
What B2B brand investment **actually** buys

The business case for brand's role in pricing power, sales efficiency,
acquisition economics and business resilience

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

Strong B2B brands make companies easier to recognize, easier to trust and easier to choose. This guide explains what brand investment actually buys, why sustained investment matters and how executives can evaluate its contribution without building an enterprise-scale measurement system.

It is written for leaders responsible for growth, competitive position, marketing, sales and resource allocation. Throughout, it connects brand strategy to pricing power, sales efficiency, acquisition economics and business resilience.

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The business case for brand investment

A company can have a strong product, a capable sales team and a competitive media budget — and still find growth getting more expensive.

Customer acquisition costs rise. Sales cycles lengthen. Buyers struggle to see meaningful differences between competitors. Price becomes a larger part of the decision. Sales teams spend more time establishing credibility and explaining capabilities before they can begin selling value.

Those are rarely described as brand problems. But sometimes, at least in part, they are.

Brand affects what happens before a salesperson enters the room or a buyer clicks “Contact Us”: whether the company is known, whether it makes the shortlist, what buyers believe it can do, how credible it appears, how easily it can be distinguished from competitors and how much value buyers attach to the difference.

That is the business case for brand investment.

Not that companies should spend on brand because brand matters, but that brand can influence the economics of how a company competes, acquires customers, sells and grows. Yet when the economy becomes cautious, brand is particularly vulnerable — not necessarily because leaders believe it has no value, but because that value is often defended in the wrong language and judged on the wrong clock.

Awareness, engagement, reach and impressions do not map neatly to a financial model. And brand is often evaluated like short-term activation: money invested this quarter against pipeline generated the next. That can create a mismatch between the time horizon of the investment and the time horizon used to judge it. The result is a familiar cycle: brand is difficult to connect to business performance, confidence in the investment declines and funding follows.

THE BRAND INVESTMENT DILEMMA

Brand becomes vulnerable when its business value is harder to articulate than its cost.

Gartner's 2026 research gives that cycle a name: **the brand doom loop**. Its survey found that 84% of organizations were caught in a cycle in which underinvestment in brand measurement reduces confidence in the results and, in turn, attracts even less funding. Companies in that loop were half as likely to exceed their growth targets. Organizations with a strong brand strategy were twice as likely to exceed theirs.

84%

OF ORGANIZATIONS

are caught in the brand doom loop

Organizations are

50%

LESS LIKELY

to exceed growth targets when caught in the brand doom loop

Organizations are

2x

AS LIKELY

to exceed growth targets with a strong brand strategy

The implication is important: cutting brand is not necessarily a neutral act of discipline. It can make the conditions for future growth harder to create. The challenge, then, is not simply to defend brand spending. It is to evaluate it more intelligently.

Consider this a translation guide: what B2B brand investment actually buys, expressed in terms the people allocating capital already value.

FOR EXECUTIVES, TWO QUESTIONS:

- 1 Where can a stronger brand create meaningful business advantage?
- 2 What level of sustained investment is required to realize it?

This guide explains four ways B2B brand investment strengthens performance and helps leaders identify where additional brand effort can create the most value.

01

Translate brand value into business value

Brand strategy is not only a marketing concern. It shapes how buyers understand the company, how sales explains the difference and how the business competes. The executive team therefore shares responsibility for giving the brand enough clarity, consistency and continuity to work.

The challenge is translation. Marketing metrics rarely capture the full value of brand investment, while a short-horizon return test can miss effects that build across a longer buying cycle. Leaders need a straightforward way to connect brand strategy with business priorities.

The disconnect is not the objective, but how leaders across marketing, finance and sales describe what creates it, which indicators they trust and the time horizon over which they expect to see results.

ANA and NewtonX's *The Confident B2B Marketer 2026* combined surveys of 202 senior B2B marketing leaders and 150 finance or revenue leaders with qualitative interviews. The report calls the absence of shared definitions around pipeline, attribution and impact the **Vocabulary Gap** — and links it to weaker trust, fragmented information, missed forecasts and pressure on brand investment.

