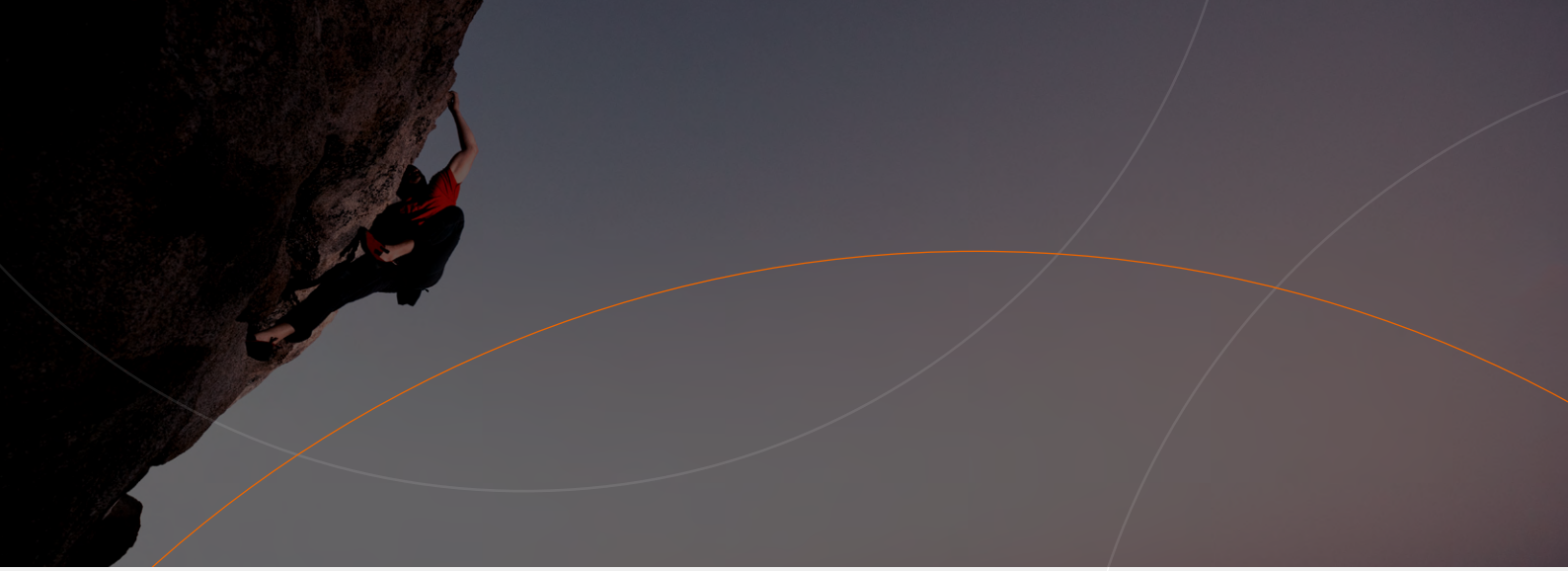
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Are you a brave B2B marketer?

B2B Marketing
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THE BRAND TO SALES™ AGENCY





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Introduction

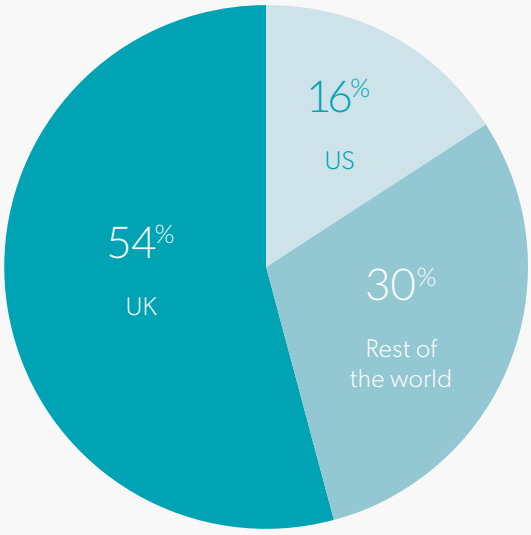
Bravery means different things to different people. For some, it's creating bold and provocative campaigns using methods they've not tried before. For others, it's standing up to stakeholders who disagree when the status quo is challenged, or creating a culture that's open to both new ideas and the occasional failure.

Whatever bravery means to you, it's a vital attribute to have in marketing today. Where business moves fast and can get pretty complex. Where living in your comfort zone and doing the same old things are likely to yield the same old results.

And while there's no doubt that being brave is a risk, it's always worth remembering that where there's risk, there's opportunity – and potentially huge rewards. So even if it requires a change in mindset, and even if it might not come naturally to you or your organisation – sometimes a bit of pluck is the only thing that will give you a major competitive edge.

Research methodology

The research surveyed 190 B2B marketers globally, of which 41% were heads of marketing or in a more senior role.



