

intelligent BRANDS[®]

The New Growth Playbook for High-Stakes B2B Marketing

Man
Bites
Dog.



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B2B has entered a new era. The Next Economy is being forged in the collision of geopolitics, technology and transition. B2B leaders are being asked to deliver predictable growth in unpredictable times.

Marketing and sales can't afford to run separate strategies; they must work together to become the Growth Department. But even the best-aligned teams are hitting the same wall.

B2B has developed a growth problem.

What B2B organisations are selling is no longer a transactional purchase: it's a transformational bet. Eighty nine percent of business leaders see their largest supplier relationships as high stakes partnerships, involving more investment, more risk and more collaboration than ever before. And 85% say they are making more of these high-stakes buying decisions than they were two years ago.

High-stakes mean **high-scrutiny**. Nearly four in five leaders say functional and technical buyers can no longer sign off on major deals alone, and 87% report that more decisions are now escalated to the C-Suite or board. That extra altitude slows everything down: 76% of leaders are seeing more delays, postponements and outright decision paralysis in high stakes buying.

Put simply: your growth problem isn't awareness, it's indecision. Most sales are not lost to competitors, but to committees that can't get comfortable enough to say "yes".

So how do marketers unstick decisions and get the B2B buying cycle moving again? By accepting that the traditional growth levers are no longer enough.

Trust, brand awareness, track record and personal relationships still matter, but when the stakes are high and the C-Suite is in the room, these foundational elements don't give buyers the confidence they need to commit. Eighty nine percent of leaders say trust does not give them enough confidence to make a high stakes decision.

C-Suite buyers have quietly raised the bar. Nine in 10 say they now require **decision-grade confidence** to move a major deal forward. And 97% tell us that, above all else, confidence comes from a partner's visible **intelligence advantage**: superior ideas, experts, data and technology that show they understand what's coming and how to help their customers win.

“

The C-Suite is looking for **Intelligent Brands®**.

These are highly authoritative B2B partners

whose intelligence advantage is made visible

through their brand, marketing and thought

leadership, giving senior decision-makers the

conviction to choose them when it really counts.

”

Intelligent Brands don't just look smart; they change the decision environment. They make acting with them feel safer than delaying. They help buyers see around corners, quantify risk, and build the story and evidence they need to win internal support. That's why 94% of leaders say suppliers that behave like Intelligent Brands are more likely to give their C-Suite the confidence to commit to high-stakes decisions. It's also why 93% say they reach decisive confidence faster with Intelligent Brands - and many are willing to pay a premium for that reduced risk.

We would like to thank the leaders who participated in Man Bites Dog's international study, providing essential insight into how B2B organisations can unlock high-stakes buying decisions. Their message was clear: the brands that win in this new environment are those that consistently make their expertise, insight and capability visible to the market, inspiring confidence and making decisions feel safer.

The opportunity, and the gap, are huge. While 95% of C-Suite buyers believe it's important for organisations in key sectors to operate as Intelligent Brands, on average, just 38% actually do. That expectation-reality gap is where the smartest brands will capture the growth that others leave on the table.

This report shows how to close that gap by introducing our six dimension Intelligent Brands system. It provides a practical framework for turning your organisation's intelligence advantage into decision-grade confidence by building a brand your customers can confidently bet their future on.

Read on to find out what sets Intelligent Brands apart, and how your organisation can unlock its intelligence advantage.

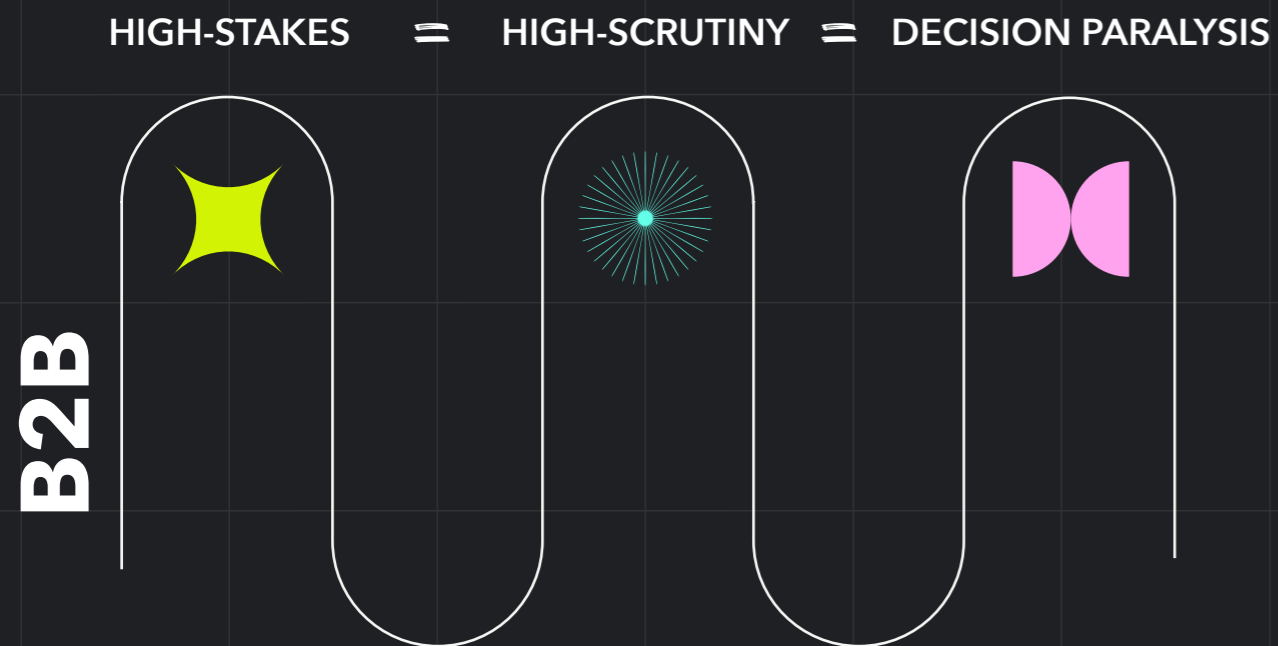


Claire Mason.

FOUNDER AND CEO
MAN BITES DOG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

So, what's the new growth playbook for high-stakes B2B marketing in the beyond-trust Intelligence Economy?
Building Intelligent Brands®.



89% of leaders say their largest supplier partnerships are not just transactional, they are transformational, making their supplier decisions more high-stakes.

85% say their major supplier partnerships tend to require more investment, more risk and a higher degree of collaboration to achieve business outcomes than ever before.

85% say their organisation is making more high-stakes B2B buying decisions than two years ago.

87% of leaders say more of their organisation's buying decisions now require direct involvement and sign-off from the C-Suite or board, compared with two years ago.

78% say their organisation's functional and technical leaders no longer have the power to make high-stakes buying decisions without escalation.

76% of leaders say their organisation is experiencing more delays, postponements and decision-paralysis of high-stakes buying decisions, compared with two years ago.

88% say high-stakes B2B decisions stall unless they can build enough confidence across the buying committee and C-Suite.

BEYOND TRUST: THE NEW CONFIDENCE TEST



90% of leaders believe decision-grade confidence is necessary to move high-stakes purchasing decisions forward.

89% say trust does not give them enough confidence to make high-stakes buying decisions.

92% say that over the next three years, they will prioritise partners that give them decisive confidence, not just those they trust.

INTELLIGENT BRANDS® UNLOCK HIGH-STAKES BUYING DECISIONS

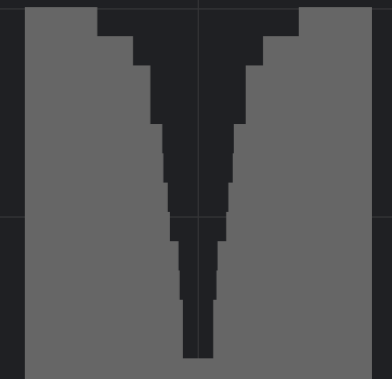
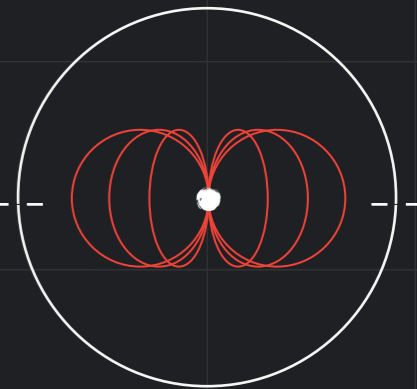


91% of leaders believe decision-grade confidence is built through a partner's intelligence advantage: their demonstrably superior ideas, experts, data and technology.

97% believe that, when making high-stakes B2B buying decisions, it's important that strategic partners demonstrate intelligence advantage.

94% believe suppliers that behave like Intelligent Brands are more likely to give their C-Suite the level of confidence needed to commit to high-stakes buying decisions.

MIND THE INTELLIGENT BRAND GAP



While **95%** of business leaders say it's important for organisations in key sectors to be seen as Intelligent Brands, on average, only **38%** of those organisations actually achieve Intelligent Brand status, with the lowest performing sector facing a more than 9x expectation-perception gap.

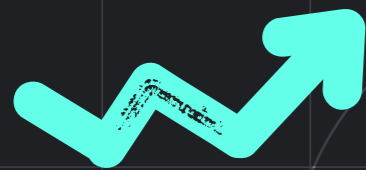
'INTELLIGENT BRANDS®' IS AN IN-DEPTH THOUGHT LEADERSHIP STUDY BASED ON INTERNATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH WITH INTERNATIONAL C-SUITE BUYING DECISION-MAKERS IN COMPANIES WITH AVERAGE REVENUE OF \$8BN.

01



PART ONE

**FROM TRUST TO PROOF:
HIGH-STAKES,
HIGH-SCRUTINY B2B**

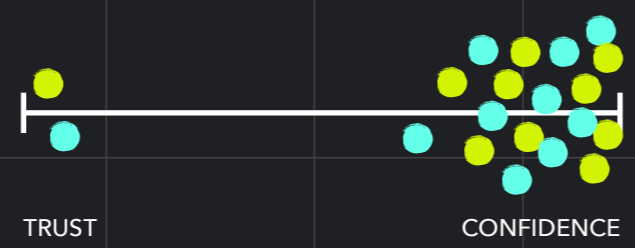


B2B has never carried higher stakes. 85% of business leaders report that their major supplier partnerships now demand more investment, more risk and a higher degree of collaboration to deliver outcomes than ever before. And the same proportion report that their organisation is making more of these high-stakes buying decisions than two years ago.

88% of leaders say high-stakes B2B decisions stall unless they can build enough confidence across the buying committee and C-Suite.

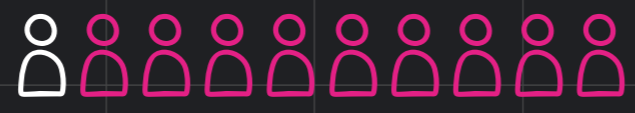
Beyond trust: engineering decisive confidence in a high-stakes world.

With high stakes leading to high stasis, what can B2B marketers do to get the buying cycle moving again? C-Suite buyers in multi-billion-dollar organisations told us that the traditional growth levers are not enough. Just 2% say trust or brand awareness enables them to make high-stakes buying decisions, and just 1% base decisions on personal relationships.



89% of leaders say trust does not give them enough confidence to make a high-stakes buying decision.

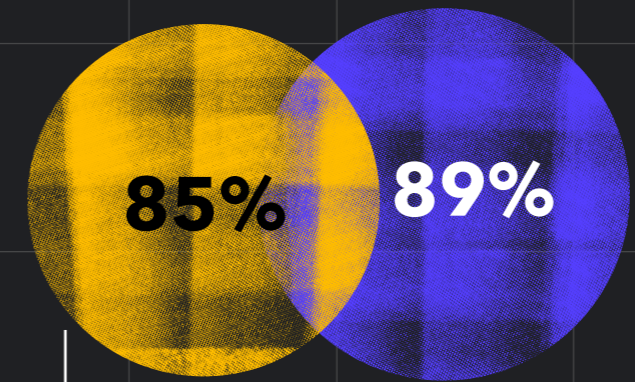
The bar for decision-making has been raised, with 89% of leaders saying that their C-Suite demands a higher level of confidence before committing to high-stakes buying decisions than they did two years ago.



