How to build more Buyable brands:

How Recommendations, Relatability and Relationships drive campaign success

WARC | LinkedIn

Brought to you by
LIONS | ADVISORY

September 2026

Contents

Experts interviewed for this report

Rishi Dave
Partner,
Bain & Company

Michele Eggers
Vice President
Marketing Shared Services,
SAS

Natalie Osborn
Vice President
Brand Marketing and
Creative,
SAS

Wendy Walker
CMO,
Global Dairy Trade
and President,
IAA Singapore

Jim Lesser
Chief Brand Officer,
ServiceNow

Monique Elliott
Chief Brand and
Communications Officer,
Schneider Electric

Cheryl Guerin
EVP of Global Brand
Strategy & Innovation,
Mastercard

Introduction by LIONS Advisory & WARC

Imaad Ahmed
Thought Leadership Director,
LIONS Advisory and WARC

B2B buying is a team sport. For many years, the likes of Forrester, Gartner and 6sense have told us that the size of the buying committee is growing. More recently, LinkedIn and Bain uncovered how the motivations – and even identities - of those influencing the final decision can be widespread and opaque[1]. To become more buyable and win more business, B2B brands must build collective confidence across the entire buyer group. That is Buyability.

LinkedIn and Bain's research also explained the importance of relationships, recommendations and relatability at the heart of building this collective confidence. That all makes sense but how intentionally do B2B brands signal these factors in their communications and how effective are they when deployed with strategic care?

To test Buyability against a set of real-world campaigns, WARC and LIONS Advisory identified 700 B2B effectiveness case studies. These were award-entered or winning campaigns, so represented a high standard of impactful campaigns – namely, a body of work we could learn from. Having tagged these campaigns against seven levers of Buyability, we were able to see if campaigns applying more levers were any more likely to report uplifts across a range of commercial and brand health metrics than those applying fewer levers.

Our findings are a rallying cry to B2B marketers. Buyability is an underused yet potentially significant advantage for B2B brands. This report shares the analysis behind potential commercial and brand health uplifts when Buyability signals are intentionally addressed, as well as a structured playbook on how to put them into practice.

The opportunity for B2B brands to become more buyable is vast. This research shows why and how.

1. Source: LinkedIn and Bain & Company, 'How to be Buyable in B2B'.

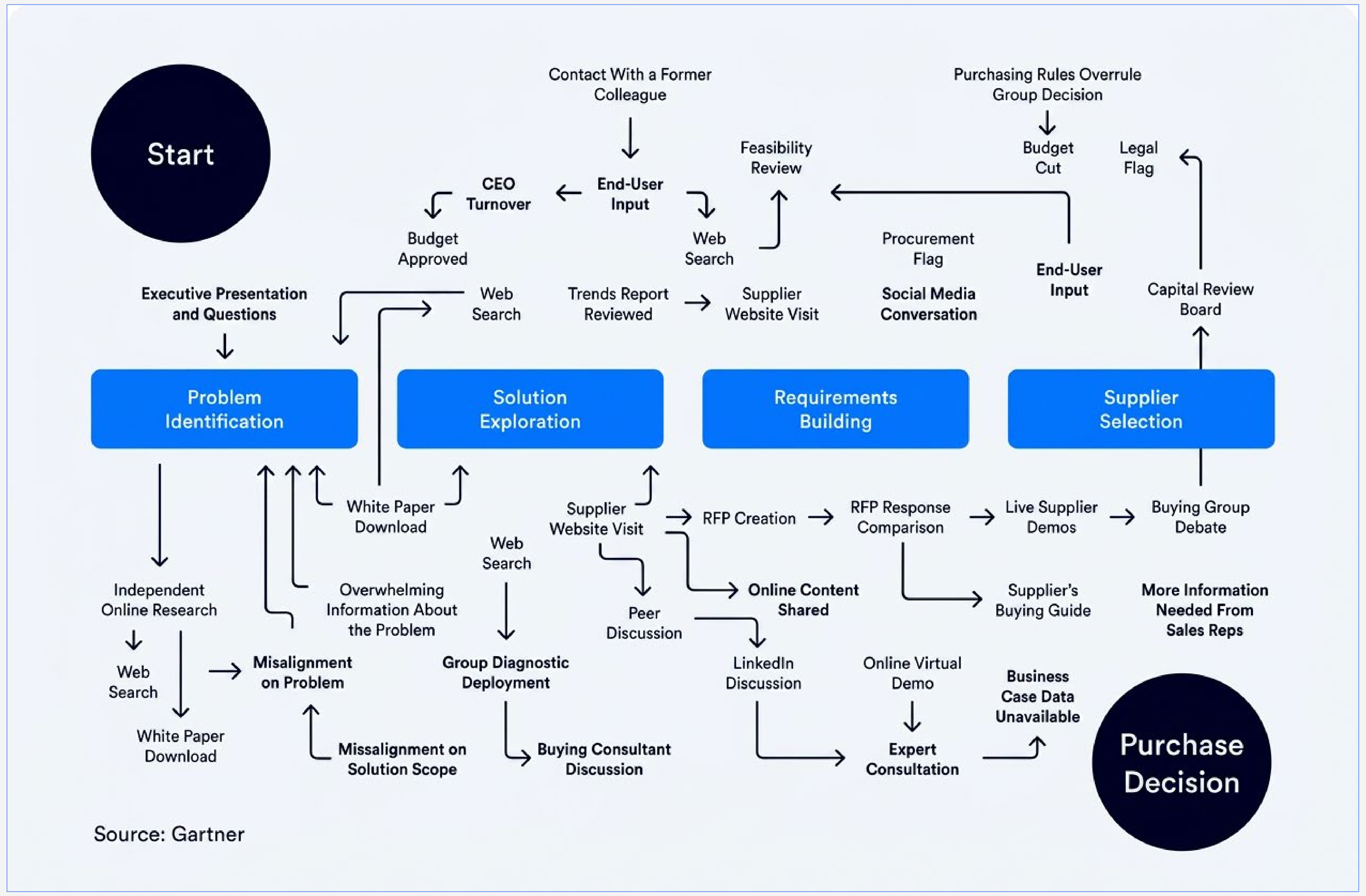
Foreword from LinkedIn

Mimi Turner
Head of Marketplace Innovation,
LinkedIn

What if B2B marketing isn't as impossible as it looks?

Ever since I first saw the (now famous) Gartner B2B buying journey schematic about four years ago, that question has been buzzing around in my head.

Don't get me wrong. Gartner's work is foundational for B2B marketers. It is widely referred to as the definition of what makes B2B buying different, complicated and organizationally difficult to influence. But to me, it sets out a buying journey whose labyrinthine possibilities appear to be about as navigable as a M.C. Escher stairwell.



Source: Gartner

Gartner: The B2B Buying Journey

Foreword from LinkedIn

Mimi Turner
Head of Marketplace Innovation, LinkedIn

Instead of obsessing over complex decision maps, perhaps there is a simpler way? What about the emotional map that actually drives B2B buyer group decision-making? Emotions, after all, are firmly in the territory of marketing, advertising and sales. For over a century, emotions have been widely understood to be an unfair advantage when leveraged well in brand-building. Coca Cola, Nike, Dolce & Gabbana can all testify to that.

But what emotions actually make B2B buying groups feel confident enough to buy? After analyzing more than 1000 B2B buyer interviews, we found that three types of signals really drive buyer group confidence: Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability. In fact, without them, buyers don't feel confident to buy.

The next step in this journey was the work you are about to see: a look at how those three types of signals correlate with actual campaign success, and that is what this new report sets out.

Thanks to WARC and LIONS Advisory we were able to access a dataset of over 700 B2B campaigns complete with all the relevant metadata about how they influenced brand health and commercial outcomes. This gave us a fascinating look back into the campaigns that are the most successful, organized by High and Low numbers of Buyability signals.

I hope that you enjoy reading our research, because the nuances are important and valuable. But if there is only one thing you take away from this whole report, perhaps the TLDR is this:

Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability signals close deals. The more of them you bake into your creative platform, the more successful it is likely to be.

The journey may be just as complicated as the Gartner diagram sets out. But navigating it successfully might be simpler than we think.

Executive summary

The unit of organisational decision-making in B2B is the Buying Group. Buyability focuses on this essential truth.

It has been described as "a groundbreaking B2B marketing model that much better aligns with the world we live in. Complex group dynamics driven by social and emotional factors are what really shape buying decisions, especially as they are increasingly mediated through AI."[2]

The Buyability model has one clear purpose: to build the collective confidence that buyer groups must feel before they will commit to a purchase.

This paper explains why Buyability is commercially critical and which levers must be pulled to build it. New research reveals Buyability's real-world impact. The final chapter provides a playbook for marketers interested in implementing the model.

Rising competition and new dynamics within buying groups make it essential for B2B brands to understand how purchasing decisions really get made.

'Hidden buyers' wield a high degree of influence; the desire to reach an emotional consensus outweighs rational considerations; and avoiding the downsides of failure is a stronger motivation than any potential business upside.

Whereas MQL strategies concentrate on individual 'target buyers', Buyability focuses on the group as a whole and identifies decision-defensibility as the most important motivation (although there are others).

2. Dean Aragón, CEO of Shell Brands International.
3. 6sense: 2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report

The 3Rs of Buyability: Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability to the buying situation

Research shows that 'positive first-hand experience' (37%) and 'recommendations from trusted sources' (25%) are the decisive factors when choosing between equivalent vendors. They are much more important than product performance or price (both 8%). Messaging that shows 'a customer similar to us' is x4 more influential than messages featuring 'a market leader'.

These insights allow us to set out the key marketing levers. Buyability is a function of the 3Rs:

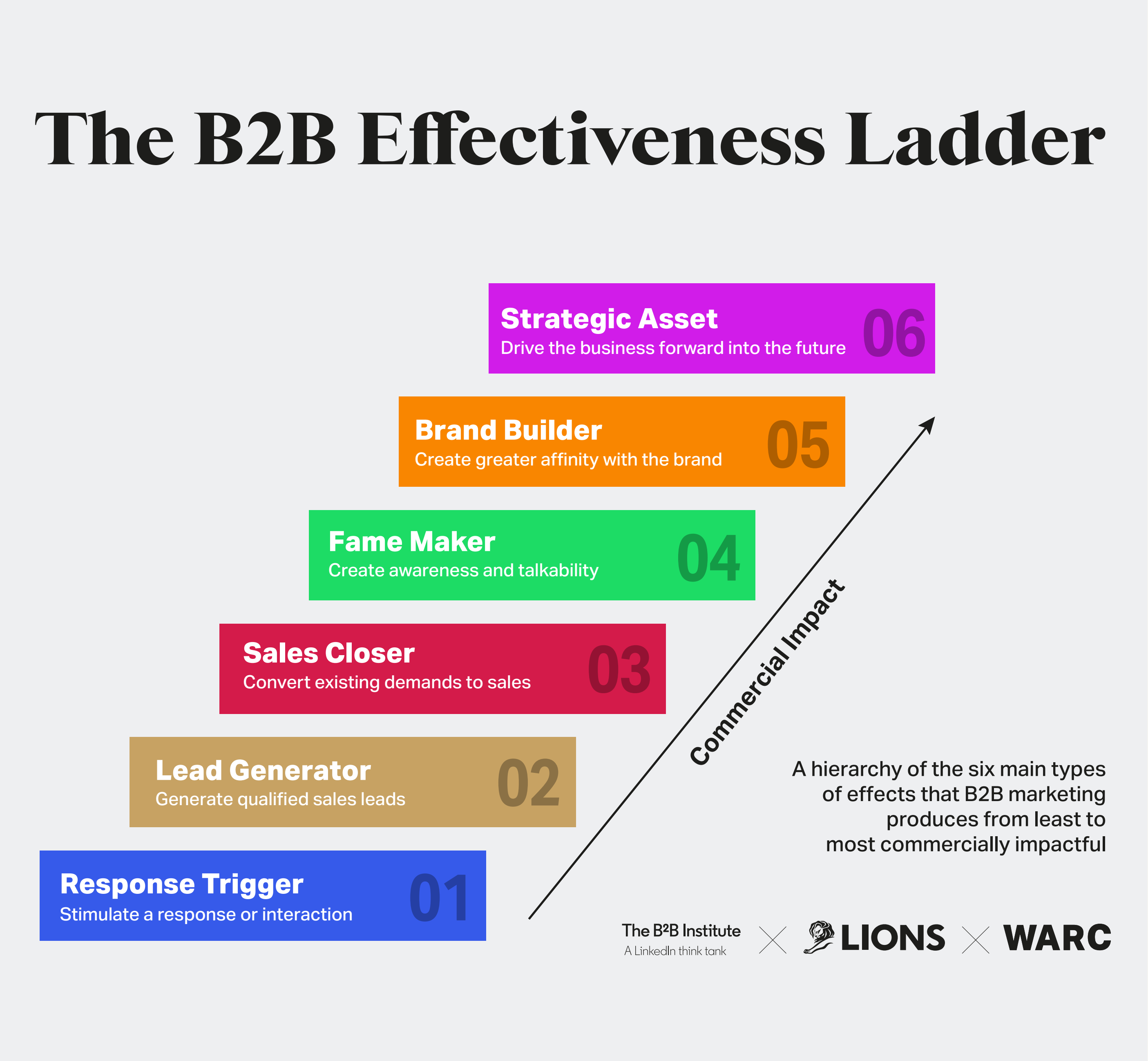
Recommendations	These are vital in providing the affirmation and validation buying groups need.
Relationships	Brands that feel familiar and credible to every member of the group are inherently more likely to secure a place on the Day One List.
Relatability	Buyer groups are looking for vendors that can demonstrate success with similar types of customer; match their organisation's working style; and feel likeable and trustworthy. Brands need to be relatable to the buying situation at both the rational and the emotional level.

