The B2B Institute
A LinkedIn think tank

The B2B Effectiveness Code

Creativity and effectiveness in B2B marketing from 2010-2021

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder
The principle of Creative Commitment in B2B

WARC
AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY   LIONS

The B2B Institute at LinkedIn, in partnership with WARC and Lions, undertook a major study to analyse the effectiveness of ten years' of B2B marketing campaigns, and to replicate Lions and WARC's B2C study The Effectiveness Code.

That earlier study introduced the concept of the Creative Effectiveness Ladder – a framework for better understanding the types of effects that advertising generates, and the types of creativity that best lead to those effects.

It also introduced the principle of Creative Commitment – an analysis that showed that campaigns become more effective as they receive greater media spend, are run for longer durations, and are spread out across a more diverse range of media channels.

In this paper, The B2B Effectiveness Code, we affirm that the principle of Creative Commitment holds true in B2B marketing.

And we introduce a specific B2B Effectiveness Ladder.

To do so, we've analysed 435 B2B cases from the WARC and Lions effectiveness databases, between 2010 and 2021.

Key findings

1
Prior research has shown that for B2B brands to grow, they require a better balance of short-term sales activation and long-term brand building, greater focus on large audiences who aren't necessarily 'in the market' today, and more use of emotion to connect deeply and powerfully with B2B purchasers.

2
Our data show that B2B marketing currently skews heavily towards short-term, rational and tightly targeted campaigns that seek to drive immediate sales effects. And that the use of long-term campaigning, broad targeting and emotional creative work is largely absent from B2B marketing.

3
Just as we found in B2C, B2B campaigns become more effective when they have higher spend, are run for longer durations, and are spread out across more media.

4
Creative Commitment in B2B is falling. The B2B marketing community is reducing spend, duration and number of media channels used for their campaigns. This will lead to lesser effectiveness of B2B marketing, and we urge the industry to arrest this decline in the interests of both campaign effectiveness, and the overall value of B2B marketing.

5
We have created the B2B Effectiveness Ladder – a hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces, from least to most commercially impactful. This Ladder differs in key ways to the B2C Ladder, and reflects the objectives and results that are more important to B2B marketing.

6
The B2B Effectiveness Ladder has been developed to enable the B2B marketing industry to more easily identify and learn from effectiveness best practice, so that they can more consistently produce highly effective creative campaigns and initiatives.

7
Through analysis of B2B effectiveness winners from 2010 to 2021, we have discovered common 'winning behaviours' of campaigns at each level of the B2B Effectiveness Ladder. These give us fresh, up-to-date insight into how to use creativity to drive specific types of important B2B marketing outcomes.

8
The Creative Effectiveness Ladder has been designed to be used as a continuous improvement tool for B2B marketers and their agencies.

The beginning of B2B's brand-led revolution

Introduction from the B2B Institute at LinkedIn

A famous economist recently said the two hardest things about running an economics experiment were "tracking down the dataset and getting the rights to the dataset".

We've often thought that the same holds true for marketing: accessing quality data is the biggest constraint to learning more about how marketing effectiveness works.

Access to quality data is a particularly acute problem within B2B industries: typically, the marketing function has less budget and less support, while the category visibility is limited to those in the current buying-cycle. LinkedIn plays an increasingly significant role in helping supply B2B marketers with the dynamic category segmentations and firmographics which provide clarity. But no single platform or partner has all the answers to what makes for more effective B2B marketing.

So, when we at the B2B Institute set about trying to answer the question: "what makes a great B2B ad?" our obvious choice was to partner with marketing effectiveness expert James Hurman,

WARC, and Lions on a project that allowed us to undertake an analysis of more than a decade of B2B campaign effectiveness data.

This study was able to conduct in-depth evaluation of 435 B2B marketing campaigns from the WARC effectiveness databases between 2010 and 2021. The analysis helped to identify a hierarchy of characteristics and winning behaviors that correlate with effectiveness.

Within this scope we found several datasets particularly illuminating:

1. The list of 54 excellent B2B campaigns
2. The difference in spend, duration, and channels in B2B vs. B2C
3. The gap between media choices and creative strategies in B2B vs. B2C

First, it was exciting to see so many high-performing global B2B campaigns in one place. Each of the 54 campaigns offers something for B2B marketers to study and learn.

Second, it is enlightening to see how differences in spend, duration, and

channels affected outcomes. It is no surprise to see B2B campaigns spend less money, run for less time, and use fewer channels. But it is helpful to see that B2B data set against B2C campaigns for context. The near complete absence of campaigns running more than three years is especially worrisome, given how important longer time horizons are to marketing and commercial success.

And finally, it is fascinating - but also troubling - to see the gap between current B2B marketing behavior and existing evidence on marketing effectiveness. B2B marketing continues produce too many short-term campaigns with rational messaging targeting small segments, despite a decade of evidence from the likes of Ehrenberg-Bass, Binet and Field and others demonstrating that the opposite is a more profitable approach.

There's a saying in tech that "you ship your organizational chart." In too many cases our research proves this to be true. B2B marketing teams are typically smaller than the sales team within their organization and often subordinate in terms of decision-making power Thus, the work

produced often looks more like a sales campaign targeting current buyers than a marketing campaign that is designed to create new ones.

At the B2B Institute we oppose this trend. We believe that brand-led marketing is the route to transformational growth for B2B businesses. Our growing body of work seeks to identify growth levers for B2B marketers that de-risk decision-making and upweight success. Whether it is focusing on reaching every buyer in the category, amplifying buying-situations in memorable creative or investing in long-term distinctive brand assets, our findings aim to help B2B marketers make growth-oriented decisions.

The B2B Institute is thrilled to present a new framework for decision-making drawn from a substantial dataset.

We are still only at the beginning of the brand-led revolution in B2B marketing. But we hope that the analysis, datasets and principles generated in this latest report will continue to catalyze the debate.

www.b2binstitute.org

> It is fascinating - but also troubling - to see the gap between current B2B marketing behavior and existing evidence on marketing effectiveness.

B2B marketing is on the cusp of an enlightenment

When I interviewed marketing legend Jim Stengel in 2010, he'd recently left P&G to write his book.

He talked to me about P&G's journey from a formulaic and unremarkable advertiser to one of the world's most creative marketing organisations. "We'd been through the dark ages", he told me. "And then we had the enlightenment." He was referring to P&G's move away from functional, benefit-led advertising and towards emotion, humour, creativity and purpose.

The commercial results following that enlightenment were extraordinary. "We doubled our size. Our margins went up ten points. We went from nine billion-dollar brands to 25. And our earnings per share went up four-fold."

It feels as if B2B marketing is on the cusp of a similar kind of enlightenment.

As long as any of us can remember, B2B has been the domain of hyper-rational advertising that's treated its audience as emotionless robots, and scorned brand building in favour of mechanical sales tactics indifferently applied to advertising media.

But lately that's begun to shift. New brands like Slack, Mailchimp and Zendesk have built towards enormous valuations with an altogether more human and brand-led approach. And stalwarts like IBM,

Microsoft and HSBC have exploited emotional brand-building to add billions to their brand value and revenue outcomes, and cement their place as B2B industry leaders.

LinkedIn's B2B Institute has tirelessly challenged the assumptions of B2B marketing effectiveness, underpinning the green shoots with empirical research demonstrating that success in B2B emerges from many of the same principles that drive growth in B2C. They've worked with Peter Field and Les Binet to show that using emotion and long-term brand building are just as important to B2B. And they've worked with the Ehrenberg Bass Institute to show that building mental availability and penetrating broad audiences are critical to driving B2B growth.

This paper builds on those efforts. In 2020, on behalf of Lions and WARC, I developed the Creative Effectiveness Ladder and the principle of Creative Commitment, using the abundant effectiveness data that both organisations had amassed. These concepts provided a framework that has helped marketers all over the world learn from the industry's most successful advertising and work towards more consistent effectiveness for their own brands and campaigns.

That work was, unsurprisingly, very B2C focused. And so I was delighted to be asked to replicate the study for B2B brands – to build an Effectiveness Ladder for B2B

marketing, and to explore whether greater Creative Commitment drives B2B effectiveness as it does in B2C.

It's true that we have fewer B2B case examples to analyse, but at 435 cases there's more than enough data from which to generate statistically significant outcomes. To our knowledge this is the largest ever study of B2B effectiveness.

In many important ways, B2B is different to B2C. Generating sales leads is an essential part of most B2B marketers' roles. Direct marketing, channel partner sales activation and thought leadership are all more central to B2B than they are to B2C.

But in many other ways, B2B marketing is made more effective when we employ powerful B2C concepts. Creativity, emotion and fame are all tools that B2B marketers should be using to amplify the engagement and ROI they see from their communications efforts, and indeed to increase the value of marketing in their organisations.

I hope this work will contribute to the enlightenment of B2B marketing. I'm convinced that, once enlightened, B2B marketing will see the same transformative results that P&G and other B2C marketers have experienced.

James Hurman, October 2021

> "Creativity, emotion and fame are all tools that B2B marketers should be using to amplify the engagement and ROI they see from their communications efforts, and indeed to increase the value of marketing in their organisations.

About the author

James Hurman is a marketing effectiveness expert from New Zealand. Formerly a strategic planner in the advertising industry, James' work has won more than 50 marketing effectiveness awards, and in 2013, he was named the world's number one planning director by The Big Won Report. His 2011 book *The Case for Creativity* explored his and others' research proving that more creative companies, agencies and campaigns achieve significantly better commercial results. His 2020 study with Lions and WARC, *The Effectiveness Code*, studied nearly 5,000 campaigns and introduced The Creative Effectiveness Ladder and the principle of Creative Commitment, concepts that have been adopted by brands all over the world. James has served as a member of the inaugural Creative Effectiveness Lions jury, Chair of the Spikes Creative Effectiveness Jury, and Chair of the New Zealand Effie Awards.

In June 2020, Lions and WARC launched The Effectiveness Code

The Effectiveness Code was a major piece of advertising effectiveness research that learned from more than 80 interviews with global marketing leaders, and studied 4,863 effectiveness award entrants and winners from 2011 through 2019, from every major market in the world.

We'd sought to understand how our global community could better learn from our industry's successes, for the sake of continuing to improve the effectiveness of marketing communications.

The Effectiveness Code presented two key outcomes:

1.
The Creative Effectiveness Ladder

In 2019, we'd undertaken a global study involving marketing and agency leaders, which revealed consensus that the industry lacked a 'universal definition' and 'shared language' of effectiveness. This had limited our ability to agree what best practice effectiveness looks like, or to learn from our best work to improve the future effectiveness of our marketing. In response, we developed a new framework – the Creative Effectiveness Ladder. The Ladder identified the six main types of effects that creative marketing produces, setting them in a hierarchy of levels from least to most commercially impactful.

The Creative Effectiveness Ladder was developed to enable the marketing and advertising industry to more easily identify and learn from effectiveness best practice, so that they could more consistently produce highly effective creative campaigns and initiatives. Through analysis of the Creative Effectiveness Lions winners from 2011 to 2019, we discovered common 'winning behaviours' of campaigns at each level of the Creative Effectiveness Ladder. These gave us fresh, up-to-date insight into how to use creativity to drive specific types of important marketing and business outcomes.

The Creative Effectiveness Ladder was designed to be used as a continuous improvement tool for marketers and agencies, and to be the judging framework for future Lions and WARC effectiveness award competitions.
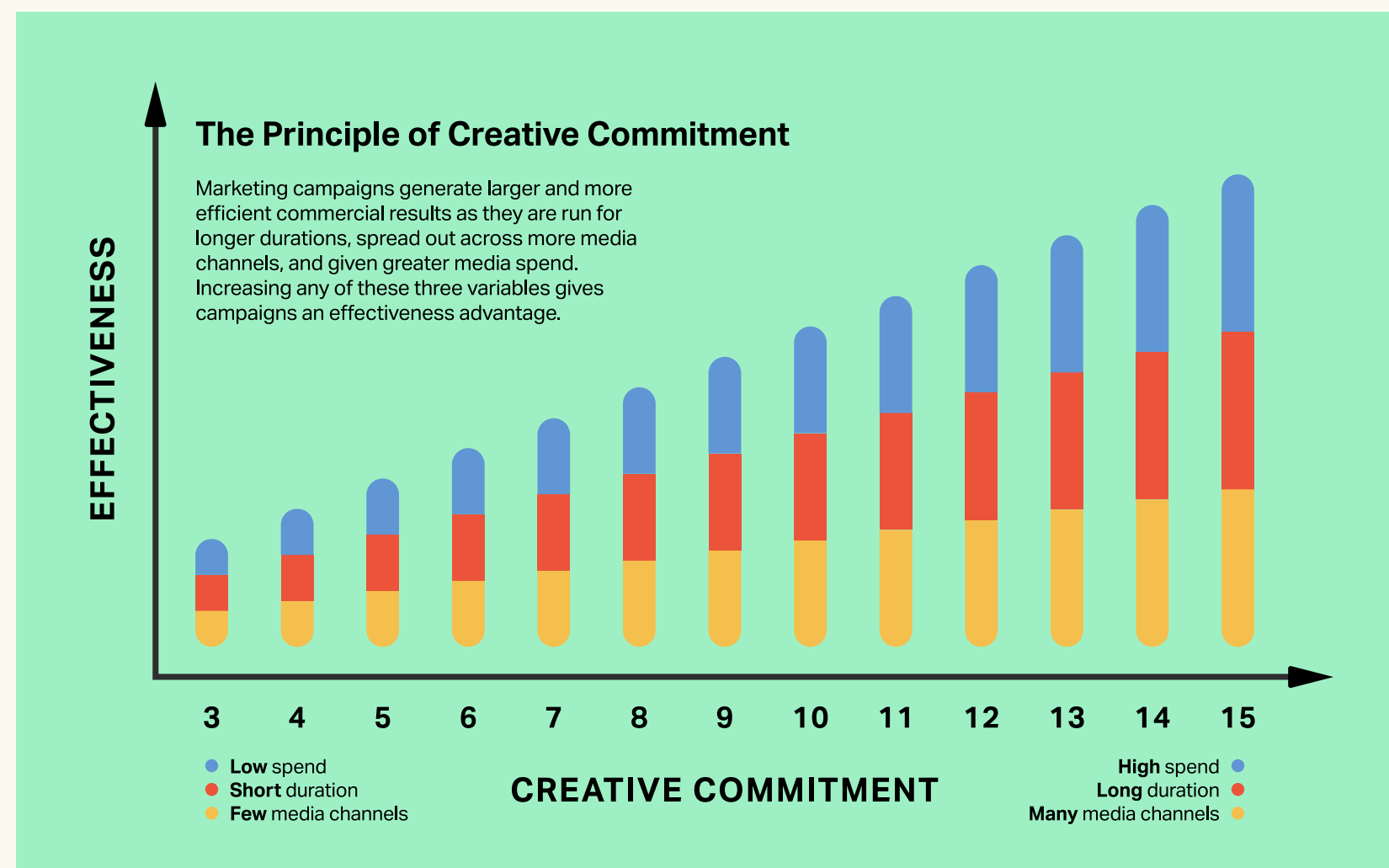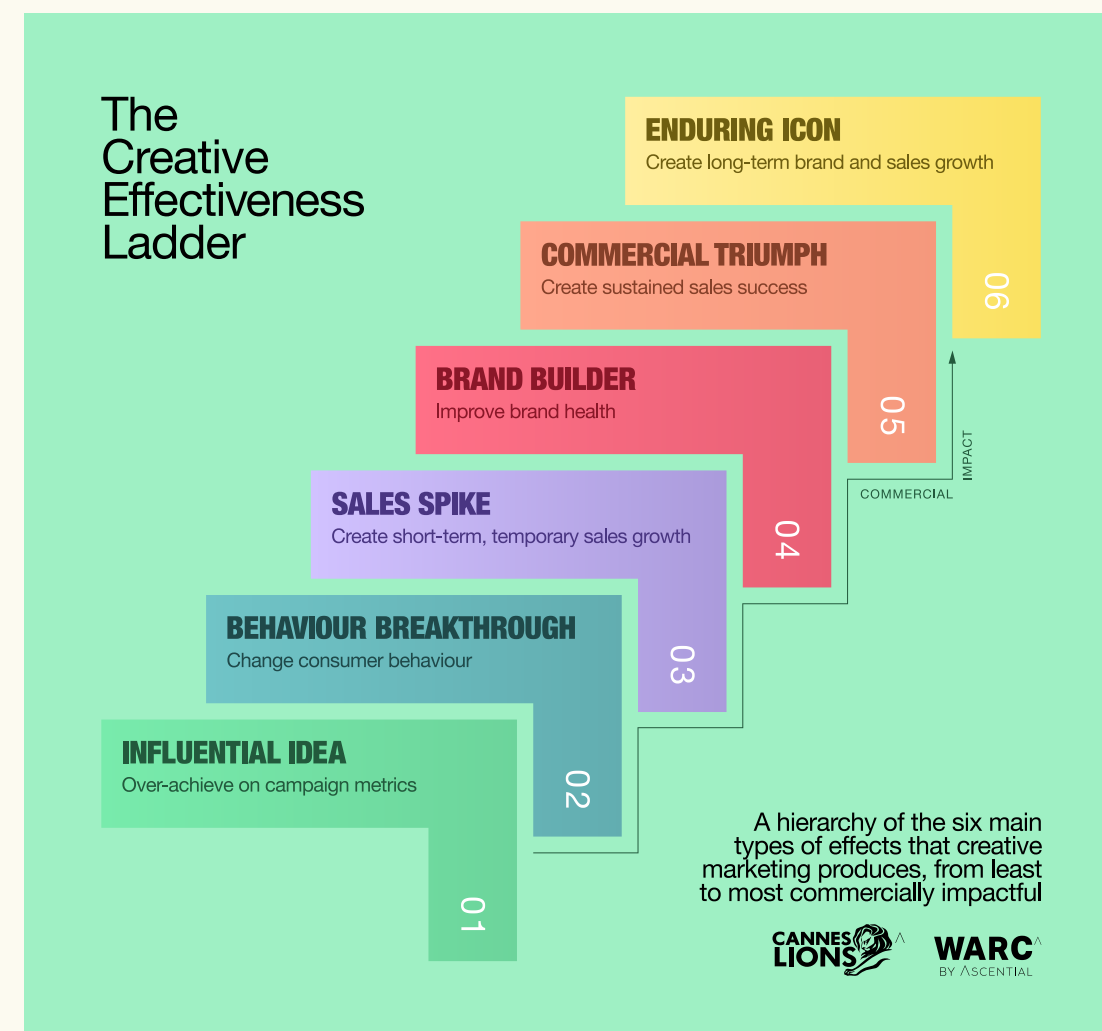
2.
The principle of Creative Commitment