THE SHARED OBJECTIVE

Stronger commercial performance. Brand investment can contribute through four outcomes executives already monitor: **pricing power, sales efficiency, acquisition economics and business resilience.**

Bridging the language gap starts by making the business question explicit — and reframing the marketing objective in terms everyone can evaluate. The next two pages show how.

Translate brand language into **business value**

WHAT MARKETING SAYS	HOW IT CAN BE PERCEIVED	THE BUSINESS QUESTION	THE SHARED-LANGUAGE REFRAME
“Brand awareness”	<i>Can feel difficult to connect to financial performance.</i>	Awareness among whom — and what changes if it increases?	“We need more priority buyers to recognize and understand us before they’re in market, increasing our likelihood of making the shortlist when an opportunity emerges.”
“Engagement”	<i>Can be perceived as a vanity metric when it isn’t connected to meaningful buyer behavior.</i>	Which behaviors indicate genuine buyer interest?	“Engagement isn’t the goal. We’re looking for evidence that buyers are moving from exposure to active interest — seeking us out by name, returning to the site, consuming high-value content or initiating contact.”
“Impressions and reach”	<i>Can sound like a measure of what was purchased rather than what was accomplished.</i>	What does greater exposure ultimately accomplish?	“Sustained visibility gives us the opportunity to build familiarity among priority buyers, increasing the likelihood that we’re recognized and considered when a need emerges.”
“We need a rebrand”	<i>Can be perceived as an expensive aesthetic exercise.</i>	What business problem would a rebrand solve?	“The business has evolved faster than market perception. We need the brand to better communicate what we’ve become, distinguish us from competitors and help buyers understand the value they’re buying.”
“Brand equity”	<i>Can sound like a soft asset whose financial value is difficult to quantify.</i>	Where does that value show up in the business?	“Brand equity is intangible, but its effects can have tangible financial value. Familiarity, trust, preference and differentiation can support pricing power, reduce perceived buyer risk and contribute to enterprise value.”

Translate brand language into **business value**

WHAT MARKETING SAYS	HOW IT CAN BE PERCEIVED	THE BUSINESS QUESTION	THE SHARED- LANGUAGE REFRAME
“Top-of-funnel investment”	<i>Can feel too far removed from revenue.</i>	How does investment this early contribute to growth?	“Buyers begin forming their consideration set before they enter the CRM. We need to build familiarity and relevance early enough to improve our chances of being considered when an opportunity emerges.”
“Distinctive creative”	<i>Can sound like a subjective creative preference.</i>	What does distinctiveness improve commercially?	“We need buyers to recognize us faster and remember us longer. Greater distinctiveness allows each media and sales touch to reinforce the last rather than starting over.”
“We need more brand budget”	<i>Can sound like a request for more spending without a defined return.</i>	What will additional investment change — and how will we know?	“We’re proposing additional investment against a defined business opportunity. Here’s what we expect it to change, what we’ll measure and the commercial outcomes we’ll use to evaluate whether it’s working.”

A SHARED LANGUAGE

Clear language helps leaders agree on what brand investment is intended to accomplish and how they will know whether it is working. **The next step is giving that investment enough time and continuity to do the job.**

02

Brand investment works on a longer horizon

EVALUATE LONG-TERM WORK ON THE RIGHT CLOCK

In *The CMO Survey 2026 Firm and Industry Breakout Report*, 29 of 38 B2B services respondents — 76.3% — said their organizations respond to increased pressure by emphasizing short-term impact over long-run gains. That is a planning risk when the intended effect is cumulative or delayed.

Performance marketing can produce near-term response. Brand-building creates memory, familiarity and preference before the buyer is ready. These jobs should not be judged on the same clock.