Nine in 10 leaders say that to commit to a high-stakes B2B buying decision, they need to feel 'decision-grade confidence'.

As B2B deals become larger, riskier and more complex, being 'a trusted partner' is now a basic requirement - necessary, but no longer enough to move a stalled buying committee. The new competitive edge is who can create decision grade confidence.

So, what gives buyers the decisive confidence to say "yes" in the new economy? According to 91% of leaders, decision-grade confidence is built through a partner's visible 'intelligence advantage': their demonstrably superior ideas, experts, data and technology.



85% of leaders say the partners they work with increasingly need to help them think, not just execute.

89% want suppliers that bring superior intelligence (ideas, experts, data and technology), not just products or services.

B2B buyers want solid proof of an organisation's thinking and capability before they commit to a partnership. Brands that demonstrate **intelligence advantage** inspire confidence in their ability to help customers think better, see further and act faster than the rest.

intelligence advantage

[noun]

The competitive edge of companies that visibly demonstrate superior ideas, experts, data and technology.

When organisations clearly demonstrate their intelligence advantage, it has a measurable effect on decision-making. Ninety-three percent of leaders report that when shortlisting strategic partners, they look for brands with a clear intelligence advantage. And 97% say a supplier's visible intelligence advantage does more to build their confidence in high-stakes buying decisions than traditional brand awareness, trust or familiarity.

Put simply, we're witnessing the shift from yesterday's trusted organisation to tomorrow's Intelligent Brand®.

97% of leaders believe it's important that strategic partners demonstrate intelligence advantage, when making high-stakes B2B buying decisions.



89% of leaders state that their largest supplier partnerships are not just transactional, but transformational, making their supplier decisions more high-stakes.

For buyers in the world's largest organisations, high-stakes decisions mean one thing: high scrutiny. Nearly four in five leaders (78%) say their organisation's functional and technical leaders no longer have the power to make high-stakes buying decisions without escalation. And 87% report that, compared with two years ago, more of their organisation's buying decisions now require direct involvement and sign-off from their C-Suite or board.

This high-altitude decision-making is slowing momentum: 76% of leaders say their organisation is experiencing more delays, postponements and **decision paralysis** in high-stakes buying decisions, compared with two years ago.



02

PART TWO

THE NEW GROWTH PLAYBOOK



With C-Suite leaders now demanding decision-grade proof of intelligence, the companies that stand out share a key trait. They consistently make their expertise, insight and capability visible to the market. We describe these organisations as Intelligent Brands®.

Smart B2B marketing isn't just shaping perception; it's actively reducing risk for decision makers. Ninety-two percent of leaders say that, in high-stakes decisions, they have more confidence in Intelligent Brands, and 94% believe suppliers that behave like Intelligent Brands are more likely to give their C-Suite the level of confidence needed to commit to high-stakes buying decisions.


 Nine in 10 leaders say they're more likely to buy from a strategic supplier if they consider them as an Intelligent Brand and thought leader.



Intelligent Brand®
[noun]

A highly authoritative B2B partner whose intelligence advantage is made consistently visible through its brand, marketing and thought leadership, giving C-Suite buyers decisive confidence in high-stakes B2B decisions.

“ Intelligent Brands don't just look smart, they engineer the decision environment so that acting feels safer than delay. This is how strategic B2B marketers are earning a seat on the ExCo - by reaching further down the funnel and influencing conversion.



ROI: Return on Intelligence.

In high-stakes B2B, Intelligent Brands win on every metric. Not only do they give the C-Suite the confidence needed to commit to buying decisions, but they also speed up the decision-making process and are more likely to win larger mandates and longer-term contracts.

In our research, 93% of leaders said they reach decisive confidence faster when a supplier behaves like an Intelligent Brand. The same proportion (93%) expect intelligence advantage to become a more important factor in supplier choice than price over the next three years. And some 42% say they would be willing to pay more than 20% extra for products or services from an organisation they recognise as an Intelligent Brand.

The new growth playbook.

The legacy B2B marketing model is built on trust. For years, relationships, reputation and familiarity have done the heavy lifting, with marketing focused on awareness and reassurance while sales teams convert demand through personal credibility and proof points.

In the new buying environment, being known and liked is no longer enough. High stakes, multi-stakeholder decisions demand more than a "safe pair of hands".

Marketing and sales must work together to engineer decision-grade confidence - using superior ideas, experts, data and technology to reduce perceived risk and show a true understanding of what is coming next.

This is the shift from the old **trust era** to the **Intelligent Brand era**. In the Intelligence Economy, growth comes from being recognised as an Intelligent Brand - making your visible intelligence advantage the main signal and turning content, people and platforms into proof that moves high-stakes decisions forward.

LEGACY MODEL: TRUST ERA	NEW GROWTH PLAYBOOK: INTELLIGENT BRAND ERA
BUILT FOR LOWER-STAKES, LOWER-SCRUTINY DECISIONS	BUILT FOR HIGH-STAKES, HIGH-SCRUTINY DECISIONS
TRUST, FAMILIARITY AND REPUTATION ARE THE MAIN SIGNALS	VISIBLE INTELLIGENCE ADVANTAGE IS THE MAIN SIGNAL
MARKETING BUILDS AWARENESS AND CREDIBILITY	MARKETING HELPS ENGINEER DECISION-GRADE CONFIDENCE
SALES RELIES ON RELATIONSHIPS AND PERSUASION	MARKETING AND SALES CONVERT CONFIDENCE BUILT THROUGH VISIBLE PROOF
CONTENT SHOWCASES CREDENTIALS AND TRACK RECORD	CONTENT DEMONSTRATES INSIGHT, AUTHORITY AND APPLIED INTELLIGENCE
SUCCESS COMES FROM BEING KNOWN AND TRUSTED	SUCCESS COMES FROM BEING RECOGNISED AS AN INTELLIGENT BRAND



03



PART THREE

THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® SYSTEM: SIX DIMENSIONS FOR GROWTH

6 C-SUITE INTELLIGENCE

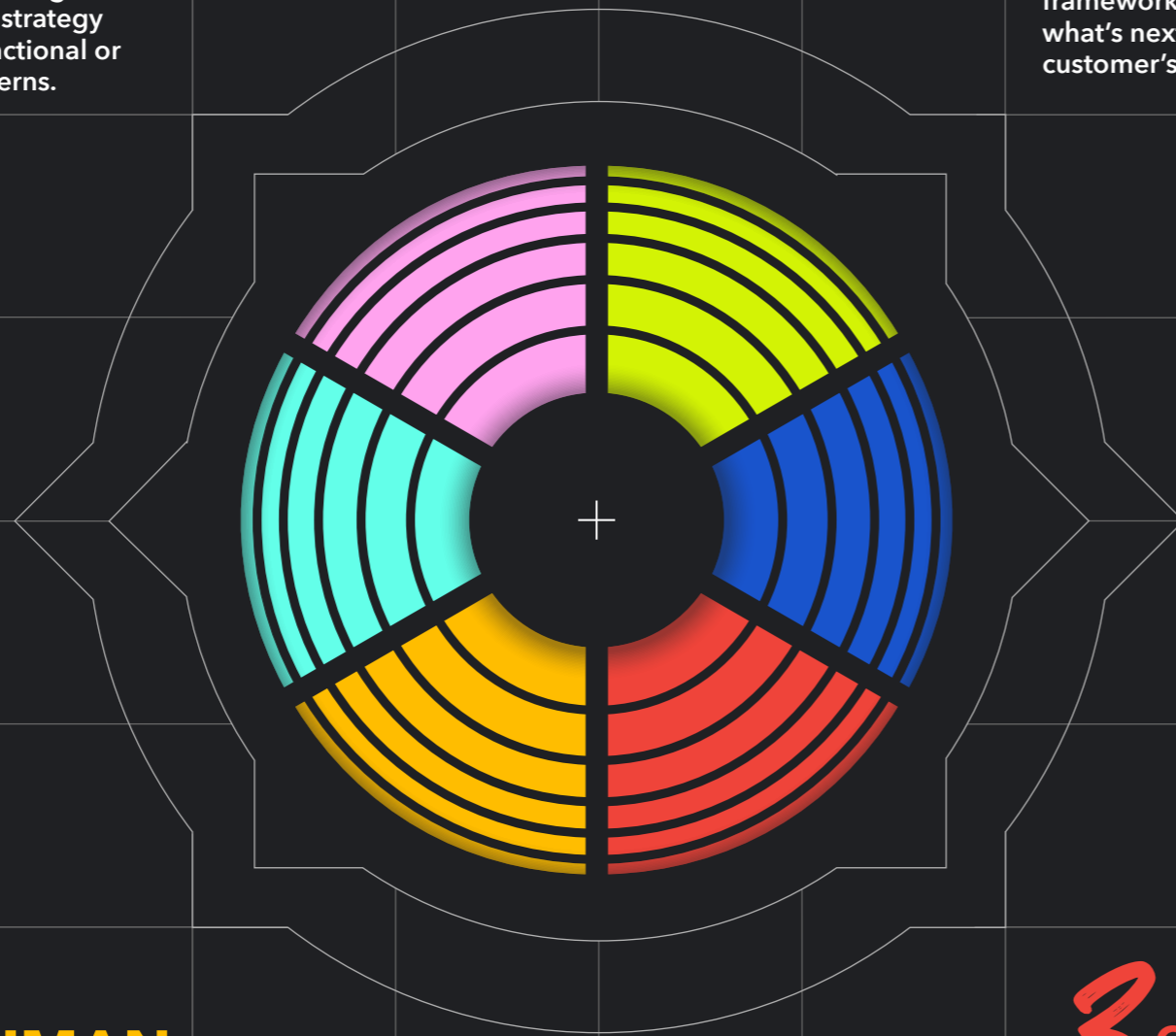
The elevation of thinking to C-Suite and board altitude, addressing business-level strategy rather than functional or technical concerns.

1 FORESIGHT INTELLIGENCE

The ability to harness foresight, data and frameworks to anticipate what's next in your customer's world.

5 AUGMENTED INTELLIGENCE

The enhancement of human expertise with digital, data and AI to deliver insights and solutions at scale.



2 IDEA INTELLIGENCE

The power to transform foresight into genuine thought leadership - clear, differentiated ideas and narratives that shape how customers think and act.

4 HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

The showcasing of visible, credible experts and executive leaders who are recognised and respected as authorities in their fields.

3 CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE

The demonstration of true customer-centricity by showing how solutions align with customer markets, contexts and needs.