During our analysis, we made a new discovery that campaign effectiveness is heavily influenced by a campaign's degree of what we called Creative Commitment.

Creative Commitment is a composite measure of the media budget, duration and number of media channels applied to a creative campaign or initiative.

Creative Commitment correlates very tightly with effectiveness – as Creative Commitment increases, so does effectiveness.

To increase Creative Commitment, marketers have three 'levers' – spend, duration and number of media channels – and pulling any of these levers will give their work an effectiveness advantage. The principle was tested against the WARC and Lions databases, and then tested independently by effectiveness researcher Peter Field, using the separate IPA Effectiveness Databank. Field's analysis showed that the principle held true and was robust – that overall effectiveness, and specific outcomes such as market share gains, penetration gains and profitability gains, all improve as Creative Commitment increases.

The analysis also showed that, despite the evidence that higher levels of Creative Commitment lead to more effective outcomes, the marketing industry had been consistently *decreasing* the level of Creative Commitment applied to campaigns – spending less, using fewer media channels, and running campaigns for shorter durations. Meaning that, as an industry, we've been actively reducing the effectiveness of our work. We appealed to the industry to reverse this trend, in the interests of protecting the value of marketing's contribution to business.

The Creative Effectiveness Ladder

ENDURING ICON
Create long-term brand and sales growth
06

COMMERCIAL TRIUMPH
Create sustained sales success
05

BRAND BUILDER
Improve brand health
04

SALES SPIKE
Create short-term, temporary sales growth
03

BEHAVIOUR BREAKTHROUGH
Change consumer behaviour
02

INFLUENTIAL IDEA
Over-achieve on campaign metrics
01

COMMERCIAL

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that creative marketing produces, from least to most commercially impactful

CANNES LIONS   WARC BY ASCENTIAL

The Principle of Creative Commitment

Marketing campaigns generate larger and more efficient commercial results as they are run for longer durations, spread out across more media channels, and given greater media spend. Increasing any of these three variables gives campaigns an effectiveness advantage.

EFFECTIVENESS

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

CREATIVE COMMITMENT

● **Low** spend
● **Short** duration
● **Few** media channels

High spend ●
Long duration ●
Many media channels ●

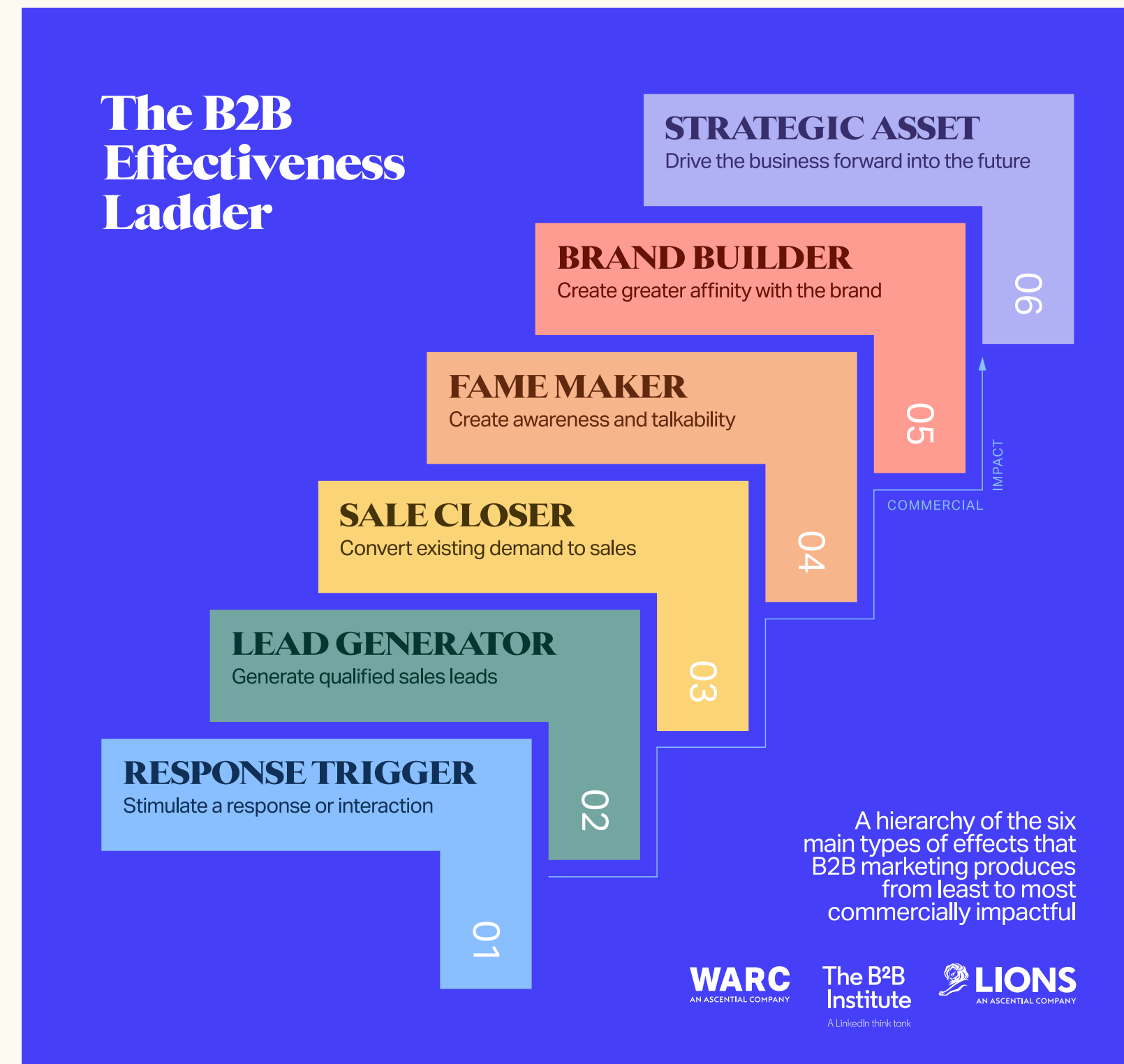# In this paper, we've recreated those same outcomes, looking specifically at B2B marketing campaigns.

We've studied 435 B2B cases from the WARC effectiveness database between 2010 and 2021.

We've used the analysis of those cases to create a B2B Effectiveness Ladder, which reflects the objectives and outcomes that are unique to B2B marketing.

And we've replicated the Creative Commitment analysis with B2B campaigns to reveal whether the principle holds true in B2B.

Importantly, we went into the analysis with an open mind. In our experience, B2B marketing differs from B2C marketing in many key ways. We wanted to reflect those distinctions in this work, rather than blithely attempt to prove that 'what works for B2C also works for B2B'.

This means that our B2B Effectiveness Ladder is fundamentally different to the B2C Ladder. The overall concept is the same – six key types of effectiveness, organised into a hierarchy from least to most commercially impactful. But the specifics are slightly different, and reflect the reality that B2B marketing often seeks to drive outcomes that are less common to B2C marketing.

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder

STRATEGIC ASSET
Drive the business forward into the future
06

BRAND BUILDER
Create greater affinity with the brand
05

FAME MAKER
Create awareness and talkability
04

IMPACT

COMMERCIAL

SALE CLOSER
Convert existing demand to sales
03

LEAD GENERATOR
Generate qualified sales leads
02

RESPONSE TRIGGER
Stimulate a response or interaction
01

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful

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Defining B2B

For the purposes of this study, we've defined B2B cases as those where an advertiser is marketing to a business audience, and that audience is intended to be the purchaser of the brand's products or services.

We have also included cases where an advertiser is marketing to a key distribution or retail channel partner, who is also a business, regardless of whether the end purchaser is business or consumer. Although these represent a small minority of cases.

We have excluded cases of traditionally B2B companies marketing to a B2C audience. And of course, all B2C cases.

The state of B2B marketing today

The gap between current B2B marketing behaviour and optimal effectiveness, and how greater Creative Commitment leads to increased B2B campaign effectiveness.

The gap between current B2B marketing behaviour and optimal effectiveness

Past research and insight from the B2B Institute has demonstrated the need for B2B marketers to shift away from predominantly small, short-term, rational and tightly targeted campaigns – and to expend more of their budgets on bigger, longer-term, emotional and broad-reach campaigning. Marketing in this way has been shown to drive much stronger growth for B2B brands over the mid to long term.

1

B2B marketing needs to better balance short-term sales activation with long-term brand building

Peter Field and Les Binet's research showed that the ideal mix in B2B is 46% of spend invested in long-term brand building and 54% invested in sales activation.

Anecdotal insight suggests that B2B advertisers commonly spend little, if anything, on brand building.

2

To build B2B brands, we need to employ more emotional advertising

Field and Binet proved that while more rational and informational advertising is more effective at driving short-term B2B sales, long-term brand building is far more effective when it engages the emotions with big, human ideas.

3

Growth is dependent on reaching large audiences, who aren't currently in the market

Professor John Dawes of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science showed that 95% of B2B customers are not in the market for many goods and services at any one time. To grow a B2B brand, we need to advertise to people who aren't in the market now, so that when they do enter the market our brand is one they are familiar with.

4

Making 'big bets' is ultimately less risky and more profitable than placing many 'small bets'

The B2B Institute's own Peter Weinberg and Jon Lombardo showed how B2B marketers should be creating fewer, larger campaigns. By 'big bets', they meant big, long-term B2B creative ideas and platforms that advertisers contributed at least 50% of their overall budget towards – rather than simply producing a stream of smaller tactical communications.

The gap between current B2B marketing behaviour and optimal effectiveness

However those findings on optimal B2B effectiveness run contrary to how B2B is largely approaching marketing.

Over the past decade, B2B Marketing has differed from B2C marketing in two key ways: their most popular choices of media channels and creative strategies.

Compared with B2C, B2B marketers are much more likely to use email marketing and direct marketing. These are the go-to media in B2B, providing tight targeting, and useful for driving short-term sales.

B2B marketers are far less likely to use TV, Radio, Outdoor or Print – those media that reach much bigger populations and which are more instrumental in brand building.

Compared with B2C, B2B marketers are much more likely to create rational and informational advertising. Again, the style

of advertising geared more towards driving
short-term effects among an audience who are already interested in the brand or its products.

B2B Marketers are far less likely to use emotion, humour and storytelling – again those creative strategies that produce larger brand-building effects.

These numbers tell us what B2B marketers have been doing – skewing heavily towards short-term, rational, tightly targeted marketing.

But certainly not what they should be doing, if they want to grow their brands and businesses efficiently over the longer term.

