	
Average	**32**	**59**	**57**	**43**	**45**	**48**	**40**	**30**	**28**	**25**	**18**	**14**

Source: Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Survey, UK and USA, n=624)
*deviations +/-10pp from average highlighted, colors highlight brands with similar deviations

Presence Check Up Questions

- ☑ Can you expand your presence in currently popular sales channels (customers or revenue) to get a greater share of existing sales?

- ☑ Are any sales channels rapidly growing in customer or revenue contribution where increased investment will pay off in future sales?

- ☑ Are there sales channels that could expand your brand's potential customer base, by improving access to customers or sales you don't currently reach?

Aim to set the brand up for the near future, without getting too far ahead of customer buying behavior. It takes a long time for customers to give up using existing channels, so don't abandon or withdraw investment from 'legacy' channels too quickly. Instead, experiment and learn about new channels for tomorrow while taking care of where the customers buy today. Some areas to think about for the future:

- How will AI assisted search, where the answer is present in the summary rather than needing to click on a blue link, affect your website traffic? Do you have content that will enable your company to show up but still encourage people to seek you out more information?

- What will be the role of AI agents in the future for your products' sales? There are some categories where adoption might be quite quick and being ahead of the curve is of value, while others are likely to take longer and so it is better to wait a bit and see how the technology develops - where do the products you sell sit?

The Ubiquitous But Undervalued Value Of B2B Events

By: Kate Newstead, the B2B Institute at LinkedIn and James Hankins, Principal Consultant at Vizer Consulting & Former Global VP of Marketing Strategy and Planning at Sage

Introduction

For decades branded events, trade shows, conferences and road shows have formed the backbone of B2B marketing calendars. But in an increasingly digital and AI-supported world, are face to face events relics or still valuable investments? Are large scale branded events like ServiceNow's Knowledge, SAP's Sapphire, or Adobe Summit worthy investments for modern marketers? What about annual trade shows like The RSA Cybersecurity industry conference in San Francisco, The Hannover Messe heartbeat of industrial automation industry, or the commercial construction industry's descent on Las Vegas for The World of Concrete?

The role of such events is disputed not only due to measurement challenges but also because strategy and activation tactics vary dramatically, and so does the ROI. **In our view, the value of events depends on their ability to put brands where B2B buying happens (or could happen) and expand access to customer and category revenue.** Marketers who fully leverage events as scaled reach multipliers, content creation engines, and thought leadership positioning opportunities stand to gain significantly improved ROI on their investment compared to those who narrow their focus to the finite event moment itself.

Each type of event has its pros and cons and its own tactics for improving and proving outcomes.

How To Assess Impact Of Branded vs. Industry Events & Trade Shows

Pillar	Branded Events (hosted by one brand)	Industry Events & Trade Shows (multi-brand)
Reach Potential	**Strength:** Precise, high-quality reach among existing customers and champions. **Limitation:** Narrow market coverage; costly per incremental non-customer reached. **Best lever:** Invite-plus-one; customer-led stages to draw adjacent prospects. **Measure:** Cost per incremental contact; % of category revenue covered; non-customer reach % vs customers.	**Strength:** Broad category coverage, including non-customers and switchers. **Limitation:** Attention is fragmented alongside competitors. **Best lever:** High-visibility slots (keynotes/sponsorships) paired with distinctive assets. **Measure:** Incremental reach vs other channels; share-of-voice on the floor/stage; qualified contact quality.
Quality, Distinctive Content Generation	**Strength:** Controlled environment → deep, ownable content (hero demos, customer stories). **Limitation:** Can become insular if not diversified beyond current users. **Best lever:** Studio interviews, hero case studies, product walk-throughs designed for post-event reuse. **Measure:** Content half-life; reuse rate; working: non-working ratio; attributable downstream traffic/leads.	**Strength:** Varied conversations and third-party settings boost credibility. **Limitation:** Rights/permissions and noise can limit depth. **Best lever:** Panel clips, analyst soundbites, booth demos captured for social recaps. **Measure:** Earned mentions; reuse rate; referral traffic from event properties; lift vs baseline content.
Customer Access Multiplier	**Strength:** High-touch experiences that convert to powerful digital stories. **Limitation:** In-room scale is finite without amplification. **Best lever:** Livestream + on-demand hub; retarget attendees and lookalikes; employee reposts. **Measure:** Digital multiplier (online reach ÷ in-room); view-through and assisted conversions over 6–24 months.	**Strength:** Built-in foot traffic across segments (buyers, partners, media). **Limitation:** Share limited time with each prospect; harder to deepen on site. **Best lever:** Session recordings, recap threads, lead-back CTAs; retargeting by session/topic. **Measure:** Online reach uplift vs baseline; retarget performance; multi-touch attribution over 6–24 months.
Thought Leadership & Employee Advocacy	**Strength:** You own the stage → authority halo for execs and customers. **Limitation:** Can read as self-promotional without outside voices. **Best lever:** Customer co-keynotes; exec AMAs; pre-built employee social kits. **Measure:** Employee vs corporate page reach; senior-decision-maker engagement; saves on paid to reach the same audience	**Strength:** Third-party platform confers credibility; proximity to analysts/media. **Limitation:** Fewer minutes of spotlight; agenda control is shared. **Best lever:** Analyst/cust. panels; press briefings; employee live posts from sessions. **Measure:** Speaker-led engagement; share of category conversation; analyst/media pickups
New Product Research & Competitive Intelligence	**Strength:** Dense concentration of current customers for roadmap feedback. **Limitation:** Sample bias toward users/advocates. **Best lever:** Advisory councils, usability labs, closed-door betas on site. **Measure:** # validated insights shipped; time-to-decision for roadmap; NPS/CSAT deltas by feature.	**Strength:** Efficient scouting of competitor roadmaps + market buzz (buyers & non-users). **Limitation:** Less depth per account; limited access to sensitive details. **Best lever:** Structured floor research; analyst briefings; post-session interviews. **Measure:** Competitive coverage checklist; insights → actions logged; pricing/positioning adjustments informed.

B2B Branded Events

Destination events created and hosted by a single brand.

Branded events excel at creating powerful customer experiences far deeper than most other forms of marketing outreach. Typically geared towards current customers, they are the perfect environment to tease new product launches, flatter high value customers by showcasing their results in front of their peers, and give sales account teams quality time to warm-up and deepen client relationships.

As a result of their current customer focus, branded events are rarely explicitly designed with new customer acquisition in mind: they are often expensive to attend and it's rare that people "pay" to be sold to. The host brand invites primarily from their customer base, which is naturally only a proportion of the total potential market and includes only a handful of current customers who are "in-market" for an additional product solution at the time.

While branded events can deepen relationships with current customers, their contribution to **customer reach** and potential **revenue coverage** is often narrow unless paired with broader distribution tactics. With the often enormous and heavily scrutinized investment behind them, leaders in B2B branded events are looking beyond physical event footprint, finding creative ways to scale content to a wider audience and improve ROI.

For many B2B brands, hosting annual in-person events are long standing pillars in their annual marketing program. By scaling event content to a digital audience, for example via livestream and post-event content amplification, many B2B marketers are realizing a significant uptick in the number of customers reached and in the ROI on their event investment.

> **To truly capture the potential value of investment, branded events should be evaluated based not only on their potential to maintain and nurture current customers, but equally on their potential to expand reach to growth audiences.**

Industry Events & Trade Shows

Events, summits, conferences and tradeshows addressing a theme or industry topic; arranged to by an event host and attended by many (often competing) brands.

Industry events & trade shows are slightly different. They invite people from the category, therefore often provide broader audiences, including attendees from exhibiting vendors and customers. From a **presence** standpoint, industry events tend to offer broad category-level **coverage**, increasing the likelihood of reaching new customers who are not (yet) buying from you.