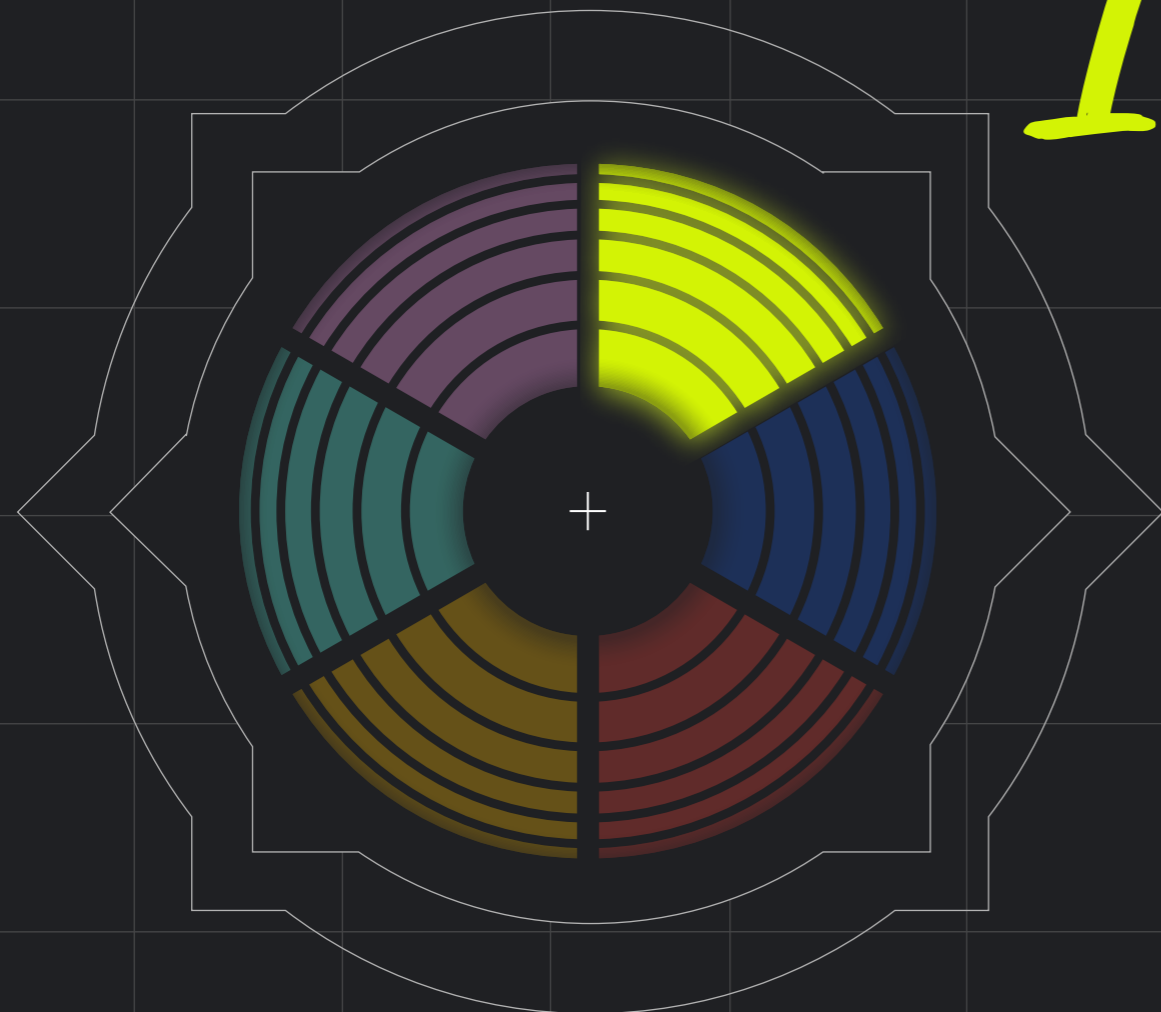
THE DIMENSIONS OF AN INTELLIGENT BRAND.

If trust is no longer enough, how do you build an Intelligent Brand® that makes your capabilities unmistakable and turns your firm's intelligence into sustained commercial growth?

Man Bites Dog's Intelligent Brands system defines six interlocking capabilities that enable organisations to translate ideas, expertise, data and technology into buyer confidence. Each dimension creates value in its own right, but together, they form a systematic growth model: helping brands become more visible, more convincing and more commercially effective in complex B2B markets.

FORESIGHT INTELLIGENCE.

The ability to harness foresight, data and frameworks to anticipate what's next in your customer's world.



In an uncertain market, forward-looking insight has taken on newfound importance. The pace of disruptive change means that 87% of business leaders increasingly rely on key partners' intelligence advantage to tell them where the market is heading. Surface-level trend spotting and generic state-of-the-nation commentary no longer cut through: 85% of leaders want to work with partners who anticipate and shape markets, not just participate in them.

Nine in 10 leaders (89%) say their most valued partners help their organisation "see around corners", highlighting novel, emerging risks and opportunities before they become obvious. And the best foresight is delivered systematically: 97% of leaders seek out partners who create and share regular outlooks, forecasts and scenarios to improve predictions of how markets, technologies and business models will evolve.

This expectation is influencing buying decisions, with 95% of leaders saying they're more likely to buy from suppliers with a clear, distinctive view of how their market will evolve. Furthermore, 87% are willing to back partners with bolder, more strategic commitments if they can show they understand what's next in their customers' industry better than competitors.

Strategic moves.

Ultimately, leaders are looking for partners with an original, informed point of view on the market: 94% say their most valued strategic partners express a unique view, distinct from their peers, which enables their long-term view of complex and evolving market trends.

Partners that share credible foresight give buyers something that's becoming increasingly rare in today's business environment: **earned certainty**. It gives them clarity on what's coming, the evidence to back bold decisions, and the momentum to move before the market does.

This isn't about predicting the future for academic interest, but equipping customers to succeed in it. Eighty-nine percent of leaders say their most valued partners **translate trends** like AI, energy transition and geopolitics into specific **strategic moves**, helping them lead the agenda, not just respond to it.

Marketers can make the shift from informing conversations to influencing strategy by combining foresight with practical tools that help align leaders around what matters. Nine in 10 leaders expect strategic partners to provide clear, evidence-based frameworks and models for thinking about the future, to support long-term strategic planning.

It's telling that 85% of leaders say an Intelligent Brand's perspectives have directly shaped their medium to long-term strategy. And 91% have made or accelerated strategic moves because a partner's foresight highlighted an opportunity or risk they had underestimated and provided the evidence and story they needed to win internal support.



85% of leaders say Intelligent Brands® help them spot opportunities and risks they would otherwise miss, giving them an edge in the market.

WHAT LEADERS SAY

The voice of the C-Suite.

"A supplier who demonstrates foresight intelligence gives me confidence that they can translate that insight into helping us make better decisions about the future with a higher degree of certainty than competitors."

95%

"Partners that share their foresight with us give us greater confidence that they can give us a higher degree of 'earned certainty' when we come to make key decisions – which is particularly valuable in this uncertain market."

94%

"We want to work with partners who demonstrate they have earlier sensing and better modelling to help us reduce downside from shocks."

92%

"By working with suppliers that see what's next sooner, we improve the quality of our own strategy and decision-making."

88%

DEEP DIVE

The power of proprietary data.

When it comes to demonstrating Foresight Intelligence, intuition isn't enough. Leaders want predictions they can trust, and this comes from evidence. Proprietary data has become essential to give ideas more weight, credibility and staying power.

94% of leaders expect their strategic partners to regularly create and curate bespoke, proprietary data to better inform their business decisions and illuminate market developments.

87% say they're more likely to read, engage with and share content and thought leadership that is supported by original data.

Overwhelmed by content, leaders are clear that clarity and rigour matter far more than quantity. Nine in 10 (91%) believe a small number of deep, research-led pieces tells them more about a partner's intelligence than a constant stream of lightweight content.

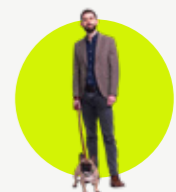
And, of course, this data must feel relevant. Today's leaders want insights that speak directly to their world: 86% expect partners to provide specific, evidence-based views on the future of their industry and context (with clear timeframes and implications). Crucially, they want data they can use to assess their own position: 92% say partners that invest in proprietary data, benchmarks and indices are more likely to be seen as Intelligent Brands® with a genuine intelligence advantage.

Man Bites Dog's [Data and Insight Lab](#) specialises in generating deep strategic insights to support brand positioning projects, thought leadership campaigns and sales enablement programmes.

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If you plan to differentiate yourself on the quality of your expertise, you'd better bring some evidence. Expert opinions carry weight, but on their own they are undeniably subjective. The most powerful insights are emphatic, something that is hard to achieve without empirical data. It's also hard to own a narrative if that data isn't your own.

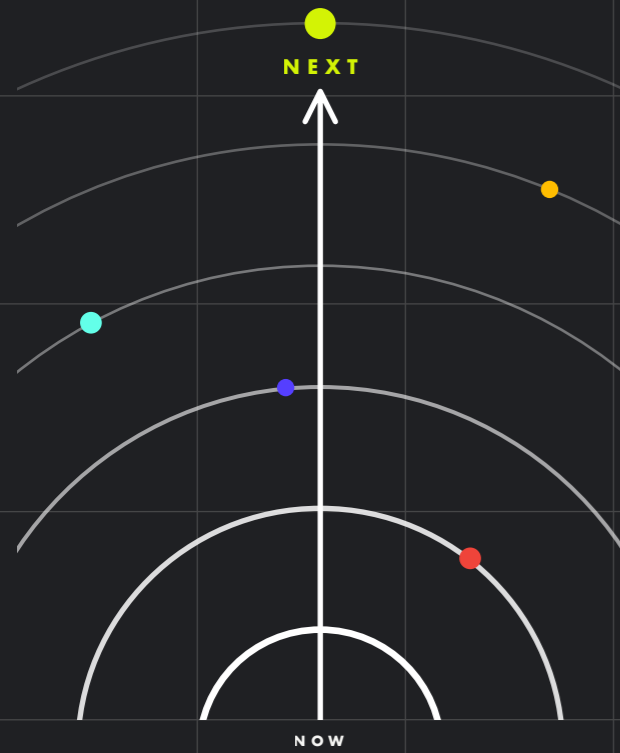
Duncan Sparke.
DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR
MAN BITES DOG



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To demonstrate Foresight Intelligence, companies must find the courage to lead thought with a unique perspective. Moving from retrospective information to predictive, actionable insight is critical to showing customers you can see further to help them navigate what's next. Business leaders value forecasts, proprietary data and practical frameworks they can use in their strategic planning.

Sean Farrance-White.
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
MAN BITES DOG



TO DO LIST:



THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

Foresight Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of Foresight Intelligence?

Share your future vision

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

We help our customers "see around corners" by highlighting novel, emerging risks and opportunities before they become obvious.

1 2 3 4 5

We create and share regular outlooks, forecasts and scenarios to improve predictions of how customer markets, technologies and business models will evolve.

1 2 3 4 5

We regularly create and curate bespoke, proprietary data to better inform our customers' business decisions and illuminate market developments.

1 2 3 4 5

We provide clear, evidence-based frameworks and models for thinking about the future, to help our customers with long-term strategic planning.