B2B marketing skews heavily towards tightly targeted media and rational creative

These charts show that, compared with B2C marketing, B2B far more commonly employs direct marketing media and rational, informational advertising. And far less commonly uses broad reaching media or emotional creative work.
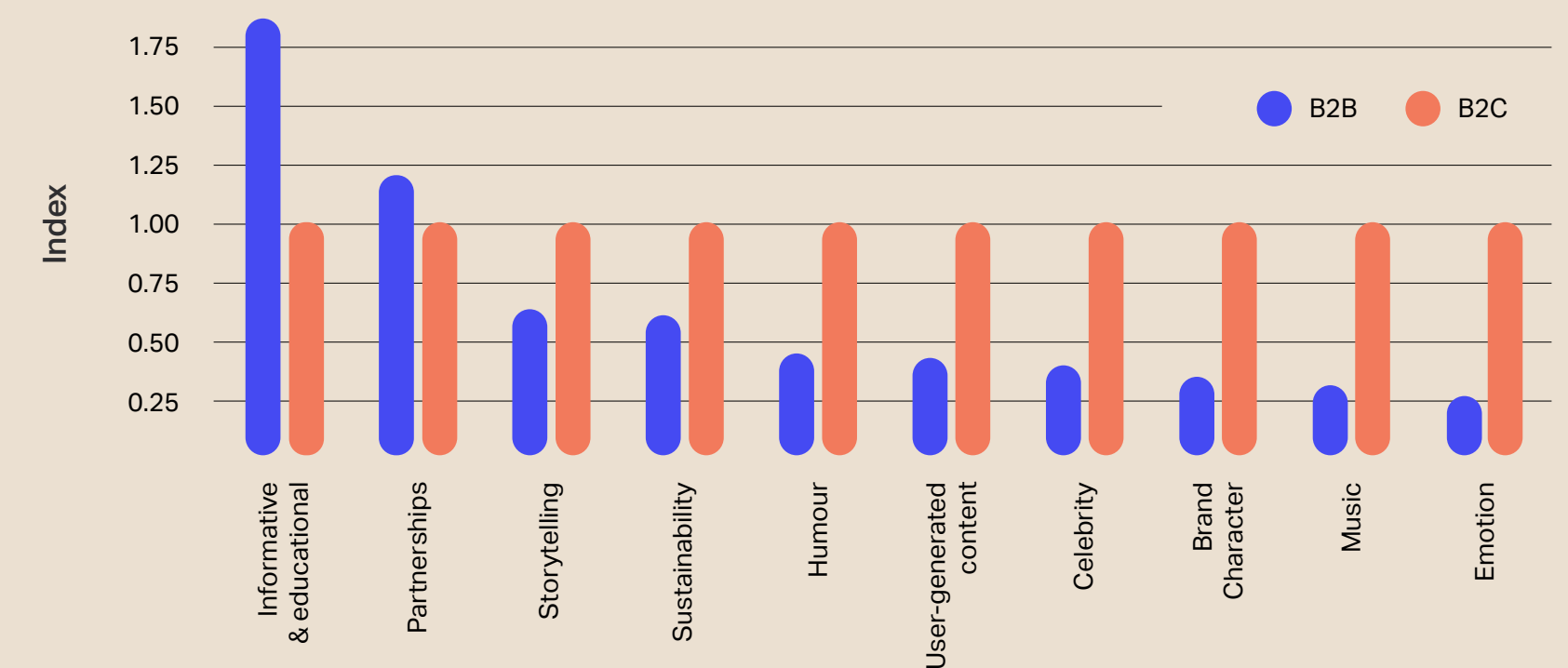
For B2B marketing to become more effective, marketers need to work hard to shift their balance towards longer-term, more emotion and more broadly-targeted campaigns.

Figures 1 and 2 - Source: WARC Database, 2010-2021 B2B cases vs B2C cases

Media used - B2B vs B2C
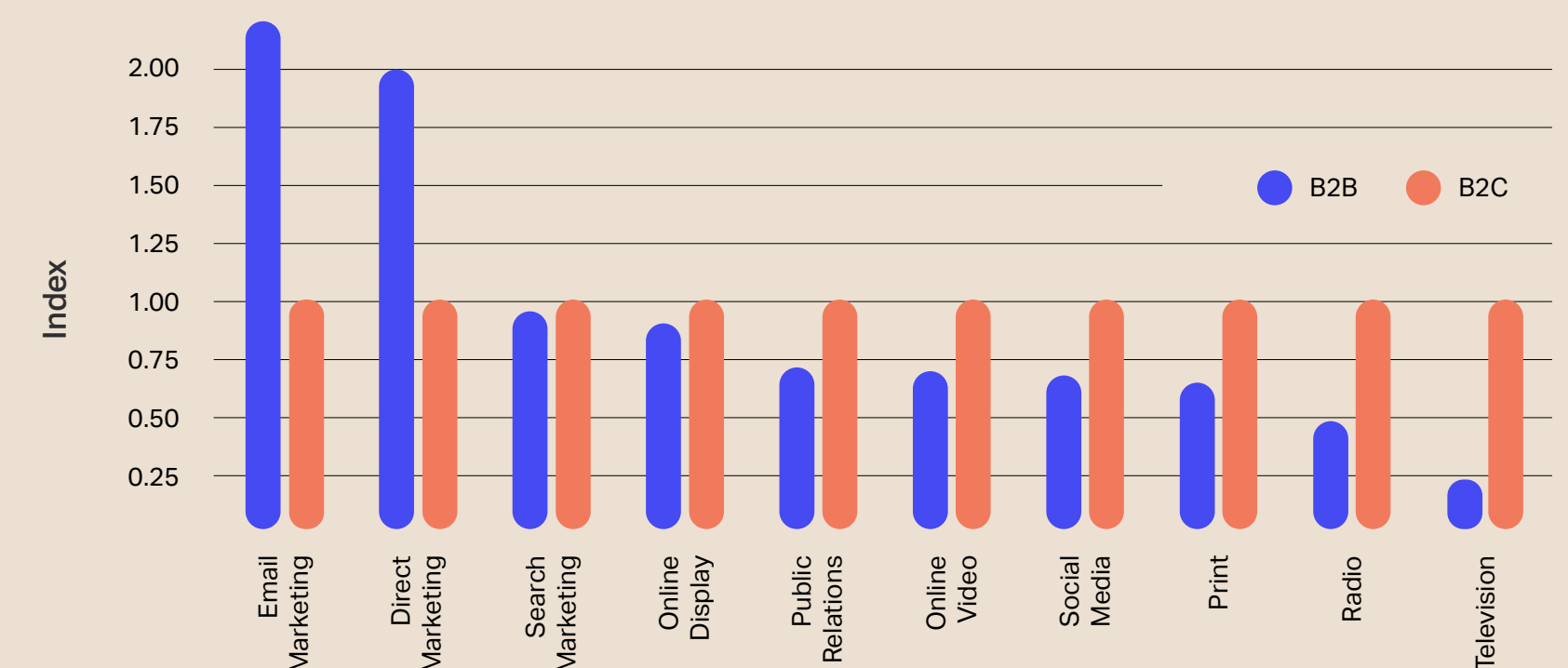
Creative strategies used - B2B vs B2C

Introduction to the principle of Creative Commitment

During our analysis of B2C campaigns for The Effectiveness Code, we made a new discovery that campaign effectiveness is heavily influenced by what we called Creative Commitment.

Creative Commitment is a composite measure of the media budget, duration and number of media channels applied to a creative campaign or initiative.

These three variables – the money, time, and media channels that have been committed to a creative idea – are three dimensions of Creative Commitment.

All campaigns have a profile across the three dimensions, and can be given a score ranging from 3 (the lowest possible level of Creative Commitment) to 15 (the highest possible level). For example:

American Express' Small Business Saturday has had a very long duration, a high number of different media channels, and a very high media spend. It has a very high Creative Commitment score of 13.
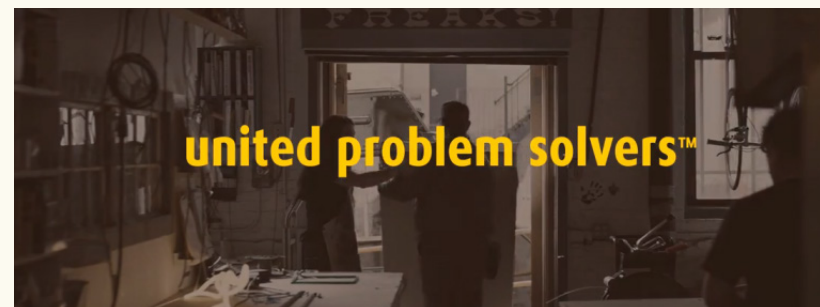
UPS' United Problem Solvers had a medium duration, a low number of media channels used, and a high media spend. It has a Creative Commitment score of 9.

Fedrigoni's Paper Skin had a low duration, low number of media channels used, and low media spend. It has a Creative Commitment score of 3.

Creative Commitment scoring methodology

Any campaign can be given a Creative Commitment score of between 3 and 15, according to its media spend, duration and number of media channels used:

Media spend	Score (1)
Under $500K	1
$500K - 1M	2
$1 - 5M	3
$5 - 10M	4
Over $10M	5

Duration	Score (2)
Under 3 Months	1
3 - 6 Months	2
6 - 12 Months	3
1 - 3 Years	4
Over 3 Years	5

Number of channels used	Score (3)
1 - 4	1
5 - 7	2
8 - 10	3
11 - 13	4
14+	5

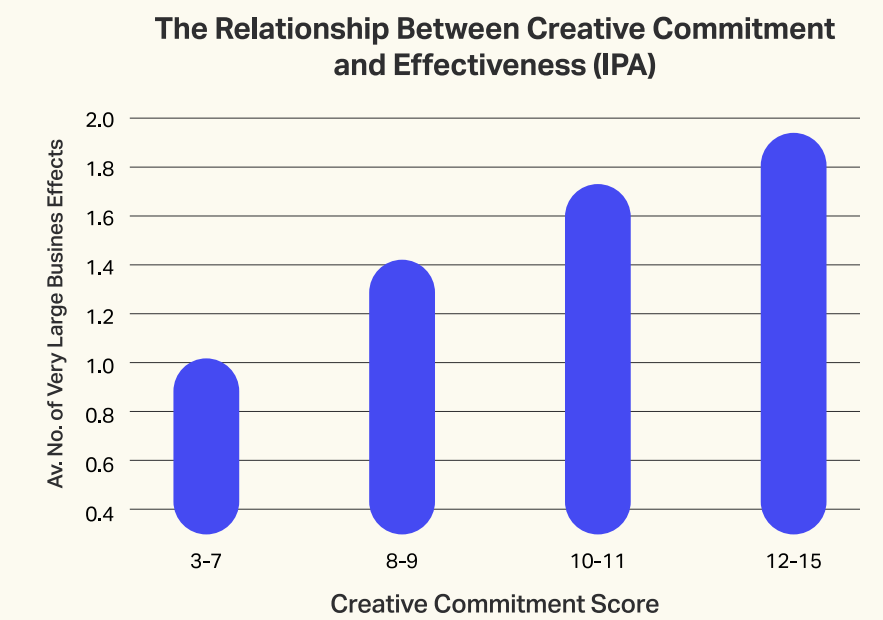**Creative Commitment Score = Score (1) + Score (2) + Score (3)**

We can then look at how those Creative Commitment scores correlate with effectiveness.

When we studied B2C campaigns, we found a surprisingly strong correlation between Creative Commitment and effectiveness:
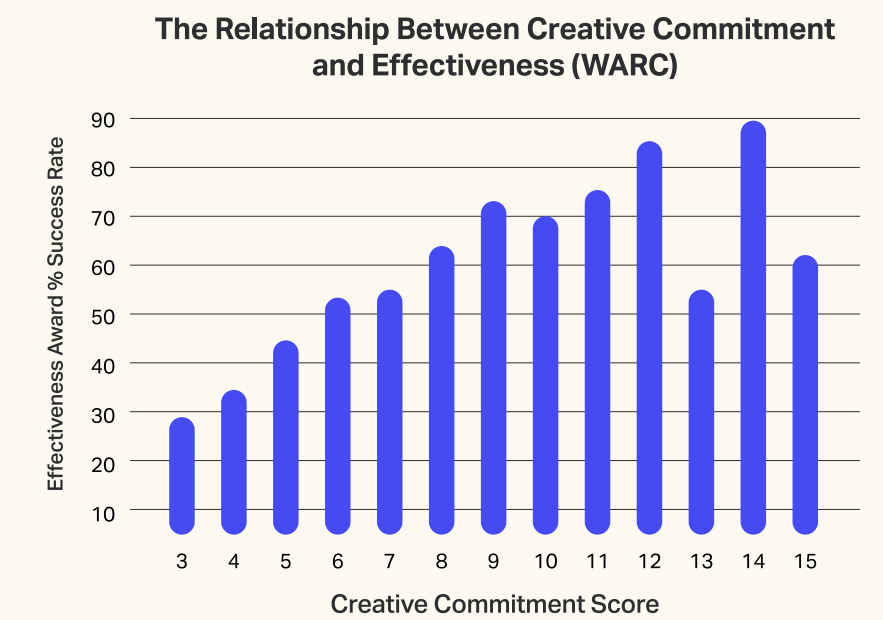
When independent effectiveness researcher Peter Field peer-reviewed the analysis, with data from the separate IPA Effectiveness Databank, he found that the principle was robust.

Overall effectiveness, penetration growth, market share growth and profit growth all improved as Creative Commitment increased:

The Relationship Between Creative Commitment and Effectiveness (WARC)

(Chart: x-axis "Creative Commitment Score" 3–15; y-axis "Effectiveness Award % Success Rate" 10–90)

The Relationship Between Creative Commitment and Effectiveness (IPA)

(Chart: x-axis "Creative Commitment Score" 3-7, 8-9, 10-11, 12-15; y-axis "Av. No. of Very Large Business Effects" 0.4–2.0)

Figures 3 and 4 – Source: The Effectiveness Code, 2020

For The B2B Effectiveness Code, we sought to understand whether the principle of Creative Commitment holds true for B2B campaigns.

Does B2B campaign effectiveness improve as Creative Commitment increases?

Finding 1:
B2B campaigns have lower Creative Commitment

When we assessed the Creative Commitment of B2B campaigns, and compared to B2C campaigns, we found that B2B campaigns tend to have lower Creative Commitment.

Our spread of B2B campaigns is weighted more heavily towards lower Creative Commitment. In B2C, the average Creative Commitment score is 6.8. In B2B it's 5.9.

This is true across all three dimensions of Creative Commitment. B2B campaigns generally spend less, run for (slightly) shorter durations, and use fewer media channels than B2C campaigns.

This supports the earlier finding that B2B marketing skews towards shorter-term, rational, tightly targeted marketing.

