The Imaginarium

A snapshot of insights, benchmarks, and learnings from leading CMOs about challenges and opportunities for B2B marketing in 2024 and beyond

The State of the B2B CMO

2024 edition

Foreword

…Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

– Dover Beach, Matthew Arnold

Friends and Family,

You'll be quite surprised to know that Matthew Arnold was describing the dawn of modernity, and not the current state of B2B marketing. While there is chaos at our door, we won't forget his rallying cry of hope, "Let us be true to one another..."

In April this year, about 50 of the most remarkable CMOs in the industry came together at **The Imaginarium Summit** to engage in a two-day-long dialogue about the future of B2B marketing. Your beloved friends at The Imaginarium, **Anteriad**, and **Octane11** built this report as an extension of that experience, working with many of the CMOs who attended. We tried to move beyond the standard litany of challenges and have our CMO friends discuss the reality of what's happening behind closed doors.

What you'll find in this report are excerpts from discussions that collectively give an authentic look at what your peers are thinking about and how they're approaching it. Then, we offer a quick take to try and synthesize those thoughts into tangible action items. Working together with our partners at Anteriad and Octane11 allows us to provide some very powerful data that adds more context and insights.

What we learned is that the B2B CMO's existence today is one of paradox. On the one hand, they are the architects of compelling narratives, shaping their brand's voice and crafting experiences that resonate with customers in a crowded digital landscape. On the other, they are also expected to be fluent in the language of data — translating numbers into actionable insights, predicting behaviors, and justifying every marketing dollar spent.

It's remarkable to hear how brilliant marketing leaders are navigating the complexities of their changing role, always keeping the goals of the business and their CEO and CFO engaged and aligned. There are interesting takes and some surprises along the way. Lots about AI – although with a genuine focus (we'd like to believe) on the real job to be done with this new technology and less shock and awe. Of course, there's a strong emphasis on the importance of using ABM systemically, but also some real concern with how broadly some of the ABM platforms have evolved. We cover a wide range of topics, from Ehrenberg Bass to the Brier (Noah Brier that is) Hierarchy of Needs.

As the world around us continues to evolve, the B2B CMO is becoming more and more of a modern alchemist — mixing creativity and technology, data and vision, innovation and leadership. It's an endlessly complex role that requires a blend of strategic acumen, operational excellence, and boundless curiosity. In an ever-shifting landscape, the B2B CMO is learning to push their organizations into uncharted territory with an indefatigable mix of optimism and skill.

I hope you enjoy The Imaginarium's first State of the B2B CMO report — and please don't hesitate to reach out to any of us if you are ever looking for a partner to help with marketing services, B2B measurement, or B2B data who share the same spirit of optimism and passion. Great things ahead!

Scott Stedman
CEO, The Imaginarium

Lynn Tornabene
CMO, Anteriad

Dan Rosenberg
CEO, Octane11

The Imaginarium

The Imaginarium is one of the preeminent B2B marketing agencies supporting both large global brands, and scaling enterprise software and SaaS. Working with companies like American Express, EY, BlueConic, Rapid7 and more we help create a unified go-to-market strategy with a clear account-based approach. Check out more at imaginarium.agency.

OCTANE11

Octane11 is an AI-powered marketing analytics platform — for B2B companies only — that synthesizes paid, owned, and earned marketing, sales, and CRM data to deliver instant insights. We help B2B-focused agencies and enterprises to improve marketing efficiency by 10x, deliver 5x more sales leads, and compare performance to 25 industry benchmarks. Octane11 also hosts the “11 Minutes with Octane11” Podcast featuring lightning-round interviews with B2B marketing leaders sharing tips and tricks for B2B excellence. Launched in 2020, Octane11 is already helping some of the largest B2B enterprises and agencies break down data silos and turn every digital interaction into an actionable insight.

Anteriad

Anteriad empowers B2B marketers to connect with their next customer and stay ahead of the competition. Trusted by leading brands like IBM, Microsoft, Forbes, SHRM, and Lenovo, they deliver privacy-compliant B2B data, advanced analytics, and multichannel execution across full- and self-service models. Anteriad’s award-winning Marketing Cloud tracks over 500 billion buyer signals monthly, providing top-rated intent data that drives demand and delivers measurable ROI. With expertise in BDR/SDR services in 26 languages and expert advisory, Anteriad supports full-funnel global marketing efforts. Start creating your future today—learn more at anteriad.com.

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Chief Brand Officer, TIAA

Zara Mirza

Zara Mirza is one of the most impactful brand creators in B2B. From her transformation of GE, to the way her work is reframing the annuities category for TIAA, she's brought meaningful success to some of the biggest brands in the world. She emphasizes the importance of making an emotional connection with B2B buyers, a crucial factor in industries with long sales cycles and complex decision-making processes. She sees AI as leveling the playing field, making it easier for companies to produce baseline content, regardless of size or history. With content becoming a commodity, she points out that brand differentiation is more critical than ever, as buyers increasingly seek partners with shared values and purpose, especially when decisions can span decades.

Building a big brand from the bottom to the top

Successful branding starts with understanding the product and the consumer. By focusing on product-level differentiation and addressing customer concerns, businesses set the stage for effective and relatable campaigns that resonate with their audience, ultimately driving engagement, loyalty, and long-term business growth. "You have to start at the bottom and build the story from the product out. That's what we did. We asked: what are the product barriers? We started there and used all of the emotive resonance of the brand to help unlock and overcome those barriers."

Our take:

By doing the hard work of understanding the brand at the most tactical level, marketing leadership will be better positioned to build a brand that unifies the disparate jobs to be done by each area of the marketing system — and can come to life using emotional messaging that resonates throughout the whole marketing system.

Simple language can unlock complex B2B markets

In B2B marketing, where products are often perceived as difficult to understand, clear and simple language can go a long way. "We spent a lot of time unpacking the barriers to our products. You've really got to lean into the complexity, and our job as marketers is to make that simple. Start using more everyday language — that's where you can put all of your uniqueness." Simplifying jargon-heavy concepts can break down barriers to understanding and make it easier for everyone on the buying committee considering your product to understand its value.

Our take:

Ogilvy famously said, "The customer isn't a moron, she's your wife." There's a real person on the other side of the conversation. If the way you go to market would confuse a friend, it's probably not particularly compelling to your customer. Simplify your language and use clear, relatable terminology that resonates with both B2B buyers and end consumers.