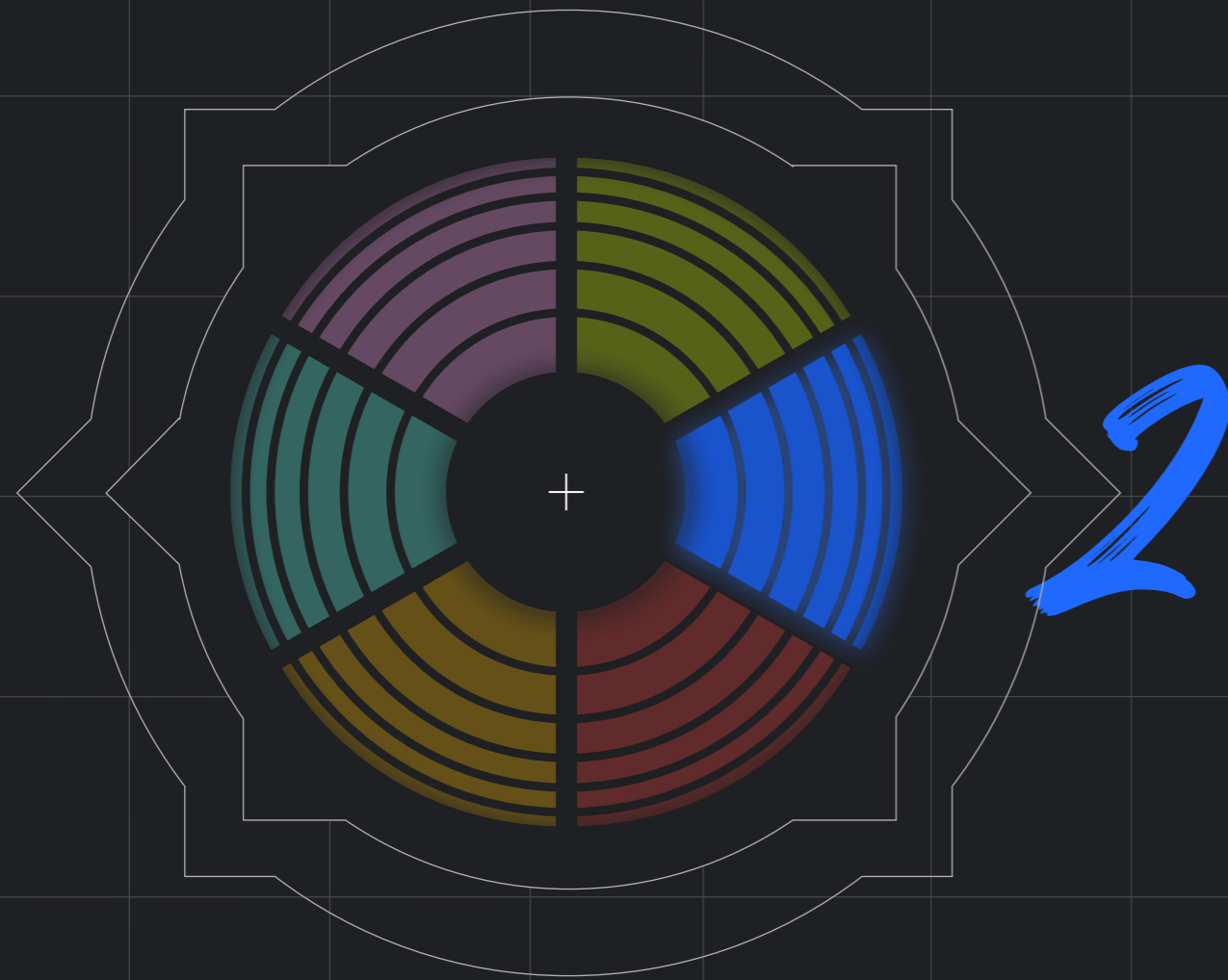
1 2 3 4 5

We express a unique view, distinct from our peers, which enables our customers to take a long-term view of complex and evolving market trends.

1 2 3 4 5

YOUR SCORE

/ 25



IDEA INTELLIGENCE.

The power to transform foresight into genuine thought leadership – clear, differentiated ideas and narratives that shape how customers think and act.

When making high-stakes B2B buying decisions, leaders identify Idea Intelligence as the most important capability for strategic partners to demonstrate. In a crowded market, C-Suite buyers are looking for partners who help them think differently, and to achieve this, brands must position themselves as true thought leaders.

Ninety-seven percent of leaders say their most valuable partners produce genuinely new ideas and thought leadership that changes how they think about their business challenges and opportunities. This is thought leadership in its truest sense: **storytelling that motivates action** by showcasing intelligence advantage.

Any impactful piece of thought leadership must be built around a strong core idea: 92% of leaders value strategic partners who are genuine thought leaders, providing insights and thought leadership based on a strong, singular core idea, rather than broad commentary.

This core idea needs to be distinctive. Leaders aren't looking for 'Thought Followers': 91% expect strategic partners to create thought leadership that provides genuinely new perspectives on key issues and debates. And 96% particularly value partners who start new waves of thinking and shape the business agenda with content and thought leadership that is genuinely differentiated: based on ownable ideas and IP distinct from competitor thinking and market norms.

To create an **effective action story**, B2B marketers must translate ideas into a clear case for customers to change something in their businesses. Nine in 10 leaders (91%) expect strategic partners to share compelling ideas that highlight an opportunity or threat they should act on.

The Thought Maker® advantage.

According to the C-Suite, thought leadership is the best proxy for a supplier's real capability. Ninety-three percent of leaders increasingly use a supplier's thought leadership to judge their real capabilities, finding it more credible and revealing than their product or service marketing collateral.

Leaders want to hear thinking in the supplier's voice. Not only is 'thought sponsorship' no substitute for genuine thought leadership, but it can be detrimental to brands' perceived status. Ninety-one percent of leaders say that when they see content that is co-branded with a media or research partner, they assume this is 'thought sponsorship' as a financial transaction, and it does not increase their perception of the company's intelligence advantage.

Our research highlights the critical influence of thought leadership on the buying process. It's no surprise that 82% of leaders say that when a supplier's thinking shapes how they frame a problem, they're more inclined to give that supplier a leading role in solving it. And 93% say high-quality thought leadership that demonstrates a supplier's intelligence advantage significantly increases their likelihood of considering them for major deals.

The impact of thought leadership extends beyond conversion, supporting premium pricing and larger mandates. Eighty-four percent of leaders say they have paid, or would pay, a premium to work with suppliers whose thought leadership they regard as market-leading. And 91% say that if a supplier consistently produces thought leadership that is ahead of competitors, they are willing to allocate a larger share of spend to them.

91%

of leaders believe that high-quality, insight-driven thought leadership is one of the main ways a supplier can demonstrate its intelligence advantage.



WHAT LEADERS SAY

Ownable ideas that travel.

"We value partners who originate clear, memorable frameworks or named/branded concepts that travel well inside our organisation."

89%

"We particularly respect partners who have named ideas, methods, tools and benchmarks that we associate with that brand alone."

91%

84%

84% of leaders always consider a strategic supplier's thought leadership content when making a buying decision – an increase of 10% from our 2024 study.

DEEP DIVE

The value of thought leadership in the age of AI.

Search engines and large language models (LLMs) are increasingly capable of recognising AI generated or derivative content and routinely down rank it as unsubstantive. And leaders can spot it too, with brand-damaging consequences.

- 91% of leaders believe that for suppliers claiming to be Intelligent Brands, AI slop is **unacceptable** and undermines the very idea of intelligence advantage
- 91% say that if content appears to be generic or AI generated, they assume there is limited expert involvement and **downgrade the supplier's credibility**
- 87% see reliance on AI-generated content as a sign of **weaker supplier expertise**
- 89% are **less likely to act** on recommendations or insights they believe have been generated by AI rather than human specialists
- 89% find it **insulting** if a key supplier targets them with AI generated content that lacks human expertise, creativity and credibility.

By contrast, genuine thought leadership - grounded in original ideas, proprietary data, and lived experience - has become a decisive advantage. It's what makes search engines surface your work, what makes AI cite it, and what makes customers share and discuss it. AI tools can assist production, but they cannot replace the judgement, creativity and analytical depth of seasoned experts.

Not all content is created equal: 89% of leaders see a clear difference between brands that publish content and brands that provide genuine thought leadership. In the generative engine optimisation (GEO) era, effective thought leadership must do more than comment; it must shape thinking and motivate action.

Man Bites Dog's **Thought Makers campaign** champions the brands using thought leadership to start new waves of thinking and supercharge both brand and sales. It also shares our five steps to successful thought leadership, helping you generate differentiated ideas, support them with substantial data, and amplify them effectively in the market to become a true Thought Maker®.

THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

Idea Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of Idea Intelligence?

Define your big idea →

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

We are genuine thought leaders, providing insights and thought leadership based on a **strong singular core idea**, rather than broad commentary.

1 2 3 4 5

We create thought leadership that provides genuinely **new perspectives** on key issues and debates.

1 2 3 4 5

We start new **waves of thinking** and shape the business agenda with content and thought leadership that is genuinely differentiated: based on ownable ideas and IP distinct from competitor thinking and market norms.

1 2 3 4 5

We share compelling ideas that highlight an opportunity or threat we should act on.

1 2 3 4 5

We make our intelligence advantage visible in the market and share our intelligence and ideas through **innovative and engaging** content formats and channels.

1 2 3 4 5

YOUR SCORE

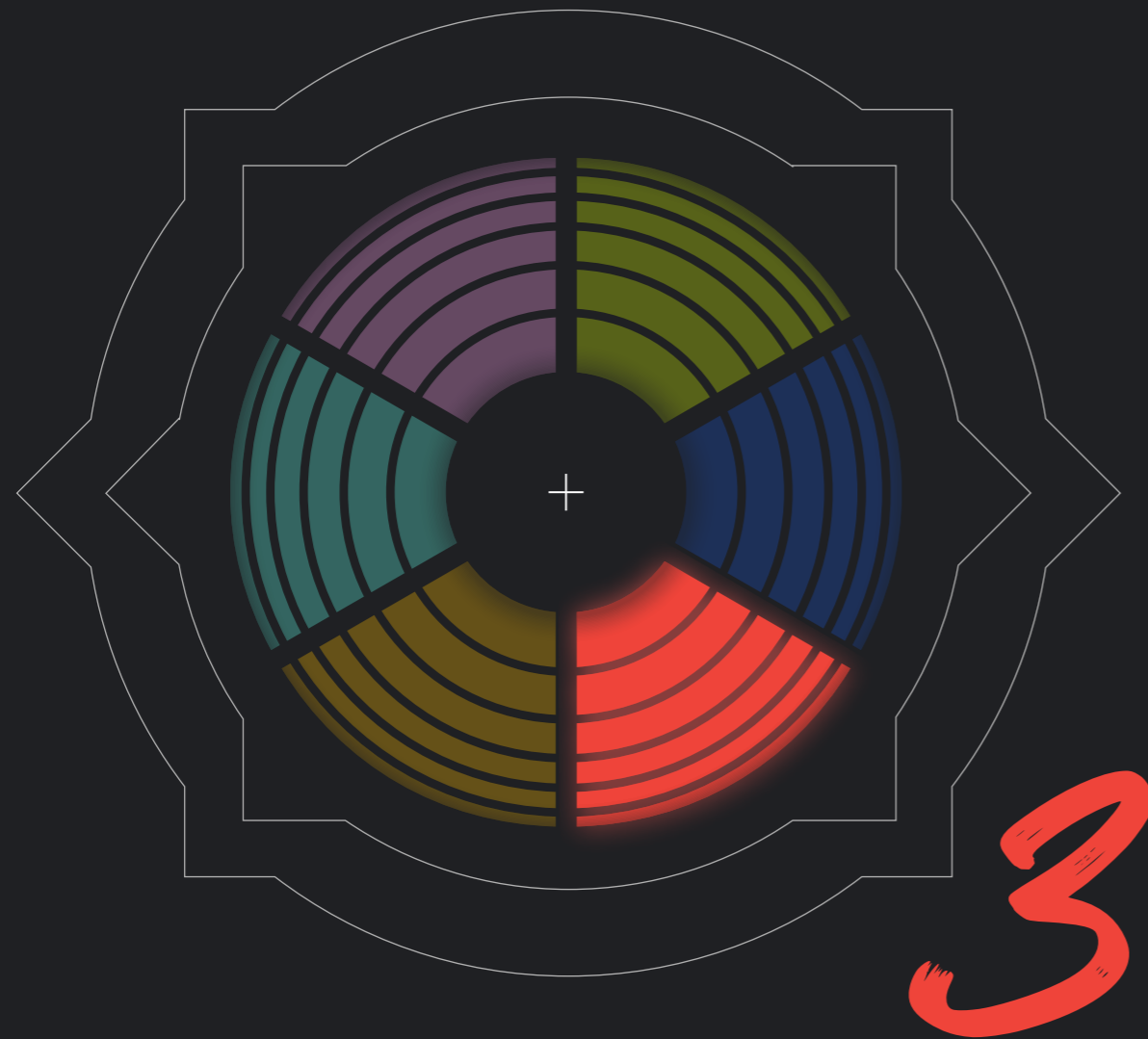
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CORE IDEA

TO DO LIST:





Intelligent Brands® stand out when they show they truly understand the customer's world. This begins with a strong grasp of the customer's industry, market and operating context - with 90% of leaders expecting their partners to demonstrate exactly that.