Key findings:

- 93% of B2B marketers said they would be more willing to make a brave decision if they would not suffer consequences in the event of failure.
- Only 35% of marketers say their organisation accepts failure as a part of the innovation process. Only 40% are actively encouraged to take brave decisions.
- 95% agree being brave in business is influenced more by company culture than external economic factors.
- 83% of B2B marketers believe leadership that supports brave decision-making is the most important characteristic of a brave business.

Section 1
How brave are B2B marketers?

The concept of bravery in business can be tricky to articulate. So a crucial goal of the Braver Business research was to understand what it means to B2B marketers.

As figure 1 shows, the most important aspect of bravery is the ability to challenge decisions, to stand up for ideas, and being honest with colleagues even if it results in a difficult conversation.

This was followed by innovation, risk taking and seizing upon opportunities.

However, with more than half of respondents of the opinion that bravery can be learned, it's important to consider the conditions under which it thrives.

Figure 1: **Which of the following do you believe are the three most important aspects to being brave?**

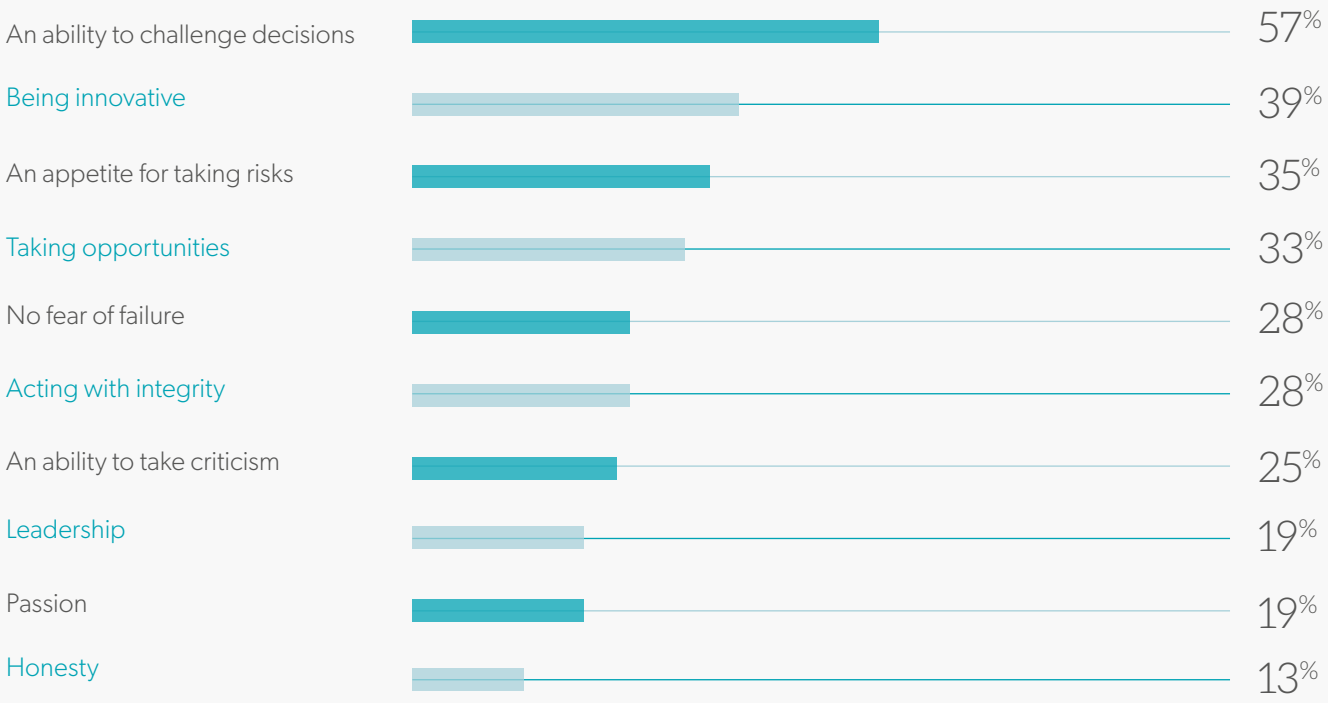
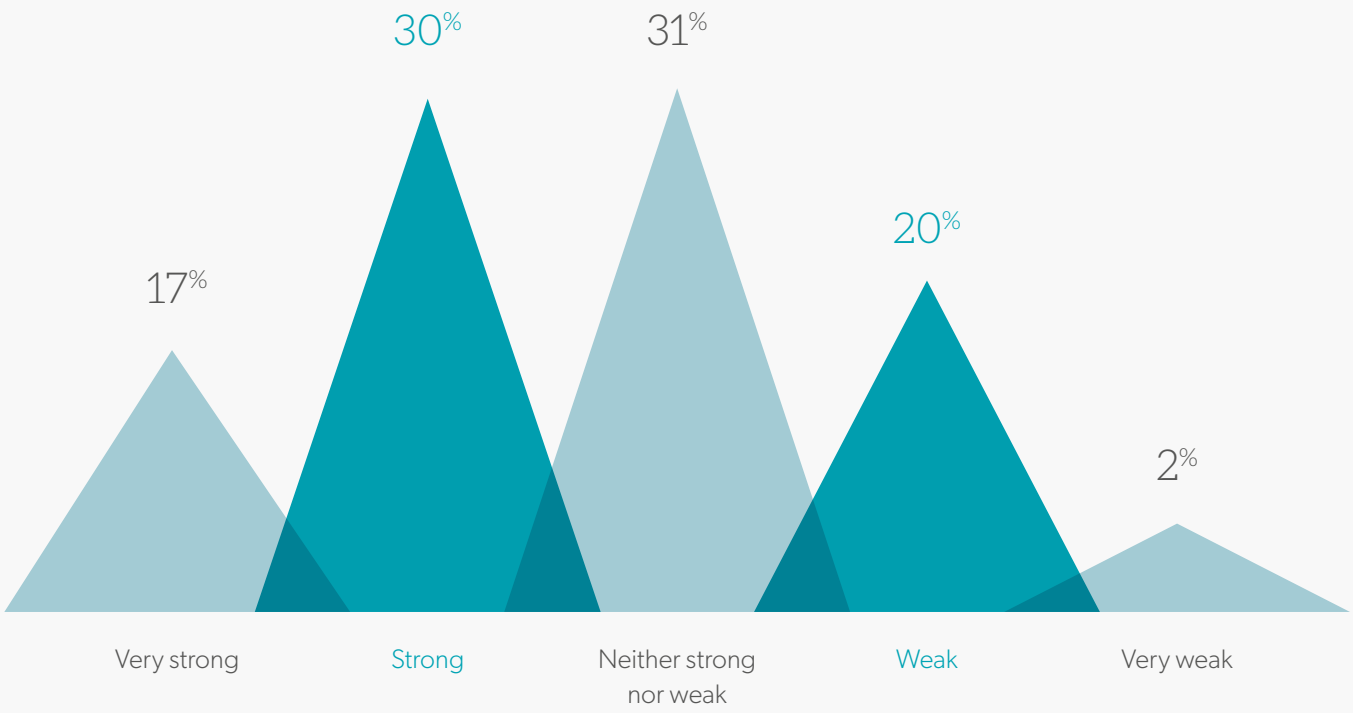


