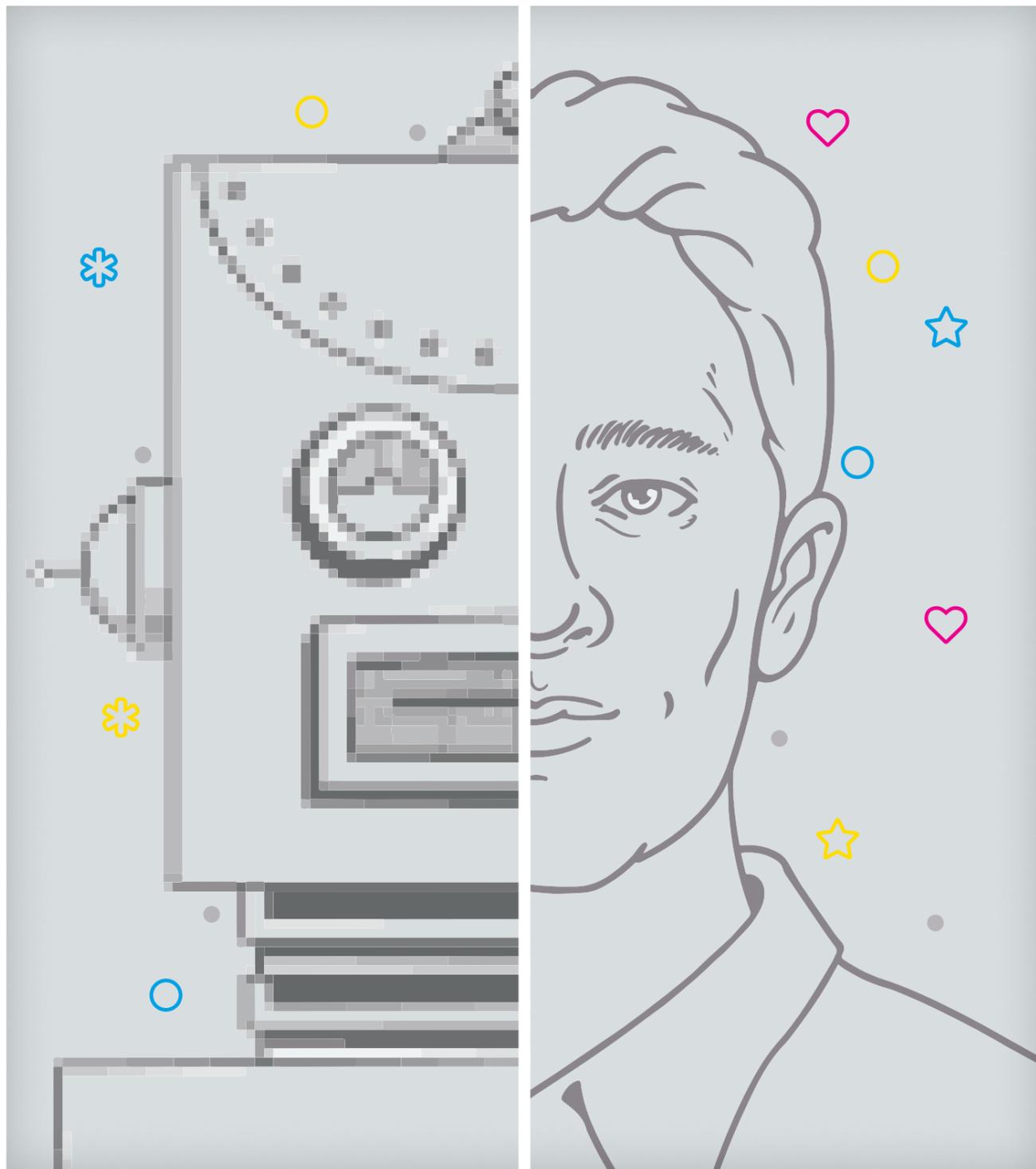




Humanized Marketing

Digital Discord and the Case for Recalibrating the B2B Mix





Are We Connecting?

Digital advertising. Data analysis. Digital customer experience. Contextual marketing. There is no shortage of discussion about on-screen advertising formats. The promise of providing marketers the abilities to target specific audiences and measure effectiveness is attractive to executives who must justify marketing spend.

