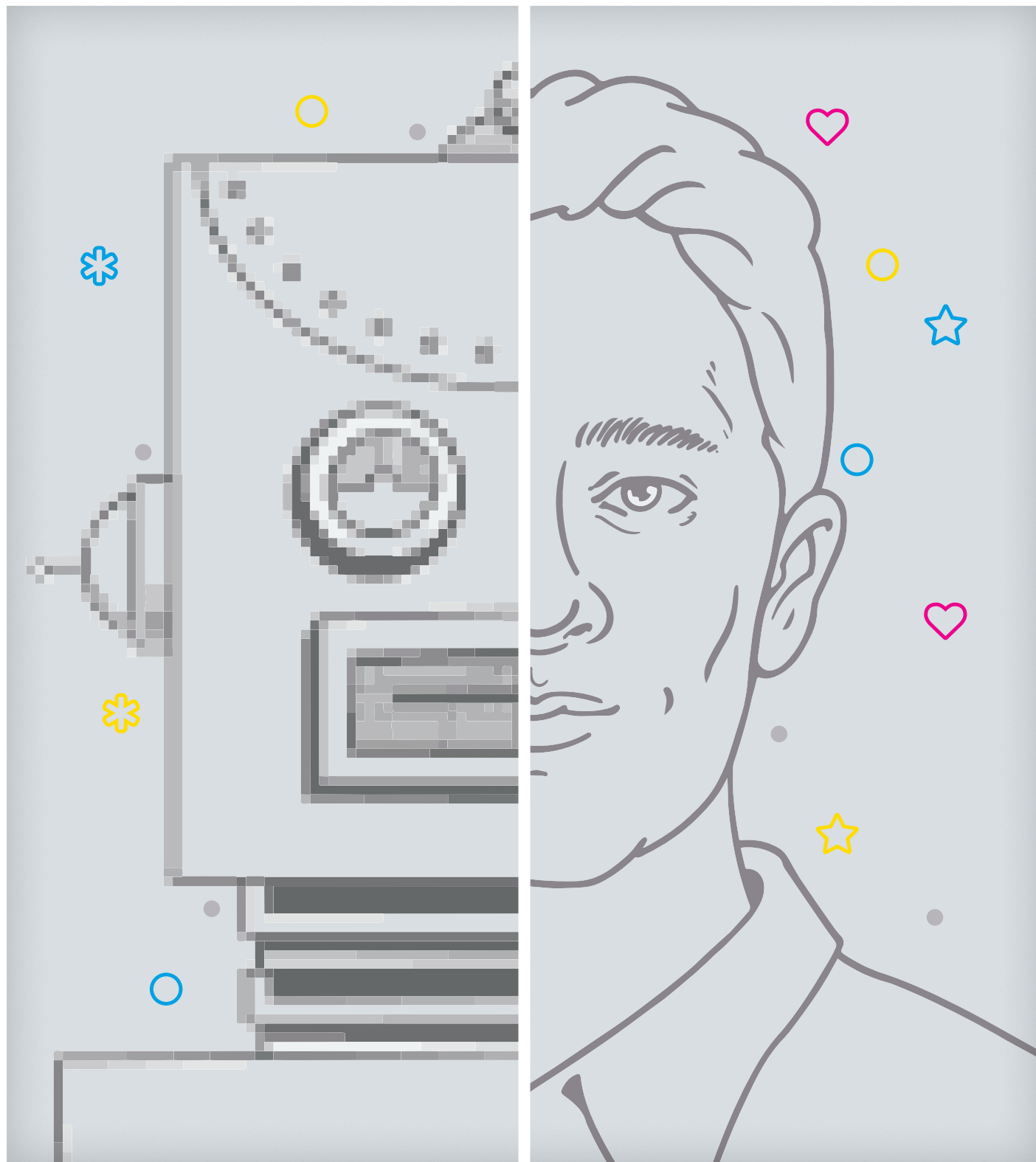




# Humanized Marketing

*Digital Discord and the Case for Recalibrating the B2B Mix*





## Are We Connecting?

Digital advertising. Data analysis. Digital customer experience. Contextual marketing. There is no shortage of discussion about on-screen advertising formats. The promise of providing marketers the abilities to target specific audiences and measure effectiveness is attractive to executives who must justify marketing spend.