Figure 2:
How would you rate your ability to say no to requests from the board or other senior stakeholders in your organisation?



Brave by nature or nurture

Only a quarter of marketers rate themselves as very confident in their ability to challenge decisions. And a combined 15% rate themselves as unconfident or worse.

Consider these numbers in context with figure two – which details that very few say no to the board – and a picture emerges. Bravery is as much about the people and things we say no to as the proactive decisions we make. And on the second metric, many businesses are falling short.

Instead of allowing marketers who know what bravery is (and what it can do) to push back, reframe the conversation and propose a more adventurous alternative, they've created conditions that make them more likely to stay silent.

That means businesses are doing the same safe things time and again. And probably getting the same results.

Importantly, seniority is not the only factor that makes it difficult to push back. The timing of the request matters too, as does the urgency or risk to personal relationships and reputation. This shows that culture matters.

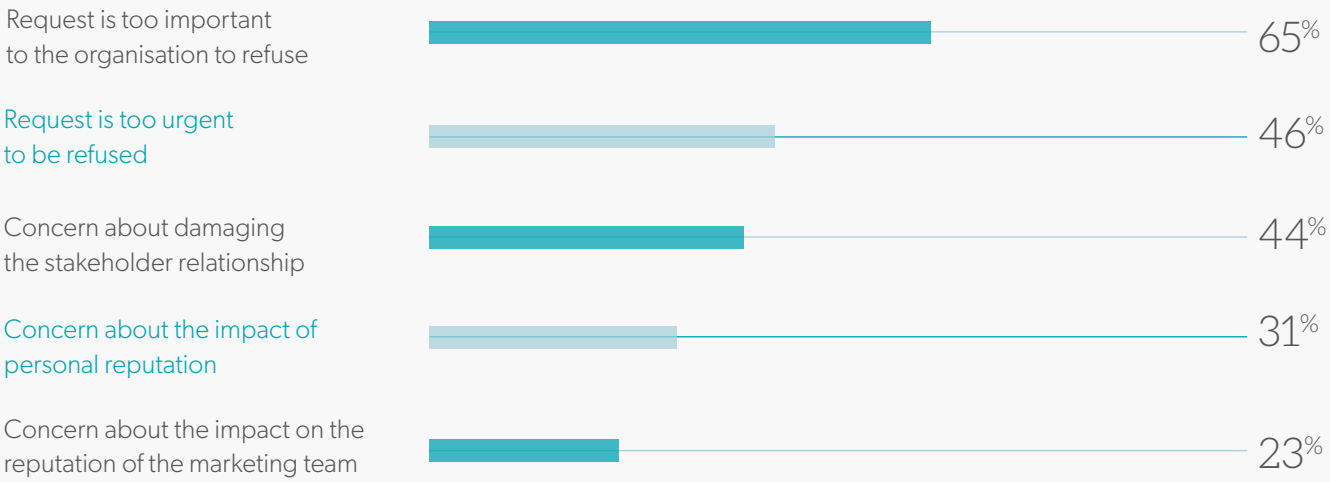
But if a brave, ideas-led marketer can't say no and suggest a better alternative, nobody wins.