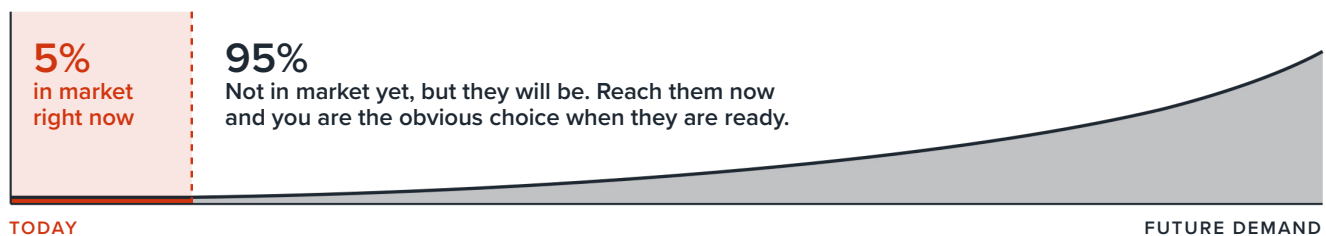
The measurement window should match both the job of the investment and the buying cycle it is intended to influence. In B2B markets, where purchase decisions may develop over months or even years, brand-building is often working long before an opportunity appears in the pipeline.

Brand investment generally requires a longer evaluation period than sales activation. When the strategy is sound and the execution is consistent, leaders should resist cutting it before it has had sufficient time to work.

The LinkedIn B2B Institute and Ehrenberg-Bass Institute's "95-5 Rule" argues that most potential buyers are out of market at any given time. The exact ratio varies by category and purchase frequency, but the planning implication is durable: activation captures existing demand, while brand-building aims to improve the probability of consideration once the considerably larger group of future buyers enters the market.

The 95-5 implication

If only 5% of potential buyers are in market today, brand investment builds familiarity with the other 95% — so your company is known and considered when they are ready to buy.



The implication is not to wait longer for the same short-term metric. It is to evaluate brand for the job it is intended to do: building familiarity and consideration among future buyers before demand appears.

Two planning implications follow:

Brand effects compound

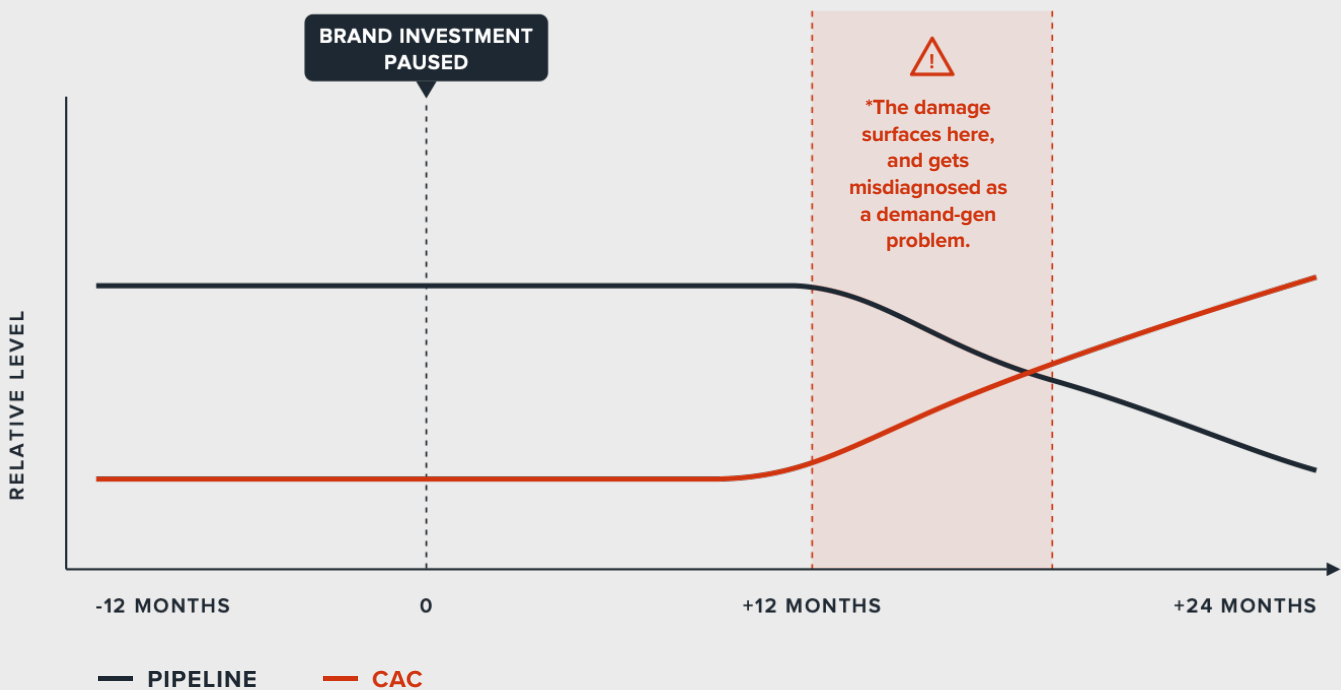
Repeated, distinctive exposure builds memory and familiarity that can improve later consideration. Consistency gives the investment a chance to accumulate.