How attractive? Business-to-business (B2B) companies in the U.S. spent more than \$10.5 billion in digital in 2021, an increase of 22 percent over 2019<sup>1</sup>.

With all this investment and innovation, marketers should be swimming in new contacts and leads. And we should thoroughly understand these leads because we're measuring their actions and engagement across all channels, right?

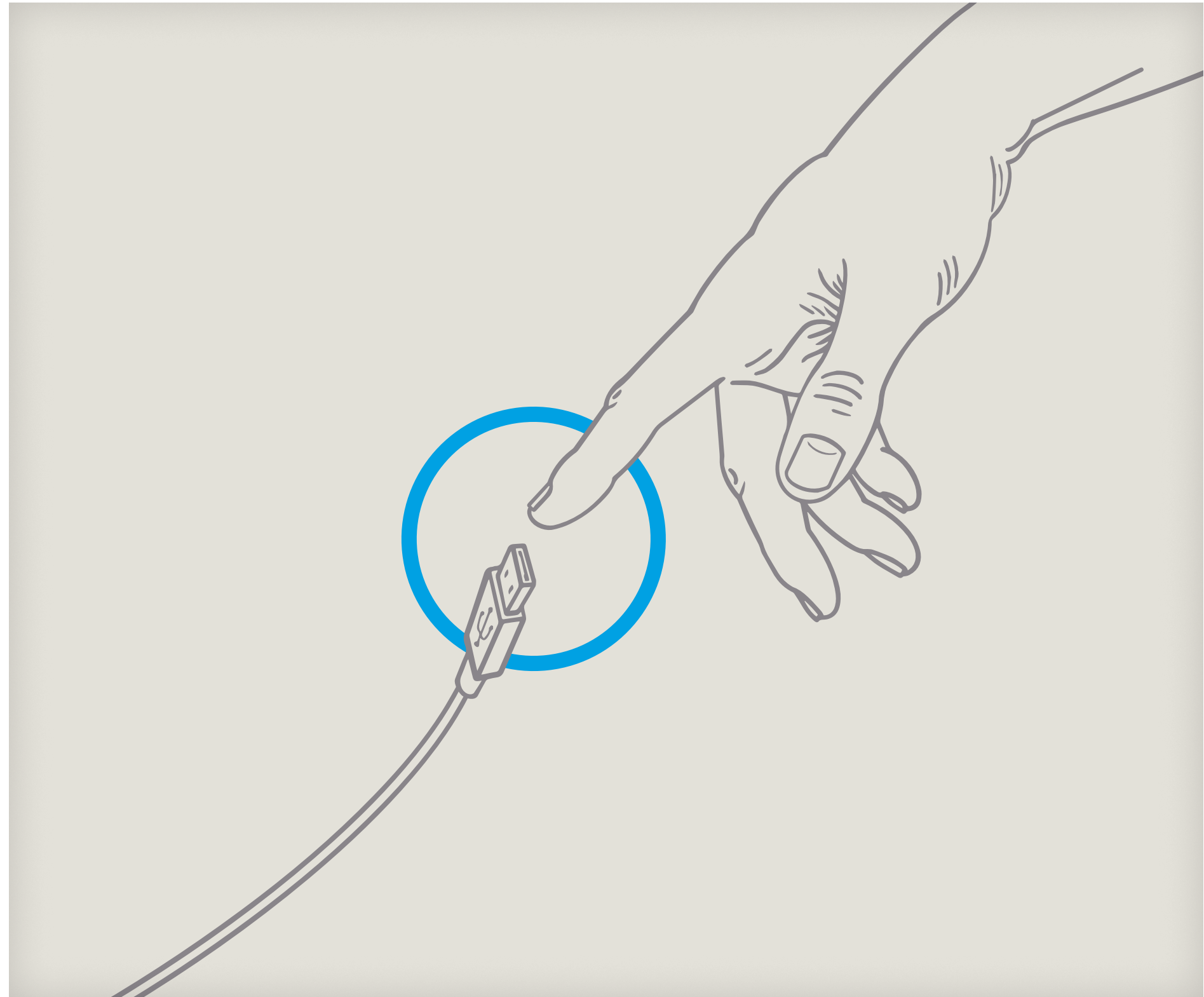
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It may be time to re-examine our relationships with customers and prospects — not only what we understand about them from a data perspective, but what we know about them from a *human* perspective.

