



12 VALUABLE
B2B BRAND INSIGHTS
FOR TODAY'S CEO



#1

Great brand messaging matters most.

B2b marketing evolves, but great brand-based messaging matters most and always comes first.



#1

Great brand messaging matters most.

Remember the fax machine? Some 40 years ago, businesses took advantage of this "emerging technology" to transmit messages faster and easier, and deploy to multiple parties within moments.

Flash forward 20 years. Businesses can communicate with anyone, anywhere in the world. The technology: the Internet. The marketing tool: email. Meanwhile, marketing accelerated at lightning speed as companies built and launched websites. Commerce shifted from regional and localized markets, to one massive global market where borders no longer exist. Not long afterward, businesses started sharing communications real time by tapping into the power of another

communications innovation – social media. LinkedIn was founded in 2002. Facebook and Twitter would follow a few years later.

Today, b2b brands are embracing developments in interactive media, augmented reality, beacon technology, apps, video content, evolving social media platforms, as well as the expansion of utilization of mobile devices. The real world and the virtual one have become increasingly intertwined.

Throughout this remarkable evolution, there is one true constant; one thing that has never changed. The one thing that

mattered most then, matters most now, and will continue to matter most tomorrow: **Creating and delivering great, emotion-based, audience-focused brand messaging.**

Communication devices and delivery systems will most certainly continue to evolve. However, great brands with great brand messaging will make the biggest difference be remembered most.

WHY? Because we connect with the brands that touched us the most, and not the manner in which they reached us.

#1

TAKEAWAY:

First, focus on getting
your message right.

Then, get tactical.



#2



Emotional b2b brands win more customers.

Emotion rules over logic for one very simple but important reason: the stakes are much, much higher.

Emotional b2b brands win more customers.

Marketing skeptics might argue that emotion, or branding has no place in b2b marketing, naively claiming:

- ▶ B2b buyers are rational decision-makers, unmoved by the emotional impact of brands.
- ▶ Sales representatives almost exclusively influence b2b purchases. The salesperson's character, persuasiveness and persona define the brand.
- ▶ B2b brands lack aspirational attributes commonly found in consumer brands, with price being the decisive factor.
- ▶ B2b organizations have more fixed and finite buying audiences, so delivering broader brand awareness seems wasteful.
- ▶ Decisions in choosing b2b products and services are more complex than their b2c counterparts, making them difficult to distill to simple core brand messages or expressions.

The skeptics are wrong.

As long as human beings make b2b buying decisions, emotion will always dominate and blow the detractors away. Here's why: 90% of buying decisions, both b2b and b2c, are decided subconsciously. Simply put, brands that evoke emotions will always win over brands that take a strictly functional messaging approach.

#2

Emotional b2b brands win more customers.

Consider this: You're out grocery shopping one evening with a mental list of items that includes toothpaste for your daughter. Upon arriving home, you realize that you happened to grab the wrong brand. It's a mistake that set you back about \$4, and you have a slightly annoyed daughter.

In contrast, imagine you're the person responsible for purchasing a new high-speed toothpaste-filling machine for your company. You do all your research; make the best possible selection, and as it turns out, the brand of equipment you purchased doesn't run properly.

This mistake can result in lost production time, re-engineering of machinery, disruptions to production schedules, material waste, missed customer orders and more. It could set your company back hundreds of thousands of dollars. It may cost you your job.

Clearly, emotions do matter for b2b brands, because the stakes are always higher. By building the right emotional connections into your brand, you'll stand apart from competitors in the decision-making process and be the preferred choice.



#2

TAKEAWAY:

Infuse your marketing mix with a clearly defined emotional brand personality.

Great brands and great relationships go hand in hand.

Great b2b brands maintain a loyal group of great A-level customers.

Understanding them is the key to accelerated growth.



Great brands and great relationships go hand in hand

There was a time when b2b brand growth was almost exclusively tied to the abilities, reach and relationships of the sales team. They controlled the information and the conversation when it came to engaging the marketplace. To grow sales, you simply had to grow the sales team, adding new talented sales professionals to new regions or new lines of business. This is no longer the case. Today's buyers have already done a great deal of research and progressed much further along the decision-making path before a company salesperson is even contacted.