How attractive? Business-to-business (B2B) companies in the U.S. spent more than \$6 billion in digital in 2019¹ — more than double their 2015 investments.

With all this investment and innovation, marketers should be swimming in new contacts and leads. And we should thoroughly understand these leads because we're measuring their actions and engagement across all channels, right?

.....

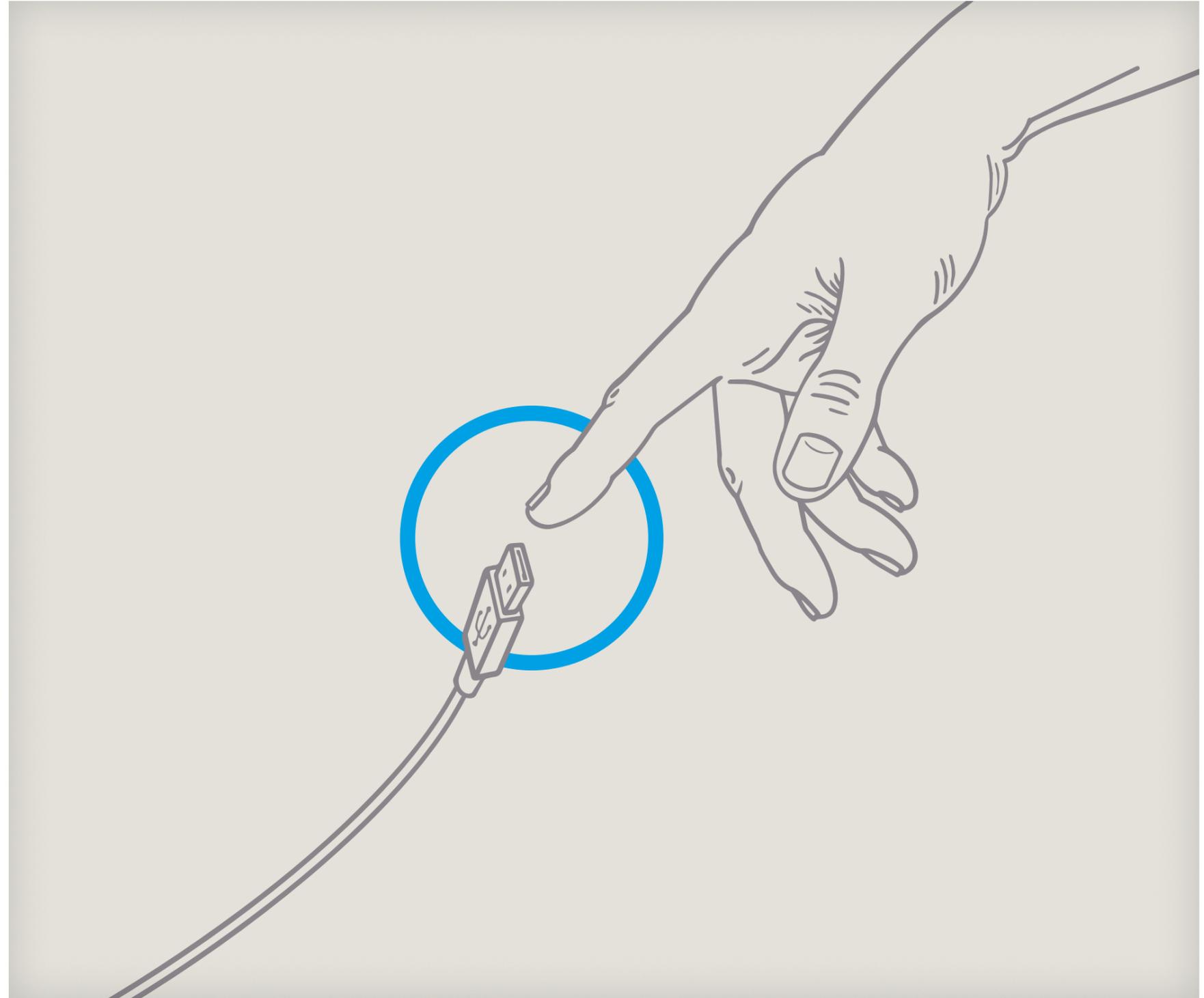
It may be time to reexamine our relationships with customers and prospects — not only what we understand about them from a *data* perspective, but what we know about them from a *human* perspective.

