

PROPOLIS
FROM B2B MARKETING

The Propolis Index:

Why marketers are under pressure, a warning of what's to come, and the way out

b2bmarketing.net/propolis

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B2B marketers are busier than ever

Busy.

If we had to choose just one word to summarise B2B marketers' start to this financial year, it would be this. Examining hundreds of conversations we've had across Propolis, we can categorically say that winning and retaining business is harder than usual, resulting in a sense of urgency and relentless pace that's leaving many stretched thinner than ever.

With that in mind, we wanted to delve into the data to understand what's going on in more detail, and what better place to start than The Propolis Index? Now updated to include three years' worth of data, The Propolis Index is a live dashboard of B2B marketing team data, presenting information submitted by Propolis members, as well as from our third-party research partner.

In order to ensure the index is as accurate and as timely as possible, we continue to collect data all year-round, so it's worth keeping in mind that what you see today may be slightly different than what you see next month – usually resulting in some of the higher or lower numbers 'levelling out'.



David Rowlands,
Head of Product, Propolis

Of course, numbers can be misleading, and only tell half the story. With that in mind, we've also analysed the conversations we've had in Propolis to make sense of the data, and share what we can see happening in the B2B market.

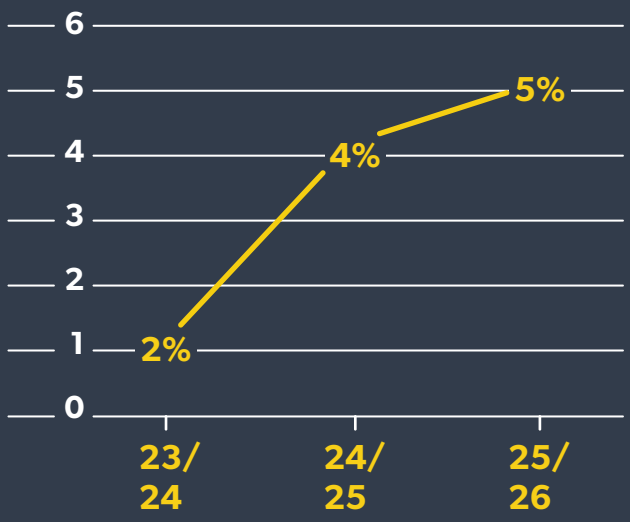
This report breaks down 220 survey responses and 155.9 hours of conversations, giving you the most comprehensive view possible of what's happening in B2B.

So, let's get into it.

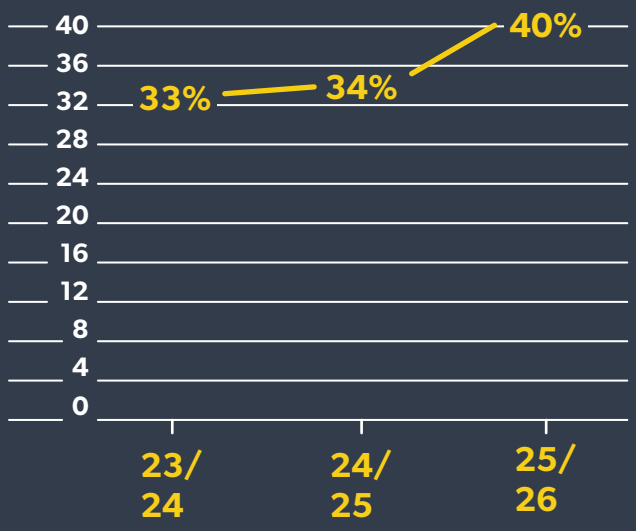
Short-term pressure at a three-year high

This year, B2B marketers are responsible for delivering 40% of their organisations' revenue, which is up from 34% last year. At the same time, marketing budgets as a percentage of revenue target are now 5% – a small increase from 4% the year prior.

Marketing budget as a percentage of revenue target



The percentage of revenue that marketing is responsible for



Propolis members can filter all data in The Propolis Index by region and by sector, helping you make decisions with the most relevant dataset possible.