Is this because lower Creative Commitment is in fact more effective in B2B? Let's find out...
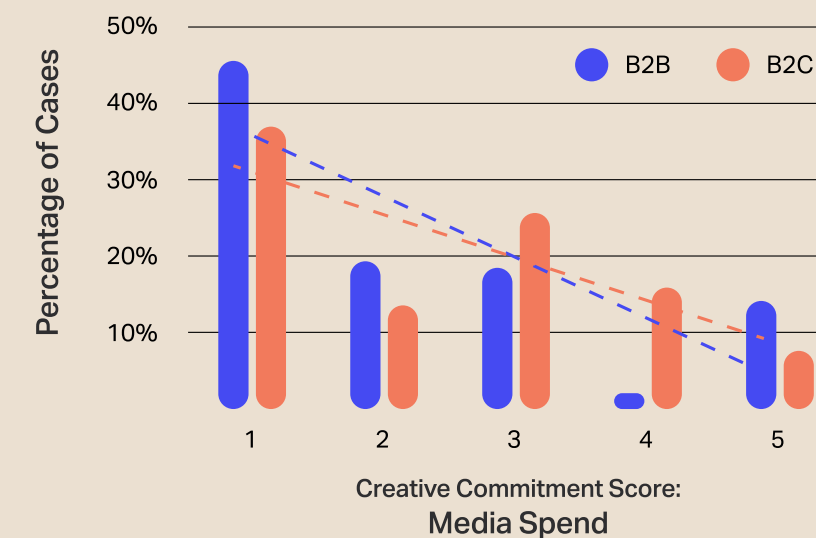
B2B skews towards lower Creative Commitment overall

The average Creative Commitment of B2C campaigns is 6.8; The average Creative Commitment of B2B campaigns is 5.9
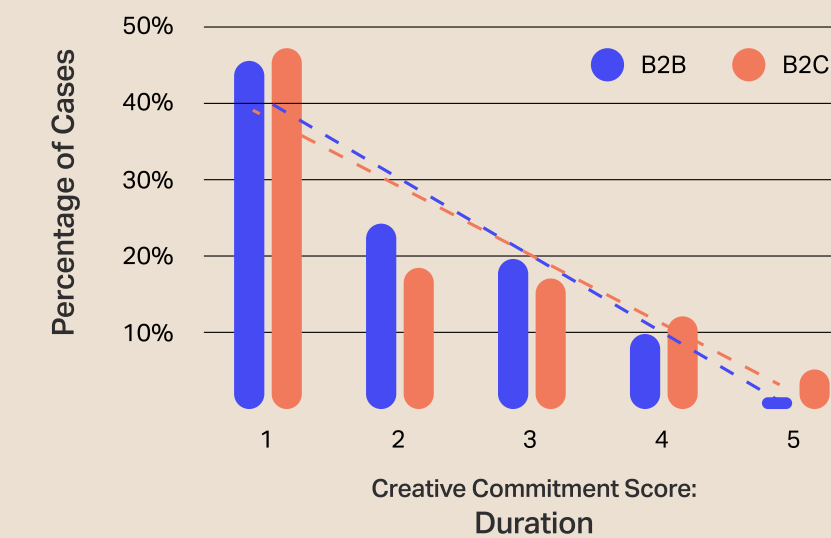
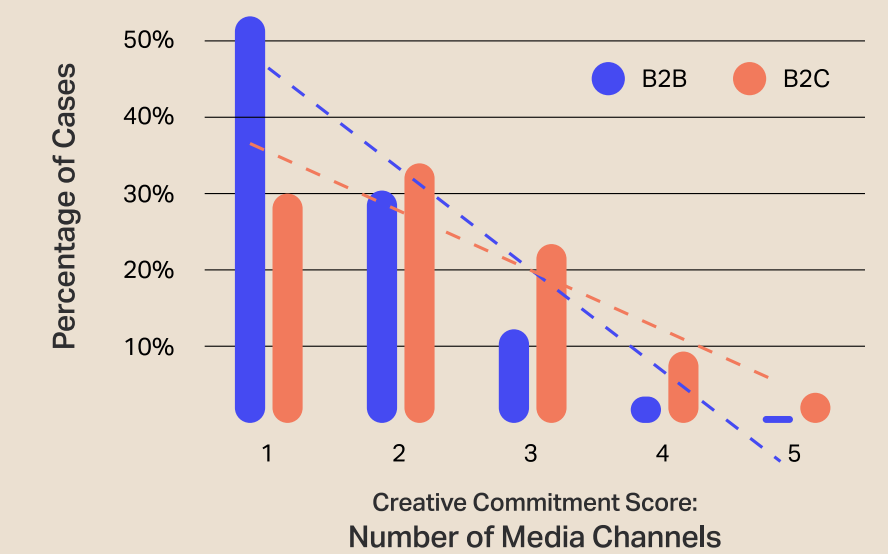Figures 4,5,6 &7 - Source: WARC Database, 2010-2021 B2B cases vs B2C cases
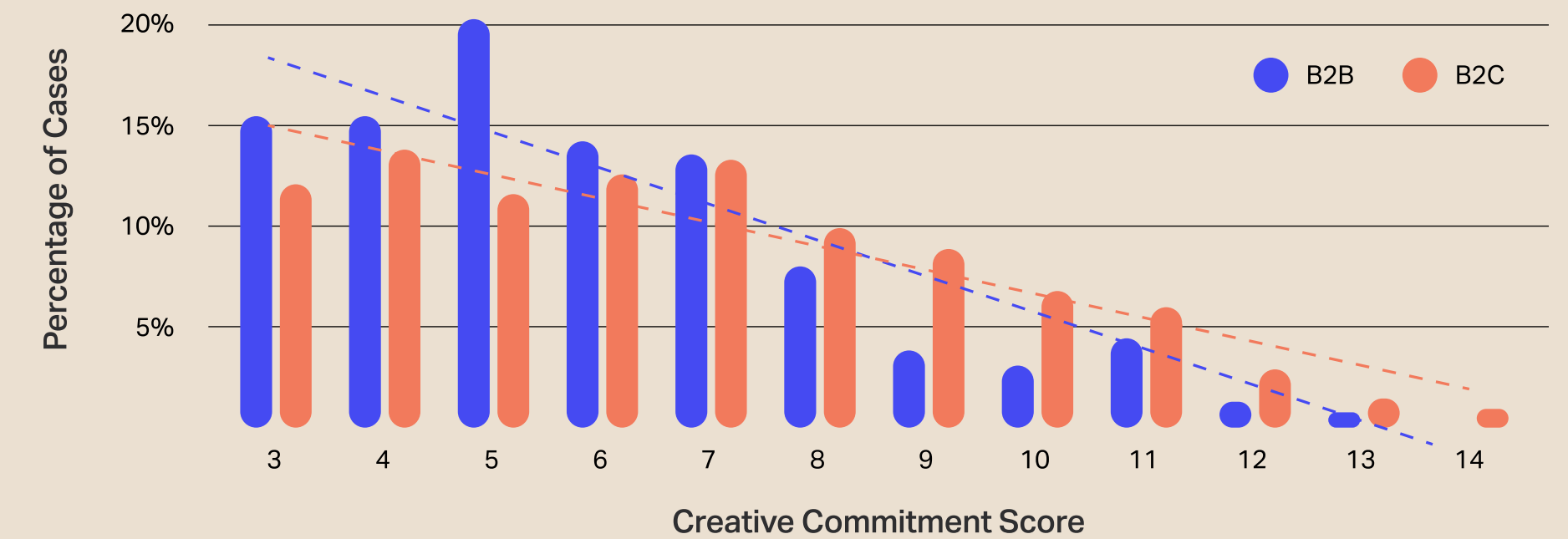
B2B spends less per campaign

B2B runs campaigns for shorter durations

B2B campaigns use fewer media channels

Finding 2:
The principle of Creative Commitment holds true in B2B

In B2B, the differences are not quite as pronounced as they sometimes are in B2C – but the outcome is the same. As B2B campaigns increase in media spend, duration and number of media channels used, they also increase in effectiveness.

The implication of this finding is that, if we want to maximise the effectiveness of B2B campaigns, we should be working to maximise their Creative Commitment.

That, just like in B2C, a surer path to strong marketing results and returns is to produce larger, longer-term and more broadly targeted campaigns.
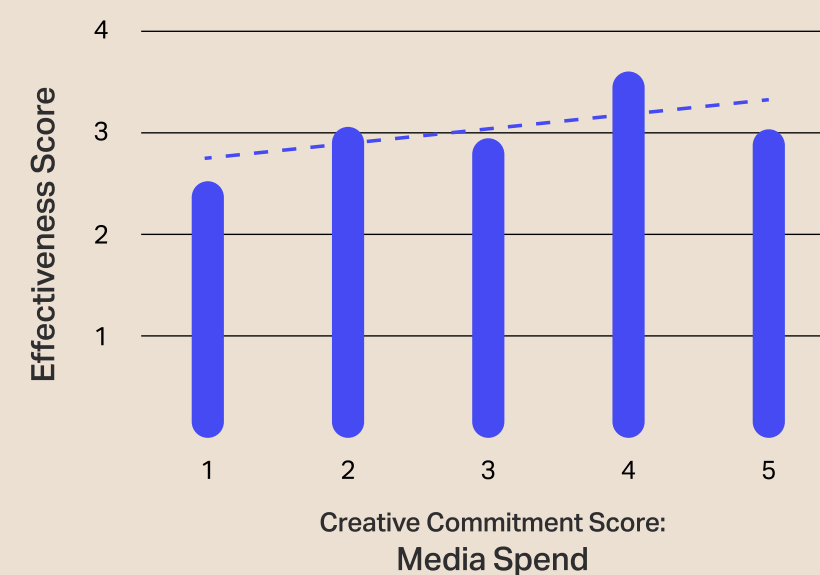
B2B campaign effectiveness increases as Creative Commitment increases

Just as we found with B2C cases, B2B campaigns become more effective as they spend more, run for longer durations and spread across more media channels.
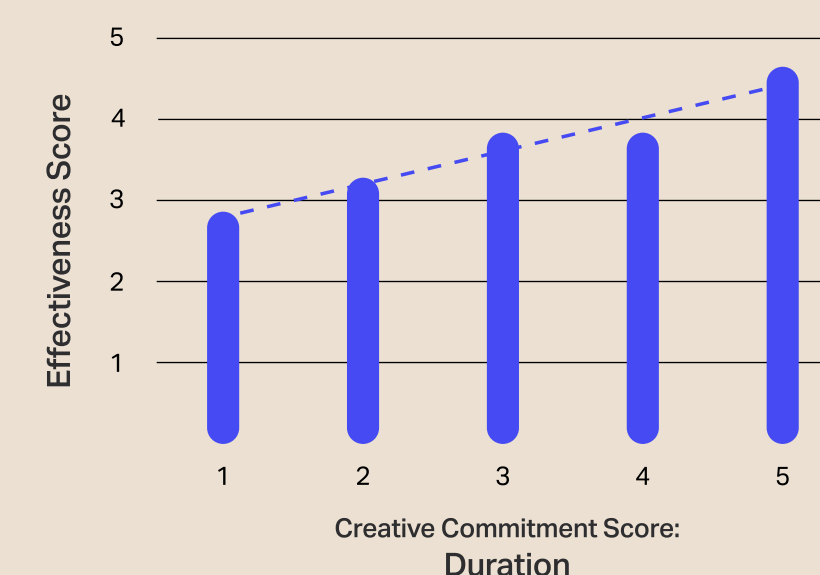
Figures 8,9,10 &11 - Source: WARC Database, 2010-2021 B2B cases
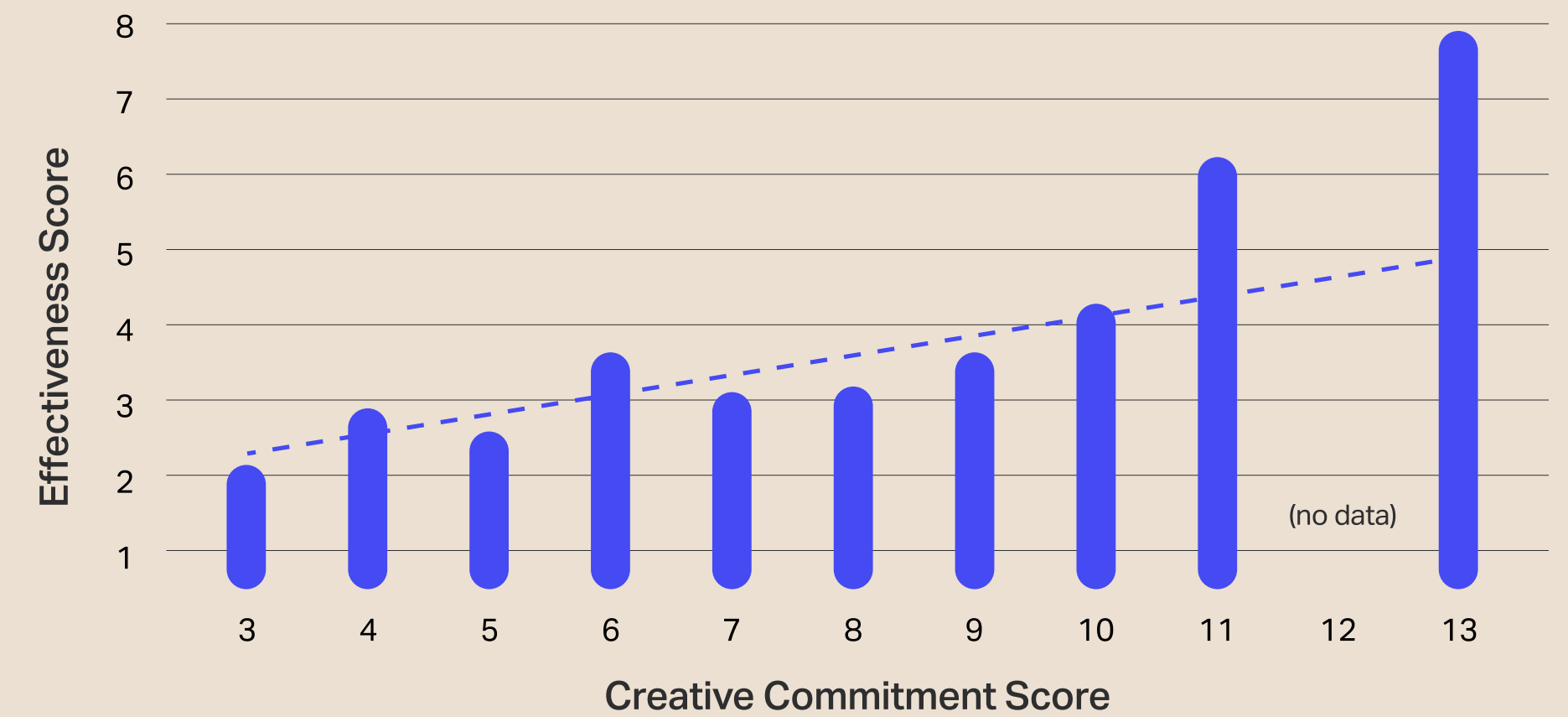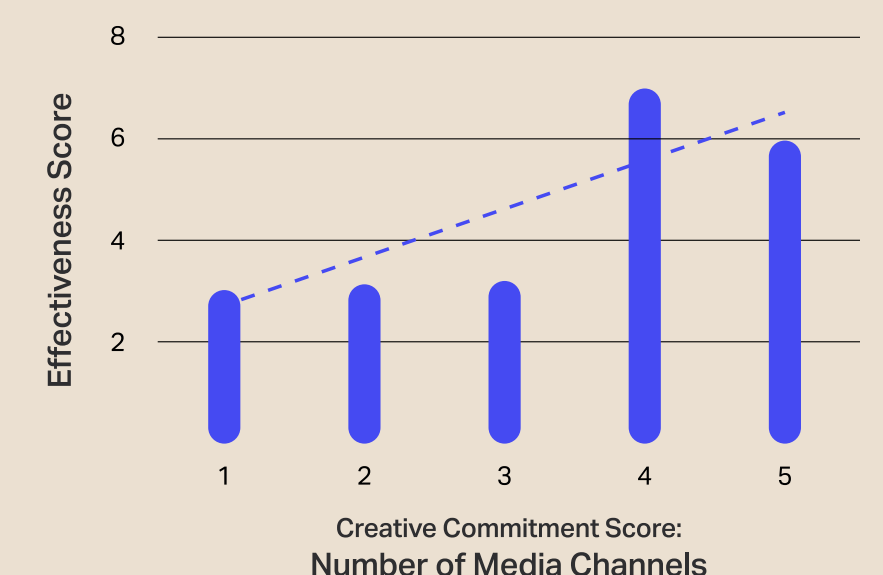

B2B campaigns become more effective as their media spend increases

B2B campaigns become more effective as they're run for longer durations

B2B campaigns become more effective as they're spread across more media channels

Finding 3:
B2B Creative Commitment is in decline

The data revealed one more important – but worrying – finding. Across the last decade, B2B Creative Commitment has declined significantly as marketers have embraced smaller budgets, smaller durations and fewer media channels.