AI usage is surging among buyer groups. According to 6sense, **94%** of B2B buyers now use LLMs as part of their buying journey[3]. As well as driving Buyability, the 3Rs signal the same types of validation, credibility and relevance which train the LLMs to surface the most authoritative and buyable brands. This is crucial as we enter the Reputation Age.

Executive summary

We analysed 700 B2B campaigns from the WARC database, classifying them as High or Low Buyability depending on the number of 'Buyability signals' present.

The same dataset was independently ranked against WARC's B2B Effectiveness Ladder.



We analysed 700 B2B campaigns from the WARC database, classifying them as High or Low Buyability depending on the number of 'Buyability signals' present. The same dataset was independently ranked against WARC's B2B Effectiveness Ladder.

The key findings were:

- There was a relatively low incidence of Buyability signals overall. Out of seven pre-specified signals, the average campaign contained just 1.6. Even when campaign spend exceeded US$1m, the average number was still only 2.25.
- Not all levers are being pulled equally. Signals that flag Relatability predominated, while showcasing 'customer testimonials or use cases' was the single biggest differentiator between High and Low Buyability campaigns.
- High Buyability campaigns significantly outperformed in driving brand equity. They were x1.24 more likely to report increases in brand awareness and x1.91 more likely to report improvements in brand health metrics.
- High Buyability campaigns also delivered better commercial outcomes. They were x2.09 more likely to report incremental revenue growth and x1.62 more likely to report uplifts in ROI.[4]
- Because they positively impact both soft and hard measures, High Buyability campaigns were x1.70 more likely to constitute a 'Strategic Asset'. This is the highest rung on the B2B Effectiveness Ladder, representing campaigns that can propel a business into the future.

Building a more Buyable brand requires strategic clarity. Marketers must lean into the non-rational dynamics and biases that dictate buying groups' decisions. They should also establish formalised systems and processes to ensure the model can be leveraged by every part of the business.
The playbook provides practical guidance on how the 3Rs of Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability can be activated effectively.
It concludes by suggesting some relevant methodologies for measuring Buyability.

4. It should be noted that these findings rely on relatively small bases.

1 Why increasing Buyability should be the mission for B2B marketers

Closing a B2B sale has become more challenging than ever

Buyers are finding it increasingly difficult to identify meaningful differences between vendors at the functional level. The perceived 'competitive gap' between winners and losers shrank by two-thirds between 2021 and 2025.[5]

One consequence is that purchasing organisations are casting their net wider. As they search for a performance edge, they're considering more brands at every stage of the buying journey.[6]

In addition to stiffer competition, vendors are confronted by more complex buyer group dynamics.[7]

Added complexity has a direct impact on process. The typical buying cycle now lasts anywhere from eight months to a year.

The average group

comprises 10+ individuals, typically spanning five distinct functions.

Three in four groups

will seek external advice from e.g. consultants, analysts or distributors.

90% of buyers

now use AI to research, evaluate and even shortlist candidates.

The new generation of buyers

expects 'digital convenience' and often looks to social media for information and commentary.

5. Dentsu, 'Superpowers Index 2025'.
6. Sources: Dentsu, 'Superpowers Index 2025', 6sense, '2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report' et al.
7. Sources: 6sense, '2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report' and Forrester, 'B2B Summit 2025'.

These changes have significant implications for B2B marketers

Many organisations still pin their hopes on a conventional, MQL-led approach.

As Forrester has pointed out: "The Marketing Qualified Leads model often sits at the heart of company culture, serving as a key performance metric, guiding executive decision-making, and dictating the conversation between marketing and sales teams.".[8]

But MQL strategies have never been particularly effective. Fewer than 1% of leads make it from the top to the bottom of the funnel, not least because purchasing companies are generally well over halfway through the process before they contact any vendors whatsoever.[9]

Instead of the traditional pipeline and its emphasis on individual contacts, **vendors should switch to targeting the buyer group as a whole.**

Doing so effectively requires understanding how B2B buying decisions really get made. There are four essential factors to consider.[10]

1. **Hidden Buyers wield as much influence as Target Buyers.**
2. **Rational consensus is a myth.**
3. **FOMU beats FOMO every time.**
4. **Personal needs have a stronger pull than professional ones.**

We'll examine each factor on the following pages, but the overall truth has been neatly summarised by Jann Schwartz, Senior Director of Marketplace Innovation and Strategy at LinkedIn: "Across all the different individuals and functions that comprise a buyer group, avoiding the downside of failure is more important than enjoying the upside of success in a B2B purchase."

8. Forrester, 'Saying Goodbye To MQLs: Six MQL Myths Squashed To Shift Your Leads-Based Culture'.
9. 6sense, '2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report'.
10. LinkedIn and Bain & Company have investigated these factors in detail. The key findings from their research are laid out in this article.

1 Hidden Buyers wield as much influence as Target Buyers

The average buying group now contains representatives from five different disciplines.

These fall into two segments: 'Target Buyers', who are subject-matter experts from (say) technology, infrastructure or IT; and 'Hidden Buyers', who are process experts from (say) Procurement, Finance or Legal.

By definition, MQL strategies concentrate on Target Buyers. The reality, however, is that the two segments have an equal voice in making the final purchase decision. A survey of 515 technology buyers from industries including software, banking, manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, energy and retail showed how evenly influence is distributed:

Share of 'Allocated Influence Points', Target vs. Hidden Buyers

Source: LinkedIn and Bain & Company.

2 Rational consensus is a myth

Most B2B organisations are intent on building better mousetraps: products and services that are innovative, quantifiably superior and category-disrupting.

These advantages obviously matter and can be especially important to Target Buyers. But they're rarely sufficient to convince the buyer group in its entirety.

Wendy Walker, CMO of Global Dairy Trade and President of IAA Singapore, puts her finger on the core issue: "For a long time, B2B marketing has comforted itself with the thought that decisions are rational and primarily motivated by logic… In practice, what separates two vendors is rarely the data. It's which one feels like a decision that can be explained and justified. Winning vendors tell stories that are compelling and emotionally convincing, not just technically sound."

Far from being cold, calculating decision-machines, B2B professionals are swayed by very human factors. These become even more prominent when group dynamics are at play.

The learning for marketers is that their primary goal should be to create emotional consensus within the buyer group. Ultimately, this is what will tip decisions in their favour.

Source: Wendy Walker, 'The Myth of Rational Consensus'

3 FOMU beats FOMO every time

In "The Jolt Effect", Matt Dixon and Ted McKenna examined the role emotions play in B2B buying decisions. They found that the Fear of Messing Up in front of your colleagues far outweighs the Fear of Missing Out on future career or business gains.

Research by LinkedIn and Bain & Company underlines the point. In their survey, two-thirds of buyers said they would prefer "products that provide peace of mind without career advancement" over choices that deliver "business growth but increased career uncertainty".

This finding held true across both segments. Target Buyers are just as likely to avoid decisions that could jeopardise their professional standing. The need for 'peace of mind' has other knock-on effects. Dixon and McKenna discovered that nearly half of all buying processes are aborted because of the perceived risk. If the reputational threat is deemed too high, many buyer groups will conclude it's safer to simply do nothing.

4 Personal needs have a stronger pull than professional ones

These emotional dynamics should come as no surprise to anyone interested in Behavioural Science, particularly as it applies to how groups of people make decisions.

In "Thinking, Fast and Slow", Daniel Kahneman highlighted the **importance of emotional narratives**: "No one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story… The confidence they have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see."

Herbert A. Simon won the Nobel Prize for his theory of **'Satisficing'**. This posits the idea that when professionals are faced with complex, confusing or incomplete information, they will stop at the point where they feel their decision is 'good enough.' In buyer groups, 'good enough' invariably translates to that moment when the room is in full agreement.

Finally, Gerd Gigerenzer from the Max Planck Institute coined the term **'Defensive Decision-Making'**. In his words: "When groups of people make decisions, they do not necessarily choose what's best. They choose the least bad option that protects them from negative repercussions."

Making buyers ‘feel safe’ is the most important differentiator for B2B brands

In a survey that’s run annually since 2021, Dentsu presents B2B buyers with 30 different choice criteria to determine which have the largest influence on their purchasing decisions.

There have been some big swings over the years as buyers react to changes in their business needs and/or the macro environment. But there is one constant: “I felt safe signing the contract” has always been the most important motivator.

Vendors who score highly on this measure share some distinguishing characteristics: they have a strongly positive reputation; they are well-known by the entire buying group; and they enjoy a high degree of advocacy from outside the group.

These are all classic brand equity effects. In combination, they ladder up to elevated levels of Trust.

As Edelman[11] and others have repeatedly pointed out, Trust in institutions and large organisations is in global decline. That means Trust may be harder to win, but it also makes it an increasingly valuable asset for brands of any kind.

Recent analysis of the IPA Effectiveness Databank in the UK shows that campaigns that recorded significant increases in brand trust were 65% more likely to report large business effects than the average campaign.[12]

Source: Dentsu, ‘Superpowers Index 2025’.

11. Edelman, ‘2026 Trust Barometer’.
12. WARC, ‘Campaigns see better business effects when they increase brand trust’.

This analysis reframes the role for B2B marketing

The primary Job To Be Done is to create the emotional security and decision-defensibility that give the buyer group permission to agree.

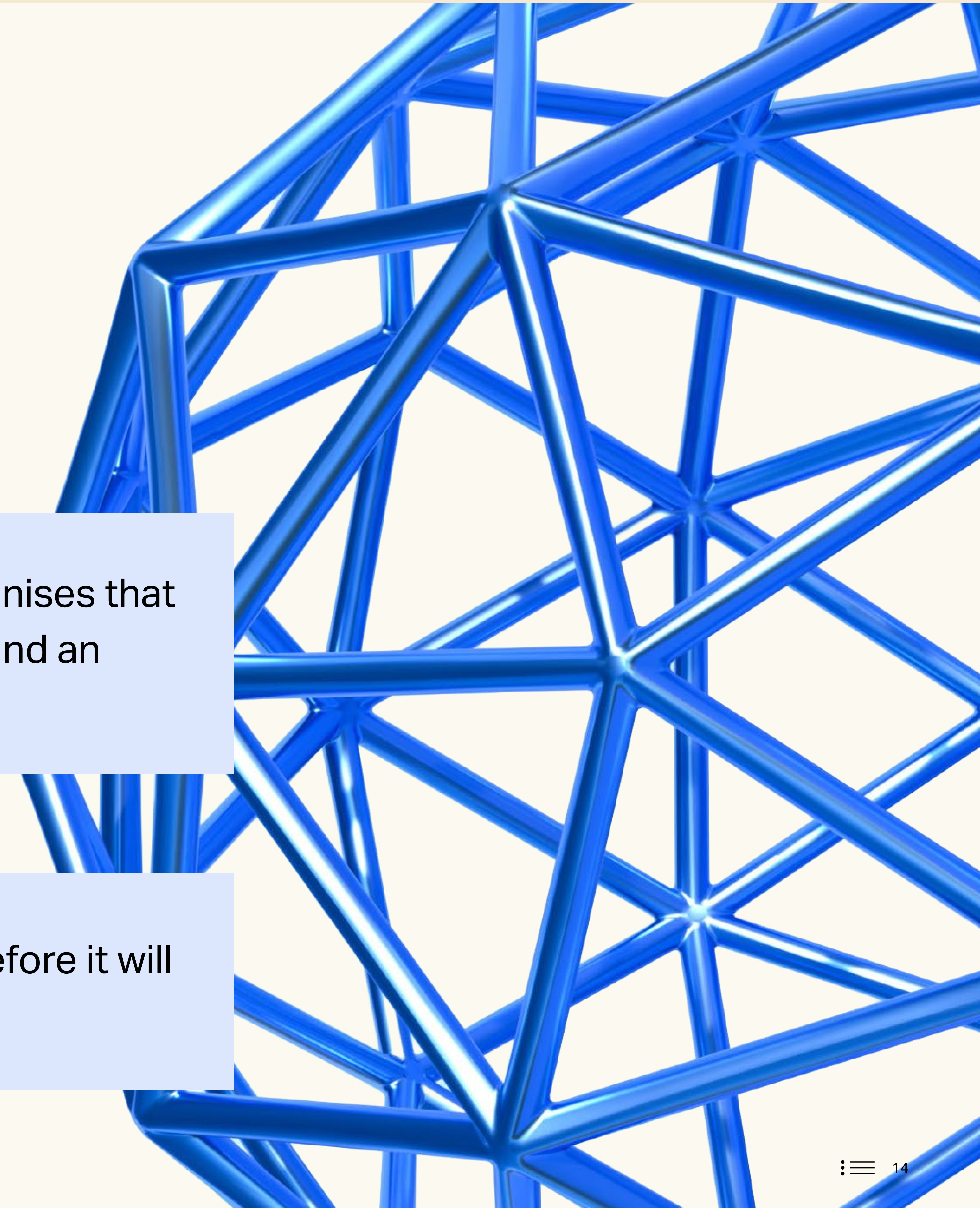
We call this Buyability.