.....

As frustrated execs continue to allocate more money to it, digital hasn't achieved its potential effectiveness:

- » 71 percent² of marketers say digital advertising fails to meet their expectations.
- » Nearly 6 in 10 marketers say measurement tools still don't help establish the ROI³ of digital investments.
- » Only 7 percent⁴ of B2B marketers rate their company's abilities to measure and analyze marketing performance as "excellent."

Don't take this wrong; digital matters — a lot. Most of the B2B sales cycle happens online, and a recent study⁵ from Heinz Marketing and SnapApp indicates that only 9 percent of millennial B2B buyers connect with vendors before doing their own intelligence gathering. Being present and accounted for digitally is paramount. **But it can't be your only answer.**





The Scientific and Business Cases for Human Connections

Because humans innately crave physical interactions, creating one-on-one, personal experiences makes for more effective business relationships. Humans crave contact. That's not an opinion; it's science. Psychologists and researchers know the power of social, personal connections for human beings. This power resides at several levels:

Feeling Happy and Valued

In their book, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, authors John Cacioppo and William Patrick document that when people are asked what contributes most to their happiness, the overwhelming majority rate love, intimacy and social interactions above wealth, fame and even physical health.⁶

Another study, *Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy*⁷, by Debra Umberson and Jennifer Karas Montez, discovered human contact is vital for physical health. The report cites evidence that **as we rely more on digital tools, we threaten the simple interactions that keep us positive and healthy.**

Brain Function

Healthy brain function depends on a social, personal world. In his book, [Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect](#)⁸, UCLA social cognitive neuroscientist Matthew Lieberman reveals we are more likely to remember information experienced socially. He contends businesses and institutions would perform better if they capitalize on our social nature. It stands to reason: marketing efforts would benefit similarly.

But do these social interactions need to be physical and face-to-face?

Connection Completeness

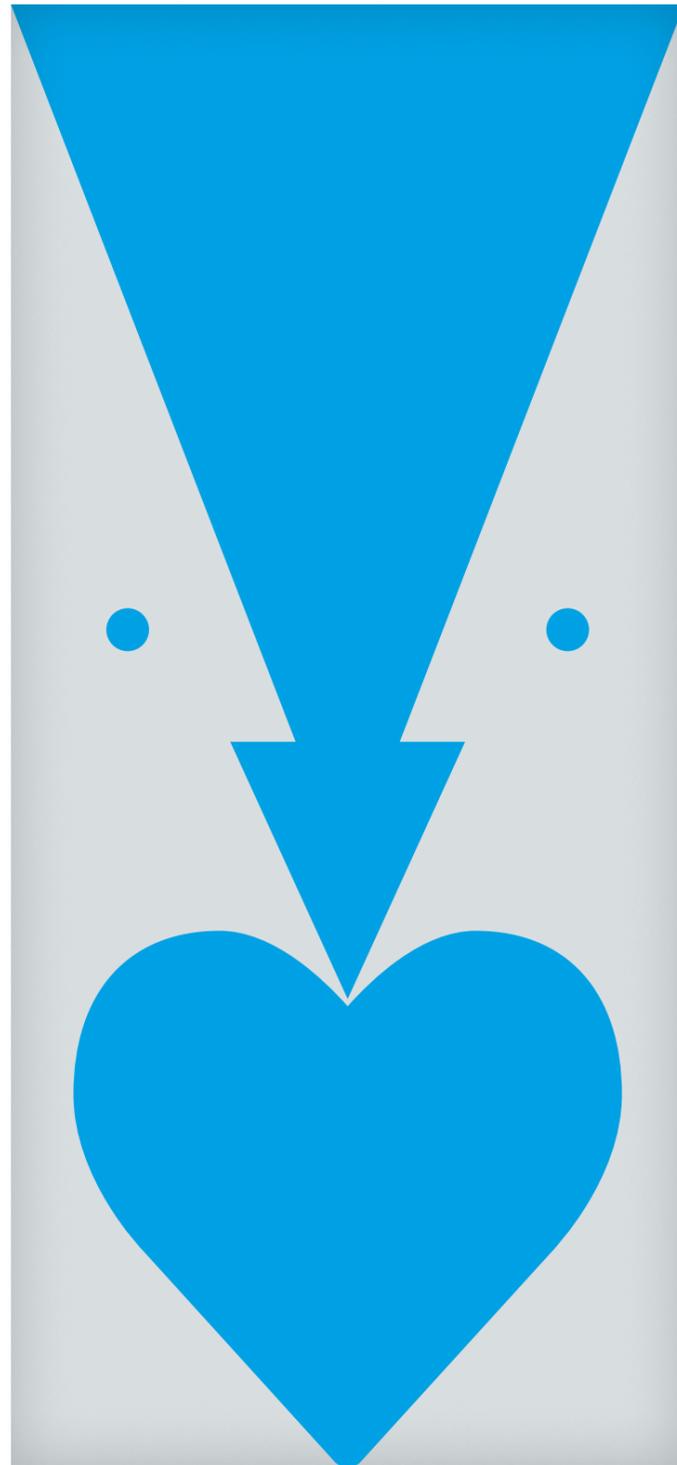
It's logical that digital connections might fulfill some of our physiological needs for social interaction. But research suggests the opposite. On-screen communications are "single-stranded," devoid of physical texture. Cacioppo and Patrick explain why this matters. "Most face-to-face encounters in real life allow us to communicate through even more subliminal cues — body chemistry, body language, action semantics, mimicry — in addition to words and gestures. Once again, the mind that seeks to connect is first about the body and **leaving the body behind can make human connections less satisfying.**"

