

How the B2B sector is embracing the power of brand, community, storytelling, and more to accelerate growth



### Introduction

When it comes to today's business relationships, brand reputation has become a critical factor. Research suggests that brand image is **40%** of the reason business-to-business (B2B) customers choose a new partner, and a recent study by McKinsey suggests B2B companies with strong brands financially outperform companies with weak ones by almost **20%**.

MEANING

There is a lot at stake when choosing a new tech platform for your business- or enterprise-level supplier. B2B decision-makers are practically betting their jobs with every major purchase decision, often changing the operations of their entire company by installing a platform or choosing a new business partner.

The link between the success of B2B brands and the success of their customers has brought more attention—and a lot more media spending—into the world of B2B marketing. Super Bowl ads, massive social media campaigns, updated logos and new brand design systems: this is B2B—but not as we know it.

The rising influence of brand means B2B marketing is more essential than ever.



"Brand has become as important as technology, data, talent, and sustainability to building future-proof businesses," says Andrea Glenn, CEO of Ledger Bennett, a Havas company. "The B2B sector is thinking about this at every level—engaging different functions, thinking about user experiences, and building communities. It's shifted from a sales-led approach to a true recognition in the power of brand—not just for the sake of brand equity itself, but as a means to unlock big opportunities."

There has been a convergence of factors behind the rise of B2B marketing in recent years. The pandemic forced B2B companies to raise their game in the social and digital spaces. The continued collapse of the funnel is driving nonlinear buying behavior, with customers self-directing across the purchase cycle in new and unexpected ways. Innovation in technology is opening up new channels and opportunities for sales acquisition and customer relationships. And the scope of the marketing function has expanded to incorporate talent, data, technology, sustainability and beyond.

All of this has necessitated an "always-on" approach from B2B companies. Campaigns now target not only B2B customers but also the customers of the B2B customers—the end users—as well as employees and potential hires, as companies realize the power of an integrated brand to drive growth. We see this reflected in Havas' global annual Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> study too. Our recently published 2024 report explores the rise of Change Makers and the desire for more agency from people around the world as citizens and consumers. The same is happening in B2B.

B2B companies are zeroing in on marketing and brand as a central strategic priority, which is why the importance of brand is eclipsing what we see in the consumer space. This year, the value of Brand Finance's top 100 B2B brands has grown **+10%** over 2023, totaling a quarter-trillion dollars. And B2B brands now account for nearly half the value in the Brand Finance Global 500, which includes both B2C and B2B brands (Brand Finance Global 500 2024 Report).

What's clear is that brand is no longer a frivolous idea in B2B—however "serious" the sector—and that innovative companies are starting to consider it a key focus for growth.



"I really believe marketing needs to be on the front foot, helping prescribe how the company moves forward, rather than reacting to suggestions from elsewhere, which may be ill-informed. Marketing is at the intersection of product and customer dialogue and is uniquely positioned to make judgement that others cannot.

In a sea of sameness, and where we understand the strong emotional connection with B2B brands, we need to be bold in order to state and maintain our differentiation. A vanilla solution and/or tactical solution is unlikely to build resonance or make someone notice if you weren't there.

To quote David Bowie: "If I'm not making myself slightly uncomfortable creatively, I'm doing something wrong."

But boldness can be applied to all aspects of marketing/brand/customer experience—resourcing, marketing team shape, distribution channels, etc. The challenge is to understand where boldness ends and foolhardiness begins."

> —Joel Harrison, Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder of B2B Marketing and Propolis

### B2B's Boom

This has big implications for marketers.

In 2024, the US spend on B2B advertising is estimated to hit **\$37.68 billion**, up from **\$32 billion** in 2022 and **\$28.86 billion** in 2021. According to the 2023 Global B2B Marketing Benchmark report from LinkedIn and the Ipsos Global Trends 2023 report, six out of ten B2B leaders say their budgets have increased in the past year, and two out of three expect their budgets to rise in the next 12 months. B2B marketing spend is also expected to grow exponentially in the coming years, with some estimates reaching as high as **\$70 billion** in the US by 2026.

This gets even larger considering the swath of B2B2C businesses such as Google, Apple, MailChimp, Geneva, Canva, and Squarespace that straddle both the consumer and enterprise space.

But with this immense opportunity come challenges —or rather, nuances—that B2B marketers must understand to unlock meaningful growth.

"There's a more complex and lengthy purchase funnel, multiple decision-makers, unique reputational risks, and a heightened dependency on direct relationships," says **Glenn**. "And those opportunities must be unlocked with skill and care."

The biggest focus for us at Havas is to explore meaning, and how brands resonate, and some key implications are emerging in B2B.

### So, how do you build Meaningful B2B brands today?

### We adapted our Meaningful Brands™ methodology for the B2B sector

Let's start by unpacking the foundations of this study and the methodologies we have used to address this question.

Meaning matters. For the past 16 years, we've pointed our research at B2C brands and members of the public, as consumers and citizens. We have repeatedly found that the most Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> enjoy disproportionate advantage versus their competitors and significantly outperform them across a range of KPIs, from impression to purchase intent to advocacy to trust.

Our quantitative research provides rich insights into how brands can improve people's lives and create more meaningful connections. We study what matters to people—their attitudes and behaviors—and their expectations of brands.

Havas has a unique way to unlock the power of brand for businesses through our proprietary understanding of meaning. We use our Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> architecture to understand how people experience brands, diagnose areas of strengths and weaknesses, and identify opportunities to create more tangible value for brands and people across three benefit areas: Functional, Personal, and Collective (36 attributes total):

#### FUNCTIONAL

Rational benefits focused on product functionality, customer service, interactivity, and technology

#### PERSONAL

Messaging and behaviors that connect on an individual basis and serve a specific personal need, want, or feel COLLECTIVE

MEANINGFU

BRAND

Company initiatives, actions, and impact that respond and connect at social and cultural levels

This year, such has been the explosion of activity in the B2B space that we have expanded our research to understand how B2B brands can unlock the value of brand to accelerate growth.