Cuts create delayed risk

Near-term pipeline may continue because it reflects earlier demand creation and existing relationships. Rebuilding lost awareness and familiarity can cost more than protecting an effective brand platform.

The Hidden Lag: How Pausing Brand Investment Can Weaken Pipeline and Raise Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC)

CONCEPTUAL ILLUSTRATION, NOT DATA



THE DELAYED EFFECT

Savings from a brand cut can be immediate. The impact on pipeline and customer acquisition costs may not appear until later.

03

The real impact of brand investment

Strong brands improve the conditions for growth in four commercially important ways. The size of the effect will vary by company and market, but the value pathways are clear.

1 Pricing power

2 Sales cycle compression & win rate

3 More efficient customer acquisition

4 Resilience & enterprise value

3.1

Pricing power

Differentiated, credible brands help reduce price-only comparison by giving buyers a relevant reason to choose — and trust — the company.

Brand is not the only influence on price realization; product quality, service, competition and sales execution also matter. Companies can still see the pattern through discounting, realized price, buyer feedback and recurring win-loss themes without building a complex valuation model.

Pricing power also depends on being understood.

When market perception trails the business, buyers evaluate an outdated version of the company.

Stronger positioning, identity, messaging and sales expression can close that gap and make the value easier to recognize.

WHERE PRICING POWER SHOWS UP

Discounting frequency

How often price concessions are required to close — and against which competitors.

Realized price

The gap between target price and what buyers ultimately pay.

Buyer feedback

Whether buyers can articulate the difference — or default to comparing on price.

Win-loss themes

Recurring reasons deals are won on value — or lost on price.

WHY DIFFERENTIATION MATTERS

When buyers struggle to see meaningful differentiation, price becomes the easiest basis for comparison. **The more value buyers perceive in the difference, the less the company has to compete on price alone.**

3.2

Sales cycle compression and win rate

Complex B2B purchases involve multiple stakeholders who must justify the decision internally. Prior familiarity and clear positioning reduce credibility-building work help buyers align around the same value story and give sales a stronger starting point.

B2B buying decisions commonly involve five to 16 people across as many as four functions, making internal alignment a meaningful part of the sale. Gartner's 2025 survey of 632 B2B buyers found unhealthy conflict in 74% of buying teams, while groups that reached consensus were 2.5 times more likely to report a high-quality deal.

The lesson is not that every stakeholder needs the same message. It is that individual messages need to reinforce a shared understanding of the company, the problem it solves, and the value it creates.

That is where brand strategy can support the sales process: by giving different stakeholders a consistent value story they can understand, evaluate and carry into the internal buying conversation. Consistency matters across channels as well as stakeholders.

74%

OF BUYING TEAMS

experience unhealthy conflict

69%

OF B2B BUYERS

report inconsistencies between supplier websites and sales conversations

+20%

IMPROVEMENT IN BUYING-GROUP CONSENSUS

when content addressed the needs of the group as a whole

CONSISTENCY REDUCES SALES FRICTION

Buyers may need different information at different points in the decision, but the underlying value story should remain consistent. **When messaging, content, digital experience and sales conversations reinforce the same value proposition, sales can spend less time resolving confusion and more time demonstrating value.**

Use sales insight to **strengthen the brand**

The relationship works in both directions. Sales conversations reveal where the value story is creating traction — or friction — in the market: from time spent establishing credibility and price concessions against familiar competitors to opportunities the company was never invited to pursue.

