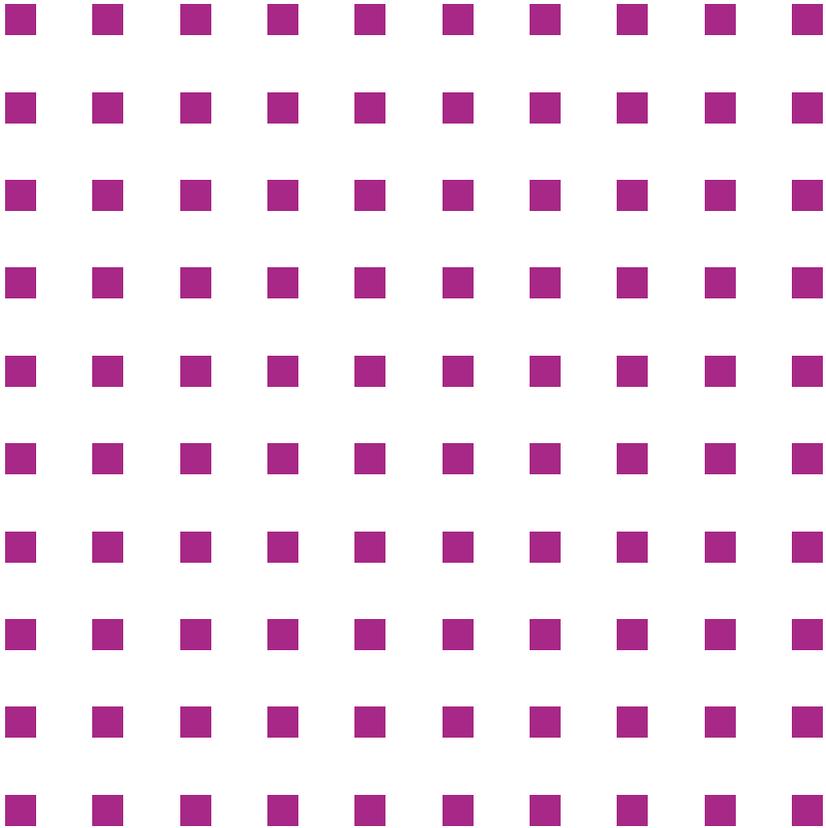


TODAY, MOST B2B BUYERS SEE  
NO REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN  
SUPPLIERS' PROPOSITIONS.



BUT THE GOOD NEWS IS,  
THEY'VE TOLD US WHAT  
IT TAKES TO STAND OUT.

This is an age when so many B2B offerings look  
and sound the same.

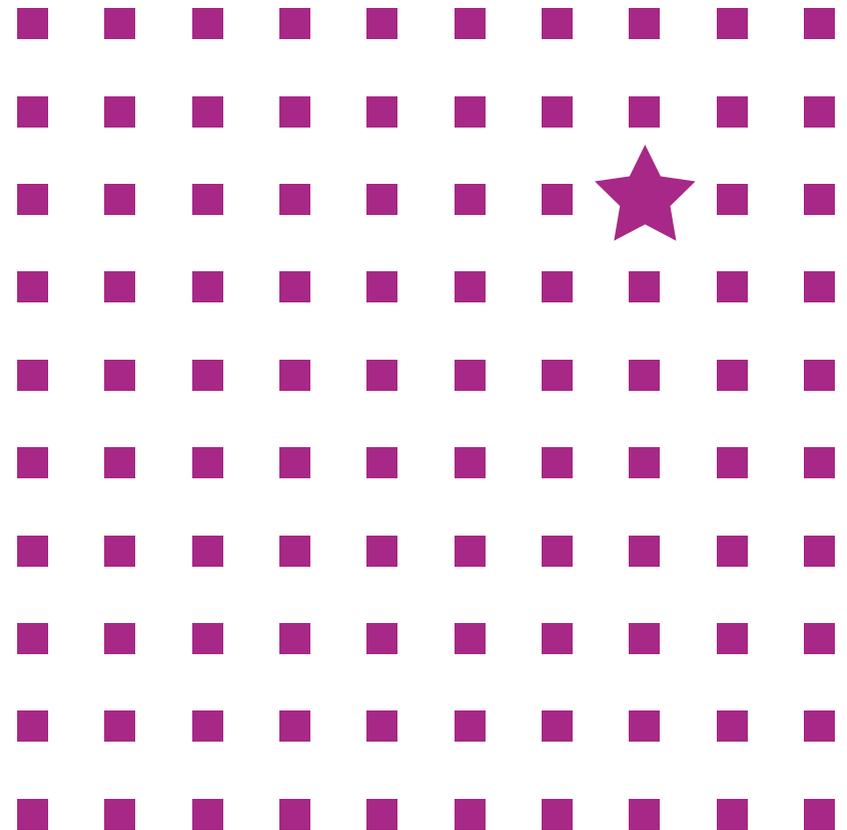
Business decision-makers have run out of patience.