The new b2b buyer wants to learn, explore and discover before they even speak with your company. They have access to endless amounts of

information. They control the pace and timing of interaction, sometimes going to great lengths to not be contacted, and often to not even be found. Relationships are more important than ever before; but at the front end of the buying process, they're being formed in a much different way than in the past. They are being built through the content that brands choose to share, and the many different ways it's shared.

Smart b2b brands recognize that the key to success in this age is not to "stalk" prospective customers with product-centric person-to-person communications until they finally succumb (most won't anymore). The key is to identify a great audience (or audiences), understand their pains,

wants and needs thoroughly, and then develop content around those factors. Content raises awareness, elevates interest, and ultimately leads to engagement.

Identify your best relationships, the A-Level relationships: The ones that love you as much as you love them. There's tremendous power in understanding why this mutual love exists. And there are always common threads. Discovering those threads is the first step. Once you do, you can develop and deploy messaging and content designed specifically to attract even more new great relationships to your brand, and grow exponentially.

#3

TAKEAWAY:

Understanding the wants and needs of your best relationships will help your business achieve and maintain great success.

#4



Every brand interaction is a relationship-building opportunity.

Utilize each engagement as a way to create or strengthen customer relationships.

Every brand interaction is a relationship-building opportunity.

"It takes seven times to be seen for the first time." Or so goes the long standing marketing adage. But sometimes it's hard to put a finger on what the ultimate tipping point that motivates a prospect to initiate contact will be, what finally gets your company on their radar screen, or what pivots a buyer away from the competition. For b2b brands, effectively delivering touchpoints in every interaction comes down to an even more fundamental motive...**TRUST.**

It takes time for people to know and trust you. It takes time to formulate a comfort level with the idea of contacting you. Think about your best relationships, such as with your spouse or partner. Most

likely, it wasn't staged. You met, talked and that went well. So you went on a date; and if that also went well, more followed. The relationship flourished to a point where you started to believe, "This is the one." The same is true of brands, especially business brands. Delivering your touchpoints with purpose and consistency enables those connections to happen more quickly and effectively.

What does your uniform say about you? If you're driving down the road and a suspicious looking person standing by the road starts waving their arms frantically at you, you might think twice about stopping. However, if that person were wearing a police, military, or other official

uniform, you would probably stop without hesitation, or at the very least slow down. The uniform is the influencing factor that convinces you to do so.

Look at your brand with fresh eyes; from your website and social media presence, to the apparel of your personnel, your interior, your sales literature, your tradeshow exhibit, your outbound communications and the like. Each touchpoint represents an opportunity to create a new selling proposition, whether through an existing relationship or the start of a new one. Are you delivering your brand with maximum effectiveness at every point?

#4

TAKEAWAY:

Deliver your “brand uniform” consistently and dynamically at every touchpoint.

In b2b marketing, content reigns.

What did you “say” today?
And how did you “say” it?



In b2b marketing, content reigns.

First and foremost, b2b marketers engage in content marketing for the purpose of driving quality leads. But according to a recent Content Marketing Institute survey, they face two problems: developing enough quality content and determining if that content is achieving its goal. In spite of the growth of content marketing in the b2b arena, many companies still don't know if theirs is generating the desired result.

Without some form of success-based metric tied to the effort and investment, many CEOs are inclined to stop the "horse" shortly after it leaves the "starting gate." Far too many b2b content marketing programs stall in the early stages. It's a shame, because given a fair opportunity a consistent content

marketing program works extremely well. In fact, we've had clients experience the benefits first hand. Through one recent effort, we helped a b2b client secure a \$1 million order; another was featured on a major radio show; and a third was the buzz of a major industry event. All these things happened because of great, compelling content.

"What is Content Marketing?" Content marketing involves developing and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and engage a specific audience, and ultimately, drive profitable customer interactions. Today, it comes in many forms: email, press releases, blog posts, social posts, audio, videos, still images, info-graphics, direct mail, text and others.