At first glance, this looks like great news. It says that B2B marketers are increasingly being seen as a capable commercial engine, and are being given the money to deliver.

Unfortunately, it's not quite that straight forward. Ultimately, the B2B marketers we speak to certainly aren't talking about some golden era of budgets – quite the opposite. They cite greater scrutiny over any marketing investment and pressure to show results immediately. So, why do the numbers and the mood seem to be at odds?

Well, the revenue targets that we collect are for this financial year (i.e. ending in March 2026). In other words, B2B marketers (on average) have slightly more budget to work with, but they're expected to turn that into revenue this year.

In a world where B2B sales cycles can frequently take over a year to close, and where only 5% of your audience is in market at any given moment, focusing exclusively on revenue this year is a relatively short-term approach for growing a business.

When short-termism prevails, investment in brand suffers and demand generation rules. What does this mean? It means marketers have to work harder, not smarter, in order to generate more business today. At the turn of the new financial year, the process repeats itself – a process that ignores the reality of today's slow-moving, silent online buyer.

That's why B2B marketers we speak to are busier than ever. Any increase in budgets always sounds great at face value, but let's be clear: this isn't marketers being given free rein. This is marketers being given more to work with, but being expected to prove the value on everything they spend.

Even more worryingly, if we look at the three-year trend, our data suggests that B2B marketing budgets as a percentage of revenue target are levelling out, whilst responsibility for delivering revenue is continuing to grow. If this continues, then next year we could be looking at budgets that remain around the 5% mark, whilst our responsibility for delivering revenue within the financial year continues to rise. That means even more short-term, urgent, tactical work, taking us away from the long-term, strategic growth we are perfectly suited to drive as B2B marketers.

Fortunately, there is a way out for those that want it (more on that later).

It's worth reiterating that we're only looking at averages here, and there are certainly B2B marketers we speak to that have not seen their budgets increase. Sadly, those marketers are rarely free of short-term pressure. They have the same pressure, but even less money to work with.

More being spent on technology

This year, B2B marketers are spending 26% of their budget on people, 33% on marketing activity, 24% on the tech stack, 16% on third parties (agencies, freelancers, etc) and 1% on everything else. The percentage of spend on people and marketing activity haven't changed year-on-year, but keep in mind that budgets overall are up. So, although the percentage is the same, more money is ultimately being spent on both people and activity.

How marketing leaders are spending their budget by activity

	People	Marketing activity	Tech stack	Third-party	Other
2025/26	26%	33%	24%	16%	1%
Difference vs 2024/25	-	-	+3	-1	-
2024/25	26%	33%	21%	17%	1%
2023/24	28%	33%	21%	17%	1%

(shown as a percentage of budget)

Unsurprisingly, we can also see that spend on the tech stack is up 3%, having remained flat the previous two years. With increasingly self-serve, digital buying journeys, technology is no longer a nice-to-have – it's an absolutey critical part of running a successful marketing team.

When you add AI into the mix, and the fact that this game-changing technology is fundamentally changing the way we operate as marketers, it's no wonder that today's B2B marketers are spending more on technology to get the job done.

The Commercial Marketer Outlook

Budgets are rising for tech and AI. As a commercial marketer, use this insight to build your financial acumen — frame tech investment not as cost, but as a revenue enabler in 2026 and beyond.

Marketing activity spent in broadly the same ways

Taking the percentage of budget allocated specifically to marketing activity, we can break this down even further to see where marketers are spending. This year, it appears that B2B marketers are spending around 21% on market research (down 1%), 23% on brand (up 1%), 20% on demand generation (flat), 17% on ABM (down 1%), and 18% on client marketing (up 1%).

The difference in these numbers is negligible, so there's not too much we can glean from this information.