Those patterns are valuable inputs to positioning, messaging, proof and sales enablement. Useful insight can come from existing CRM notes, routine sales meetings, customer conversations and occasional win-loss interviews.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE WITH SALES

- 01 When buyers first contact us, what do they already understand about our company?
- 02 Where does sales spend too much time explaining who we are or why we are different?
- 03 Which competitors force price concessions and what do buyers believe they offer?
- 04 Which messages, proof points or brand experiences consistently help opportunities move forward?

THE SALES-BRAND FEEDBACK LOOP

Sales insight keeps brand strategy connected to how buyers actually understand, evaluate and choose the company, revealing where the story is working and where it needs to get sharper.

3.3

More efficient customer acquisition

Customer acquisition is most expensive when every prospect must be found, educated and reassured from scratch. A strong brand changes those starting conditions. It increases the likelihood that buyers already know the company, include it in initial consideration, respond to its outreach and approach its website and sales team with some confidence in the offer.

That advantage is substantial in B2B. **Forrester's Buyers' Journey Survey, 2025 found that 68% of B2B buyers begin the purchase process with a front-runner already in mind — and that vendor wins 80% of the time. Taken together, those findings suggest that roughly half of B2B purchases are won by a vendor that was preferred before the formal buying process began.**

Familiarity across the buying group matters as well. LinkedIn's B2B Institute reports that vendors known across the buying group from the start are 20 times more likely to be purchased than vendors known only through an expert recommendation. Brand investment therefore does more than generate

awareness. It improves the probability that the company enters the buying process as a credible option rather than an unfamiliar challenger.

This is how brand can improve acquisition economics. It does not make media cheaper or correct weak targeting. It reduces the amount of paid exposure, explanation and reassurance required to earn consideration; gives demand-generation programs a more receptive audience; and helps the website and sales team convert interest already supported by familiarity and trust.

The practical question is not simply whether customer acquisition cost moved. It is whether brand strength is making the acquisition system less dependent on paid media to create every introduction — and more productive once buyers engage. More branded and direct demand, stronger conversion from initial engagement to qualified opportunity and less sales effort spent establishing basic credibility are useful indications that the investment is working.

74%

OF B2B BUYERS

start the purchase process with a front-runner already in mind

80%

OF THE TIME

that front-runner wins

20x

MORE LIKELY TO WIN

when buyers across the buying group know the company from the start

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION

When buyers know, understand and trust the company before the buying process begins, every acquisition dollar starts closer to a decision.

3.4

Resilience and enterprise value

Historical advertising research assembled by the IPA indicates that firms maintaining or increasing marketing investment during downturns have often gained more market share and profit during recovery than firms that cut. The evidence is directional and context-dependent; liquidity, category demand and execution quality still influence the appropriate response.

Brand Finance's 2026 analysis found that companies with stronger branded businesses commanded a 65% premium in forward price-to-earnings ratios

compared with weaker peers, while the strongest brands achieved 45%+ higher EBIT multiples than B-rated brands. Among the top 100 brands, B2B brand value grew 15% versus 10% for B2C brands.

These findings do not isolate brand as the sole cause of stronger valuation. They do reinforce that brand strength belongs among the factors executives consider when assessing competitive quality, resilience and long-term enterprise value.

65%

**HIGHER FORWARD
P/E RATIOS**

for companies with stronger branded businesses vs. weaker peers

45%

HIGHER EBIT MULTIPLES

for the strongest brands vs.
B-rated brands

80%

**SMALLER
VALUATION DECLINES**

for stronger brands during
market downturns

**CONTINUITY
IS STRATEGIC**

Episodic campaigns cannot build the same memory, consistency and market presence as a sustained brand platform. Leaders should protect strong long-horizon work while improving activity that is no longer effective.