In truth, Content Marketing is an elaborate term for what firms like ours have been doing for more than a century: getting the right information to the right people. Only now, we're doing it with a completely new set of tools.

These tools can sometimes confuse people, but they definitely make content deployment easier and more direct. Ultimately, the great content needed to drive tools still requires a commitment.

And the commitment must come from the top down to really work.

#5

TAKEAWAY:

Content is the spark that ignites new sales. Make it valuable, relevant, and stay the course.

#6



In b2b search marketing there's no magic pill.

If there were, we would have gotten a prescription a long time ago.

In b2b search marketing there's no magic pill.

At a recent presentation, I was asked about recent changes to the Google algorithm. At another, I was asked about the implications of recent moves by LinkedIn, and Facebook. **Here's what we recommend to our clients:** Instead of fretting over what Google or any other search or social platform might do next, recognize that there is no magic pill. For many years, b2b brands were able to effectively compete in search through tried-and-true organic search tactics, and smart use and optimization of content. The steady rise of paid search (even for b2b brands) is changing all that. Effective search marketing – usually undertaken to drive quality inbound inquiries and leads – requires a balanced approach. That's especially true, given the latest Google development. I'm not suggesting that b2b

brands start blindly pouring money into Paid Search for positioning, as that can quickly lead to concerns about a **B.O.A.T.** effect: **Break Out Another Thousand.** When executed poorly, paid search for b2b brands can be a bottomless pit into which money disappears daily.

When it comes to b2b search, we have always and continue to endorse a **B.U.I.L.D.** approach: **Balanced & United in Lead Development.** It really comes down to an integrated array of search and engagement tactics, all designed to work together, to generate the most awareness and the best leads possible.



In b2b search marketing there's no magic pill.

In keeping with our acronym theme, consider the **P.O.S.E.** approach to a balanced, effective search program for your brand:

P.O.S.E. = Paid, Owned, Shared, and Earned

Each category of tactics supports a b2b brand's online brand presence, and can facilitate quality lead generation.

PAID

When brands pay to have visibility by a particular audience. Examples include: Paid Display Ads, Pay-Per-Click, Paid Social, Digital Directories

OWNED

When brands own, control and manage online assets in their entirety. Examples include: Corporate Website, Product or Service Website, Subject-Specific Blog or Site, Branded Content, On-Site Organic Search

SHARED

When brands are engaged with audiences in a manner that facilitates shared and equal control over message and medium. Examples include: Social Media Sites, Public Forums, Shareable Content

EARNED

When brands convince or enable external media to generate visibility for them. Examples include: News Articles, Press Mentions, Off-Site Organic Search (Ex: Back Links)

#6

TAKEAWAY:

Marketing tools and tactics continuously evolve, but the foundational rules of the marketing road remain unchanged. Stay balanced and “smartly” introduce paid search into your P.O.S.E. mix.

Your website speaks volumes about your brand.

Often it's a prospect's first brand impression.

Is yours making you money or costing you sales?



Your website speaks volumes about your brand.

You meet someone for the first time. Your brain begins a series of instantaneous calculations to form a first impression. This happens in less than seven seconds. Our brains are hard-wired to do this, with non-verbal cues outweighing any verbal exchanges by four to one.

When it comes to your brand's website, this exchange happens even faster. According to numerous studies, a viewer will have formulated a first impression of your brand within 1-3 seconds upon landing on your website.

A recent Pew Research Center Study indicated that 85% of b2b customers will review your site before making a purchasing decision. And 75% will judge

your brand's credibility based on the quality of your website's design alone.

If you do nothing more today, visit your website. Take a fresh look at it with "brand eyes." What is the first impression that your brand makes within three seconds upon visiting your website? Does it create emotional impact? Is it clear and readily understood? Does it allow the viewer to easily interact?

There are few second chances in business, and your website may be your one shot to engage a prospect with your brand. Your website should create selling opportunities, not turn them away.



#7

TAKEAWAY:

Every day your website should be delivering a powerful brand impression. If not, it's costing you sales and money.