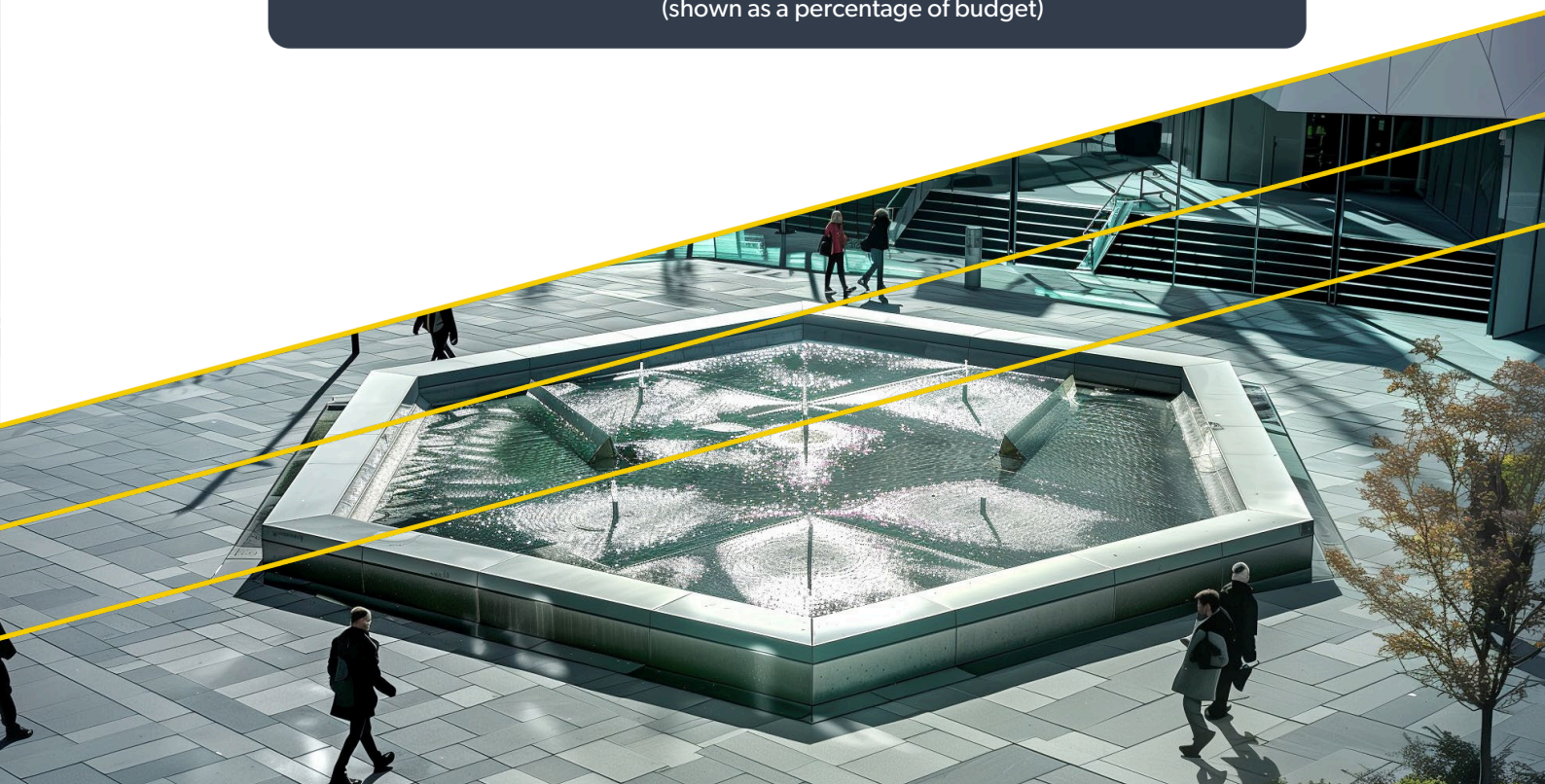
Broadly speaking, it appears that the budget allocated to 'actual marketing' is still being used to achieve the same aims in roughly equal measure. It's just that more is being done (given that budgets have increased on average).

As we collect more data, we may see some interesting developments in how budget is being spent, but let's wait and see.