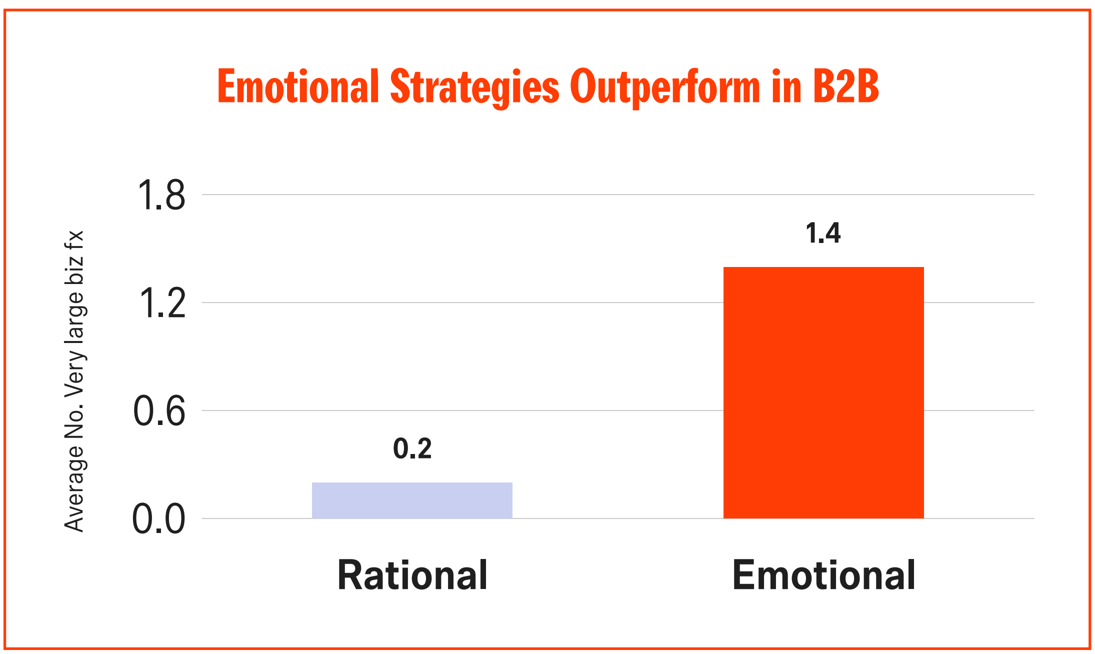
In an AI-driven world, brand becomes a key differentiator

As AI levels the playing field for content creation, brand differentiation becomes increasingly important. "Content that used to be a premium is now the cost of entry. Everything's going to look pretty much the same. So the role of brand is going to be increasingly more important." Companies need to re-discover the emotional aspects of their brand — purpose, values, and unique points of view, and bring them to life for buyers as true differentiating factors that create a memorable connection extending the actual product.

Our take:

As AI delivers more and more content, brands that can deliver the unexpected in a way that is brand-specific will have the advantage in a sea of sameness — delivering benefits to every stage of the funnel and to the broader business itself.

Emotional Ads Deliver More Revenue, Profit, and Market Share Growth than Rational Ads



IPA Databank, 1998-2019 B2B cases, from "Cashing in on Creativity," B2B Marketing Institute

Founder, Alephic

Noah Brier

Noah Brier is one of marketing's great entrepreneurs, having founded the early social media management platform Percolate. As impresario and founder of the pre-eminent conference about GenAI's impact on marketing, BrXnd, he frequently addresses both the promise and reality of GenAI. As Noah points out, we often don't fully understand what problems artificial intelligence is actually best suited to solve. He recommends that leaders start by circulating access throughout the organization, then layer in specific human expertise to amplify impact. He has recently launched his new venture Alephic to help large brands identify and create opportunity with AI.

Prioritizing strategic use-cases for AI

Where to get started? Everyone is looking for a foothold to begin using AI in their own business. "The hardest question I get is: what are the top three use cases? There's just not a good answer because it can do anything. You have to try and identify what you need — what are the best kinds of problems personally for you to solve with AI? The best kinds of problems to solve with AI are the ones where you have the most unique point of view."

Our take:

Start by doing what only you can do. GenAI is a tool — and using that tool to amplify your own knowledge and talent is how you can drive immediate impact. Not only will you have a better sense of how good the output is, but you'll focus on the work you know needs to get done.

Feedback over generation

It's very exciting to watch as AI spins new creative concepts out of nothing more than a prompt. That said, there's a complex alchemy to meaningful creative work. Instead of relying on AI for net-new generation, use it for a use case where it offers an immediate benefit: feedback. Using AI as a feedback tool allows you to retain creative ownership while refining work. "I have found a much more fruitful way to get people engaged with AI is to recommend that they use it for feedback on their own work and their own writing." This approach allows individuals to enhance their creativity and output without feeling overwhelmed (or overtaken) by the technology. Prioritizing feedback allows teams to gradually incorporate AI into their workflow while maintaining creative control and driving quality improvements.

Our take:

Easy does it using GenAI to generate net-new creative. Automating creativity to generate worse content slows down the change management necessary to implement new tech. Instead, use GenAI to get nuanced feedback on your work from a variety of perspectives and personas that help your team become faster and better.

Amplifying talent

The most talented members of your team are invariably bogged down with enormous amounts of work that is only tangential to their real superpowers. When integrated systemically, AI can help scale the expertise of these top performers by super-charging their output and removing the friction that wastes their time. “The outcome can be that you can amplify the effectiveness of that person by five or ten times. And that can have [...] downstream effects into [...] the organization and everything else.” By creating systems around individuals who are highly skilled, marketing organizations can amplify their impact and efficiency.

Our take:

Unleash the beast! You know who we’re talking about. That person on your team who generates breakthrough work every time, that colleague who is simply irreplaceable. Use GenAI to amplify their work and discover the 10x worker we’ve all dreamed of.

Brier’s Hierarchy of Needs

Impact: Solving high-leverage problems

At the top of the pyramid is the strategic application of AI. This involves identifying high-impact areas where AI can be used to solve complex, high-leverage problems. Here, AI isn’t just a support tool — it’s built into systems that deliver the same level of quality as the top performers in the organization. The impact of this approach can amplify the effectiveness of key individuals by five or ten times, leading to organizational growth, increased efficiency, and an evolved structure that maximizes the potential of AI-driven systems.

Expertise: Amplifying top performers and distributing excellence

The second layer focuses on helping individuals within the organization understand how to best utilize AI. This isn’t just about improving operational efficiency — it’s about taking the expertise of standout performers and distributing that excellence across the organization. By teaching key team members how to create AI prompts and workflows that reflect their unique skills, companies can scale their top talent and raise the bar for everyone. AI becomes a tool for amplifying expertise and making it more accessible to everyone.