This understanding must translate into marketing that is 'outside-in', rather than 'inside-out'. Business leaders are clear that they're looking for integrated solutions focused on their specific goals. Ninety-five percent want to partner with suppliers that have propositions, solutions and content clearly focused on solving customer problems and helping them seize opportunities, rather than promoting services and products.

For B2B marketers, this means being able to tell a compelling **partnership story** that connects your offering to the outcomes customers want to achieve, showing you can help them reduce risk and create value.

From siloes to solutions: marketing the matrix.

Solving complex problems requires integration. Customers don't experience their world in silos, and they don't want their partners to operate in them either. Ninety-one percent of leaders say it damages their perception of a partner when they receive multiple, uncoordinated approaches and marketing communications from different parts of the organisation. This presents a challenge for complex B2B organisations whose marketing teams must 'market the matrix', navigating siloed propositions across products and services,

go-to-market sectors and geographies.

Leaders are equally clear about what they do expect: 91% prefer suppliers that bring joined up, integrated solutions - combining people, methods, technology and data - rather than siloed products or services. Intelligent Brands stand apart by orchestrating multiple touchpoints into a single, coherent customer experience.

Effective B2B sales enablement and account-based marketing (ABM) programmes help clarify the customer journey by aligning marketing and sales behind one unified message. And thought leadership acts as the golden thread that ties all of this together, creating a single, coherent narrative that builds trust and reinforces intelligence advantage at every touchpoint.

Turning intelligence into decision tools.

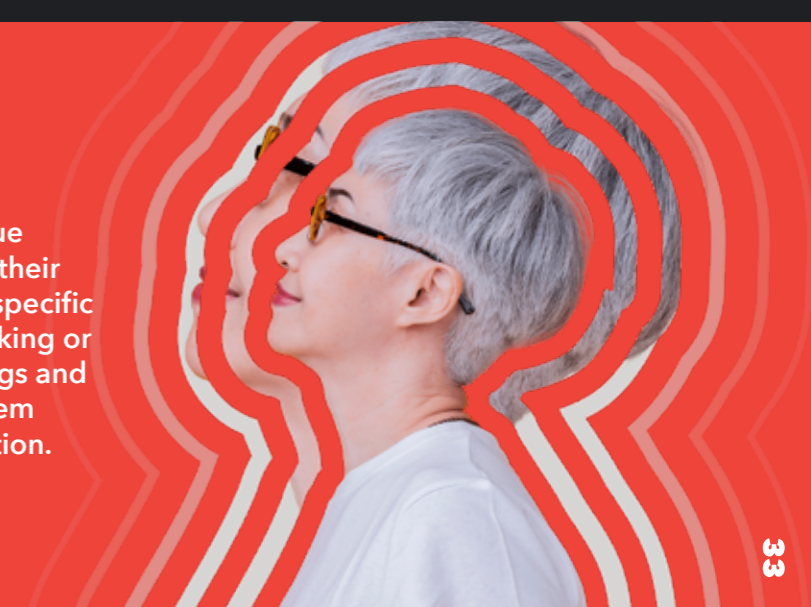
Translating proprietary data into practical models and tools strengthens this further, creating **gateway services** that are critical in the sales conversion process. Assets such as diagnostic tools, frameworks and roadmaps turn big ideas into structured conversations that help executives identify gaps and prioritise action.

CUSTOMER INTELLIGENCE.

The demonstration of true customer-centricity by showing how solutions align with customer markets, contexts and needs.

93%

of leaders say they value suppliers who can link their thought leadership to specific assessment, benchmarking or roadmap tools, meetings and experiences to help them bridge from idea to action.



WHAT LEADERS SAY

DEEP DIVE

Account-based thought leadership®.

At the highest level of customer-centricity, C-Suite buyers want thought leadership that speaks directly to them. Nine in 10 leaders pay more attention to suppliers who bring ideas, insights and benchmarks specific to their organisation, not just their industry.

In an age of general marketing noise, personalisation has become one of the strongest signals of an Intelligent Brand. In fact, 96% of leaders say they're more likely to engage with a supplier who tailors their marketing, content and thought leadership specifically to their organisation, rather than relying on generic material.

Account-based thought leadership goes beyond traditional ABM tactics, delivering highly tailored insight and strategic guidance to key prospects. This is ideas-led selling in practice, using bespoke campaigns and content to support profitable conversations and accelerate high value opportunities.

Customised content gains attention. Ninety-five percent of leaders say that when a supplier's marketing and thought leadership is tailored specifically to their organisation, it positively influences how they see the brand.

More than that, it impacts buying decisions: 91% of leaders say they are more likely to choose suppliers whose marketing and sales approach makes them feel like a priority account, not just one of many prospects. And 93% of leaders say that when a supplier shows deep understanding of their organisation and brings them account-specific solutions (through account-based marketing and account-based thought leadership), it increases their confidence in selecting them.



Account-based thought leadership unlocks a different level of influence, taking big ideas out of the abstract and showing customers exactly how you can help them win. This hyper-personalisation is what really takes insight from content to commercial advantage."



CUSTOMER CONTEXT

Fiona Buckley.
DIVISIONAL DIRECTOR
MAN BITES DOG



THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

Customer Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of Customer Intelligence?

Connect on your customers' terms

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

We demonstrate a deep understanding of our customers' **industry, market** and operating **context**. 1 2 3 4 5

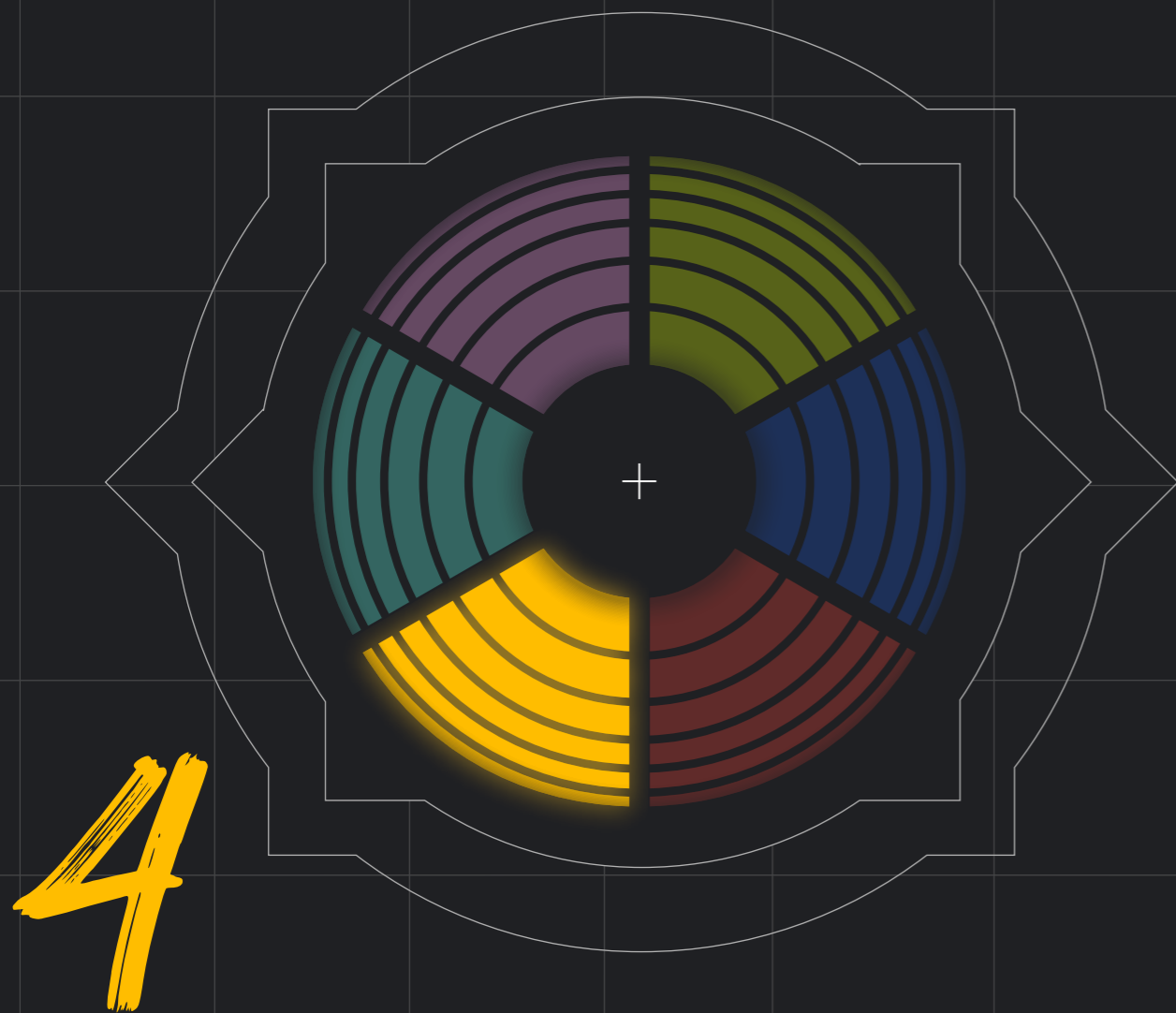
We have propositions, solutions and content clearly focused on **solving our customers' problems** and helping them seize opportunities, rather than promoting our services and products. 1 2 3 4 5

We bring joined-up **integrated solutions** (people, methods, technology, data) rather than siloed products or services. 1 2 3 4 5

We invest in our customer relationships with **relevant** propositions, content and marketing that can be personalised. 1 2 3 4 5

We **tailor** our marketing, content, thought leadership and outreach specifically to individual customers rather than providing generic material. 1 2 3 4 5

YOUR SCORE / 25



HUMAN INTELLIGENCE.

The showcasing of visible, credible experts and executive leaders who are recognised and respected as authorities in their fields.

We are entering the new age of experts. As AI multiplies generic content, credible, named experts now offer the sharpest point of differentiation a brand can have.

Nine in 10 C-Suite leaders believe that in a world of AI generated content, demonstrating an organisation's human expertise and credibility is more important than ever. And 94% of leaders favour partners with visible, credible subject matter experts with deep domain expertise and recognised authority.

This is only set to increase, with 91% of leaders stating that over the next few years, they expect the value of genuine expertise and experience to rise, not fall, as AI becomes more widespread. And 90% believe that in a world where AI is delivering more execution, they expect human experts to become more sought after for their value-add.

When decisions carry significant risk, leaders want the reassurance of people whose names, reputations and track records they recognise. It's the reason 87% of leaders say they pay attention to content when they know who is behind it and what their track record is. And 93% say thought leadership that is clearly authored or owned by senior experts gives them more confidence than anonymous or generic content.

Conviction is the new currency. In a market saturated with bland, neutral content, there's huge value in experts who are willing to nail their colours to the mast: 92% of leaders say the experts they value most show conviction in their views and are prepared to stand behind their judgement and recommendations, and 94% value partners who can demonstrate judgement -

experts who get off the fence and offer bold ideas and strong opinions.

This conviction must be paired with consultancy, not just commentary. For 91% of leaders, the best experts turn complex information into directional clarity, making it obvious what their next move should be and helping them build the story they need to share with their leadership team.

At the highest level, human intelligence should also be demonstrated beyond your subject matter experts. The most effective Intelligent Brands® also harness the power of their executive leaders, with 89% of business leaders valuing partners whose executives are visible and respected authorities in their fields.

Intelligent Brands activate their people - their subject matter experts, their senior executives, their thought leaders - as both a key source of content and as a channel to market. This plays a major role in influencing buying decisions.

But this isn't a story of humans versus machines and models. Ninety-one percent of leaders say that, over the next three years, they will favour partners who combine leading technology with visible human expertise, not those that rely on AI to replace experts. In the **Intelligence Economy**, brands will win by mastering this 'hybrid intelligence'.

85% of leaders believe organisations that invest in expert-led content demonstrate stronger capability and credibility.



WHAT LEADERS SAY

The expert advantage.

89%

of leaders believe the calibre of a supplier's people and experts matters more than their products or platforms, for complex, high-value buying decisions.

