



LOOKBOOK

Balancing act: B2B marketers juggle performance, brand strategies

B2B marketers must do more with less, prioritizing high-value accounts and lead quality amid budget cuts and rising competition. While brand-building is crucial for long-term differentiation, marketers face pressure to prove performance and justify short-term ROI. This Lookbook explores why and how B2B marketers balance brand and performance strategies across channels, and how AI can help.

MADE POSSIBLE BY



B2B marketers feel under-resourced and over-pressured

Despite tighter budgets and lower headcounts, B2B marketers must still deliver results. This means they must be strategic with available resources, prioritize high-value accounts, and streamline the marketing-to-sales pipeline.

Trends to watch

Resources are limited for B2B marketers and buyers

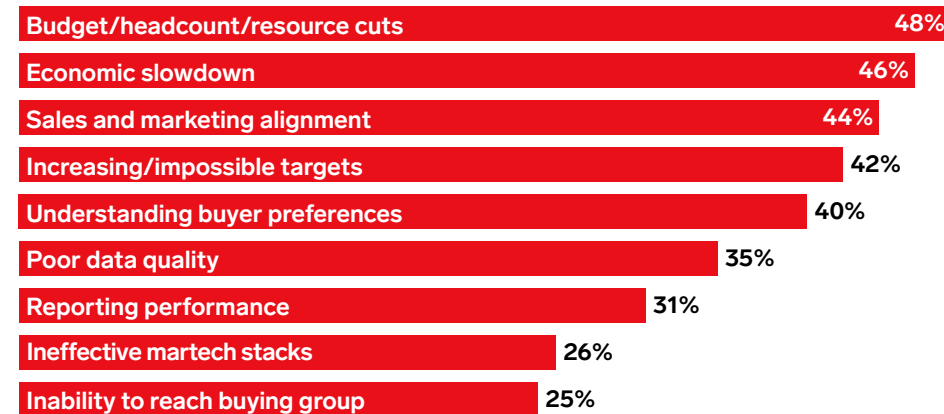
Nearly half (48%) of US and UK B2B marketers say budget/headcount/resource cuts are their biggest challenge, while 46% cite economic slowdown, according to Demand Metric and Pipeline360. Marketers are also seeing buyer pullback—65% of US and UK B2B sales leaders and marketers say buyers with tighter budgets are a major pain point, according to Sopro.

This puts additional pressure on marketers to deliver leads

B2B marketers struggle to generate enough quality leads as competition makes it harder for brands to stand out. Some 45% of B2B sales leaders and marketers cite generating enough leads as a challenge and 42% say the same of lead quality, according to Sopro. However, 40.2% of B2B marketers are pressured to deliver marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) regardless of quality, according to Marketing Week's State of B2B Marketing report.

Challenges UK/US B2B Marketers Are Facing in Marketing

% of respondents, July 2024



Source: Pipeline360 & Demand Metric, "H2 2024 State of B2B Pipeline Growth," Oct 8, 2024

288119

EM | EMARKETER

What the experts say



Kelsey Voss
PRINCIPAL ANALYST
EMARKETER

"In a tight budget environment, B2B marketers can't afford inefficiencies. The focus must shift from volume to value—prioritizing high-intent accounts, refining lead scoring, and aligning tightly with sales. The brands that win won't be the loudest, but the smartest with their time and investments."



Ryan Nelsen
CMO
STACKADAPT

"Marketers often default to efficiency metrics like CPL [cost per lead] and ROAS [return on ad spend] under pressure to show immediate results, but true marketing effectiveness comes from balancing brand, demand, and expansion strategies. Brand investment isn't just strategic—it directly enhances efficiency by lowering acquisition costs, speeding up sales cycles, and strengthening customer advocacy."

Increasing competition calls for a stronger emphasis on brand

Over a quarter (28%) of US and UK B2B sales leaders and marketers struggle to justify spend on brand-building over sales activation, per Sopro. However, competitive pressure demands that B2B marketers prioritize brand strategy. Some 75% of buyers prefer to gather information on products on their own, and 57% purchased a tool in the last year without meeting the vendor's sales team, according to Hubspot.