Access: Empowering the organization with AI tools

The foundation of the framework is democratizing access to cutting-edge AI models like Claude, GPT-4, etc. Organizations need to equip their teams with the right tools and models, giving them the ability to tap into AI technology. This stage is about democratizing AI across the marketing organization, ensuring everyone has access to the resources that allow them to experiment, learn, and integrate AI into their workflows.

Chief Digital Marketer,
EY Americas

Lou Cohen

Lou Cohen is the Chief Digital Marketer for EY Americas. He is outstandingly passionate about the media landscape and has been a professor of marketing at schools including NYU and Yeshiva University for a decade. Lou shares his perspective on the evolving landscape of B2B marketing, offering a deep dive into the role of AI and first-party data in shaping today's strategies and how businesses can navigate the complexities of digital transformation.

A changed B2B landscape: pre and post pandemic

The pandemic accelerated digital adoption across every industry. B2B marketing was also transformed. "B2B marketing is having its moment, especially over the past few years since COVID. At that time, everyone had a moment of panic, wondering how to reach audiences when they weren't just in the office. But at its core, B2B is still about people. As a result, everyone shifted to digital and virtual engagement, and that has persisted even as people return to offices, work, and life." As digital marketing has become a central part of B2B CMOs' go-to-market, there's an enormous amount of transformation happening and the companies that have invested in marketing automation, CRM, CDPs, and enabling data flow for actionable insights are reaping the benefits.

Our take:

It's nice to finally be the cool kids on the block! Instead of lagging, B2B is leading when it comes to using first party data, finding innovative ways to isolate buying signals like intent, and using a mix of first and third-party data to target audiences. Keep up, you B2C schmos.

The power of pricing is in the hands of fewer and fewer publishers

There is rapid ongoing consolidation that's impacting the cost of media. "Several media companies have been buying up smaller publishers, and DSPs are buying smaller DSPs. As rates come down in the financial markets, consolidation will speed up because it's cheaper to acquire than to build. Less competition means higher prices, so media budgets will likely increase, especially in B2B since we're all targeting the same C-suite executives." Reduced competition leads directly to higher media costs. As these acquisitions continue, the media buying landscape becomes flatter, with advertisers having to navigate relationships with fewer, larger conglomerates.

Our take:

Strategic media planning becomes more important than ever. Consider using Media Mix Modeling (MMM) to stay in front of media trends. Also, as these conglomerates constantly innovate to drive new revenue, pay attention to new ad units that might not yet be discovered but are set to offer tremendous efficiencies (and take a look at our B2B media benchmarking developed in partnership with Octane11).

A unified growth strategy

Aligning account-based marketing (ABM) and demand generation strategies creates a holistic approach to customer acquisition and engagement. “DemandGen and ABM go hand in hand — they’re like twin siblings and really need to work together. DemandGen is about prospecting for new business, while ABM focuses on people you already know. The journey over the last few years with first-party data has been all about moving people from unknown to known. Once someone is known, you can start using ABM because you have that information. Frankly, any B2B company that doesn’t invest in an ABM strategy is five to ten years behind where they should be. That said, relying solely on an ABM strategy for your known touchpoints without prospecting for new revenue is a missed opportunity.”

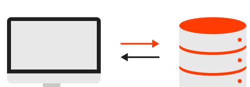
Our take:

At the end of the day, all B2B marketing is inherently account-based, making it essential to integrate DemandGen and ABM. By unifying efforts around the language of the “account,” CMOs can create a seamless strategy that drives new leads while effectively engaging known targets, leveraging intent signals to maximize impact.

Understanding the Data

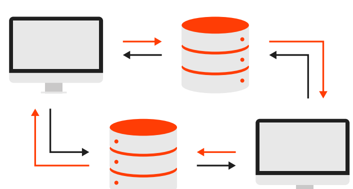
It’s absolutely critical that the teams working with data understand where it’s from and how it’s being used. Take a look at The Imaginarium’s Data Dictionary to find a great tool for unifying your team’s data knowledge and to make sure you’re all reading from the same playbook.

1st Party Data



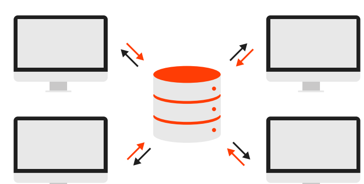
Data that is collected via a direct relationship with the person/device

2nd Party Data



Data that is shared between a data provider and their partners

3rd Party Data



Data that is collected without a direct relationship with the person/device

Chief Marketing and Impact Officer, TIME

Sadé Muhammad

As Sadé Muhammad reflects on her journey as the Chief Marketing and Impact Officer at the 100-year-old global media brand TIME, she notes that early in her tenure, market research revealed a key challenge: while advertisers always respected TIME, there was opportunity for more authentic connections. Sadé took this as a call to redefine the brand's appeal. She recognized that TIME's events and platforms foster a sense of aspiration and belonging — her goal became to strengthen those connections while creating a more inclusive experience.

Understanding your customer

TIME is an iconic and universally known brand that needed to re-imagine its relationship with its current customers. "Whether people experience TIME digitally, socially, or at our events, there's a sense of aspiration, inspiration, and a feeling that being among these people means something — it signifies that I've made it in some way. We wanted to tap into that sense of community and explore the communities we're not currently serving. So, we approached it by asking: who do we want to serve that we're not reaching? Younger people, people of color — identifying these communities. Then, what's the editorial vision that feels like TIME, and how do we activate and bring that to life in a way that feels fresh? It's about shifting the perspective so that people feel they can truly be part of the brand, rather than just seeing it on a newsstand or a cover on the wall." By taking the time and space to earnestly listen to their community, TIME found a clear way to not only provide their audience with what they were looking for, but also to package new experiences for brand partners.

Our take:

Your customer is everything. Great CMOs are constantly assessing not only who they are reaching but also who might be overlooked. The more you understand how your customer of tomorrow relates to your brand, the more you'll find ways to connect with them — and those connections will lead to growth.

Using creativity to maximize what you've got right now

Innovation doesn't always require a larger budget or a bigger team; often, it's about rethinking the assets at hand. Even with limited resources, TIME demonstrated that creativity could thrive by leveraging existing teams. "We couldn't increase our resources, but we could use those resources in a different way. And we figured the best way to do that was to get specific about different tentpoles (like) climate, health, AI [...] that we knew would resonate." By focusing on these high-impact topics, TIME was able to create new offerings such as TIME 100 AI, TIME 100 Health, and TIME 100 Climate — all without significant budget implications.