Buyability

is both a strategic marketing and sales model that recognises that B2B purchasing decisions are made by Buying Groups, and an emotional threshold that brands must meet.

The purpose of Buyability

is to build the collective confidence a group must feel before it will commit to a purchase.



Industry insights

Not enough B2B marketers are considering how groups actually buy. Many go-to-market strategies aren't targeting the whole buyer group, and messaging isn't factoring in the emotional aspects of buying.

Rishi Dave
Partner, Bain & Company

Buyability is a full funnel marketing approach. Buyers are out of the market 95% of the time, so you need to build confidence on an ongoing basis. Then, when they're lower in the funnel, your brand will be one of the choices in their consideration set.

Cheryl Guerin
EVP of Global Brand Strategy & Innovation, Mastercard

Awareness gets you into someone's mind. Buyability helps you get into the decision. It's the difference between being known and being genuinely easy to choose.

Wendy Walker
CMO,
Global Dairy Trade
and President, IAA Singapore

B2B buyers are more emotional in their buying processes than B2C. If I buy the wrong phone, I can just buy the right one next time. No big deal. But making a bad B2B buying decision can directly impact people's livelihood. We need to remove the fear of messing up.

Natalie Osborn
Vice President, Brand Marketing and Creative, SAS

A focus on Buyability helps drive alignment across the C-suite

'Brand building' is a slippery term. Unless used precisely – which isn't always the case, even among marketers – it's open to misinterpretation, misunderstanding and potential rejection by the CFO.

By contrast, Buyability is more tangibly related to business outcomes. It minimises the risk of confusion by providing a shared language that can be endorsed by CMOs, CFOs and everyone else sitting round the boardroom table.

The model also clarifies the key roles for Marketing:

Buyability creates a single story of value creation, built from the buying group's perspective. It is s a full-funnel, deal-closing model that can help resolve the on-going tension between Marketing and Sales over 'brand' versus 'demand'.

As we'll see in the next chapter, the factors that drive Buyability apply to every stage of the purchasing process… but they become increasingly influential the closer the buyer group gets to a final decision.

Increasing commercial **effectiveness**

- Inclusion on more shortlists
- Greater predisposition to buy, resulting in higher conversion rates.
- Accelerated time to revenue.
- New opportunities for cross- and upsell.

Increasing commercial **efficiency**

- Less time wasted on nil-potential targets.
- More accurate resource allocation.
- Enhanced productivity for the sales function.
- Improved returns on marketing investment in both short and long term.

2

Understanding the factors that drive Buyability

The hallmarks of B2B excellence

Commercially, highly successful organisations excel in three areas:

1. **They win more new customers**
2. **They retain more existing customers**
3. **They're more effective at unlocking additional revenue lines from their customer base**

In other words: **they're consistently more Buyable than the competitive set.**

The **$24 trillion** question[13] for marketers, of course, is how they can put Buyability to work.

To answer that, we first need to understand the factors that give buyers – as individuals operating within a group – the confidence to buy.

13. Grand View Research has estimated that the global business-to-business e-commerce market was worth US$ 24.08 trillion in 2025. It's projected to reach US$ 105.85 trillion by 2033.

Buyers need to feel emotionally confident before they'll commit

Qualitative research by LinkedIn and Bain & Company found that 'confidence to buy' is a function of five factors.

They were (in no particular order):

> **I felt confident that the thing we were buying would do the job.**

> **The buying process itself was easy-ish.**

> **The buyer group was more or less aligned.**

> **I knew there'd be downsides but felt they could be managed.**

> **I felt I would be able to defend the decision even if it went wrong.**

While some rational considerations are clearly at play, these are primarily emotional responses to the pressures of the buying situation.

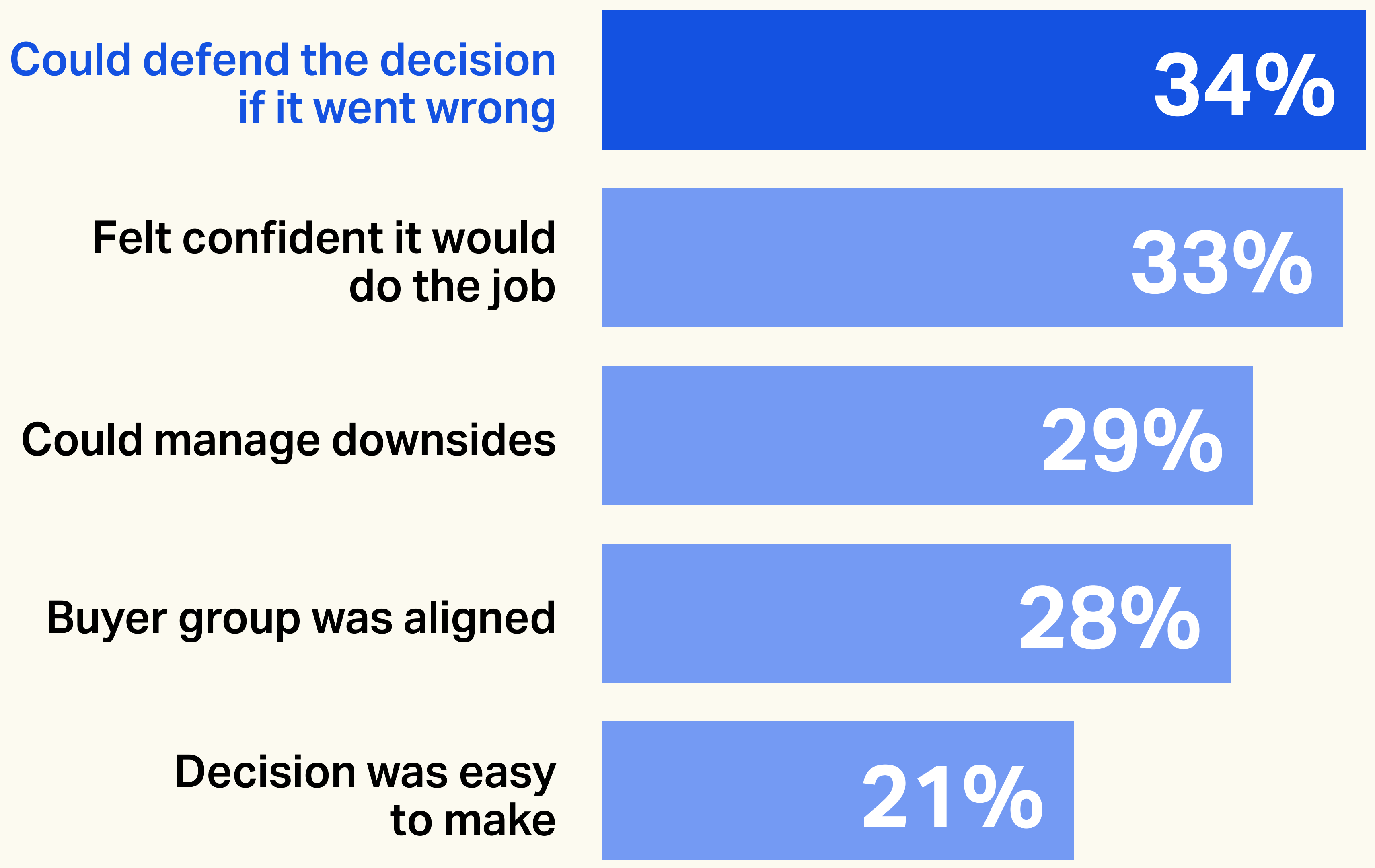
A multi-territory survey of 750 B2B buyers was then conducted to rank the factors. This revealed a key insight.

While each of the factors is important in making a brand Buyable, the biggest motivation for buyers is decision-defensibility. This scores more highly than feeling the product or service will perform as required.

Emotional needs sit at the heart of decision-defensibility. Buyers want to feel 100% confident that, in two years' time, they can stand up in front of the board, credibly justify their choice and (thereby) protect their reputation – and perhaps even their career.

Emotional JTBDs by B2B marketing

Reasons buyers felt 'extremely confident' in their final choice



Source: LinkedIn and Bain & Company, 'How to be Buyable in B2B'.

When all else is equal, what tips the balance?

In the final phase of their research, LinkedIn and Bain & Company examined a very common B2B buying situation. When competing vendors tick all the same boxes, what seals the deal? What ultimately makes one brand more Buyable than the rest?

They found that three inputs are decisive:

- Positive first-hand experience (37%) is significantly more influential than product performance or price (both 8%).
- Recommendations from trusted sources (25%) also carry much greater weight than these transactional factors.
- Relatability to the buying situation is critical. Buying groups want assurance that a product or service has delivered for organisations like theirs and are strongly influenced by proof-points featuring a 'customer like us'.

Individually and collectively, these are the inputs that give buyers (and therefore buying groups) the emotional security they need to make a final decision.

To increase their brand's Buyability, B2B marketers should focus on these three sources of influence and persuasion.

Drivers of preference between seemingly equivalent vendors

37%

"I had previous success with them"
is over four times more influential than "product promised superior performance".

25%

"Heavily recommended by customers and colleagues"
is over three times more influential than price.

X4

"Video messaging from a "customer similar to us"
is four times more influential than video messaging from "a market leader".

Source: LinkedIn and Bain & Company, 'How to be Buyable in B2B'.

The 3Rs are the main levers of Buyability

The insights from LinkedIn and Bain & Company's research allows us to pinpoint the most important levers:

R	Recommendations	Provide affirmation and validation
R	Relationships	Foster familiarity and connection
R	Relatability	Instils belief that this is 'an organisation we could do business with'

Stimulating, harvesting and communicating the 3Rs should be CMOs' top priority.
Let's examine each in turn.

R Recommendations

Recommendations provide affirmation and validation

Every recommendation carries weight, but there is a clear hierarchy. The most powerful 'recommendations' are internal. If you've worked successfully with a vendor in the past, your confidence in them will be pretty much unshakeable.

Self-recommendation is closely followed by recommendations from colleagues. If incumbents can unlock this positive word-of-mouth, they're extremely well-placed to retain contracts – or even extend their remit. (Of course, the reverse is also true.)

Next come recommendations from within a buyer's network. 'Conversations with other professionals' is the second biggest trigger to switching suppliers (ranking just behind 'an increase in the organisation's expectations').

The final element in the hierarchy is recommendations from experts and thought leaders. These may lack the immediacy and personal touch of the first three, but they're still highly influential.

Complementing all of the above is the growing need for B2B brands to be prominent in the social discourse. As Forrester puts it: "Organisations should expand their buying signal universe to surface cues such as commentary, social amplification and third-party endorsements. Influencer activity will be increasingly important to this."[14]

'Buying signal cues' like these also drive AI discoverability. Authentic human-led recommendations feed directly into machine-led recommendations, and it's increasingly vital for brands to stimulate both.

32%

"Conversations with other professionals"
is a primary motivation for starting a buying process.[15]

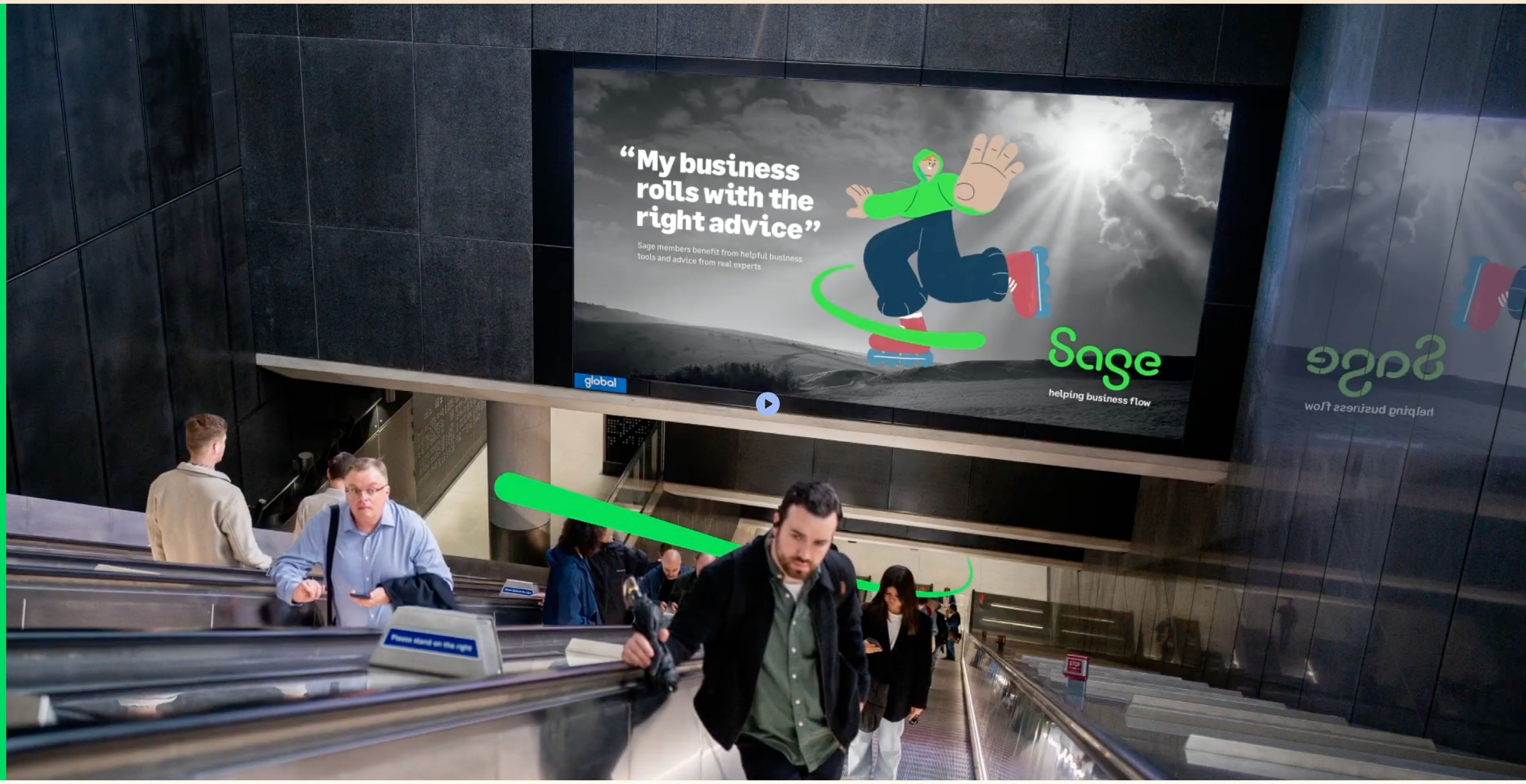
31%

"Colleagues with first-hand experience did not recommend"
is over three times more influential than price.[16]

14. Forrester, '2026 B2B Predictions Guide'.
15. Dentsu, 'Superpowers Index 2025'.
16. LinkedIn and Bain & Company, 'How to be Buyable in B2B'.