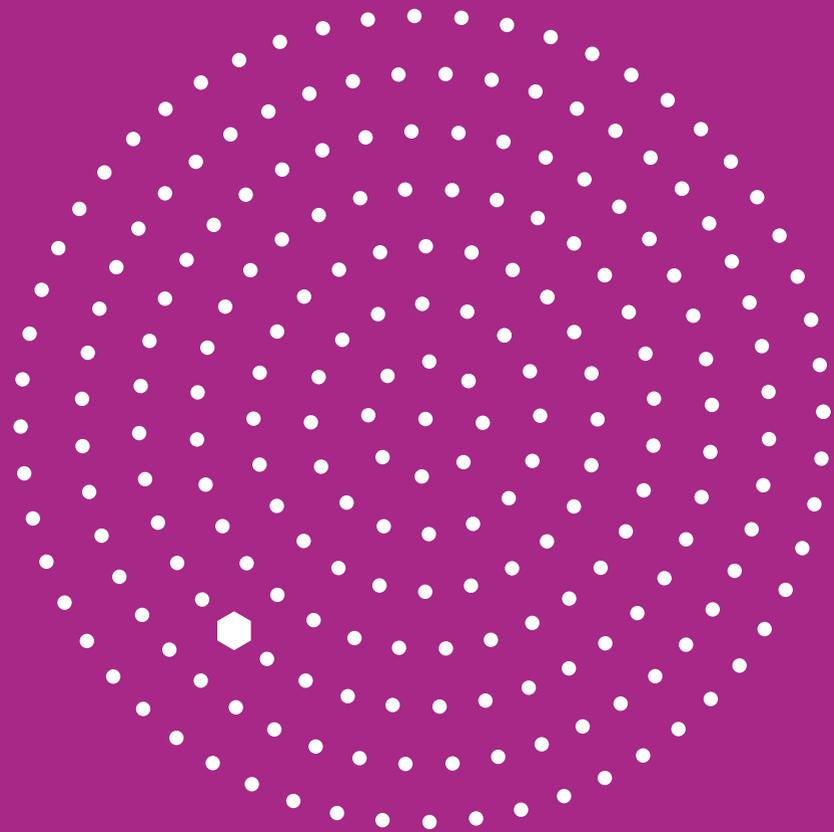
Many feel that marketing is an obstacle,  
not an aid to purchase.

Sounds like madness? We agree.

Building on independent audience research and  
insights from thousands of our own conversations,  
we've developed a methodology for creating B2B  
propositions that stand out and deliver results.

Read on for details of our approach and some  
frank feedback from the front line.





WHAT'S THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR  
IN SALES AND MARKETING SUCCESS?

IT'S THE PROPOSITION. STILL.

In the world of B2B marketing, getting a complex proposition right can be especially difficult. Is it supposed to be unique? Is it supposed to be exciting and interesting? Or should we just not sweat about the details and look for other emotional buttons to push because, after all, it's all too complicated anyway?

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86% of B2B buyers saw “no real difference between suppliers.”

From Promotion to Emotion: Connecting B2B Customers to Brands,  
CEB and Google, 2013

Many marketers have responded to statistics like the above by embracing content marketing or more 'emotional' forms of engagement. They've shifted the emphasis to how you can provide useful content, and how you make your audience feel, and not what you do. For a while we were all encouraged to stop thinking in terms of the product.

**It's a good idea in many ways. But there is a problem.**

## WE'VE SWAPPED ONE KIND OF BANALITY FOR ANOTHER.

Much of that helpful or 'touchy feely' stuff has become as indistinguishable and as ineffective as the old-fashioned dull, product-led messaging. Worse still, it's muddied the waters for the audience and those responsible for talking to them at the sharp end of sales and delivery.

One critical reason is that messaging has become too distanced from the story of what the business actually does, why it started doing it in the first place, and how it does it – in other words, the proposition.

## SO THE PENDULUM SWINGS BACK.

We need to come back to square one. We think the proposition is the single most important factor in sales and marketing success, whatever the tactics and whatever the area. Whether it's an elevator pitch, or an all-singing, all-dancing, brand 'experience' campaign, it's the foundation that makes the difference. It's where the nuggets of useful insight and original opinions can be found.

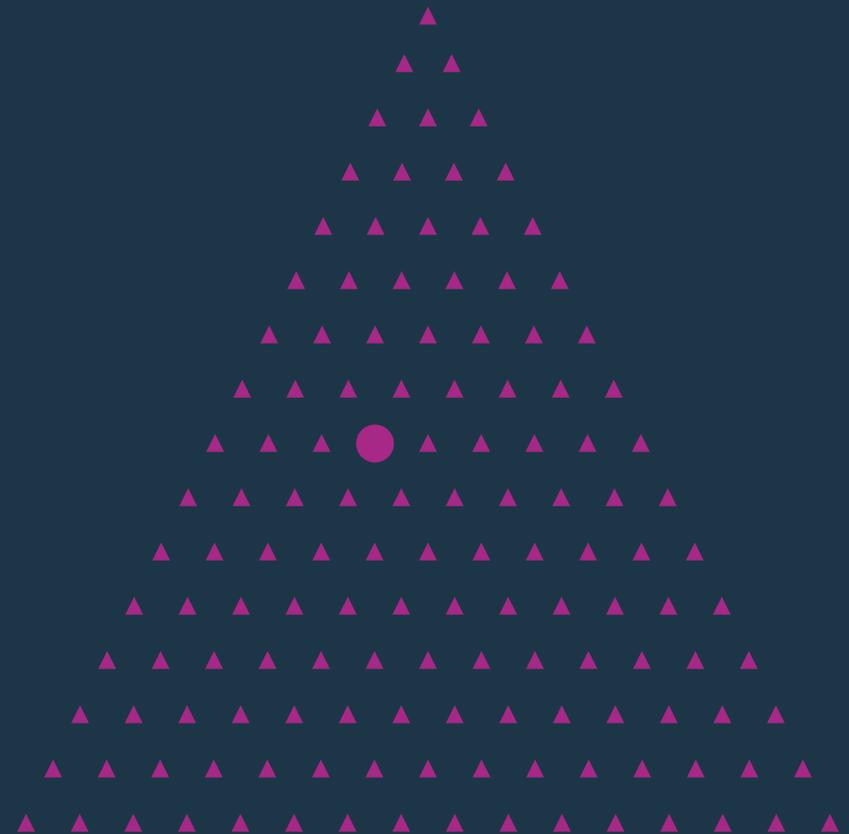
This playbook is about how to build or reinforce that foundation for everything you want to do well in sales and marketing.