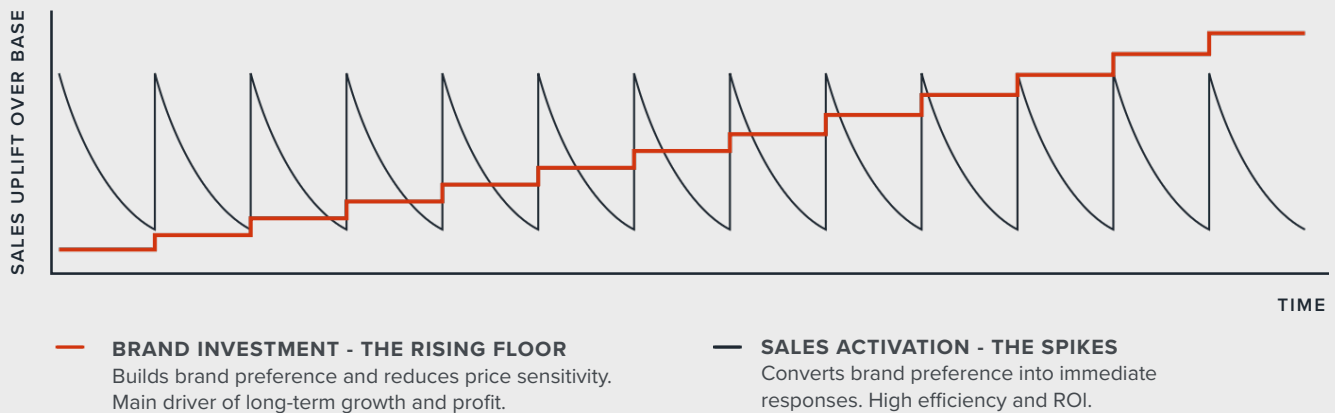
04

Brand investment and sales activation do different jobs

Most B2B companies need both brand-building and sales activation. Activation converts available demand; brand-building creates familiarity and preference before buyers enter the market and gives later activation more to work with.

The familiar spike-and-step model captures the distinction: activation seeks near-term response from in-market buyers, while brand-building raises the baseline through broader, more persistent effects.

Brand Investment vs. Sales Activation



The practical implication is to fund both when both jobs matter and stop forcing every brand dollar into a last-click attribution model.

Continuity matters because memory, familiarity and distinctive associations are built through repeated exposure. Consistency should protect the strategy while creative and channel execution continue to improve.

LinkedIn's B2B Institute summarizes IPA Databank evidence from 1998–2018 as a roughly 50/50 B2B starting point between long-term brand-building and short-term sales activation.

Treat 50/50 as a starting point, not a prescription. The appropriate mix varies with category demand, maturity, competitive position, purchase frequency, existing awareness and sales capacity.

If the current mix is heavily weighted toward activation, ask whether the company is capturing existing demand faster than it is creating future consideration. If it is heavily weighted toward brand-building, ask whether the business can convert the demand it creates.

The right balance follows the company's growth opportunity — not a fixed industry ratio.

Keep measurement proportionate to the decision

Measurement should serve the brand strategy, not become the strategy. Most midmarket B2B companies do not need a complex attribution system, a dedicated measurement team or a perfect baseline before strengthening the brand.

CHOOSE

Two or three practical signals that fit the objective, such as buyer awareness, branded demand, sales feedback, price concessions or recurring win-loss themes.

REVIEW

Those signals on a schedule that reflects the buying cycle. Use information the company already has, and add research only when the value of the decision justifies the cost.

APPLY

What the team learns to sharpen positioning, creative, buyer experience and investment — not to postpone brand work until perfect attribution becomes possible.

MEASURE ENOUGH TO DECIDE

The goal is not perfect attribution. It is enough evidence to make better decisions about **where to invest, what to improve and whether the strategy is delivering against its intended business objective.**

05

The brand accountability scorecard

Use this scorecard to identify where stronger brand strategy and execution could create the most leverage. The goal is not a perfect score, but a clearer view of where the business is strong — and where brand may be making growth harder than it needs to be.

RATE EACH STATEMENT FROM 1 TO 5

Use available information and informed judgment. Look for the rating that best reflects the business today.