Trends to watch

The B2B landscape is becoming more complex and competitive

Increased competition is a top sales challenge, cited by 45% of US and UK B2B sales and marketing decision-makers, according to Sopro. The number of brands considered part of the B2B journey has increased 62% since 2021, according to Dentsu.

B2B marketers are investing more in brand-building to differentiate themselves

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of B2B marketers are confident in their ability to “communicate a distinct brand position or strong unique selling proposition,” per Dentsu. However, 68% of B2B buyers believe many of the brands they see at work “all sound and act the same.” This disconnect isn't unnoticed—B2B marketers ranked raising brand awareness/top-of-funnel performance as the most important factor in their future strategy in 2024, per Dentsu.

Sales Challenges Experience by UK/US B2B Sales and Marketers

% of respondents, Nov 2024

Buyers have tighter budgets

65%

Increased competition

45%

Longer time taken before a decision

35%

Leads go silent without explanation

32%

Buyers expect sales to do more work/a more personalized experience

29%

Source: Sopro, “The State of Prospecting 2025,” Jan 14, 2025

289095

EM | EMARKETER

What the experts say



Kelsey Voss
PRINCIPAL ANALYST
EMARKETER

“Brand differentiation isn't a luxury in B2B—it's a necessity. Buyers have more choices and are more self-directed than ever, so building credibility and awareness early is critical. The brands that stay visible, relevant, and reinforce a clear position at every touchpoint will be the ones buyers remember.”



Kenny Ginapp
DIRECTOR OF EMERGING VERTICALS
STACKADAPT

“Shifting budget toward brand doesn't mean sacrificing short-term leads. Instead, it's about gradually reallocating resources, measuring early results, and scaling efforts to create sustained growth and lasting competitive advantage.”

Blending performance and brand requires a multichannel strategy

B2B marketers need both performance and brand marketing to drive short-term results and long-term growth. A mix of channels is key—email and events excel at lead generation, while social media, connected TV (CTV), and out-of-home (OOH) build brand awareness. Programmatic uses data and automation to enhance targeting and personalization, making campaigns more efficient and impactful.

Trends to watch

B2B marketers must balance performance and brand marketing tactics

B2B marketing works best when 46% of the budget is allocated to brand (i.e., long-term growth) and 54% is allocated to driving conversion (i.e., immediate response), per the B2B Marketing Institute.

Traditional channels like events are best at driving leads

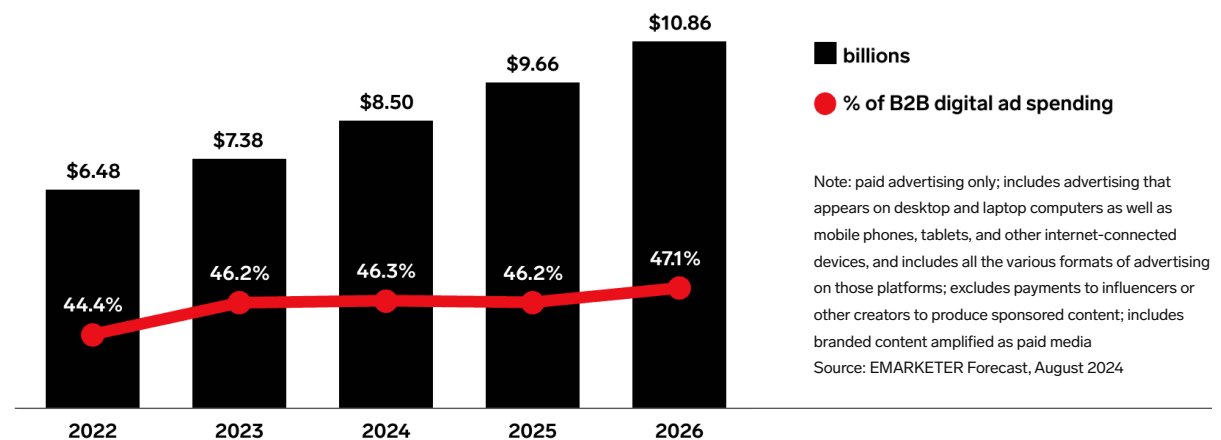
In-person trade shows and events are the top driver of lead sources, according to 45% of US B2B marketers, according to Sagefrog Marketing Group. Digital events can also boost lead generation, with 35% of US B2B marketers using them for leads.

