

emotion and contrast in early-stage messaging

overview

The average open rate for B2B emails is somewhere between 15–20 percent. But the average click-through rate is closer to three percent. That means about 85 percent of B2B emails that get opened aren't compelling enough to motivate action.

Marketers are struggling to get buyers interested in their solutions, and there are a couple reasons why.

Most marketers know that buyers want to see specific, quantified results. But they don't know the best way to position those numbers to early-stage prospects.

Meanwhile, marketing thought leaders and pundits continue to debate whether rational or emotional language is more persuasive. And until now, there's been very little scientific evidence to support either claim in a B2B setting.

So what's the answer? How do you present a convincing business case to prospects, so they want to learn more and feel more urgency to solve the challenge you introduce?

To answer those questions, The Marketing Practice, a global B2B marketing agency, commissioned B2B DecisionLabs and Dr. Nick Lee, behavioral scientist and Professor of Marketing at Warwick Business School, to conduct a research study with 500 B2B professionals.

research objectives

The goal of this behavioral research study was to determine the best way to frame a business challenge to early-stage prospects to build interest in your solution.

Specifically, researchers tested three messaging variables to determine the most effective combination:

1. Including **unquantified vs. quantified** business impact.
2. Using **rational vs. emotional** language.
3. Adding **contrast** by including the current risk in addition to future benefits.

the study

Five hundred B2B professionals were divided into five groups of 100 participants.

Researchers asked each participant to read one of five demand gen messages based on the following business simulation:

Imagine you lead customer service and support for your company and are accountable for providing great customer experiences that help keep and grow your customer relationships.

While you're always open to new ideas from outside services and technology providers, you are not currently in active discussions with vendors to support your initiatives.

As part of your job, however, you consistently receive unsolicited emails from potential vendor partners. One catches your eye thanks to an interesting subject line. You choose to open the email to learn more.

After reading the email, each participant answered several "attitude" questions, rating their reaction to the email on a scale of 1–9. They also answered three multiple-choice "recall" questions to gauge how well they remembered the information they read.

five message test conditions

Each participant group read one of the following five messages. The bold text has been added to emphasize key differences—it was not included in the original test messages.

1. Unquantified emotional – This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It does not include quantified business impact or contrast.

*Are you losing more customer revenue than you should each year due to **hidden "leaks"** in your customer support system?*

- *Customer service inefficiencies*
- *Incident management bottlenecks*
- *Below industry average customer engagement experiences*

*These are just some of the **unseen cracks** inside your company's support system workflow that can slowly, silently let your hard-won customers leak out – before you even notice they are gone.*

We help companies like yours **find the cracks and plug the leaks** in your customer support processes and systems, resulting in:

- More satisfied customers that stick around and spend more because of improved service
- Reduced unnecessary administrative and technology costs by finding efficiencies
- More motivated support staff who are equipped to provide a better customer experience

Companies like yours achieve all of this and more when they use our workflow automation solutions. For a personalized assessment of **your potential missed opportunity**, click here to access our [online leak-fixing calculator](#).

2. Quantified emotional – This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for the solution only.

Are you losing more customer revenue than you should each year due to **hidden "leaks"** in your customer support system?

- Customer service inefficiencies
- Incident management bottlenecks
- Below industry average customer engagement experiences

These are just some of the **unseen cracks** inside your company's support system workflow that can **slowly, silently let your hard-won customers leak out**—before you even notice they are gone.

We help companies like yours **find the cracks and plug the leaks** in your customer support processes and systems, resulting in:

- An average of **15% more revenue** from **more satisfied customers staying and spending more**
- An average **18% cost savings in unnecessary administrative and technology costs**
- **More motivated** customer support staff that deliver a **better customer experience**

Companies like yours achieve all of this and more when they use our workflow automation solutions. For a personalized assessment of **your potential missed opportunity**, click here to access our [online leak-fixing calculator](#).

3. Quantified rational – This message uses rational language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for the solution only.

Companies like yours are often looking to improve customer support functions to retain revenue while also lowering costs.

*Opportunities can be found by **finding and fixing** customer service inefficiencies, **reducing** incident management bottlenecks, and **improving** below-average customer engagement experiences.*

Those are just a few examples where our advanced workflow automation solutions have helped companies like yours achieve results like this:

- **Retain and increase your customer revenue** by 15%
- **Reduce unnecessary administrative and technology costs** by 18%
- **Improve both support staff and customer satisfaction** scores

These results represent the average improvement companies like yours experience working with our workflow automation solutions. For a personalized assessment, click here to access our [online leak-fixing calculator](#).

4. Quantified emotional with contrast – This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for both the challenge and the solution.