The business loses good ideas, the clever marketer gets frustrated and leaves, and (perhaps worst of all) the long-incumbent seniors are never challenged on their thinking.

If there is an upside it's that marketing leaders are often responsive to the concerns of their juniors. More than half of those surveyed say their leaders are either 'supportive' or 'very supportive' of their refusal of requests from internal stakeholders. But more needs to be done to transform that into true bravery.

"The business loses good ideas, the clever marketer gets frustrated and leaves, and (perhaps worst of all) the long-incumbent seniors are never challenged on their thinking."

Figure 3: **Which of the following affect your ability to say no to requests from internal stakeholders?**



Section 2
Failure leads to success

Every modern business will tell you it wants its employees to be bold, brave and innovative – yet our research shows that only 40% of B2B marketers are actively encouraged to do so.

Only a third (34%) have the freedom to try something new, even when it presents a risk to the business.

Some 43% say brave decisions that support the business are welcomed. In only 5% of businesses is bravery actively discouraged.

Those that take this forward-thinking approach are the most innovative out there. They understand that failure happens. That it's an important part of the innovation process and that fear of it shouldn't thwart their thinking. They follow the mantra of Thomas Edison: "I've not failed, I've just found 1000 ways that don't work."

"A quarter of marketers are too afraid to fail, and their organisations are missing out on a potential source of new ideas."

Fail again, fail better

Happily, most businesses seem to take this enlightened approach to the concept of failure. As figure 4 shows, 35% of marketers say failure is part of innovation in their organisation. And a further 55% say their organisation is prepared to accept it, even if they'd prefer to avoid it. In addition, more than half of marketers think their organisation's culture allows them to fail (54%). However, a quarter (27%) believe they are not allowed to fail. This results in marketers being too afraid to fail, and their organisations are missing out on a potential source of new ideas.

But are businesses going far enough? Would explicit communication that failure isn't a career-killer improve the appetite for bold decisions?

The results overwhelmingly suggest so, with 93% saying they'd be more willing to make riskier choices if they knew they were allowed to fail. This shows us that businesses are the masters of their own destinies when it comes to bravery.

Figure 4: **How would you describe your organisation's tolerance of failure?**

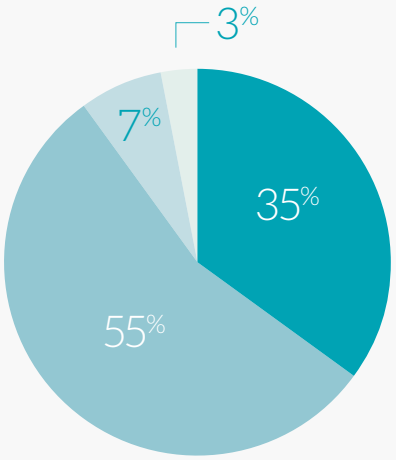


Figure 5: **Which of the following could your organisation offer to encourage you to take braver business decisions?**



63%	59%	47%	47%
More acceptance of failure in pursuit of new ideas	Greater freedom to take the initiative	Training for employees to encourage bravery	Reduce decision-making bureaucracy

Reward bravery, reward failure

Greater acceptance of failure in the pursuit of new ideas was highlighted as the main thing organisations could do to encourage staff to be braver – ahead of offering more freedom to take the initiative and more training.

