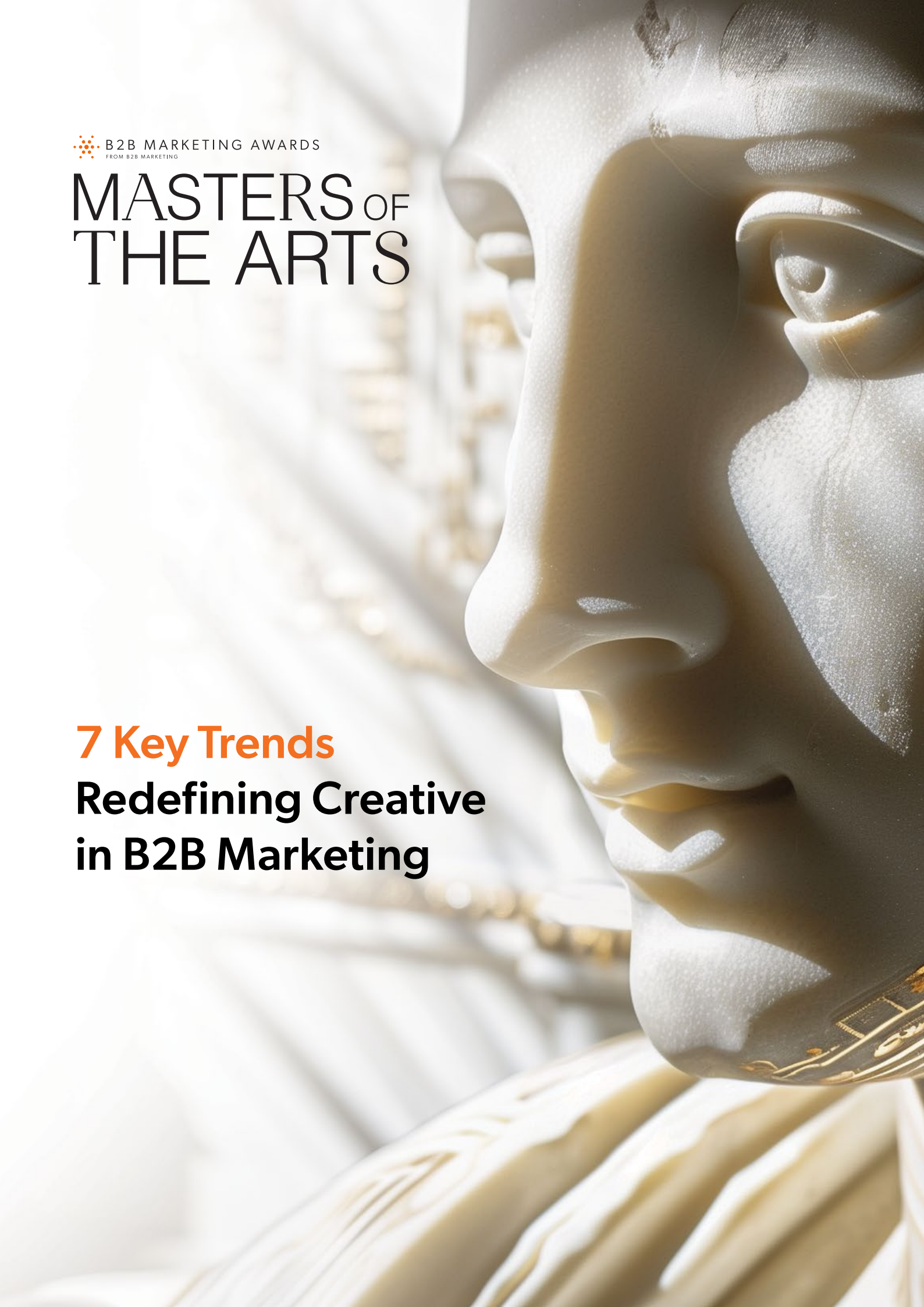
B2B MARKETING AWARDS
FROM B2B MARKETING

MASTERS OF THE ARTS



7 Key Trends

Redefining Creative in B2B Marketing

Introduction

We are witnessing a fundamental shift in how creativity is deployed to drive business growth in the B2B space. The submissions from the latest B2B Marketing Awards, specifically within the Best Use of Creative category, are not just compelling; they reflect a period of strategic reinvention.