87%

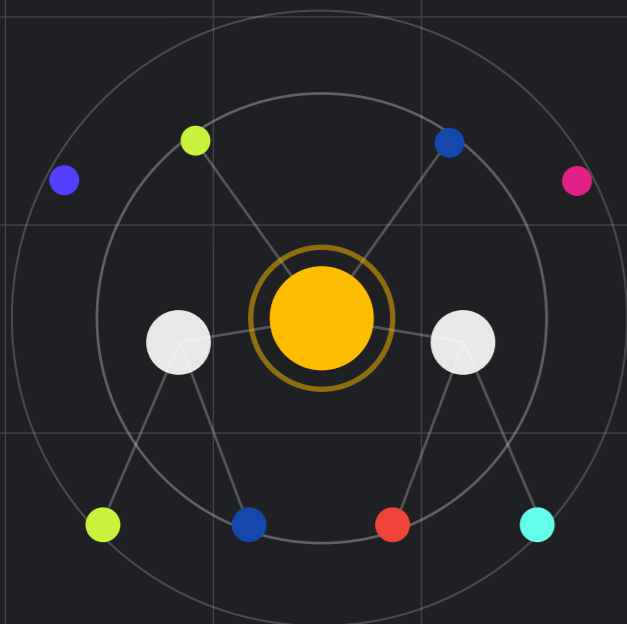
say that, for high-stakes decisions, they trust the judgement of named experts more than automated or AI-generated recommendations.

87%

predict that, however powerful AI becomes, having access to credible human experts will remain a key reason they choose one supplier over another.

89%

are more willing to act on bold recommendations when they come from expert individuals they regard as true authorities.



EXPERT AUTHORITY



THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

Human Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of Human Intelligence?

Switch on your experts

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

We have visible, credible subject matter **experts** with deep domain expertise and recognised authority. 1 2 3 4 5

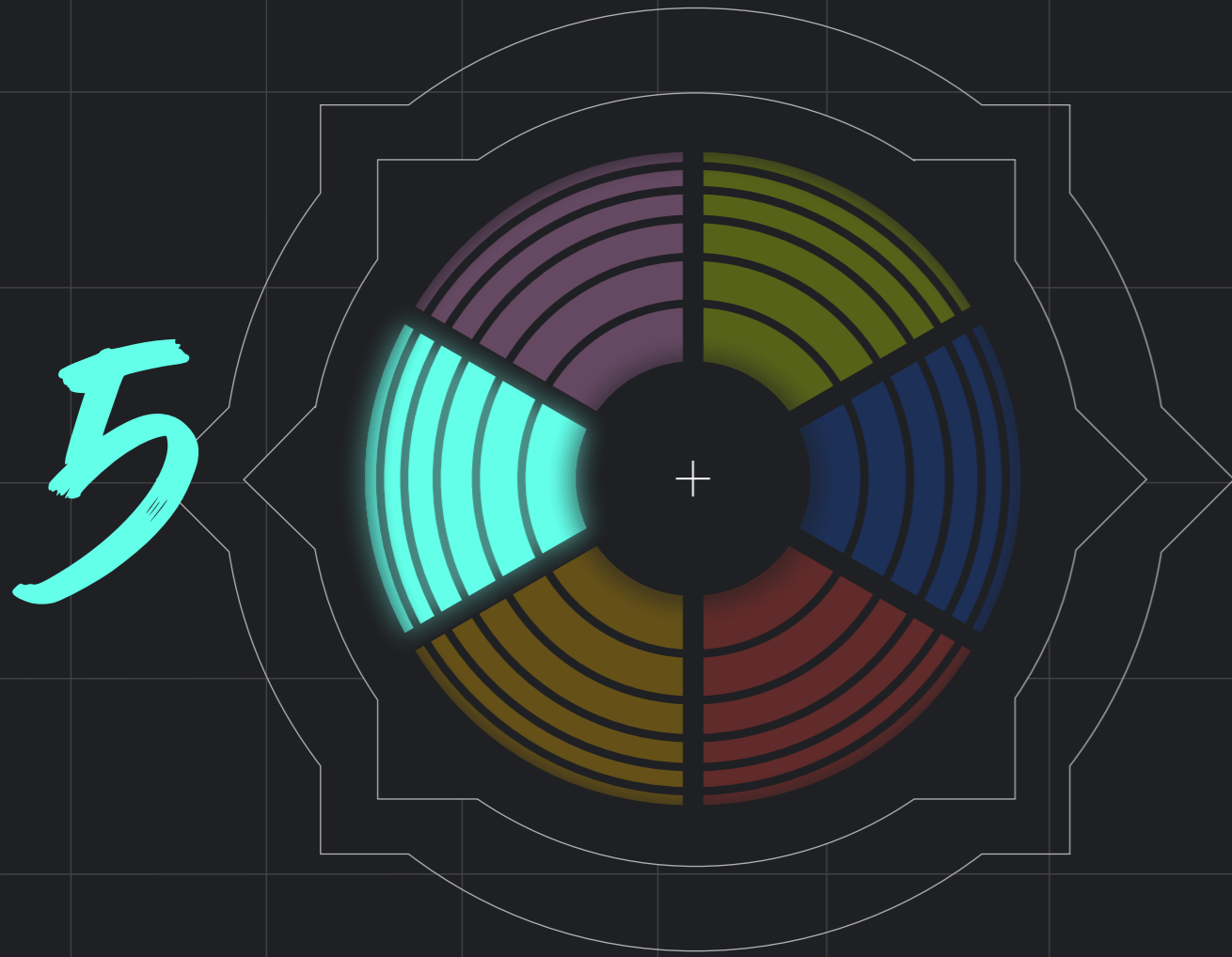
Our experts are willing to show **conviction** in their views and are prepared to stand behind their judgement and recommendations. 1 2 3 4 5

Our experts turn complex information into **directional clarity**, making it obvious what customers' next moves should be and helping them build the story they need to influence their own C-Suite. 1 2 3 4 5

We are acknowledged **thought leaders** - seen to be leading the industry and shaping debate. 1 2 3 4 5

Our **executive leaders** are visible and respected authorities in their fields. 1 2 3 4 5

YOUR SCORE / 25



With every organisation now effectively operating as a technology company, customers expect partners who are visibly AI enabled and genuinely data driven - regardless of sector. Intelligent Brands are expected to clearly demonstrate how AI enhances their expertise and elevates the value they deliver.

C-Suite leaders want to see that their strategic partners are using AI for more than time saving or cost cutting: 94% prefer partners who can show clearly how their operational use of AI improves the quality of their ideas, insights and recommendations, not just their efficiency.

When human judgement is amplified by digital tools, from agentic AI to advanced analytics and intelligent automation, teams can operate at an entirely new level. With richer data and faster learning loops, sales and marketing teams can be more agile. They can read the market in real time, refine solutions continuously and anticipate customer needs ahead of competitors. And the more systems learn, the sharper and more impactful the insight becomes. In this sense, AI doesn't kill marketing, only bad marketing: the generic, the slow and the shallow.

Leaders also expect strategic partners to stay on top of ongoing digital disruption: 97% expect their most important partners to demonstrate they are ahead of the curve in understanding how AI will change their industry, context and operating model.

'Show, don't tell' has become the new rule for credibility. Clients increasingly expect partners to act as client zero for their own AI capabilities, openly sharing how they're experimenting and what they've learned. Beyond demonstrating their internal capability, leaders want partners who can guide their AI journey: 91% say that when a supplier can show them concrete AI use cases and roadmaps for their business, it increases their strategic importance.

Buyer confidence rises further when partners use digital tools to enhance their content with innovative formats and sophisticated delivery. Ninety-three percent of leaders say that when partners use AI and other technology in the personalisation and delivery of their content, it gives them greater confidence in their overall AI and digital capability. This shows that technology can enhance credibility, but only when it amplifies real insight.

For high-stakes decisions, however, substance still beats novelty. Business leaders continue to place a premium on well crafted long form reports, and expect marketers to start with robust thinking and then orchestrate it across multiple formats.

AUGMENTED INTELLIGENCE.

The enhancement of human expertise with digital, data and AI to deliver insights and solutions at scale.

85%

of leaders say Intelligent Brands® help them spot opportunities and risks they would otherwise miss, giving them an edge in the market.





AI + HUMAN EXPERTISE

TO DO LIST:



THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

Augmented Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of Augmented Intelligence?

Scale intelligence with AI →

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

We demonstrably use AI to **enhance** our intelligence advantage, not just to cut costs.

1 2 3 4 5

We consistently demonstrate we are ahead of the curve in understanding how AI will change our **customers' industries, contexts and operating models.**

1 2 3 4 5

We clearly show customers how our **operational use of AI** improves the quality of our ideas, insights and recommendations, not just our efficiency.

1 2 3 4 5

We show customers concrete **AI use cases and roadmaps** for their business.

1 2 3 4 5

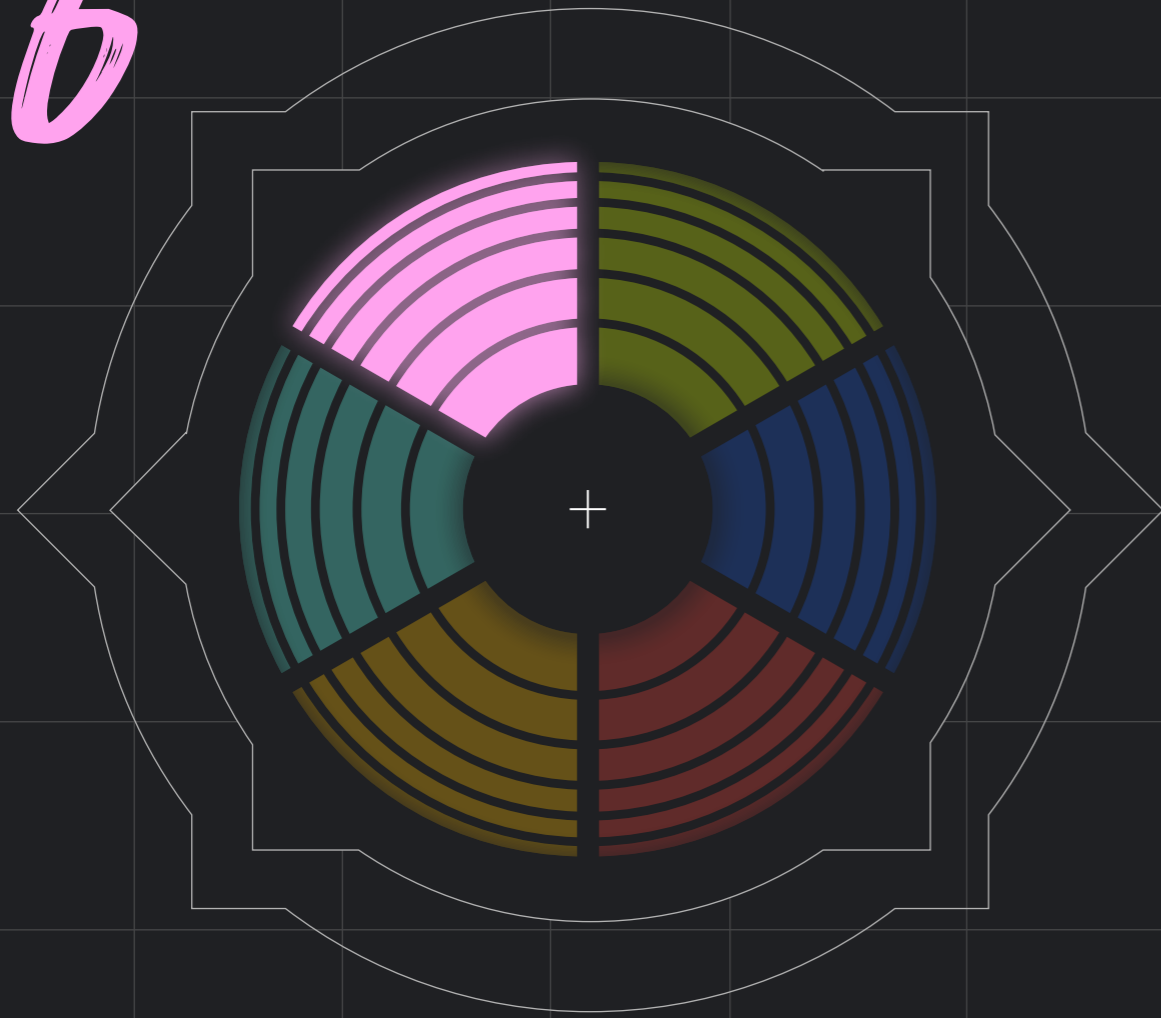
We use AI and other technology in the **personalisation and delivery** of our content.