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### What do we all mean by 'proposition' anyway?

For practical purposes, in the world of B2B, this is what we mean.

- **Brand proposition** – the story you take to the market as a whole business
  - **Business proposition** – the story for a specific product, solution or business practice
  - **Campaign proposition** – the story you're telling in a particular campaign or launch
- And when we say a complex proposition, we mean something that is beyond the quick and easy understanding of the average non-specialist audience – for example, accounting software or big data analytics tools.





## DON'T JUST TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT: THE AUDIENCE FIGHTS BACK.

We partnered with Kindle Research to undertake a qualitative study of senior enterprise IT buyers and what they thought of supplier marketing efforts.

We asked them how current marketing and content affects their preference and consideration and how it helps move them along the purchase journey.

The results suggest there's a serious problem with most B2B propositions out there – or at least the way they're translated into marketing communications.

## HERE ARE SOME OF THE HIGHLIGHTS:

There's an extraordinary volume of **random** and **generic** 'cold' approaches.

However, they know that around **2 or 3 per week** will be **worthwhile**.

Spotting which ones **takes time**. Any subsequent engagement will also take time and effort.

So they will favour any supplier who can quickly show their product is both **appropriate** and **valuable** to their **specific challenges**.

They see those that don't bother to differentiate their offering as **passive**, **uninterested**, even **arrogant**.

They resent having to **act as a translator** for jargon-filled communications and **build the business case for themselves**.

And they resent a '**mechanised sales process**' from lead generation through to pitch.

In the face of uncertainty, they will **stick to the status quo**.

**This all sounds like pretty reasonable criticism. So what did they suggest could be done?**

## WHAT THEY WANT MORE OF FROM SUPPLIERS:

**Passion** about the product or service – supported by **detail** on how it applies to their own business.

Evidence of time and budget spent **understanding** the specific industry or business challenges they face.

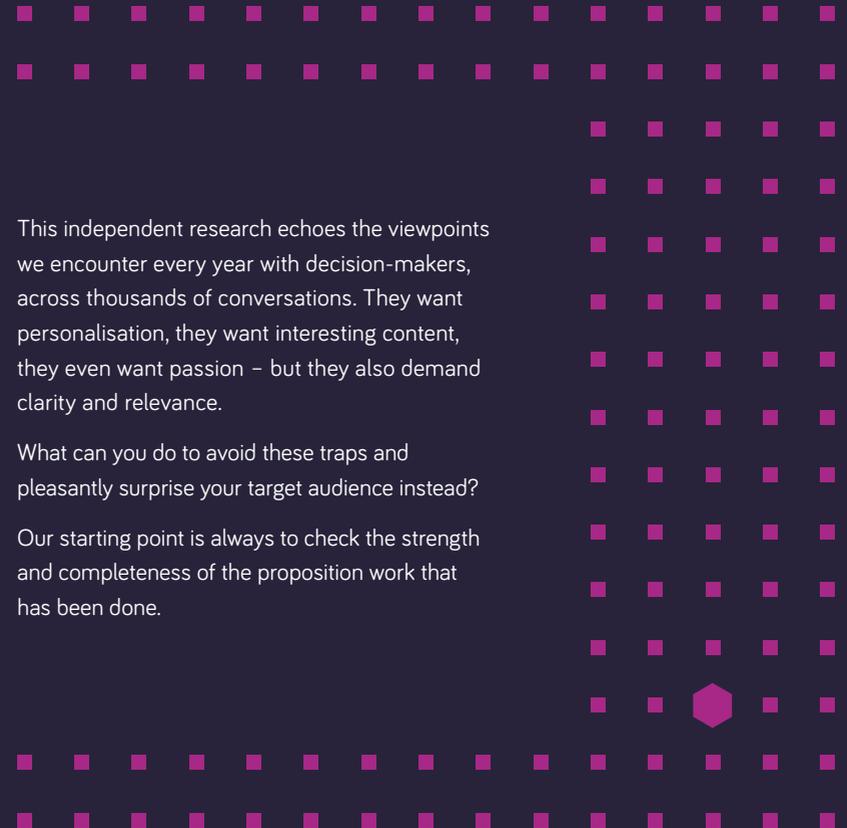
**Fresh insight** on trends that they can **take action** from.

An ability to **listen** and **ask the right questions** first.

**Openness** and **honesty** about other projects and the learnings from them.

**Clarity** and practical solutions to the **risks of change**.

A **stress-free** purchase **without uncertainty**.



This independent research echoes the viewpoints we encounter every year with decision-makers, across thousands of conversations. They want personalisation, they want interesting content, they even want passion – but they also demand clarity and relevance.

What can you do to avoid these traps and pleasantly surprise your target audience instead?

Our starting point is always to check the strength and completeness of the proposition work that has been done.