Gone are the days when creative in B2B was synonymous with risk-aversion, conservative design and feature-heavy messaging. The most successful campaigns today are embracing bold visual metaphors, emotionally resonant storytelling, channel innovation and AI-driven execution. More importantly, they are delivering measurable business impact, both in terms of ROI and pipeline growth.

This isn't creative for creative's sake. It's creative as a business multiplier, driving real business outcomes, cutting through crowded channels and earning emotional attention in what was once thought to be rational environments.

What follows is an analysis of the most effective trends and best practices shaping award-winning B2B creative campaigns, from global powerhouses to emerging disruptors. It reveals not only what great creative work looks like today, but why it works. The data is compelling: creativity done right doesn't just win hearts, it wins business.

Explore the key creative trends from the 2024 B2B Marketing Awards. They represent the direction of modern B2B marketing for brands committed to differentiation and long-term commercial success.

Think your work has what it takes to set a new creative standard? Apply now for the next B2B Marketing Awards and showcase your impact on the industry's biggest stage.

If you're looking to stay ahead of the curve year-round and gain exclusive access to Gold-winning case studies, join Propolis, our global community where B2B marketing leaders share insights, solve challenges and shape the future together.

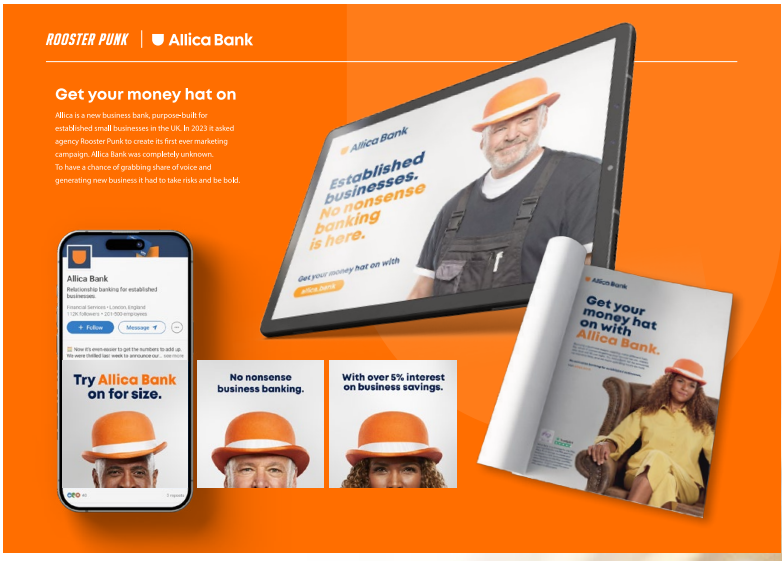
1. Visual Boldness Is the New Baseline

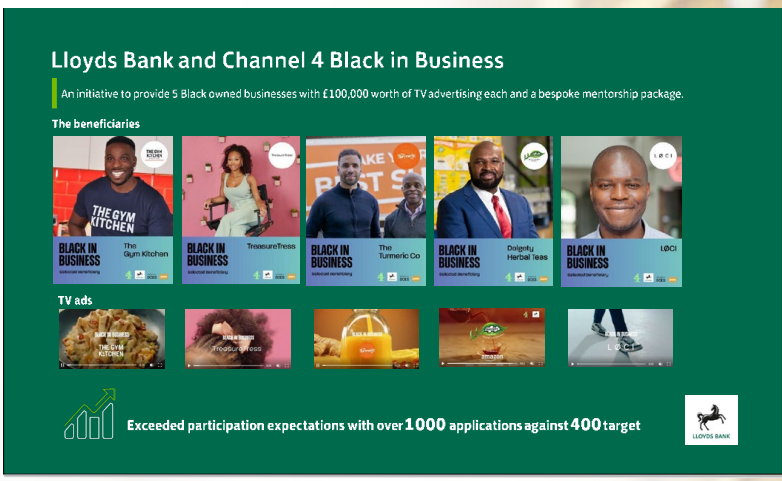
B2B visual design has historically leaned toward the functional: safe color palettes, static layouts and predictable iconography. This year's top campaigns overturned that expectation. B2B marketers are now embracing vibrant colors, metaphoric imagery and unexpected visual narratives.