1 2 3 4 5

YOUR SCORE

/ 25

6



In today's high-stakes environment, B2B buying decisions aren't made by a single 'buying committee', but across stacked buying 'layers'. To sell high-value services, global B2B companies must engage at every layer, from operational teams through to the boardroom.

Due to the sophistication and complexity of their products and services, B2B sales and marketing teams have traditionally been more comfortable selling at the technical and functional levels. But high-stakes decisions increasingly hinge on a brand's ability to connect with the C-Suite.

Senior leaders expect their strategic partners to speak directly to the issues at the top of the board agenda. Ninety-three percent prioritise partners who, through their marketing and thought leadership, demonstrate a clear understanding of board-level issues such as growth, risk, capital allocation and transformation. And 92% prefer to engage with partners who develop campaigns, events and publications that are clearly designed for senior decision-makers, not only for technical or functional specialists.

B2B marketers must produce executive ready content - content that can be taken into a board meeting and help leadership teams make sense of change and decide what to do next. This is where gateway services, such as diagnostic tools, frameworks and roadmaps, become really powerful. They turn big ideas into structured conversations that help executives identify gaps and prioritise action. Ninety-six percent of

leaders say they value partners that create thought leadership, content and frameworks that can be used directly with the C-Suite and board, without major translation.

With business leaders under relentless pressure to innovate, B2B marketers have a major opportunity to bridge critical knowledge gaps: 95% of leaders value insight-rich content, thought leadership and communities that provide executive education and knowledge. This requires a shift in how marketers approach events, with traditional hospitality no longer enough. Ninety-two percent of business leaders are finding it increasingly difficult to justify spending leadership time on hospitality activities, preferring insight and information-rich experiences from their partners.

Events are still relevant, but the expectation has changed. High-stakes B2B suppliers must deliver learning led customer experiences that bring experts and business leaders together for valuable conversations. Thought leadership will play a key role in feeding event programmes, making them more valuable, engaging and commercially impactful.

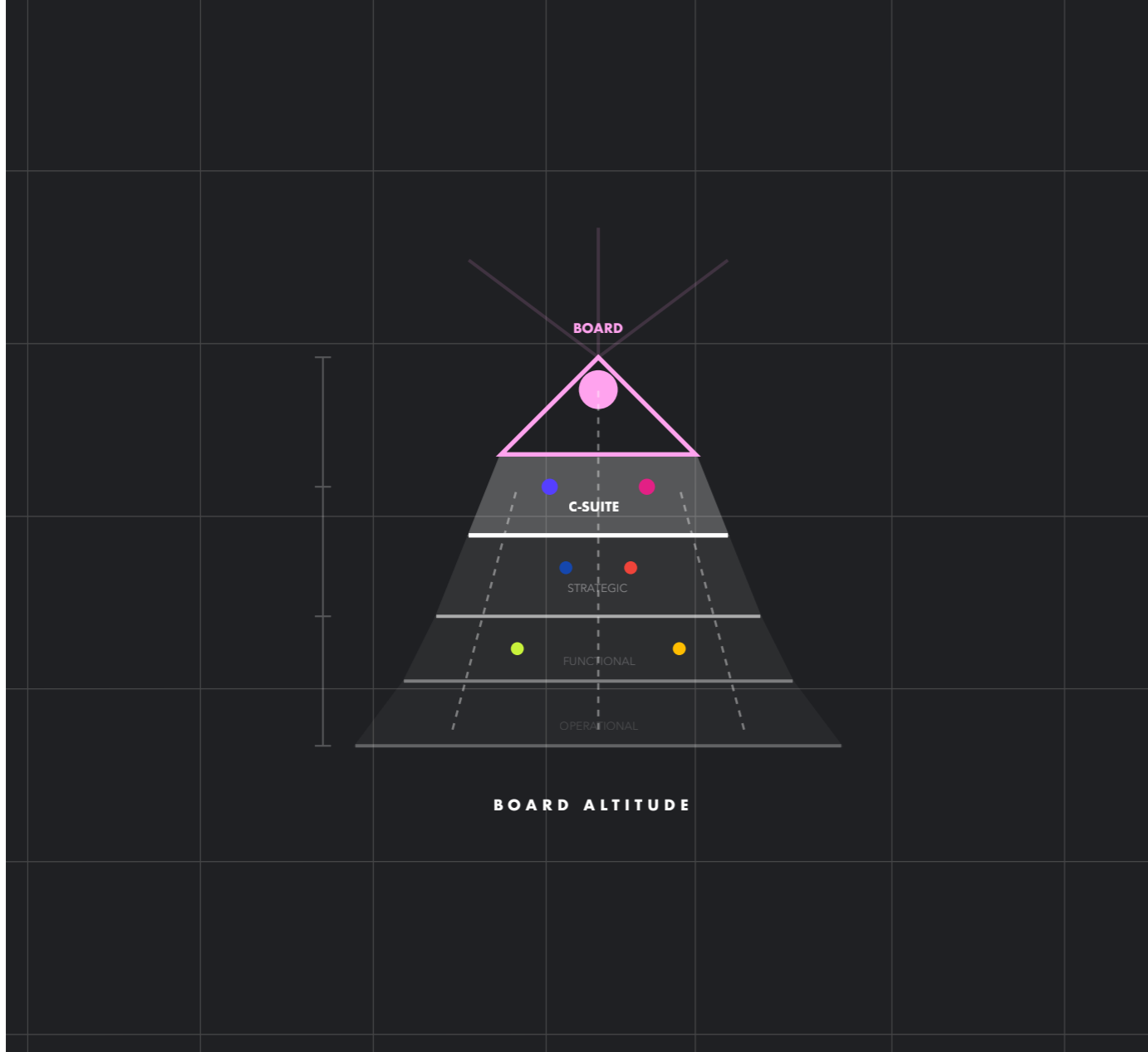
C-SUITE INTELLIGENCE.

The elevation of thinking to C-Suite and board altitude, addressing business-level strategy rather than functional or technical concerns.

95%

of leaders say they have greatest confidence in partners who have experts who can talk at business and board level, not only at technical and functional depth.





THE INTELLIGENT BRANDS® CHECKLIST

C-Suite Intelligence.

How strongly do you believe your organisation demonstrates the key aspects of C-Suite Intelligence?

Speak the language of the C-Suite

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE | 5 = STRONGLY AGREE

Our marketing and thought leadership demonstrates a clear understanding of **board-level issues** such as growth, risk, capital allocation and transformation.

1 2 3 4 5

We develop campaigns, events and publications that are clearly **designed for senior decision-makers**, not only for technical or functional specialists.

1 2 3 4 5

We create **thought leadership, content and frameworks** that can be used directly with customers' C-Suite and board, without major translation.

1 2 3 4 5

We deploy our own **executives** in addition to subject matter experts, as thought leaders on C-Suite issues.

1 2 3 4 5

We provide **insight-rich** content, thought leadership and communities that provide executive education and knowledge to our customers.

1 2 3 4 5

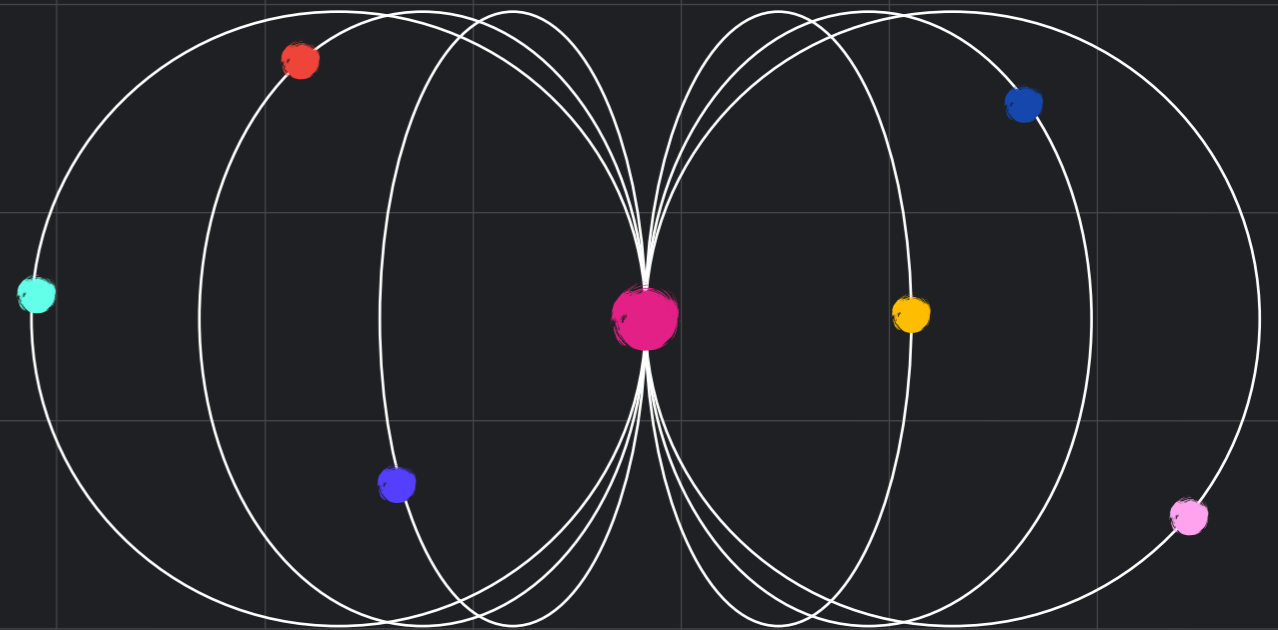
YOUR SCORE

/ 25

TO DO LIST:



04



PART FOUR

**THE INTELLIGENT
BRAND® GAP.**

Buyer expectations are evolving faster than many organisations can adapt. Today’s decision-makers expect their strategic partners to demonstrate visible expertise, clear intelligence and a distinct point of view.

But across industries, there is a clear gap between what buyers say they need and expect from strategic suppliers and how they actually rate them.

We compared importance (how critical it is that organisations in each sector are seen as Intelligent Brands® when buyers make high-stakes decisions) with perception (which organisations leaders currently regard as Intelligent Brands). The distance between these two scores is the Intelligent Brand gap. In almost all sectors, importance is many times higher than current perception, meaning expectations of Intelligent Brand behaviour are significantly higher than the reality leaders experience today.



While **95%** of business leaders say it is important for organisations in key sectors to be seen as Intelligent Brands, on average only **38%** of those organisations achieve Intelligent Brand status, with the lowest performing sector facing a more than 9x expectation-perception gap.

This Intelligent Brand gap is most pronounced in sectors where complex decisions, high-stakes and specialist knowledge should naturally position brands as authorities. Instead, many fall short of demonstrating the level of intelligence and insight buyers expect. These organisations are often “quiet brands” - rich in expertise but underpowered in how they express it.

The legal sector is a striking example. While law firms aspire to be strategic advisors to the corporate C- Suite, their clients expect them to behave like Intelligent Brands far more than they currently experience them as such. The expectation for Intelligent Brand behaviour is 9.3x higher than today’s perception.

We see a similar pattern in private markets. As private equity and private credit move from the margins to become a mainstream engine of global growth, business leaders expect the sector to bring sharper conviction, differentiated insight and clearer foresight to the table.

