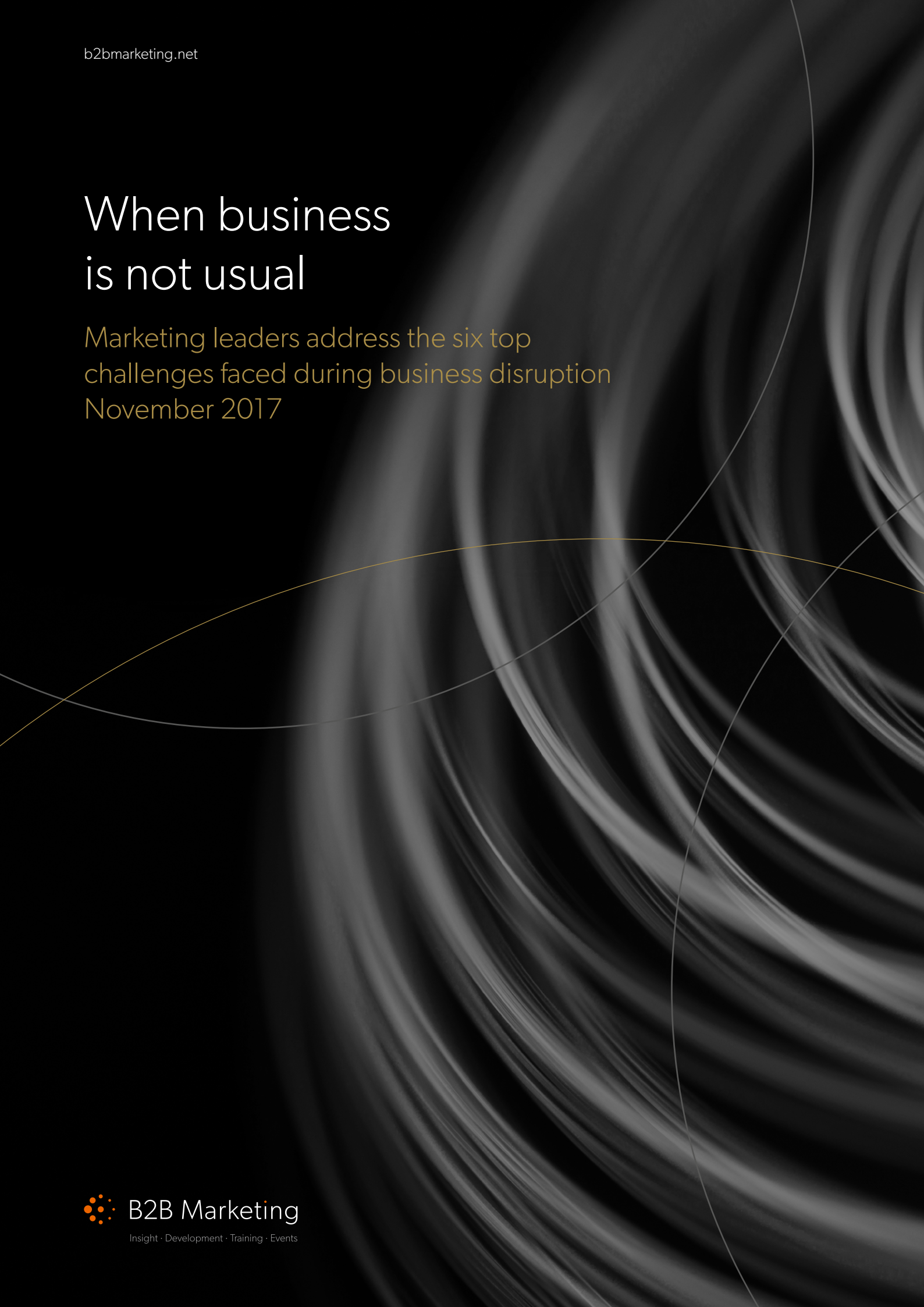
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When business is not usual

Marketing leaders address the six top challenges faced during business disruption

November 2017



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6 things we learned at this month's Leaders roundtable

We've all heard that change is the new constant. Whether it's rising stakeholder expectations, M&A or a new CEO, many leadership challenges call for adjustments and reassessments of the strategy. But how do you address them while staying on track with the long-term marketing vision?