As marketing executives turn exclusively to digital strategies, science seems to be telling us to tap the brakes and consider the holistic, physical aspects of human interaction.

Relationships

Don Peppers and Martha Rogers predicted a more personal marketing model in 1993 in their prophetic book, [The One to One Future](#). They expanded their thinking in *One to One B2B: Customer Development Strategies for the Business-to-Business World*. They wrote, "It's equally important for B2B organizations (and their sales and marketing teams) to concurrently work to develop relationships with individuals from different relevant departments of the customer organization as well. **People buy from people they like.** People buy from companies they like. There's no easy button for this, but it's not hard. You just need to care enough to want to build relationships⁹."





Customer Service

While consumers are comfortable using digital channels, 83 percent prefer dealing with human beings when seeking help or information. That's according to Accenture's 2016 report, *Digital Disconnect in Customer Engagement*.¹⁰ "U.S. businesses have reached a tipping point in their customers' digital intensity and need to rebalance their traditional and digital customer services investments to differentiate and drive growth ... The idea of leveraging human interaction in combination with digital is still the best business play."

The Ancient Art of Conversation

In the 2017 Harvard Business Review article, *Your Customers Still Want to Talk to a Human Being*, author Gregg Johnson stated, "As brands prioritize this digital experience, they often overlook a simple fact: communicating by voice is faster, easier, and more effective than typing messages back and forth."¹¹ He pointed to a Google study¹² that revealed 61 percent of mobile users call a business in the purchase phase of the buying cycle and the majority would call instead of reaching out online because they want to talk to a real person.

This preference is supported by trends in consumer behavior. Calls to businesses have significantly increased in response to mobile phone adoption. According to the advertising and marketing advisory firm BIA/Kelsey, businesses were expected to field more than 169 billion phone calls per year by 2020. These calls are 10–15 times more likely to generate a successful sale or follow-up activity than digital form submissions.

An Emotional Attachment

In the 2019 paper, *Stop Making Sense: The Powerful Role of Emotion in B2B Decision Making*¹³, TriComB2B demonstrated that brands must embrace emotion to gain preference in B2B. Research declares that an appeal to emotion wins in B2B marketing, and buyers buy when they see personal value in a brand.

As we retarget programmatically and engage in personalized content sequencing, are we considering the quality of the emotional connections so essential to customers?