How marketing leaders are spending the portion of budget allocated to 'marketing activity' by marketing aim

	Market research	Brand	Demand generation	ABM	Client marketing	Other
2025/26	21%	23%	20%	17%	18%	1%
Difference vs 2024/25	-1	+1	-	-1	+1	-
2024/25	22%	22%	20%	17%	17%	1%
2023/24	21%	21%	20%	17%	19%	1%

(shown as a percentage of budget)



Agencies being used across a broader spectrum of activity

As we saw earlier, B2B marketers are spending more budget on technology, but slightly less (albeit only 1% less) on third parties, such as freelancers, consultants and agencies. However, when we look at how those marketers are using agencies, we can see that they're now using them to deliver a much broader span of activities. For instance:

47% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver some form of demand generation (an increase of 14%).

51% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver brand and brand awareness (an increase of 2%).

51% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver content marketing and creation (an increase of 5%).

58% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver digital advertising (an increase of 5%).

54% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver market research and analysis (an increase of 13%).

43% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver social media marketing (an increase of 9%).

In fact, the only areas where client-side B2B marketers are using agencies less are ABM and events:

31% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver account-based marketing (a decrease of 1%)

33% of marketers using agencies are using them to deliver events and conferences (a decrease of 1%).

Clearly, these are both minor decreases and don't necessarily demonstrate any significant shift in behaviour. In fact, when we analyse the conversations we're having with Propolis members, it is abundantly clear that account-based strategies are actually becoming more popular. For some, it's ABX, ABG or ABE, but what's irrefutable is that account-based strategies are increasingly at the heart of modern B2B marketing, especially as AI makes it more scalable.

In the opinion of Robert Norum, Propolis ABM & Demand Strategy Expert: *"As in-house ABM maturity and perceived effectiveness increases, marketers may be becoming less reliant on agencies for foundational ABM work and more likely to reserve agency spend for capabilities that are truly indispensable or difficult to build internally. This trend is consistent with recent industry observations that ABM is moving from a discrete program to an embedded "business as usual" marketing discipline, managed in-house whenever possible. AI is also clearly having an impact, where in-house teams are looking at delivering more themselves."*

When it comes to agencies, the more significant takeaway is the fact that they're helping across a much wider span of activity. This suggests that agencies are being successfully positioned as strategic partners, helping to add value across client's entire marketing strategy, as opposed to delivering isolated campaigns or creative.

Agencies can add huge value to client-side marketing teams, so we'd say that's great news. However, it is interesting to note that demand generation is the activity that has seen the largest uptick when it comes to agency work. As discussed earlier, this could suggest an ominous focus on short-term results, especially given brand only saw an increase of 2%.



> ***ABM is moving from a discrete program to an embedded "business as usual" marketing discipline, managed in-house whenever possible.***

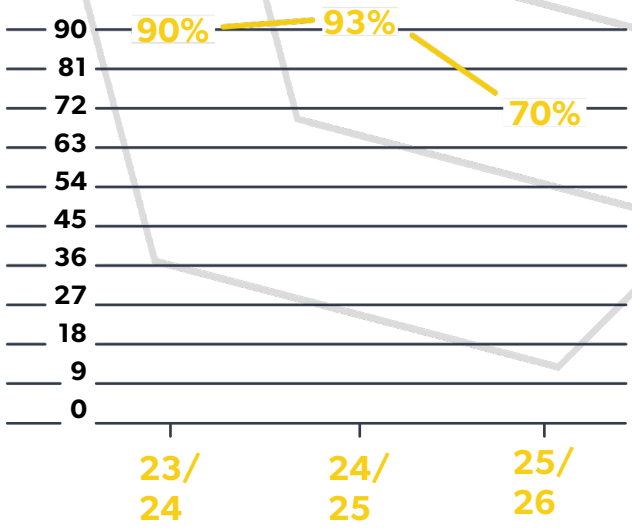
SECTION SIX

New business dominates at the expense of retention

According to The Propolis Index, 23% of B2B marketers are looking to acquire 'significantly more' clients this year. For context, last year this was 20% and the year prior it was 15%. In other words, with each passing year, B2B marketers' thirst to acquire new clients becomes increasingly powerful.

There's nothing wrong with that in theory. After all, who doesn't want new business? However, we can also see that expected retention rates this year are 70%. This compares to 90% and 93% in the two prior years.

