



BE OUTSTANDING

WINNING THE BATTLE FOR B2B ATTENTION



ADCOMMUNICATIONS

WINNING THE BATTLE FOR B2B ATTENTION

THE CHALLENGES B2B MARKETERS FACE TODAY

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THE CHALLENGES B2B MARKETERS FACE TODAY

THE BATTLE FOR B2B ATTENTION IS GETTING HARDER

B2B marketing has always demanded patience and precision. Today it demands more: the ability to cut through noise that didn't exist five years ago, reach buyers who are harder to find, and build trust with people you may never interact with directly.

The pressures are converging. AI is flooding channels with generic content, making differentiation harder. Buyers are completing more of their journey before they ever engage with a sales team. Privacy regulations are limiting targeting options. And, for most teams, the budgets available to respond to all of this aren't growing.

According to Marketing Week's 2026 Career & Salary Survey, 65% of marketers felt overwhelmed in the past 12 months and more than 60% feel undervalued.¹ Meanwhile, 63% of businesses have increased investment in short-term activity, chasing quick returns at the expense of sustained brand building.²

The result is a marketing environment in which doing more of the same produces diminishing returns. **Seven interconnected challenges** are making positive B2B brand awareness harder to earn and harder to maintain.

CONTINUE >

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AI IS FLOODING CHANNELS WITH
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PRIVACY REGULATIONS ARE
LIMITING TARGETING OPTIONS.
BUDGETS ARE NOT GROWING.

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¹ Marketing Week Career & Salary Survey, 2026

² LinkedIn - Life as a Fractional CMO: It's a Rollercoaster

THE CHALLENGES B2B MARKETERS FACE TODAY

CONTENT SATURATION

AI-generated content has flooded every B2B channel. Volume is up, but at the cost of quality and distinctiveness. Organic reach is declining across platforms and differentiation across channels is harder than it has ever been. Traditional SEO is losing ground as AI assistants reshape how buyers find information.

The data confirms the situation: 69% of B2B marketers report intense pressure to increase the number and variety of digital assets they produce.³ Producing more content is not the answer, however. Producing better, more distinctive content is.

DEMAND FOR GENUINE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Buyers have more information than they can use. Insight – content that takes a clear position, challenges assumptions and offers real perspective – is what they really want and value.

The distinction matters. ‘Thought leadership’ is not a catch-all label for content marketing. It requires brands to have and communicate strong opinions on trends, risks, opportunities and regulation in their sector. Brands without a clear and consistent point of view appear less credible and less trustworthy.

**‘THOUGHT LEADERSHIP’
IS NOT A CATCH-ALL
LABEL FOR CONTENT
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THE CHALLENGES B2B MARKETERS FACE TODAY

MULTIMEDIA EXPECTATIONS

Static content is no longer sufficient. Video, audio and interactive formats increasingly dominate B2B consumption and buyers favour varied expert-led formats over written-only content. Building effective multimedia content requires planning, structure and real budget commitment, which makes it a differentiator for those who invest in it.

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61%

of B2B marketers plan to increase their investment in video in the coming year, with short-form video currently generating the highest ROI across B2B content formats.⁴

COMPLEX BUYING COMMITTEES

B2B buying decisions are no longer made by a single decision-maker. Committees of multiple stakeholders are now common, each with different priorities, different content needs and different thresholds for trust. Content that only speaks to one persona misses most of the room.

And evaluation periods are getting longer. The average B2B buyer journey now spans 272 days and 88 touchpoints⁵ – up from 211 days in 2024. Buyers are doing more of their own research than ever before and place greater weight on peer experience and independent validation. When they engage with sales, they are better informed and move faster. The challenge is reaching them during those 272 days, before their views have fully formed.

AVERAGE B2B BUYER JOURNEY NOW SPANS 272 DAYS AND 88 TOUCHPOINTS – UP FROM 211 DAYS IN 2024.⁵

AI IS CHANGING BRAND DISCOVERY

AI assistants – ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity and others – are replacing traditional search as the starting point for vendor research. The discovery stage of the B2B buying cycle is moving into systems that reward authority, credibility and structured, factual content, not keyword optimisation.

The scale of the problem is significant. According to the 2026 2X AI Visibility Index, only 4.3% of B2B companies appear in early-stage AI-generated vendor shortlists. The other 95.7% are effectively invisible until buyers encounter the brand through other channels.⁶

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95.7%

of B2B companies are invisible in early AI-driven buyer discovery.⁶

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4 CMI B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends: Outlook for 2025
5 Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2026
6 2026 2X AI Visibility Index, 2X Marketing, April 2026

THE CHALLENGES B2B MARKETERS FACE TODAY

PRIVACY REGULATIONS AND DATA LOSS

Increasing privacy regulations are limiting targeting options and reducing visibility into niche B2B audiences. Third-party data has become less reliable, less available and more legally constrained. First-party data that is owned, clean and nurtured is now a competitive asset.