In this inaugural Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> B2B Special Report, we have applied our foundational method to explore the inter-relationships between B2B brands, professionals, and society. This has allowed us to identify the challenges and opportunities for B2B brands. And in turn, revealed a set of codes to create more meaning in the relationship between brands and professionals in the B2B space.

The most effective research balances truth and recency. And that's what our triangulated research methodologies have given us to ensure credibility, reliability, and thoroughness.

Our quantitative research has yielded a reliable and insightful foundation.

Qualitative interviews have provided rich layers of subjectivity, enabling us to find saturation in certain themes or ideas. Generative AI has given us truly unprompted data at scale for holistic insights.





### Our research has revealed a large delta in brand strength between B2B and B2C brands.

Brand KPIs	B2C Brands*	B2B Brands**	Delta
Impression	57.3%	85.2%	+27.9 ppts
(Re)Purchase	48.4%	84.6%	+36.2 ppts
Advocacy	53.8%	85.1%	+31.3 ppts
Trust	52.1%	84.5%	+32.4 ppts
Attachment	44.7%	81.1%	+36.4 ppts
Quality of Life	36.6%	78.4%	+41.8 ppts

\*Havas Meaningful Brands™ Global annual report (Global Brands) 2024

\*\*Havas Meaningful Brands™ B2B Special Report 2024

# What does this mean?

In short, it's clear that when it comes to B2B, brand is no longer a nice-to-have but an essential part of building a successful business. It's a strategic imperative for growth, loyalty, talent retention, even M&A.

By applying the Havas Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> framework, B2B brands can diagnose opportunities and define new codes of brand behavior to enhance their value and impact and drive bottom-line growth.



"The biggest takeaway is that brand is actually more meaningful in B2B than in the consumer space," says Mark Sinnock, Global Chief Strategy, Data and Innovation Officer at Havas Creative Network. "Our consumer research has consistently told us an inconvenient truth: that people wouldn't care if 75% of B2C brands disappeared. Attachment to brands is low, making it challenging to cut through.

However, our B2B research shows that the inverse is true in this space: **B2B professionals would care if 81% of B2B brands disappeared.** Put simply, building a strong brand is critical to building a strong business."





### B2B's dynamic context

It's not news that marketers have been facing major headwinds in recent years, including rampant inflation, economic volatility, and political instability. But as the pandemic upended work habits, and media habits became even more individualistic and self-directed, there was a groundswell of innovation in products and services in the B2B space.

Some industries have both innovated and prospered against broader market adversity. Europe's B2B SaaS sector alone has exploded, for example. Top performers' revenue nearly tripled in 2023, according to Boston Consulting Group. A survey of the top 100 SaaS providers found the leading performers in B2B are projected to grow by **235%** in 2024.

The AI market alone is projected to reach a staggering **\$407 billion** in revenue by 2027, up from an estimated **\$86.9 billion** in 2022. Nearly two thirds of businesses (**64%**) now view AI as a means to improve productivity and add value, according to Forbes.

#### Claude Alexandre, VP Digital Media, B2B Product

and Campaign Marketing at Adobe, said: "Generative Al is now helping companies tackle complex problems and uncover new opportunities, particularly in how they strengthen customer relationships. By bringing these technologies directly into existing workflows, B2B brands are increasing the value teams get out of business applications and expanding their role as a trusted partner."

But businesses are also facing systemic challenges: talent shortages, ongoing inflation, and supply chain disruptions—not to mention increased competition and disruption from start-ups as Al floods the space and changes expectations for productivity.

Our research shows that mounting regulation is creating significant pressure on B2B professionals; **67%** feel increasingly pressured by regulations and their impact on the decisions they make. This rises to **71%** for those in higher management positions (i.e. managing corporations and C-suite). And this sentiment is more pronounced at large companies (**68%**) compared to small ones (**56%**).



On top of this, there is the continuous pressure on quarterly results and the bottom line. Our research highlights cost saving as the most important motivation for changing suppliers: **51%** said this was a prime driver (rising to **62%** in the UK). As **Jeff Bartoletti**, **VP Marketing and Commercial Operations for Privacy Software at GE Vernova** observed: *"In B2B, we look at the bottom line."* 



In this challenging, evolving—and exciting environment, empowering and supporting B2B buyers becomes more important than ever.



### Agents of Change: B2B Buyers seek impact

%

Pressures are great for B2B professionals, but they remain resolute—even optimistic—in the face of their many challenges. This echoes sentiments in our latest global Meaningful Brands<sup>TM</sup> report, "**The Rise of the Change Makers**," which showed a growing emphasis on agency, action, and affecting positive change in the world overall.

The same is true in the workplace: **75%** of those surveyed said they feel optimistic about their career progression and evolution over the next five years; **82%** went further to say they were both excited and inspired about emerging technologies; and **86%** feel equipped for the changes and transformations facing their industry over the next 5 to 10 years.

I feel equipped for the changes and transformations facing my industry over the next 5 to 10 years

Indeed, many view their expanding roles as agents of change in their businesses and the world at large: **83%** of B2B professionals we spoke to felt they had a strong impact on business decisions and that they could influence the evolution of their company.

This sentiment was even stronger among those with direct purchase responsibilities (**85%** compared with **71%** of those with indirect purchase responsibilities).

Most feel that they are in a position to make a positive impact for their team/department/company (**72%**), their industry (**59%**), and themselves (**58%**).

In the wider world, professionals felt their role in B2B buying could help yield positive impact economically (**63%**), environmentally (**56%**), and societally (**51%**).

Across the board, a fifth feel they are agents of positive change and in a position to make a positive impact for people and the planet. "Has a positive impact on society as a whole"

Collective attribute improving Quality of Life for B2B customers

What's clear is that B2B professionals see themselves as more than just buyers, or talent, but as change agents for progress within their organizations and the world at large.

