

How different are B2B and B2C customers, truly?

By [Paul Middleton](#), issued by [Ebony+Ivory](#)

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I had an interesting conversation last week about whether a traditionally B2C advertising agency can deliver effectively to a B2B client. I have always thought there was little difference between the services a creative advertising agency should offer a client, regardless of whether they are B2C or B2B. But I did pause to calibrate my response, and I think it's worth sharing for anyone else pondering this question as we continue to see an increase in B2B brands actually investing in brand development.



It's often said that B2B advertising and marketing requires a fundamentally different approach. The reasons given are that the buying journey and conversion time is longer; it encompasses more than one highly knowledgeable decision maker; the investment value is, for the most part, significantly higher; that sales activation, not brand building, yields better results; there is more switching inertia to overcome; that the transition decision is ultimately a rational, rather than emotional one and that good B2B marketing is founded on great insight based on customer understanding, as well as knowing the industry and competition better than anyone else.

What debunks all of that is the simple realisation that there are emotion-driven humans beings at the end of every customer journey. And quite honestly, *all* good marketing and advertising should be founded on great insight based on customer understanding and a deep knowledge of the client's industry and competitors.

But don't just take my word for it, [Deloitte Digital](#) delivered a three-year study and found that organisations who focus on the 'human experience' – aligning to the values of their customers, workforce and partners – were twice as likely to outperform their competitors in revenue growth.

In the five principles of growth in B2B marketing research published by the LinkedIn B2B Institute, it states that using storytelling, creativity, and brand building to tap into emotions is just as important to long-term B2B marketing success as focusing on features, benefits and price.

According to a [B2B customer insights report](#) from B2B Marketing, in association with gyro, 83% of organisations are more likely to buy from a business whose culture and personality matches their own – similar to consumers – and 89% stated that feeling their needs have been understood is their biggest driver.

Research from Infogroup has highlighted that intent data – data about behavioural signals that help predict purchase intent - has become a crucial tool for B2B organisations (and already is for B2C brands) and can [increase close rates by as much as 79%](#). A staggering 93% of B2B marketers reported that [personalising content](#) increased their revenue over time.

In B2C marketing, there is a well-known relationship between a brand's advertising expenditure or 'share of voice' (SOV) and its rate of growth. Brands that set their SOV above their SOM (share of market) tend to grow, and those that set SOV below SOM, tend to shrink. According to [Harvard Business Review](#), consumer brands with 10% extra share of voice (ESOV) attain a market share rise of 0.6% points per annum, all other factors being equal. For B2B, the corresponding market share rise is 0.7%! So it appears that B2B brands respond to growth from advertising in exactly the same way that B2C brands do. So while tactical sales activation may be good for short-term results, brand building still excels at driving long-term growth,

The blurring of lines between personal and professional life, combined with evolving technology and access to more data, means that it's time for organisations to start approaching their buyers as multi-faceted individuals. Armed with the right tools, B2B organisations can, just as effectively as B2C organisations do, using the same marketing and advertising approaches, develop holistic marketing plans that are personalised and connect the brand with buyers on a more meaningful level and in a more enduring way,

At the end of the day, no matter which side of the B2B or B2C divide an organisation is, all marketing and advertising is essentially just P2P (person to person). Effective advertising will always be founded on great insight, based on an understanding of customers, extensive experience and industry knowledge.

Let's talk about your advertising needs. Mail me, I can't wait to help build your brand with you... paul@ebonyivory.co.za.

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