75% of creative category submissions broke visual category norms and 40% introduced entirely original frameworks.

- Palo Alto Networks used AI-generated imagery of padlocks reimagined as peacock feathers to symbolize security in imaginative ways, resulting in a 139% increase in website traffic.
- Allica Bank's "Get Your Money Hat On" transformed its logo into a bright orange bowler hat, a far cry from the traditional blues of the financial sector, leading to a 14x spike in brand searches.
- Lloyd's Register creatively visualized complex maritime regulations using abstract fuel gauges and motion graphics, resulting in a 66% lift in organic traffic.

What these campaigns tell us is that it's important to break category norms with visual storytelling that conveys brand essence in metaphorical, emotionally resonant ways. This shift toward symbolic rather than literal visual elements signals a move from features to feelings, a theme seen repeatedly in top campaigns.





"Men in suits shaking hands in front of glass buildings represented B2B marketing for too long. That doesn't stand out, doesn't resonate and it's not believable. We work in busy environments, if you don't stand out from everything else, you just get lost. You need to be bold!"

Steve Kemish, *our Propolis Content, Creative and Campaigns Expert,*



2. **Emotion:** The Rise of Human-Centric Storytelling

Emotionally charged storytelling is rapidly replacing dry product-centric messaging. These narratives connect on a personal level and often feature employees or customers, building authenticity and relatability. 65% of campaigns led with emotional content and 35% completely omitted product features in their hero creative.

- Reward Gateway Edenred delivered "The Power of Appreciation" using dramatic light projections tied to specific emotions felt by employees. The campaign lifted web traffic by 55% YoY.
- Amazon Ads' campaign focused on the life and pressures of advertising professionals, not ad tech features, achieving a 66% increase in brand awareness.
- Twilio's "Power of Voice" used customer stories rather than platform specs to drive a 32% improvement in click-through rates.

These are great examples of campaigns that lead with relatable human experiences, especially those targeting decision-makers fatigued by technical detail. Emotional storytelling builds affinity and earns attention in low-engagement categories.

As Steve Kemish puts it with humour:

"Humans don't pop Lego heads on to say, 'I'm in work mode now.' They're still emotional beings, so if you want to engage, you're going to need emotional tools." He adds an important observation: "With B2B buying, you're always responsible for someone else's money. That's very emotional. So everything is still about emotion."