Industry events attendees tend to pay lower entry fees and are more open to being sold to. And whilst it's true that most of them won't be in the market for a new product as they walk the conference

center floor- it's also true that many of them attend to discover what's new and happening in the market, including new products and innovations.

Marketers tend to view these events as new customer acquisition/lead gen opportunities, even though immediate payback in terms of leads may be rare or slower than the standard 3-month post event tracking cycle. Industry events attendees experience a far lighter 'brand touch' than attendees at branded events – but even a subtle nudge builds mental and physical availability.

From the perspective of increasing a brand's presence when/where buying happens, industry events (especially large ones) tend to offer access to a significantly large cohort of potential customers all in one place. Here conference sponsorships and speaking opportunities have the potential to position the brand in front of a concentrated buying audience. This makes them a powerful tool for expanding reach to a relevant, low wastage audience – including the 95% of buyers who are not yet 'in market'. New or small brands, or marketers with particularly limited budgets may also benefit from a "birds of a feather effect" by associating themselves with the industry and competitive set.

But industry events aren't without their challenges. Playing in these channels literally means sitting side-by-side with your direct competitors, so it's crucial your brand is prominent enough to stand out against the competitive clutter. Industry event organizers are wise to this challenge, offering a range of premium real estate and sponsorship add-ons to the highest bidders. Suddenly the cost of participating in these channels starts to add up, feeling like a competitive spend race. 'Free' assets that aid in standout should be elevated and leveraged – Distinctive Assets that uniquely cue the brand and associations with valuable category entry points relevant to wide pools of buyers are a great starting point.

Just like branded events, industry events, trade shows and conferences can also be scaled digitally to touch a far wider customer base beyond those attending face to face, thereby further maximizing the ROI of the event investment.

Distinctive brand assets help brands stand out from their direct competitors at the World Of Concrete Industry event.

Image source: https://www.roadsbridges.com/concrete/news/55262256/world-of-concrete-2025-tech-takes-center-stage

Sizing And Measuring Potential Value Contribution

To decide which events (if any) to invest in, and to maximize value from that investment, consider and measure value through several lenses:

1. Reach Potential

Since brands grow primarily by recruiting new users, reaching a wide audience is key to growth. But events are not created equally, and neither are their participation prices. To right size investment, the challenge is to understand both the quantity and quality of audience members delivered by an event (or any other potential channel). In many B2B categories, accessing buyers is difficult, and events can provide an opportunity to reach a concentration of quality customers all in one place. It's always worth remembering that effective reach tactics are different according to the audience you are targeting.

Measurement Tip

Do the math. Compare the cost, quantity, and quality of contacts generated by different events against other channel options. Prioritize events that give you incremental access to prospects you can't reach elsewhere, especially since maintaining visibility in your market is an ongoing competitive necessity.

2. Quality, Distinctive Content Generation

Events are content creation engines. The interviews, panels, demos, white papers, videos, and custom builds needed to create compelling customer experiences become raw material for dozens of follow-up touchpoints, turning a single event into sustained market presence via social posts, customer case studies, sales enablement toolkits, website content and more. Starting from events and working out (from owned to paid and then via earned) provides a simple and cost-effective model upon which to increase value from the investment. It also has the potential side benefit of replacing mediocre B2B advertising content with distinctive, authentic and stand out content, thereby saving on production costs.

Measurement Tip

Look beyond immediate event costs to include content value. Compare how much you invest in creating materials (working dollars) versus promoting them (non-working dollars), and track how long those assets keep generating ROI after the event ends.

3. Customer Access Multiplier

Face to face events create high touch moments of brand experience for those physically attending. But leveraging digital distribution channels to make valuable event content available online multiplies the brand's coverage of customers and revenue. If done well this can even create FOMO–driving interest and registrations for future events.

Measurement Tip 1

Beyond the leads & immediate conversions generated at the event, measure the number of potential customers touched f2f and with digital scaled assets, and track their behavior over a long-time horizon. Remember many B2B categories have extended buying cycles that span multiple years.

Measurement Tip 2

Separating customer and non-customers post attendance reviews is more useful than a combined view. Brand users always rate their brand more highly, and a combined view masks the specific challenges in converting new customers.

4. Thought Leadership & Employee Advocacy

Employees have their own social media following and broadcasting their activities at events adds both scale and authenticity to the content suite. For example, we looked at the LinkedIn follower base for the world's 10 largest tech companies. The average company has 13.9 million LinkedIn followers, but their employees collectively have 28 million followers, of which only 5 million are also following the company page, and 22.8 are unique followers of the employees. Tapping into employee advocacy provides brands access beyond customers to industry bodies, regulators, the board, and other important stakeholders and transforms reach from corporate broadcasts into trusted, authentic conversations at scale.

Measurement Tip

Consider not just how many, but what type of people your employees can efficiently reach, and how this overlaps or adds to your paid amplification investment.

5. New Product Research & Competitive Intelligence

The concentration of current customers in one place provides a unique opportunity to gather valuable product feedback to shape product roadmaps, therefore contributing to efficient resourcing decisions. Industry events have the bonus of being efficient learning grounds for analyzing competitive priorities and industry trends.

Measurement Tip

Involve cross functional stakeholders to estimate the value concentrated customer feedback & competitive intelligence adds to the product development. This helps connect events beyond the traditional marketing metrics and to firm long term value creation.

Conclusion

Business growth hinges on increasing a brand's mental and physical availability—being easier to think of, find, and buy. While events may be shoe-boxed as expensive, resource intensive and focused on existing customers, this headline overlooks the many nuances that impact their strategic potential. Many B2B events are underleveraged and amplification before, during and after the physical moment is the obvious low hanging fruit to step change this. By understanding the full in-person and digital customer coverage events can deliver, and their wider contribution to value creation, marketers will more accurately assess the role of events in building brand availability, and reap better returns on their financial and time investment to run them. From this comes a more considered evaluation of the cost-benefit of an event and it's role as a strategic channel to intercept buyers where B2B buying happens.

Events should not be evaluated only on their conference center build costs and ability to fill 3-month lead quotas —but on their role in showcasing your brand, putting it front and center to potential buyers. Many B2B marketers are underleveraging their events, and amplification is the low hanging fruit to step change this.

Takeaways

Pillar	Keep	Start	Stop
Reach Potential	Delivering precise reach to current customers	Tailoring each event for **incremental reach**	Treating all events the same
Content	Capturing and packaging on-site assets	Designing everything for reuse	One-and-done content
Customer Access	Staging high-touch in-room experiences	Setting a **digital multiplier** target	Chasing 90-day leads
Thought Leadership & Employee Advocacy	Spotlighting execs + customers as credible voices	Equipping employees with social kits	Corporate-only voice
Research & Competitive Intelligence	Running structured customer feedback loops	Gathering systematic competitor/floor intel	Anecdotes with no follow-through

About The Authors

Kate Newstead is the Marketing Science Lead at LinkedIn's B2B Institute. She has 15+ years of experience growing some of world's most beloved brands in large multinational companies including LinkedIn, Mars, Mondelez, and Coty; and a nose for applying evidence-based marketing to the real world. Kate is a frequent speaker at marketing conferences, a judge for effectiveness awards and advisor to LinkedIn's top clients on sustainable marketing strategies that deliver financial results.

James Hankins is a leading industry thinker on marketing effectiveness, having published on topics such as channel economics, share of search and 'Digital Availability'. Formerly Vice President of Marketing Strategy & Planning at Sage (a B2B fintech), and co-chair of an IPA Thinktank; James brings a wealth of hands-on experience in strategic channel management to this opinion piece.