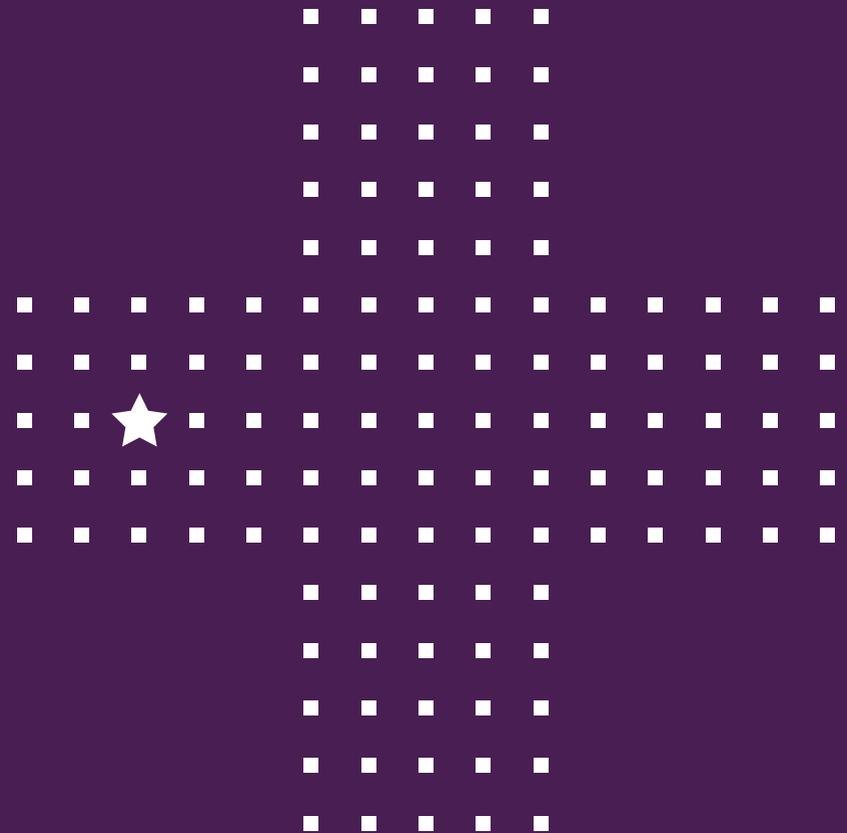
## A PROPOSITION HEALTH CHECK: HOW STRONG ARE YOUR FOUNDATIONS?

The following are typical signs that a proposition is not as clear and convincing as it could be.

- Briefing an agency takes longer than it should and the outputs generate more debate than agreement.
- The creative you get back is underwhelming or 'not quite right' – even though you're working with a team that normally delivers the goods.
- You're using tactics and channels that usually work, but engagement is poor.
- You're not attracting the audience you were expecting.
- Your online assets are not attracting the numbers you expected.
- If you're honest, your differentiators just aren't very... different.
- You keep revisiting and rethinking the main story every 12 to 18 months.
- You're relying on a few strong performers in sales and presales to do a lot of explaining.
- The experience of doing business with you is not clearly shown – in the briefings, it's mainly about the capabilities of the solution.
- It's hard to say what it's really worth to your audience – the commercial impact of your proposition isn't clear.

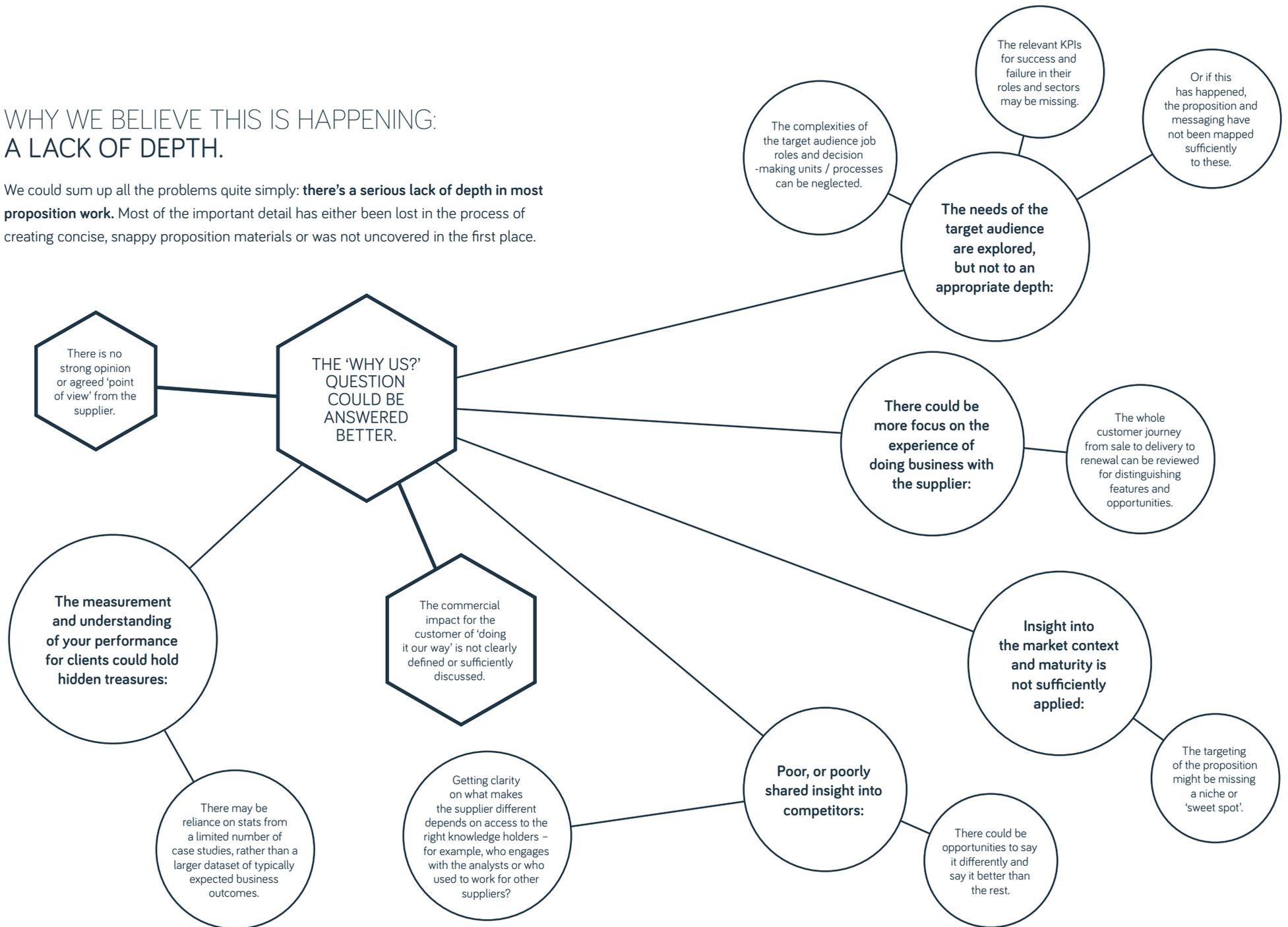
These are not uncommon problems. Most honest B2B marketers will admit they encounter these warning signs from time to time. And yet most B2B marketers will also have done some proposition work already.