#8

Clarity vs. Creativity: It's not a zero sum game.

BOTH must win for you to create effective b2b brand communications.

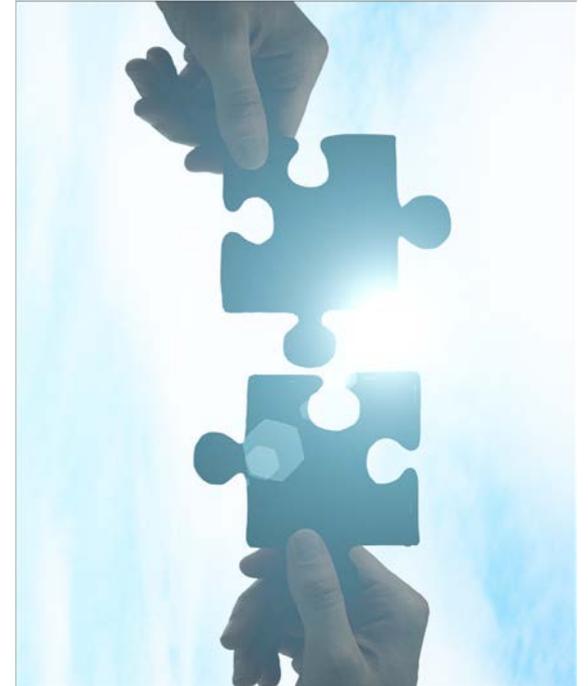
Clarity vs. Creativity: It's not a zero sum game

You have seconds to make a great first impression. If it takes any longer for prospects to figure out what your product, service, or company is or how it provides direct benefit, you've lost them. We all enjoy great creative expression. However, when the core intent of a brand is lost in a wave of creative coolness, it simply isn't effective. The reverse is true as well.

Creativity and clarity are BOTH important. This is especially true for b2b brands. Our Brand Leadership Solution® establishes this balance in the context of the functional and emotional sides of the brain. The functional side defines the "need" (what's required), and the emotional side dictates the "want" (what's desired). B2b entities must always create

meaning in the functional side (this is what we do), while also effectively engaging the emotional side (this is how we deliver great value to you).

Most b2b clients we start working with are only defining their brands in a functional context. "We do X. Do you want to buy X?" Little, if any, attention is paid to establishing the essential emotional connections that lead to relationships. As a result, they find themselves becoming commoditized or marginalized by clients and prospects. With no emotional engagement to drive desire, it becomes easy for buyers to resort to price and convenience, more functional criteria, as the basis for decision-making. When did cheap and fast ever lead to a sustainable and prosperous relationship?





#8

TAKEAWAY:

If you don't want to be commoditized, don't position and market your brand just like everyone else in your category.

Step out. Be creative. Stand apart.
Win more business at better margins.

Moving your prospect moves the needle.

Brand success means moving your prospects – emotionally, figuratively and literally.



#9

Moving your prospect moves the needle.

If you don't MOVE them, they will move on to a brand that does. And if you're not moving forward as a brand, you're going to get "killed." As my young nephew said to me the first time we played **Call of Duty** together, "Uncle Ed! You have to move! If you don't, you're going to get killed!" The one who stands still is the first to be killed. This is especially true of business brands. I've seen it too many times. A brand becomes the leader and then rests on their heels. BAM! In comes an agile, fast moving competitor with an emotive, highly-energized brand, and blows them away. Don't be caught standing still. Be the one locked in on Vision, using brand to drive growth every step of the way.



Moving your prospect moves the needle.

MOVE target audiences by infusing your brand with emotion.

B2b brands that emotionally connect **earn 2x more** than brands selling on functional value alone.

B2b buyers who feel an emotional "connection" are **60% more likely to buy and pay a premium.**

64% of people cite shared values as the main reason they have a relationship with a brand.

In other words, stop talking only about the features and functions of this product or that service. Take your brand to a higher emotional ground, and your winning percentage will grow exponentially.

MOVE a viewer to take action with interaction.

Using a water analogy, help your prospects . . .