As we've shown, we know that as Creative Commitment declines, effectiveness decreases. So this overall decline in B2B Creative Commitment will be reducing the effectiveness of B2B campaigns, and the overall value of B2B marketing.

This finding should be a clear message to the B2B marketing community that our budgeting and campaign planning choices are moving us in the opposite direction of effectiveness.

What's driving the decline?

Across both B2B and B2C marketing, we can see trends and pressures colluding to drive down Creative Commitment:

1
Downward pressure on overall marketing budgets, reducing spend per campaign.

2
A trend towards cutting budgets up into more and smaller increments and spending those within specific media or marketing opportunities – alongside this is the proliferating use of agencies (i.e increasing rosters to include many specialist agencies in areas like digital, social, PR, performance marketing etc), also meaning that marketers end up cutting their budgets up in to more and smaller increments for each agency.

3
The growth of performance marketing – which tends to be much shorter in duration (going for immediate returns), lower in budget (driving for short-term efficiency at all cost) and less spread in terms of media (the use of primarily highly-targeted online media instead of running bigger integrated campaigns across many online and offline channels).

4
General short-termism leading marketers to focus on shorter-term, lower-budget campaigns.

The decline in B2B Creative Commitment 2011-2021

Average levels of Creative Commitment in B2B campaigns have significantly declined over the past decade.

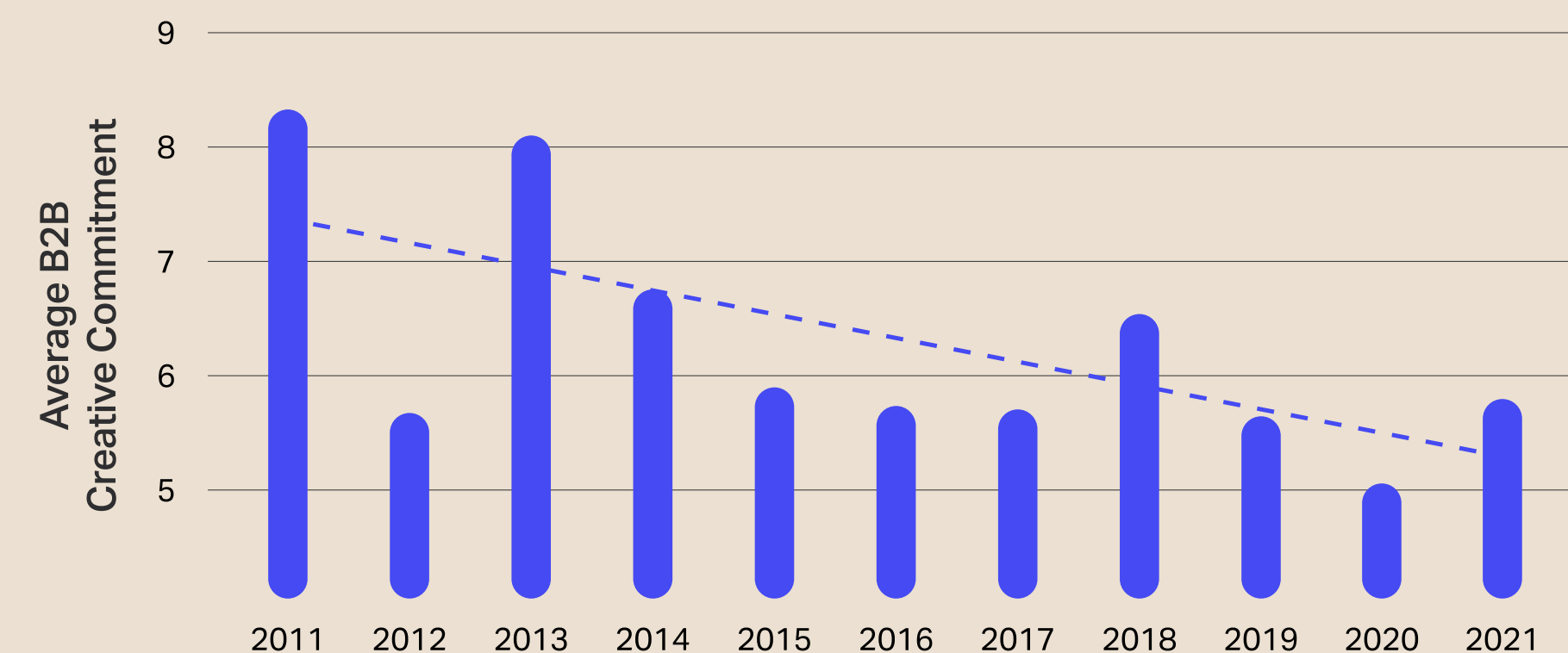Figure 12 - Source: WARC Database, 2010-2021 B2B cases

Our guidance is to resist these pressures, and to work to reverse this decline, in the interests of greater effectiveness – to increase the Creative Commitment of B2B campaigns so that they have a greater effectiveness advantage. And, where competitors are slow to do so, gain an advantage by increasing Creative Commitment as quickly as possible.

The B2B
Effectiveness Ladder

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces,
from least to most commercially impactful.

Introduction to the B2B Effectiveness Ladder

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder is a framework with which to better understand and categorise the common objectives and results of B2B marketing.

To build the Ladder, we studied the objectives and results of the B2B campaigns in our database, grouped those into broad categorisations, and then set those in a hierarchy from least to most commercially impactful.

Driving response

In our analysis, we learned that it's most common for campaigns to strive for some kind of response or interaction. B2B is dominated by direct marketing examples, which are engineered to generate online or offline responses – be they clicks, website visits, downloads of content, attendance at events or interactions at trade shows. These results don't yet tell us that the campaign has delivered any kind of commercial return, but they're a good indicator that the work has stood out and had an effect on the audience.

Generating leads

The desired outcome of these responses tends to be quality sales leads.

B2B marketers strive to grow their sales pipeline, provide qualified leads for their sales teams, and to reduce the cost or improve the quality of those leads. Many of the campaigns that generated a response also generated sales leads.

Closing the sale

Generating leads is, of course, in the interests of eventually closing sales. Some campaigns aim to do this directly – i.e. without the help of a sales team. Others measure the success of sales leads converting to actual revenue. Many lead-gen campaigns could show that they resulted in positive sales outcomes.

Aiming higher

Those three outcomes – driving responses, leads and sales – are where most B2B campaigns currently play. They tend to be short-term campaigns that are useful at converting the 'existing demand' that's present in the market – convincing those who are currently 'in the market' to buy.

What they're less geared towards is growing the business over the long term by creating 'future demand', among broader audiences, that can be converted efficiently in the future, as those audiences arrive 'in the market'.

Campaigns focused on creating future demand tend to be much more effective at generating mid to long-term growth for B2B businesses. And so we had a particular interest in studying those examples.

Creating fame

The more creative campaigns in our database managed to do more than generate a response among a tightly targeted group. They built awareness and interest for the brand among a much larger audience, by exploiting ideas that captivated consumers and the media in a way that saw them spread contagiously. They created 'fame' for their brands.

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder

STRATEGIC ASSET
Drive the business forward into the future
06

BRAND BUILDER
Create greater affinity with the brand
05

FAME MAKER
Create awareness and talkability
04

SALE CLOSER
Convert existing demand to sales
03

LEAD GENERATOR
Generate qualified sales leads
02

RESPONSE TRIGGER
Stimulate a response or interaction
01

COMMERCIAL | IMPACT

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful

WARC AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY · The B2B Institute A LinkedIn think tank · LIONS AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

Building the brand

Many of those campaigns led to a measurable increase in the health of the brand. More potential customers became aware of the brand, and as a consequence of the campaign, thought better of the brand and its products, and reported that they were more likely to buy from the brand in future.

Becoming a strategic asset

And the best of those campaigns became long-term strategic assets for their businesses. Creative platforms that could be re-purposed again and again, over successive years, to continue telling the story of their brand. Importantly, these campaigns continued to drive strong brand and sales results over successive quarters. These campaigns are examples of versatile and enduring creative ideas that build on themselves with each new execution, accumulating greater results and ROI as they go. These are the high watermarks of effectiveness achievement in B2B, and so sit at the top of our Ladder.

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder

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LEAD GENERATOR
Generate qualified sales leads

RESPONSE TRIGGER
Stimulate a response or interaction

06
05
04
03
02
01

IMPACT

COMMERCIAL

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful

WARC AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

The B2B Institute
A LinkedIn think tank

LIONS AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

Level 1: Response Trigger

Response Trigger campaigns are designed to generate some form of response or interaction from their audience. Rather than just being 'seen', these campaigns aim to provoke an action, such as visiting a website, downloading content, or signing up for an event.

Level 2: Lead Generator

Lead Generator campaigns are designed to increase the quantity or quality of sales leads flowing through to the sales team. They benefit sales pipelines by generating inbound enquiries, reducing the cost of leads, or improving the quality of leads.

Level 3: Sale Closer

Sale Closer campaigns are designed to generate immediate or near-term sales. Some do this directly and without the help of a sales team. Others measure the success of sales leads converting to actual revenue.

Level 4: Fame Maker

Fame Maker campaigns are designed to generate widespread awareness of the brand, by exploiting creative ideas that captivate consumers and the media in a way that sees them spread contagiously and result in 'fame' for their brands.

Level 5: Brand Builder

Brand Builder campaigns are designed to improve the fundamental measures of brand health – including awareness, consideration, preference, purchase intent and image attribute ownership.
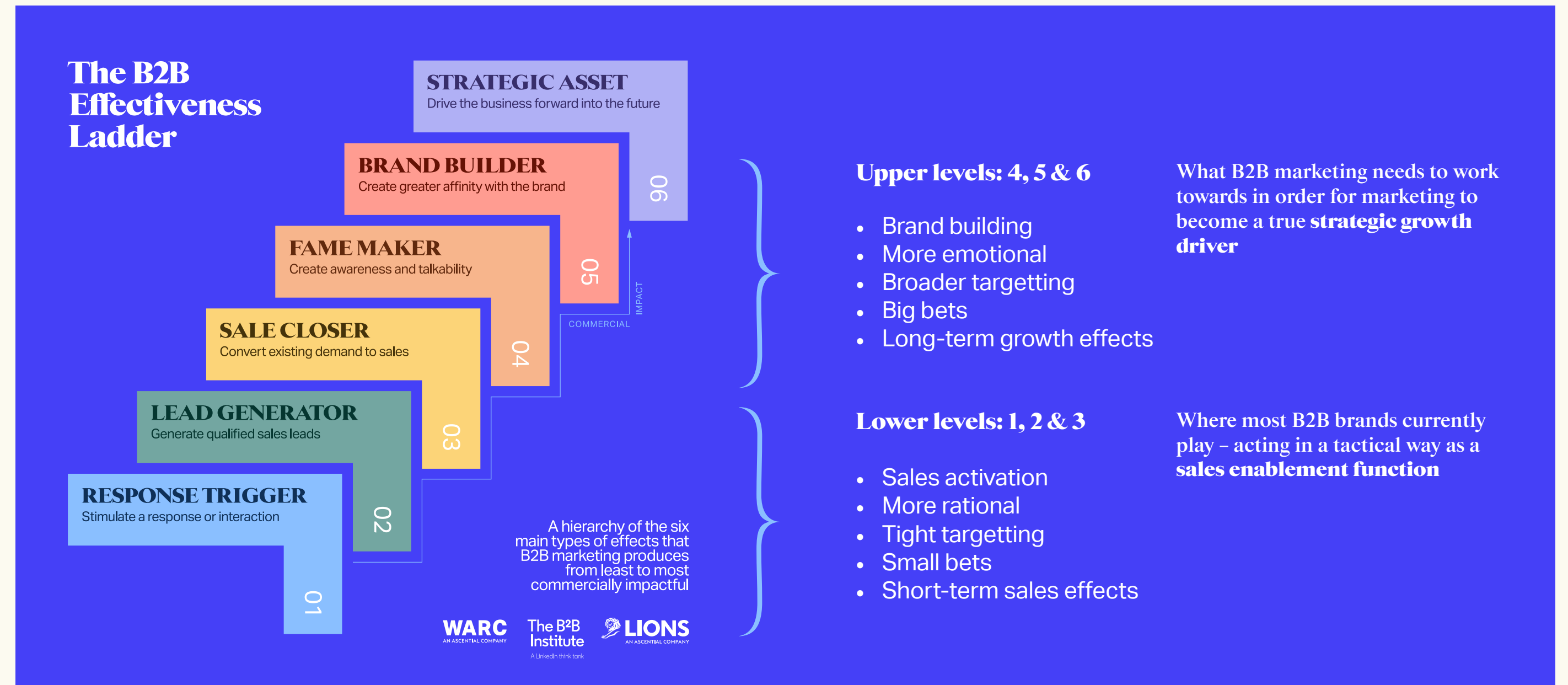
Level 6: Strategic Asset

Strategic Asset campaigns are those that grow the brand and business over the long term – versatile and enduring creative platforms that are re-purposed again and again, over successive years, to continue telling the story of their brand and contributing to revenue and profit growth.

Building on prior B2B Institute research

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder reflects past research and insight from the B2B Institute that has demonstrated the need for B2B marketers to shift away from predominantly small, short-term, rational and tightly targeted campaigns – and to expend more of their budgets on bigger, longer-term, emotional and broad-reach campaigning.

Marketing in this way has been shown to drive much stronger growth for B2B brands over the mid to long-term.

Therefore, the lower three levels of the Ladder focus on smaller, shorter-term, more rational and more tightly targeted marketing. This way of marketing is useful for driving short-term sales (upcoming quarters), but rarely contributes to significant longer-term growth. The upper three levels focus on bigger, longer-term, more emotional and broader-reaching marketing. This way of marketing supports short-term sales while also building the brand and business over the longer term (1-3+ years).

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COMMERCIAL   IMPACT

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful

WARC AN ASCENTAL COMPANY   The B2B Institute A LinkedIn think tank   LIONS AN ASCENTAL COMPANY

Upper levels: 4, 5 & 6

- Brand building
- More emotional
- Broader targetting
- Big bets
- Long-term growth effects

What B2B marketing needs to work towards in order for marketing to become a true **strategic growth driver**

Lower levels: 1, 2 & 3

- Sales activation
- More rational
- Tight targetting
- Small bets
- Short-term sales effects

Where most B2B brands currently play – acting in a tactical way as a **sales enablement function**

Using the B2B Effectiveness Ladder

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder

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LEAD GENERATOR
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WARC   The B2B Institute   LIONS

How do we envisage the Ladder being used?