France:

%



## Marketing as a key enabler of B2B Growth

The role of marketing in B2B is changing, too. "It's moving from marketing as 'communications' to marketing as 'commercial lever,' an engine of growth," explains Glenn.

#### Tracy Swartzendruber, VP Marketing for Power and Energy Resources Software at GE Vernova, agrees.

"When I started in marketing, I felt like I had to eat at the kids' table," she says. "Now, the business understands that marketing is true revenue generation."

The concept of brand in B2B was historically treated as an afterthought or outcome of sales activities, but there is a broad recognition of the value a strong brand brings to the process of attracting and keeping customers. "Now it's about how we show marketing as a revenue-driving department, focusing on meaningful KPIs linked to business success." observes Abigail Rogerson, Marketing Director at Expleo Group.





Brand is now a major lever for transformation. Just over half of our audience (**52%**) cited brand stewardship as one of the top three most important parts of their role, second only to talent, and data and technology.

#### Séverine Nubel, Global Advertising and ID Brand

Director at Orange Group, illustrates this changing dynamic well: "Now, we don't just sell connections anymore. Before, we sold telecoms, but today we support the digital transformation of our clients, so it's not the same business at all; it's more of a consulting business."

So, what do marketers need to consider? Our research decoded how B2B brands can become more meaningful to both customers and employees. Modern marketers can now unlock the differentiating power of brand to accelerate business growth and align all stakeholders around a unified vision for the company.

Marketing in this scenario is becoming more complex, and important. Customers and employees are seeing B2B brands in new ways, and with new expectations.

Some key findings emerged from our study about how marketers can unlock the power of brands to accelerate growth.

We call them the seven codes of Meaningful B2B Brands in 2024.



#### INTRODUCING THE 7 CODES OF MEANINGFUL B2B BRANDS

Brand professionals need to consider their impact on the collective company, especially in how brand sets the tone for employees on the front line. As **Richard Hepworth, President at Trelleborg Marine & Infrastructure** observes, *"Brand is 'how we show up' not just a name."* In this way, B2B professionals must think about every facet of how they adapt their brands to connect with people across the purchase cycle. **Hepworth** goes on to say, *"Collective is important at early stages, the personal for decision-making, and then functional for the purchase decision and the user. It's aligned to the customer journey."* 

Overall reputation is critical to this, with brand acting as a powerful halo. Séverine Legrix de la Salle, VP CSR and Communication at Orange Wholesale, explains this well: "Orange's brand is instrumental in reinforcing our reputation for security, reliability, resilience, technological innovation, and industry leadership. A strong brand is essential for establishing us as a trusted network leader, among our B2B clients and partners (hyperscalers, operators, wholesalers, enterprises) as well as our financial and institutional stakeholders."

# Flex & Adapt

"Is a leader in their category with unique or best-in-class products and services"



In the world of B2B, brand stretches its scope to embrace talent engagement too. Global B2B powerhouses like Adobe and Salesforce, with Adobe Max, and Dreamforce, respectively have reshaped their approach to culture and how they engage with employees at every level of the organization, spending big on their annual conferences where staff can connect, develop relationships, and explore new tools. These internal communication efforts recognize the role of culture in brand strength, making lifelong fans of their employees. *"Collective value is also important internally for employer brand,"* points out Hepworth.

This speaks to a bigger shift in B2B communications, with brands' reputations essential to competing for top-tier talent. "Strengthening your brand is crucial for attracting top talent, especially in the digital realm. Today, the importance of a strong employer brand is more pronounced than ever in the digital age," says Séverine Nubel.

The right B2B narrative adds dimension to the firm's legacy as well, highlighting the company's latest tools and breakthrough services as part of a holistic brand platform. Consider WeTransfer, which not only continuously innovates in collaboration and creativity tools, but also has made a large part of its purpose (and client engagement activities) to explore the future of creative industries. *"We just hired three people right out of college. One of the top reasons they chose to work for us was our mission statement,"* states GE Vernova's Bartoletti.



B2B professionals and companies must mirror the pace of change and disruption by adopting a more malleable and nuanced approach. In today's environment, brand experience will become more important than ever.

"Today's media landscape means that brands are living and breathing entities whose value resides in how people feel about them," explains Glenn. "So having an acutely consistent brand visual and verbal articulation, both internally and externally, is vital."



### Get Personal

Our Meaningful Brands<sup>TM</sup> Global B2C Report reveals a common truth about people's experience of brands. It tends to be primarily Functional, with Personal attributes scoring lowest. In this study, that imbalance is adjusted, and performance scores are even across each of the three pillars: Functional – 5.66 out of 7; Personal – 5.61 out of 7; Collective – 5.60 out of 7.



Far from being an isolated or purely functional purchase, the B2B purchase journey is loaded with emotion and is highly personal. Analysis of online publisher and social content using Quid, Havas' Gen AI analysis tool, revealed that mentions of "Brand Marketing" and "Personal Benefits" increased by **34%** over the 12 months ending August 2024.



Séverine Legrix de la Salle issued a helpful reminder: "Remember, the person I'm addressing is also a human being who has a family and colleagues." And Margo Cooke, Head of Marketing North America at NTT DATA, endorsed this: "People do business with people. And people that they like."

Our research showed that "personal experience" is a critical deciding factor when selecting suppliers and recommending them to stakeholders: **58%** of B2B professionals recommended suppliers after having a positive experience previously. And nearly half (**47%**) recommended goods and services that would benefit their personal profile and reputation.

"B2B buyers want to buy like they buy Netflix. They want to renew like they renew Netflix," says GE Vernova's Bartoletti. "We need to give customers a better experience, regardless of how much they're spending."