Place their TOE in the water: Create an easy initial step for a prospect to take. Think sign up, follow, like, download, calculator, etc.

Put their FOOT in the water: Offer a moderate step that requires a bit more effort; but one that comes with a more valuable benefit. Think schedule a demo, see us at, webinar, consult, etc.

TOTAL immersion: Start a conversation when they're ready to talk and buy. Think, "Have I given a prospect every conceivable opportunity to reach me when they are ready to make the final MOVE?" Try telephone, mobile, text, e-mail, LinkedIn, contact form, smoke signal, etc.

A silhouette of two hikers on a mountain peak. One hiker is standing on the left, leaning forward and reaching out to assist another hiker who is sitting on the ground on the right. The background shows a mountain range under a cloudy sky. A red triangle is positioned at the top center of the image, containing the text "#9".

#9

TAKEAWAY:

When evaluating a marketing project or your entire mix, always ask: how are we “moving” the recipient of the message to an emotional feeling about us, and to a point of engagement with us?

A close-up, over-the-shoulder view of a man in a dark blue suit and tie, looking at a tablet computer. The tablet screen displays a colorful dashboard or data visualization. The man's hair is dark and short. The background is slightly blurred, suggesting an office environment.

#10

**True brands are born
of honesty from within.**

Authenticity comes from the
inside out.

True brands are born of honesty from within.

Remember the last time you encountered a marketing message that simply didn't ring true? You know the kind. You come across a particular brand's promise-filled marketing message and consciously think, "No Way!" For b2b brands, this situation often happens when a brand representative makes a grand statement in a sales presentation, and you immediately think, "Yeah, Right!"

When a marketing message comes across as inauthentic, we go beyond dismissing it; we completely reject the brand itself. Sometimes, in pursuit of creating a "wow factor," brands go well beyond the boundaries of believability – even if their claims are actually true. The result is still the same: they appear

inauthentic, "off-brand," and therefore "off-putting." Ultimately, they set unbelievable standards that the brand in question could never possibly live up to.

Being a best-in-class b2b brand begins with honesty and sincerity. It's fine to have grand aspirations, but to exist as one brand and express yourself as another is a recipe for disaster.

That's why we always start our [Brand Leadership Solution](#)[®] with an internal Discovery Session. This powerful first step ensures that we begin with a strong and truthful foundation, as the people charged with representing the brand every day provide input in an honest, candid manner. Beginning this way creates the opportunity to affirm or

challenge any foundational brand claims at the onset, ensuring that any subsequent creative brand expressions are guided from a position of authenticity, and that audiences are engaged in a powerful-yet-always-truthful fashion.