Data quality is a persistent problem across B2B marketing: research consistently shows that a significant proportion of B2B databases contain incomplete, outdated or invalid contact records, making the case for investing in data governance stronger each year.

DARK SOCIAL AND CLOSED COMMUNITIES

A growing proportion of B2B influence happens in channels that marketing analytics cannot access: private Slack groups, WhatsApp conversations, LinkedIn DMs, peer communities and conference hallways. These are where buying decisions are formed, vendor reputations are built or damaged, and recommendations are made.

Research from 6Sense finds that, on average, buyers don't engage with sellers until they are two-thirds of the way through their journeys. Similarly, sales development outreach plays a minimal role in influencing the Point of First Contact (POFC) with buyers; in most cases, buyers deliberately ignore unsolicited outreach until they're ready. By the time a prospect fills in a contact form, the shortlist is already set. Visibility in these channels relies on brand advocacy, peer trust and community presence, none of which can be bought.⁷

BUYERS DON'T ENGAGE WITH SELLERS UNTIL THEY ARE TWO-THIRDS OF THE WAY THROUGH THEIR JOURNEYS.⁷

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HOW CAN YOU RESPOND?

IN THE FACE OF THESE CHALLENGES...

...B2B brands need to be laser-focused, channelling resources into activities that will really differentiate them, and maximising campaign effectiveness all the way through the funnel.

We've identified **7 key areas** for B2B marketers to focus on to make their brand stand out and win the battle for attention – without doubling their budget.

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Key areas of focus

1. Build a distinctive brand point of view	8
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1. BUILD A DISTINCTIVE BRAND POINT OF VIEW

In a market flooded with content, volume is not a strategy for success. The brands that win attention and hold it are those that have something to say. A clear, consistent and distinctive point of view isn't a nice-to-have; it's the foundation of effective B2B communications.

A brand point of view is a considered, defensible perspective on the issues that matter most to your customers and prospects. It reflects where the market is going, what the risks and opportunities are and what your organisation believes buyers should do about them. It gives your communications a reason to exist beyond promotion.

THE BRANDS THAT WIN ATTENTION AND HOLD IT ARE THOSE THAT HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

Start with a clear message architecture

Before any content is created, a brand needs a messaging framework: a structured, hierarchical set of messages that defines its core narrative, its category positioning and the proof points that support both. This is the infrastructure that makes all downstream communication faster, more consistent and more credible.

Without it, marketing programmes generate a lot of activity but very little coherence. With it, every piece of content, whether a trade press article, a LinkedIn post, a sales presentation or a webinar, reinforces exactly the same story. Over time, that consistency builds authority.

Take a position worth defending

Generic commentary does not build authority. Brands recognised as thought leaders in their sectors are those that go beyond acknowledging trends and take clear positions on them. They comment on regulation, challenge received wisdom and name the risks others are ignoring.

This requires confidence. It also requires knowledge – sector expertise deep enough to generate insight rather than just echo the consensus. For many industrial and technical B2B businesses, that expertise exists within the organisation. The challenge is locating it and shaping it into content that earns attention.

Make executives visible

Buyers don't just evaluate companies; they evaluate the people behind them. Executive visibility – through published articles, media appearances, speaking engagements and consistent social presence – is one of the most effective ways to build the individual trust that influences B2B decisions.

This is particularly true for buying committee members, such as the finance director, the compliance lead and the operations manager, who operate at the periphery of an investment decision. These are the hidden buyers who rarely interact with sales but often have significant influence over whether a deal proceeds. They respond to credible, expert perspectives, but less so to product marketing.

Engage press, analysts and speaker platforms

Earned media coverage in credible sector publications, inclusion in analyst reports, and regular presence at industry events are not marketing vanity metrics. They offer independent, third-party validation that reinforces a brand's authority claims and extends reach into communities that other communications channels can't reliably penetrate.

For B2B brands operating in specialist or technical sectors, expert independent media platforms carry particular weight. A positive editorial article in a trade publication read by a buying committee, or a relevant presentation at an industry conference, can do more to build trust at the consideration stage than months of content marketing activity.

95% of hidden buying committee stakeholders* say strong thought leadership makes them more receptive to sales and marketing outreach. It earns trust and creates credibility before a salesperson ever gets in the door.

