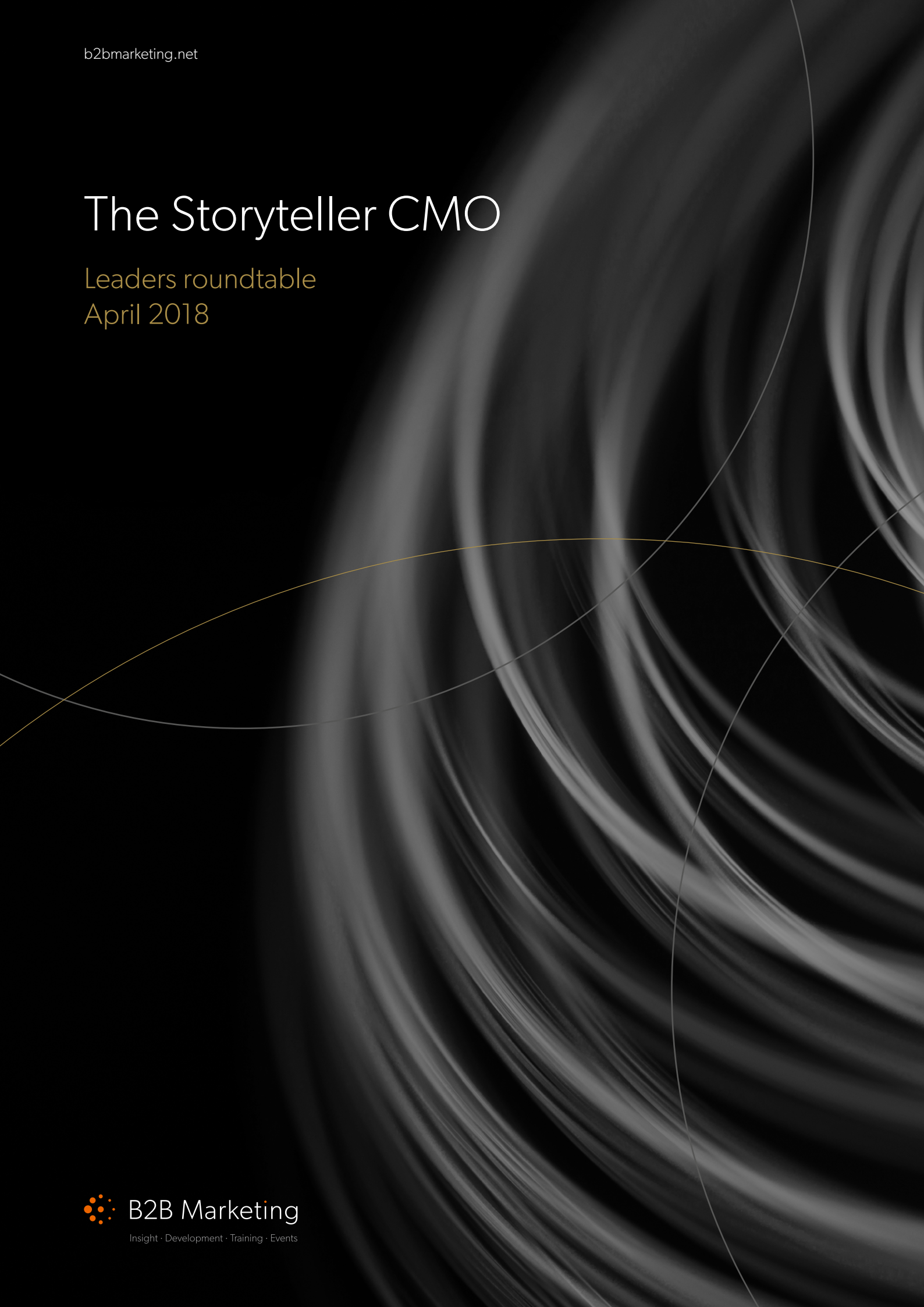
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The Storyteller CMO

Leaders roundtable
April 2018



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10 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable

With the board's demands for data, data and more data it can feel like there's little room for emotion. But savvy marketers will merge data with their ability to spin a persuasive yarn, knowing when and where to add illustration to the numbers. It's a balancing act between telling a story that perks interest and providing enough data to placate the sceptic number-lovers.

We share some of the examples and thoughts given during our recent leaders roundtable where one senior marketer was quick to point out that data and storytelling is not an either/or scenario. "The power of story is so fundamental. But a story without data is just a story."

1 Don't pitch the board a story without the data to back it up

Data provides evidence that the story you're telling has, or will, deliver. In an industry up to its eyeballs in data, presenting a business case purely on numbers can run dry and tired. Yes the board want to hear about investment and ROI, but it's also important to tell a story about how your plans support strategic growth and intertwining with other teams.