3. Tech-Savvy Creativity: AI Takes Center Stage

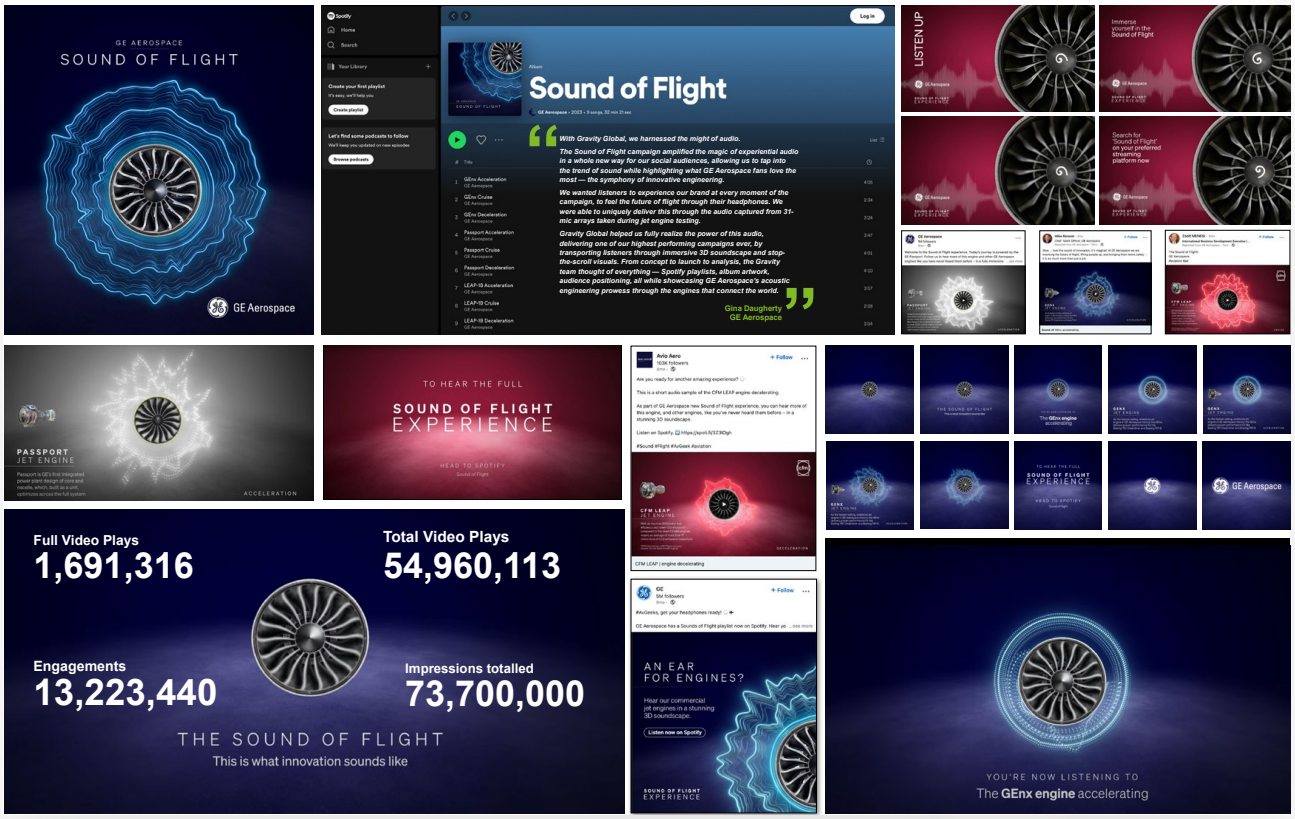
Today's B2B creative is not only emotionally engaging but also technologically sophisticated. AI, immersive formats and audio-visual innovation are increasingly common. 45% of entries used advanced creative technology and 35% leveraged AI in creative production or optimization.

- GE Aerospace's "Sound of Flight" campaign used 360° spatial audio to simulate jet engines, deployed on Spotify and immersive installations, earning over 73 million impressions.
- Silver Agency deployed Cylvy™, its proprietary AI platform, to analyze over 16 million words and inform Finastra's content strategy, resulting in a 24-place rise in digital brand rankings.
- Palo Alto Networks conducted AI-based visual testing with eye tracking and heat maps to validate creative performance before launch.

Steve highlights how AI is best used to enhance human ideation:

"AI is excellent as a muse, to get the human going. It plays a part, but it won't surface front-of-house just yet. It's more of an artworker than a creative visionary. It can polish the idea but it's not replacing the creative director."

Just to reiterate Steve's point, technology should serve the narrative. Whether using AI for content strategy, creative development or testing, the integration needs to enhance relevance and performance.



4. Redefined Tone: From Corporate to Conversational

The traditional B2B tone is formal, cautious and laden with jargon. What award-winning campaigns show is that tone is shifting to include humor, directness and relatability. The point is to make it authentic, replacing stiffness with sincerity. 40% of our awards submissions in the creative category used a conversational tone, 35% employed bold, direct language and 25% incorporated humor.

- KPMG's "Consumer Advisory Collection" spoofed consumer goods to promote professional consulting services, using dry humor that earned CTRs 480% above benchmarks.
- Virgin Media O2 Business cheekily encouraged customers to "Achieve Less," flipping the usual B2B productivity narrative to highlight sustainability. The campaign exceeded lead targets by 1,358%.
- Zonal used subtle, situation-based humor in hospitality scenes, increasing emotional connection while remaining brand-appropriate.