**So what's behind these issues?**



## WHY WE BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING: A LACK OF DEPTH.

We could sum up all the problems quite simply: **there's a serious lack of depth in most proposition work.** Most of the important detail has either been lost in the process of creating concise, snappy proposition materials or was not uncovered in the first place.



## HOW WE TAKE ACTION: THE PRO APPROACH.

Building on years of experience taking complex propositions to market, we have developed practical ways of filling the gaps and strengthening a story. We've applied this to a wide variety of sales and marketing proposition challenges, whether it's crafting a high-level brand story or identifying the hook and positioning for a demand generation campaign.

We call our approach **TMP PRO: Proposition Refinement & Optimisation** to ensure the strongest possible foundation.

### Our support throughout the process

We support the organisation of the sessions and calls, positioning and communicating the activity, setting the agendas and next steps.

Typically this process takes a few weeks. It is flexible and pragmatic – using existing materials and insight we have and building around work you have already conducted.



#### Proposition scan

This is about talking to the knowledge holders, both inside and outside the organisation. These can include the people who architected the solution, the people who made the decision to buy it and use it, the people who sold it, and the people who roll out and deliver it.

##### HOW?

- 30-minute interviews with relevant customer(s)
- 45–60-minute interviews with other knowledge holders



#### Audience scan, sector scan, competitor scan

Following a first review, we add market context and relevant audience, sector and competitor insight. This normally involves a combination of insights from our own in-house research and data reserves to complement existing work done by the client.

##### HOW?

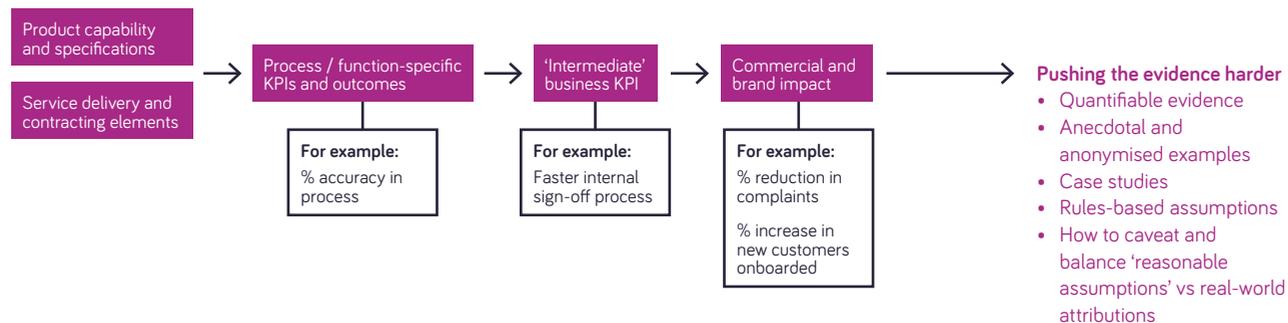
- Comprehensive review of client's internal and public-facing resources
- Desk research, key sector publications and resources, analyst commentary and reports
- Relevant audience and data insight from library of TMP engagements

### Commercial insight workshop

This is the critical next level of differentiation. We explore in detail how to demonstrate measurable commercial impact on a customer's business, and how to identify relevant commercial insight that will teach them something valuable and new. This workshop stems from initial conversations and contacts made at stage 1.

#### HOW?

- Half-day workshop and follow-up
- Stepping through the impacts and evidence at each stage:



### Business proposition playback and final agreement

This is the final checkpoint to ensure agreement across key stakeholders, and that the work is robust, long-lived and practical for future use. We consolidate and review work delivered to date, play back the full proposition and the insight it is based on, and we confirm the more specific details and claims we are able to make.