Our take:

George Perec wrote an entire novel without the letter "e." Creativity is as much about reimagining what's possible within existing constraints as it is about generating new ideas.

Navigating internal stakeholder buy-in

Keep the CFO excited! Creative success isn't achieved in isolation; it must resonate both externally and internally by showing clear benefits for all stakeholders. "I've tried to figure out what's the win for every single stakeholder that has nothing to do with what the win is from a marketing perspective." By achieving the necessary internal buy-in, TIME's creative initiatives not only aligned with broader business goals, but also played a key role in engaging employees, driving retention, and meeting financial performance targets.

Our take:

You can't do this alone. It takes big bucks to successfully go-to-market. Engage stakeholders early by tying creative projects to their KPIs for swift buy-in and funding.

Reimagined... Community-building

"There's a place for media in the buying strategy, but the conversations are so much richer when the value goes beyond that. Every single time, clients are more engaged and happier. It works better for marketers when they know they'll get the distribution they need, but there's so much more they can take back to their teams about why it matters."

For TIME, community building and live experiences have become key marketing tactics to create genuine connections and drive business results. A prime example is the launch of Impact House on Martha's Vineyard, a three-day initiative designed in partnership with a global financial partner to engage with financially influential leaders in a relaxed, intimate setting. The experience unified TIME's purpose-driven mission to catalyze conversations that drive social impact with the necessity of creating a space for their financial partner to build meaningful business connections to drive growth.

To achieve both, TIME carefully curated the guest list, bringing together the right mix of influential figures from their community and their partner's target audience. The live experience was tailored to spark meaningful interactions that felt genuine rather than transactional. This approach not only allowed the partner to meet their business goals, but also reinforced TIME's ability to leverage its community and programming to deliver high-impact, targeted experiences that resonated both at the live experience and beyond through their global media footprint.

Vice President CX and Corporate Marketing, MetLife

Jaime Punishill

From Citibank to Thomas Reuters, Jaime Punishill has touched all areas of marketing at some of the most famous B2B brands. Working with an incredible team at the iconic MetLife, he's had a first hand look at how a company's rich history and distinctive assets built over a century create deep connections with consumers. He talks about the complexity leading a large global business through transformation – all while delivering on growth both today and tomorrow.

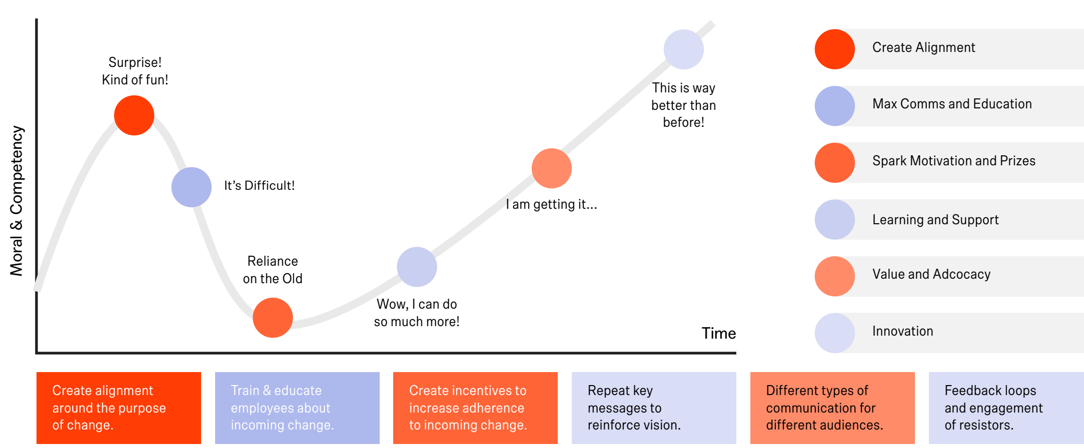
Prioritize strategic wins that build momentum for long-term transformation

During a business' transformation, CMOs must "design, fly, and build the plane at the same time." There's no safety net. Operations need to run smoothly while change takes place. "That's the art — finding meaningful wins that become the seeds of transformation while swapping engines out." Transformation is a process, and it's important to generate a steady cadence of strategic wins that not only solve immediate challenges but also create the momentum needed to push forward larger organizational shifts. These wins act as proof points that can secure buy-in from stakeholders, making it easier to introduce more complex changes down the line — ensuring both short-term success and long-term transformation.

Our take:

A new CMO is often a change-agent. While it's key to offer clear and decisive strategic direction, it's just as important to recognize that without delivering wins along the way, it will be very hard to keep your team and your leadership's buy-in for the duration of the transformation.

Managing change at scale



Source: www.ProServeIT.com

Mine your heritage to understand what makes your brand special

The longevity of a brand like MetLife requires consistency and resilience. While markets and strategies may shift, there's a deep throughline of culture — values, mission, and core identity — that provides stability and enables a brand to endure. When you can tie that culture to the brand's unique heritage — that becomes a brand that can last, well, over a century. "MetLife has a Heritage Room, the original boardroom from the Metropolitan Life Tower, and when you look at it, you see that brand archeology is essential for building a brand. Consistent branding relies on understanding that history. MetLife has been through this amazing 156-year journey, and it's really interesting to dig into that history." By understanding the story of your brand and all the rich and meaningful details of it, you are able to continually refresh the way you communicate, while retaining what makes you unique.

Our take:

The mighty Mark Ritson notes, "Studying a brand's history is not just about looking back — it's also a way to understand where the brand is going." Whether it's a 156-year-old brand or a startup that can only look to the founders and their unique perspectives, a brand's heritage is one of the most powerful ways to bring it to life for its customers.

Auditing your brand's heritage

The story of your brand is the most unique asset you have. Understand your heritage to find the rich and distinctive building blocks that make you unique.

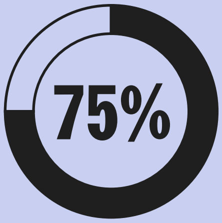
Research brand origins	Investigate the founders, the brand's mission at its founding, and key milestones to understand its beginnings and initial purpose.
Analyze brand evolution	Review changes in logos, design, and products over time to see how the brand has maintained or evolved its identity.
Review historical communications	Study past advertising, public relations efforts, and key slogans to understand the brand's messaging and public perception.
Gather internal and customer insights	Conduct interviews with long-standing employees, examine internal documents, and analyze customer perceptions to capture both culture and audience views.
Synthesize heritage and legacy	Identify core brand values, emotional connections, and cultural significance to create a coherent narrative around the brand's legacy.