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As frustrated execs continue to allocate more money to it, digital hasn't achieved its potential effectiveness:

- » 89 percent of marketers say digital advertising fails to meet their expectations.
- » Nearly 6 in 10 marketers say measurement tools still don't help establish the return on investment (ROI) of digital investments<sup>2</sup>.
- » Only 13 percent of B2B marketers rated their company's abilities to measure and analyze marketing performance as "excellent" in 2020<sup>3</sup>.
- » Don't take this wrong; digital matters — a lot. Most of the B2B sales cycle happens online. A study<sup>4</sup> from Demand Gen Report indicates that only 9 percent of millennial B2B buyers connect with vendors before doing their own intelligence gathering. Being present and accounted for digitally is paramount. **But it can't be your only answer.**



## The Scientific and Business Cases for Human Connections

Because humans innately crave physical interactions, creating one-on-one, personal experiences makes for more effective business relationships. Humans crave contact. That's not an opinion; it's science. Psychologists and researchers know the power of social, personal connections for human beings. This power resides at several levels:

### Feeling Happy and Valued

In their book, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*, authors John Cacioppo and William Patrick document that when people are asked what contributes most to their happiness, the overwhelming majority rate love, intimacy and social interactions above wealth, fame and even physical health<sup>5</sup>.

An article, *Why Physical Touch Matters for Your Well-Being*, discovered human contact is vital for physical health. It cites evidence that as we rely more on our phones, we threaten the simple interactions and touches that keep us positive and healthy<sup>6</sup>.

### Health and Well-being

We learned about the significant adverse impacts to our overall health and well-being during the global pandemic. Billions of people across every continent took preventative measures to maintain physical distance from others to reduce their chances of contracting COVID-19. According to research conducted in 2021 and printed in the *Frontiers in Psychology Journal*, the pandemic had drastic negative effects on

every segment of human society in the socio-psychological and physical paradigm. Many experienced depression, loneliness, anxiety and post-traumatic stress due to the isolation<sup>7</sup>.

### Brain Function

Healthy brain function depends on a social, personal world. In his book, [Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect](#)<sup>8</sup>, UCLA social cognitive neuroscientist Matthew

Lieberman reveals we are more likely to remember information experienced socially. He contends businesses and institutions would perform better if they capitalize on our social nature. It stands to reason: marketing efforts would benefit similarly.

But do these social interactions need to be physical and face-to-face?