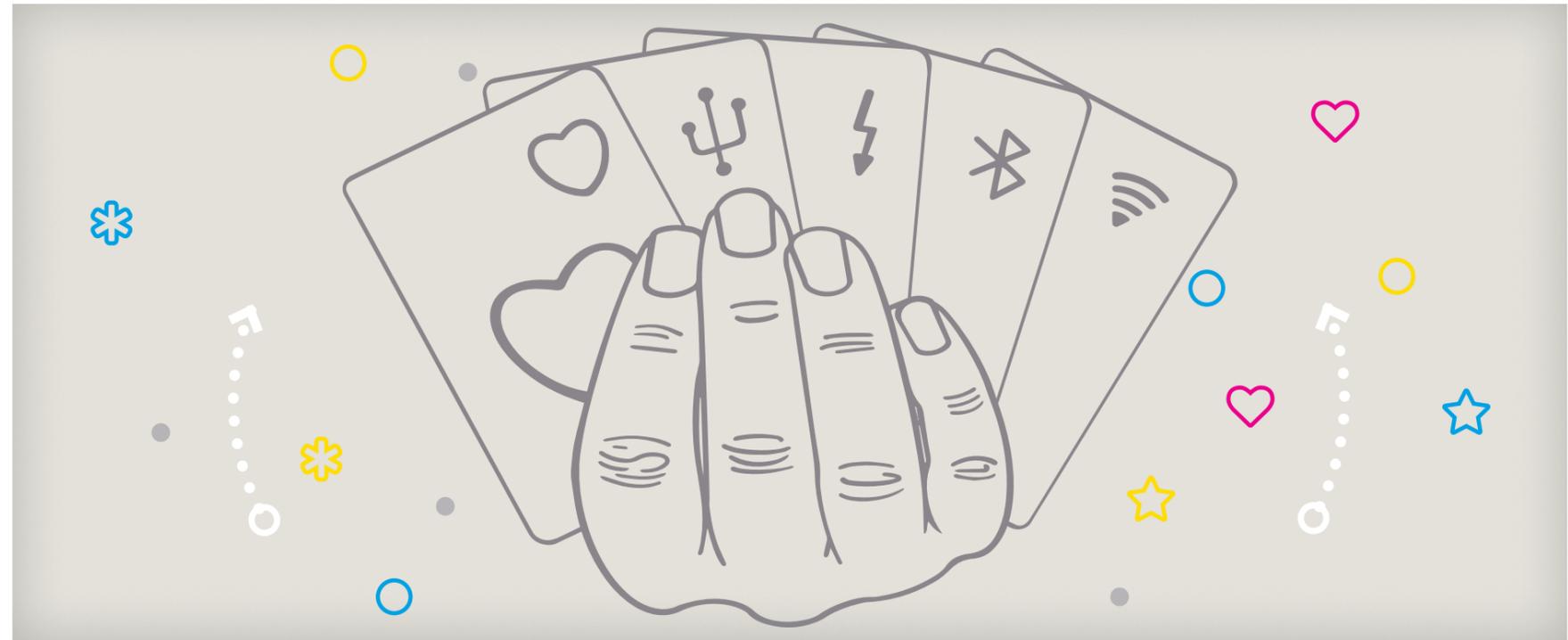
Encouraging Human Connections

When using digital channels, evaluate how much *digital* contact is too much. Then, recalibrate your marketing programs to create human interaction opportunities. Here are some ideas to help you rebalance:

Face-to-Face

In their study, *Value Co-Creation by Customer-to-Customer Communication*, authors Kijima and Novani confirmed face-to-face communication is still the most powerful human interaction.¹⁴ No other communication channel offers more closeness and immediacy than people talking in the same room.

Trade shows and industry events are not the only option. Creating proprietary events allows you to control the environment, content and format. Hosting an event may sound daunting, but the benefits are clear. Think of the value of hosting 10, 100 or 1,000 of your most important customers and prospects, each spending exclusive time with your people and your brand. Great B2B brands like [Teradata](#), [Emerson](#) and [Rockwell Automation](#) have discovered the value of hosting their own events.