A look into the 2024 B2B Marketing Outlook: The Data Confidence Divide

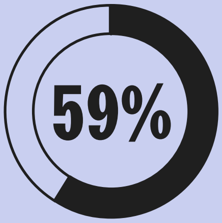
Our partners at Anteriad surveyed 429 B2B marketing leaders about how they felt about their data strategy, reaching evolving audiences, and fostering authenticity. See an excerpt of the results below.

Data Strategy is vital to performance

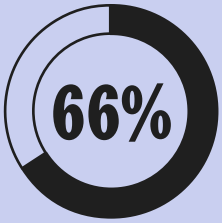
3x Confidence in data strategy is directly correlated with improved results. Marketers who report they are highly confident that they have the right data strategy in place are 3x more likely to have seen a significant increase in revenue in the last year. When we dig deeper into the data, we uncover that the marketers with best-in-class data strategies share some unique brand values compared to their peers and place more importance on authenticity, transparency, and innovation. They focus on authenticity to drive engagement throughout the buying journey.



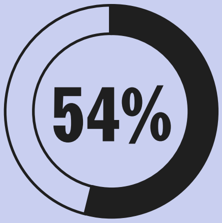
75% of these marketers consider authenticity in brand messaging to a great extent compared to 58% of their peers.



59% of all marketers rank authenticity among their most important brand attributes. It’s the most common attribute reported among marketers, ranking above customer-centricity, transparency, consistency, and innovation. Introducing the Authenticity Acrobats.



This high-flying group consists of the 66% of those surveyed that say they consider authenticity in their brand messaging to a great extent. They stand out because they report better outcomes than those who consider authenticity to a lesser extent. Plus, Authenticity Acrobats report more confidence in their data strategy and that they are personalizing campaigns effectively.



54% of Authenticity Acrobats report they are extremely confident in their data strategy compared to just 34% of the rest of the marketers surveyed.

Authenticity matters.

Anteriad

Check out this QR code to download the full report.

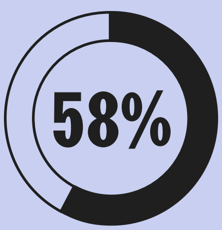
Data quality is a top challenge (and priority)

The vast majority of marketers agree that integrating technology and improving data quality are top challenges in executing an effective go-to-market (GTM) strategy. These challenges are what they're prioritizing improving in the year ahead. Marketers understand that data quality drives better results and they are prioritizing improving it; 60% of marketers reported that improving data quality is a top challenge and 66% reported that improving data quality is a top priority.

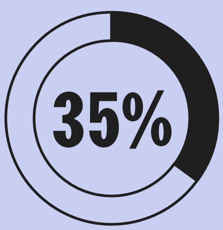
The story of your brand is the most unique asset you have. Understand your heritage to find the rich and distinctive building blocks that make you unique.

	Challenges	Priorities
Improving data quality	60%	66%
Integrating technology	64%	61%
Enabling opportunities for self-service	35%	35%
Aligning sales and marketing on GTM objectives	49%	50%
Testing/implementing new tactics	56%	51%

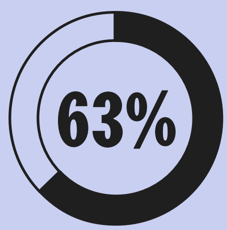
Expand your audience:



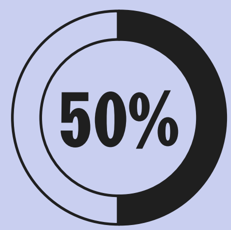
58% of marketers are working on expanding their audience to new demographics and market segments in 2024.



Another 35% report maintaining their current audience targeting strategy, while just 5% will focus on narrowing their audience to more niche markets or specific industries.



Two-thirds (63%) of marketers report that reaching the right audience is a top challenge as they work to create continuity in the buying journey.



About half of marketers also report that sourcing the right data and determining the right channel mix are top challenges.

As businesses look to expand their audience, they must be able to use data to build custom audiences, target the right customers, and deliver the most engaging message. But this is easier said than done.

2x Audience expansion can be the key to growing lead pipeline. Our Authenticity Acrobats are more likely to report expanding their audience in the coming year. They're also 2x more likely to expect an increase in lead pipeline in 2024 than those who don't value authenticity.

Co-Founder, Evidenza

Jon Lombardo

As an original member of LinkedIn's B2B Institute, Jon Lombardo's been one of the most vocal freethinkers in B2B marketing. He has codified some of the most powerful B2B marketing insights and practices through work with Les Binet, Byron Sharp, Mark Ritson and others. Evidenza, Jon's latest venture with his fellow B2B Institute alum Peter Weinberg (affectionately known as the Statler and Waldorf of B2B marketing), offers synthetic customer insights at scale to help B2B marketers build mental availability and salience for brands.

Don't drop the ball on brand

Short-sighted emphasis on lower-funnel metrics is a common issue in B2B marketing. It comes at the expense of creativity and brand and over time costs businesses enormous amounts of money by making buying cycles longer, and burning through opportunities. "It's irrational to believe that everybody wants to buy now […} investing in a brand campaign increases mental availability across buying situations and makes either the sales job or the marketing conversion faster, cheaper, [and] better." While it's difficult to quantify the immediate financial returns of top-of-funnel initiatives, investing in campaigns to keep your brand at top of mind ensures buyers are more likely to choose you when they're ready to make a decision, making the sales process easier and reducing long-term acquisition costs.

Our take:

Brand matters as much in B2B as it does in any other category. Maybe even more, since it's the one thing that the entire buying committee shares. Ensuring that your brand remains highly visible and easily recognized by your prospects across key buying situations will ultimately enhance both short-term and long-term marketing effectiveness, while reducing friction for the sales team.

AI makes market research available at the scale of B2B

AI is revolutionizing market research in B2B marketing by making collecting and analyzing insights significantly easier and faster, reducing the time and cost barriers that have often limited B2B marketers. "You can do segmentation 100 times in a day […and] AI helps you do that much faster […] You can think about what are the needs and then what's the financial value of all those needs that can rank them from top to bottom." AI's ability to uncover hidden patterns and analyze the financial value of specific customer segments enables marketers to prioritize high-value opportunities and tailor campaigns more effectively. This increased accessibility and precision ensure that B2B marketing teams can leverage AI to gain deeper, faster, and more accurate insights, driving more competitive and effective marketing strategies.