Case study

How Sage leveraged the power of Recommendations



The Buyability Challenge

In 2022, Sage's leadership in the UK was under threat. The company had become overly reliant on demand-led marketing, and SME's saw new players like Xero and QuickBooks as more relevant to their business needs.

Word of mouth was turning increasingly negative. As one accountant put it: "Only older people use Sage, because they always have. It's got a lot of catching up to do."

How Recommendations provided the solution

Sage conducted extensive research among its primary audience of 'Dynamic Investors': SME owners who are constantly on the look-out for ways to improve their business. Rather than focusing on the wonders of accountancy software, the brand encouraged them to talk about their vulnerabilities and the messy truths of running a small business.

Individual respondents' stories and voices formed the heart of a new campaign, positioning Sage as an 'anxiety reliever' for SMEs. Investment in brand advertising was substantially increased, with social media enabling Sage to target a wide variety of buying situations and use cases.

Results

- The empathetic use of Recommendations struck a clear chord with the audience, leading to a **12ppt** increase in spontaneous awareness.
- Sage also saw strong gains in equity metrics like "understands my business" and "cares about customers like me".
- Most importantly, annual recurring revenue grew by **7.2%** in FY 2023.

Read the full case study here: Sage

R Relationships

Relationships foster familiarity and trust

First-person relationships are priceless, especially when they stem from having physically worked together. But they're also relatively rare – and highly unlikely to cover every member of the buying group, even for incumbents.

With the rise of AI and a growing desire for self-serve, establishing meaningful 1:1 relationships is becoming more difficult. 75% of buyers now say they prefer a rep-free experience.[17]

For both these reasons, it's imperative that vendors invest in building relationships at the brand as well as the personal level. Buyer groups are looking for reassurance and permission to agree...and brands that command a positive reputation and feel familiar are automatically more likely to meet these needs.

Research by LinkedIn and Bain & Company has quantified this effect. In their survey, 81% of buyers said that 'everyone' or 'almost everyone' knew the brand that was eventually bought at the start of the process. But just 4% said their company bought a product that 'only the recommending function" knew of.

This is about more than blunt awareness. Brands should strive to be known for a particular set of attributes and capabilities. At the end of the day, it's salience that drives relationship strength.

Groups buy brands that feel familiar

17. Gartner, 'How to align sales engagement strategies with B2B buyer preferences'.

Source: Linkedin and Bain & Company, 'The real job of B2B Marketing is to give the Buyer Group permission to agree'.

Case study

How Barclaycard Payments capitalised on Relationships

The Buyability Challenge

By 2017, the Fintech revolution was threatening to turn the world of payments processing upside down. The likes of Square and Monzo had a Silicon Valley sheen that was proving irresistible to entrepreneurial businesses. To compete, Barclaycard Payments needed a new, more dynamic way to demonstrate its relevance.

How Barclaycard Payments got 'unseriously serious' about Relationships

Scale brings many advantages. One that leading brands often ignore is the diversity of their customer base. Barclaycard calculated that showcasing some of its more unexpected business relationships could drive the necessary reappraisal.

The new creative platform launched in 2018 with a campaign featuring Upside Down House and The Crystal Barn. They exemplified precisely what the brand wanted to communicate: how Barclaycard was the perfect payments solution for even the most esoteric businesses.

The brand also leveraged **Relationships** to navigate its way through COVID. A series of humorous "How To" videos showed how – whether you were a coffee shop juggling a surge in takeaways or a professional strength trainer needing to master YouTube – Barclaycard ensured payments would be the easiest and most reliable part of your business.

Using the same quirky tone, the final phase of the campaign demonstrated how Barclaycard had helped real-world customers to do more than simply make or take payments; replenishing stock, for instance, or launching their business online.

Results

- The primary purpose of the **Relationships** lever is to drive familiarity and connection.
- Barclaycard Payments' strategy led to significant uplifts in key equity measures like "delivers the solutions my business needs" and "helps me achieve my ambitions".
- Over the 5-year course of the campaign, transactions rose by **48%** and turnover increased by **22%**.

Read the full case study here: Barclaycard

R Relatability

Relatability instils belief that this is 'an organisation we could do business with'

Buyer groups are typically spoiled for choice. There will be multiple suppliers offering the sort of solution they're looking for, and the functional differences between them are often paper-thin.

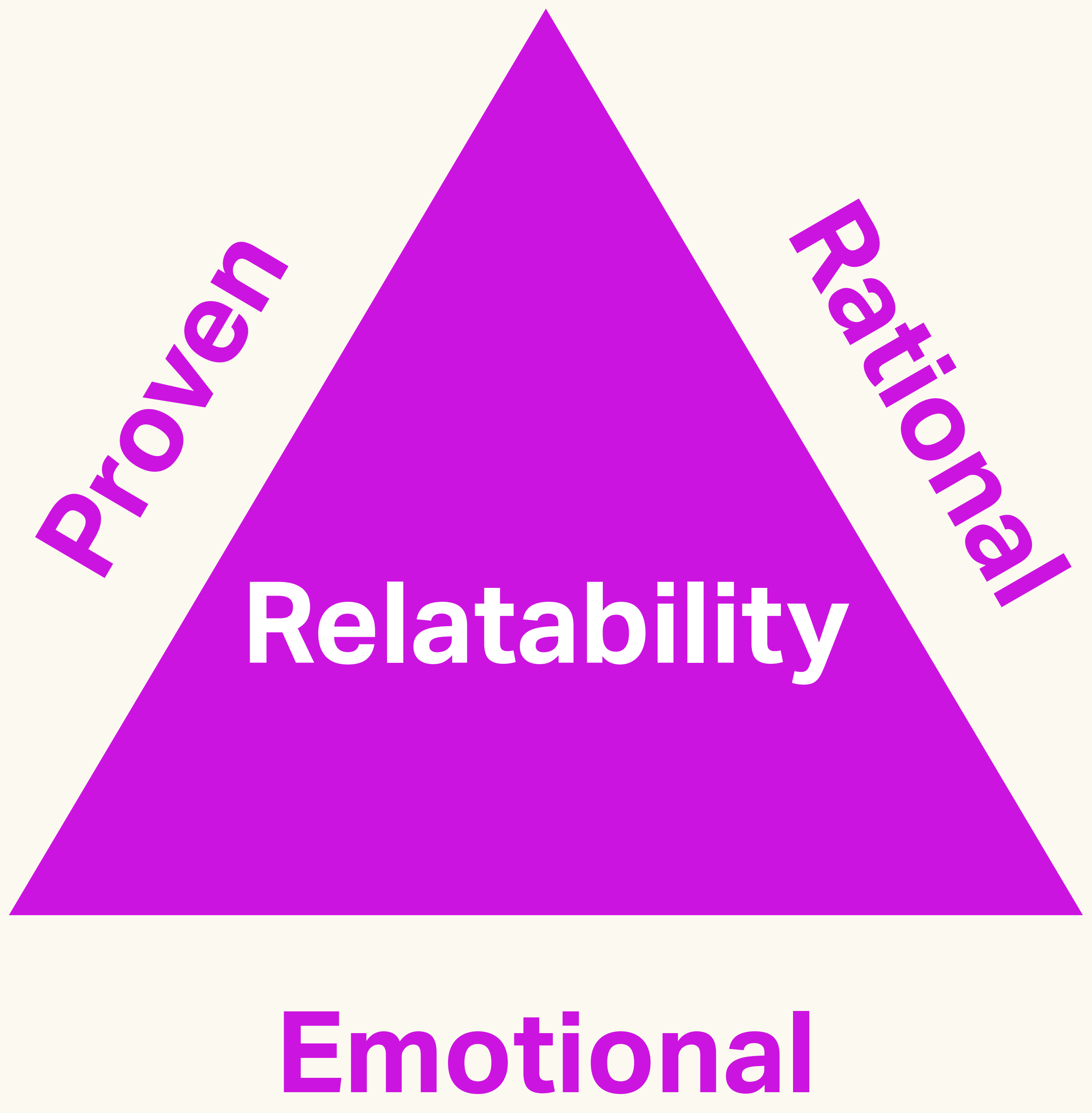
Recommendations and Relationships are two ways they whittle down the list. The third is Relatability. Before making a final commitment, the group needs to feel confident there'll be a good fit both operationally and culturally.

First-hand experience of how a vendor thinks, acts and behaves obviously provides the maximum comfort. We call this **Proven Relatability**. It is (or should be) a real advantage for incumbents.

The second aspect is **Rational Relatability**. This is about demonstrable relevance and a strongly evidenced track-record. Entirely logically, buyer groups are highly attracted to products and services that have solved "similar challenges for organisations like ours".

Finally, vendors should never under-estimate the importance of **Emotional Relatability**. We've already seen the impact of 'brand effects' like reputation and familiarity. These are magnified when the vendor feels likeable, trustworthy and well-aligned in terms of working style.

The Three Dimensions of Relatability



Case study

How Relatability drove distinctiveness for Workday

The Buyability Challenge

Workday provides enterprise-level software solutions for two key business functions: HR and Finance. The company was enjoying enormous success with the former; by 2023, its customer base included over half of the Fortune 500. However, Workday had struggled to gain traction in Finance, leading to it being seen as a narrow product specialist.

How Relatability empowered Workday to break out of its niche

Historically, Workday's marketing had been highly product-focused – but the company knew this would never create widespread perceptual change, especially among Hidden Buyers.

Instead, it decided to bring a healthy dose of humour and emotion to relatable buying situations.

The re-set started with a 60" Super Bowl spot, featuring rock legends including Ozzy Osbourne, Joan Jett and Billy Idol. With tongue firmly in cheek, the ad contrasted their real-life antics with corporate employees' habit of applauding each other as 'rock stars'.

Workday went all in on the campaign, mobilising its sales teams with stickers, email headers, Zoom backgrounds and rock-style merchandise.

While Workday prioritised **Emotional Relatability**, it didn't neglect **Rational Relatability**.

As well as honouring top performers in the Wall Street Journal's "Best Managed Companies" list with a rock-inspired salute, the campaign included customised executions targeted at different C-suite audiences.

Results

- **Relatability** delivered the brand fame Workday needed, generating over **4bn** earned impressions around the Super Bowl alone.
- More significantly, it led to a sharp rise in Buyability. **63%** of those exposed to the campaign said Workday was in their consideration set, compared to just **38%** in a control group.
- The reward was a **50%** increase in inbound leads.

Read the full case study here: Workday

The 3Rs drive Buyability; Buyability drive commercial impact

Whether it's a first-time pitch, a contract renewal process or a negotiation for a scope extension, Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability maximise the chances of a brand being bought.

The more levers present, and the more strongly they're felt by the buyer group, the greater the likely success-rate:

Very buyable brands:

1. **Secure the highest possible place on the Day One List. This is critical because, in Forrester's words, 'B2B buying has become an act of confirmation, not selection'.**
   - **95%** of contracts are won by a vendor that featured on the Day One List.
   - **80%** of contracts are won by the pre-contact favourite.
2. **Engender the collective confidence and decision-defensibility buyer groups need to make a purchase commitment.**

Source: 6sense, '2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report'

Each of the levers builds awareness and trust. That means you increase mental availability, grow brand equity and can engage with target accounts at a more meaningful level.