#10

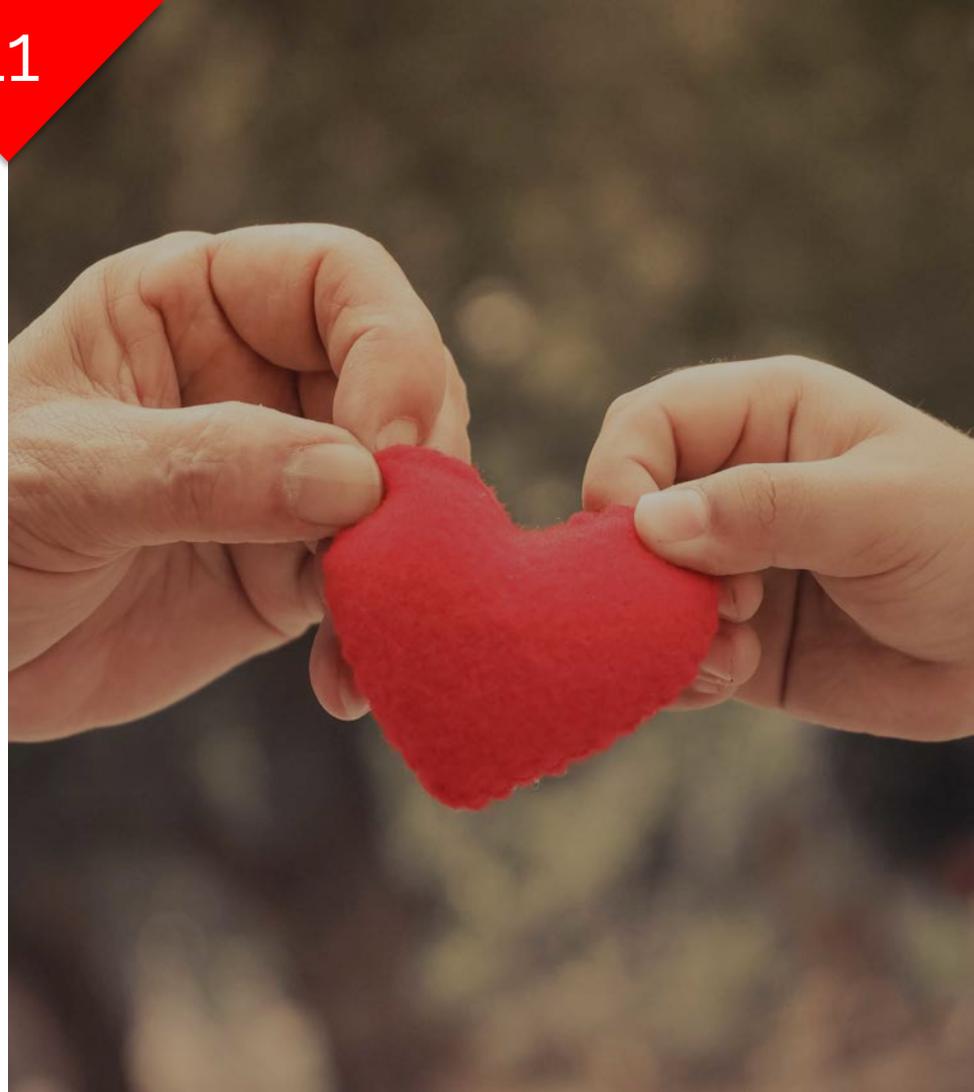
TAKEAWAY:

While there's a short-term thrill that comes from making a seemingly bold claim about your brand, overly exaggerated (or false) brand promises never get you very far. They most certainly do not set the stage for creation of long-term relationships that will drive your business to higher levels of profitability.

"To thy own self be true."
To thy own brand as well.

Brands that care more win more.

Successful marketing embraces
real life human-to-human
experiences and needs.



Brands that care more win more.

Today, the battle for b2b customers is not being waged on pricing and features alone. It's all about customer experience. Customer experience, which can literally make or break an organization. One bad customer experience can set off a spark, igniting fires online and offline that expend time, money and mental energy to put out. Smart organizations are investing in customer-centric brand building and customer experience strategies and tactics to not only win more business, but ensure that the business they have does not drift off to the competition.

A great customer experience can only be delivered from a brand that truly "cares" about its customers. Nobody is a number.

Nobody wants to feel like an afterthought. It's high touch love from start to finish; and this energy must permeate every touchpoint that the brand delivers.



Just in case you're not pro-actively working on it, here are a few stats to get you energized about improving your brand's customer experience.

95% of buyers talk about poor customer service experiences with other people. *(American Express)*