Up Next

Presence helps you get in the room, but can your buyers find you? In our next article exploring **Prominence**, find out why you should stop borrowing the spotlight and start owning it.

Part 2:
Prominence

Prominence: Standing Out In A Sea Of Clutter

You can pick your child easily out of a crowd of children. But if I ask you to find my child it would be more challenging for you. I can give you a description, but this only works if that visual description includes elements distinctive to my child. For example, knowing she has two eyes is less helpful than knowing her top has purple butterflies.

Similarly, it is easy to spot the brands we work with in a crowded marketplace, but what about anyone else? Have we dressed up our brand to look distinctive, and given the customer the tools to find it?

You are probably thinking - we have a great logo - what more do we need? Well, the logo may look good but can it do the work? Does it enable the brand to stand out in any (let alone all) sales environments? And if not, do you have other visual elements that help a (potential) customer find the brand when the logo might not cut through?

Prominence is making a brand/company easy to find in all sales environments, bricks-and-mortar, digital or mobile. If you are selling on a marketplace website, how easily does your brand attract the viewer's eye? On an average smart phone with 80 or so apps, how eye catching is your app? The more sales channels a brand uses, the more diverse the environments where a brand/company must stand out. You can own or rent prominence:
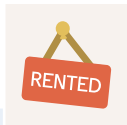
Rented Prominence

This is when you pay for better real estate within a sales environment. For example, to be on the first online page, paid search, conference sponsorship, or front of store placement to improve brand visibility in retail settings. This is a temporary sugar hit to your brands' sales. You only get the benefit when you pay for it. If you stop paying for it, a competitor can take your place.
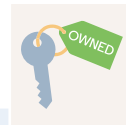
Owned Prominence

These are the Distinctive Assets that work as branding devices in sales environments. When managed well, Distinctive Assets are with the brand for the long term. These branding devices don't grow overnight, you need to teach customers how to find your brand.

Reliance on rented prominence puts you at the mercy of the landlord. However, while every B2B brand has a logo, there is often not much else to boost branding effects. This means B2B brands are often ill-equipped to cut through environmental, mental, or competitive clutter.

Different asset types give you more options to help the brand stand out in any environment. Here are some examples from B2B brands, can you identify the brand behind the Distinctive Asset (answers at the end of the paper).

Prominence Challenge: Which Brands Do These Assets Belong To?

Find the answers on the next page.
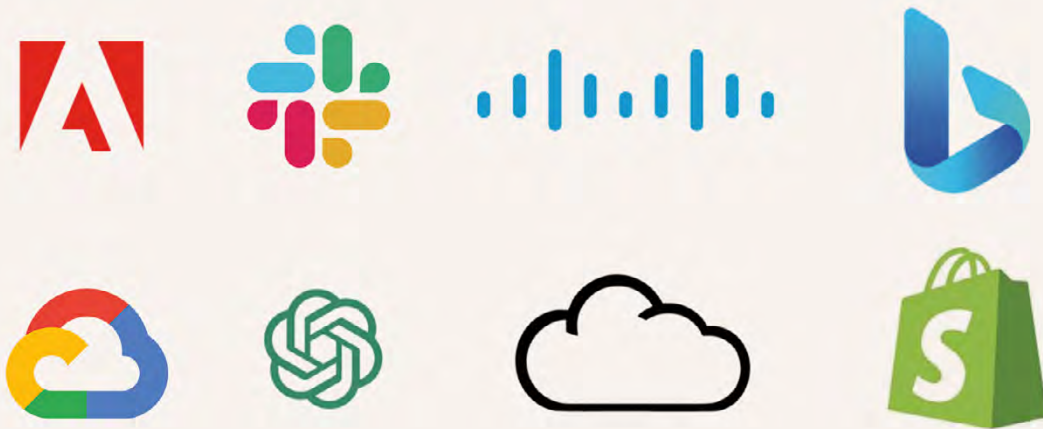
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Different asset types give you more options to help the brand stand out in any environment. Here are some examples from B2B brands, can you identify the brand behind the Distinctive Asset (answers at the end of the paper).

A diverse set of assets might include a visual image, word-based asset, colour combination, a face and maybe an audio asset if audio media are commonly used.

For long term brand identity building, assess the environments where you are more vulnerable and create a plan to build a Distinctive Asset to help there. Where you do use 'rented prominence' try to employ a 'rent to buy' tactic instead. Rented prominence works better when it leverages Distinctive Assets, so both can work together until you have enough branding strength to stop needing that expensive sugar-hit.

Prominence Check Up Questions

- ☑ What obstacles prevent potential buyers from finding your brand in sales channels?

- ☑ Do you have a diverse set of Distinctive Assets?

- ☑ Do you have a plan to wean your brand off the sugar hit of 'renting prominence'?

Prominence Challenge Answer Key

Adobe

Slack

Cisco

Bing AI

Google Cloud

OpenAI

Oracle Cloud Infrastructure

Shopify

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Moving From Rented To Owned Prominence

By: Kate Newstead and Alejandro Garcia Medina, at the B2B Institute at LinkedIn

Introduction

Is it better to rent or to buy? This investment strategy applies equally to growing a real estate portfolio and building a B2B brand. Just as renting property offers immediate access to a prime location but with little long-term security, many B2B brands rely heavily on rented brand prominence (e.g., sponsored search ads) to stand out in a crowded and complex marketplace. Rented prominence is a quick fix, or a short-term lease, on brand visibility. But, without a plan to transition toward owned prominence (e.g., thought leadership, community engagement, strong brand associations), brands risk being evicted from prime real estate the moment budgets tighten, or competitors outbid them.

Renting may get brands a penthouse view today, but it is the brands that invest in laying foundations, building equity and putting down roots that create lasting impact and value in the future. Owned prominence is the brand equivalent of buying the land, designing the home, and becoming part of someone's mental neighborhood. It is not just about visibility; it's about living in your customers' heads, rent-free.

The Challenge

B2B brands tend to overinvest in rented prominence – primarily through SEM - because buyers typically lack strong mental availability or clear brand associations. While effective in the short term, this approach is expensive and inefficient in the long run. The rise of generative search engines and LLM-powered discovery is reshaping how information is surfaced. Relevance is now determined by content authority and context, not just keyword bidding. Brands that haven't built a recognizable asset or established relevance risk being filtered out entirely.
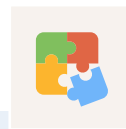
The Solution

B2B marketers should rebalance investment towards owned prominence (i.e., investing in brand building efforts that create mental availability and teach customers how to find and recognize them). This means consistently developing distinctive brand assets, designing content that aligns with category entry points, and fostering associations that makes the brand easy to recall and trust, essentially teaching customers how to find your brand. While B2B brands will require a combination of rented and owned strategies, the winning strategy is clear: build a brand that earns attention, rather than one that pays for it.