Michele Eggers
Vice President Marketing Shared Services, SAS

Brands love to talk about all the things they can deliver for customers. But trust and proof are becoming far more significant factors in the decision-making process.

Monique Elliott
Chief Brand and Communications Officer, Schneider Electric

The 3Rs also fuel AI discoverability

In the not-so-old world, buyers would engage with dozens of vendors across multiple touchpoints to evaluate information.

Now they can simply type: "Give me a personalised list of CRM platforms for a 2,000-person SaaS company in North America and Europe, ensuring they're designed for highly regulated industries like finance." In minutes, AI will provide a curated shortlist complete with rationale and considerations. No wonder usage is already omnipresent.

The Large Language Models that power AI prioritise 'reputational signals' like expert opinion, third-party media coverage and authentic social commentary. The cross-over with the signals that drive Buyability is clear.

Brands that can credibly demonstrate peer validation, customer relevance and risk reduction are more likely to appear in LLM shortlists and more likely to be deemed highly Buyable by purchasing organisations.

Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability are fundamental to both AI discoverability and Buyability

Reputation signal	How it drives AI discoverability	How it drives Buyability
Customer proof / validation	Real world validation	Builds confidence and defensibility
Peer / network / colleague recommendation	Reinforces authority and consensus	Builds confidence and defensibility
Expert recommendation	Seen as authoritative	Seen as defensible
Specific to the buying situation	Matches the query	Matches the buyer's specific needs
Relatable to a specific customer	Relevant to the query	Relevant to the buyer
Emphasising partnership	Easier to recommend	Signals safety and confidence
Public content	Can be indexed and cited	Feels transparent

New research: Putting Buyability to the test

Research objectives & methodology

Buyability is conceptually compelling.

As Dean Aragón, CEO of Shell Brands International, says: "It's a groundbreaking marketing model that much better aligns with the world we live in. Complex group dynamics driven by very human social and emotional factors are what really shape B2B buying decisions, especially as they are increasingly mediated through AI."

The model has already received enthusiastic support from across the B2B industry, but important questions remain: what impact does Buyability have in the real world? What are the proof-points?

In search of the answers, LIONS Advisory, WARC and LinkedIn Marketing Solutions partnered on a large-scale research study.

Objectives:

To measure the frequency with which different Buyability signals appear in B2B campaigns, and to examine whether the presence of more signals leads to greater uplifts across a range of metrics.

Methodology:

We used WARC's database of awards-winning or awards-entered case studies.[18] This gave us a sample of 700 B2B campaigns from the period 2010 to 2025. The dataset covered all major geographies and sectors.

Each case study was tagged to capture:

1. The presence or otherwise of 7 pre-specified Buyability signals.
2. The outcomes reported.
3. Data on campaign spend and duration (where available).

Note: We are conscious our methodology is imperfect. Awards entries are written to a specific purpose, and the metrics reported will be chosen to fit the argument. Moreover, our sample only covers 'successful' campaigns and therefore will not necessarily represent the totality of B2B marketing. In one sense, however, this is an advantage. By looking at campaigns that have already been recognised as successful, the methodology allows us to identify whether Buyability signals make them even more effective and, if so, in what specific ways. At least by implication, this would suggest lower-performing campaigns would also benefit from including the signals.

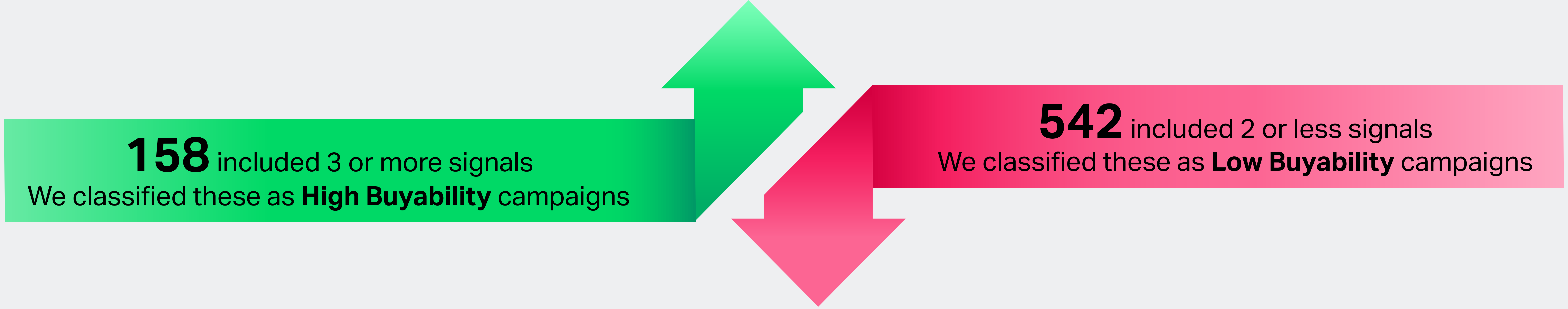
18. The database spans more than 30 different Awards shows, including Cannes Lions, Effies, MMA Smarties and the WARC Effectiveness Awards.

How Buyability pulls through into campaign messaging

We defined seven distinct communication signals that B2B brands might use to position themselves as more Buyable than the competition, whereby the campaign featured or was based on:

1. Testimonials / endorsements / use cases from customers
2. Validation by industry experts / peers
3. Validation by celebrities / influencers
4. Signals relating to long-term relationships
5. Signals relating to category leadership
6. Insights from current or prospective customers
7. Signals relating to the brand's working style

We then coded each of the 700 case studies to capture how many of these signals were present:



The signals reflect the different Buyability levers

Each of the signals can be mapped back to one of the 3Rs, although there are inevitably areas of overlap.

For instance: 'campaign features validation by celebrities or influencers' is clearly a Recommendation, either overtly or implicitly. But such campaigns also drive Relationships (because they tend to generate higher levels of awareness and brand fame), and Relatability (because they can help make messaging more human and accessible).

Our final matrix looked like this:

The 7 Buyability signals

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Testimonials / endorsements / use cases from customers	Validation by industry experts / peers	Validation by celebrities / influencers	Signals relating to long-term relationships	Signals relating to category leadership	Insights from current or prospective customers	Signals relating to the brand's working style
These are primarily Recommendation signals			These are primarily Relationship signals		These are primarily Relatability signals	

Key finding #1

The Buyability model is under-leveraged

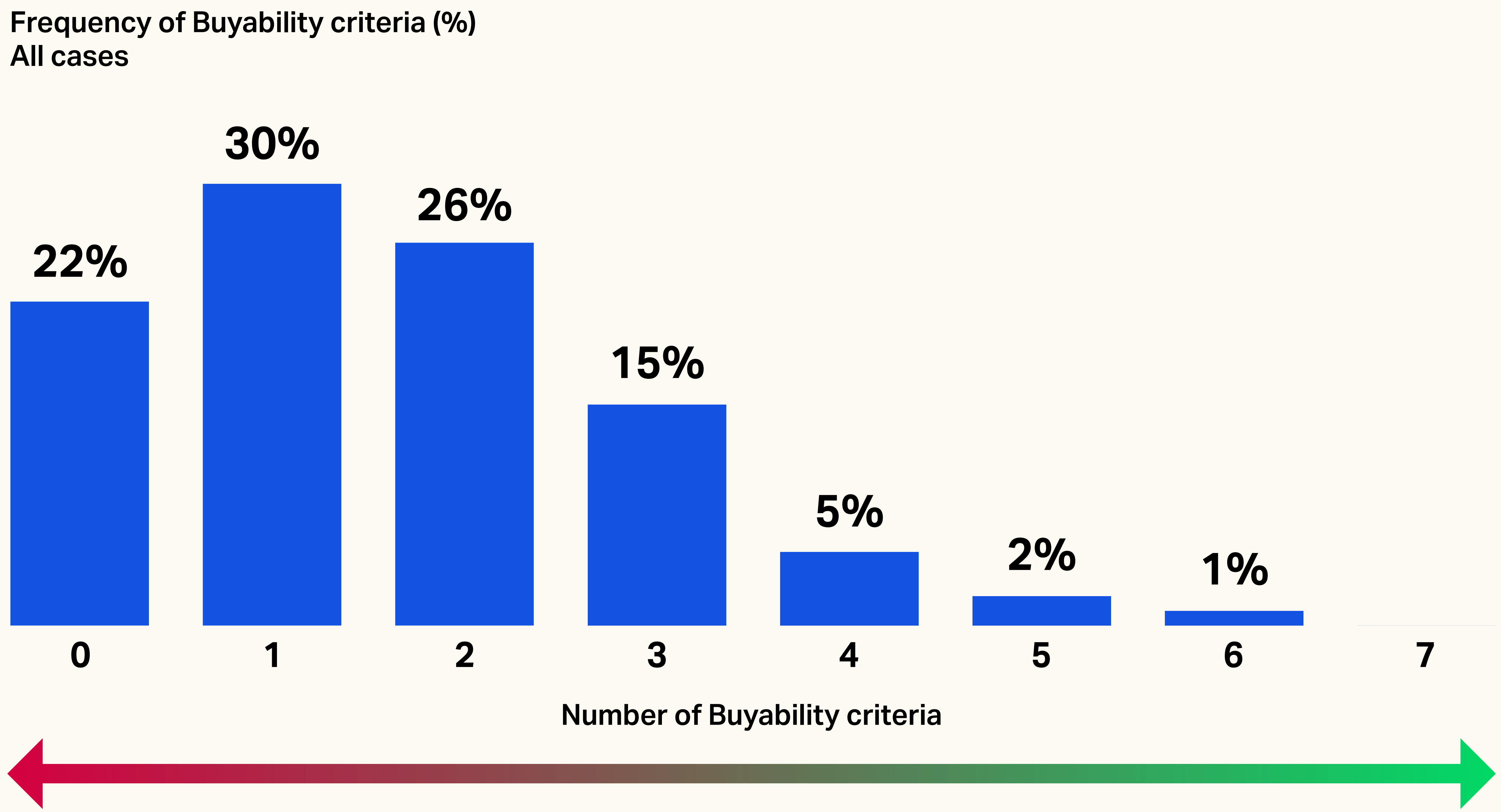
There was a much lower incidence of Buyability signals than we had expected. Across the full sample, the mean number of signals per campaign was 1.6.

30% of the case studies only included one signal – and a further **22%** contained none at all.

Very few reported using multiple signals. Less than a quarter had 3 or more. This isn't simply a function of campaign scale. Even when campaign spend exceeded US$1m, the average number of Buyability signals was still only 2.25.

For B2B marketers interested in adopting Buyability as a strategic communications model, there is clearly white space to be occupied.

Number of Buyability signals per campaign



Base. Total Sample: n = 700.

Key finding #2

Not all levers are being pulled equally

Analysis of signal incidence across High and Low Buyability campaigns revealed some important patterns.

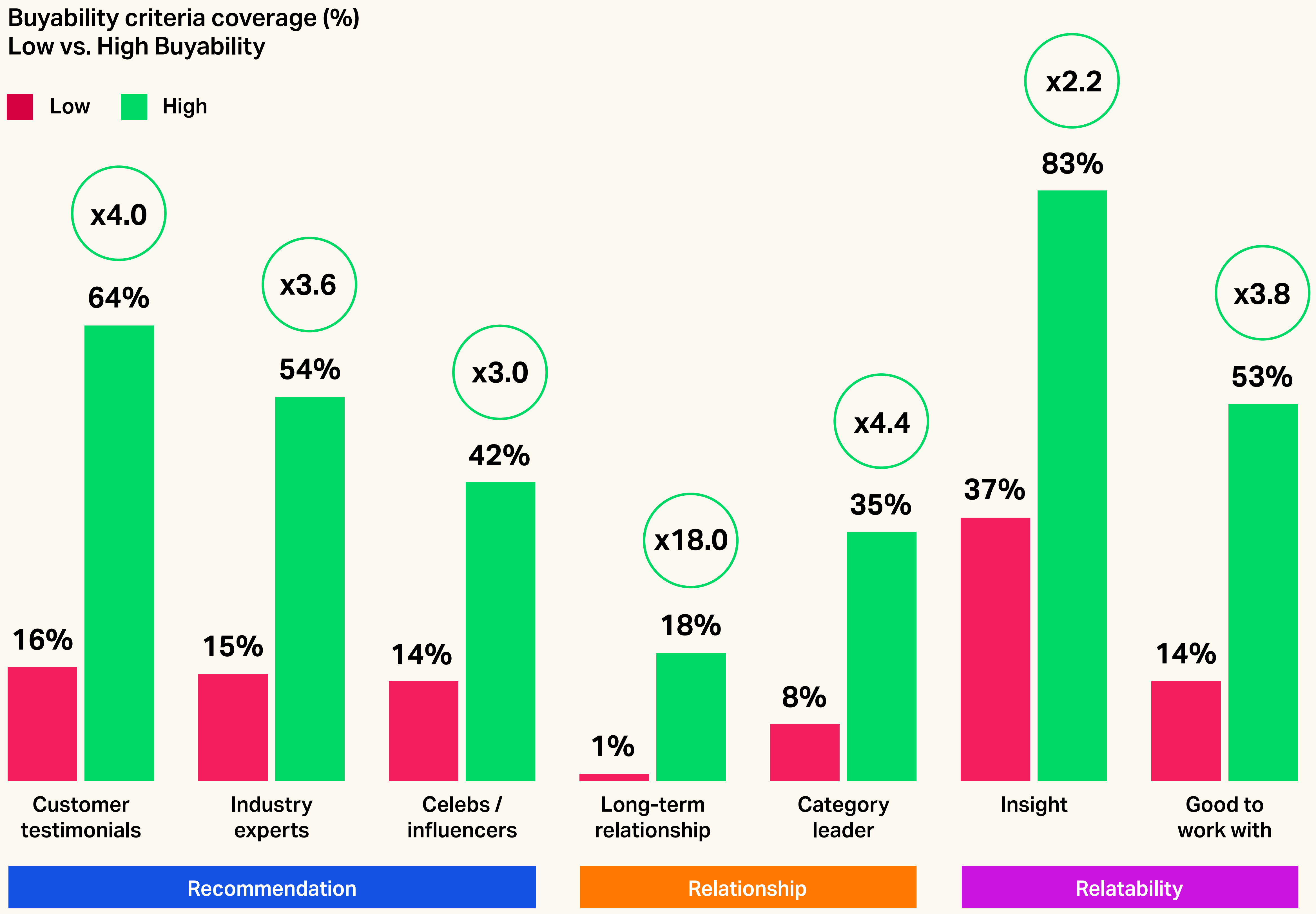
Signals that flag Relatability appeared most often. In fact, 'insights from current or prospective customers' occurred in 83% of High Buyability case studies. Customer-centricity – and the relevance that comes from it – seems to be the foundation stone upon which such campaigns are built.