The percentage of customers that marketing leaders are looking to retain this financial year



The Commercial Marketer Outlook

Retention slipping? A commercial marketer leans on customer insight and agile decision-making to rebalance. Use this data to make the case for deeper investment in client marketing.

SECTION SEVEN

Short-term pressure at a three-year high

As we identified earlier, the percentage of budget spent on people has remained level, year-on-year. However, given that budgets have slightly increased, that still means slightly more money is being spent on people.

When we look at the data in more detail, we can see that 53% of teams have seen an increase in their size this year, 44% have remained level, and 2% have shrunk. On average, teams have increased by 23%. It's worth re-iterating here that this is only an average. We're acutely aware that many teams we speak to are not experiencing this.

The fact that the average percentage of budget spent on people hasn't changed suggests that there are few 'heavy hitters' bringing up the average. We expect this to level out as we collect more data.

Final thoughts

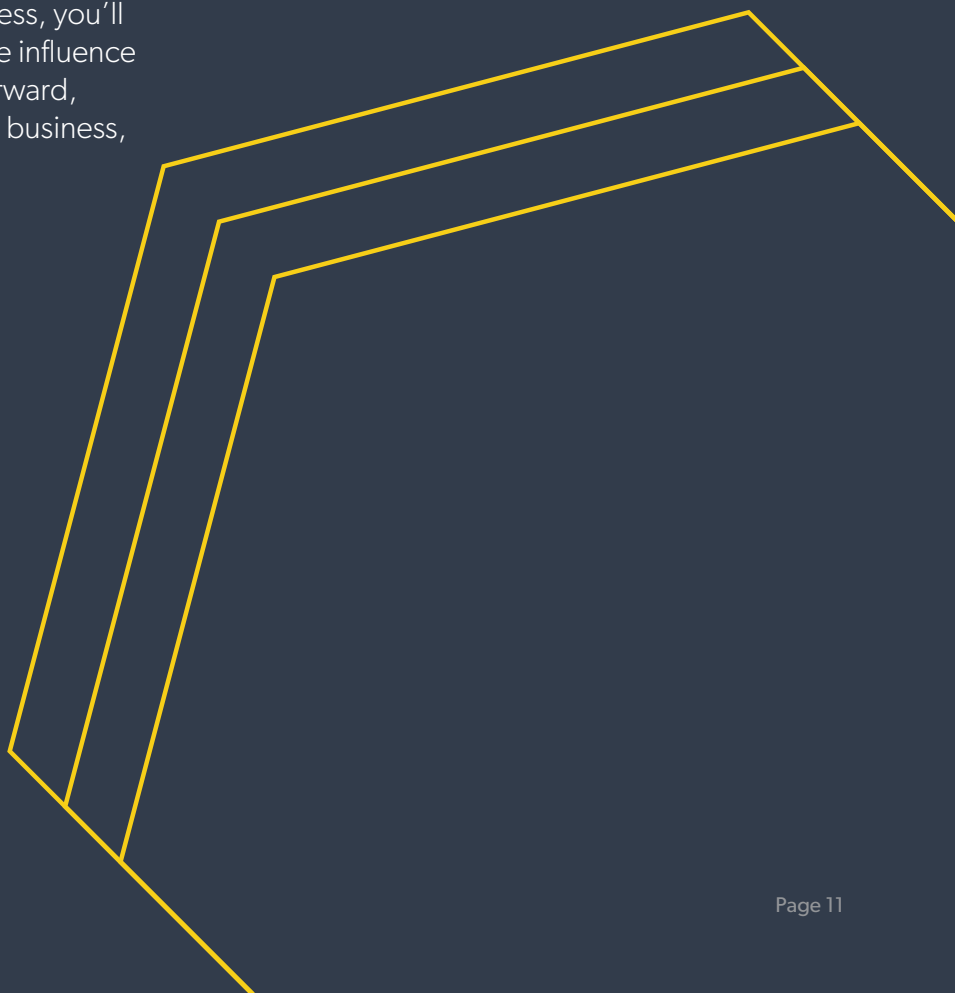
It's a confusing time to be a B2B marketer. On the one hand, businesses are waking up to the fact that driving revenue is increasingly the responsibility of the marketing team, as traditional B2B sales loses impact.