Brand Building In The AI-Supported Buyer Journey

Balancing rented and owned investment isn't easy. But it's a necessary strategic move that reaps rewards over the long-term. This principle holds true across traditional brand placements and is even more critical in today's rapidly evolving, AI-driven landscape.
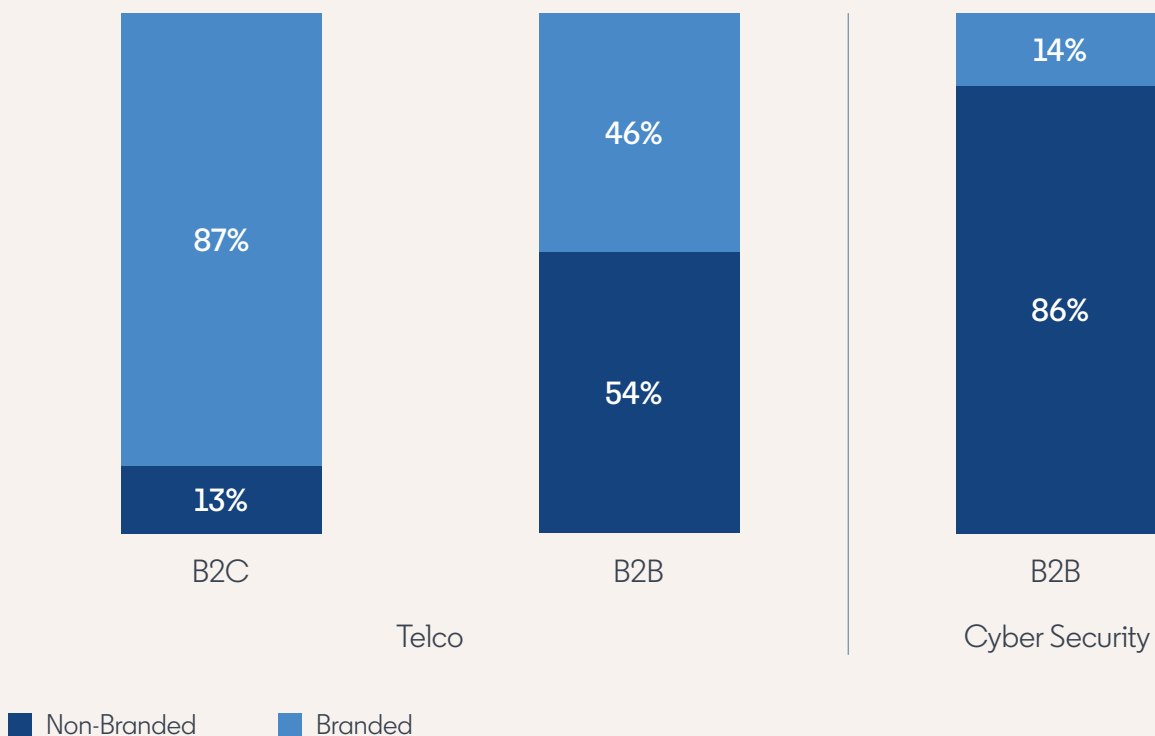
In an era shaped by large language models (LLMs) and AI-assisted search, building brand memory is more critical than ever. Brand recommendations are increasingly generated through complex algorithms and third-party analysis, with little direct influence from paid efforts from brands (Source: OpenAI). When consumers are ready to buy, your brand should surface, not because of an algorithm, but because it's already top of mind.

In fact, GEO (Generative Engine Optimization), the new wave of SEO, rewards foundational brand-building efforts that establish authority and relevance. Beyond the technical readiness of your content (e.g., adding metadata information, allowing LLM crawler permissions), GEO emphasizes the value of organic signals like thought leadership, authentic reviews, and earned mentions. These elements significantly influence whether generative AI tools recommend your brand. The future of discoverability still lies in the strength of your brand. (Sources: earch Engine Journal, Forbes), Foundation Marketing)

Owned Prominence Is The Strategic Play

Compared to large B2C brands, many B2B brands tend to have smaller physical availability in the human brain. This is likely because of the often significant and long-term investment B2C brands have made into building distinctive branding and establishing mental links between the brand and purchasing cues. For example, in our research with Dr. Grace Kite at Magic Numbers, 87% of B2C Telecom searches included a brand name, while only 46% of B2B Telecom searches did. The gap is even wider in cybersecurity, a purely B2B category, where just 14% of searches mentioned a brand. Most B2B searches are generic, making it harder for smaller brands to stand out unless they've invested in building strong brand assets.

% Of Searched Terms

Telco

B2C	B2B
Branded 87%	Branded 46%
Non-Branded 13%	Non-Branded 54%

Cyber Security

B2B
Branded 14%
Non-Branded 86%

■ Non-Branded   ■ Branded

Magic Numbers research into cyber security and telecom search data, conducted for the B2B institute, 2022, US market.

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In B2B, where purchase decisions are complex and committee-driven, unique and strong brand assets are even more critical. They do not just help buyers recognize you, but they help them remember you when it matters most. With the rise of GEO (Generative Engine Optimization), the stakes are higher. GEO favors brands with strong, consistent, and recognizable signals; those who have invested in building a clear identity across channels.

So, what does it mean to invest in brand assets? It means developing and amplifying strong brand elements, such as:

- **Visual Identity:** logos, color palettes, typography

- **Message Signals:** CEP-led content and frameworks

- **Thought Leadership:** consistent POVs, authorities reviews, and insightful industry analysis.

- **Community Signals:** partnerships, events, employee advocacy, social proof.

These assets should be woven into your marketing strategy, not just as decorative pieces, but as foundational elements to build mental availability. Before customers type anything into a search bar or ask an AI assistant, they activate their memory. The same is true before the beginning of a B2B buying process. On day one of the purchase journey, most buyers already have a shortlist of brands they will consider – a short shortlist, typically only 3 brands that has been curated well before they were even in-market[1].

The brands that make it onto the shortlist are those that are easy to mind. Brands and product perceptions are (often subliminally) activated in the human brain, long before human hands turn to search engines or LLMs to guide them on the purchasing journey. Brand building remains an often-overlooked gold mine in B2B marketing, providing both a buffer against competitors and a guide for audiences during their search journey.

"Brand building gets people to think of you and then search for you when the right time to buy comes around. In turn, that helps people to traverse the search environment safely, arriving to you rather than landing with a competitor."

Dr Grace Kite
Magic Numbers

magic numbers

The Real Rewards Of Renting vs. Owning

A 30-year mortgage takes a lot of time and money to pay down, but month by month this discipline builds a valuable financial asset. Investing in the human brain also pays back – both in building valuable long-term assets and in delivering short-term ROAS numbers.

For example – and perhaps obviously – the return on investment from branded searches is significantly higher than the return on generic terms. Dreamdata's large analysis of B2B search investments found that non-branded search terms return an average of just 68% ROAS (i.e.: for every $1 spent, only $0.68 is returned as revenue). By comparison, 'owned terms' (i.e.: search queries that included the brand name) produced $12.99 in ROAS for every $1 spent–making them significantly more efficient and profitable.

[1] Source: Google/Bain, B2B Discovery to Devotion Study; LinkedIn Hidden Buyers research.