High Buyability campaigns were significantly more likely to include Relationship signals. However, 'category leadership' and 'long-term relationships' still featured comparatively rarely. Of course, not every brand will be in a position to make these claims. But those who can will encounter low levels of competition.

Of the three Recommendation signals, 'customer testimonials, use cases and endorsements' stood out. High Buyability campaigns were x4 more likely to include this signal. The 48-point gap between High and Low Buyability campaigns (64% vs. 16%) was the largest delta in our analysis.

These findings could suggest a productive starting point. Creatively connecting a customer-sourced insight to a customer-validated solution may be the simplest, most practicable way for B2B brands to increase their perceived Buyability.

Incidence of individual signals, High vs. Low Buyability campaigns



Base: Low campaigns n=542, High campaigns n=158.
Note: Chart shows Buyability criteria coverage across Low and High Buyability campaigns. For example, 83% of High Buyability campaigns met the 'Insight' criteria, compared to 37% of Low Buyability campaigns.

Key finding #3

High Buyability campaigns significantly outperform on brand equity measures

In Chapter 1, we described the advantage strong brands have in meeting buyer groups' primary need: to feel justified and safe when signing the contract.

Our analysis shows that Buyability helps boost brand equity. High Buyability campaigns were:

- **x1.24** more likely to report increases in brand awareness.
- **x1.35** more likely to report positive PR coverage and / or 'buzz' on social media networks.
- **x1.91** more likely to report improvements in brand health metrics such as consideration, preference and purchase intent.

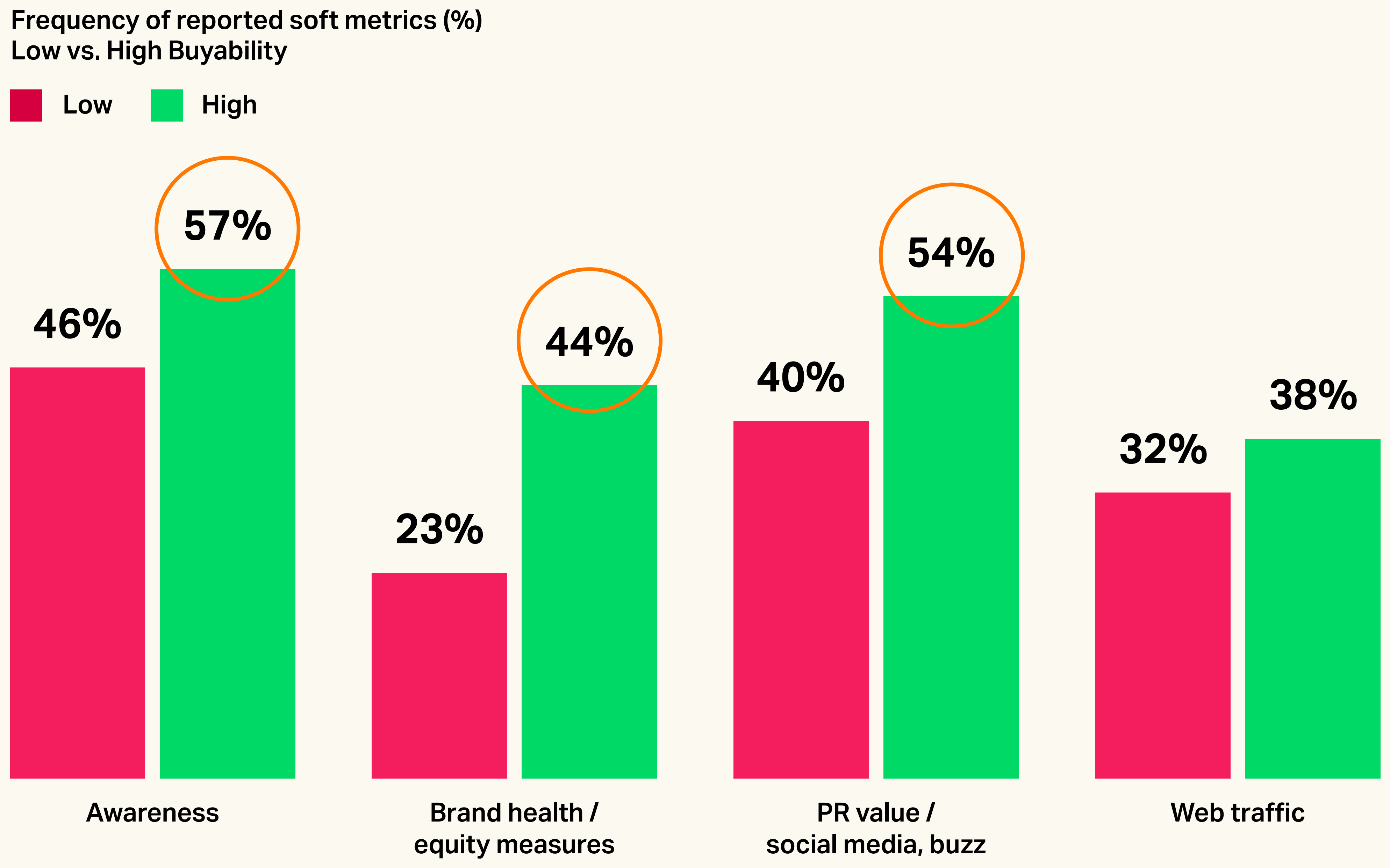
We also saw some evidence that these campaigns were more likely to generate an uplift in web traffic.

If your CFO thinks increases in mental availability, brand fame and brand positivity are vanity metrics disconnected from commercial success, remind her of this:

Target organisations will not commit to a purchase unless the buying group is collectively confident it can defend its decision. Brands with high awareness and reputational strength are best placed to instil this confidence.

During the conversation, you might also point out that the same factors are fundamental to AI discoverability.

Equity metrics reported, High vs. Low Buyability campaigns



Base: Low campaigns n=542, High campaigns n=158.
Note: Chart shows the frequency of reported soft metrics across Low and High Buyability campaigns. For example, 57% of High Buyability campaigns reported an 'Awareness' result, compared to 46% of Low Buyability campaigns.

Key finding #4

High Buyability campaigns deliver superior commercial outcomes

Knowing how frequently organisations deploy Buyability signals in their B2B campaigns, and which signals predominate, is useful. Determining the extent to which High Buyability campaigns strengthen brand equity is even more so.

But what matters most is understanding whether higher signal presence leads to uplifts in financial performance.

The preliminary evidence[19] is encouraging. In our sample, High Buyability campaigns were:

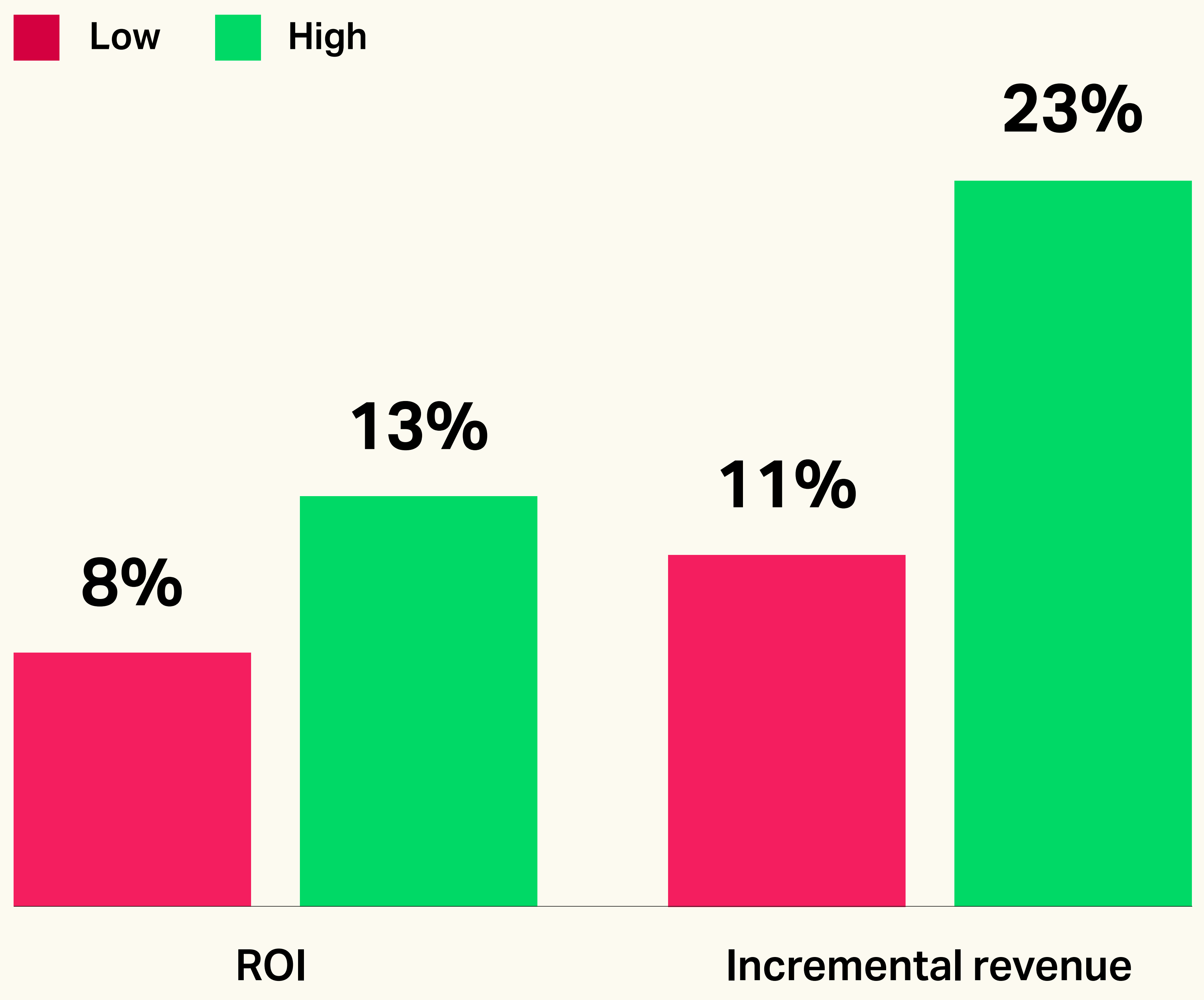
- **x1.62** more likely to report uplifts in ROI.
- **X2.09** more likely to report incremental revenue growth.

Had the sample sizes been larger, we would have liked to cross-analyse the data by campaign scale. While that proved impossible, these findings clearly pass the intuition test: **campaigns that include more signals give buying groups greater permission to buy, and thereby create meaningful commercial advantage.**

The case studies in this report strongly support the point. Each had a significantly positive effect on both the top- and the bottom-line.

19. It's worth noting that the case studies in our sample were generally weak at reporting hard commercial metrics. We would urge the authors of future submissions to make this an area of focus.