## Connection Completeness

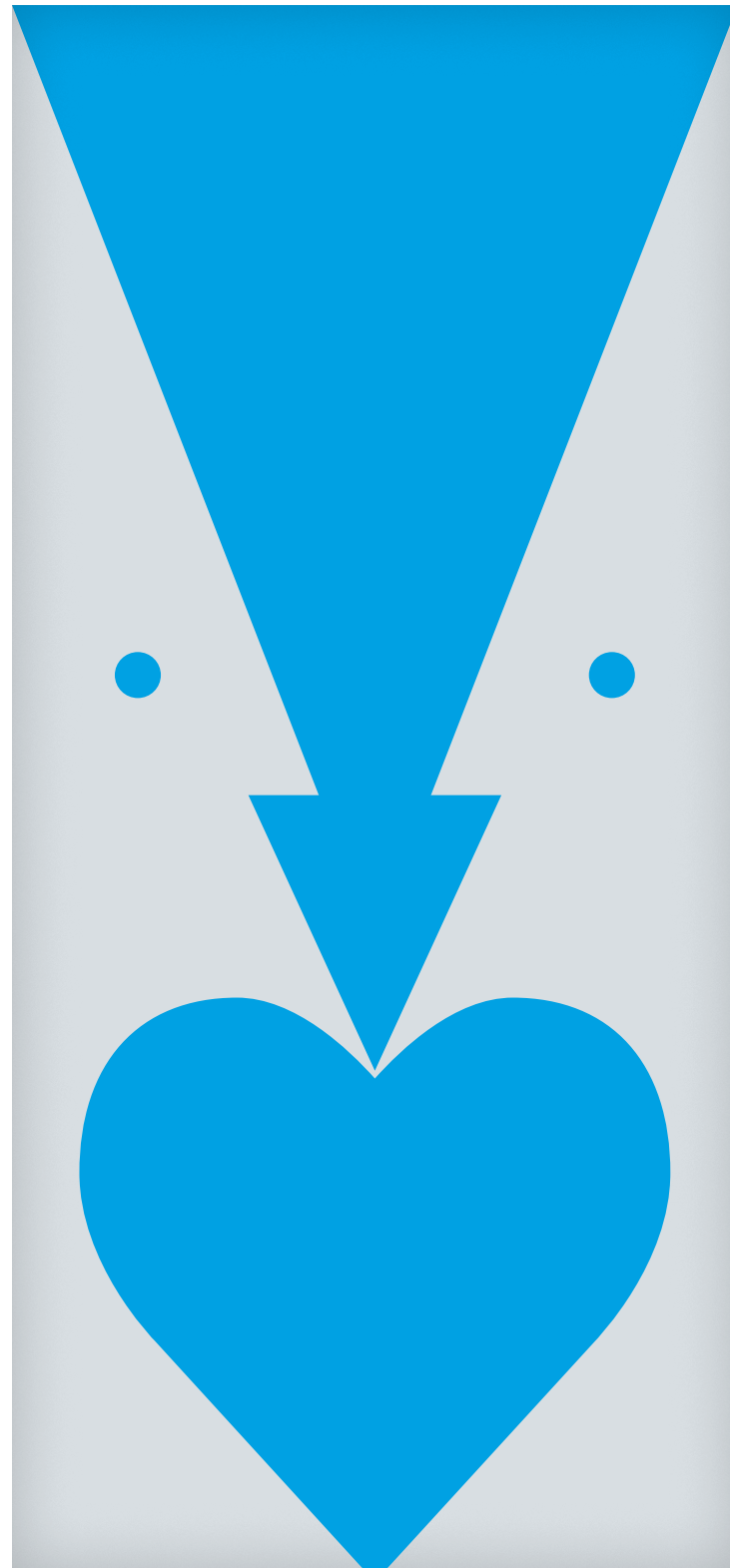
It's logical that digital connections might fulfill some of our physiological needs for social interaction. But research suggests the opposite. On-screen communications are "single-stranded," devoid of physical texture. Cacioppo and Patrick explain why this matters. "Most face-to-face encounters in real life allow us to communicate through even more subliminal cues — body chemistry, body language, action semantics, mimicry — in addition to words and gestures. Once again, the mind that seeks to connect is first about the body and **leaving the body behind can make human connections less satisfying.**"

As marketing executives turn exclusively to digital strategies, science seems to be telling us to tap the brakes and consider the holistic, physical aspects of human interaction.

## Relationships

Don Peppers and Martha Rogers predicted a more personal marketing model in 1993 in their prophetic book, *The One to One Future*. They expanded their thinking in [One to One B2B: Customer Development Strategies for the Business-to-Business World](#). They wrote, "It's equally important for B2B organizations (and their sales and marketing teams) to concurrently work to develop relationships with individuals from different relevant departments of the customer organization as well. People buy from companies they like. There's no easy button for this, but it's not hard. You just need to care enough to want to build relationships<sup>9</sup>."