Our take:

CMOs should adopt AI-driven market research tools to enhance the speed, accuracy, and depth of their data insights. Leverage AI for a range of tasks, from customer segmentation to uncovering patterns in buyer behavior, and use these insights to inform key marketing decisions. Just as importantly, use these insights to develop the distinctive assets that will build mental availability to help make sure your brand is considered when it matters most.

Ehrenberg Bass should be impacting your work… if you've heard of it

The concept of mental availability was pioneered by The Ehrenberg Bass Institute's (EBI) Byron Sharp. For the past fifteen years it's been the foundation of how sophisticated B2C brands use marketing to build consideration at the "category entry point." Through the efforts of LinkedIn's B2B Institute, these concepts have been slowly making their way into B2B. "There are three revolutions right now: B2B, AI, and the Ehrenberg Bass Institute. I ask people, 'Have you heard of the Ehrenberg Bass Institute? If so, raise your hand.' And nobody raises their hand. You know, apropos of mental availability. Ehreneberg Bass has a huge mental availability problem […] Practitioners like us have to link all these core concepts to financial value."

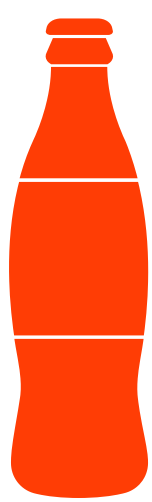
Our take:

Ehrenberg Bass' principles around mental availability, category entry points, and distinctive assets are foundational to good marketing. The data around the importance of brand in driving consideration by people like Les Binet and Peter Fields is irrefutable at this point. Considering the principles of EBI should be a cornerstone of any B2B marketing strategy.

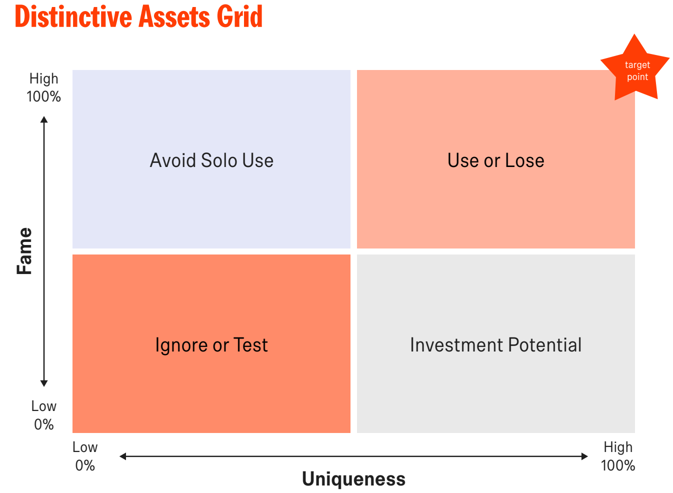
A word on distinctive assets

The brilliant Jenni Romaniuk first created and coined the concept of "Distinctive Assets" – the idea that brand is basically comprised of elements that are both uniquely identified with that brand and also famous. For example, when considering Coca Cola, we might think that Coke's "red" is a powerful asset. However, while it's very famous, it's not actually unique to Coke. The coke bottle on the other hand is both unique and famous – and therefore a much stronger asset. Since the goal of a "brand" is to allow your product to be considered at the point of purchase, using your distinctive assets across all of your performance marketing is one of the most powerful ways to make sure that you're driving brand and demand at the same time.

Romaniuk, J. (2018). Distinctive Asset Measurement. Ehrenberg-Bass. https://www.marketingscience.info/research-services/distinctive-assets/



Distinctive Assets Grid



VP of Marketing Data and Audience Strategy, SAP

Teresa Joy

As an executive at Dell, 6sense, and most recently SAP, Teresa Joy has worked with some of the largest B2B businesses in the world. Teresa discusses the current complexity in B2B marketing, such as overlapping tech stacks, the pressure to justify the impact of marketing on revenue, the intricate data landscape, and the ongoing pursuit of perfect attribution, with the wise warning that when it comes to data and attribution models — one size certainly does not fit all.

The two pillars of building an effective attribution model

1. Align attribution models with specific business objectives for maximum impact

Measurement is a tool to optimize performance — therein lies the challenge. When choosing the right attribution model, it's impossible to optimize without identifying what performance means to your organization. "What are you using attribution for? Are you using attribution to drive conversions, optimizations, or increase engagements? All three answers have a different way to look at attribution." For example, a last-touch model might ignore the role of paid media in building brand awareness, even though awareness ultimately accelerates the B2B sales cycle.

Our take:

The selection of an attribution model is not a one-size-fits-all decision; CMOs need to be clear on their organization's objectives and evaluate the stages of the buyer's journey to ensure their chosen model reflects the weight of each interaction.

2. Embrace the complexity of marketing data for effective attribution

Accurate, comprehensive data plays a crucial role in creating effective attribution models. This realization has never been more important given the changing landscape of B2B data. "Your attribution model is only as good as the data driving it. You can have the most sophisticated technology, but if your data isn't accurate, the results won't be either." Right now, many companies don't have a strong understanding of where their data comes from, which makes it impossible to develop strong attribution models or accurate segmentation.

Our take:

Get smart on data. Not every CMO has a data background — if you don't have the knowledge, find an agency partner who can be an impartial support (and check out our Data Dictionary to gain a shared understanding of the current B2B data ecosystem). You need to get your data right for the system to work.

Achieving cross-functional alignment with ABX

Account-based experience

Account-based experience, or ABX, is the most powerful way to unify marketing with sales, allowing both teams to engage customers holistically. "We call it account-based experiences because both sales and marketing have a role to play. It starts with speaking the language of the account. Sales has been chasing marketing alignment forever and marketing has been chasing sales alignment forever. There's no perfect solution to it. A couple of ways we're doing it is with joint planning — looking at our ICP and the market that we want to go after in a very similar way, and aligning measurement — we talk about the same metrics and have very clear handoffs between sales and marketing. Ultimately, sales and marketing are trying to do the same thing, which is to drive revenue and growth. It doesn't need to be a competition, it should be a collaboration, because one without the other does not really succeed."

Our take:

Don't settle for tactical ABM when you can create a systemic account-based go-to-market that unifies the currency between marketing and sales. By making your planning and measurement account-based, you're able to achieve a truly cohesive go-to-market.