We have developed the ladder for a single purpose: to enable the B2B marketing and advertising community to more easily identify and learn from B2B effectiveness best practice, so that they can more consistently produce highly effective creative campaigns and initiatives.

Specifically, we envisage two key uses of the Ladder:

1
Identification of the very best creative work at each level and discovery of how to drive specific types of important marketing outcomes.

We have analysed campaigns from ten years of global advertising and marketing effectiveness competitions, categorising their results according to the Ladder. This has enabled us to identify the winning behaviours of the world's best work in achieving results at each level – to help marketers and their agencies develop work that best meets their objectives.

2
A continuous improvement tool for marketers and agencies

By collecting our own work and assessing it using the Ladder as a benchmark, we can understand where we are now, then look to the learnings from the world's most effective work to implement strategies to improve the effectiveness of our work in future.

Our vision is for B2B marketers and agencies around the world to adopt the Ladder as an internal continuous improvement tool, developing their own proprietary analyses and best practice learnings to take into future marketing efforts.

What level should I be aiming for?

Campaigns at any level of the Ladder are effective in at least one sense – and valuable in some way to the client's brand. But the commercial value of the effects increases at each level. Generally speaking, we should be aiming to reach as high a point on the Ladder as possible.

Our advice is that B2B marketers should be placing more emphasis on the upper three levels of the ladder, if their goal is for marketing to become a valuable growth driver in their business.
However, in some cases, marketers will be working to achieve a specific outcome that relates to a lower level on the Ladder.

For example, short-term lead-gen or sales activations will be explicitly intended to be 'Lead Generators' or 'Sale Closers' and won't be expected to build either the brand or long-term sales.

Success of some brand-building efforts might not be contingent on an immediate commercial uplift.

And in many cases, marketers may only be looking to achieve a moment of fame for the brand, in the interests of creating future demand – for which a great Level 4 result would be considered a success.

In a nutshell, you should be aiming for the Ladder level that matches the objective you've set for the campaign you're embarking on.

Also worth noting is that campaigns can, and usually will, be able to show effects at at least two levels of the Ladder. Some will be able to show effects at every level. The levels are not mutually exclusive – rather the overall achievement of a campaign is indicated by the uppermost level that the campaign can prove results at.

Ladder level analysis and winning behaviours at each level

To develop our key learnings for how to drive results at each level of the B2B Effectiveness Ladder, we've categorised the results of around 100 of the most effective B2B cases between 2010 and 2021.

We compared these against our total pool of 435 B2B effectiveness award papers in the WARC database from 2010 to 2021 – in order to identify defining characteristics at each Ladder level.

We've analysed the strategy and creative work of the 100 most effective cases to reveal the commonalities among cases that have achieved impressively at each level.

Together these give us an indication of the types of strategic and creative choices that are 'winning behaviours' when planning towardss achieving the objectives particular to that Ladder level. The winning behaviours identified in this paper are not exhaustive – they're intended as a starting point, which will be built upon in future analyses.

> We've analysed the strategy and creative work of the 100 most effective cases to reveal the commonalities among cases that have achieved impressively at each level.

Level 1: Response Trigger

Response Triggers drive high rates of campaign response and interaction:

Response Trigger campaigns are designed to generate some form of response or interaction from their audience. Rather than just being 'seen', these campaigns aim to provoke an action, such as visiting a website, downloading content, or signing up for an event.

These campaigns commonly use direct marketing, or the tactics of successful direct marketing, to explicitly call for or motivate a response.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure response metrics such as:

- Response rate
- Campaign engagement (views, clicks, CTRs, etc)
- Engagement and interactions at events / trade shows
- Interactions with the brand through website visitation, app usage, content downloads, etc
- Interactions with product content that educates and informs
- Attendance at an event or retail location

Response metrics can normally be assessed after a relatively short period – within three months of the campaign being in market.

When we should be striving for a Response Trigger result as an end in itself:

Response Trigger results are normally redundant on their own – that is, most campaigns should be striving for more than simply an interaction with the marketing. Our guidance is that marketers should be measuring the brand and business results of such campaigns.

When we should be using Response Trigger as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

In nearly all cases we should be shooting for and celebrating strong Response Trigger results, but using these as a way to increase engagement with a campaign that ultimately strives for brand or business outcomes.

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AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

The B2B Institute
A LinkedIn think tank

LIONS
AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

Winning behaviour #1
Don't be a boring business

The essential precursor to customers responding to a campaign is that the campaign is noticed in the first place. Business people are inundated with dry, functional marketing – and so in B2B, a little creativity can go a long way.

Turning a printer launch into a fashion show, hosting a virtual bike race, or having last century's most iconic ads reinterpreted using digital media are all examples of B2B marketers standing out among the boring business clutter.

Google USA
Project Re:Brief

Reimagined iconic ads from the 60's and 70's with today's digital technology; drove 480,000 unique site visitors with interaction rates 13x the average for online advertising.

Watch the case study video

Braintree UK
Tour de Tech

Ran a virtual Tour de France in London on real bikes to showcase the capabilities of their global payments platform; engaged 200 customers who rode 50,000 cumulative miles.

Watch the case study video

Fuji Xerox New Zealand
Haus of Versant

Held a fashion show of outfits created from paper printed using FX's new digital printing press; drove a 47% response rate and 110% attendance at the product's launch.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #2
Demonstrate product benefits in surprising ways

Rather than simply bullet-pointing product benefits, successful B2B marketers have found exciting and engaging ways to demonstrate those benefits.

Can we use AI to design a fashion collection? Can we use cloud data to predict basketball scores in real time? Can we show the fire resistance of a building material by subjecting our boss's classic car to flame throwers? Yes. We can.

**IBM Global
Cognitive Couture**

Partnered IBM's Watson AI with fashion designers to create the world's first AI-enhanced couture collections; drove huge increases in engagement and video completion rates 34% above norms.

Watch the case study video
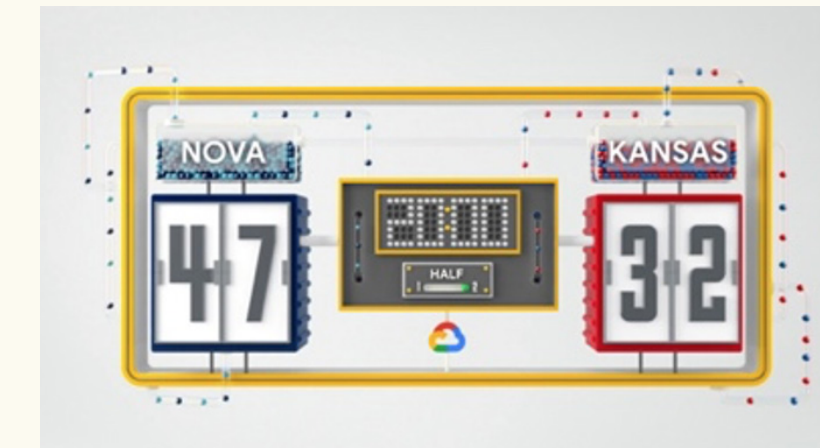
**Google Cloud USA
Know What Your Data Knows**

Turned Google Cloud data into knowledge by predicting NCAA game results halfway through the games; drove a 42% increase in search volume for Google Cloud.

Watch the case study video

**Rockwool Europe
The 7 Strengths of Stone**

Showcased the thermal, acoustic and aesthetic benefits of their innovative 'stone wool' material by subjecting the product to humorous and over the top tests; achieved 1.6m video views and a click-through rate 717% above industry average.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #3
Catch people off-guard

"WTF!?" That's a reaction that focuses the mind. And when your advertising that elicits that reaction, it'll almost certainly provoke a response.

Partnering with a hacker that caused $1.7b of economic damage, putting your clients' photos on billboards without their permission, or double-bluffing your customers are ways successful B2B advertisers have focused the minds of their audience on their brand.

HP Canada
Head of a Hacker

Highlighted security vulnerabilities in printers by celebrating notorious hacker MafiaBoy; drove 1.7m video views and 35,000 website visits.

Watch the case study video

JCDecaux Belgium
Personal Billboards

Showed marketing directors that outdoor media is still effective by putting a photo of each marketing director on a billboard; achieved 100% response rate.

Watch the case study video

Hiscox UK
Double Bluff

Piqued interest for their specialised IT insurance with a DM pack that asked to be sent back if the receiver wasn't an IT professional; more than doubled response rates.

Read WARC case study

Level 2:
Lead Generator

Lead Generators improve the value of the brand's sales pipeline:

Lead Generator campaigns are designed to increase the quantity or quality of sales leads flowing through to the sales team. They benefit sales pipelines by generating inbound enquiries, reducing the cost of leads, or improving the quality of leads.

These campaigns work by motivating potential customers to identify themselves as leads by expressing interest in a company's products or services.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure lead generation metrics such as:

- Increase in lead generation
- Increase in sales pipeline
- Increase in inbound enquiries or call centre calls
- Reduction of cost per lead
- Improvement in quality of leads

Lead generation metrics can normally be assessed after a relatively short period – within three months of the campaign being in market.

When we should be striving for a Lead Generation result as an end in itself:

For most B2B advertisers, lead generation is a critical aspect of their marketing activity. Especially in cases where a product or service is of high value and requires a sales team to give customers an in-depth understanding of its application or to customise its delivery. In these cases, generating leads may well constitute shorter-term marketing success.

When we should be using Lead Generation as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

In most cases, lead generation is a short to mid-term game, targets tightly defined audiences, and doesn't contribute to longer-term brand building and business growth. Good lead generation should be considered an essential short-term tactic, and work in parallel with bigger, longer-term activity.

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Winning behaviour #1
Target insightfully

Generating leads efficiently means reaching the right audiences with the right content. Successful lead generators use insightful targeting – both in terms of showing up in the right place, but also delivering the right kind of content.

SAP discovered it was more effective to maintain conversations with individual execs as they moved companies, rather than with companies and whoever was in the role at the time. Citrix and Brighthouse Financial both segmented their prospects, understood the content that they needed in order to be nurtured, and delivered that content in ways that were specifically relevant to those groups.

Citrix Global
The Power of Three

Segmented their pipeline into three clear levels of engagement and pushed relevant messaging to each; drove a 443% increase in pipeline.

SAP Singapore
Buried Treasure

Tracked executive job moves and picked up where they left off with executives previously exposed to SAP, rather than starting all over again with a new employee in a current prospect company; generated a 30% increase in leads and reduced cost per lead by 91%.

Watch the case study video
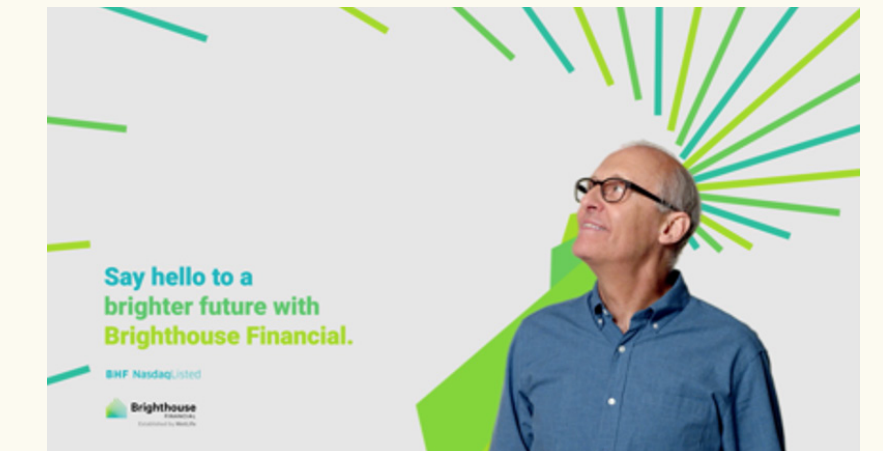
Brighthouse Financial UK
Insights Panel

Created a thought-leadership content platform that delivered the content to older prospects with longer articles and younger prospects with bite-sized video and audio content; drove a 78% increase in leads.

Visit the website

Winning behaviour #2
Get playful with your direct marketing

"When baiting a trap, always leave room for the mouse", goes the ancient wisdom. B2B is awash with informational and uncreative direct marketing – marketing that's so full of messaging about what the advertiser wants to say, that there's no room left for the customer.

Highly creative DM gets people involved, makes them think, and hooks them in before delivering the knockout blow. These examples show that the companies that are playful with their prospects are the ones that convert them to leads.

Google Japan
The Google Puzzle

Sent a padlocked box to prospects with an invitation to search on Google AdWords for the combination to unlock it; 95% of prospects responded with over 500 high-potential leads generated.

Watch the case study video
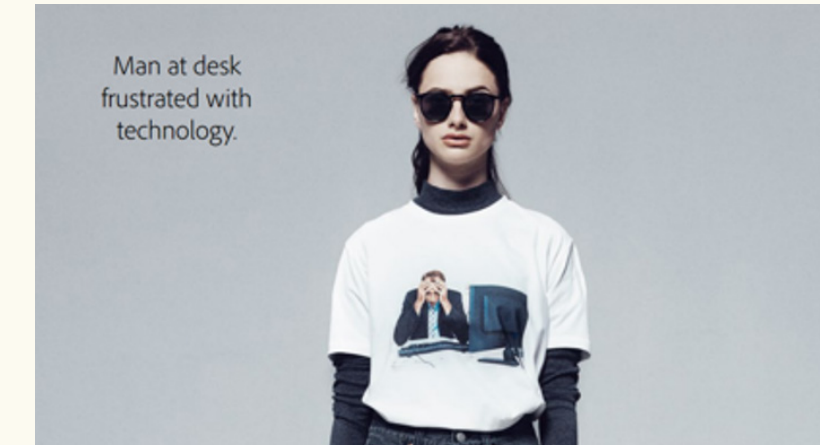
Adobe USA
Stock Apparel

Created a tee-shirt collection featuring the kinds of stock photos that creative people love to hate, with the benefits of Adobe's higher quality stock images printed on the washing labels; converted 42% of the audience into sales leads.

Watch the case study video

IBM India
Number Game

Sent a mailer comprising un-put-downable mathematical problems that could be solved easily using IBM solutions. Generated 112 high-value leads totalling $4.86m in pipeline.

Read the WARC case study

Winning behaviour #3
Be useful

Doing something helpful for your prospects is a great way to demonstrate that you can add value to their business, and are thinking proactively about them. We're often so keen to 'get' that we forget to give.

Putting live export opportunities under the noses of exporters rather than hiding them away on a government website is one way. Helping your channel navigate regulatory change, or showing prospects how they stack up to their industry are other examples proving that giving gets.

UK Dept for International Trade
Real Overseas Opportunities
Broadcast Live

Turned the Department's online database of overseas business tenders – i.e. live export opportunities for UK businesses – into ads that ran on broadcast media; generated 42,530 applications for export opportunities, 45% of whom were first time exporters.

Watch the case study video

Aviva Insurance UK
Time for New Thinking

Used behavioural science to teach financial advisors how to survive following a regulatory change threatening their incomes; drove a 624% increase in new sales conversations.