## Customer Service

While consumers are comfortable using digital channels, 83 percent prefer dealing with human beings when seeking help or information<sup>10</sup>. That's according to Accenture's Study, "Service is the New Sales." There is a growing frustration between buyers and sellers; one reason is because of the failure to marry technology with human interaction. Leveraging human interaction in combination with digital is still the best business play.

## The Ancient Art of Conversation

In the 2017 Harvard Business Review article, *Your Customers Still Want to Talk to a Human Being*, author Gregg Johnson stated, "As brands prioritize this digital experience, they often overlook a simple fact: communicating by voice is faster, easier, and more effective than typing messages back and forth."<sup>11</sup> He pointed to a Google study<sup>12</sup> that revealed 61 percent of mobile users call a business in the purchase phase of the buying cycle and the majority would call instead of reaching out online because they want to talk to a real person.

Having excellent customer service is your competitive advantage. In fact, 90 percent of Americans use customer service as a factor in deciding whether or not to do business with a company<sup>13</sup>.

## An Emotional Attachment

In the 2019 paper, *Stop Making Sense: The Powerful Role of Emotion in B2B Decision Making*<sup>14</sup>, TriComB2B demonstrated that brands must embrace emotion to gain preference in B2B. Research declares that an appeal to emotion wins in B2B marketing, and buyers buy when they see personal value in a brand.

As we retarget programmatically and engage in personalized content sequencing, are we considering the quality of the emotional connections so essential to customers?

## Encouraging Human Connections

When using digital channels, evaluate how much digital contact is too much. Then recalibrate your marketing programs to create human interaction opportunities.

Here are some ideas to help you rebalance:

### Face-to-Face

In their study, *Value Co-Creation by Customer-to-Customer Communication*, authors Kijima and Novani confirmed face-to-face communication is still the most powerful human interaction.<sup>15</sup> No other communication channel offers more closeness and immediacy than people talking in the same room. Research conducted by Mahdi Roghanizad and Vanessa Bohns found that people tend to overestimate the power of their persuasiveness via text-based communication and underestimate the power of their persuasiveness via face-to-face communication. Face-to-face was found to be 34 times more successful than an email<sup>16</sup>.

Trade shows and industry events are not the only options. Creating proprietary events allows you to control the environment, content and format. Hosting an event may sound daunting, but the benefits are clear. Think of the value of hosting 10, 100 or 1,000 of your most important customers and prospects, each spending exclusive time with your people and your brand. Great B2B brands like [Teradata](#), [Emerson](#) and [Rockwell Automation](#) have discovered the value of hosting their own events.



### Outsider Expertise

Unsure you have the experts in an area impacting your customers? You don't have to be. Your best customer engagements might happen when the focus isn't on you!

An extensive study by the CMO Council<sup>17</sup> showed definitively that **B2B audiences trust third-party content over vendor-created content**. What's more, 50 to 60 percent of respondents list reports from associations, industry groups, analysts and other third parties as content they trust the most. Vendor-created content ranks last at less than 10 percent.

It's easy to imagine how this translates to incorporating third parties into the customer interactions you create. Demonstrate your commitment and objectivity by bringing in experts. Find the author, researcher or prominent official who knows the subject better than anyone. Invite them to speak to your customers and get out of the way. How?

**Establish formats that lend themselves to third-party commentary** like moderated panels, Q&A forums and keynote sessions.

## Peer-to-Peer

Intrigued by the credibility of a third-party expert? Imagine if your customers start talking and problem-solving together. Although this can happen naturally at an event, marketing should facilitate customers talking, learning from each other, and networking.

Here are a few ways to do it:

- » Moderated panels featuring multiple customers
- » Customer-led presentations
- » Small-group formats and problem-solving, break-out sessions
- » Customer focus groups

When planning an event, focus your energy and resources on creating environments that foster discussion and interaction.

## Insider Sharing

An advisory council is a powerful format for interaction that allows customers to get involved in your business. Many leading B2B brands operate high-performing advisory groups with facilitated customer collaboration and dialogue. A council can help to build relationships through customer feedback, ideas, advice and input on a range of business challenges and opportunities. B2B leaders use this type of format to guide product development, test brand messaging, improve customer satisfaction, and explore new technologies and portfolio expansion ideas.