Upper-funnel formats can help drive brand awareness

We forecast B2B social ad spend will reach 46.2% of B2B digital ad spend. LinkedIn will account for 22.6%, making it the top platform for B2B social marketing. CTV and OOH are emerging as effective brand-building channels.

B2B Social Ad Spending

US, 2022-2026



What the experts say



Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf
SENIOR ANALYST
EMARKETER

“Programmatic can complement B2B marketers’ efforts up and down the funnel, allowing them to meet their audiences where they are—even outside of professional environments. And once brands have gone to the trouble of curating the highest-quality leads, they can adjust their bidding strategies accordingly so they spend more on the audiences that drive better outcomes for the business.”



Giuseppe La Rocca
VP GLOBAL ENTERPRISE
STACKADAPT

“B2B marketers often overlook channels like DOOH [digital out-of-home] and CTV—but these bold canvases are powerful tools for emotional connection. The truth is, you’re not marketing to businesses—you’re marketing to humans. When you lead with storytelling and strike that emotional chord early, every part of your marketing—brand, demand, even sales—performs better. It’s not just B2B, it’s B2H: business to human.”

AI can optimize B2B marketing throughout the funnel

B2B marketers are investing in AI. By automating tedious tasks, AI frees up time for strategic initiatives while optimizing areas like content creation, helping marketers develop, brainstorm, and personalize content at scale to drive brand awareness. As AI evolves, its role in lead generation and predictive analytics is expanding, enabling smarter targeting and personalization.

Trends to watch

AI optimizes content creation, helping drive brand awareness

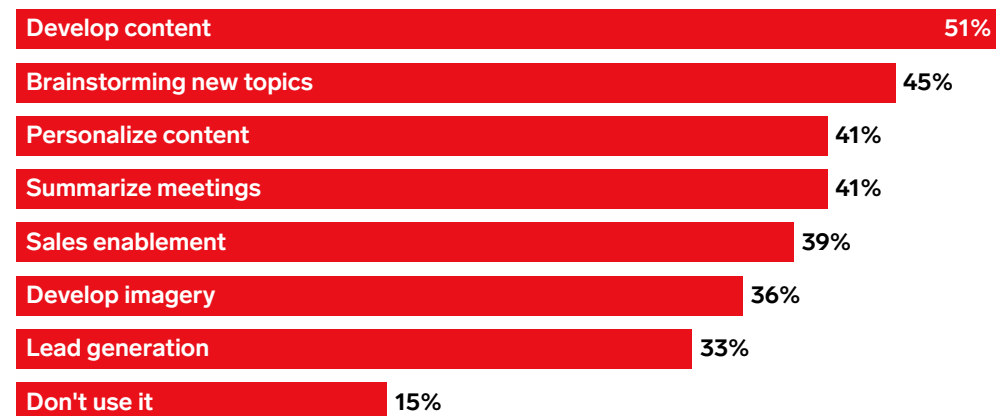
A majority (87%) of B2B marketers worldwide say content marketing helps them build brand awareness, according to MarketingProfs and Content Marketing Institute. Many marketers use AI to help them optimize their content, with 51% of B2B marketers in the US and UK using generative AI to develop content, and 45% to brainstorm new topics, per Demand Metric and Pipeline360.

AI's role in lead generation may grow

Over a third (34%) of enterprise marketers worldwide say lead management is the most impactful use case for advanced/predictive analytics (which can rely on AI-powered algorithms), according to International Data Corporation and Sprinklr. In addition, 40% of CMOs worldwide say their leading AI objective by 2025 is access to intelligence for growth and personalization (including sales/lead generation) and improved customer experience, per Merkle and B2B International.

