



# FROM PROMOTION TO EMOTION:

## Connecting B2B Customers to Brands

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### THE **RUNDOWN**

In today's crowded and commoditized marketing environment, B2B marketers are becoming more customer-centric and ramping up their branding efforts. A core part of brand building has always been to create an emotional connection with consumers. But, assuming their customers make purely rational decisions, B2B marketers are focusing on business value to differentiate their brands. Is this assumption correct? Does emotion actually play a role? Google partnered with CEB's Marketing Leadership Council to research these questions. The quick answers: No. And yes, a big one. Read more about these and other surprising findings.

Forging emotional connections with consumers has long been at the heart of business-to-consumer (B2C) marketing. For business-to-business (B2B) marketers, it's not so simple. They ultimately need to reach business decision makers, but those customers deal with the influences of purchasing committees, third-party buying consultants and corporate procurement processes. This framework distances marketer from customer and assumes a "rational" frame that's devoid of emotion.

However, we tend to forget that whenever there are people trying to work together to make a decision, there will be interpersonal and, inevitably, emotional forces at work. With this in mind, could B2B marketing rely on emotional connection even more than B2C?

To find out, Google and CEB's Marketing Leadership Council worked with marketing research firm Motista to survey 3,000 purchasers of 36 B2B brands across multiple industries. We wanted to uncover the reality beyond the basic assumptions that drive B2B marketing and communications. Using the same methodology as their B2C research, we were able to directly compare B2B results to Motista's baseline consumer data.

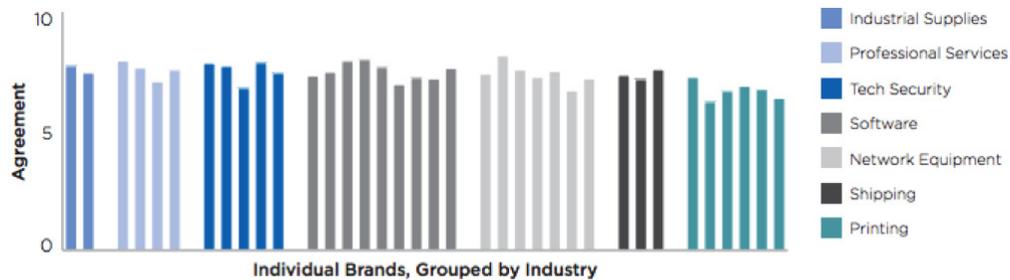
Not only did the B2B brands drive more emotional connections than B2C brands, but they weren't even close. Of the hundreds of B2C brands that Motista has studied, most have emotional connections with between 10% and 40% of consumers. Meanwhile, of the nine B2B brands we studied, seven surpassed the 50% mark. On average, the B2B customer is significantly more emotionally connected to their vendor and service provider than a consumer.

While it may seem surprising at first, this high level of connection with B2B customers makes a lot of sense. When a personal consumer makes a bad purchase, the stakes are relatively low. Best case, it's returnable. If not, it might require an explanation to a spouse. Business purchases, on the other hand, can involve huge amounts of risk: Responsibility for a multi-million dollar software acquisition that goes bad can lead to poor business performance and even the loss of a job. The business customer won't buy unless there is a substantial emotional connection to help overcome this risk.

Another common misconception is that B2B purchase decisions are just about maximizing business value. That's no longer the case. Our research shows that perceptions of business value barely differ between leading brands within a given industry (see fig 1). Where differentiation does exist, we found that only 14% of business decision makers are willing to pay a premium for it (see fig 2). So while business value is table stakes, the majority of B2B marketing still focuses therein.

**Figure 1: Perceived Business Value, by Brand**

Average Agreement with "This Brand Will Help Us Achieve Business Goals"

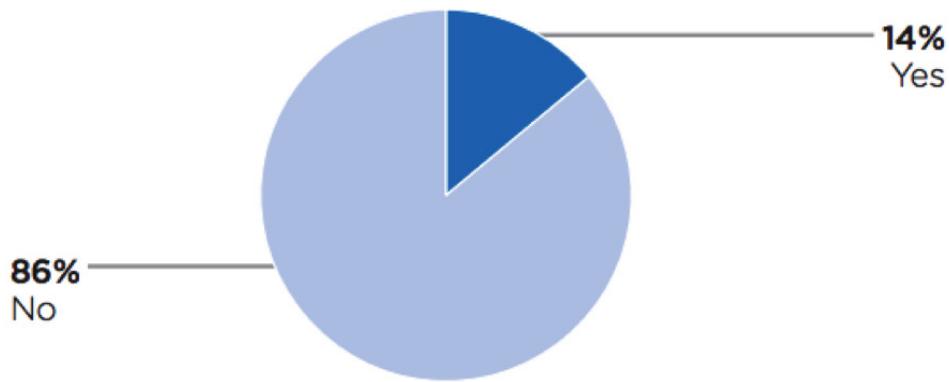


n = 3,000.

Source: CEB/Motista Survey; CEB analysis.

**Figure 2: Customer Perceptions of Supplier "Unique Benefits"**

Q: " Do you see a real difference between suppliers and value the difference enough to pay for it?"



n = 9,000+.

Source: CEB 2009 Customer Experience Survey; CEB analysis.

To stand out, B2B marketers need to create excitement — anticipation of both professional and personal rewards. How? By building emotional connections with their customers, which can drive important purchase outcomes like purchase intent and pricing power. B2B purchasers are almost 50% more likely to buy a product or service when they see personal value — such as opportunity for career advancement or confidence and pride in their choice — in their business purchase decision. They are 8x more likely to pay a premium for comparable products and services when personal value is present.

We like to think of organizations as rational and logical. The truth is, there are people within them, and those people are just as — if not more so — influenced by emotion than everyday consumers. While the latter may place some value on bonding with a brand, the former needs an emotional connection to buy at all. By getting personal, B2B marketers can get ahead — creating purchase intent, pricing power, brand advocacy and, most importantly, happy customers.

**Read the full whitepaper below. View more materials and diagnostic tools [here](#).**

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### **About the Research**

This research was completed by CEB Marketing in partnership with Google and Motista using four key components: Survey responses from 3,000 B2B buyers across 36 brands and 7 categories; Insight from the CEB advisory teams specializing in B2B marketing issues and from subject matter experts at Google, structured interviews with leaders at 50 B2B marketing organizations, secondary research and interviews with numerous vendors, consultants and research organizations operating in the digital marketing space.

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