"Is a partner I would be proud to work with"

Ranking across Personal attributes improving Quality of Life for B2B customers



### Balance Human & Machine

Artificial intelligence brings a curious duality to B2B, as seen in the broader cultural discussion around AI as both an existential threat to and a panacea for all our problems. Its rising influence in B2B companies cannot be denied, and Havas found B2B professionals are consistently optimistic about AI's potential and excited to incorporate it into ways of working. *"If I speak to an agency and they're not using AI, I would be really questioning what they're doing,"* says Expleo Group's Rogerson.

Our audience agreed: in Havas' survey, those managing both organizations (C-suite) and dayto-day employees stated that investing in data and technology is the most important factor in their current roles (**43%** and **42%**, respectively).



But the application of technology for customer experiences carries a risk for loyalty and engagement if you're a B2B player, as greater digitization and automation have the potential to depersonalize relationships and purchases. As AI expands, human relationships in B2B will become even more important.

As **Séverine Legrix de la Salle** explains, "Actually, it comes from digitalization, meaning the more you digitalize your services, the more you can have pure players who will take a piece of your business, and the more you have to become an aggregator to provide global added value and simplify our customers' lives."

As with most things, balance is key: "Addressing fears and expectations around AI is essential, as people worry about job displacement or dismiss AI's usefulness," explains Béatrice Mandine, Executive Communication Director at Sopra Steria. "The truth lies in between, and we emphasize that AI will augment human capabilities rather than replace humans."



This places greater emphasis on tailored, targeted approaches and aligns with an increased focus on account-based marketing (ABM) in B2B. Our Gen Al analysis showed ABM was a leading topic across online B2B marketing discussions over the last 24 months ending August 2024. **Miguel Gernaey, Chief Marketing Officer at Aptean**, concurs: *"ABM is focus, focus, focus. If someone meets my brand top of funnel, I need to be able to give them an experience that is really relevant to them."* 

"Al will support this," says Expleo Group's Rogerson. "It will make creating personalized content faster and make ABM easier." Bartoletti agrees: "Over the next five years, ABM and personalization is going to become a given. It won't be an option—it will be the standard."



### Embrace the Power of Partnership

Another topic repeatedly emerged in the study: the importance of brand reputation and trust in building long-term customer relationships. In fact, **69%** of the B2B professionals with whom we spoke believe a long-term trusting relationship with a partner/provider is more important than a fresh point of view and approach. Among those who directly impact purchasing decisions, the figure rose to **72%**.



Purchase decisions representing "higher stakes for B2B decision-makers" emerged as a leading theme across our interviews.

"The B2B buying decision is about as emotional as it gets," explains **GE Vernova's Swartzendruber**. "I've never lost sleep over buying a house and car. I've lost sleep over B2B decisions because that's my career on the line."

As such, a primary focus has been to instill confidence in buyers. As **Hepworth** explains: "Our brand is "we provide the best product that comes with a premium price"; therefore, that person can shine if they choose us."



Ken Reisman, VP Digital Media Enterprise at Adobe agrees: "Some executives are literally betting their careers on the partnership with Adobe. And so, it really comes down to establishing relationships and a governance model that promotes open dialogue. When you know your customers on a first-name basis, you can't let them down. We want to show that we are a great partner to them in the long run, and to listen and resolve any issues in the best way possible."

Adobe practices this approach internally, with its "Customer Zero" program, inviting talent to experience, interact, and experiment with tools that they're selling. In a sense, Adobe is their own Customer Zero in this drive.

NTT DATA's Margo Cooke insightfully observes that "B2B marketing has fundamentally changed, and yet, is also returning to its roots. At the moment, Generative AI is a combination of hype (while business adoption catches up) and real seismic change. We have a lot of cool tools and bells and whistles that enable us to do accountbased marketing in a digital-first way. They enable us to digitally target like never before."





### **Design for** the Journey

Building strong B2B brands is vital precisely because the decision-making process can be so long. This makes the role of brand even more fundamental. *"Brand building is more important in B2B than B2C because of the length of the buying decisions,"* says Megan Johnson, Director of Marketing and Communications at UNC Executive Development.

Aptean's Miguel Gernaey told us that because the journey is so long, the transaction values are high, and the audiences are often small, you need to invest in brand to avoid missing the boat entirely, and discovering your brand is not on the consideration list and will not get another chance for another 10 years. *"In B2C you need physical availability on the shelf. In B2B you need mental availability so that your brand is front of mind. In reality, this plays out as digital availability and brands need to think carefully about how they show up online."* 



ranking Personal

**B2B** customers

attribute improving Quality<u>of Life for</u> Continuity is key for protracted purchase cycles and brand is a vital lever. "Our sales cycle can be two years," says GE Vernova's Swartzendruber. "That again makes that data all the harder to stitch together. There are 20 to 30 touchpoints for that B2B journey."

One of the senior marketers we spoke to agrees: "The most challenging part is getting an aperture of what's actually happening with the buyers. Especially when you get into the markets where there are so many different folks that can influence the decision. And frankly, you could have sales cycles that we could have been marketing to that buyer for a year or two, and then making progress within the sales process doesn't even start until two years later."

According to Karine Gangneux, Director of Partnership Development at Generali, the firm describes itself as "a lifetime partner," meaning it fosters long-term relationships, even with its partnerships. "When we build a partnership, it actually takes time. The idea is for it to be for our successors, we'll say for our heirs," she explains.

This requires taking a multipronged approach in organizations, engaging with talent at every level. "With long sales cycles comes a very complex environment and multiple decision makers," says **Expleo Group's Rogerson**. "You have five to eight people making decisions—all in different roles with different priorities and challenges. You also have all of the teams underneath, influencing that decision. It's a lot more complex than B2C."

There's a strong sense of brand stewardship over time. "Personal value is decreasing as Millennials and Gen Z switch careers more," says GE Vernova's Swartzendruber. "It's a valuable opportunity for some of the bigger brands to make sure they surround the story with the message that 'We're still going to be here as people change'."