82%
of search budget is on renting non-branded keywords

18%
of search budget is on owned branded keywords

$1 investment = $0.68 ROAS

$1 investment = $0.68 ROAS
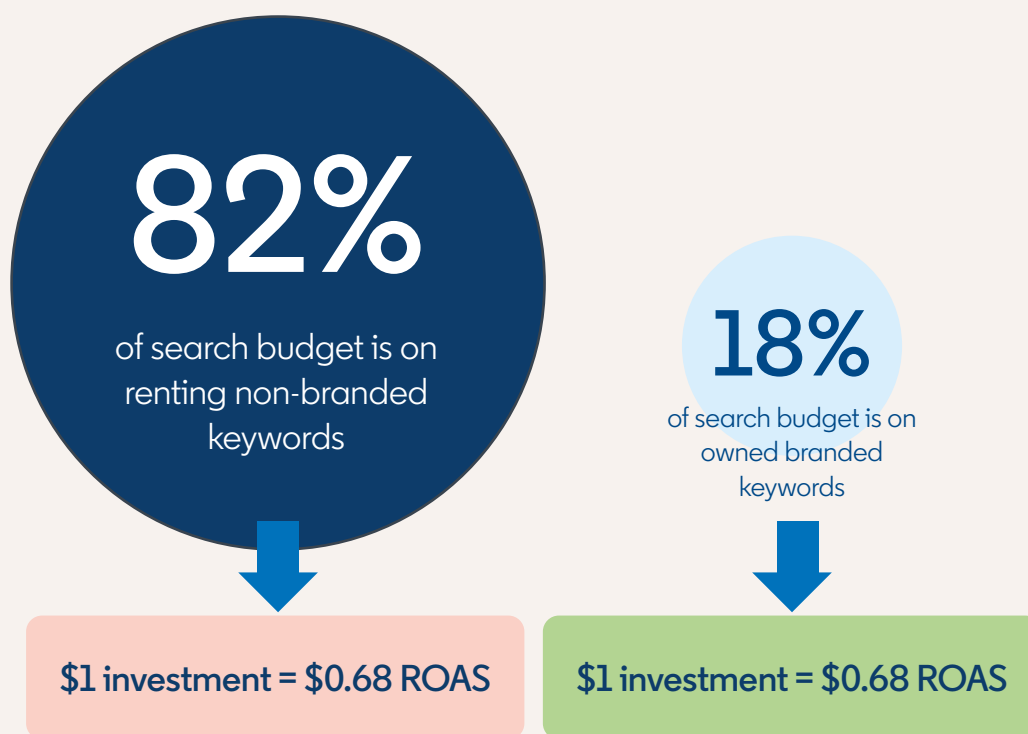
Study: Non-branded keywords have 19x worse return than branded keywords', by Jeremy Sacramento & Alexandra Flygare, 2025, https://dreamdata.io/blog/branded-vs-non-branded-google-search-ads-b2b

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Over time, B2B brands that invest in increasing brand awareness should expect benefits in increasing branded search volume. Especially in categories where branded search is still low, the white space is wide open to shape the narrative and capture mindshare.

This principle of leveraging owned assets to amplify the value from rented prominence extends beyond SEM to all types of paid brand placements. Premium positions in any channel command higher prices because they offer greater visibility and impact. Consider platinum sponsorship packages at industry events, first-in-feed ad units, exclusive partnerships with A-grade B2B influencers – each rented prominence placement carries the same price tag, no matter which brand purchases it.

However, the value a brand can extract from these placements significantly increases when the placement is paired with strong, distinctive branding that resonates with the contexts buyers encounter during purchase occasions (i.e., Category Entry Points). In our view, far too few B2B advertisers capitalize on this opportunity. Leveraging distinctive assets and Category Entry Point-first messaging represents low-hanging opportunities for significantly boosting the return on marketing investments.

Conclusion

While discovery and search methods are evolving, the psychology of brand recall remains the same. Brands that underinvest in long-term branding risk becoming invisible, no matter how optimized their SEM or GEO are. The human brain is the place to start investing in owned brand prominence. To do this, use broad-reaching advertising and consistent distinctive branding that makes your brand stand out more easily in purchasing situations. Focus on building brand associations that teach customers how to find you when they're in a sales channel and in buying mode. Doing so will maximize immediate value from short term rented prominence, while also gradually building a valuable strategic asset that you truly own.

Up Next: Presence gets your brand in the room. Prominence gets your brand seen. In our next article, we'll be exploring why Portfolio management is the key to getting your brand chosen.

About The Authors

Kate Newstead is the Marketing Science Lead at LinkedIn's B2B Institute. She has 15+ years of experience growing some of world's most beloved brands in large multinational companies including LinkedIn, Mars, Mondelez, and Coty; and a nose for applying evidence-based marketing to the real world. Kate is a frequent speaker at marketing conferences, a judge for effectiveness awards and advisor to LinkedIn's top clients on sustainable marketing strategies that deliver financial results.

Alejandro Garcia Medina is a Research Lead in the B2B Institute at LinkedIn, where he drives innovation in the B2B space through impactful, human-centered thought leadership. Prior to joining LinkedIn, Alejandro led creative effectiveness and trends research at TikTok, where he helped strategic accounts activate successfully on the platform through data-driven insights. A trained mixed-methods researcher, Alejandro began his career in the public sector and holds an M.S. in Data Analytics from New York University.

Up Next

Presence gets your brand in the room. Prominence gets your brand seen. In our next article, we'll be exploring why Portfolio management is the key to getting your brand chosen.

Part 3:
Portfolio

Portfolio: Have Enough Options, But Not Too Many

The science (and art) of portfolio management is like channel management, where it is necessary to cover current needs, while also planning for future needs. Two complementary ways to identify the parts of the category you want to cover (a) sales data and (b) Category Entry Points (CEPs). Sales data will tell you which product types within the category currently sell the most, which are growing or declining, and the sales competitive intensity. CEPs help you to understand how each of your products match the buyer mindset as they enter 'buying mode', and the level of mental competitive intensity.

Combining sales and memory metrics helps suggest useful portfolio investments. This needs to be matched with company capabilities. For example, an AI enhanced offering might be desired by customers for a category, but unless your company has the credibility and capability to offer this, it will be a difficult area for your brand to cover.

Learn more about how to execute a CEP-led strategy in B2B here.

Good portfolio management is knowing, protecting, and investing in the core product/service, the one that contributes the most to the brand/company's top and bottom line. Protecting the core is about protecting current and future revenue. It is important to ensure any marketing decision 'does no harm' to what is currently the most important company revenue source. It's difficult to access this information widely across B2B companies, but a benchmark from packaged goods, where data is more easily available, is that the top-selling product contributes 44% to total brand revenue (Tanusondjaja et al, 2018).

When we asked B2B marketers to estimate the contribution of the core product/service to their brands' revenue, around 30% could not give any answer. Of those that could answer, the average sales contribution is 50% (see Figure 1), slightly higher for those with five or fewer products (63%).

This suggests there are brand portfolios with long tails full of low sales generating products, as if the core product contributes 52% for a company with over 20 products, the remaining 19+ products are responsible for the remaining 48% of sales. If you can slim down your portfolio and get rid of underperforming products it can free up funds to invest in more scalable or valuable areas. Then with an in-shape portfolio you can look to smart areas to innovate and develop new products/services.

Figure 1: Average Sales Contribution Of Core Product

Average #products	5 or fewer products	6 to 10 products	11 to 20 products	21 to 50 products	Over 50 products
53%	63%	54%	49%	54%	52%
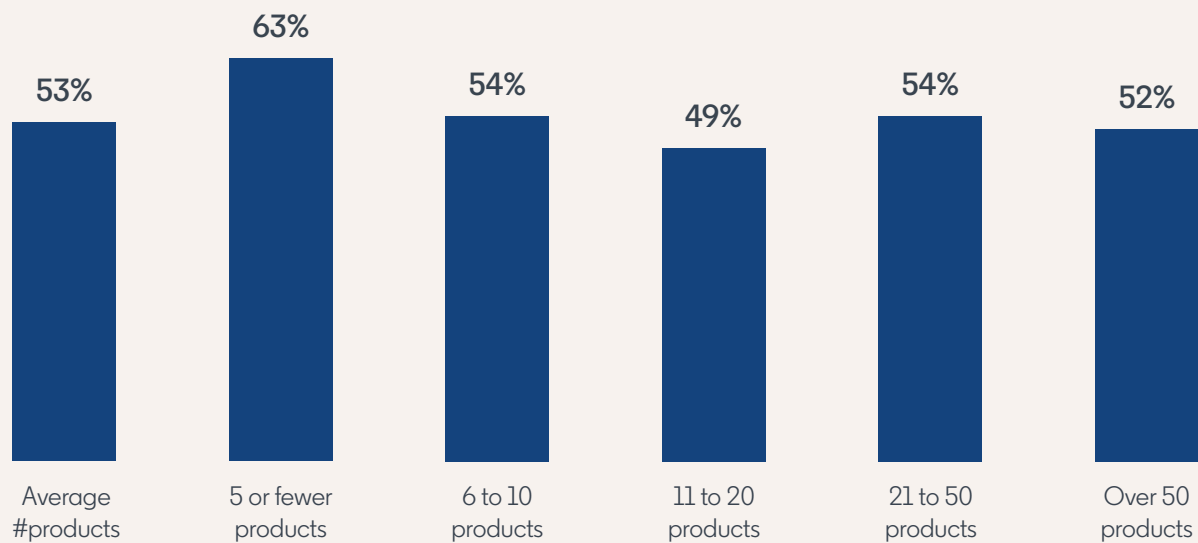
Source: Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Survey, USA

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Portfolio Check Up Questions

☑ Do we have products/services to cover the major parts of the market?