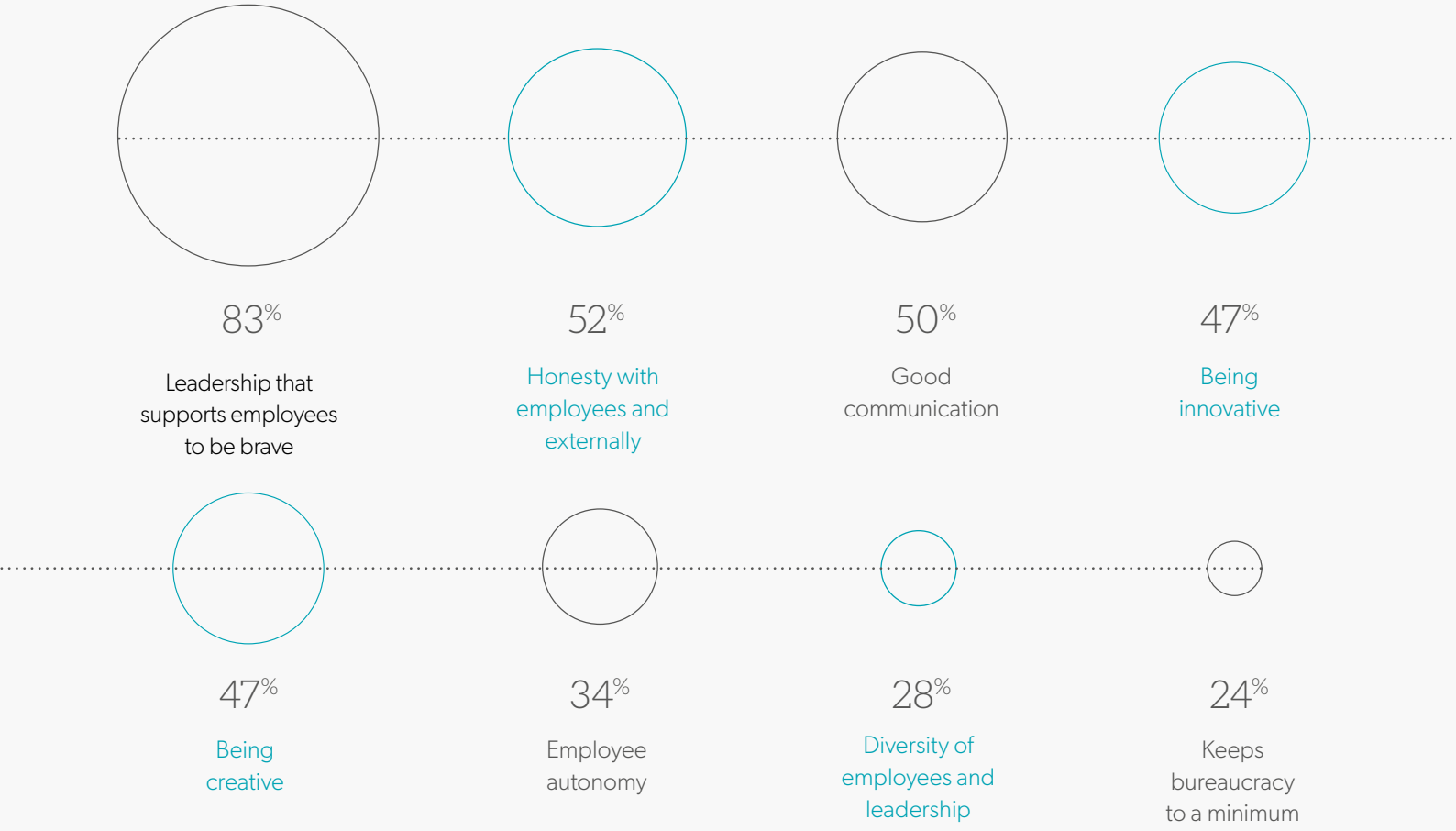
But would more freedom really mean braver marketers, or are they using a restrictive culture as a convenient excuse?

The thing to remember is that risk requires a shift in mindset. Giving more freedom to a marketer who will behave the same way won't lead to an upswing in brave decision-making. You must have the right marketer there in the first place. Then encourage and incentivise new ways of doing things.

Research shows the main thing that would motivate employees to take braver decisions – ahead of additional financial rewards, career progress or even benefits like holidays – is a visible impact on corporate results (the top motivation for three-quarters of those surveyed). It shows that brave decisions that differentiate a brand in the marketplace will not only improve brand advocacy and boost sales – they'll provide the motivation marketers are looking for.

Section 3
Developing the culture of a brave business

Figure 6: **Which of the following attributes are most important in a brave business?**



Bravery doesn't start and end with the marketing department. It's a cultural thing that's rooted at the top of an organisation. Indeed some 83% of respondents cite 'leadership that supports employees to be brave' as the most important attribute of a bold business.

While 'honesty', and 'good communication' also top 50%.

Given the importance marketers place on leadership, it's good that most believe their organisation's leaders have an appetite for bold decision-making, with more than two-thirds describing it as strong. And that nearly 63% of marketers think their CEO's (or equivalent's) approach is either 'brave' or 'very brave' – compared with just a fifth who see them as cautious. But how frequently does a leader's bravery cascade down into the rest of the organisation?

Findings from the report suggest that the appetite for adventure increases with both seniority and experience – two-thirds say it rises in line with position in the hierarchy, and 73% think the more experienced you are, the braver you get.