## HELP, DON'T SELL

The first instinct is to sell when meeting face-to-face. The effort to create an opportunity makes this the ideal time to show prospects what we've got, right? Wrong. Absolutely wrong. This is your chance to help them, not sell them.

Trust happens when you educate and inform. According to the *Demand Gen Reports 2021 Content Preferences Survey*<sup>18</sup>, as B2B buyers become more sophisticated in their independent research, there is a strong desire for content that educates and informs, rather than sells.

So less pitching, please. Resist the urge to sell and focus on the issues that are impacting your customers — whether it's new regulatory standards, emerging technologies or materials, alternative system architectures or economic policies that could impact their business. Your best experts — including that engineer who everyone knows in your industry — know how to talk about the issues. Recruit them to take part in any face-to-face event you participate in or host.



## KEEP IT REAL

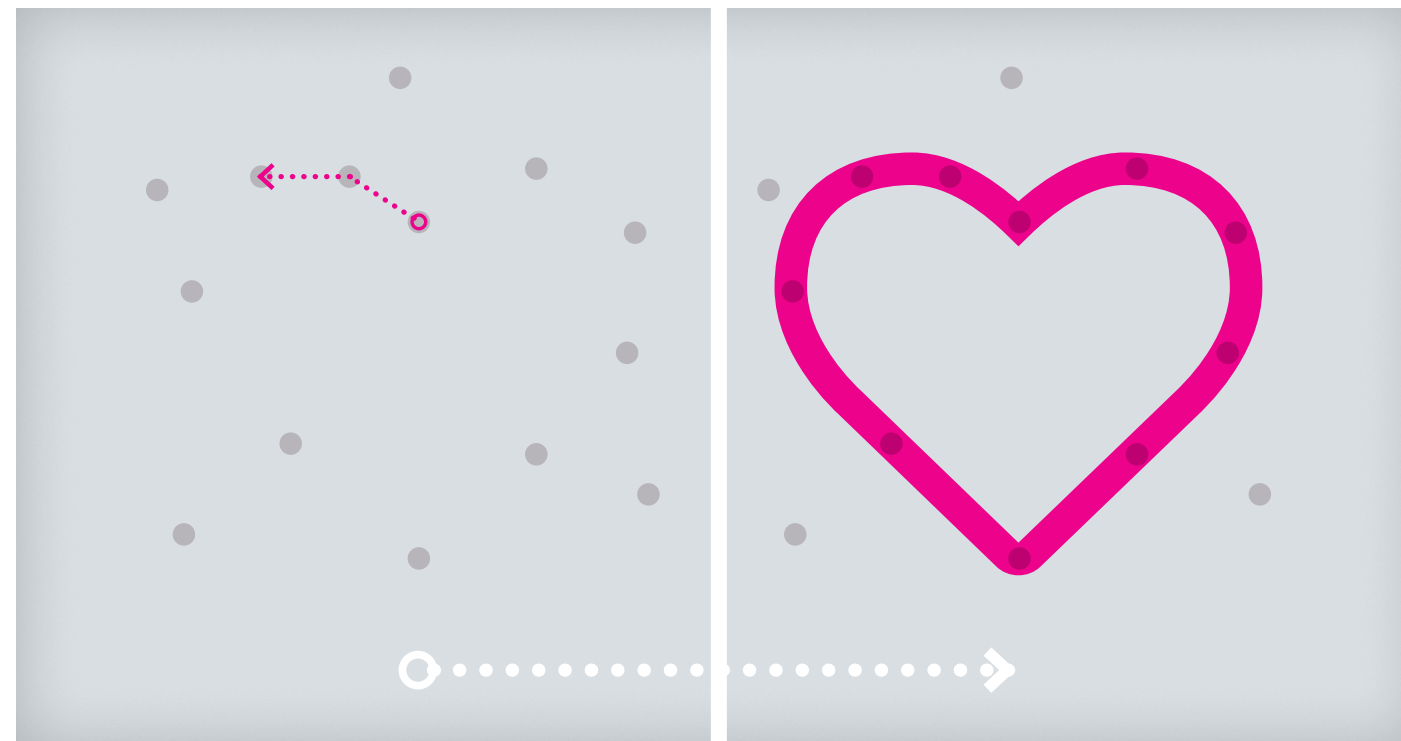
You know that feeling you get when someone is speaking from the heart? Imagine how your customers might feel when they sense the same honest and open feeling from your business.