*Companies like yours are typically **losing 15% more** customer revenue than you should each year. And most are **spending 18% more** than you should on administrative and technology each year.*

And most don't even know how or why this is happening.

*Imagine **finding hidden** customer service inefficiencies, **uncovering frustrating** incident management bottlenecks, or learning you have below industry average customer engagement experiences.*

*These are just a few examples of the **"value leaks"** we typically discover and fix when companies like yours bring us in to help improve your customer support processes and platforms.*

The resulting benefits can be measured on both the top and bottom line:

- **Keeping 15% more of your customer revenue** each year...**What's that worth to you?**
- **Saving 18% in unnecessary administrative and technology-related costs...That's real money!**

And then **calculate the positive strategic impact** of improving both your employee and customer satisfaction scores due to a better customer service experience. **There's even more upside potential!**

These results represent the average improvement companies like yours experience working with our workflow automation solutions. For a personalized assessment of your potential missed opportunity, [click here to access our online leak-fixing calculator](#).

5. Quantified rational with contrast – This message uses rational language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for both the challenge and the solution.

Companies like yours are **losing 15%** of potential customer revenue and **spending 18% more** than they should on administrative and technology costs—on average, each year—based on our experience.

Opportunities to fix both problems can be found by **finding and fixing problems** such as customer service inefficiencies, **reducing** incident management bottlenecks, and **improving** below-average customer engagement experiences.

Those are just a few examples where our advanced workflow automation solutions have helped companies like yours achieve results like this:

- **Retain and increase your customer revenue** by 15%
- **Reduce unnecessary administrative and technology costs** by 18%
- **Improve both support staff and customer satisfaction** scores

These results represent the average improvement companies like yours experience working with our workflow automation solutions. For a custom assessment, [click here to access our online leak-fixing calculator](#).

the results

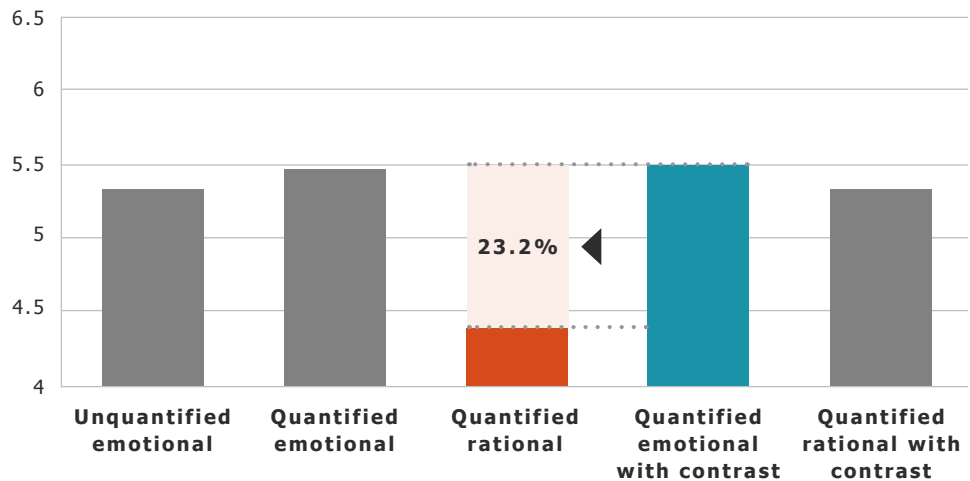
Participants' responses clearly and consistently speak to the benefits of including quantified, contrasting results and emotion in demand gen messages.

In aggregate, messages with emotion beat the rational ones. And including contrast led to better recall than a lack of contrast. Taken together, results show the most differentiation between the quantified emotional with contrast message and the quantified rational message.

For example, when participants were asked how large of a problem they had after reading the email, there was a **23 percent difference in favor of the quantified emotional message with contrast** compared to the quantified rational message without contrast.

How large of a problem do you believe you might have?