Source: 2025 Edelman-LinkedIn B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report



*The unseen stakeholders who may never use your product themselves but have a significant say in whether you win the business!

2. INTEGRATE PR AND MARKETING

In many B2B organisations, PR and marketing operate independently. Content is produced for one channel without a distribution plan for others. Sales teams use their own materials, often disconnected from the brand's external communications. The result is a fragmented programme that requires more resources while delivering less impact.

A single, unified narrative, in which PR, content, digital, social and sales enablement all reinforce the same story across every stage of the buying cycle, is one of the most significant steps a B2B brand can take to improve communications effectiveness.

Integrated communications is a competitive advantage. A well-constructed narrative that travels consistently across all touchpoints is more memorable, more credible and more effective at building the kind of long-term brand awareness that drives consideration.

Top of funnel – PR and thought leadership for awareness

The top of the funnel is where brand reputation is built and where the buying journey increasingly begins – before buyers have raised their hand, before they have visited your website and often before they have consciously identified a need. PR and thought leadership activity at this stage is about gaining mindshare: being credible and recognisable when a buyer's need for your product or service does emerge.

Buyers who already know a brand and associate it with credible expertise respond better to every downstream communication, making top-of-funnel activity one of the most efficient investments a B2B marketing team can make.

Mid funnel – educational content for trust-building

At the evaluation stage, buyers need evidence: case studies, technical explainers, benchmark data, white papers, independent validation and comparison content. They are past the point of wanting perspective and are now looking to assess options.

This is also where the complexity of the buying committee matters most. Different stakeholders need different content. The technical evaluator needs specification detail. The finance lead needs ROI evidence. The operations manager needs implementation confidence. A well-structured, mid-funnel content programme addresses all of these without requiring a separate campaign for each.

Late funnel – voice of customer and sales enablement

At the point of decision, peer proof points matter more than brand claims. Customer case studies, testimonials, independent reviews and reference conversations are the content that converts consideration into commitment. Voice of customer programmes – structured approaches to capturing, shaping and deploying customer advocacy – are among the highest-return investments a B2B marketing team can make.

Sales enablement content at this stage should be tightly aligned with the brand's broader messaging framework. If the story a salesperson tells in a pitch contradicts or ignores the narrative the prospect has been reading in press coverage and content for the previous six months, trust is eroded at exactly the wrong moment.

Post-sale – nurture, satisfaction and advocacy

The funnel does not end at conversion. Long-term customer relationships, satisfaction programmes and structured advocacy activity are the source of the peer recommendations that increasingly shape B2B buying decisions. A customer who actively advocates for a brand in their professional community is worth more than any paid media campaign.

Integrated communications programmes that extend into the customer relationship through regular value-adding content, community participation and proactive engagement create the conditions for advocacy to develop naturally. This is particularly important in sectors where buying committees rely heavily on peer validation and where dark social influence is strong.

70% of B2B buyers in consideration seek case studies or whitepapers from potential vendors.

Source: B2B Buyer Journey Statistics - 2026



3. CREATE MULTI-FORMAT CONTENT ECOSYSTEMS

A strong idea, properly developed, should fuel a content programme for weeks, not produce a single article. The challenge for most B2B marketing teams is not a shortage of ideas; it's the absence of a system for turning good ideas into content that works across multiple formats and channels simultaneously.

A multi-format content programme starts with a strong central idea – valuable insights, a sector trend, an expert perspective – and extends it deliberately into every format and channel that serves the target audience: written, video, audio, visual, interactive; owned, earned, shared and paid; sales enablement and customer advocacy.

At the core of each ecosystem is typically a primary piece of content – a report or a piece of research, for example. From that content flow a range of derivative formats, for example corporate and executive LinkedIn posts and/or authored articles, infographics, content for trade media, sales tools, videos, direct marketing and customer/prospect engagement, and so on. Each format reaches a different part of the brand's target audience at a different point in their journey, but all reinforce the same central message.

Full PESO activation

Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned (PESO) channels each have different audiences, different trust levels and different roles in the buying cycle. A content programme that uses only one or two of these channels leaves significant reach on the table.

Earned media – coverage in credible publications and analyst reports – carries a trust premium that owned and paid content cannot replicate.

Owned content – a brand's website, newsletter and marketing collateral – offers control and direct audience access.

Shared content – posts, shares and employee advocacy – extends reach into networks that paid media doesn't reach efficiently. Paid amplification ensures that the strongest content reaches the right people at the right time.

And the integration of all four produces results that no single channel can match.