According to the 2021 Content Preferences Survey Report<sup>19</sup>, 44 percent of respondents stated they place a higher emphasis on the trustworthiness of the source.

Some transparency and vulnerability might be the missing ingredients to building stronger customer relationships. Use face-to-face time as an opportunity to talk about business challenges, successes, failures and your leadership's point of view on what the future holds for your industry.

## More Opportunities to Connect

Trade shows, conferences and hosted events are great for creating interactions with customers. But there are many more options. Interaction and dialogue are imperative, and when executed correctly, can also include a little brand building. So how can we add a little brand "remember-worthiness" to these human interactions? Continue reading for some thought-starters.



## Mobile Tours and Pop-ups

Finding unique ways to be present at key customer locations can create personal interactions — and significant buzz. Design a custom, mobile marketing machine that informs and entertains. Make it a food truck or a coffee bar. How about an escape room? Maybe there's a co-marketing opportunity with a partner? You see it all the time in B2C — [T-Mobile and Taco Bell](#), anyone? How about colorful coffee served up by [LG and the Pantone Color Institute](#)? These ideas require budget, but it's not out of the question in B2B. Check out the [Bosch Big Blue Tour](#) or [GE's Healthymagination](#) initiatives to see examples of effective brand experiences.

## Factory Tours and Showrooms

Invite customers to experience how you do business and turn your factory and offices into a showroom. This is a great way to highlight the softer side of your business — the people and culture that make what you do special. What's more authentic and transparent than bringing customers to your place of work?

## Contests and Awards

Think about how your product or service makes life easier for your customers. Maybe you help them manufacture something in an innovative way. Perhaps your product allows them to be more imaginative with their products. Create an award to acknowledge customers who maximize the value of their relationship with you. Hosting an awards event to recognize them is a great way to create peer-to-peer connections that will benefit you in the long run.

## CONCLUSION

B2B transactions are inherently personal. So why shouldn't our marketing feel the same? Each day, we seemingly move further away from real, interpersonal interactions. It's time for a change. Let's use digital technology as a means to facilitate — not replace — the human interactions that will ultimately lead to healthier customer relationships and better business results.

Human interactions build trust, and there's plenty of research that shows trust pays off in B2B. According to Sagefrog, the most trusted B2B companies<sup>20</sup> are also the most profitable and best known, two outcomes any B2B marketer would be thrilled to achieve. Striking a better balance between digital and human interactions might be the first step toward getting there.

<sup>1</sup> “US B2B Digital Advertising Thrives amid the Coronavirus as Traditional B2B Spend Plummet,” *Insider Intelligence-eMarketer*, 2021, <https://www.insiderintelligence.com/content/us-b2b-digital-advertising-thrives-amid-coronavirus-traditional-b2b-spend-plummet>

<sup>2</sup> Ryan, Jillian. “Ad Waste Survey,” *Demandbase*, 1 March 2016, <https://www.demandbase.com/press-release/b2b-marketers-frustrated-with-ad-waste-in-their-marketing-c>

<sup>3</sup> “40% of B2B Marketers Believe Their Company Could Do Better at Measuring Performance and Impact,” *KMKOMarketing*, 2020, <https://komarketing.com/industry-news/40-of-b2b-marketers-believe-their-company-could-do-better-at-measuring-performance-and-impact-4317>

<sup>4</sup> “2019 Marketing Measurement & Attribution Benchmark Survey Report,” *Demand Gen Report*, 2018, <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/reports/2019-marketing-measurement-attribution-survey-report>