#### HOW?

- Presentation session to all key stakeholders, ideally face to face
- Sharing of final outputs and positioning with the aim of achieving consensus – and an opportunity to begin exploring next steps

### FINAL OUTPUTS

There's no point in doing all this if you can't turn it into a clear and practical plan for taking the proposition to market. The outputs give you the tools to develop this plan:

- A consolidated document that can form the basis of a wide variety of internal and external briefings, rooted in insight, and the best of the organisation's real-world experience
- An outlined report on the strengths and weaknesses around proof points and commercial relevance – and recommendations for strengthening this
- Insight into the kind of sales and marketing activity that has been proven to be effective for the kind of proposition and challenge you face

**Following this work, we are also happy to explore developing a go-to-market plan with you in more detail.**

## WHY DID WE DEVELOP THIS APPROACH?

At The Marketing Practice we have been delivering specialist B2B marketing into large enterprises since 2002. As a full-service agency, we have a strong background in demand generation and sales and marketing alignment. These days we have tens of thousands of conversations with business decision-makers every year.

This is the sharp end of B2B marketing, where weak propositions and fluffy messaging are rapidly exposed. It also provides a perfect complement to our extensive marketing work in brand and awareness, giving us a far closer understanding of our audience, and the people who sell to them.

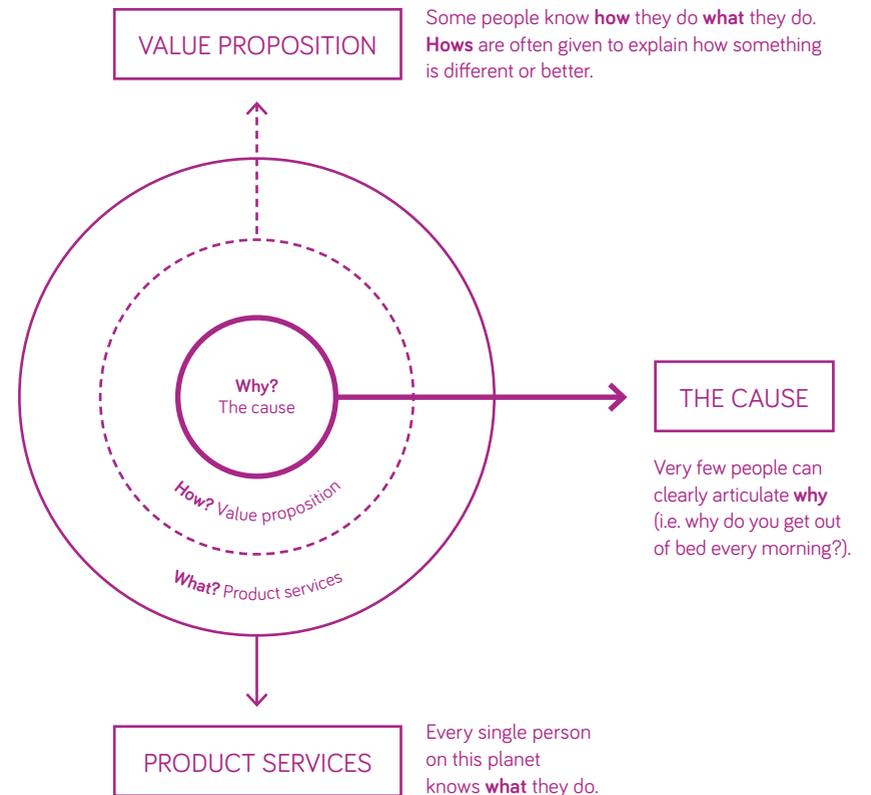
Put simply, our **PRO** viewpoint has been forged in an environment where there is nowhere to hide.

Of the many sales and marketing philosophies that exist, there are two which fit particularly well with our own experience and have informed our approach to solving the problem.

## THE 'INSIDE-OUT' PERSPECTIVE.

This starts inside your own business, proposition or product, and finds the story that sits at the heart of its existence – this is what Simon Sinek calls the **'Why'**. The best insights we get are from solutions designers or the people who deliver services and have a strong opinion on what they can do better for their clients.

### The golden circle



Source: Simon Sinek, *Start With Why*

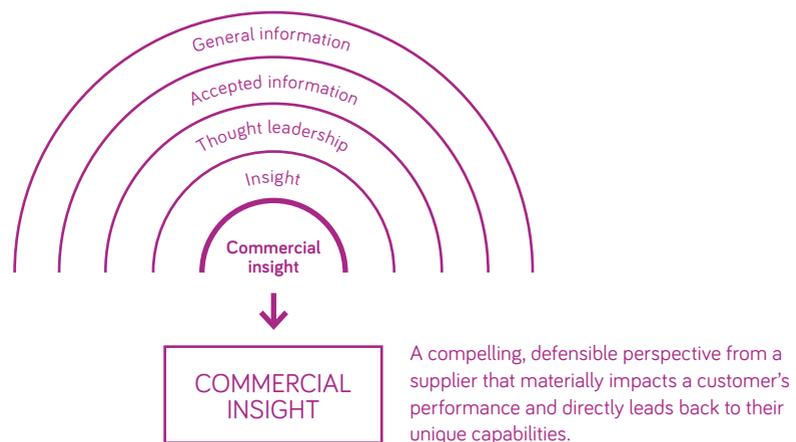
## THE OUTSIDE-IN PERSPECTIVE.