2 Each board member is different. Your story should be too

Members of the board don't always have the same checklist for what makes a good idea. Conducting one-to-one meetings with tailored pitches overcomes this issue. One senior marketer used this method to gain individual buy-in from the board. They resolved any questions of contradictory messaging by providing a range of example scenarios, each one appealing to a different area of the business.

3 The board want to see cross-team collaboration

Many business structures have developed in a matrix with boards looking for ideas that brings teams together in collaboration, focused on a common goal. One senior marketer admitted it can be difficult to bring multiple teams together. "Sales are in often conflict with the product team while marketing are in the middle." One piece of advice was to arm your sales team with their own stories of how they worked with marketing to close a deal, convincing the sales team that this looks just as good for them as it does for marketing.

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4 Emotional attachment to a brand can be a barrier

Often members of the top team have been in their posts for a long time and are protective of the brand and its heritage. Hearing what their competitors are doing can be a great way to get buy-in for moving in a new direction. One senior marketer found that building narratives around examples from competitors outside their sector was a good way to shift ideas away from deep-rooted traditional views. By comparing themselves to brands outside their own industry, the board were made to think about how different approaches could work for their business.

5 Building a panel of supporters gets results

Collecting narratives from different teams within your business can be a really persuasive way to gain buy-in. Doing so demonstrates you understand the needs of the business and have advocates. Colleagues will be encouraged to support a marketing idea if they feel they're part of the story and have had an input. One senior marketer sets up engagement tasks for the sales teams on Salesforce whenever a new piece of marketing is sent out.

6 Data has made it harder to find a story

Internal marketing should be no different to marketing to an external audience, the story should be kept as simple as possible. Digital tools were found to be something that clouded the view of marketers. "They create lots of noise, so it's difficult to get down to the key data," explained a senior marketer. The copious amounts of data could swing the pendulum the other way, particularly with GDPR coming into play, and the recent Facebook scandal. One senior marketer said they were moving their board away from data, condensing KPIs to just one slide for monthly board meetings, but you must already have trust from the board to do this.

7 Don't claim the big wins in long sales cycles

No doubt marketing has a part to play in long and lucrative sales cycles, but the deal breaker can be harder to track. Often the CEO will believe their business meeting sealed the deal, while sales may also contend for the title of key player (unless it goes wrong). One senior marketer said it was wise not to challenge this. "Choose the stories you want to tell," like how they won a smaller deal, less heavily fought, he warned.

8 Marketing needs to speak the same language

Language – including jargon and tone – can separate marketing from the rest of the company. The challenge is not to talk marketing if you want to be understood and endorsed by the rest of the company. Knowing most CEOs and many board members come from a finance background, one senior marketer had enrolled their team in a finance course, while another said they altered their language to finance-related buzzwords when meeting with the FD.

9 Know how to work with finance

Understand who will respond better to data versus those who will respond to emotive storytelling. For example, data is likely the best way to win over your finance

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director, who is often the gatekeeper to the CEO, and so is an important ally. "If you fight with finance, you're always going to lose," said one marketer. Working collaboratively with finance and producing the numbers they want to see will build trust and provide a looser rein long-term. At some tech start-ups marketing teams report to the FD and sit alongside the finance function, however it was agreed that this leaves the team at risk of losing creativity and emotional impact.

10 Telling the corporate story internally is just as important

So much attention can be paid to marketing to the external audience that internal stakeholders are served a pre-heated and dried out version of the story. Working with the CEO to sell a dynamic and engaging internal story can be a great way to gain recognition for marketing's expertise. The challenge is to create one inspiring story that all employees can feel passionate about.

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About

B2B Marketing

The B2B Leaders programme is a network of the most senior marketing figures at prestigious B2B brands.

Members benefit from a unique and invaluable opportunity to regularly network and collaborate with senior-level peers, sharing insights and discussing strategic challenges at events every month.

Membership is by invitation only, and includes:

- Your B2B Leaders Forum ticket, the only B2B marketing leaders event of its kind.
- Regular roundtables focusing on key marketing leadership topics.
- Monthly roundtable findings reports.
- Annual *B2B Leaders Report*, with key research data and insights.
- Monthly Premium content reports.
- A subscription to *B2B Marketing* magazine.

The B2B Leaders programme counts senior marketing names from Deloitte, Oracle, Atos, Dell, HSBC, KPMG and Adobe among its members, all sharing ideas on topics ranging from team development to board interaction.

To register your interest in the programme call +44 (0)20 7014 4920 or email adam.harper@b2bmarketing.net.



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