Commercial outcomes reported, High vs. Low Buyability campaigns



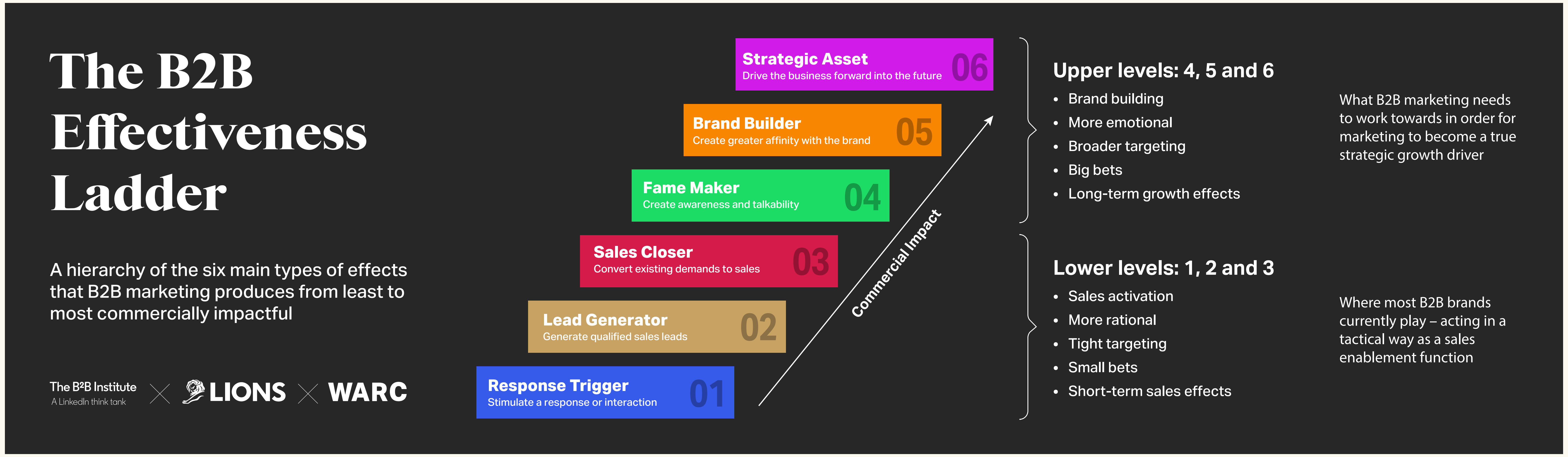
Base: Low campaigns n=542, High campaigns n=158.
Note: Chart shows the frequency of reported hard metrics across Low and High Buyability campaigns. For example, 23% of High Buyability campaigns reported an 'Incremental Revenue' result, compared to 11% of Low Buyability campaigns.

Key finding #5

High Buyability campaigns help future-proof the business

The B2B Effectiveness Ladder is a framework developed by WARC that ranks campaigns by objectives and outcomes.[20]

It is best thought of in two parts. Rungs 1 – 3 focus on the kind of short-term effects to which activations are typically geared. The gold standard here is sales conversion (Rung 3). The top half of the Ladder reflects longer-term, and therefore more commercially beneficial, outcomes.



Each of the 700 case studies in our sample was scored against the Ladder. This process was conducted independently of the Buyability signal analysis.

There were no discernible differences across Rungs 1 – 3. High and Low Buyability campaigns were equally likely to reach each of these rungs, meaning they performed similarly in terms of converting existing demand into sales. **However, High Buyability campaigns dominated the upper reaches of the Ladder:**

High Buyability campaigns were

x1.50 more likely to be 'Fame Makers',
creating brand awareness and talkability.
(Rung 4 on the Ladder)

High Buyability campaigns were

x2.03 more likely to be 'Brand Builders',
driving greater customer affinity.
(Rung 5 on the Ladder)

High Buyability campaigns were

x1.70 more likely to be 'Strategic Assets',
propelling the business forward into the future.
(Rung 6 on the Ladder)

20. You can read more about the B2B Effectiveness Ladder here.

Research headlines

We would not claim these findings are definitive. More work is required, especially in terms of understanding the precise relationship between Buyability and campaign scale. There's a strong body of evidence that Creative Commitment – a composite measure of campaign spend, campaign duration and media channel variety – is also a key driver of B2B marketing effectiveness.[21]

However, the study does indicate Buyability's potential at both the brand and commercial level. When we separated out High and Low Buyability campaigns (those that contained three or more of the relevant signals versus those with two or fewer), we found that:

High Buyability campaigns are much more likely to deliver

- Increases in brand awareness and brand health.
- Cultural impact through positive PR coverage and social media buzz.
- Incremental revenue growth and ROI uplifts.

They are also more likely to constitute a 'Strategic Asset', capable of propelling the business into the future.

We also found that Buyability is currently under-leveraged as a marketing model, regardless of campaign budget or duration.

21. Detailed findings are available in 'The B2B Effectiveness Code' and 'The Big Long Idea for creative effectiveness in B2B'.

There is one clear takeaway from this analysis

It is no longer sufficient for B2B marketing to increase awareness and consideration. It needs to prove that it directly generates sales.

Buyability provides the key:

To get deals closed, marketers should strategically and intentionally build more Buyability signals into their communication programmes

Messaging that leverages the 3Rs increases brand discoverability, grows brand credibility and gives buying groups the decision-defensibility they need.

The opportunity is significant.

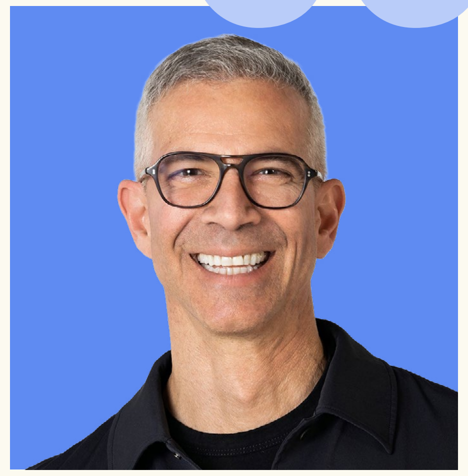
In the final chapter, we'll explore how B2B marketers can seize it.

Industry insights

Buying groups are making decisions with their budgets and careers attached to the outcome.

When a campaign contains more Buyability signals, it's reducing informational, emotional and professional risk.

Wendy Walker
CMO, Global Dairy Trade and President, IAA Singapore



What's brilliant about this research is that it puts a framework around things that are intuitively connected... People need to realise that doing purely rational marketing that only targets the in-market audience is incredibly inefficient.

Jim Lesser
Chief Brand Officer, ServiceNow

The results show how Buyability increases a brand's reputational surface area. It gives people more reasons to engage.

It's also de-risking. Buying committees will see your brand as the safe choice.

Natalie Osborn
Vice President, Brand Marketing and Creative, SAS

4

A playbook for building more Buyable brands

Strategic clarity is a prerequisite

To win in hyper-competitive environments, B2B brands must be laser-focused on what marketing needs to achieve. This will require a mindset shift in many organisations.

By focusing on individual Target Buyers, traditional MQL strategies do not fully reflect the realities of the purchasing process. The key unit of decision-making in B2B is the buying group, typically comprising ten or more individuals from multiple disciplines.

Almost invariably, it will include 'Hidden Buyer' functions like HR, Legal and Procurement. AI is already a widely used resource for researching and vetting potential suppliers.

The composition of buyer groups means non-rational dynamics and biases are at work. In reaching a final decision, these are usually more influential than logical criteria like product performance or price.

To build Buyability, brands must be::

1 Discoverable

Buying groups need to recognize your brand before they begin actively evaluating vendors. As buyers increasingly rely on AI to do that early research, brands must send the right reputational signals to feature prominently in LLM outputs and make the Day One List.

2 Credible

Buying groups need evidence they can trust. Customers, peers, experts, and trusted publications provide the proof that a brand can deliver, and increasingly shape what AI surfaces. That third-party evidence earns a place on the short list by giving buying groups something they can trust and defend.

3 Winnable

Winning means giving every stakeholder, including procurement, legal, and finance, the confidence to say yes. That means matching how the organisation works, demonstrating success with similar customers, and being recommended by sources they already trust. When those signals line up, consensus forms around your brand.

Marketers who embrace the Buyability model will be well-placed to meet these strategic imperatives.

The most Buyable brands act with full intentionality

The importance of Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability won't be news to most B2B marketers. Many will already be activating one or more of these levers – although, based on our analysis of 700 campaigns, such efforts can often be hard to detect.

Deriving full benefit from the Buyability model requires a systematic, well-structured approach. Marketing success rarely happens by accident, and the brands who are seeing the best returns from Buyability have made it a core organisational and operational principle.

Examples include:

- Having a team dedicated to securing case studies and testimonials, then categorising them by sector and customer size.
- Appointing a Customer Success Manager with specific responsibility for generating customer-led insights.
- Identifying the most prevalent challenges by business segment, researching how those needs are likely to manifest themselves, then targeting activity against the most relevant Category Entry Points.
- Seeding connections with thought leaders and other influencers in anticipation of future opportunities.

Investing in programmes like these maximises Buyability's long-term impact, whilst ensuring the model can be leveraged by every part of the business.

A lot of organisations just don't have the ingredients ready. They may not have strong customer stories or a clear category point-of- view. Then the campaign defaults to the easiest thing to say, rather than the most useful thing for the buyer to hear.

Wendy Walker
CMO, Global Dairy Trade and President, IAA Singapore.

Very successful companies tend to have teams dedicated to securing customer testimonials and case studies. They run that capability programmatically so it can be done at a scalable level.

Rishi Dave
Partner, Bain & Company

In the future, the Buyability model could replace more traditional ways of looking at funnel performance… it's the intentionality around the key levers that will really make the difference.

Monique Elliott
Chief Brand and Communications Officer, Schneider Electric.

Unlocking the power of Recommendations

The importance of Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability won't be news. Positive word-of-mouth always carries more weight than numbers in a spreadsheet or a well-polished presentation.

For high-performing brands, the process is often organic. Other organisations may need to work a little harder. Either way, B2B marketers should consider four key actions:

- Build close contacts across your category, including experts and media commentators.
- Leverage your best customers. Remember, 'conversations with other professionals' is the second biggest trigger for switching suppliers.[22]
- Explore opportunities with credible influencers and content creators. This may not be right for every brand, but it opens up new touchpoints and can help messaging to cut through.
- Understand the power of 'small things'. How a brand behaves is just as likely to drive recommendation as how it performs.

Network effects play a key role. People are naturally quicker to endorse a product or service if they've heard others do the same. Marketers should therefore build 'recommendation momentum' by stimulating as many sources as possible.

They'll find their efforts are rewarded twice over. Brands that are publicly endorsed command significantly greater prominence in AI models.

22. Dentsu, 'Superpowers Index 2025'.

Brands should see the different types of recommendation as complementary. Customer voices reduce risk; expert voices build credibility; and influencer voices build memory.

Wendy Walker
CMO, Global Dairy Trade and President, IAA Singapore

When there are 20 to 30 people in a buying group, the ability to say, 'Company X works with them, they're probably good' is powerful. And experts are paid to be independent, so their voices are also very powerful.

Jim Lesser
Chief Brand Officer, ServiceNow

Everyone says thought leadership content needs to be gated so you get contacts to add to the pipeline. But the minute you do that, you block your content from the LLMs. That's a disconnect. To build Buyability, you need volume and reach. There needs to be a mindset shift.

Michele Eggers
Vice President of Marketing Shared Services, SAS

Forging stronger Relationships

B2B organisations should never forget the importance of Hidden Buyers. They are hugely influential within the buying group.

However, it's rarely practical to target this segment on a 1:1 basis. Instead, relationships need to be built at the brand level.

Increasing understanding and interest amongst Hidden Buyers requires:

- More inclusive media strategies. The goal is not reach for reach's sake – it's about creating brand familiarity throughout the buyer group by leveraging multiple media channels and contexts.
- Greater emphasis on cognitively fluent formats like video.
- Being bold enough to challenge category conventions. Creatively, this may include possible 'shortcuts to fame' such as celebrity endorsements or the imaginative use of influencers.

The double dividend is that this approach will simultaneously open the door to new and more productive Target Buyer relationships.

As WARC's 'The Multiplier Effect'[23] makes clear, demand-driving activities become more effective when used in conjunction with equity-led marketing… but few B2B brands are exploiting this fact. Research has found there is only a 4% average alignment between 'brand' and 'demand' efforts in terms of the audiences targeted and reached.[24]

What drives the Day One List is generally category fame and strong social proof. Many companies don't invest in those elements. Worse, they don't even realise why they're not on the Day One List. There's a lot of missed opportunity.

Rishi Dave
Partner, Bain & Company

B2B marketing is just as much about catering for an emotional decision as a functional one, so you need to think beyond performance marketing. You have to make an emotional connection and build confidence across the entire buying group.

Cheryl Guerin
EVP of Global Brand Strategy & Innovation, Mastercard

The more Buyability levers you weave into campaigns, the more you increase your stickiness with the buying group. That's because you're talking about a shared value proposition rather than a purely transactional relationship.

Monique Elliott
Chief Brand and Communications Officer, Schneider Electric

23. WARC: 'The Multiplier Effect: A CMO's guide to brand building in the performance era'.
24. WARC: 'Brand to demand: Unlocking sustainable growth in B2B'.

Stressing Relatability

We've already described how this lever is multi-dimensional. For the purposes of this chapter, we can set aside **Proven Relatability**: first-hand experience of how a vendor thinks, acts and behaves.

To increase a brand's **Rational Relatability**, marketers need to:

- Prove immediate relevance to the needs and circumstances of target organisations. In practice, this means showing how a product has successfully resolved similar challenges in similar companies.
- Strongly associate their brand with the most pertinent Category Entry Points: the principal 'jobs to be done' that buyer groups will identify before considering potential suppliers. For instance, a logistics company might strive to be the go-to name for 'on-time delivery' or 'real-time tracking'.

Emotional Relatability is about resonance at the human level.
Marketers should consider:

- Behaviours and ways-of-working that demonstrate obsessive customer-centricity. This is an area in which actions speak much louder than words.
- Creative messaging that is empathetic and tonally warm. Appropriate humour can also have a role; it's a card that B2B organisations too often underplay.
- Tools and tactics that give the brand an approachably human face. Using celebrities and influencers can help; so can empowering employee advocacy.