Steve mentions that it's not about clever wording but brand integrity, and above all authenticity:

"The brands standing out are the ones humanizing, not synthesizing. Authenticity is the key word, easy to say, hard to attain. You can't just tell a copywriter to 'be authentic.' It has to come from the brand's values. If not, it comes across as fake."

These campaigns illustrate how important it is to speak a human language. Ditch the clichés and embrace a tone of voice that reflects your audience's real conversations, challenges and humor. This makes brands appear more approachable and memorable.



5. Channel Integration and Experiential Execution

Today's top campaigns go well beyond LinkedIn and white papers. Multi-touch, integrated experiences are becoming the norm, even in traditionally narrow B2B sectors. 80% of submissions used 4+ channels and 40% included physical or experiential elements.

- Finastra's "Finance is Open" deployed a synchronized campaign across YouTube, programmatic, CTV, physical events, and digital out-of-home—driving 95 million paid impressions.
- Lotlinx created an interactive Scalextric racing experience with RFID-tracked VIP passes at NADA Las Vegas, merging analog nostalgia with digital data capture.
- Sky Business combined projection mapping and immersive event formats, increasing brand familiarity by 4.5%.

These campaigns highlight how important it is to design creative experiences across digital and physical environments. Ensure your narrative and brand consistency extend seamlessly through every channel. Integration boosts recall and brand coherence, while unexpected channels surprise and delight audiences.

As **Steve Kemish** notes, it's not just about reach, it's about resonance.

"Creative integration only works when each channel feels like it belongs to the same conversation. That's where consistency wins."

7. Measurable Impact: The Business Case for Bold Creative

Data proves that convention-breaking creative isn't just a stylistic flourish. It actually drives stronger commercial outcomes. The most successful campaigns balanced innovation (60%) with proven B2B principles (40%).

APPROACH TYPE	AVERAGE ROI	LEAD GENERATION	BRAND LIFT
Convention-Breaking Creative	746:1	+78%	+32%
Traditional B2B	125:1	+23%	+15%
Hybrid	325:1	+45%	+24%

Creative bravery should be tied to strategic objectives and backed by measurement frameworks. **Steve** stresses the need to tie bold creative to outcomes, whether ROI, pipeline or performance metrics

"In the age we're in, scrutiny on marketing is more than ever. If you can't justify spend, it's a risk, it might not even be commissioned. You have to marry creativity to what it is you're trying to achieve. Awareness? Leads? Be clear or it becomes discretionary."

6. Authentic Faces: Employee and Customer-Driven Creative

Authenticity is amplified when real voices replace stock models. Campaigns featuring real people, whether employees and customers, build trust and credibility while driving engagement. Our awards submissions reveal that 40% of campaigns involved customers in creative development and 30% featured real employees.