This starts with a very strong understanding of your audience and your market. CEB talks about how great content is based on commercial insight, and a great proposition is too. When we are able to uncover the commercial insight that counts, we can help a potential client imagine – or even start building – a potential business case.

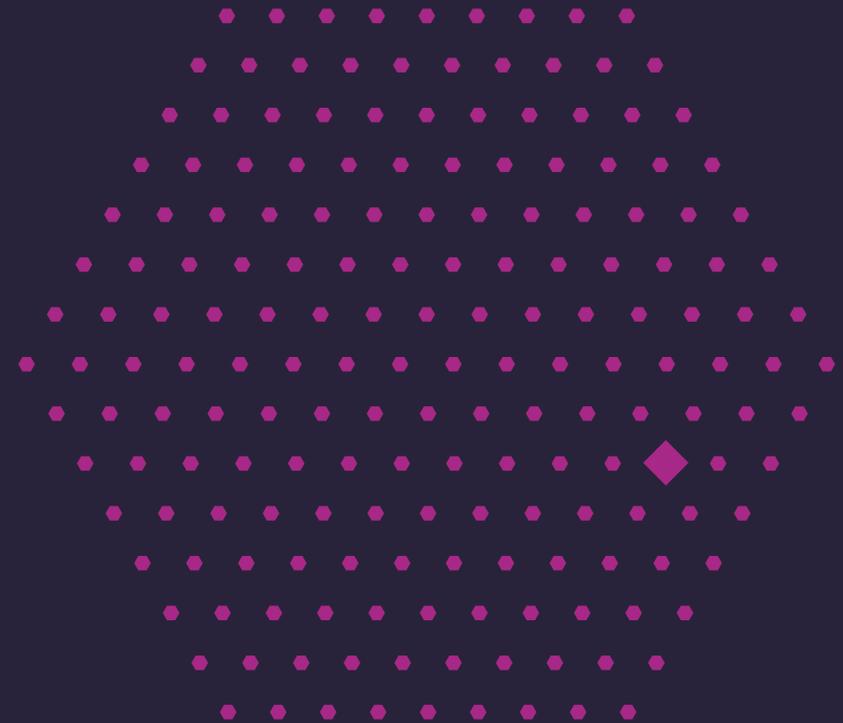
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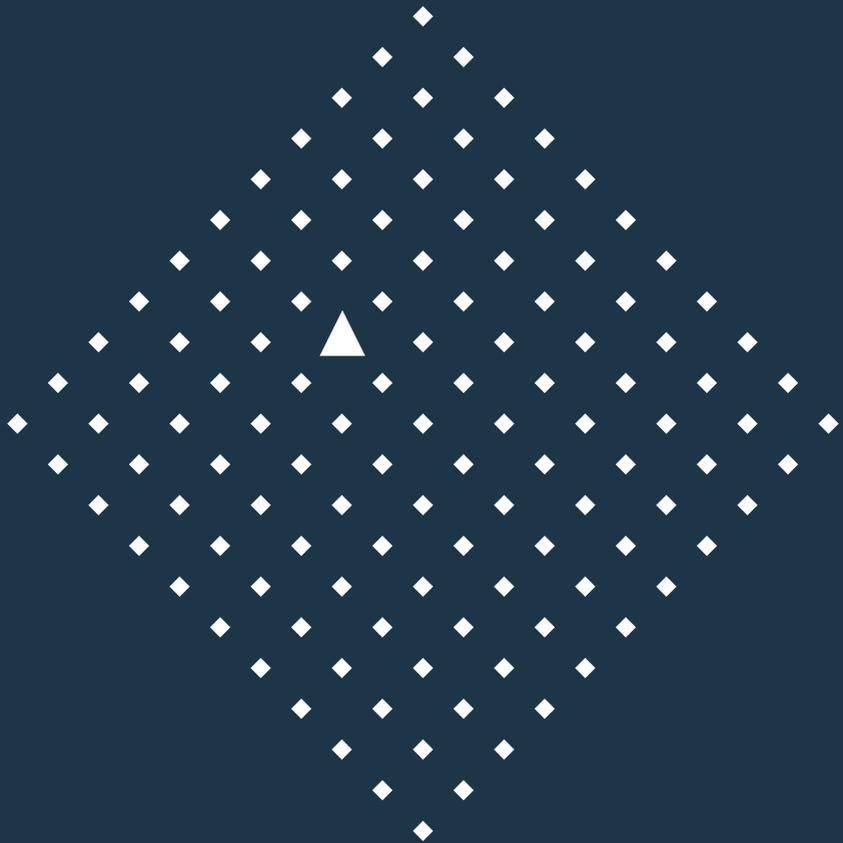
### The content marketing hierarchy

Marketers create many flavours of content in their aspiration to achieve thought leadership, but only one type of content will create the desired commercial impact.



Source: Brent Adamson & Matthew Dixon, *The Challenger Customer*, CEB





## SO IS IT WORTH IT?

We firmly believe that a strong proposition is key to achieving great sales and marketing results. Our most successful campaigns have all been built on this foundation. We've won more B2B Marketing Awards than any other agency in recent times (14 in the last 3 years at time of writing). Here's a small selection of our work:



Created pipeline value of 277x marketing investment.



Established over 200 C-level relationships across 7 European countries, leading directly to £8m closed deals.