B2B marketing can be very focused on the short-term. There's a belief we just need to tell people what our product does, then they'll magically show up and buy it. This results in a lack of fluidity and connectivity between campaigns.

Natalie Osborn
Vice President of Brand Marketing and Creative, SAS

For all the conversation about being bold and taking risks, I don't think there's a CFO in the world who wants to take a chance. In B2B, the first thing marketers need to do is help their colleagues understand that it's very rational to be emotional.

Jim Lesser
Chief Brand Officer, ServiceNow

One of the sign-offs in our campaign was "Together the possibilities are priceless." That was a signal of our working style. To reinforce the point, we'd show partner case studies to demonstrate what each side brought to the table.

Cheryl Guerin
EVP of Global Brand Strategy & Innovation, Mastercard

Framing the message

While the specifics will obviously vary across categories, brands and individual campaigns, messaging should always be geared towards giving the buyer group 'permission to agree' that:

- **The vendor demands inclusion on the Day One List.**
- **The vendor represents a safe and defensible final choice.**

In an earlier WARC paper with LinkedIn, we showed how Customer Promises are highly effective at creating these types of permission.[25]

A Customer Promise can be defined as a direct commitment made by an organisation to its buyers and users.

It should be specific and auditable rather than a vague statement of intent. The easier one can be put to the test, the more convincing customers will find it.

When made and fulfilled with 100% consistency, audiences stop thinking about a Customer Promise and accept it as a true statement of fact. Trust and belief are generated, and the brand is elevated above more generic alternatives.

If you'd like to know more about Customer Promises, the Harvard Business Review has published an in-depth article on the topic.

A strong Customer Promise drives familiarity while helping derisk the buying decision

Customer Promises work because of their inherent customer-centricity and strategic simplicity.

They're an antidote to complexity, which can be a huge advantage for the brand… and ultimately for the customer too.

Harjot Singh
Global Chief Strategy Officer, McCann Worldgroup & McCann

25. WARC, 'Making a promise to the business customer'.

Case study

Learnings from Juniper Networks

The Buyability Challenge

In 2022, Juniper Networks was looking to expand beyond its traditional heartland of telecoms operators and ISPs. It had its sights set on the higher-margin enterprise market. But it faced significant barriers: low awareness, low consideration and an audience of IT and C-suite decision-makers who simply didn't believe a networking vendor like Juniper had the necessary capabilities.

How Juniper Networks applied the 3Rs

Juniper was confident its new generation of products offered best-in-class reliability and predictability. Its main challenge was finding a communications strategy that would persuade buying groups to place the company on the Day One List. Buyability provided the answer.

The 'Demand More' campaign used humour to demonstrate how Juniper's technology empowers customers, in stark contrast to some of its better-known competitors:

Recommendations: The campaign showcased real-world examples of how customers had benefitted from switching to Juniper, including faster technology rollouts and a dramatic reduction in help desk tickets.

Relationships: Media budgets were trebled and invested in a video-first strategy to increase brand familiarity. Platforms including LinkedIn and Reddit were harnessed to stimulate conversations around the brand, with a vendor partnership programme driving 1:1 advocacy.

Relatability: Juniper targeted key Category Entry Points, such as having a clear line-of-sight on network performance and minimising costly infrastructure fixes. Emphasising the brand's personality built Emotional Relatability across both Target and Hidden Buyers.

Key takeaways:

- Brand sentiment improved by **74%** between June 2022 and September 2023.
- Brand consideration also spiked, helping drive incremental growth of **51%** in enterprise sector revenues.
- Juniper's competitors were paying close attention. In early 2024, the company was purchased by HPE (Hewlett Packard Enterprise) for **$14 billion.**

Read the full case study here: Juniper Networks

Case study

Learnings from ServiceNow

The Buyability Challenge

AI's emergence represented a huge opportunity for ServiceNow… but also posed a pressing challenge. How could it ensure prospects didn't automatically default to better-known names like IBM, Salesforce or SAP? And what did it need to do to compete effectively against marketing budgets that were typically x7 – x10 larger than its own?

How ServiceNow applied the 3Rs

ServiceNow's primary audience was the C-suite: leaders responsible for making decisions that impact every part of the organisation. With a proven track record in connecting and optimising corporate software systems, ServiceNow's proposition was that it was uniquely capable of solving enterprise-wide challenges by 'Putting AI to work for people'.To drive home this top-down strategy, the brand pressed hard on all three Buyability levers:

Recommendations: ServiceNow focused on expert recommendations to increase brand credibility. It partnered with Oxford Economics on the 'AI Maturity Index', a major thought leadership effort. This helped spark PR coverage across business news outlets.

Relationships: big-tent events like 'Knowledge' allowed the company to tell its story on a 1-to-1 basis, while an engagingly light-hearted campaign featuring Idris Elba fostered relationships at the brand level.

Relatability: ServiceNow's advertising leant into relatable buying situations. Its media strategy was two-pronged. It leveraged high attention sports moments to connect with the C-suite outside the working environment, while placements around AI, tech and business communicated specific proof-points. Rational Relatability was further strengthened by a Q&A Exec video series showcasing relevant use cases.

Key takeaways:

- This Buyability-led strategy cut through. Agreement that "The ServiceNow platform enables a single AI to work across the entire enterprise" rose from **7%** to **77%** in just six months.
- Perceptions of ServiceNow as an AI leader jumped from **7% to 80%**, driving a **x10** increase in consideration.
- The campaign also had a clear halo effect. Subscription revenues (including non-AI income streams) jumped by **23%.**

Read the full case study here: ServiceNow

Dissecting ServiceNow's comms strategy

ServiceNow ensured that Buyability signals featured prominently throughout their communications mix. That relied on building a system of communications where each phase – awareness, consideration and demand – had different jobs to do but were able to refer back to a consistent message, set of characters and suite of distinctive brand assets to leverage key Buyability signals. The results speak for themselves. Their Buyability-led approach has helped ServiceNow achieve a 13x increase in unaided awareness over the past three years.

	Awareness	Consideration	Demand
1 Focus on 'customers like us'	✓	✓	✓
2 Customer recommendation			✓
3 Peers / expert recommendation		✓	
4 Celebrity / influencers recommendation	✓	✓	✓
5 'Working style like us'	✓	✓	✓
6 Long-term partnership	✓	✓	✓
7 Category leader		✓	
# of Signals	4	6	5

Source: Cracking B2B Creativity: The 7 Buyability signals that Power Successful Campaigns.

Optimising for Buyability

If the strategic and executional drivers of Buyability are well-defined, best practice in terms of measurement remains a work-in-progress.

The topic is being examined by various industry groups, agencies and consultancies. Building on its research with LinkedIn, Bain & Company favours the 'Likelihood To Buy' metric. Stein IAS is developing a methodology based on Shortlist Inclusion Rates. Other parties are also hard at work.

As things stand, there is no commonly accepted, off-the-shelf solution for measuring Buyability. However, most brands will already possess – or can readily acquire – the data to develop their own model.

It is likely to look like this →

Where are we today?

- Shortlist & win rates by category / sub-category.
- Brand saliency among Target & Hidden Buyers.
- Brand perceptions among Target & Hidden Buyers.[26]
- Share of search.
- Share of LLM (by model).
- Share of positive coverage in social and other media channels.

N.B. Intelligence should also be gathered on key competitors.

What have we been communicating?

Analysis of past campaign activity, split by Awareness vs. Consideration vs. Demand.

- Which Buyability signals were transmitted?
- How effectively were they expressed?
- How did the campaigns perform?

Consider as many aspects of the brand experience as possible, including websites, PR, events, sales materials etc.

What do we need to change?

Diagnosis of relative strengths and weaknesses.

- How Buyable is our brand overall?
- How do we perform across each of the 3Rs?
- Where do we lag competitors?

Develop comms strategies specifically designed to capitalise on strenths or address weaknesses.

Prioritise by campaign objective, Buyability lever, individual signal, channel mix etc.

26. The most important perceptions to measure are those that reflect the Emotional Jobs To Be Done outlined on P18 i.e., "I feel confident that Brand X could do the job"; "I think the process to buy Brand X would be relatively easy"; "I think my buying group would be aligned in choosing Brand X"; "If there were to be downsides with Brand X, I feel they could be managed"; "I'm confident I could defend the decision to choose Brand X even if things went wrong".

Summary: The strategic argument for Buyability

Challenges for B2B marketers

- **Growing pressure to show commercial returns.**
- **Increased competition.**
- **More complex buyer group dynamics.**
- **Insight gaps on how buying decisions really get made.**

Recommended solution

- **Make Buyability marketing's primary focus**. Concentrate on building the collective confidence and decision defensibility a buyer group needs before it will commit to a purchase.
- **Use Buyability to drive alignment across the C-suite.** The model establishes common priorities and a shared language.

Primary levers to pull

- **Recommendations provide affirmation and validation.** Positive word-of-mouth from within the buyer's professional network, expert opinion and social commentary all influence the decision-making process.
- **Relationships foster familiarity and connection.** These should be cultivated at the brand as well as the personal level. While priceless, 1:1 relationships are rare and unlikely to cover every member of the buying group.
- **Relatability instils belief that 'this is an organisation we could do business with'.** These should be cultivated at the brand as well as the personal level. While priceless, 1:1 relationships are rare and unlikely to cover every member of the buying group.

Focusing on these levers pays a double dividend because the 3Rs are also fundamental to boosting AI discoverability.

Summary: The evidence for Buyability's impact

Analysis of 700 award-winning or awards-entered B2B case studies showed Buyability has a strongly positive effect on brand and business outcomes.

We compared the performance of High Buyability campaigns (those containing 3 or more Buyability signals) with Low Buyability campaigns (those containing 2 or fewer signals):

Buyability drives brand equity

High Buyability campaigns were:

- **x1.24** more likely to report increases in brand awareness.
- **x1.91** more likely to report improvements in brand health metrics.

Buyability boosts commercial returns

High Buyability campaigns were:

- **x1.62** more likely to report uplifts in ROI and **x2.09** more likely to report incremental revenue growth.[27]
- **x1.70** more likely to be classified as 'Strategic Assets', capable of propelling the business into the future.

The research also found that Buyability is under-leveraged as a communications model. The mean number of signals per campaign was just 1.6. Even among campaigns with a reported spend over US$1m, 57% contained two or fewer signals.

For organisations interested in putting Buyability to work for their brands, there is currently clear white space. This window of opportunity will not last for ever, so marketers may want to move fast.

27. Please note that the base for these findings is relatively small.

Summary: Recommended actions to build Buyability

Marketers must act with full intentionality. Transmitting more Buyability signals increases brand discoverability, grows brand credibility and ensures buying groups perceive their product as a more defensible choice than competitive offerings.

The 3Rs provide the right strategic lens:

Recommendations	• Dedicate resources to securing case studies and testimonials from a wide variety of customer types. • Develop close contacts with experts, media commentators and other influencers. • Consider how celebrities or content creators could help amplify Buyability messaging.
Relationships	• Increase brand familiarity – especially among Hidden Buyers – via more inclusive media strategies that span multiple channels and contexts. • Ensure sufficient priority is given to cognitively fluent formats like video. • Avoid defaulting to category conventions. It's hard to build productive relationships if your brand is easy to ignore.
Relatability	• Prove relevance by demonstrating to the target organisation how your product has helped similar companies succeed. • Strongly associate your brand with key Category Entry Points. • Never under-estimate the power of Emotional Relatability. Develop ways-of-working that show true customer-centricity and ensure comms give your brand an approachably human face.

Who we are

About WARC

The global authority on marketing effectiveness

For 40 years, WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective. Across WARC Strategy and WARC Media, its services include 100,000+ case studies, best practice guides, research papers, special reports, advertising trend data, news & opinion articles, as well as events and advisory services. WARC operates out of London, New York, and Singapore, servicing a community of over 75,000 marketers in more than 1,300 companies across 100+ markets and collaborates with 50+ industry partners.

WARC is part of LIONS.
Want to get access to WARC? Get a demo

About LIONS Advisory

LIONS Advisory helps ambitious CMOs establish marketing as a business growth engine – fueling cultures of creative effectiveness with the industry's leading consultants. The LIONS Advisory team is made up of strategists with expertise in activating creative transformation based across EMEA, the Americas and APAC. We establish deep and enduring partnerships with marketers at some of the world's largest, most influential and most successful marketing organizations.

LIONS is part of Informa plc.

WARC X LIONS | ADVISORY

The B2B Institute at LinkedIn

The B2B Institute is LinkedIn's in-house think tank for B2B marketing. We partner with leading academics, researchers, and practitioners to study how B2B businesses grow and translate that evidence into practical frameworks marketers can apply.

Our research helps organizations become more discoverable, credible, and winnable by applying Buyability principles.

LinkedIn

Our offices:

London
5 Howick Place,
London SW1P 1WG
United Kingdom
enquiries@warc.com

New York
Floor 20-22, 605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158
United States
americas@warc.com

Singapore
230 Victoria Street,
#04-6, Bugis Junction Towers
Singapore, 188024
asiapacific@warc.com