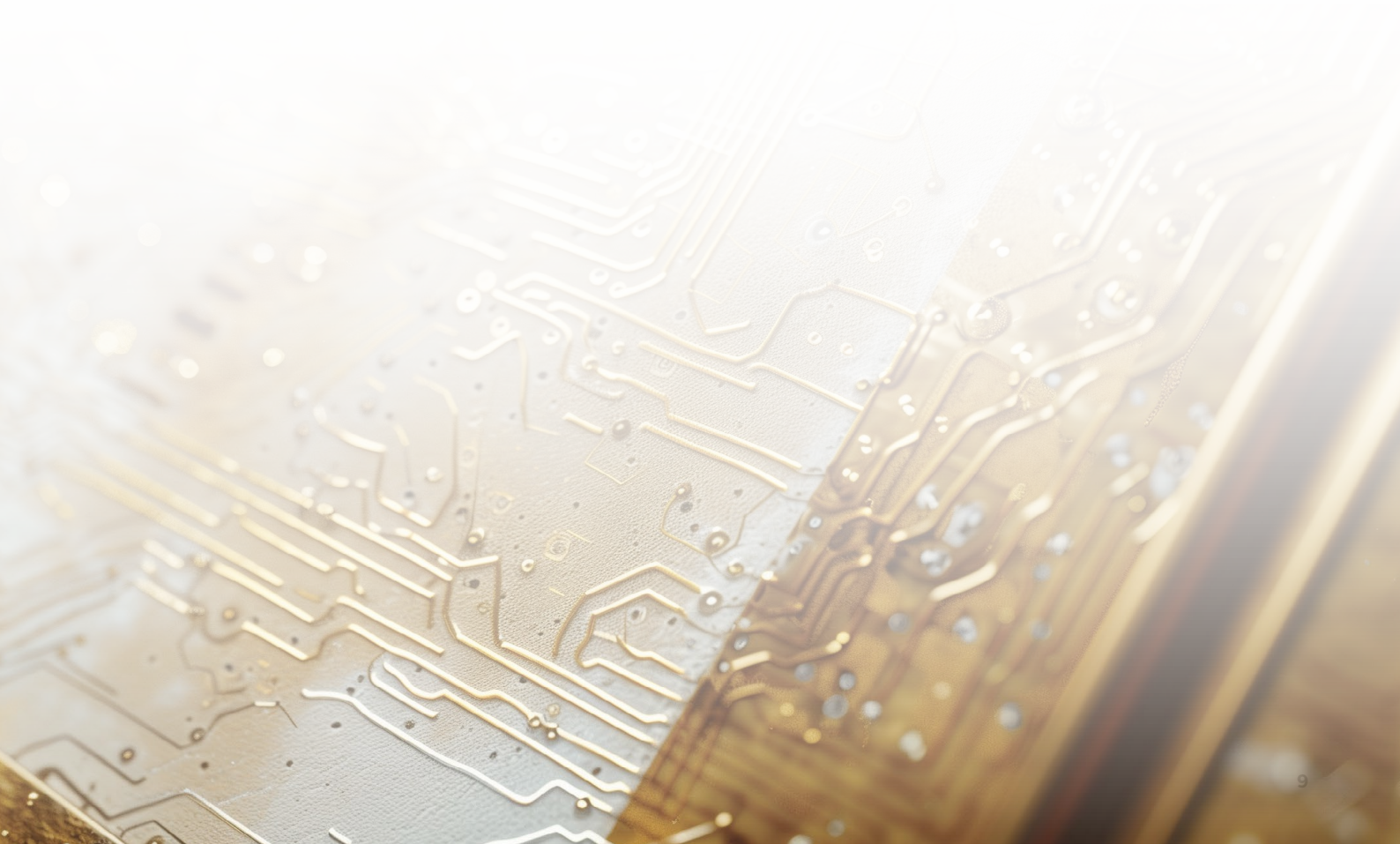
- EY.ai's "Face of the Future" blended over 200 employee faces into an evolving AI-generated image. It earned 300,000+ organic LinkedIn views.
- Capgemini's TechnoVision featured CxO interviews that shaped its visual identity and messaging.
- Twilio's creative used actual customer voices, resulting in CTRs 3x the industry average

Steve Kemish comments that *"real stories, real visuals and real voices deliver higher results in B2B."*

That's why it's important to showcase real humans, not just personas. This is especially powerful in emotionally driven or complex industries, where proof of authenticity matters.

He adds another key consideration:

"Buyer groups are plural, you're rarely targeting one person. It takes insight to know how to talk to them all authentically."



Creativity as a Catalyst for Business Growth

The most effective marketers are not just optimizing campaigns, they're redefining what creativity means in B2B. They're moving beyond function to feeling, beyond facts to stories, and beyond channels to experiences.

B2B creative leaders should take note: breaking conventions, when done with clarity, authenticity and strategic intent, is not risky but essential. **Steve** recommends that B2B creativity must feel human and look bold:

> *"Until humans are replaced by robots, emotional, human-led creative will remain key."*

The 2024 B2B Marketing Awards show us what great looks like: creative that is visually daring, emotionally resonant, technologically sophisticated, and delivered with a tone that feels human.