How ABX differs from traditional marketing

	Traditional marketing	ABX
Targeting	Casts a wide net, targeting a broad audience to generate leads.	Focuses on a select group of high-value accounts that align with the ideal customer profile.
Personalization	Uses generic messages and campaigns for a broad audience.	Tailors messaging and campaigns to individual accounts, addressing their specific needs and challenges.
Relationship-building	Focuses on lead generation and nurturing, with less emphasis on building personalized relationships.	Prioritizes building strong relationships by understanding the unique dynamics of each account and delivering personalized experiences.
Alignment	Works independently from the sales team, potentially resulting in a disconnect between marketing-generated leads and sales objectives.	Aligns marketing and sales efforts by jointly defining target accounts and developing strategies to engage them, leading to better collaboration and higher conversion rates.
Approach	Takes a broader, mass-market approach, aiming to capture a larger audience.	Takes a focused, account-centric approach, investing resources in a smaller set of high-value accounts.

CMO,
BlueConic

Patrick Reynolds

Patrick Reynolds' career has spanned iconic ad agencies like Hill Holiday and renowned brands like Mastercard. Now, as CMO of the rapidly growing CDP BlueConic, he observes the evolving role of the B2B marketer in a tech-driven landscape. Patrick shares insights on maintaining a human touch in marketing, even as technology expands possibilities, offering a thoughtful perspective on navigating complexity while balancing analytics with instinct.

Balancing technology with human intuition

It's a real challenge to empower teams to be successful in the wake of "marketing fracking," where tasks have become broken down into small, technology-driven activities. While data-driven platforms provide granular insights, information overload can fragment efforts. "We don't need all the data, just the right data." Marketers must focus on actionable insights without losing sight of human intuition. There's still "a place for guts, taste, and feel" in decisions. "Don't lose your humanity among the tech; you still need people with human qualities to make great work."

Our take:

Remember, at the end of the day all the data in the world dies at the door of mediocre execution. Use audience insights to fuel your intuition and spur breakthrough creativity.

Drive business results, not marketing performance

CMOs are more likely to communicate the impact of marketing if they can shine a light on what the marketing team knows about customers. It's not — "oh, they opened this email or we had this many impressions." The key is to go beyond metrics and the parlance that marketers are so used to speaking among one another. "The number one advice I always give people is talk business talk, don't talk marketing talk." The impact of marketing must be "conveyed and communicated in a way that the rest of the organization at a senior level can understand what role they play and how they add value to this matrix approach that we're taking to market."

Our take:

Marketers are storytellers who must know who is listening to the story they are telling. If you're expected to impact the business, then you need to understand the business. Translate the work being done into terms your CEO and CFO partners understand. The best CMOs are true counterparts to their fellow leaders — and not just great marketing tacticians.

Technology generally has a job to be done, make sure it does it

In B2B there's been a proliferation of powerful new digital solutions, from ABM platforms, intent data, marketing automation, GenAI and more. Technology platforms' capabilities have increasingly blurred together. "I don't want 99 different marketing vendors to deal with, but I do want those vendors that are best at what they do and that's generally not the person that does everything." It's important to identify what job needs to be done by your technology partner, and make sure that's what it's being used for.

Our take:

Don't be wowed by the promise of tech platforms. Understand that each platform has a unique capability. Understand where the data comes from, and make sure that however you assemble an integrated tech stack, you know exactly why it's there, and how your team will use it to get the job done.

ABX Platforms: What is the real job being done?

When choosing the best platform for your business, it's important to focus on the job that's being done so that you choose the platform with the right capabilities for you. Also, be prepared for the internal changes necessary for the platform to work. Contact The Imaginarium if you've got any questions about what platform is right for you — or if you really need one at all.

Predictive analytics

ABX platforms heavily weight intent data to help you find "in-market" accounts within your Ideal Customer Profile (ICP). Using a mix of other signals, like website visitation and CRM data, these platforms are able to create account prioritization that can help develop high priority Target Account Lists (TALs).

Programmatic bidder

You can seamlessly target those high priority accounts programmatically using a programmatic bidder (typically built on Zander, Trade Desk, or Beeswax technology).

Account-Based Analytics

You can measure performance at an account level across the TALs that you've bought media against.

The unification of predictive analytics, programmatic bidding, and account based analytics is incredibly powerful and the foundation of a good ABX motion, but each of these jobs can also be disintermediated from each other to create powerful point solutions, or be efficiently managed by a great service partner. Using a partner has the great advantage of not being self-service, which takes away all the friction of "change management" that often accompanies the implementation of new technology. It's important to understand what's best for both your business and your culture before getting locked into a long contract.

CMO,
Tishman Speyer

Alicia Parker

Alicia Parker is the CMO of Tishman Speyer. From Rockefeller Center to Harvard University's life sciences and technology destination, Tishman Speyer owns real estate in 35 different geographies across the globe. Alicia shares her excitement about the evolving role of a B2B CMO in today's dynamic landscape. With an abundance of channels, innovative strategies, and unprecedented access to data, CMOs are now equipped with powerful tools to drive business growth. Team prioritization around data-driven goals and strategic focus can be a key competitive advantage and help create alignment across the organization. That alignment is integral in getting fellow leaders to support the marketing team's initiatives.

Bringing the CFO to the party

CMOs can't achieve their goals without aligning with their leadership team, particularly the CFO — and achieving that alignment requires empathy. "The number one thing is to understand the business and you're not going to do that by having conversations with yourself and only with the marketing team. So the best way to do that is really to figure out what is important to your key business partners and figure out how you can partner with them to unlock what's possible." When forged with empathy, these partnerships not only provide insights that inform creative marketing initiatives but also ensure that the marketing team's efforts are aligned with broader business goals.

Our take:

The best way to smash the silos between marketing, sales, and other business units is to create allies in the leadership team. Make sure they understand how you are helping them accomplish their goals so that they have the patience to let the hard work of marketing pay off.

Demanding the space to innovate

Without stakeholder alignment, marketers are playing defense, which doesn't allow the space for innovation. B2B must adopt a growth mindset — the era of set-it-and-forget-it strategies is over. "The reality is that getting your stakeholders comfortable with that test and learning model is what is essential. Because what gets you here does not get you there. And you very quickly can see that strategies that worked 12 months ago are not strategies that are necessarily going to continue to work in the same way."

Our take:

Don't let yourself get stuck in the B2B hamster wheel. Make sure you have the space to do your job properly — and that means having the same latitude to innovate with rigorous testing that other key areas of the business have.

Creating clear priorities

Today's B2B CMOs are asked to be creative leaders, data scientists, MarTech experts, and everything in between. In such a marketing landscape, developing a clear strategy that allows teams to focus on the right initiatives is crucial for driving meaningful business impact. "It comes down to prioritization [...] the number one thing that B2B CMOs need to do and need to think about is focus and where they're going to put that focus."