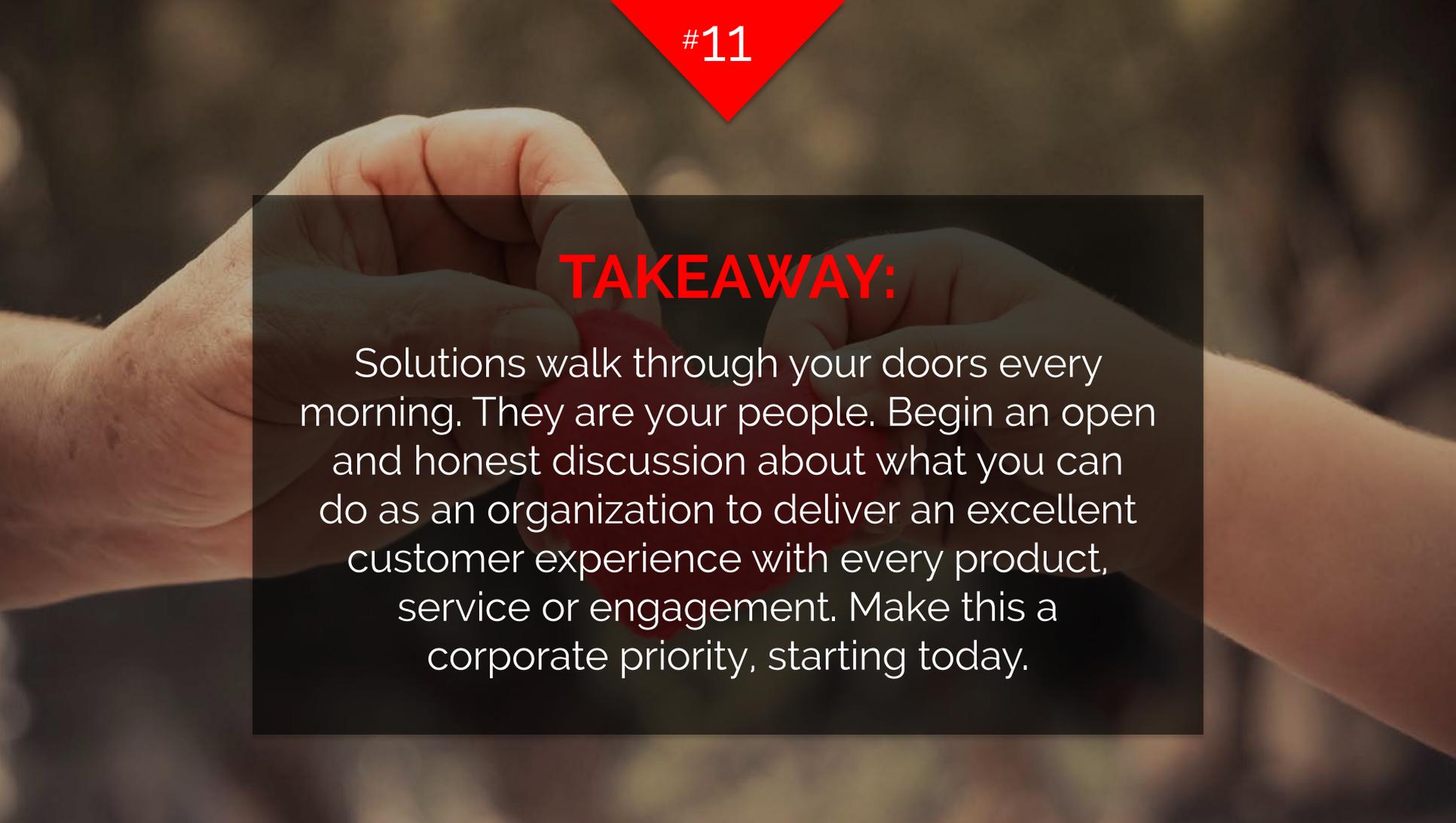
40% of customers begin purchasing from a competitor because of their reputation for great customer service. *(Zendesk)*

Companies that excel at customer experience **grow revenues 4-8%** above the market. *(Bain and Company)*

66% of buyers say they are likely to switch brands if they are treated like a number instead of an individual. *(Salesforce)*