1 Not in place	2 Limited, informal, or rarely demonstrated	3 Partly in place but inconsistent	4 Generally in place	5 Consistently demonstrated
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Section A — Pricing power

We win at our target price more often than we discount to close. _____ / 5

Buyers rarely make us justify our price against a cheaper, unfamiliar competitor. _____ / 5

Our positioning names something specific we do that competitors can't credibly claim. _____ / 5

We have raised prices in the last 24 months without material customer loss. _____ / 5

subtotal _____ / 20

Section B — Sales efficiency

Most of our deals begin with the buyer already aware of us. _____ / 5

Our first sales meetings are spent on the buyer's problem, not on explaining who we are. _____ / 5

Our sales materials help buyers understand our relevance and differentiation without requiring extensive explanation from the sales team. _____ / 5

Sales and marketing articulate the same brand promise. _____ / 5

subtotal _____ / 20

Section C — Acquisition economics

Our blended customer acquisition cost has held steady or declined over the past 24 months.	___ / 5
Branded search volume is growing year over year.	___ / 5
Our share of voice is at or above our share of market.	___ / 5
We are not becoming more dependent on paid media to hit pipeline targets.	___ / 5
subtotal	___ / 20

Section D — Consistency and resilience

Our brand looks, sounds and behaves consistently across every touchpoint.	___ / 5
We can introduce new products, services or campaigns without reinventing the brand each time.	___ / 5
With the logo removed, a prospect could still tell our materials from a competitor's.	___ / 5
Our website reflects our current positioning, not the one from three years ago.	___ / 5
subtotal	___ / 20

Section E — Leadership commitment

Leadership treats brand as a long-term business investment, not merely as a marketing campaign expense.	___ / 5
We can identify the business priorities our brand strategy should support.	___ / 5
Brand decisions are guided by a clear strategy rather than one-off preferences or short-term pressure.	___ / 5
We invest consistently enough for brand efforts to build recognition and preference over time.	___ / 5
subtotal	___ / 20

Total _____ / 100

Interpreting your score

85–100

STRONG BRAND FOUNDATION

Protect continuity and look for opportunities to build on what is working.

70–84

VALUABLE STRENGTHS, IDENTIFIABLE GAPS

Prioritize the area most likely to improve growth or competitive position.

50–69

LESS LEVERAGE THAN IT COULD CREATE

Focus investment on the weakest, most consequential sections.

Below 50

UNDERDEVELOPED OR INCONSISTENT

A focused strategy and stronger execution can create meaningful opportunity.

The lowest-scoring section is a starting point for strengthening the brand, not an automatic budget formula.

06

The executive decision

Strong brand strategy makes the company easier to recognize, understand, trust and choose — and those advantages compound when the work is sustained. Brand investment should not wait for perfect attribution or be judged solely by one quarter's pipeline.

The four pathways in this guide — pricing power, sales efficiency, acquisition economics and business resilience — show how brand strengthens commercial performance. Product quality, service, pricing, market conditions and execution still matter, but none eliminates the need for a clear and distinctive brand.

For many B2B companies, the greater risk is underinvestment: remaining generic, asking sales to create credibility one opportunity at a time, relying too heavily on paid demand capture and allowing competitors to define the category.

Before the next planning cycle, decide where the brand must become clearer, more distinctive, more consistent or more visible. Connect that priority to the business opportunity and choose two or three practical signals that will show **whether the investment is delivering against its intended business objective.**

The objective is shared: stronger commercial performance. A common language allows marketing, sales, finance and the broader leadership team to evaluate brand investment against that objective rather than through the lens of any one function.

The next budget conversation should ask: Where is the current brand holding the business back? What stronger positioning, identity, messaging or experience would make the company easier to choose? What level of sustained investment does that opportunity require?

Executives do not need perfect certainty to act. They need a clear business case, practical measures of progress and the commitment to build **an advantage that competitors cannot reproduce overnight.**

Take the next step

Build the brand your next stage of growth requires. A strong B2B brand makes the company easier to recognize, understand, trust and choose. Spire helps companies build that advantage through brand strategy, positioning, identity, messaging, digital experience and integrated activation. If your brand no longer reflects the strength, direction or ambition of the business behind it, let's talk about what it should make possible next.

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