This is somewhat surprising as workload, professional and personal responsibilities and pressure from senior stakeholders all increase with seniority. You might expect senior marketers with more to lose don't want to jeopardise what they've worked hard for by taking risks. And equally, that more junior employees would be less encumbered by such fears and therefore more willing to put forward bolder suggestions. Less experienced marketers arguably have also had less time to become institutionalised by a conservative culture that doesn't welcome new ideas.

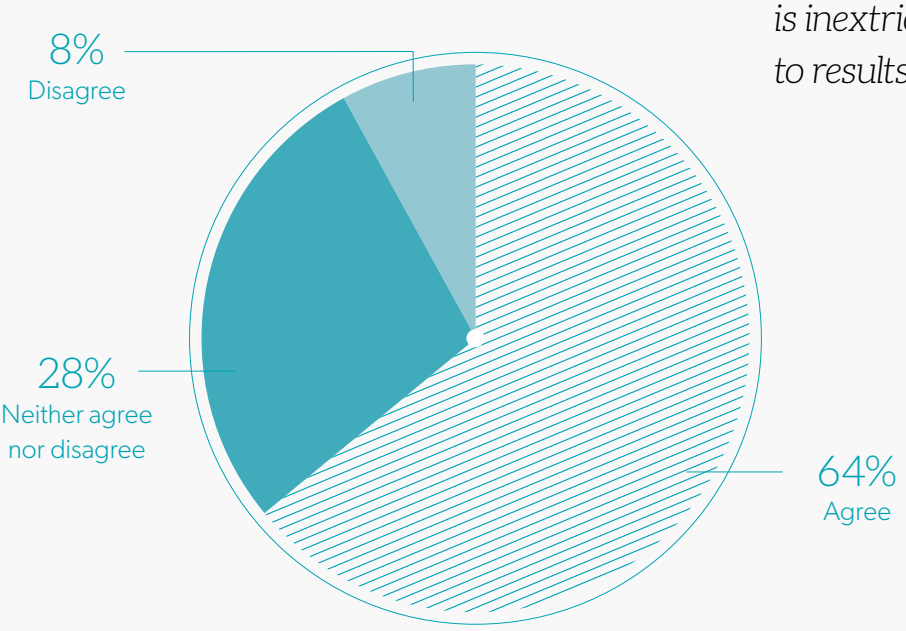
The challenge is getting this to filter down through the business. Particularly as 57% think they're as risk averse (or more risk averse) than their rivals.

A call for bravery

Most marketers (64%) agree that (in the past 12 months) there have been instances when a braver approach would have resulted in better outcomes for the organisation, it's clear that bravery is inextricably linked to results.

For businesses this means it's essential to have everyone pushing in the same direction if they are going to progress and gain a competitive advantage. Failure to encourage new ideas will mean a gloomy long-term future spent losing out to those who do.

Figure 7: **In the past 12 months, there have been instances where a braver approach would have resulted in a better business outcome:**



"It's clear that bravery is inextricably linked to results"

Section 4
Five key takeaways

This research suggests marketers are not averse to the idea of making brave decisions and organisations have gone some of the way to provide the conditions and culture in which they can be taken. Yet fear of failure is still widespread and inhibits marketers from taking brave decisions. Here's five steps for braver marketing:

1. Stand up for yourself

Challenging decisions is the most important characteristic of bravery it seems, but many marketers feel intimidated when stepping up and saying no to senior stakeholders. Businesses often discourage conflict and nobody wants to hear no for an answer – but sometimes it's necessary for the business to make the right decision.

View saying no as an opportunity to propose a bolder alternative. Stakeholders (who often don't understand the intricacies of marketing) may be unwilling to try something new, but it's your responsibility to outline the potential huge reward a brave decision could reap.

› **What to do now:** Understanding the context as to why your stakeholders made a request helps you build a valid framework for your refusal of it. This means getting to grips with the company's objectives and challenges (or that of the individual stakeholder) early on. With this knowledge you can convincingly argue your resources are better invested elsewhere, or pitch bolder alternative solutions to the same challenges.

Much of this means creating allies, in-roads and advocates before a problem hits. Carry out stakeholder mapping to evaluate individuals' influence, and establish who'll be more receptive to a braver approach. Get them on board to build advocates within the business.

2. Change the language around bravery

Bravery is a skill that can be learned, but mindsets need to change. In business, a 'brave' decision is often a euphemism for a risky one that might cost you your job. Marketers are therefore afraid of the consequences of something going wrong. Focus on communicating bravery as an essential requirement while also highlighting the negative consequences of doing the same old thing. After all, in today's fast-paced business climate, customers and competitors will not wait for you to catch up.

"Bravery is a skill that can be learned, but mindsets need to change"

› **What to do now:** Marketing leaders should invite their internal influencers and fellow senior marketers to form a communication committee in which they agree to an aligned approach to messaging. Without consistency your message won't sink in. While the influencers will be able to deliver that message at an informal, lower level, senior marketers must express the same message both in actions and in words.