☑ Are we seeding and not bleeding the core to keep it generating revenue?

☑ Do we have products/services in growing parts of the category?

☑ Do we have a plan to remove the deadweight in the portfolio, reallocate resources to more promising options, and boost overall profitability?

In the future LLM's could aid B2B marketers portfolio decisions, by going beyond analysing sales patterns to exploring unstructured data like feedback from sales reps or customer emails for patterns linked to successful sales and future customer needs.

Wrap Up From The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute

Remember it's Mental and Physical availability, not Mental or Physical Availability. Physical Availability helps a brand to realise the advantages gained from Mental Availability building activities. Hopefully in the future they will have Cannes awards for performance in Physical Availability, but until then we will just have to settle for more profitable sales.

There is still much to learn in the B2B space, so stay tuned for more developments as we continue our R&D.

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The Merchandising Playbook For B2B Portfolio Management

By: Derek Yueh and Kate Newstead, the B2B Institute at LinkedIn

Walk into any retail store and you're instantly told what to buy in both obvious and subliminal ways. The hero product is in the window, the key pieces are at eye level, and there are just enough new SKUs sprinkled in among the staples to trick your brain into entering the store for the third time in a week. Nothing in the store is there by accident; in fact, every square footage has been engineered by retail merchandisers to maximize the buyer's shopping basket. They obsess over what to cut, what to feature, and how to balance basics with fresh drops because they know that **shoppers have limited attention, limited patience, and limited dollars**.

B2B shopping follows the same principle, even though buyers are browsing digital shelves rather than physical store aisles. And while digital shelves might be technically infinite, the **mental shelves inside your customers' memories are decidedly finite**. If your portfolio is a cluttered maze, your hero products are buried, and your messaging feels as disjointed as a clearance bin, don't be surprised when buyers walk away empty-handed.

Here's what B2B portfolio management can learn from the best retail merchandisers and why CEPs are the ultimate organizing framework to optimize your portfolio.

1. Declutter Your Portfolio

Retailers figured this out decades ago: you can't sell everything to everyone. Mickey Drexler—the so-called "merchant prince" behind Gap and J.Crew, and handpicked by Steve Jobs to shape Apple's retail strategy—was ruthless about killing deadweight SKUs. He found that 20% of products drove 80% of revenue, while the rest just cluttered shelves, confused shoppers, and wasted resources.

Too many B2B portfolios are packed with long-tail products—one-off solutions for niche use cases, legacy SKUs from M&As that sit abandoned in a corner, and R&D bets that never scaled. They hoard engineering time, R&D spend, sales enablement cycles, and marketing budget… all for negligible incremental revenue.

The B2B Lesson: Start tidying up—Marie Kondo style. Go product by product and ask: "Does this spark growth?" Use sales contribution data and Category Entry Points (CEPs) as your filter.

Use Sales Data & Category Entry Points To Guide Portfolio Decisions. Align Advertising Investment To The Biggest Bets.

Revenue Contribution

50% of revenue from 95% of products

50% of revenue from #1 core product
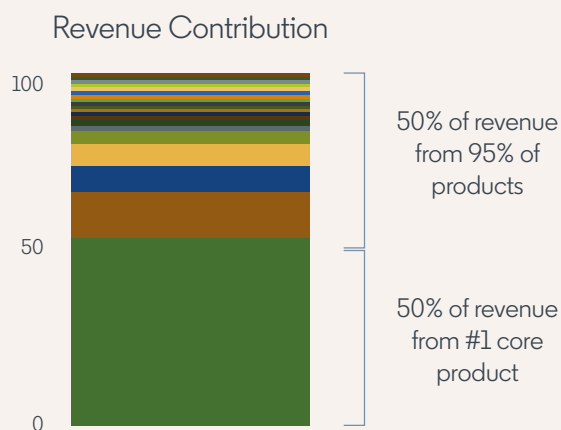
Sales data tells you which products sell best, are most profitable, which are growing or declining.
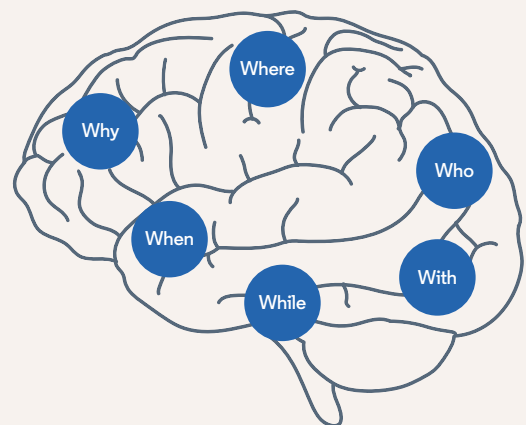
CEPs data tells you what potential customers look for when they enter buying mode.

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If a product doesn't clearly align to a meaningful, frequent, and winnable buying situation, thank it for its service—and let it go. But take care to analyze the full tail. You may have some hidden gems that give you valuable penetration coverage. Like a raincoat or a swimsuit - these are items you just can't do without. The finished product range you end up with should be one that delivers the maximum profit contribution, with the minimal number of SKUs.

In other words, aim for the perfect capsule wardrobe with just enough and all the right pieces to carry you through the whole season. Avoid having too many items that weigh you down and clutter closet space, and de-duplicate pieces that play practically the same role. This focus allows you to allocate resources to where customers' needs (and future revenue pools) are, without compromising on maintaining the core range.

B2B Examples

Salesforce	Adobe	JPMorgan
After years of acquisitions, Salesforce turned a fragmented sprawl of inherited products (Slack, Tableau, MuleSoft, Quip, etc.) into bundled "Clouds" with unified message (Customer 360), making the portfolio much easier for sellers to sell and buyers to buy.	Adobe ditched dozens of boxed SKUs (e.g., Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign) that were difficult to upgrade and expensive to maintain to launch Creative Cloud: one subscription, zero clutter, and a lot less operational drag.	JPMorgan poured years of R&D into Quorum, its proprietary blockchain for B2B payments. Despite the hype, adoption lagged, and the bank eventually divested Quorum to ConsenSys—choosing instead to fold blockchain learnings back into its core payments infrastructure.

2. Focus Your Portfolio

In retail, there's a mantra worth remembering: "if it's not **eye-level, it's not buy-level.**" And because retailers know they only have maybe two seconds to attract a customer as they walk by their store, they agonize over what products you see first upon entrance. After all, **visibility drives velocity**. For example, it's no accident that we often first encounter fragrances, designer handbags and jewelry when we enter a department store. It's a deliberate strategy that puts the highest-margin, broadest-appealing products right up front, that prime your brains to spend before you know what you came in for.

In B2B, the same visibility principle applies, even if your "storefronts" are websites and your "window displays" are your campaigns. Too often, the true revenue heroes get buried three clicks deep, lost at the bottom of the page, or crowded out by too many niche messages in a single 30 second spot. Additionally, budgets get spread thin, sales enablement tools give everything equal airtime, and buyers either leave confused about what to buy, or even worse, leave before they even browse.