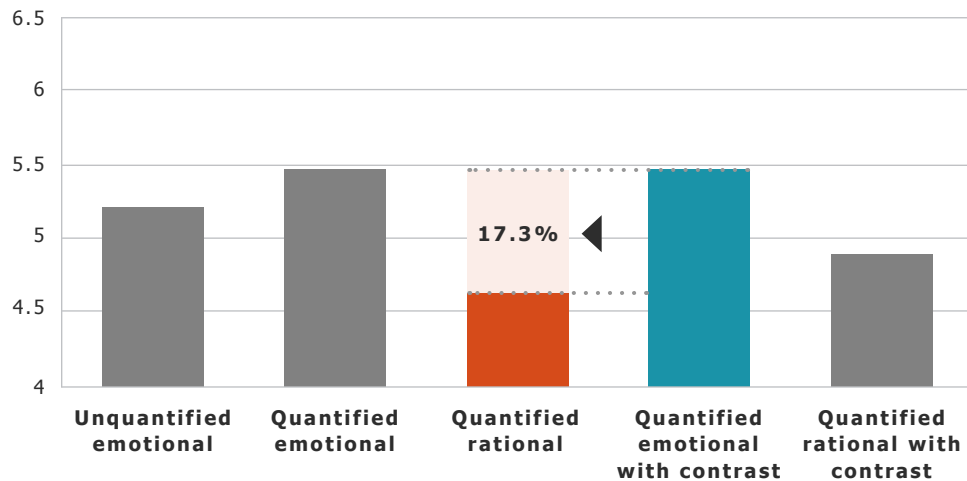
Quantified emotional messages made the problem feel more impactful than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message was less impactful by a difference of 23.2 percent.



The quantified rational message without contrast was also significantly less urgent and less motivating than the emotional messages in the study.

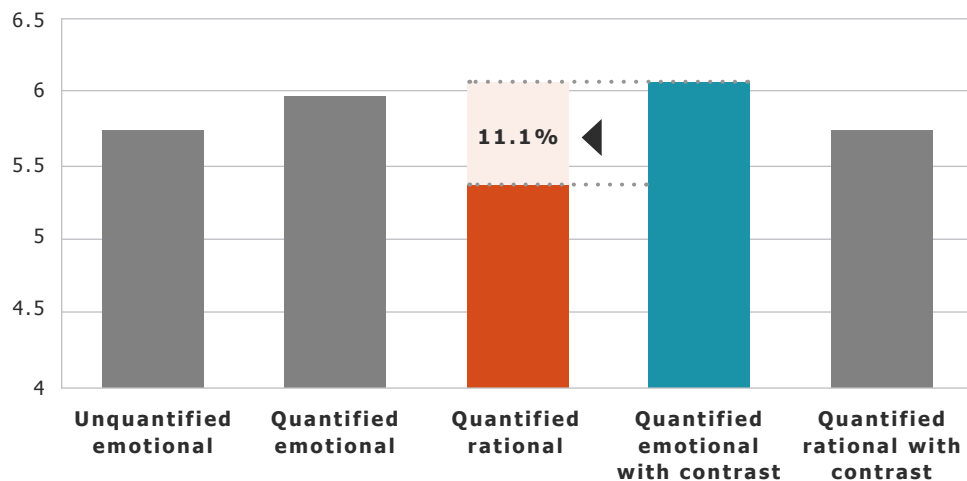
How urgent is it that you fix the problem?

Participants felt more urgency to act after reading quantified emotional messages than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message provided the least urgency by a difference of 17.3 percent.



How willing are you to investigate solutions to this problem?

Participants were more willing to investigate a solution after reading the quantified emotional messages than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message lost by a difference of 11.1 percent.



Based on these results, **using both quantified impact and emotional language in your messages will motivate your prospects** more than using either quantified results or emotional language alone.

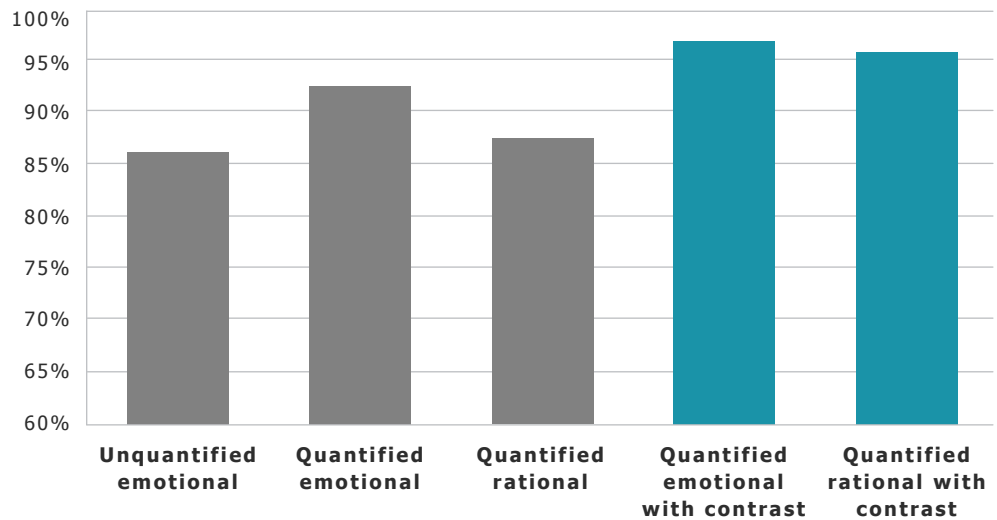
But what about contrast?