"Creating a widespread culture of bravery means changing the behaviours and attitudes of everyone involved"

3. Start small, think big

Smaller pilot projects can be a great opportunity to try new ideas with lower risk and the ability to move quickly. Consider trialling that brave idea under an Agile marketing methodology as failing fast in the pursuit of innovation is core to its philosophy.

› **What to do now:** When a small project goes well, it creates the perfect launch pad and internal success story from which to scale up your ideas. Any employees joining that growing project will already be energised by its early success, while senior leaders are more likely to give it their buy-in. But remember that new ideas can easily be cannibalised by the bureaucracy of the larger group, so continue to protect it from the rules and regulations that could hinder its agility and bravery.

4. If you do fail, fail fast and fail early

If a brave idea doesn't go to plan, have the courage to admit it didn't work. Doing this sooner rather than later minimises risk to the business and gives you time to learn from it before moving forward. Organisations will accept failure in the pursuit of new ideas – but only to a point.

› **What to do now:** The key is in recognising when failure has struck, but also when it is outweighing the benefit of the learning process. This means having clear objectives, KPIs and measurements that you regularly come back to. Communicate with honesty when they are not being met.

5. Support brave ideas in your organisation

While a brave culture starts at the top of the organisation, bold marketing decisions need to be supported by the wider business to gain traction. Creating a widespread culture of bravery means changing the behaviours and attitudes of everyone involved. It takes time, but the rewards will be on going.

› **What to do now:** By celebrating failure as well as winning, you'll prove that the culture really does support improvement through trial and error. This can be done in many playful ways; some businesses hand out awards for the most impactful 'epic fail' – i.e. those that deliver the greatest insight.

It's crucial that every failure is communicated as being a means to take the team one step closer to success. Share what was learnt during the process and get the team to generate more ideas on the back of it.

Most of all, remember this is about being positive and sending a message that there is no shame in not hitting the mark first time. This should be communicated at a local team level but for company-wide impact, ask the CEO to take the same approach at town hall meetings.

Section 5
Three great examples of bravery in B2B marketing

1. 84 Lumber

The US building materials merchant whipped up a storm with its provocative TV commercial for this year's Super Bowl, which was initially rejected by the network for being too political.

The recruitment ad featured a Mexican mother and daughter trying to get past a huge wall to seek work in the US. The firm submitted an amended 90-second version for TV, which invited viewers to watch the ending on its website.

It was certainly brave to tackle a political issue in the US' biggest advertising opportunity (and not cheap either, as the slot was reported to have cost $15 million).

The firm also had to deny criticism it was supporting illegal immigration, yet the results were spectacular. Within one minute of airing on TV, the longer online version had 300,000 views and now has more than 11 million on YouTube. Not to mention the additional publicity for being too hot for TV and positioning itself at the heart of one of the US' most politically charged issues.

2. Netsuite

Cloud software business NetSuite (now part of Oracle) ran a series of aggressive ads that specifically attacked its direct competitor Sage in UK newspapers. The adverts featured a London Underground map with all routes finishing at the NetSuite logo with the slogan "All Sage lines terminate here".

The campaign was accompanied by NetSuite's then-CEO Zach Nelson provocatively tweeting the ad to his newly-appointed counterpart at Sage, Stephen Kelly, 'welcoming' him to his new role. Kelly took it in good spirit, responding to Nelson with a parody of the NetSuite ad. The research has shown marketers want their leaders to demonstrate their bravery, and Nelson was not afraid to take the fight directly to the opposition.

3. Maersk

In 2014 a Maersk container ship pulled into the Port of Rotterdam with a dead whale draped across its bow. For many firms, this would be something to deal with discreetly and hope nobody found out.

Instead the shipping firm took the brave step of admitting what had happened and posting about it on social media. It uploaded pictures to Facebook and even set up a Pinterest gallery in the Whale's memory. This sympathetic and human approach to social media has won it many fans – it now has more than 2.5 million followers on Facebook, where its nearest rivals measure their followers in the thousands.

Section 6
Comment



Pete Hendrick,
Director,
Octopus Group

Being brave is about daring to challenge the norm. It's about differentiation in crowded, competitive markets.

It's encouraging to see such an appetite to be braver amongst B2B marketers. This definitely resonates with what we see among our clients: businesses investing in marketing and communication to drive sales.

Beyond technology and creative thinking, being brave boils down to the ability to challenge decisions for the majority of marketers (57%). This is about being bold. Marketing has to lead the sales organisation to better performance, not follow. It follows that making a visible impact on corporate results is the biggest motivator for marketers to make braver decisions (76%).

We've all struggled at one point or another to get initiatives off the ground. That's why the call to 'stand up for yourself' in the takeaways is a great sentiment. We could all do with a bit more gumption on the odd occasion.