<sup>5</sup> Cacioppo, John, and Patrick, William. “Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection,” *W.W Norton & Company, Inc.*, 10, Aug. 2008, <https://www.amazon.com/Loneliness-Human-Nature-Social-Connection/dp/0393335283>

<sup>6</sup> “Why Physical Touch Matters for Your Well Being,” *Greater Good*, 2018, [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why\\_physical\\_touch\\_matters\\_for\\_your\\_well\\_being](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/why_physical_touch_matters_for_your_well_being)

<sup>7</sup> “The Influence of COVID-19 Pandemic on Physical Health-Psychological Health, Physical Activity, and Overall Well-Being; The Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation,” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.667461/full>

<sup>8</sup> Wolpert, Stuart. “UCLA neuroscientist’s book explains why social connection is as important as food and shelter,” *UCLA News*, 10 Oct. 2013, <https://www.scn.ucla.edu/pdf/SocBookUCLAN.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Newman, Daniel. “B2B Marketing Must Focus On 1:1,” *Forbes*, 21 Oct. 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielnewman/2014/10/21/b2b-marketing-must-focus-on-1-1/#58116bc43825>

<sup>10</sup> “80% of B2B Buyers Have Switched From Suppliers That are Unable to Align Their Services with Buyer Expectations, Accenture Interactive Research Finds,” *Accenture*, 2019, <https://newsroom.accenture.com/news/80-percent-of-b2b-buyers-have-switched-from-suppliers-that-are-unable-to-align-their-services-with-buyer-expectations-accenture-interactive-research-finds.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, Gregg. “Your Customers Still Want to Talk to a Human Being,” *Harvard Business Review*, 26 July 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/07/your-customers-still-want-to-talk-to-a-human-being>

<sup>12</sup> “The Role of Click to Call in the Path to Purchase,” *Google*, Sept. 2013, [https://thinkstorage.googleapis.com/docs/click-to-call\\_research-studies.pdf](https://thinkstorage.googleapis.com/docs/click-to-call_research-studies.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> “Why Customer Service is Important: 16 Data-Backed Facts to Know,” *Hubspot*, 2022, <https://blog.hubspot.com>

<sup>14</sup> “Stop Making Sense: The Powerful Role of Emotion in B2B Decision Making,” *TriComB2B*, 2019, <https://resources.tricomb2b.com/tricomb2b-insights-stop-making-sense>

<sup>15</sup> Novani, Santi, and Kijima, Kyochi. “Value Co-Creation by Customer-to-Customer Communication,” *Journal of Service Science and Management*, March 2012, [https://www.scirp.org/pdf/JSSM20120100013\\_66716579.pdf](https://www.scirp.org/pdf/JSSM20120100013_66716579.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> “A Face-to-Face Request Is 34 Times More Successful Than an Email,” *Harvard Business Review*, 2017, <https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-face-to-face-request-is-34-times-more-successful-than-an-email>

<sup>17</sup> Dodd, G. David. “Better Lead Yield in the Content Marketing Field,” *CMO Council*, 24 Aug. 2014, <http://b2bmarketingdirections.blogspot.com/2014/08/why-expert-content-should-be-part-of.html>

<sup>18</sup> “Content Preferences Survey Report,” *Demand Gen*, 2021, <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/research/2021-content-preferences-survey-buying-committees-look-for-visual-research-influencer-backed-content-experiences-that-tell-a-valuable-story>

<sup>19</sup> “Content Preferences Survey Report,” *Demand Gen*, 2021, <https://www.demandgenreport.com/resources/research/2021-content-preferences-survey-buying-committees-look-for-visual-research-influencer-backed-content-experiences-that-tell-a-valuable-story>

<sup>20</sup> “2018 B2B Trusted Brands Report,” *Sagefrog*, 2018, [https://www.sagefrog.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Trusted-Brands-2018\\_v6.pdf](https://www.sagefrog.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Trusted-Brands-2018_v6.pdf)



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