Participants who read the emails with contrast remembered the information better and more accurately than participants in other groups.

Message number four—the quantified emotional message with contrast—was the most memorable of the five test conditions. Ninety-seven percent of participants in group four accurately remembered the problem the vendor described, and 90 percent answered all the recall questions correctly.

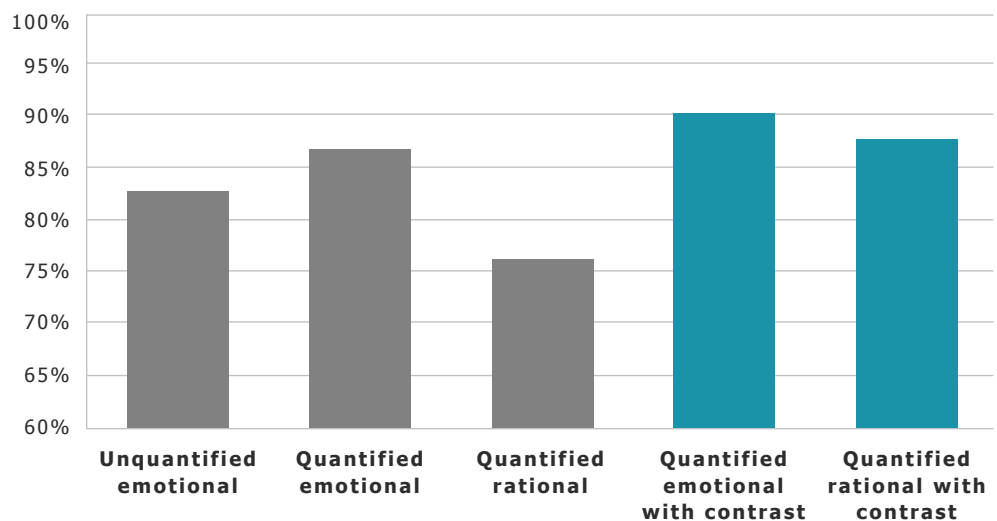
What were the biggest problems the vendor described? (% correct)

Participant groups who read the emails with contrast remembered the problems described by the vendor more accurately than other groups.



Percent of recall questions answered correctly

Participant groups who read the emails with contrast answered more recall questions correctly than other groups.



conclusions

Overall, **this study shows that the quantified emotional message with contrast was the most effective in terms of provoking urgency, motivation, and memorability.**

This message included all three variables in the study. So the broad recommendation is to include quantified impact, emotional language, and contrast in your demand gen messages.

But what, specifically, are the individual effects of each variable?

quantify business impact

Quantifying the business impact of the challenge and solution adds specific and tangible value to your message, making it more persuasive.

For example, the unquantified emotional message says, “Reduced unnecessary administrative and technology costs by finding efficiencies.” The quantified emotional message says, “An average 18% cost savings in unnecessary administrative and technology costs.”

The more specific quantified message scored better across every variable in this study. So, when possible, use specific numbers to illustrate the impact for your buyer.

add emotion

Many marketers and sellers assume their prospects will make purely rational buying decisions. But behavioral science shows that people make decisions subconsciously—on an emotional level—before their brain’s logical and analytical part takes over to justify the decision.

That’s why adding emotional language to your message is so powerful. The emotional messages in this study used language like “hidden leaks” and “unseen cracks” to help the reader visualize and “feel” the problem they faced.

When you pair this kind of emotionally appealing language with specific, quantified business impact, your buyers are more likely to feel the urgency to take action.

show contrast

Telling your prospects what they can gain by choosing your solution is only one side of the story. But when you contrast the future benefits with the risk of their current approach, you also show them what they stand to lose by not choosing your solution.

This happens because of a Decision Science concept known as Loss Aversion. Coined by behavioral researchers Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, Loss Aversion refers to the idea that losses loom larger (psychologically speaking) than gains. People tend to weigh the loss of a decision more heavily than the gain.

Considering that the messages with contrast made a lasting impression on participants in this study, it's worthwhile to add contrast to your messages. Highlight the risk—the loss to be avoided—in your prospect's current approach in addition to what they gain with your solution.

meet our research team



Doug Hutton

SVP Products, B2B DecisionLabs

Doug Hutton leads all product development and management activities at B2B DecisionLabs. He works with scientists and research partners to create a scientific foundation for solutions that help sales, marketing, and customer success teams have more successful customer conversations. Doug is co-author of *The Expansion Sale: Four Must-Win Conversations to Keep and Grow Your Customers*.



Dr. Nick Lee

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Nick Lee is a professor of marketing at the Warwick Business School in Coventry, UK. His work connects theories from social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, economics and philosophy.

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