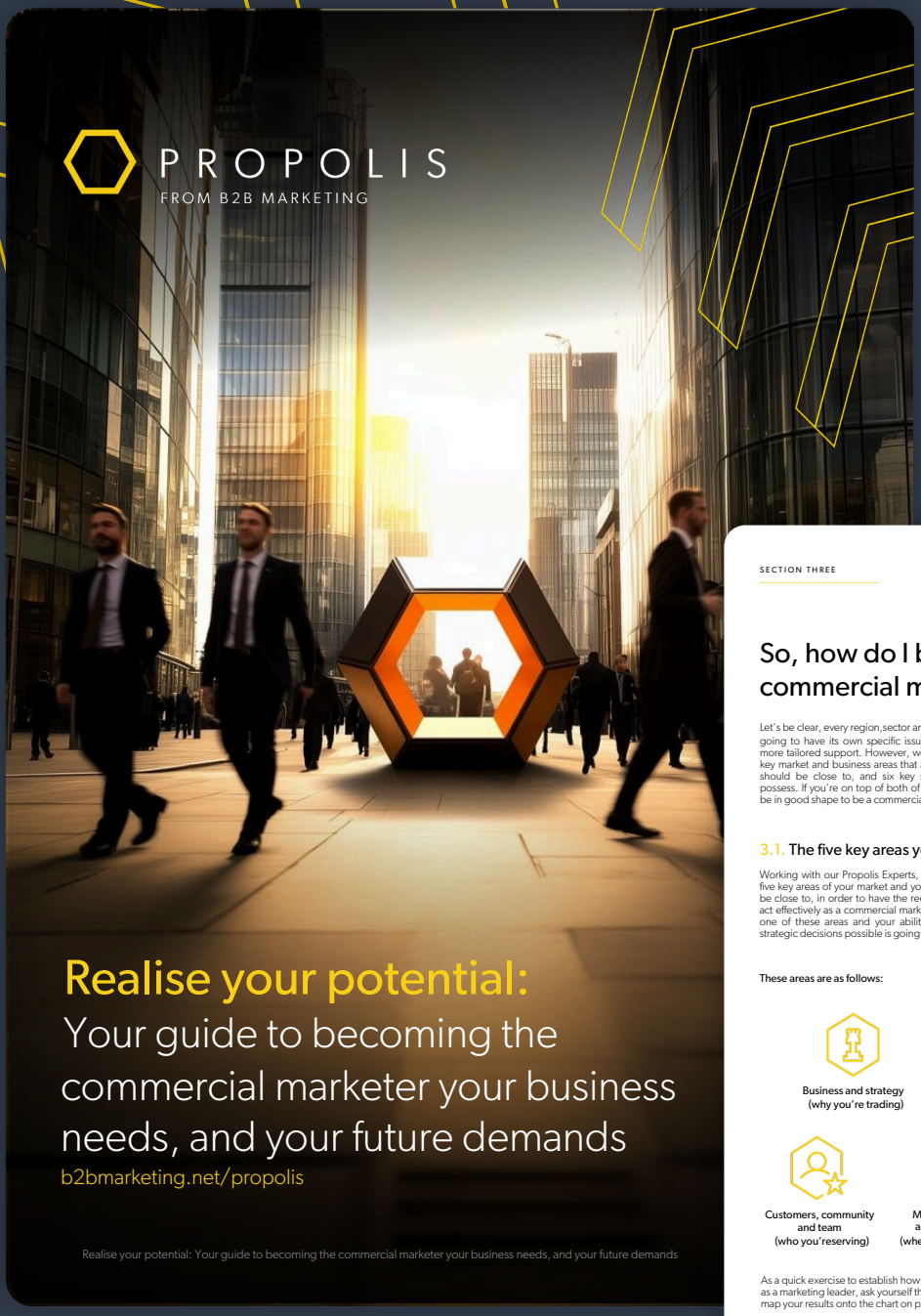
At the same time, this awakening is forcing B2B marketing teams into short-term tactics. With pressure to win revenue today, marketers often feel they don't have the time to invest in long-term growth. With B2B sales cycles frequently taking longer than a year, how can we possibly invest our budget in the long-term success of our businesses when commercial demands must be answered at next week's board meeting?