### Think PPP: People, Purpose, Progress

A sense of purpose or larger meaning is becoming important for B2B buyers to the point of becoming a key lever of decision-making.

Our study found that shared values are a growing priority.

"Is aligned with my environmental and ethical values"

ranking Collective attribute improving Quality of Life for B2B customers



Havas' Gen Al tool research shows online coverage mentioning both "Brand Marketing" and "Collective Benefits" has increased by **+22%** across the last 12 months ending August 2024. Meanwhile, the engagement this coverage has received has increased by **+115%** and the positive sentiment associated with this coverage has risen by **+36%** over the last 12 months, ending August 2024.

"We live in a world where ethics and the brand are hyper-important," explains Charlotte Gillardeau, Director of Marketing and Customer Experience at KPMG France. Rogerson agrees: "There's definitely been a big change in the collective brand over the past five years, particularly with sustainability targets and ESG. All of these things are gaining in prominence."

Jean-Michel Molette, Director of New Services and President at La Poste New Services Holding and Simone Sampieri, Marketing Director of New Services, La Poste Groupe, told us: "The subject of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is something that is now also bursting into how we approach B2B."

"Just look to the big OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) like Airbus, which is looking at their supply chain," agrees Expleo Group's Rogerson. It's clear that sustainability is not just a nice-to-have but a business imperative. In fact, **55%** of respondents in the UK say that committing to sustainability is the most important factor in their current role, as do **49%** in France and **48%** in the US.





### Be a Village, not Just a Vendor

From Slack's emojis to WeTransfer's Future of Creativity events to Salesforce's Sheryl Crow digital concerts, B2B companies are finding that successful engagement and ongoing loyalty come from developing a genuine community around their brand. The goal is to actively involve the next generation of B2B decision-makers and provide them with opportunities to learn and network while being engaged and entertained.

Successful B2B brands were as relevant as a support community or industry resource to buyers as to their peers (87% to 88%, respectively). Most respondents said they felt well supported by their professional network and peers (89%), their colleagues (88%), their company (87%), and their business suppliers and partners (87%).

We also found that a sense of community plays a growing role in B2B supplier recommendations and purchases. **46%** of B2B professionals said they'd recommended individuals they trust for new opportunities, underscoring the value of personal connections made through communities. Among C-level managers, **48%** would select a supplier recommended by someone they trust.

This word-of-mouth from brand advocates cannot be underestimated.





"Community is a really beautiful mechanism for renewals in the software business," says GE Vernova's Swartzendruber. "Buying committees exist to share the risk... customer references in B2B are everything."



NTT DATA's Margo Cooke emphasizes that "there's a full element of experiential marketing—physical, real-world engagement—that I think is in its renaissance, at least inside the NTT DATA organization. We recognize that there's something differentiating about experiences that we can create—whether that's through things like our client advisory boards or other moments that can truly become memorable. That when you bring the right people together in the right environment, it can really facilitate strong business growth."

Community can even be a reason for changing suppliers. Asked what would make them switch, over a third of respondents (**35%**) said a peer recommendation could trigger a change in supplier. Brand strength is critical simple because the buying process in B2B is inherently community driven.

"Complexity of the buying committee and length of the buying process means a large group of very diverse people needs to find alignment and agreement," observes **Havas' Sinnock**. "The only thing that can unify them is brand." **IN SUMMARY** 



### 2024 key take-aways for B2B Marketers:

#### Flex & Adapt

Treat brand as a series of engaging, plural experiences that have real value in unlocking growth.

**Get Personal** 

Offer a personal touch. Engage with buyers and talent as humans.

3

SODE

#### **Balance Human & Machine**

Supercharge innovation plans to blend technology and humanity.

#### **Embrace the Power of Partnership**

Be a Partner first; purchase will come next.

5

#### Design for the Journey

And for the time it takes to unlock growth. Think long-term.

6

#### Think PPP: People, Purpose, Progress

Value your brand's positive impact, from business to partners and people. Purpose is becoming a key lever in B2B.

СОР

#### Be a Village, not Just a Vendor

Empower and connect the next generation of B2B communities—think beyond leadership and executives to every level in organizations.

B2B presents a wellspring of opportunities for brands and marketers—especially as work, industries, creativity, and entrepreneurship evolve to require new tools—but also new ways to talk to buyers.

Havas will continue to explore this space with this inaugural global study. What's clear is that building powerful brands, empowering talent at every level in organizations, and developing rich communities will help power the future of the industry. "It's an exciting time where brand storytelling, marketing excellence, and richer consumer insights are transforming the way B2B business is being done," concludes **Sinnock**. "This is only going to become more prevalent as buying journeys evolve and more innovative players show how standing out, being compelling, and talking to talent on their level brings true results."

#### B2B Meaningful Brands™



#### Context

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In the Data SNAPSHOTS we provide different lenses into the Meaningful Brands™ B2B data across:

3 markets: UK, France, and USA

12 sectors (for a total of 90 brands, including a deep dive on Health)

Financial Services, Human Capital Management, Health Insurance/Services, Insurance, Logistics, Operations Consulting, Payment services, Pharma/Health Tech, Real Estate, Tech IT/Data, Tech IT/Hardware, Utility Analysis based on the size of the company (respondents company turnover - from Less than 1 million to More than 20 billion).

MEANINGFU

We use the SNAPSHOTS to illustrate various analysis of the data – Functional | Personal | Collective scores, Performance Scores, KPIs, Importance Scores.

We have prioritized Trust as a KPI for analysis of Importance scores based on the findings of our research and the 7 Codes of Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> highlighted in the report.