Read the WARC case study

Verizon USA
5G Readiness Assessment Tool

Created a dynamic spider graph that gives IT leaders an at-a-glance comparison between their company and their industry, and delivered personalised action plans to prepare for 5G innovation; delivered 400% of their qualified lead target.

Watch the case study video

Level 3: Sale Closer

Sale Closers produce short-term sales or market share gains:

Sale Closer campaigns are designed to generate immediate or near-term sales. Some do this directly and without the help of a sales team. Others measure the success of sales leads converting to actual revenue.

These campaigns work by converting demand and motivating willing customers to buy a company's products or services.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure short-term sales metrics such as:

- Generation of incremental sales
- Increase in sales growth rate
- Increase in market share
- Reduction of cost per sale
- High revenue or profit ROMI

Short-term sales metrics can normally be assessed after a relatively short period – within three months of the campaign being in market.

When we should be striving for a Sales Closer result as an end in itself:

In the short term, generating new sales is often the endgame for B2B marketers.

When we should be using Sale Closer as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

Short-term sales are critical for any business, but activity focused on short-term sales should only constitute around 54% of the spend of a B2B business. The other 46% should be spent on longer-term brand building, which is proven to improve future sales and growth outcomes.

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Winning behaviour #1
Activate the channel

Many B2B advertisers have sales channels with a high degree of influence over eventual sales. When this is the case, keeping those channels informed, inspired and motivated to sell your products is essential.

These examples demonstrate excellence in engaging and incentivising sales channels and driving significant sales growth as a result.

**Google USA
Project Re:Brief**

Proved the value of display advertising to advertising and media agencies by reimagining iconic ads from the 60's and 70's with today's digital technology; drove a 35% increase in display ad sales.

Watch the case study video
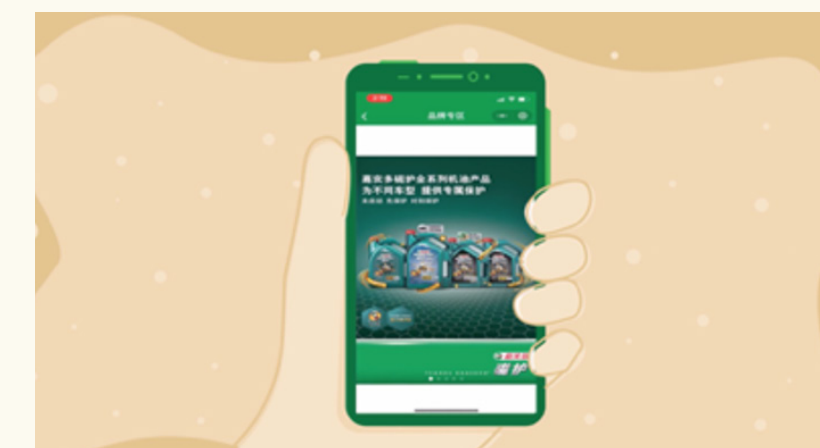
**Castrol China
Influence the Influencer**

Created a WeChat mini-program that educated mechanics on Castrol's products and engaged them with games and rewards; drove an average 50% increase in each mechanic's Castrol sales and a 370% ROI.

Watch the case study video

**DAF Trucks Europe
Market to the Max**

Developed a Europe-wide programme and privileges card to help DAF dealers with their marketing; drove 6% market share growth, 17% profit growth and a 450% ROI.

Read the WARC case study

Winning behaviour #2
Lead thought

Business customers are drawn to partners with unique insight into their domain and into the future. Thought leadership activity done well is an effective way to prove your brand has real value to add, and is a powerful motivator to become a customer.

These examples show B2B brands that have used thought leadership strategies to drive significant sales returns.
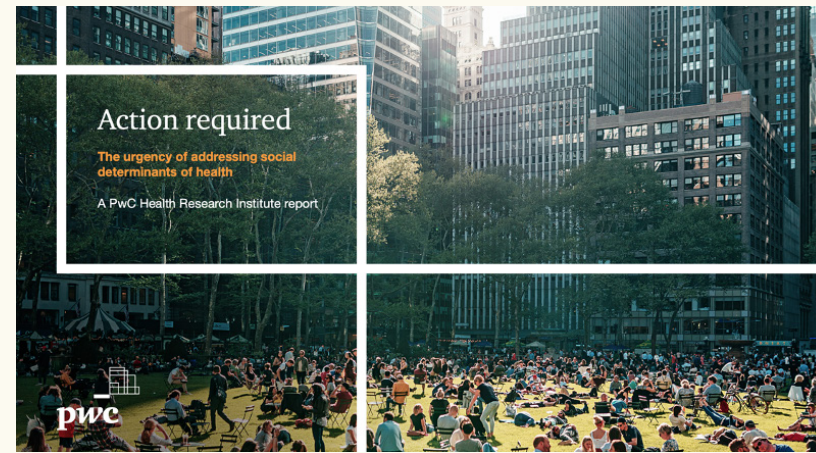
PwC Global
Social Determinants of Health

Launched a global paper, video, quiz, slide decks and competitions to highlight the 80% of health outcomes that aren't determined by medical care; generated more than $13m in associated revenue.

Read the report
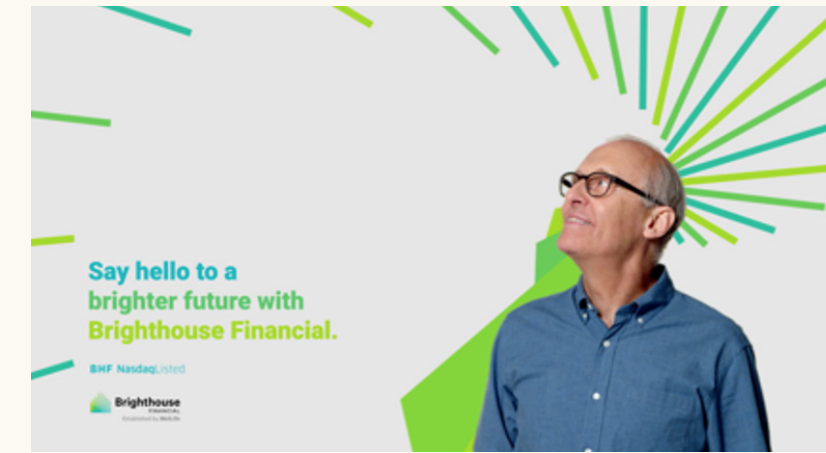
Brighthouse Financial USA
Insights Panel

Created a thought-leadership content platform to upskill third-party financial advisors; drove 78% year-on-year sales growth.

Visit the website

Trelleborg Global
SmartPort

Educated port operators with low digital maturity on the availability of better technology solutions to improve efficiency and safety; drove revenue 31% above target, with a 10:1 ROI.

Read the WARC case study

Winning behaviour #3
Prove your ongoing relevance

In a super-fast-changing world of disruption and obsolescence, business brands and products can sometimes feel as if they're relics of the past. In these cases, proving your contemporary relevance and value can be not only existentially important, but a great way to attract back sales from those who've been seduced by the new.

These examples show how three mature brands drove sales increases by proving they're a part of the future.

**IBM Global
Cognitive Couture**

Partnered IBM's Watson AI with fashion designers to create the world's first AI-enhanced couture collections; Created $31m in new Watson revenue from a $1.6m spend.

Watch the case study video

**Newsworks UK
A New Story for
National Newspapers**

Argued that technology was not killing newspapers, rather it was extending their content onto new platforms and helping them reach more readers in more ways, and that the audience for national newspaper brands was actually growing; drove a significant increase in newspaper advertising revenues and an ROI of 185%.

Read the WARC case study

**TNT Netherlands
Made in Holland, Delivered by
TNT Express**

Challenged perceptions that global courier TNT was just an old-school local postal service by letting companies create their own radio ads that were run for free around the world, then shipping their goods there; drove 60% sales growth.

Watch the case study video

Level 4: Fame Maker

Fame Makers get customers and the media talking and sharing:

Fame Maker campaigns are designed to generate widespread awareness of the brand. They exploit creative ideas that captivate consumers and the media in a way that sees them spread contagiously and result in 'fame' for their brands.

These campaigns work by surprising the world with original ideas that people feel naturally compelled to share with others.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure fame metrics such as:

- Generating campaign or brand awareness beyond what would be expected for the media budget
- Generating significant news coverage and earned media reach
- Generating significant earned impressions and social shares

Fame metrics can normally be assessed after a relatively short period – within three months of the campaign being in market.

When we should be striving for a Fame Maker result as an end in itself:

Fame Maker results are usually in the service of growing the health of the brand, and ultimately sales revenue, over the longer-term. Creating fame is a proven way to achieve these outcomes. Our guidance however is that marketers should still be measuring the brand and business results of such campaigns.

When we should be using Fame Maker as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

It is certainly in our interests to shoot for and celebrate strong Fame Maker results, but use these as a way to increase the reach and engagement of a campaign that ultimately strives for brand or business outcomes.

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder

STRATEGIC ASSET
Drive the business forward into the future
06

BRAND BUILDER
Create greater affinity with the brand
05

FAME MAKER
Create awareness and talkability
04

SALE CLOSER
Convert existing demand to sales
03

LEAD GENERATOR
Generate qualified sales leads
02

RESPONSE TRIGGER
Stimulate a response or interaction
01

A hierarchy of the six main types of effects that B2B marketing produces from least to most commercially impactful

WARC
AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

The B2B Institute
A LinkedIn think tank

LIONS
AN ASCENTIAL COMPANY

Winning behaviour #1
Be surprising and original

"It's not news if it's not new." Getting Jean-Claude Van Damme to do the splits between the wing mirrors of two reversing trucks is news. A statue of a young girl facing down Wall Street's charging bull is news.

If we want people to talk about and share our work, it absolutely must push the boundaries of originality.

**Volvo USA
Live Test Series**

Showed the features of Volvo's new commercial truck range with extraordinary demonstrations, including Jean-Claude Van Damme's 'epic split'; viewed over 100m times, written about in over 20,000 news stories, earned media value of over $170m.

Watch the case study video

**State Street Global Advisors USA
Fearless Girl**

Promoted the inclusion of women in business leadership by erecting a statue of a young girl facing off the iconic bull in Manhattan's financial district; billions of social media impressions, thousands of global news stories.

Watch the case study video

**Fedrigoni Paper Europe
The Paper Skin**

Created a unique paper sample pack by replacing the traditional leather banderol on the Leica X2 camera with their premium paper; 80k views and over $500k in earned media.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #2
Champion a purpose or cause

As is the case in B2C marketing, purposeful work has a higher likelihood of being talked about and shared. Going in to bat for your customers and communities in new and original ways is a reliable way to end up in the media for all the right reasons.

Championing struggling small businesses, vulnerable communities or at-risk workers are some of the ways these brands have created fame.

American Express USA
Small Business Saturday

Supported small businesses across America by creating a national day to 'shop small'; drove 74% awareness among Americans, was tweeted about by Obama, and was made an official national day.

Watch the case study video

IBM Global
Code & Response

Enlisted thousands of developers from 165 nations to build software to help communities better prevent and recover from natural disasters; drove 1.1b social reach and connected with more than 100,000 developers.

Watch the case study video

Emirates NBD Bank UAE
The A/C Vests

Attracted the attention of SMEs in construction across the UAE by creating an innovative worker's vest that cooled workers facing relentlessly hot outdoor conditions; reached 4m people and became the most watched content for an MENA banking brand in 2016.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #3
Do something everyone can be a part of

Most B2B campaigns are tightly targeted to a specific prospect audience. Creating fame among a much broader audience isn't creating wastage – rather it builds the brand a level of public awareness and stature that creates greater trust among actual B2B buyers.

These examples show how brands have opened themselves up to widespread interaction in order to create fame.

KBC Bank Belgium
Gap in the Market

Asked communities across Belgium what businesses or shops were needed in their neighbourhoods and shared the information with potential entrepreneurs; became a national issue, found 171,000 market gaps and became the most popular website for Belgians looking to start a new business.

Watch the case study video

American Express USA
Small Business Saturday

Engaged consumers and small businesses en masse to make shopping small a national event; drove 74% awareness among Americans, was tweeted about by Obama, and was made an official national day.

Watch the case study video

Yellow Pages Australia
The Hidden Pizza Restaurant

Promoted a restaurant serving free pizza, hidden from public view, with Yellow Pages the only place advertising its contact details; became a social phenomenon and was the most effective ever campaign for Yellow Pages Australia.

Watch the case study video

Level 5:
Brand Builder

Brand Builders grow B2B brand equity:

Brand Builder campaigns are designed to improve the fundamental measures of brand health – including awareness, consideration, preference, purchase intent and image attribute ownership.

These campaigns work by targeting an area of brand health that needs improvement, and communicating in a way that leads to that improvement.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure brand health metrics such as:

- Increases in brand awareness, consideration or preference
- Improvement of NPS
- Improvement of specific brand perceptions
- Improvement of specific product perceptions
- Increases in purchase intent

Brand health metrics should be assessed over a longer period – by using ongoing tracking that monitors their movements continually over periods of 6 months to 3+ years.

When we should be striving for a Brand Builder result as an end in itself:

In many cases, marketers are KPI'd with supporting and improving brand health metrics. NPS in particular has become a popular metric for companies who believe that it's a good enough proxy for future performance to be considered an end in itself. In these cases, a strong performance for the brand can be considered effective in its own right.

When we should be using Brand Builder as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

Though brand building may be a central KPI, we are of course building the brand to enable the business to deliver sales more efficiently, or to insulate it against market forces. So, wherever possible we should still be working to show how increases in brand health have laddered up to improved sales, market share or profitability.

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Winning behaviour #1
Use emotion

Significant prior research has proven that brands are built most effectively when they engage the emotions of their customers. In B2B, this is true too – customers are more likely to think well of brands that they feel emotionally close to, and emotional campaigning is one of the best ways to build this connection at scale.

These are some of the companies that have used a more emotion-led approach to improve the health of their brands.

**BT UK
Proving the Power of Emotion
in Business**

Evolved from a rational and informational approach to a series of highly emotional B2B campaigns; drove remarkable uplifts in brand trust, leadership, value for money, affinity, innovation and uniqueness.

Read the WARC case study

**Dell USA
The Unseen Ballet**

Told the story of Lily, a visually impaired girl and aspiring ballerina, who was able enjoy a performance of Ballet Austin's The Nutcracker with Dell's eSight device; drove a 61% increase in intent to purchase Dell.

Watch the case study video

**Simply Business Insurance UK
You Name It, We Insure It**

Took a humorous approach to engage YouTube audiences with the most celebrated of English linguistic devices: the pun; drove an 18% lift in brand awareness and a 1,349% increase in brand interest.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #2
Target broad audiences

As consumers, our view of the quality of a brand is a composite of how we personally feel about it, and how we perceive everyone else feels about it. It's very difficult to think of a brand that no one else knows about or likes as a 'great brand'.

Which is why, when it comes to brand building, it's more effective to target broad audiences to create a sense among our target that our brand is big enough and familiar enough to truly be trusted.