Use of Generative AI (Gen AI) by Their Team According to UK/US B2B Marketers

% of respondents, July 2024



Source: Pipeline360 & Demand Metric, "H2 2024 State of B2B Pipeline Growth," Oct 8, 2024

288121

EM | EMARKETER

What the experts say



Kelsey Voss
PRINCIPAL ANALYST
EMARKETER

"AI is now ingrained in B2B marketing, from content creation to targeting and analytics. But AI alone won't drive results. Marketers who integrate AI strategically, maintain human oversight, and prioritize credibility will see the biggest impact. AI enhances efficiency, but trust and differentiation still require a human touch."



Ryan Nelsen
CMO
STACKADAPT

"Programmatic advertising already empowers B2B marketers to reach buyers at scale—but adding AI unlocks hyper-personalization. With AI-driven creative optimization, marketers can automatically generate and test personalized ads tailored to each buying committee member, scaling precision messaging across every touchpoint for maximum impact."

The Experts



Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf

Senior Analyst, EMARKETER

Evelyn Mitchell-Wolf is a senior analyst at EMARKETER. Evelyn covers the US digital ad market, including spending trends, programmatic media buying, ad measurement, and ad tech. Previously, she worked agency-side in channel insights and media planning.



Kelsey Voss

Principal Analyst, EMARKETER

Kelsey Voss leads B2B marketing analysis and research for EMARKETER. Kelsey covers trends and developments in areas such as advertising, content marketing, data management, email marketing, and marketing technology. In previous positions, she led B2B marketing teams at Ziff Davis, Onvia, Deltek, and Airspace.



Kenny Ginapp

Director of Emerging Verticals, StackAdapt

Kenny leads sales and go-to market for the central region at StackAdapt, specializing in B2B. He focuses on solving complex customer challenges and building high-performing, customer-obsessed sales teams. With over a decade of experience in ad tech, Kenny is a strategic revenue leader passionate about driving meaningful partnerships and bringing innovative solutions to market.



Giuseppe La Rocca

Vice President Global Enterprise, StackAdapt

Giuseppe La Rocca oversees global enterprise sales at StackAdapt, leading a high-performing team focused on driving strategic partnerships with the world's largest advertising holding companies and brands. A forward-thinking, product-focused revenue leader, Giuseppe has a proven track record of building and scaling enterprise organizations. Prior to StackAdapt, he held leadership roles at Yahoo and Verizon Media, where he played a key role in advancing media and technology partnerships across the industry.



Ryan Nelsen

CMO, StackAdapt

Ryan Nelsen serves as CMO where he leads all aspects of global marketing, communications, and brand. Prior to his role at StackAdapt, Ryan's journey spans four key posts, including strategic marketing leadership roles at both Qualtrics and MX. At Qualtrics, Nelsen served in product marketing, ABM, field marketing, and enterprise marketing. In his role as Executive Vice President of Marketing for MX, Nelsen built a world-class team and led all aspects of marketing and brand, including product marketing, demand, communications, field marketing, and creative.

Related resources

Watch industry thought leaders on webinars, and ask questions live

Check out our [upcoming and on-demand events](#).

Stay informed with daily newsletters

[Sign up for timely digital trends](#) delivered straight to your inbox.

Hear us analyze news and trends on podcasts

Tune in to [Behind the Numbers: The Daily](#) and [Reimagining Retail](#).

Get the bigger picture

Our research is trusted by industry leaders. Over 100,000 business decision-makers, including many of the Fortune 1000 and most major media companies and agencies, subscribe to EMARKETER research. Learn if your company [subscribes](#).

We are here to help

If you are an EMARKETER research client and have questions, please contact

ii-help@emarketer.com

If you are not a research subscriber, please send inquiries to

ii-sales@emarketer.com

To learn about advertising and sponsorship opportunities, contact

advertising@emarketer.com



EM Studio is EMARKETER's premier design and content studio delivering custom multimedia experiences. By marrying data-driven insights with superior design and production value, we help our clients tell actionable stories for business decision-makers engaging with our media channels.

EM Studio—where intelligence meets invention.

[Learn More.](#)