#### 2024 Ranking — Most Meaningful B2B Sectors

The Most Meaningful sectors across the three markets provide **critical and foundational capabilities and support to businesses**: payment, operations, people, technology. The ranking mirrors what we found from our research into what matters most in people's roles:

- Investing in data and technology
- Managing company culture and talent
- Innovative and future-focused solutions

#### 틀 US

#1 Tech IT/Data
#2 Human Capital Management (HCM)
#3 Payment Services

#### 🕕 France

- #1 Health Insurance/Services
  - \_\_\_\_
  - #2 Pharma/Health Tech
- #3 Payment Services

#### \mu UK

SPAT	#1 Utility
	#2 Operations Consulting
Q.	#3 Human Capital Management (HCM)

#3 Human Capital Management (HCM)
#4 Tech IT/Data
#5 Health Insurance/Services
#6 Pharma/Health Tech
#7 Real Estate/Construction
#8 Tech IT/Hardware
#9 Insurance
#10 Utility
#11 Logistics
#12 Financial Services

**#1** Payment Services

#2 Operations Consulting

#### **By Market**

Ш

& IMPORTANC

()

3. Good value



This reflects the relative positivity and agency across the three markets seen through the rest of our quantitative research.

HAV/AS MEANINGFUL

2. Leader

3. Relevant &

clear info

3. Positive impact

BRANDS



Our research shows that Trust in B2B brands derives from a wide range of attributes. Functional attributes score highest and Productivity ("Helps increase productivity and efficiency") is important in each market. However, there are nuances.

3. Peace of mind

workload

balance

З. Work-life

3. Regenerative

solutions

In France, Integration and Innovation are important. In the UK, Skilled (expertise) and Proactivity. And in the US, B2B professionals value Peace of Mind, Customer Support, and a strong sense of Leadership.

3. Easy integration



3. Positive impact

support

3. Leader

#### **By Sector**

		PERFOR	MANCE			
All sectors show a <b>healthy</b> <b>balance of scores</b> , noted in our report as a marked difference versus B2C brands. The most meaningful sectors have higher Personal scores.	🚯 Fin Serv	🙎 нсм	Health Ins/Serv	🕅 Insurance	Distics	Operations Consulting
	F 5.42 P 5.35	F 5.69 P 5.72	F 5.70 P 5.69	F 5.64 P 5.54	F 5.62 P 5.55	F 5.72 P 5.72
	<b>C</b> 5.30	<b>C</b> 5.69	<b>C</b> 5.71	<b>C</b> 5.57	<b>C</b> 5.56	<b>C</b> 5.69
	Payment Serv	I Pharma/ Health Tech	Real Estate/ Construction	Tech IT/Data	Tech IT/ Hardware Utl	👬 Utility
This is consistent with the findings of our report and our recommended codes for building meaning.	F 5.62 P 5.78 C 5.66	F 5.66 P 5.64 C 5.67	F 5.64 P 5.55 C 5.55	F 5.75 P 5.68 C 5.62	F 5.66 P 5.57 C 5.55	F 5.68 P 5.59 C 5.60
Mea	ningful Bra	ands™ Ind	ex Correla	ation to Tr	ust Hea	alth Insurance/Services
90%				Operatio	Payment Serv	Tech IT/Data
88%				Pharma/	Health Tech	
86%		Tech	Real estate/Co T/Hardware	onstruction		<b></b>
5 82%				Ins	urance Utility	





Our research identified trust as vital to the relationship between B2B professionals and brands and key to unlock the power of brand value across all sectors.

Our analysis shows that trust and meaning have a very strong correlative connection across all sectors. The  $R^2$  is sufficiently high to suggest a predictive relationship between the two metrics.

The rich variation of drivers by sector illustrates the importance of a tailored approach.

**Easy Integration and Productivity are common** drivers for all sectors.

Personal benefits are more important for the most meaningful sectors: Proud to Work, Better at my Job, Customer Support.

#### **IMPORTANCE by TRUST**





#### B2B Meaningful Brands™ 2024 Data Snapshots



#### **By Company Size**

Functional, Personal, and Collective scores increase as respondent company turnover increases up to \$500 -\$999.9 million. Then they decline.

#### Company size \$500 - \$999.9 million represents peak positivity and satisfaction towards brands.

And the differential is greatest for Personal and Collective attributes.

Once again, this demonstrates the importance of a tailored approach in B2B to account for different situational contexts beyond market and sector.



#### **IMPORTANCE by TRUST**

**Top 3 attributes** #1 Peace of mind **#2** Easy integration

**#3** Customer support

#### **Top 3 attributes**

**#1** Skilled experts **#2** Easy integration

#### **Top 3 attributes**

**#1** Productivity & efficiency **#3** Skilled experts

#### **Top 3 attributes**

#1 Innovative **#2** Productivity & efficiency **#3** External reputation

#### **Top 3 attributes**

#1 Easy integration #2 Clear information #3 Tailor products/services

#### **Top 3 attributes**

#1 Good value **#2** Skilled experts **#3** Innovative

#### **Top 3 attributes**

#2 Proud to work **#3** Peace of mind



#### B2B Meaningful Brands™

### Deep Dive Pharma & Health

Healthcare and Pharma, including health insurance, health tech, and pharmaceuticals, is one of the most fertile B2B sectors. The pharmaceutical B2B eCommerce market alone was valued at **\$30.2 billion** in 2024 and Grand View Research expects it to reach **\$47.27 billion** by 2030.

Meanwhile, the pharmaceutical software market, valued at **\$27.49 billion** in 2022, is expected to grow at a CAGR of **8.6%** between 2023 and 2029, reaching nearly **\$48.98 billion**. Its potential to inspire growth by revolutionizing marketing and engagement makes it one of the key sectors Havas has explored in its inaugural Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> B2B Special Report.

#### Here's what we found...

#### Pharma and Health are outperforming all other B2B sectors by emphasizing brand building

Havas' research reveals that the healthcare B2B brands are overperforming on most Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> metrics and KPIs:

- Ranked #5 (Health Insurance/Services)
- Ranked #6 (Pharma/Health Tech)
- Most meaningful sectors across the study

Driving brand stewardship is more important for B2B healthcare professionals (**69%**) than in other sectors (**52%**).