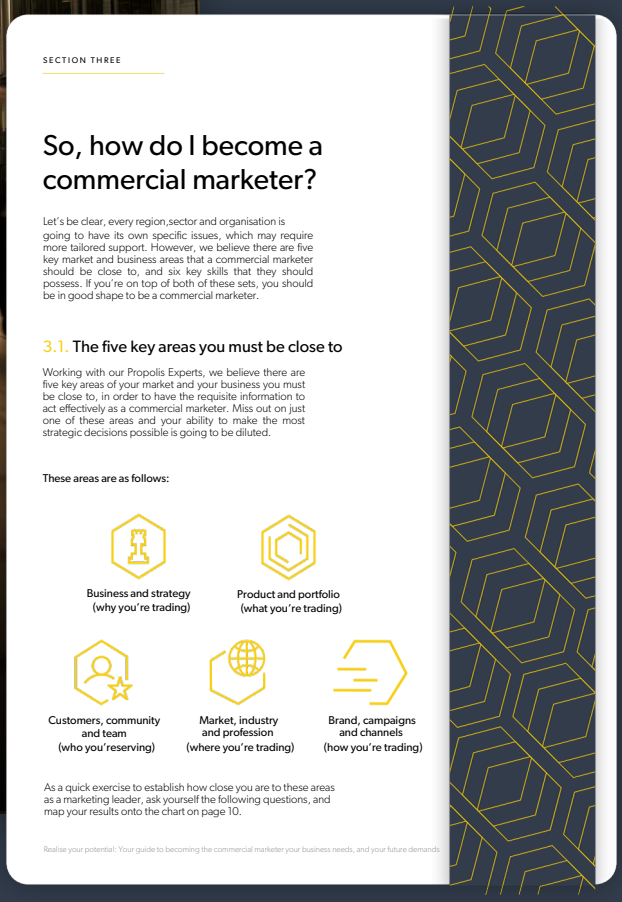
The good news is that there is a way off the hamster wheel, and towards seizing back control, driving long-term growth and feeling less, well, busy. The answer is to become a commercial marketer. When you master the six key skills and get close to the five key areas of your market and business, you'll have the knowledge, the ability and the influence to show your business the right way forward, ensuring the long-term success of your business, and your career.

In the words of Propolis Expert, Shane Redding: *"Faster, higher, stronger. As we head into 2026 – a winter Olympic year – this motto applies as equally to marketers, as it does to Olympians. We face the challenge of having to go faster, deliver better results and build stronger and more robust marketing functions. Those who are investing in daily, small, iterative improvements are the ones winning the race to become commercial marketers."*

If you haven't seen it already, we'd recommend you check out our comprehensive guide to becoming a commercial marketer, which you can find by clicking here.







SECTION THREE

So, how do I become a commercial marketer?

Let's be clear, every region,sector and organisation is going to have its own specific issues, which may require more tailored support. However, we believe there are five key market and business areas that a commercial marketer should be close to, and six key skills that they should possess. If you're on top of both of these sets, you should be in good shape to be a commercial marketer.

3.1. The five key areas you must be close to

Working with our Propolis Experts, we believe there are five key areas of your market and your business you must be close to, in order to have the requisite information to act effectively as a commercial marketer. Miss out on just one of these areas and your ability to make the most strategic decisions possible is going to be diluted.