Tailor content for multiple stakeholders

The same core message needs to be expressed differently for different members of a buying committee, as discussed on page 5. A technical director reads differently from a CFO. A procurement manager needs different reassurance from an end user. Content programmes that account for this and produce format and channel variants for different personas are significantly more effective than single-format programmes.

This doesn't require the creation of entirely different campaigns for each audience. It means thinking carefully about framing, emphasis and format when adapting a core piece of content for different stakeholders. The central message remains consistent; how it is expressed is tailored for each audience and their individual drivers.

Use interactive formats to simplify complexity

Interactive content, such as calculators, assessment tools, configurators and benchmarking tools, serves a dual purpose in B2B marketing. It simplifies complex information, making it easier for buyers to understand how a product or service applies to their specific situation. And it generates engagement data that shows where buyers are in their journey and what they're focused on.

For brands in technical, industrial or specialist sectors, this is particularly valuable. The ability to translate complex technical or economic arguments into formats that are immediately useful to a non-specialist buying committee member can move a brand from the periphery to the centre of a consideration set.

A SINGLE STRONG IDEA, PROPERLY DEVELOPED, SHOULD FUEL A CONTENT PROGRAMME FOR WEEKS.

With the average B2B buyer journey now spanning **88** touchpoints, buyers need a consistent story across every interaction.

Source: Dreamdata LinkedIn Ads Benchmarks Report 2026



4. OPTIMISE CONTENT FOR AI DISCOVERY

Search is changing faster than most B2B marketing programmes have adapted. AI assistants – ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Perplexity and others – are now a primary research tool for B2B buyers. They surface vendor recommendations, summarise categories and shortlist options in ways that bypass traditional search entirely.

The rules for appearing in AI-generated answers differ from those that govern Google rankings. Brand mentions across credible, independent sources correlate more strongly with AI citation than backlinks. Factual accuracy matters more than keyword density. Structured, clearly written content that answers specific questions is now favoured over long-form content optimised for search bots.

What actually improves AI visibility

Four practical priorities stand out.

1. **Ungated content.** Content should be freely accessible to AI crawlers as well as human readers. Gating valuable content behind forms keeps it out of AI training and reduces the chance of being cited as a source.
2. **Factual, high-authority resources.** AI systems favour content that is specific, accurate and citable. Proprietary research, definitive sector explainers and data-backed perspectives earn citation more reliably than opinion-led content.
3. **Consistent brand description across every platform.** AI systems build an understanding of a brand from everything they can access about it – its website, LinkedIn profiles, trade press coverage and industry directories. A consistent, precise description of what the business does, repeated across all of these, makes it easier for AI to represent the brand accurately.
4. **Schema mark-up and structured data.** Technical optimisation remains relevant. Structured data helps AI systems understand and categorise content.

Adding statistics increases AI visibility by **22%** and quotations by **37%** highlighting the importance of factual, evidence-led content in AI-generated search.

Source: 2025 AI Citation & LLM Visibility Report: How Large Language Models Choose What Sources to Mention

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5. GROW OWNED AUDIENCES

‘Rented’ audiences, such as followers on LinkedIn, subscribers acquired through a third-party platform, and contacts in a purchased list, can be taken away. Owned audiences cannot. The case for investing in first-party data has been building for years, and privacy regulation has now made it urgent.

An owned audience is a database of contacts who have chosen to hear from a brand directly. Building this kind of database requires a clear value proposition: content, insight or access that is worth trading an email address for. Maintaining that database requires consistent delivery on that promise, while the effective use of it demands alignment between marketing, sales and the content programme.

Data acquisition as a strategic priority

Growing a validated B2B database is not a campaign task. It’s a sustained programme, built on the quality of owned content, the strength of media relationships and the ability to create reports, events, webinars, tools etc. that give buyers reasons to engage.

Publisher-level relationships, developed through connections with the trade press, industry bodies and sector communities, provide routes to data acquisition that go beyond what most brands can achieve through their own channels alone. As does account-based marketing (ABM), which targets specific high-value accounts rather than broad audiences.

Consistent, direct access to buyers

Establishing direct, repeatable communication with buyers is one of the most effective ways to build presence across a long B2B buying cycle. Channels such as email provide a reliable route to do this, enabling brands to reach known contacts without reliance on algorithm-driven platforms. The value lies not in the channel itself, but in the quality and relevance of what is delivered, and the consistency with which it is maintained – think newsletters, for example.

ESTABLISHING DIRECT, REPEATABLE COMMUNICATION WITH BUYERS IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO BUILD PRESENCE.