University of Melbourne Australia
Made Possible by Melbourne

Created a free interactive exhibition of its research in Melbourne's Central Business District, which used outdoor media sites as custom designed exhibits; drove brand awareness to 78%, and the university's reputation for research 80% above target.

Watch the case study video

Volvo USA
Live Test Series

Showed the features of Volvo's new commercial truck range with extraordinary demonstrations, viewed by over 100m people; drove 85% awareness of the brand and campaign among customers and increased purchase intent by more than 40%.

Watch the case study video

UPS Europe
United Problem Solvers

Invited customers to bring UPS their problems with a broad-targeted TV campaign; increased brand consideration by over 40%.

Watch the case study video

Winning behaviour #3
Address key brand weaknesses

When we're working with a brand that's tracking poorly, clearly identifying the attribute that needs work is the first step towards recovery.

Trying to increase all brand metrics at once makes for an 'all things to all people' brief, and consequent ineffectiveness. By picking just one, we liberate creative teams to do their best work – and more often than not, the effects halo out powerfully across other key metrics.

**IBM Global
Let's Build a Smarter Planet**

The brand platform that repositioned IBM from the old-school computer company you never got fired for hiring, to the technology company creating a smarter, better future; drove $11b in increased brand value and huge gains in brand leadership, expertise and trust.

Read the WARC case study

**UPS Europe
United Problem Solvers**

Repositioned from merely a 'postal service' to a 'problem solver'; increased brand consideration by over 40%.

Watch the case study video

**Newsworks UK
A New Story for
National Newspapers**

Argued that technology was not killing newspapers – rather it was extending their content onto new platforms and helping them reach more readers in more ways, and that the audience for national newspaper brands was actually growing; significantly improved consideration for newspaper advertising.

Read the WARC case study

Level 6: Strategic Asset

Strategic Assets grow the brand and business over the long term:

Strategic Asset campaigns are versatile and enduring creative platforms that are re-purposed again and again, over successive years. They stick with the same creative strategy or creative work throughout that period, creating sustained commercial outcomes.

These campaigns work by establishing a creative strategy or campaign that is built up with new executions launched in succession. The cumulative effect of these campaigns means that their effectiveness and efficiency in building brand and business metrics tends to improve with each successive execution.

To achieve at this level, campaigns need to track and measure long-term brand and business metrics such as:

- Improvements in lead generation performance
- Improvements in brand health
- Sales and market-share growth
- Profit growth
- Long-term return on marketing investment

Long-term brand and business metrics can only be assessed over periods of at least 1 year, and should be assessed over periods of 3+ years.

When we should be striving for a Strategic Asset result as an end in itself:

In any case where we've set out to drive long-term, sustained brand and sales growth.

When we should be using Strategic Asset as a stepping stone to higher levels of the ladder:

When it comes to B2B marketing, there is no greater achievement than reaching this status.

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Strategic Asset exemplar cases

There are remarkably few campaigns in our effectiveness database that can be truly designated as Strategic Assets. As we've noted, B2B brands today focus largely on the lower levels of our ladder, and rarely exploit the benefits of bigger, longer-term campaigns.

And so, rather than deriving specific winning behaviours from this small set of cases, we've chosen to explore key Strategic Asset campaigns in a little more detail, to provide some specific insight into these marketing programmes.

They wrap up many of the winning behaviours we've described throughout other levels of our ladder – being surprising and original, engaging emotionally, providing thought leadership, and targeting broad audiences. The key difference at this level is that those strategies have been employed and committed to over a much longer term that B2B campaigns tend to run for.

IBM Global
Let's Build a Smarter Planet

In the heat of the 2008 global financial crisis, IBM began a repositioning of the brand that capitalised on their transformation from IT hardware stalwart to a company focused on the intelligent application of technology.

The economic crisis spawned some of the biggest stimulus spending packages the world had ever seen – and much of these were targeted towards the energy, healthcare and transport infrastructure in cities and countries in the world's biggest markets. This coincided with IBM's view that emerging technology, applied smartly, could make significant positive change to energy, healthcare and traffic systems.

They focused away from IT managers, and towards national, city and business leaders, who they could help solve the biggest problems they were facing.

The brand platform became an invitation to those leaders: Let's Build a Smarter Planet

In 2010 alone, the Smarter Planet initiative generated US$3 billion in revenue and double-digit growth from more than 6,000 client engagements, as IBM Research delved into Smarter Planet projects in areas such as mobile web, nanotechnology, stream computing, analytics and cloud.

Read the full WARC case study

American Express USA
Small Business Saturday

To help small business owners recover from the GFC, and survive among the growth of big-box retailers, American Express launched Small Business Saturday in 2010, held on the Saturday that fell between long–established shopping occasions of Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

American Express declared Small Business Saturday a national event where Americans could patronise their local stores, restaurants and coffee shops, giving them an official reason to shop small every year and providing a much-needed injection of cash into local communities post-recession.

In 2011, The US Senate made Small Business Saturday an official day, and in 2012, elected officials in all 50 states championed the initiative.

The campaign was exported to the UK that same year, and by 2014, more than $14b was being spent at independent businesses each November. 110 million consumers shopped small on the day in 2019. And it all worked to the advantage of American Express: the more the tills were ringing in those local stores, the higher the number of American Express card-member transactions.

Read the full WARC case study

Brighthouse Financial USA
Insights Panel

To demonstrate their commitment to financial professionals, insurer Brighthouse Financial set out to create useful content that would help them have more effective relationships with their clients.

Bringing together a group of behavioural economics professors, anthropologists, futurists, and former successful financial professionals, they created the Brighthouse Financial Insights Panel.

Together with the Panel, they created content that helped financial professionals grow their businesses, covering topics such as "The Future of Retirement", looking 30 years into the future to see how drastically retirement might change, and "The Great Wealth Transfer", the $30 trillion transfer of assets between generations.

The initiative drove significant improvements in brand awareness, consideration, NPS and lead generation – leading to revenue increasing 12.6 times faster than the category, and growing their market share 50% between 2017 and 2019.

Read the full WARC case study

BT UK
Proving the Power of Emotion in Business

This is the story of how Britain's biggest telecommunications company, BT, reconnected with business people, by leveraging the power of emotion.

To retain its position as market leader in the face of growing competition, and to reverse the decline in revenue, BT sought to celebrate human connections, on the basis that better relationships lead to better business.

The brand created six online films over three years, all of which took a more emotion-led approach, and supported them with product-level advertising and activation.

The campaign drove significant uplifts in brand trust, leadership, value for money, affinity and uniqueness. The work generated a net profit of over £14.5m and delivered a £3.16 return for every £1 spent.

Read the full WARC case study

Maersk Global
Setting a New Course for Growth

Maersk, the largest and best-known ocean shipping company in the world, wanted to diversify away from its core offering and completely re-centre its focus around the customer – moving itself from market leader to challenger brand.

When communicating its Logistics & Services solutions, Maersk reconsidered who its target was. Although the companies would remain the same, the future decision-maker was in the C-suite, not the logistics team.

It all started with a vision. "Within the next three to five years, it should be as easy to ship a container across the world as it is today for consumers to send a parcel."

It created a series of films and other marketing initiatives that invested heavily in storytelling and emotional connection, to drive home their 'Together All The Way' promise.

Between 2017 and 2020, the campaign led to a 32% increase in revenue and a 91% increase in EBITDA. Brand value improved 45% in Maersk's home nation of Denmark, moving the brand up four places in the rankings to become the second most valuable Danish brand in any category.

Read the WARC case study
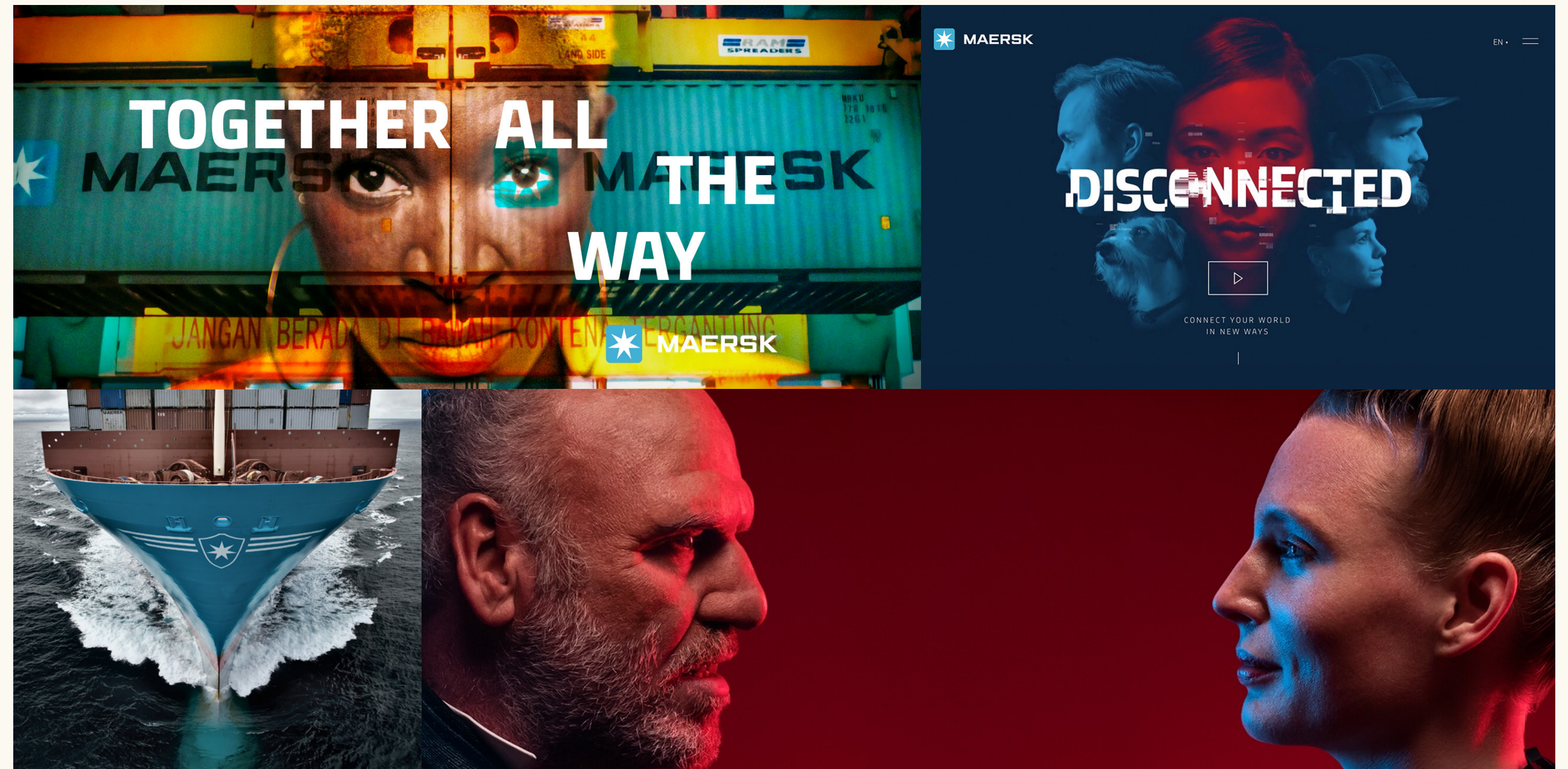
Conclusions

The suboptimal performance of most B2B marketing is a big opportunity for you. Yes you.

A key finding of this research is that the evidence confirms anecdotal views of B2B marketing – that it skews towards rational creative work delivered over tightly targeted media. That B2B campaigns receive less spend, are run for shorter durations and are spread across fewer media channels than B2C campaigns. And that B2B marketers are almost exclusively focused on driving responses and generating leads and short-term sales – and barely at all on building their brands over the longer term and making marketing a true strategic asset for their companies.

We now have substantial evidence that these B2B marketing bevaviours will be producing suboptimal results.

Prior research by LinkedIn's B2B Institute and their partners is clear – for B2B businesses to thrive in the longer-term, their marketing needs to shift balance towards broader reaching media and more emotionally-driven creative work.

And this study shows that in B2B, low Creative Commitment – lower levels of campaign spend, duration and media channels – produces lower rates of campaign effectiveness.

For these reasons our unequivocal view is that B2B marketing needs to evolve if it's to generate best-in-class business results.

It's not that driving short-term effects isn't important – of course it is – rather we will drive greater long-term effectiveness and efficiency if we spend more of our budgets on bigger, longer-term and more emotionally-driven brand campaigning.

Nor should it be assumed that these longer-term efforts mean sacrificing success in the short term. As Peter Field and Les Binet have shown, brand building campaigns drive greater long-term effects, while *also* having a positive effect on short-term sales. The reverse, however, is not true. Short-term sales activation and performance marketing rarely build brands, and many short-term successes do not add up to efficient long-term growth.

Our key advice for B2B marketers:

1
Spend around 54% of your overall budget on short-term sales activation and performance marketing – rational campaigns, targeted tightly at your most likely buyers today. Spend the other 46% on brand building – emotional campaigns, broadly targeted at all category buyers, to prime those who will soon be in the market to choose your brand.

2
Pursue higher levels of creative commitment – especially when it comes to brand buidling. Even when you have lower spend, use those other levers of increased duration and number of media channels to maximise the effectiveness of your campaigns.

3
Think about where you currently sit on the B2B Effectiveness Ladder. Where is most of your spend going? Where are you seeing the majority of your results? And importantly, where would you like to be?

4
Hone the effectiveness of your short-term work using the winning behaviours identified at levels 1-3 of the Ladder.

5
To reach levels 4-6 of the Ladder, learn from the winning behaviours identified at those levels. As you'll see, these strategies are much less commonly used in B2B marketing, but have produced significant results for their brands.

6
Take the opportunity to grab a competitive advantage while the B2B marketing industry continues to pursue less effective strategies. This context provides you with a chance to zig as they zag, and get ahead of the competition early.

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At WARC, our purpose is to save the world from ineffective marketing by putting evidence at the heart of every marketing decision. We believe that effective marketing is based on facts and not opinions.

For over 30 years WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective. WARC services include 94,000+ case studies, best practice guides, research papers, special reports, advertising trend data, webinars, awards, events and advisory services; has 1,400+ client companies, 21,500+ active users in 100+ countries; collaborates with 50+ industry partners; has offices in London, New York, Singapore and Shanghai.

Visit the home of the Creative Effectiveness Ladder

As The Home of Creativity, LIONS powers the marketing segment of Ascential and is a destination for those in the business of creativity.

As the definitive benchmark of creative excellence and with unparalleled access to insight on how it works, LIONS provides those on the journey to creative excellence all they need, at whatever stage they are at and wherever they are.

Our annual five-day Festival, Cannes Lions, is the meeting place for the global creative marketing community and a celebration of the world's most excellent and effective work.

The B2B Institute is a Think Tank funded by LinkedIn that studies the future of B2B branding and decision making.

The Institute partners with the best minds in the industry to empower the B2B community with breakthrough ideas and category-defining research.

They are a diverse team of 17 talented strategists and storytellers who are all passionate about changing the world of business for the better and building relationships where magic and logic intersect.

www.b2binstitute.org

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