Outsider Expertise

Unsure you have the experts in an area impacting your customers? You don't have to. Your best customer engagements might happen when the focus isn't on you! An extensive study by the CMO Council¹⁵ showed definitively that B2B audiences trust third-party content over vendor-created content. What's more, 50 to 60 percent of respondents list reports from associations, industry groups, analysts and other third parties as content they trust the most. Vendor-created content ranks last at less than 10 percent.

It's easy to imagine how this translates to incorporating third parties into the customer interactions you create. Demonstrate your commitment and objectivity by bringing in the experts. Find the author, researcher or prominent official who knows the subject better than anyone. Invite them to speak to your customers and get out of the way. How? Establish formats that lend themselves to third-party commentary like moderated panels, Q&A forums and keynote sessions.

Peer-to-Peer

Intrigued by the credibility of a third-party expert? Imagine if your customers start talking and problem-solving together. While this can happen naturally at an event, **marketing should facilitate customers talking, learning from each other and networking**. Here are a few ways to do it:

- » Moderated panels featuring multiple customers
- » Customer-led presentations
- » Small-group formats and problem-solving, break-out sessions
- » Customer focus groups

When planning an event, focus your energy and resources on creating environments that foster discussion and interaction.

Insider Sharing

An advisory council is a powerful format for interaction that allows customers to get involved in your business. Many leading B2B brands operate high-performing advisory groups with facilitated customer collaboration and dialogue. The council helps build relationships through customer feedback, ideas, advice and input on a range of business challenges and opportunities. B2B leaders use this type of format to guide product development, test brand messaging, improve customer satisfaction, and explore new technologies and portfolio expansion ideas.

HELP, DON'T SELL

The first instinct is to sell when meeting face-to-face. The effort to create the opportunity makes this the ideal time to show prospects what we've got, right? Wrong. Absolutely wrong. This is your chance to help them, not sell them.

Trust happens when you educate and inform. According to the Demand Gen Reports 2016 *Content Preferences Survey*, "As B2B buyers become more sophisticated in their independent research, there is a strong desire for content that educates and informs, rather than sells. An overwhelming majority (93%) want content that has less of a sales pitch ..." ¹⁶

So, less pitching, please. Resist the urge to sell and **focus on the issues that are impacting your customers** — whether it's new regulatory standards, emerging technologies or materials, alternative system architectures or economic policies that could impact their business. Your best experts — including that engineer who everyone knows in your industry — know how to talk about the issues. Recruit them to take part in any face-to-face event you participate in or host.

KEEP IT REAL

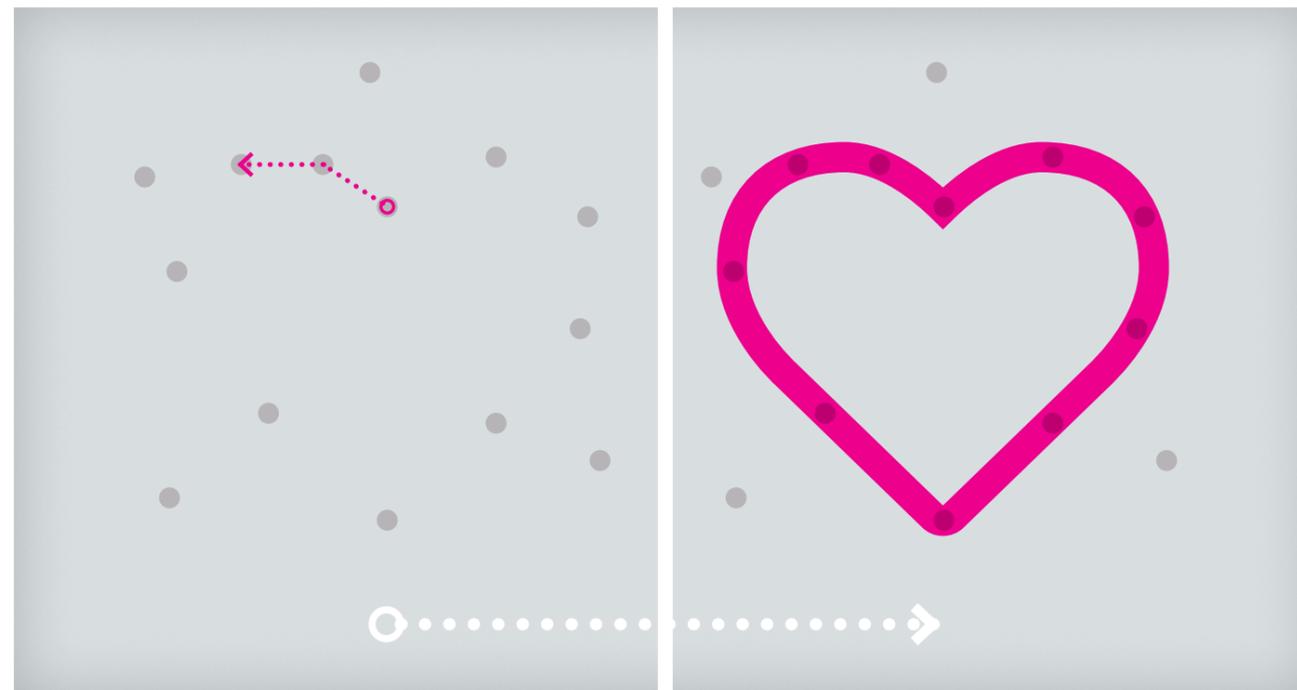
You know that feeling you get when someone is speaking from the heart? Imagine how your customers might feel when they sense the same honest and open feeling from your business.