6. ACTIVATE BRAND ADVOCACY

The most credible things that can be said about a brand are said by its customers, employees and sector peers in places the brand doesn't control, to audiences the brand cannot directly reach.

B2B buyers trust colleagues, peers, technical experts and community members far more than they trust marketing communications. Activating those voices, consistently and authentically, is how brands build influence in the dark social channels where buying decisions are increasingly thought through.

Customer advocates and peer sharing

Customer advocacy is a deliberate strategy for equipping satisfied customers to represent the brand credibly in their own professional communities. This includes reference programmes, joint thought leadership, customer-contributed content and the kind of direct peer conversations that a salesperson can't have, but a happy customer can.

Peer sharing – the informal recommendation that happens in WhatsApp groups, at industry dinners and in private LinkedIn messages – can't be manufactured, but it can be cultivated. Brands that deliver real value, communicate credibly and treat customers well create the conditions for advocacy to emerge naturally.

Industry influencers and technical experts

In specialist B2B sectors, true industry influencers are typically not social media personalities. They are respected technical experts, senior practitioners, independent consultants and recognised voices within specific professional communities. Their endorsement carries weight precisely because it is hard to earn and can't be bought the way consumer influencer marketing can.

Building relationships with these individuals, through engagement, collaborative content, speaking opportunities and industry body participation, is a long-term investment. It pays off in exactly the channels that are hardest to reach any other way: the closed communities, the peer recommendations and the quiet word at an event that influences a buying decision.

Peer recommendations
and third-party
reviews carry
73%
more influence
than vendor-
created content.

Source: The Hidden Psychology: Why 92% of B2B Buyers Trust Strangers More Than Your Sales Team

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7. MEASURE SMARTER

If buyers are nearly 70% of the way through their purchasing process before they engage with sales, last-click attribution captures only a fraction of what actually influences decisions.⁸ The problem is structural.

A buyer who first encountered a brand in a specialist press article, heard it discussed at a conference, read the customer newsletter for three months and then Googled the company name before filling in a contact form will show up in a CRM as an organic search lead. The months of brand-building activity that created that conversion is invisible.

Move beyond vanity metrics

Page views, social impressions, email open rates and download counts are indicators of activity, not marketing effectiveness. A report downloaded 5,000 times by people who never engage with the brand again is worth less than one downloaded 200 times by senior decision-makers in target accounts who forward it to colleagues.

Measuring what is easy to track needs to shift to measuring what matters: account-level engagement, pipeline influence, sales-cycle length in accounts where marketing was active versus those where it was not, and the quality of the conversations sales teams are having.

Build a hybrid measurement model

No single attribution model captures the full picture. A practical approach combines three complementary methods:

1. **Multi-touch attribution** to understand which tracked channels contribute to pipeline.
2. **Self-reported attribution** – asking customers directly how they heard about the brand and what influenced them – to surface the dark funnel activity that analytics misses.
3. **Signal-based indicators** such as account-level intent data and brand search volume to track awareness that has not yet converted.

This is not a precise science, but it is significantly more honest than a model that attributes 80% of revenue to the last click. And it gives marketing leadership the evidence to defend investment in brand-building activity against the pressure to cut everything that doesn't produce an immediate, trackable return.

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BE OUTSTANDING

WHAT MARCOMMS SPECIALISTS BRING TO THE PARTY

The brands that will win the battle for B2B attention now and in the future are not those that produce the most content or spend the most on paid media.

They are those that build genuine authority, communicate a consistent and distinctive perspective, and create the conditions for trust to develop across channels, over time, and across the full complexity of the modern B2B buying committee.

This is not a series of isolated tactics. It is a system.

A clear point of view, expressed consistently through PR, content, digital activity and sales enablement. A structured approach to content that works across formats, channels and audiences. A deliberate focus on visibility, credibility and advocacy in places that cannot be directly controlled or measured.

Most organisations recognise the individual components of this system. Few have the internal structure, resource or perspective to connect them in a way that is coherent, sustained and effective.

This is where specialist marcomms expertise makes a difference.

Not as an additional layer of activity, but as a way of bringing clarity and cohesion to what already exists: aligning messaging, strengthening narrative, translating internal expertise into external authority, and ensuring that each activity reinforces the next rather than competing with it.

Because standing out in today's B2B environment is rarely about doing something completely different.

It is about doing the fundamentals exceptionally well, in a way that is consistent, credible and recognisable over time.

Outstanding B2B communications does not mean being everywhere.

It does mean being credible, consistent and worthy of attention on the channels that matter to the audience you're trying to reach.





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