Your digital storefront may be infinite, but your buyer's time and attention certainly are not. That's why your hero products also deserve a digital 'first impression zone'—prime real estate where buyers can't miss them (think: above-the-fold homepage banners, featured spots in your email newsletter, the first slide in every sales deck, or even LinkedIn's Reserved/Primetime/First Impression ads).

The B2B Lesson: Flagship products belong on the runway, not hidden in the stockroom. Category Entry Points tell you which products deserve the spotlight. Lead with the ones that are most profitable, and which buyers can recall in real buying situations, not just the ones you wish they did.

Here's a checklist to see if you're putting a big enough spotlight on your hero products:

Website
(Your Storefront)

- ☑ Is your hero product **visible above the fold** on the homepage?
- ☑ Does it have a **dedicated landing page** with zero distractions?
- ☑ Is it the **default CTA** in your navigation, not buried under "See All Products"?
- ☑ Can a buyer figure out what you're famous for in **5 seconds or less**?

Paid Media & Campaigns
(Your Window Displays)

- ☑ Do your top paid placements feature **flagship products first**, not the long tail?
- ☑ Are **Category Entry Points (CEPs)** driving campaign creative?
- ☑ Are there **consistent visual branding and messaging** around your hero solution across channels?

3. Balance Your Portfolio

Retailers know the P&L economics: innovations might grab the attention, but it's the basics that keep the engine running. We can call this the Oreo Strategy: new innovations (e.g. Oreo Cakesters, Oreo Ice Cream Sandwiches) and limited-edition flavors (e.g. Chromatica or Post Malone Oreos) might be the ones creating the media buzz and pulling shoppers into the stores, but it's the classic Oreo that drives the P&L.

B2B brands could learn a lot from the Oreo Strategy: use innovation with clear intention. In Oreo's case the role of much innovation is to generate buzz, to spotlight the brand while effortlessly doubling down on the core products that reinforce brand equity and fuel repeatable revenue. In B2B, "buzz" might not mean trending on TikTok, but it can mean strategic launches, marketing moments, or flagship updates that spotlight your most valuable solutions — not drowning them in a sea of feature creep. The best portfolios resist spaghetti strategy and instead make it obvious which handful of products buyers should recall in real-world buying moments.

But what about disruptive innovation, that thing every business leader claims they want? Yes, B2B brands need to evolve through innovation. But the most successful ones don't chase novelty for novelty's sake—t**hey use innovation to solve the core customer needs even better.**

> **The B2B Lesson:** Build a healthy mix. Invest in proven earners while giving emerging needs room to grow without cannibalizing the core. That's a tall order akin to juggling on a unicycle but using Category Entry Points can help marketers find balance. Ask yourself: What buying situations are you winning today? Which ones could you credibly win next?

And if you're going to disrupt your category, disrupt it in service of gaining incremental coverage in your priority Category Entry Points. That way you're balancing the portfolio around real customer needs instead of internal politics.

B2B Example: **Microsoft's AI blitz** — from Copilot in Word to AI-powered Excel and Outlook — may grab headlines, but the real play from Satya Nadella is betting on the Category Entry Points Microsoft already dominates (productivity, collaboration, cloud) while expanding into those it can credibly own next (AI-assisted work, developer tools, security). By weaving AI into bread-and-butter products like Office 365 and Azure, (instead of creating multitudes of net-new products) Microsoft grows mental availability in priority buying moments without cannibalizing its core — the Oreo Strategy in B2B form.

Conclusion

Great merchandising isn't about showing everything—it's about showing the right things, in the right way, at the right time. B2B portfolios deserve the same discipline, and these principles apply to both the digital shelf (where-ever buying happens) and in your shop windows (where buyer's memories and journeys are influenced). When you declutter, spotlight your heroes, and balance for real buyer needs based on category sales data, profitability and Category Entry Points, you don't just build a catalog—you build physical and mental availability.

	Low Mental Availability	High Mental Availability
High Physical Availability	**Shelf Warmers** You're everywhere, but no one's thinking or looking for you.	**Jackpot** Cue the sales confetti! Coveted product, that's there when and where your customers want to buy it.
	LMA + HPA	HMA + HPA
	LPA + LMA	HPA + LPA
Low Physical Availability	**The Chopping Block** Not in stores, not in minds. The Bermuda Triangle of brand growth.	**The Reverse Robin Hood** You're using your own budget to drive buyers to the store, where they reach for your competitors with better distribution.

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The Three Takeaways

1 **Declutter**
Clear out the stockroom, so you can keep the fewest SKUs that cover the most CEPs.

2 **Focus**
Stage your website and campaigns like a Fifth Avenue window, giving prime "real estate" to your hero products.

3 **Balance**
Attract customers with new innovations, that lead them to shelves stocked with your best-sellers.

About The Authors

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Kate Newstead is the Marketing Science Lead at LinkedIn's B2B Institute. She has 15+ years of experience growing some of world's most beloved brands in large multinational companies including LinkedIn, Mars, Mondelez, and Coty; and a nose for applying evidence-based marketing to the real world. Kate is a frequent speaker at marketing conferences, a judge for effectiveness awards and advisor to LinkedIn's top clients on sustainable marketing strategies that deliver financial results.

Conclusion

Mental & Physical Availability: The Opportunity for Better Marketing ROI

Mental & Physical Availability: The Opportunity For Better Marketing ROI

By: Tom Stein, Chairman and Chief Brand Officer at Stein and Kate Newstead, the B2B Institute at LinkedIn

The B2B Growth Equation

A cornerstone of consumer brand strategy, Mental Availability (how easily and often a brand comes to mind) is becoming a foundation of B2B marketing strategy. This empirical concept was pioneered by the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute more than 10 years ago based on decades of research in the B2C world. Since then, many independent and industry datasets and case studies have validated that B2B brands must also build Mental Availability to overcome the same challenge: getting past the forgetfulness of the human brain to increase the likelihood of a brand surfacing in a purchasing situation. Increasingly, B2B marketing leaders are delving into Mental Availability, thoughtfully and deliberately applying it to their growth strategies and marketing investments. This in turn is prompting more integrated, unified campaigns; bold, emotive and human-centric creative approaches; and a holistic approach to brand and marketing measurement. All the while, it is driving B2B forward, step by step.

Now, the aligned strategy of Physical Availability (making a brand easy to find & buy) is emerging in B2B. Physical Availability will be unfamiliar to many B2B marketers. Reason being, unlike our B2C counterparts, many B2B marketers have limited influence over where their products are physically available – in other words, the sales channels their products appear in (called **presence** by The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute), how brands stand out to win in those channels (**prominence**), and which products are created, prioritized and retired to better serve customer needs and drive opportunity (**portfolio**). These three domains – presence, prominence and portfolio – are more typically owned by marketers' cross functional peers, including product, sales, finance, engineering and R&D. But all are core to unlocking growth – a unifying objective across all functions and at the heart of marketers' remit. An optimized and unified approach to managing Mental and Physical Availability can lead to effectiveness and efficiency gains across the organization. For marketing specifically, a unified approach illuminates the pathway to improved ROI on Mental Availability investments – most of which are funded from the marketing budget.

For each element of Physical Availability, we explore below why marketers must integrate them into the earliest stages of marketing strategy and communications planning and how doing so can lead to better decisions and campaign performance gains.

Portfolio: Investing In Growth

In today's resource-constrained environment, marketers are consistently required to 'do more with less'. So, while it's tempting and sometimes politically necessary to spread budgets thinly across products and channels (thus covering all bases to appease a complex internal stakeholder map), this often leads to underinvestment in the areas that matter most and lack of return overall.