Well-known 2013 research by McKinsey¹⁷, *How B2B Companies Talk Past Their Customers*, suggests most businesses don't know how or simply aren't willing to keep it real with their customers. The study revealed that the messaging theme 'honest and open dialogue' was considered most important to more than 700 B2B global executives they interviewed. Sadly, all 90 companies they analyzed failed to communicate this message. Talk about a miss!

Some transparency and vulnerability might be the missing ingredients to better customer relationships. Use face-to-face time as an opportunity to talk about business challenges, successes, failures and your leadership's point of view on what the future holds for your industry.

More Opportunities to Connect

Trade shows, conferences and hosted events are great for creating interactions with customers. But there are many more options. Interaction and dialogue are imperative, and when executed correctly, can also include a little brand building. So, how can we add a little brand "remember-worthiness" to these human interactions? Turn the page for some thought-starters.



Mobile Tours and Pop-ups

Finding unique ways to be present at key customer locations can create personal interactions — and significant buzz. Design a custom, mobile marketing machine that informs and entertains. Make it a food truck or a coffee bar. How about an escape room? Maybe there's a co-marketing opportunity with a partner? You see it all the time in B2C — [T-Mobile and Taco Bell](#), anyone? How about colorful coffee served up by [LG and the Pantone Color Institute](#)? These ideas require budget, but it's not out of the question in B2B. Check out the [Bosch Big Blue Tour](#) or [GE's Healthymagination](#) initiatives to see examples of effective brand experiences.

Factory Tours and Showrooms

Invite customers to experience how you do business and turn your factory and offices into a showroom. This is a great way to highlight the softer side of your business — the people and culture that make what you do special. What's more authentic and transparent than bringing customers to your place of work?

Contests and Awards

Think about how your product or service makes life easier for your customers. Maybe you help them manufacture something in an innovative way? Perhaps your product allows them to be more imaginative with their products? Create an award to acknowledge customers who maximize the value of their relationship with you. Hosting an awards event to recognize them is a great way to create peer-to-peer connections that will benefit you in the long run.

CONCLUSION

B2B transactions are inherently personal. So, why shouldn't our marketing feel the same? Each day, we seemingly move further away from real, interpersonal interactions. It's time for a change. Let's use digital technology as a means to facilitate — not replace — the human interactions that will ultimately lead to healthier customer relationships and better business results.

Human interactions build trust, and there's plenty of research that shows trust pays off in B2B. According to Sagefrog, the most trusted B2B companies¹⁸ are also the most profitable and best known, two outcomes any B2B marketer would be thrilled to achieve. Striking a better balance between digital and human interactions might be the first step toward getting there.