Fully integrated awareness and demand generation campaign that grew market share from 12% to 26%.



We launched the O2 Enterprise offering, now delivering over £100m pipeline year on year.

## WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE IN PRACTICE?

OPENING DOORS WHEN EVERYONE THINKS THEY'VE HEARD IT ALL

It's hard to start a new conversation about a topic as big and potentially disruptive as outsourcing. It's even harder when people mostly struggle to see the difference between providers – unless they just boil it down to price.

In this case our client had developed a very interesting new way of applying their services to support specific innovation and restructuring projects. Talking to the people behind this, it was clear that the thinking behind it was genuinely original and relevant to their audience.

So we boosted our demand generation campaign materials with a couple of focused blog articles from the leadership team and some repurposed sales slides that got the main message across quickly. We were able to really grab the audience's attention and get on the way to achieving over €800m in pipeline.



## BEING BOLD ABOUT THE COST OF THE STATUS QUO

### Enterprise data quality is a critical area – although it can get passed over.

There's a huge volume of thought leadership that is often interesting to a specialist audience but not very actionable for sales and marketing. Our client wanted to elevate the conversation to the level of strategic decision makers and meet them face to face. But what right did we have to get their time?

Instead of just replaying all the existing platitudes we spent the time and effort to fully understand and quantify the impact of just doing nothing for a target organisation. And we put this provocative, highly tailored message at the centre of our campaign.

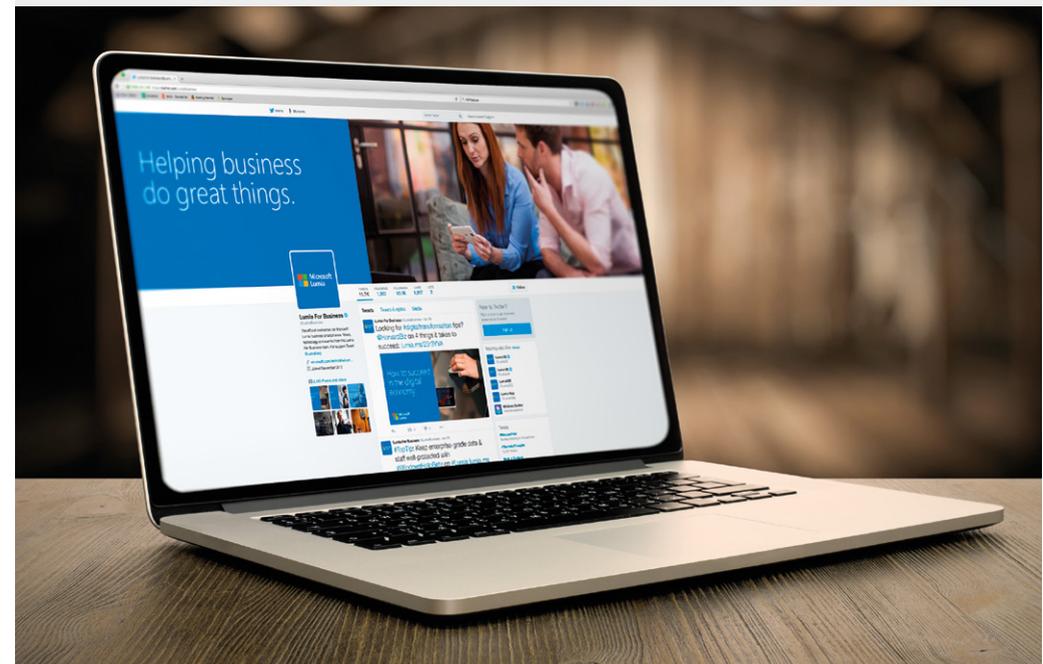
We secured meetings with nearly a third of accounts targeted – including direct approaches from some of the UK's highest profile business figures.

## UNCOVERING A DIFFERENT ANGLE ON BUSINESS SMARTPHONES

In this case we had to raise awareness of a well-known smartphone – but in the **business context**. We could have spent time arguing the case about features and functionality but that would have resulted in some pretty blunt lead messaging. Instead we found the killer insight somewhere else: user behaviour and feedback.

People who used their phones in the workplace were more likely to adopt it for personal use too – a relationship that started at work.

So began **#OfficeLove** – a multichannel brand campaign which resulted in a 21% uplift in consideration for the device. Backed up by focused demand generation activity, our overall programme contributed to a more than doubled share of the business market.



## NEXT STEPS – WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW.

We have a team of planners and marketing consultants to discuss the challenge. You may be starting with a brand new proposition or looking to strengthen or refresh what you have. You may just have the feeling that your campaigns and messaging are not as effective as they could be.

Here's what you can do next:

### Use the proposition health check in this book as a starting point for a conversation

- Identify the main challenges you're facing.
- We can discuss possible root causes and gaps in your proposition – and how to fix them.

### Or try a short PRO taster session

- We can go through the workshop programme in brief.
- And talk through examples of what the outputs look like in practice and how this could work for your business (examples range from thought leadership and awareness to focused demand generation activity).

### Your place or ours?

We're happy to come to you, or welcome you to one of our offices. You might even prefer to chat over a cocktail at our regular Sales & Marketing Forum in Central London.

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## CONTACT:

### Allyson Bancroft

01235 443 677

[abancroft@themarketingpractice.com](mailto:abancroft@themarketingpractice.com)

<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/allysonbancroft>

[themarketingpractice.com](https://themarketingpractice.com)



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