Effective portfolio management provides clarity on which sub-brands, products, services and solutions drive the greatest growth and profit. Although B2B marketers are rarely the owners of product portfolio decisions and architecture, understanding (and ideally influencing) these decisions is the essential starting point for marketing investment allocation that optimally delivers against the company's commercial objective. Marketers must be able to identify between core revenue drivers and growth opportunities—and allocate investments accordingly.

This often means focusing first on sufficient investment in the brand (to drive Mental Availability, and highest-opportunity product/solution sets (to support Physical Availability). It then means making deliberate, evidence-based bets on other product solution sets to support, budget permitting. The goal is to support the products that will deliver the greatest return. This in turn provides the biggest opportunity for marketing ROI.

For one Stein client (an enterprise software brand), the agency and marketing team recently completed a highly complex portfolio management and prioritization exercise to enable sales and marketing focus, inform further product development and acquisitions, consolidate solutions (including sunsetting some), and provide an extensible system to analyze and financialize the portfolio over time. The net effect was to eliminate myriad "micro campaigns" and in their place invest in highest potential campaigns, from brand-through demand, in lockstep with the sales organization and partner/reseller ecosystem.

On this instance, a focused portfolio investment strategy not only is improving campaign performance, it also is strengthening marketing's role as a strategic growth partner within the organization.

Presence: Be Where Buying Happens

Physical Availability (presence) is largely about where people buy. As marketers, we are also interested in who these people are and how do they get there? The B2B buyer journey is often complex. Unlike B2C, there is no 'B2B shelf'; instead, it's a maze of many digital and physical touchpoints, buying groups, and a purchase process that can stretch over two years.

So, effective marketing also involves knowing intimately where your brand and prioritized offerings are—or should be—available to buy. This means mapping the sales channels where you and your competitors are present, and identifying which channels deliver the most—and most profitable—customers. Channel penetration and customer audience analysis further help to understand which (if any) channels deliver access to types of customers for specific offerings. Identifying where you're overperforming or under-indexing, and understanding the nuances of what it takes to win in each channel (and how resource intensive it may be) is key to focusing resources on sustainable growth.

For example, if on average 30% of category revenue is attributed to brand-owned websites, but only 15% of your revenue is attributed to your website, this suggests your website is underdelivering on its revenue potential. Understanding what is restricting growth is the next step. Or consider this: a distributor partnership may unlock a new set of customers or geographies your sales team currently can't access. Presence in this distributor channel may thus provide a growth opportunity that is also resource efficient for your organization.

Once your priority channels most likely to deliver growth are identified, marketing investments should be aligned accordingly. If sales representatives are the primary route to purchase, sales

enablement becomes essential. If mobile apps and websites are a core source of engagement with your products/solutions, investing in an easy to find and navigate digital ecosystem (and media decisions to drive people to it) is a must.

What's more, B2B buying is almost never a solo decision. It involves a group of stakeholders, including both direct and hidden buyers, with diverse roles and priorities. Understanding who these buyers are—and where they engage—is critical. For instance, technical decision makers may attend industry trade shows or download white papers from your website or social posts, while legal or finance stakeholders may be more likely to come across your brand and products via paid media or earned PR content. Taken together with sales channel choices, communication and media channel choices become more robust.

Lexmark, one of the world's leading manufacturers of imaging products, has maximized the impact of its marketing programs by optimizing channel investments based on a deep understanding of their audiences' purchasing patterns. Mental availability and prospect engagement is achieved through digital display and paid social targeting enterprise accounts with substantial customization by vertical. Additionally, Lexmark has anchored its content strategy in the physical presence of its products by developing interactive value maps that enable engaged audiences to click into diagrams of facilities (e.g. hospitals, retail stores, manufacturing plants, etc.) to see how Lexmark imaging solutions deliver value across each area of a business. These approaches have led to sustained growth in enterprise pipeline contribution from marketing and consistent improvements in marketing spend efficiency.

Prominence: Stand Out Where It Matters

Once your products are present on the right channels, the next challenge is visibility. In a crowded marketplace, simply showing up is not enough. Human attention is limited and easily distracted by competitors. The task is to achieve strong brand prominence so that your offerings stand out in sales environments. Sales environments can vary significantly, from trade shows to search queries typed into a web browser or LLM. Consider which tools are most helpful to achieve stand out in these various environments and how they can be integrated throughout both sales channels and the communications channel strategy.

Brands can achieve prominence by investing in high-impact placements—such as premium ad formats. However, these are temporary 'rented' gains unless supported by distinctive brand assets and associations that your brand uniquely owns. Without them, prominence becomes a bidding war where the deepest pockets win.

Prominence is perhaps where the value of synergies between Mental and Physical Availability are most obvious. Every touchpoint, from a 90-second website visit to a social media ad to a product demo at a trade show should reinforce a consistent and distinctive brand experience. Repetition and distinctiveness are key to building memory structures that influence buying decisions. Consistency has a compounding effect.

A unified approach to brand expression across the customer journey can deliver significant value. Juniper Networks, for example, aligned brand messaging across F1 sponsorship, WSJ takeovers, CNBC, Reddit and LinkedIn, connecting to solution-specific demand messaging across digital channels, SEM/SEO, third-party and owned events, sales enablement, competitive takeaway campaigns, landing pages and email nurtures. This orchestration contributed to a 40% year-over-year increase in product orders. Visual consistency and use of distinctive brand assets, such as

celebrities in Juniper's case, contributed to stand-out prominence and ability to outperform larger competitors with much higher marketing budgets.

In long B2B purchase cycles, consistency and distinctiveness are not optional—they are essential for nurturing the journey and reinforcing brand memory over time. Even for the biggest global B2B brands memory building is a job that is never done.

Conclusion: Physical Availability Is A Marketing Imperative

Physical Availability is not just a sales or operations concern—it's a marketing imperative. When B2B marketers take ownership of where and how their brand shows up in the buying journey, they gain the insights needed to build more effective communications strategies. While most marketers are resource constrained and asked to do 'more with less', the thoughtful application of Physical and Mental Availability principles can be an untapped opportunity. With the potential to unearth sharper media choices, stronger creative cut-through, and improved ROI. And perhaps most importantly, elevate the strategic and commercial value of marketing across the business.

Tying It All Together

Presence	Prominence	Portfolio	Example Symptoms	What To Do:
✗	✓	✓	The Reach Plateau Flat/new-visitor growth; small cookie/audience pools; paid reach frequency spikes on the same people.	Expand coverage (events, channels, partners) to reach incremental buyers
✓	✗	✓	Traffic without trial Sessions rise, but click-through to hero CTAs is weak; high bounce on key pages.	Pair rented real estate with distinctive assets in conjunction with building owned prominence
✓	✓	✗	Clicks & conversations, no conversions High demo/meeting volume; low opp creation or late-stage drop-off.	Prune/reshape SKUs to CEPs; hero the few that drive most revenue
✓	✓	✓	Higher conversion, lower CAC; durable growth	Keep compounding: measure coverage, asset recall, and portfolio contribution

About The Authors

Tom Stein has been a B2B marketing thought leader and evangelist for four decades. Tom's passion has helped Stein win ANA B2B Agency of the Year 13 times over 15 years and become the first agency to win the WARC Effectiveness Award for B2B at Cannes, back-to-back. Tom was a significant influence in the decision to launch a Creative B2B Lions at Cannes in 2022 and was named jury president in 2023. In 2017, Tom was among the first inductees into the ANA B-to-B Hall of Fame. He sits on the International Advertising Association (IAA) board and serves as Regional Director for North America. A scholarship at Baruch College recognizes Tom's many contributions to the equitable advancement of the marketing profession.

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