These areas are as follows:

Business and strategy (why you're trading)

Product and portfolio (what you're trading)

Customers, community and team (who you're reserving)

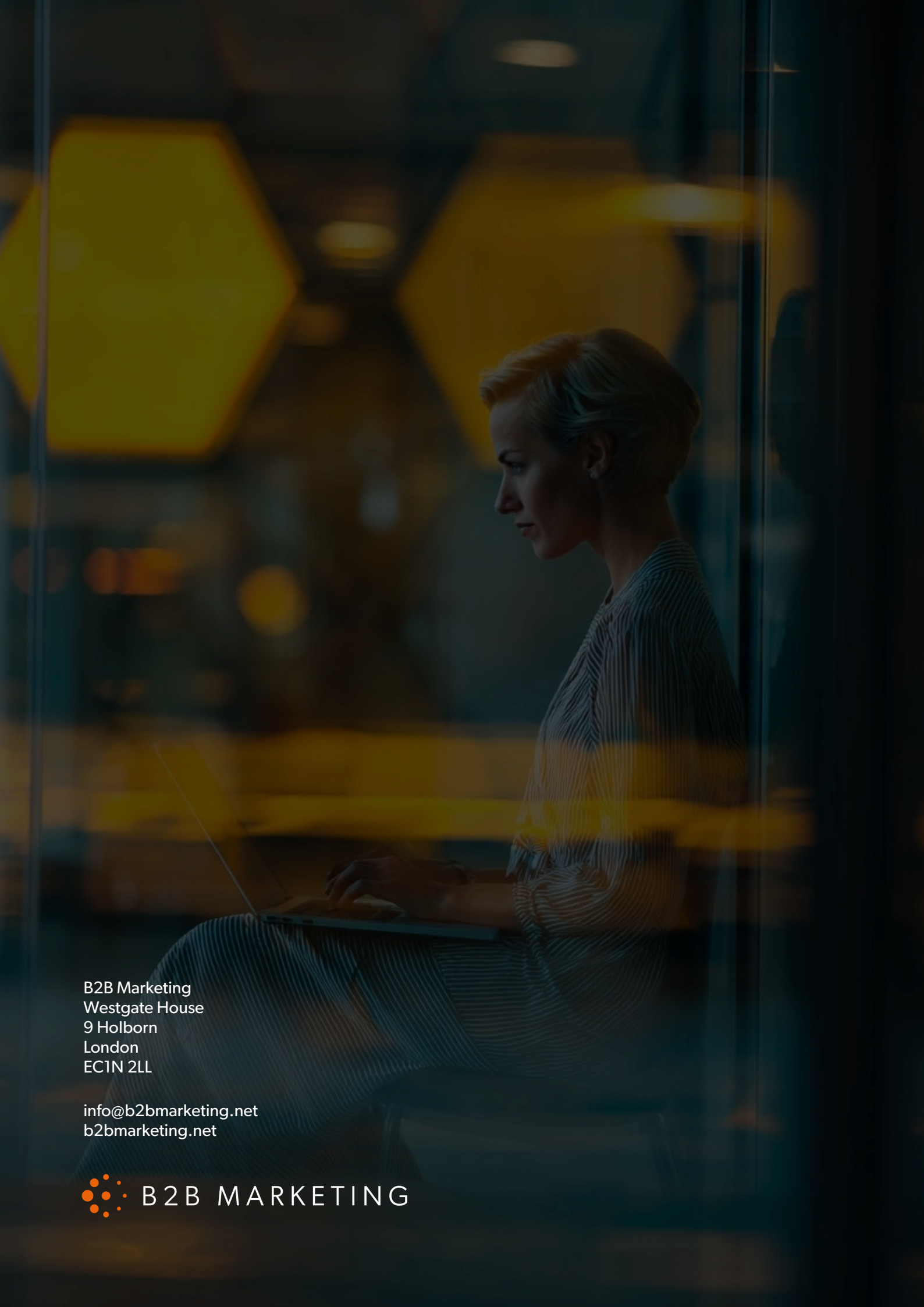
Market, industry and profession (where you're trading)

Brand, campaigns and channels (how you're trading)

As a quick exercise to establish how close you are to these areas as a marketing leader, ask yourself the following questions, and map your results onto the chart on page 10.

Realise your potential: Your guide to becoming the commercial marketer your business needs, and your future demands

Download the report here



B2B Marketing
Westgate House
9 Holborn
London
EC1N 2LL

info@b2bmarketing.net
b2bmarketing.net

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