Instead, with a 6x Intelligent Brand gap, they perform markedly worse than their banking counterparts, highlighting a critical opportunity for a sector now under the spotlight and expected to steward the next wave of economic value.

Asset and wealth management firms also face a significant 4.4x Intelligent Brand gap. Institutional and high net worth clients now expect managers to act as strategic guides through structural shifts in markets, inflation, geopolitics and sustainability.

Yet many firms still lead with products and performance tables, rather than a clear, differentiated point of view on where value will be created next. Firms that fail to make their intelligence visible risk becoming interchangeable, while those that behave like Intelligent Brands are more likely to win discretionary mandates, defend fees and become default partners for long term capital.



The built environment, engineering and infrastructure sectors face the same challenge. These firms design and deliver much of the hard infrastructure behind the energy transition, urban renewal and resilient supply chains. Their expertise is undeniable, yet they remain among the quietest of all. With a 4.4x Intelligent Brand gap, their visibility, narrative and leadership presence lag significantly behind what buyers expect from the organisations shaping our future infrastructure.

Professional services firms should be the archetype of Intelligent Brands, with their entire business model built on selling judgment, insight and advisory capability. But rather than being recognised as the sharpest thinkers, they are often perceived as less intelligent than buyers expect, with some of the largest Intelligent Brand gaps in our study (3.3x for management consultancy firms and 3.2x for accountancy firms). This is a clear call for brands to do more to demonstrate their intelligence advantage.

Energy and resources firms are under increasing expectation to be Intelligent Brands, but in reality, just a third of business leaders see them as such. As energy economics, resilience and transition top the agenda, these firms are expected to demonstrate intelligence advantage beyond the technical - connecting engineering depth with strategic insight on policy, markets and society.

While financial services firms appear to be doing better, the gap remains substantial (1.7x). In commercial and corporate banking, where clients are rethinking capital structures, liquidity and risk amid volatility, this shortfall matters. Rising competition from private markets and specialist fintechs, along with sustained regulatory and margin pressure, means relationship banks can no longer rely on balance sheet strength alone. They need to evidence superior intelligence on sectors, capital flows and risk. Firms that make this intelligence advantage visible are far better positioned to shape strategic conversations, win lead bank status and defend economics on complex deals.

Only technology firms come close to meeting expectations, but even here the bar is set higher than current performance: leaders are 1.4x more likely to say tech firms should behave like Intelligent Brands than to say they actually do. That gap is a strategic opening. As AI, quantum and digital transformation redefine business models, tech companies are uniquely placed to set the agenda, translate complex innovation into board ready narratives and architect their clients' transformation roadmaps.

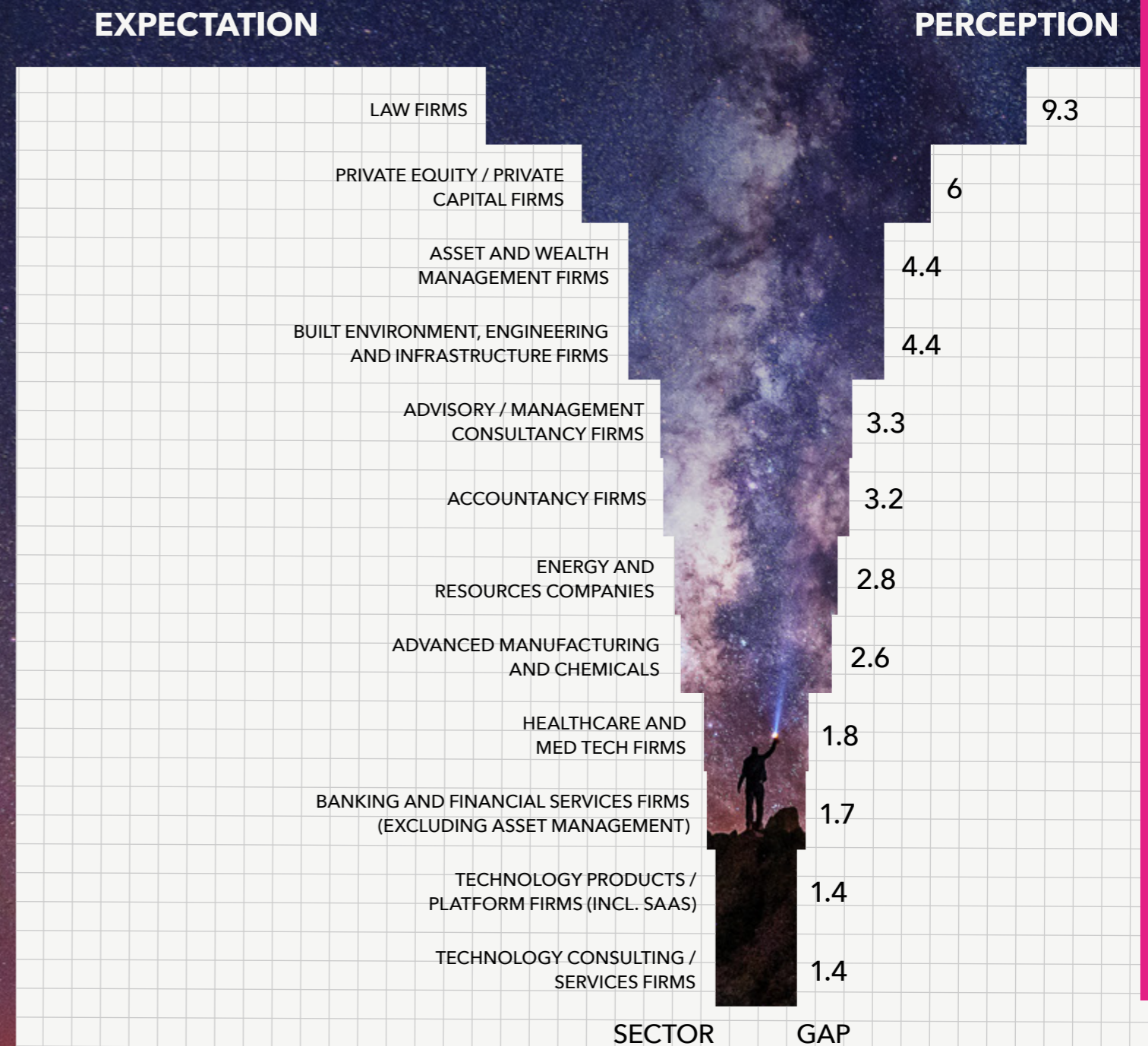
As B2B has moved from transactional deals to transformational partnerships, and from technical buyers to the C-Suite, closing this gap must become a strategic priority for marketing and sales leaders. No sector is exempt: every industry has work to do to meet the new standard of intelligence buyers now demand.

Many organisations have deep expertise, but buyers aren't consistently seeing it - and when intelligence advantage isn't visible, it isn't valued. The brands that will win the next wave of high-stakes growth are those that make their intelligence advantage impossible to miss.

The Intelligent Brand[®] gap.

How business leaders' expectations outpace reality by sector.

"We compared **importance** (how critical it is that organisations in each sector are seen as Intelligent Brands when buyers make high-stakes decisions) with **perception** (which organisations leaders currently regard as Intelligent Brands). The distance between these two scores is the Intelligent Brand[®] gap."



HOW TO WIN IN THE INTELLIGENCE ECONOMY.

Our research outlines a clear change in the rules of B2B growth. In a world of larger deals, higher scrutiny and more collective decision-making, the old model of trust, familiarity and brand awareness is no longer enough to move high-stakes decisions forward.

Trust still matters, but it has become table stakes. It may get you considered, but it rarely gets you chosen when the C-Suite is weighing up risk, reputation, investment and long-term impact. What buyers now need is decision-grade confidence: clear proof that a partner has the intelligence, insight and authority to help them act with conviction.

That is why intelligence advantage has become the new source of competitive advantage in B2B. Organisations that make their superior ideas, experts, data and technology visible do more than build reputation; they reduce uncertainty, unlock confidence and make commitment easier. In other words, they behave like Intelligent Brands®.

For marketing and sales leaders, this is not a messaging tweak. It's a playbook change. Rather than focusing on building trust or awareness at the top of the funnel, they must focus on engineering the confidence that helps complex buying groups say "yes".

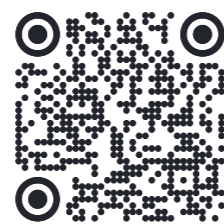
Marketers need to treat intelligence as an operating system, not a campaign - bringing together foresight, ideas, customers, humans, augmentation and the C-Suite into an intelligence advantage that's impossible to ignore.

This report introduces the Intelligent Brands system as a practical way to do that, helping you understand where you are today, where the gaps are, and how you can build towards inspiring decision-grade confidence in your customers. Use the checklists to sense-check your brand against the six dimensions, select high-impact moves, and shape programmes that make decisions feel clearer and safer for your customers.

Whether you are building an Intelligent Brand or testing your current strategy against this framework, Man Bites Dog can help. With 21 years' experience partnering with Intelligent Brands across the world, we can work with you to apply the Intelligent Brands system to your markets, your buyers and your growth ambitions.

To continue the conversation, or discuss your checklist results, get in touch with one of our experts. We won't bite!

You can also complete the full Intelligent Brands online assessment at manbitesdog.com/intelligent-brands



hello@manbitesdog.com

CONVINCING DECISION



Glossary.

High-stakes B2B partners/suppliers	Providers of high-value services and products to the corporate C-Suite, often requiring significant investment, risk and collaboration to achieve outcomes.
High-stakes B2B decisions	B2B relationships, deals and decisions where the financial, strategic or operational consequences are so significant that C-Suite leaders demand very high levels of evidence, reassurance and confidence before they commit.
Decisive-confidence / Decision-grade confidence	The elevated level of certainty C-Suite leaders need to commit to a high-stakes B2B decision, early and at scale.
Intelligence advantage	The competitive edge of companies that visibly demonstrate superior ideas, experts, data and technology - inspiring confidence in their ability to help customers achieve outcomes and navigate what's next with greater clarity, confidence and quality of decision-making.
Intelligent Brand®	An intelligent brand is a highly authoritative B2B partner whose intelligence advantage (superior ideas, experts, data and technology) is made consistently visible through its brand, marketing and thought leadership, giving C-Suite buyers decisive-confidence in high-stakes B2B decisions.
The Next Economy	The emerging corporate landscape, defined by fast-developing risks and opportunities. A world that is greener (more sustainable) and smarter (tech-enabled) - but also more volatile.
Thought leader	An expert, brand or company recognised for their intelligence advantage.
Thought leadership	Thought leadership is storytelling that motivates action by showcasing intelligence advantage.
Thought Maker®	The highest form of thought leader, evaluated by Man Bites Dog's thought leadership effectiveness matrix. Thought Maker status is based on exceptional differentiation and amplification of ideas. See our Thought Makers report for more detail by visiting manbitesdog.com/thought-makers-thought-leadership

About the study.

Intelligent Brands is an in-depth thought leadership study conducted by Man Bites Dog in 2026. This report is based on international opinion research with 150 C-Suite executives with buying decision responsibility in very large B2B organisations (companies with an average revenue of \$8 billion), headquartered in the US, UK and Europe.

The Intelligent Brands report is based on research design, data analysis and content development by Man Bites Dog.

Opinion research fieldwork was conducted by Coleman Parkes, a full-service B2B market research agency specialising in IT/technology studies, targeting senior decision makers in SMB and large enterprises across multiple sectors globally.

About Man Bites Dog.

Man Bites Dog is the Growth Department for Intelligent Brands. We are a creative business and marketing consultancy that helps global B2B companies unleash growth through brand positioning, thought leadership and sales enablement. We combine the commercial strategy of a management consultancy with the big ideas of a creative agency and the data and economic insights of a business intelligence firm.

For more information, contact hello@manbitesdog.com or visit manbitesdog.com



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