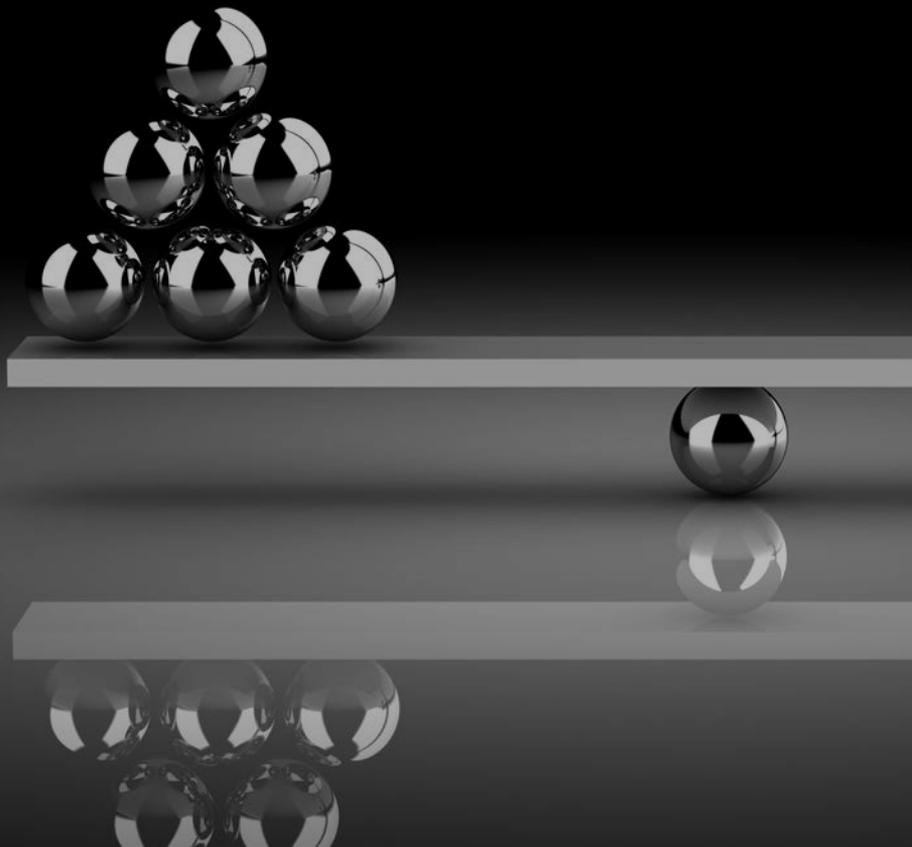
#11



TAKEAWAY:

Solutions walk through your doors every morning. They are your people. Begin an open and honest discussion about what you can do as an organization to deliver an excellent customer experience with every product, service or engagement. Make this a corporate priority, starting today.

#12



Play the percentages to grow your business.

I'd gladly trade 100 interested inquiries for 10 highly motivated prospects any day.

And you should too.

Play the percentages to grow your business.

I'd gladly trade 100 interested inquiries for 10 highly motivated prospects any day... and you should too.

Here's a personal experience to illustrate that very point. As a youth baseball coach, I would ask my players at the start of the season, "What's your #1 goal as a batter?" Inevitably someone would say, "To hit the ball." My answer, "You're on the right track. The goal is to hit the ball HARD." Anyone with some basic coordination can hit a baseball. However, a weak infield grounder does little to advance your team's cause. You have to hit the ball hard. This same principle applies to b2b brand building.

I see a lot of organizations hitting grounders. They are essentially making noise in an already noisy communications landscape. It takes more than noise to "hit the ball hard" and create the resulting and desired impact.

B2b brand building is not about engagement. It's about the quality of engagement.

This is one area where b2b brand building differs from b2c branding. In b2c branding, such as for consumer products, the emphasis is on moving a large audience to a point of connection with and preference for a given brand. Typically, the transaction value is comparatively low to many b2b sales opportunities.

For many b2b organizations, one great new client alone has a decisive impact on both the top and bottom line. Many of our b2b clients who receive 10 quality leads in a month from our efforts are delighted.

Why? Because each one represents a high-value opportunity that alone could more than pay for all associated marketing costs.

B2b marketing is all about quality, not quantity. It is a far more sales-aligned customer-centric brand position, message and solution that is designed to drive not the "B" or "C" level customers, but the "A-Level" clients that will drive your business forward.

TAKEAWAY:

Step back and look at your brand, and how it is being delivered through marketing. If you feel like you are just “hitting the ball,” it’s time to reevaluate. Focus your energy on crushing the ball and knocking it out of the park.



ARE YOU READY TO...
GROW,
ACCELERATE,
GET TO YOUR NEXT?

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