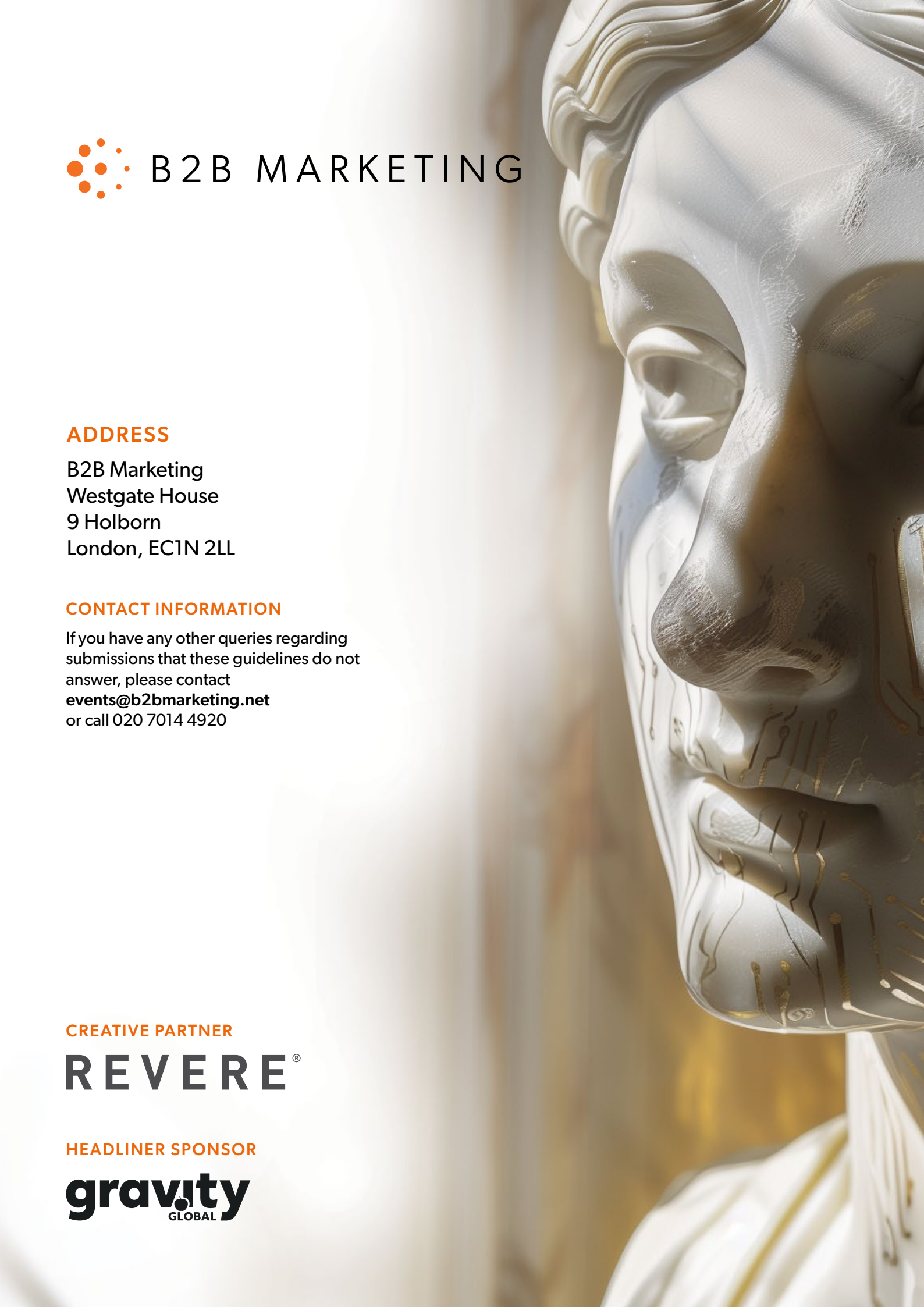
These aren't one-off campaigns; they're a blueprint of what's next. Brands that adopt these practices won't just win awards. They'll win trust, pipeline and market share.

LAST CHANCE TO ENTER!

The B2B Marketing Awards close this Friday 11 July. If you've delivered standout work in creative, strategy, demand gen, brand, or anything in between, this is your moment.

SUBMIT YOUR ENTRY NOW

B2B MARKETING



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