B2B healthcare professionals are recognizing the importance of brands as catalysts for change. This echoes Havas' recent global 2024 study, Meaningful Brands™: **The Rise of the Change Makers**, which found a rising sentiment of agency, action, and an emphasis on true impact among the general public.

#### Average Brand KPIs: Healthcare vs Other Industries

	Healthcare B2B Brands	B2B Brands
Impression	82%	85.2%
(Re)purchase	90%	84.6%
Advocacy	90%	85.1%
Trust	90%	84.5%
Attachment	82%	81.1%
Quality of Life	80%	78.4%

In this study, Havas investigated this sector further by augmenting the sample to an additional **310+** B2B Healthcare and Pharma professionals in the UK, the US, and France across:

- Pharmacies Benefits Managers (PBM)
- Health Systems and Delivery Networks, Hospitals
- Health Group Purchasing Organizations
- Health Insurance Companies

The B2B healthcare sector is at a transformative crossroads, filled with opportunities provided by technological advancements and a real shift towards value-based care and sustainability.

As technology and customer engagement plays an increasingly critical role, introducing innovating business and marketing models is essential to staying competitive.

—Brian Robinson, Global Chief Strategy Officer and Head of Growth, Havas Health

#### **BRAND TRUST**





#### It's a complex global market, requiring complex strategies

"It's important to be nuanced and specific as the B2B Pharma and Health industry is distinct, with its own challenges. Dynamics also shift dramatically between different markets," explains Havas' Brian Robinson. "There are varying issues of interoperability, regulatory compliance, long decision-making, legacy administrative processes, data fragmentation, budget constraints, financial pressures, and more. Marketers must take this into account to win."

Regulation is a part of professional life in all sectors, but perhaps none more so than Pharma and Health. But despite regulation being a long-standing presence, a majority of B2B healthcare professionals are feeling increasingly pressured by regulations, with 67% reporting they affect their decision-making. This is notably more intense in France (75%) compared to the US (58%).

The higher pressure in France can be attributed to its comprehensive regulatory framework, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and specific national laws governing artificial intelligence (AI). This enforces strict compliance with safety and guality standards and more rigorous oversight compared to other countries.

#### Do you feel increasingly pressured by regulations and their impact on the decisions you make?

#### HEALTHCARE



What is the consequence of this? Well, it might explain why "brand" is so important in Pharma and Health. Where regulation forces parity, "brand" becomes a key differentiator and a critical frame for the type and nature of relationship needed between partner companies in the sectors.

#### B2B healthcare professionals driving transformation and innovation as Change Makers

The B2B healthcare market is becoming more dynamic and competitive than ever, largely driven by advancements in AI, personalized medicine, and health tech.

The healthcare technology sector, valued at \$439.09 billion in 2023, may reach \$1,029.07 billion by 2028 at a CAGR of 18.7%.<sup>1</sup> And the market for Gen AI in healthcare alone is projected to grow at a staggering CAGR of 85% to reach **\$22 billion** by 2027, unlocking opportunities to increase efficiencies, enhance health outcomes, and lower costs.<sup>2</sup>

In B2B healthcare, AI, big data, automation, and digital platforms are all enabling data-driven, personalized strategies, and refined campaigns. B2B healthcare professionals are optimistic about the future and see investment in these technologies as a top priority in enabling them to become true Change Makers.

- 75% of B2B healthcare professionals feel they can have ٠ a positive impact on their team/department/company (vs 72% for other industries).
- 72% identify technology investment as essential to their role (vs 68% other sectors)
- 87% feel excited and inspired by emerging ٠ technologies, such as AI (vs 82% for other sectors)

Do you feel you're equipped for the changes and transformations facing your industry over the next 5 to 10 years?





"Healthcare Technology Market Report 2024 - Healthcare Technology Market Analysis and Research 2033." *The Business Research Company*, Oct. 2024. "Generative AI in Health and Opportunities for Public Sector Organizations." Boston Consulting Group, Oct. 2023.

#### B2B Meaningful Brands™ Deep Dive Pharma & Health



### Trust and collaboration are becoming the ultimate factors that differentiate B2B brand performance

We see B2B companies increasingly collaborating with healthcare providers, insurers, PBMs, and technology vendors to codevelop innovative, integrated solutions with trust, and long-term relationships being key factors in building strong B2B brands in the eyes of the practitioners we questioned.

Our survey found that **78%** of B2B healthcare professionals, compared to **69%** across industries, value long-term, trusting partnerships.







### ESG & DEI have become key meaningful differentiators, with new emphasis on health equity

"ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) have become integral components of the B2B healthcare landscape," explains **Robinson**. "It's becoming a core strategic focus to use health to improve people's lives and to increase health equity."

Havas found that Pharma and Health companies and buyers are increasingly focusing on sustainability and on making health more equitable for underrepresented groups.

Our research shows that **91%** of B2B professionals agree that healthcare brands should prioritize sustainability across their operations and supply chains, while **92%** believe these brands are actively promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.



"Invests in regenerative solutions (such as circular business models) for tomorrow's economy"



The net result is that purpose is becoming an essential component in talking to B2B's Pharma and Health audiences, a differentiator, and a motivating force for them as Change Makers in companies.



#### IN CONCLUSION

The opportunity in marketing to B2B Pharma and Health clients is clear, but there are also key rules of engagement.

What we're seeing is the rise of a generation of conscious, purpose-driven, and impactoriented buyers who want to make change. Al, tech innovation, and data will take on an increasingly important role in selling to B2B clients, as they become key components for future-facing B2B brands themselves.

1 Alert



Havas has measured Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> annually since 2009, furthering a commitment to bringing data science, insights, and an understanding of people to the core of its strategic methodology across businesses, brands, and markets.