¹ "How Generational Differences Impact B2B Buying Committees Today," *Heinz Marketing and SnapApp*, 2017, <https://www.heinzmarketing.com/resources-library/report-generational-differences-impact-b2b-buying-committees-today>

² "US B2B Digital Advertising Trends," *eMarketer*, 17 Jan. 2019, <https://www.emarketer.com/content/us-b2b-digital-advertising-trends>

³ Ryan, Jillian. "Ad Waste Survey," *Demandbase*, 1 March 2016, <https://www.demandbase.com/press-release/b2b-marketers-frustrated-with-ad-waste-in-their-marketing-campaigns>

⁴ "B2B Marketing Mix Report," *Sagefrog*, 2019, https://www.sagefrog.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Marketing_Mix_2019_Report_Final.pdf

⁵ "2019 Marketing Measurement & Attribution Benchmark Survey Report," *Demand Gen Report*, 2018, <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/reports/2019-marketing-measurement-attribution-survey-report>

⁶ Cacioppo, John and Patrick, William. "Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection," *W.W.Norton & Company, Inc.*, 10, Aug. 2008, <https://www.amazon.com/Loneliness-Human-Nature-Social-Connection/dp/03933335283>

⁷ Karas Montez, Jennifer and Umberson, Debra. "Social Relationships and Health: A Flashpoint for Health Policy," *J Health Soc Behav*, 4 Aug. 2011, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150158>

⁸ Wolpert, Stuart. "UCLA neuroscientist's book explains why social connection is as important as food and shelter," *UCLA News*, 10 Oct. 2013, <https://www.scn.ucla.edu/pdf/SocBookUCLAN.pdf>

⁹ Newman, Daniel. "B2B Marketing Must Focus On 1:1," *Forbes*, 21 Oct. 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2014/10/21/b2b-marketing-must-focus-on-1-1/#58116bc43825>

¹⁰ Davies, Lucy. "U.S. Companies Losing Customers As Consumers Demand More Human Interaction, Accenture Strategy Study Finds," *Accenture*, 23 Mar. 2016, <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/us-companies-losing-customers-as-consumers-demand-more-human-interaction-accenture-strategy-study-finds.htm>

¹¹ Johnson, Gregg. "Your Customers Still Want to Talk to a Human Being," *Harvard Business Review*, 26 July 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/07/your-customers-still-want-to-talk-to-a-human-being>

¹² "The Role of Click to Call in the Path to Purchase," *Google*, Sept. 2013, https://think.storage.googleapis.com/docs/click-to-call_research-studies.pdf

¹³ "Stop Making Sense: The Powerful Role of Emotion in B2B Decision Making," *TriComB2B*, 2019, <https://resources.tricomb2b.com/tricomb2b-insights-stop-making-sense>

¹⁴ Novani, Santi and Kijima, Kyochi. "Value Co-Creation by Customer-to-Customer Communication," *Journal of Service Science and Management*, March 2012, https://www.scirp.org/pdf/JSSM20120100013_66716579.pdf

¹⁵ Dodd, G. David "Better Lead Yield in the Content Marketing Field," *CMO Council*, 24 Aug. 2014, <http://b2bmarketingdirections.blogspot.com/2014/08/why-expert-content-should-be-part-of.html>

¹⁶ "2016 Content Preferences Survey," *Demand Gen Report*, <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/research/2016-content-preferences-survey-b2b-buyers-value-content-that-offers-data-and-analysis>

¹⁷ Freundt, Tjark and Hillenbrand, Philipp and Lehmann, Sascha. "How B2B companies talk past their customers," *McKinsey*, Oct. 2013, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/how-b2b-companies-talk-past-their-customers>

¹⁸ "2018 B2B Trusted Brands Report," *Sagefrog*, 2018, https://www.sagefrog.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Trusted-Brands-2018_v6.pdf



Marketing is in a state of constant change. Your business requires focus. TriComB2B is your resource for B2B marketing and communications that respond to those changes. We promote industrial and technical products and services with the unique requirements of B2B.

With a team of engineers, technically oriented industry veterans, imaginative graphic artists and savvy interactive developers, TriComB2B can effectively complement your internal marketing resources or manage every aspect of your marketing programs. Learn more at TriComB2B.com.



CONFIDENTIALITY REQUEST. This information should not be distributed without the expressed, written consent of an authorized representative of TriComB2B.