But let's not confuse confrontation with imagination.

The report shows that we're looking at ways to embrace failure. Equally,

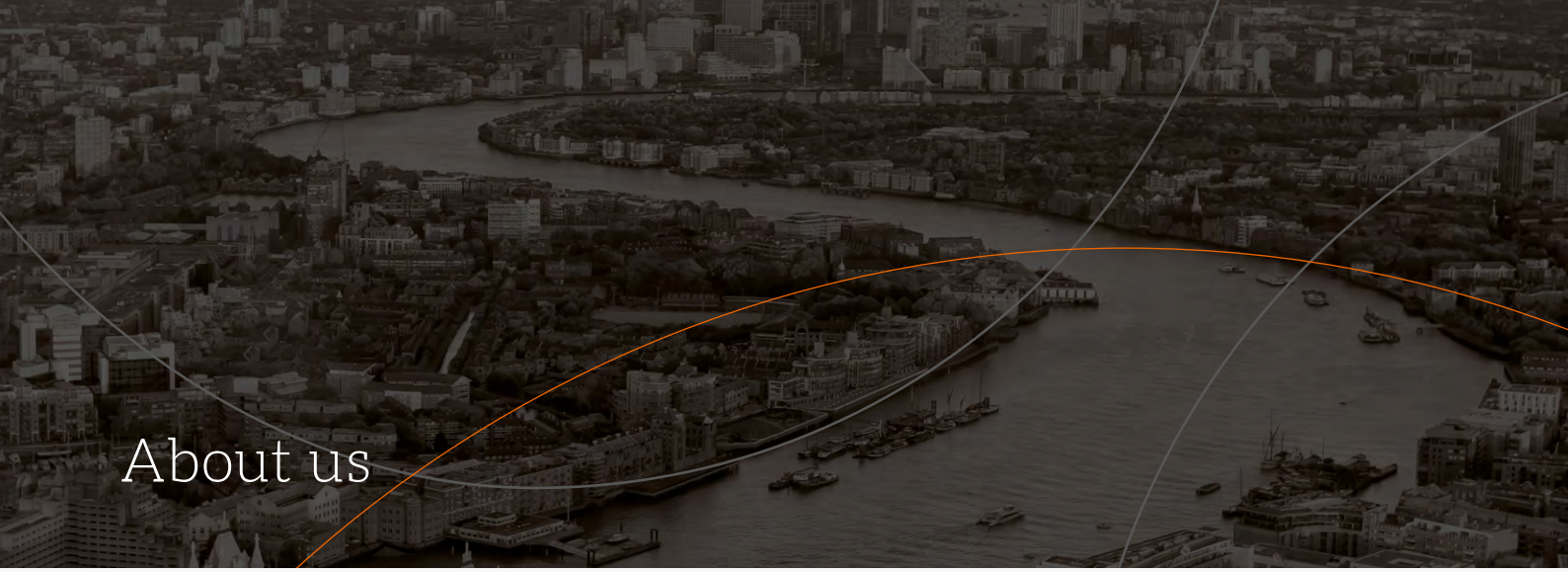
"Let's not confuse confrontation with imagination"

failing big seems foolhardy. That's why, for me 'start small, think big', is another great takeaway from the report. It's a keystone to unlocking a 'braver business'.

Essentially, we're talking about experiments by stealth! Pilot projects that prove a new approach, delivering a return and having the capacity to scale, quickly. The digital world and B2B's increasing appetite for creativity provide ample opportunity for agencies and clients to prove this model.

Some 93% of respondents in the survey would be more willing to make riskier choices if they knew they were allowed to fail. Maybe our mistake is to wait for permission? By all accounts, bravery works best when it comes from within.

Come talk to Octopus Group if you're considering doing things differently in 2018.
Visit www.octopusgrp.com
or call 020 3772 8899



About us

B2B Marketing

B2B Marketing is the comprehensive information resource for B2B marketers. Its mission is to provide practitioners with the information they need to perform better and achieve more, whatever sector of the B2B space they are operating in.

Launched in 2004 as *B2B Marketing* magazine, it has since evolved into a multi-faceted resource, delivering a broad range of content in a variety of different forms and formats.

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Octopus Group

Our Brand To Sales™ approach

Octopus Group is the home of Brand To Sales. With 65 staff based at its Farringdon office, it helps blue chip and fast-growth technology and professional services brands create sales fast. The agency is the first to fuse research, creative, demand generation, PR, social, events and technology together into focused campaigns, based on its Brand To Sales methodology. All under one roof, with one team, and delivered in a way that makes commercial sense for clients.

Octopus Group has been recognised for its work and approach – ranked as one of the Top 100 Independent Agencies by *The Drum*, highlighted as an Agency of the Future by the PRCA and winner of the 2017 In2 SABRE for Innovative Agency Initiative.

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