Strategy is always key but leaders must move away from thinking they hold the map for a pre-destined route. That path keeps moving. As such, it's time for marketing leaders to create a culture that's equipped for constant change.

During November's Leaders roundtable, 'When business is not usual', we asked attendees to share their experiences of disruption and got them to tackle the key questions leaders ask when struck by change. Here's what was shared.

1 How do you make plans without seeing what's around the corner?

Every leader will be struck by change over the course of their career; those who are immobilised by it won't survive for long. If you wait for that state of flux to pass before taking action, your productivity will fall off a cliff.

Take the entry of a new CEO as an example; they won't be enthusiastic about executives who wait around to hear the new strategy. That CEO will want their executive team to provide decisive opinions and plans upfront.

2 How can I set objectives without knowing the desired result?

It's hard to set clear objectives when the goal posts are moving, or were never in situ. One leader had to throw out all KPIs in order to successfully respond to a changing environment. In a situation like this, you should give your team a strong, clear marketing strategy and the freedom to chart their own way to success.

Most of all, make sure your budgets and plans are adaptable. And, if you can, forge alliances with the CFO. Aside from the financial imperative, the CFO can help push your agenda to the CEO and board.

3 How do I ensure my message lands in the right way?

Communication is key to managing change – it must be consistent and regular for your message to sink it. Think people have got it? Say it another 10 times just in case – but make sure you're doing it in different ways.

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In today's business environment inertia quickly leads to declining profits, so we must all see the opportunities in change

It's best to consider all the options – such as video messages, town halls, engagement surveys and personal one-to-ones. However, remember that people will respond on two levels – there'll be the formal response you hear at meetings and those 'water cooler' conversations where the real stuff is expressed. Ensure you engage on both levels.

Be aware that different teams and individuals may interpret what you've said in different ways. It's useful to ask them to feed back what they think you've said.

4 What can I do to navigate the political minefield?

Change brings tectonic shifts in the political landscape. Be savvy to it but don't get caught in the game.

This is never more apparent than following a merger or acquisition. Leaders in that situation will be challenged with uniting an 'us and them' culture amid the pressure of job cuts and dramatic change.

It's natural for members of the two united companies to compete over jobs, budget and other resources, so it will be crucial to emphasise the importance of collaboration. One way to do this is to bring people together from across the divide to work on short-term projects. Those individuals can then share the other team's perspective among their own and be an advocate of 'the other side'.

At a personal level, you will have to find the right balance between forging allies among influencers and the senior leadership team, and being authentic. Get this wrong and you may ostracise yourself by seeming untrustworthy.

5 What skills do I need, or should develop?

An obvious leadership skill crucial when managing change is adaptability, but too many overlook the importance of authenticity. Change is really all about people, which means that emotional intelligence plus the ability to empathise and connect with others will become your greatest tools.

Authentic positivity is infectious, even during the most disruptive times. Teams – both senior and junior – can be invigorated by instability if those at the top are able to communicate convincingly that it brings opportunity for success.

In today's business environment inertia quickly leads to declining profits, so we must all see the opportunities in change, and experiment and innovate with passion.

6 How can I spot change before it happens?

Sensing change before it happens grants you time to prepare. That could be through natural conversations, or monitoring changes in your fellow executives' diaries (yes, your exec team may already be stalking you!).

However, it can be hard to spot a changing tide when you're focused on delivery. Whether it's attending events, networking at a group or individual level, or reading at home, it's crucial to take time out of the day job and give context and perspective on the world around you.

Too many people invest all their time trudging through work that doesn't deliver results, or isn't properly measured. Stand back, assess and then chart a way forward.

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About

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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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