Our take:

Good strategy is about decision-making. It's as much about choosing what not to do as what to do.

Reimagined... Partnerships

"The big wins are when we deliver something in partnership [...] it's about finding what's unique about the product and really getting it out there."

Strategic partnerships at Tishman Speyer have proven to be a powerful marketing tactic, blending innovation, community engagement, and unique experiences to reinforce the brand's values. A standout example is the collaboration with the San Francisco Giants on the Mission Rock development. Leveraging the scenic views from the property during a baseball game, Tishman Speyer created social media content that went viral – a very hard feat for real estate marketing. This partnership highlighted the importance of outdoor spaces and meaningful collaborations, demonstrating the company's commitment to enhancing community and experience.

At Rockefeller Center, Tishman Speyer has used partnerships to create diverse, community-driven events with a focus on emotional resonating content. A notable activation was the Paris Olympics, where NBC, a tenant and partner, helped transform the plaza into an immersive Olympic experience. The emotional reactions of visitors — some moved to tears viewing the opening ceremony in the space — reinforced the value of being centered in an iconic space, like Rockefeller Center, where art, culture, and business intersect. These strategic collaborations not only create memorable experiences but also solidify the brand's role in connecting people and places through shared values and innovative partnerships.

Founder, Octane11

Dan Rosenberg

Dan Rosenberg has been a leader in programmatic marketing and measurement throughout his career. As a leader at MediaMath, he's an innovative thinker who lives and breathes the complexity of how to deliver media at scale to the right audiences. Most recently, he's put all his attention — wisely — into the challenges of B2B marketers with founding Octane11, an omni-channel, account-based measurement platform for B2B.

Using data to find "blue ocean" efficiencies before your competitors

If you're only relying on trends, the signal you think you're seeing is probably the same one that every other CMO is already chasing. Without paying close attention to the data, and making optimizations in real time, you're likely paying a premium for media that the rest of your competitors are using. "The number one thing that's really important in B2B as a CMO is just breaking through the clutter. And the minute there's a good idea that people recognize, it becomes obsolete. That cycle is getting faster and shorter. It's just another reason why you just have to have that data at your fingertips to be really able to jump in and be fast reacting to take advantage of those windows of opportunity."

Our take:

While it's important to take a test-and-learn mindset to find new efficiencies, that's not possible without robust, account-based measurement so that you can find the signal that relates to your unique audiences.

Optimizing execution across so many different channels

"The mirror image of the measurement side is the challenge of fragmentation on the execution side. It's really hard to execute and take advantage of all these amazing channels. There are always new channels emerging, and you need to understand them — the creative, the copy, all those aspects that will suit each channel best. And that's why there's great value in agency partners who can help with execution."

Our take:

Well, we couldn't agree more. Agencies and marketing services partners don't only act as an extension of your team but are thought leaders who are living and breathing these challenges every day. Thanks for the throw, Dan!

Using measurement to generate a holistic picture that brings sales and marketing together

Unifying sales and marketing has been a holy grail for B2B CMOs for decades. It's challenging when the two sides of the growth organization speak a different language. Finally, with account-based measurement, the CMO can offer a unified look at what marketing is doing in the language of the sales team by using the same ID as their beloved CRM: the account. "Our clients need to connect the dots by ingesting data from all these different tools, enriching that data with account signals. It makes it easy to visualize and understand how all those tactics work together to move customers through their journey and get them to a point where the sales team is ready to engage, close, and upsell them."

Our take:

It's crucial to view ABM as a system and not a tactic. Once you flip that switch and adopt that mindset, suddenly, sales and marketing are playing from the same playbook. As Peter Drucker said, "What gets measured, gets managed." When you have omni-channel account-based measurement you're able to bring the sales organization with you.

Octane11 Media Trends

	Insight	Media Benchmarks
Channel Mix	Using multiple channels per campaign improves effectiveness but has a limit, as paid social has started to take market share from open web ads in 2024.	• Moving from 1 to 2+ channels increases engagement rate by 2.5x, with 4 channels being the sweet spot for CPL. • Paid Social is taking market share YoY (37% of total spend in 2024 versus 23% in 2023). • Open Web Ads are losing market share YoY (30% of total spend in 2024 versus 40% in 2023). • Search continues to be a critical component of the B2B Marketer's media plan with a relatively consistent share of budget YoY.
KPI Trends	CPM costs are down slightly YoY and engagement rates are declining. Format matters for continuing to drive cost-effective engagement.	• Average CPM is 10% lower YoY, though Social is more expensive than Open Web (2-3x higher on average). • Average CPE is 40% higher YoY. Instagram has the highest CPE at $4.23. Google Discovery Ads has the lowest CPE at $0.10. • Engagement rates are steadily declining from Q1 2023 through Q3 2024, though we expect a bump as end-of-year nears.
ABM vs Non ABM	If you're not jumping on the ABM bandwagon, you should be!	• ABM has 2.5x higher CPM, but 4x higher engagement rate.
Funnel	Conversion rates from website visits and form fills are low, making marketing engagements off-site even more important than ever.	• Average web visits to Form Fill is 1.26%, down from 1.93% in 2024. • Average Form Fill to close rate is 2.15%.
Days To Close	Average days-to-close has increased YoY as deal activity is up and competition grows.	• 97 days in 2023 vs. 114 days in 2024.

Conclusion

What a wonderful journey getting to hear all these amazing perspectives from some of the most influential B2B marketers today.

One thing is clear. Our industry is at a point of inflection. There are new technologies and an evolving data marketplace offering new ways to understand our customers and where to reach them. It's clear that in many organizations, the CMO is the guardian of customer insight — we have to generate the data that helps us understand who they are, where they are, and how to speak with them. Our toolbox is tech heavy, and data-centric, but at the end of the day it's all in service of the customer, and using creative communication to speak with them in a memorable way that helps them understand (and buy) our solution.

The opportunities have never been greater — and there's tremendous optimism about marketing budgets growing. Increasingly, CMOs have a seat at the table with the leaders of the business — and the best CMOs are earning it every day with great communication and tight alignment with business goals.

In addition to all the rich insights, I'm also struck by the realization that as things are changing, this space is still very much a work in progress. It's not all figured out and the playbook is not static. That's fun, exciting, and strategic. It also means that a community of peers is more important than ever. The Imaginarium Summit was an incredible experience and we can't wait to meet with a new group of CMOs each Spring to explore all the opportunities available to great CMOs.

The Imaginarium

The State of the B2B CMO