"We have been investing in our landmark Meaningful Brands™ study for more than 16 years, and these insights now take on even greater prominence in our work for clients through our shared Converged strategy and operating system.

We launched Converged to transform the client experience by building even more strategic bridges between creativity, media, production, and technology, and a shared understanding of today's consumers is essential to this vision and to unlocking more meaningful growth for our clients and their brands"

> —Yannick Bolloré, Chairman and CEO, Havas

This study is the inaugural Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> dedicated to the B2B sector. The quantitative research was conducted between June and September 2024 across **99** brands, **12** sectors, and **3** main markets in collaboration with Market Probe International.

Sample	()	<b>#</b>	<b>()</b>	Total
Size	USA	UK	France	
Total	523	533	674	1,730

Our research and report feature language that requires definition for clarity. On this page and the next, you will find definitions and a lexicon to guide understanding.

#### Meaningful Brands™ B2B List of Attributes

#### FUNCTIONAL

Anticipates needs proactively

Ensures data security and backup

Has a strong reputation in the sector

Has very competent and skilled experts

Helps increase productivity and efficiency

Is a leader in their category with unique and/or best-in-class products/services

Offers easy integration with existing systems and processes (internal and external)

Offers good price for the value of their products/services

Offers innovative products/services

Offers strong customer support for the duration of the relationship

Provides relevant and clear information about their products/services

Tailor products/services to their clients' needs

#### PERSONAL

Allows me to develop my network outside of my company

Allows me to find out about new developments, practices and innovations in the sector

Enhances my reputation within my company

Gives a boost to my career

Gives me a sense of accomplishment

Gives me access to its community of customers to share opinions and suggestions with the brand

Gives me peace of mind

Helps me deliver better financial and economic results

Improves my work-life balance

Is a partner I would be proud to work with

Is a reliable, long-term business partner rather than just a transactional supplier

Makes me better at my job

**Reduces my workload and stress** 

#### COLLECTIVE

MEANINGFU BRAND

Communicates transparently and honestly about their activities

Enhances my brand's reputation as a business partner

Has a clear commitment and plan to address environmental issues in their operations and supply chain

Has a positive impact on society as a whole

Has purpose beyond profit

Has the reputation of being a good employer

Invests in **regenerative solutions** (such as circular business models) for tomorrow's economy

Is actively promoting sustainable lifestyle choices and behavior change

Is aligned with my **environmental and ethical** values

Promotes diversity, equality and inclusion

Uses local suppliers whenever possible

#### B2B Meaningful Brands™ Methodology & Lexicon



	KPIs		
Impression	Impression What is your perception of that brand in your professional life?		
(Re)Purchase	If you were the decision-maker, how likely would you be to contract/use or choose to continue working with (if you already work with) the following brands and partners?		
Advocacy	If you were discussing the following brands with a colleague/workmate, what would you say?		
Trust	Please indicate to what extent you trust each of these brands		
Attachment	In your professional life, please indicate how much you would care if the brand disappeared tomorrow?		
Quality of Life	How do the following brands make your life at work easier or better?		

#### Performance & Importance Scores

#### PERFORMANCE

This score allows us to understand how well brands deliver on and meeting people's expectations for Functional, Personal, and Collective attributes.

#### **IMPORTANCE by TRUST**

This score tells us how strongly these Functional, Personal, and Collective attributes drive brand KPIs.

### Thank you

Our analysis couldn't have been completed without the precious help of our partners and collaborators. Thank you all for sharing your time, experience, insights, and perspectives and helping us validate our hypothesis, run our analysis, and publish the content for this report:

#### **Claude Alexandre**

VP Digital Media, B2B Product and Campaign Marketing, Adobe

Jeff Bartoletti VP Marketing and Commercial Operations for Proficy Software, GE Vernova

Charlotte Gillardeau Director of Marketing and Customer Experience, KPMG France

Margo Cooke Head of Marketing North America, NTT DATA

Karine Gangneux Director of Partnership Development, Generali

Miguel Gernaey Chief Marketing Officer, Aptean

Joel Harrison Editor-in-Chief and Co-Founder, B2B Marketing and Propolis

Richard Hepworth President at Trelleborg Marine & Infrastructure

#### Megan Johnson

Director of Marketing and Communications, UNC Executive Development

Séverine Legrix de la Salle VP CSR and Communication, Orange Wholesale

Béatrice Mandine Executive Communication Director, Sopra Steria

Jean-Michel Molette Director of New Services and President, La Poste New Services Holding

Séverine Nubel Global Advertising and ID Brand Director, Orange Group

Ken Reisman VP Digital Media Enterprise, Adobe

Abigail Rogerson Marketing Director, Expleo Group

Simone Sampleri Marketing Director of New Services, La Poste Groupe

Tracy Swartzendruber VP Marketing for Power and Energy Resources Software, GE Vernova

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Founded in 1835 in Paris, Havas is one of the world's largest global communications networks, with more than 22,000 people in more than 100 countries sharing one single mission: to make a meaningful difference to brands, businesses, and people.

Havas has developed a fully integrated model through its 70+ Havas Villages around the world, covering all communication activities. The teams of the three business units Creative, Media, and Health & You work together with agility and in perfect synergy to offer tailormade innovative solutions to clients who support them in their positive transformation.

Havas is committed to building a diverse culture where everybody feels they belong and can be themselves and thrive. Further information about Havas is available at www.havas.com.

#### CONTACT US

#### **FRANCE**

Beatrice Speisser VP Transformation beatrice.speisser@havas.com



Maggie O. Connors Global Marketing & Brands Officer maggie.o.connors@havas.com



Tracev Barber Global Chief Transformation & Growth Officer tracey.barber@havas.com

#### 💮 Global CMBC Team TeamCMBC@havas.com

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Learn more about Meaningful Brands<sup>™</sup> & access the 2024 Special Report, "Decoding B2B's Brand Boom" at www.meaningful-brands.com