

# Drive B2B Brand Value With Emotion And Experience

Organization: The Brand Experience Playbook

by Dipanjan Chatterjee

October 5, 2017

## Why Read This Report

B2B CMOs, marketers, and CX professionals should read this report to understand brand's far-reaching impact in driving successful acquisition and retention as well as creating top-line growth. The report describes the process for designing emotion-led brand strategies that enable B2B firms to heighten their brand's energy and maximize its impact through the customer life cycle.

## Key Takeaways

### **B2B Marketers Must Not Undersell Branding**

It is common for B2C companies to place a heavy emphasis on branding, while B2B organizations tend to limit its scope. Branding is crucial to B2B success, which hinges on building and maintaining customer relationships.

### **Emotion Is The Crux Of B2B Marketing**

B2B decisions are often complex, are high stakes, and involve several players. In this environment, emotion-led branding drives value through the entire B2B customer life cycle — from prospecting through customer retention.

### **Marketers Must Unite The Organization Around A Wide-Reaching Brand Agenda**

CMOs must prioritize brand at the organizational level by driving an emotion-focused brand strategy that extends well beyond the marketing team.

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[B2B Firms Must Focus On Brand Equity To Drive Value](#)

[Emotions Fuel Your Brand Energy](#)

[The Rise Of Intelligent Branding](#)



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## B2B Marketers Must Take A Broad View Of Branding

Organizations vary enormously in how they adopt branding as a discipline. B2C-centric companies often have a creative-driven, mass-media-focused, marketing communications approach to branding. B2B firms tend to view branding as the engine that fills the lead funnel and supports sales efforts. But branding includes all of the above — and much more. B2B CMOs looking to build an effective brand strategy require a broad foundation that builds on existing practices, embraces B2C best practices, and incorporates emerging findings about how perceptions impact brands.<sup>1</sup> This broad view of branding recognizes that:

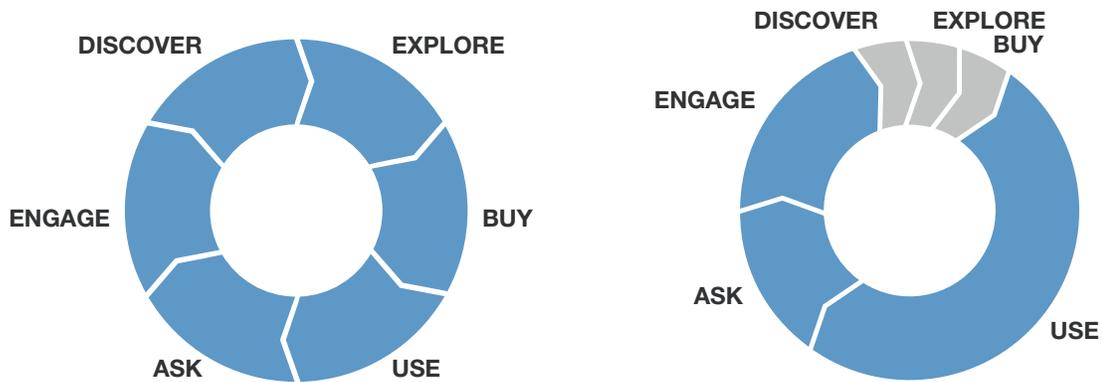
- › **Brand is about the life cycle.** The marketing organization is usually the home of the brand, and branding is the acquisition engine that feeds the lead funnel. Sales picks up the baton, takes it over the line, and delivers it to a support organization that nurtures the relationship. Branding is relegated to a supporting role even among B2B marketing decision makers: Only 15% of them consider brand equity, which is at the heart of building strong brands, to be an important metric.<sup>2</sup> This view of branding as a support function is archaic and dangerous. Brand transcends functions and encompasses the entire customer relationship. Especially in B2B, the post-purchase cycle accounts for the lion's share of a customer relationship (see Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> To fully appreciate the role of brand requires an understanding of its breadth, which extends well beyond advertising, messaging, and sales collateral to every aspect of the relationship.
- › **Brand is energy.** People form perceptions about a company based on exposure and interaction. They may be customers with direct interactions, prospects seeking information, or even passive absorbers of information from advertising and social media. At Forrester, we call the accumulation of this perception “brand energy” — with every positive impression, a brand adds energy to its charge.<sup>4</sup> Brands with high energy are strongly positioned to win. For example, a medical products company that has created strong brand energy with physicians and hospital administrators based on quality products, numerous clinical tests, a track record of innovation, and strong relationships creates an express lane from energy to action, which translates into revenue, profit, and value.
- › **Brand is experience.** The B2B world departs significantly from B2C in the extent of the interactions that a brand has with prospects and customers. Unlike the ephemeral nature of most consumer purchases, B2B transactions are wrapped up in relationships that build (and break) over time. The B2B customer experience is a critical input into the perception that fuels a brand's energy. Lauren Flaherty, CMO of CA Technologies, told us that 14 to 18 touches are needed to move through a purchase journey. To win requires “architecting the totality of experience” that threads together human, personal, and digital experiences. Customers voraciously seek validation; this validation comes from confidence; and, says Lauren, “Experience creates confidence better than old-school brand messaging.”<sup>5</sup>
- › **Brand is a symbol.** The B2B process can be incredibly complex, with many moving parts like RFPs, specifications, testing, evaluation, training, adoption, and more, depending on the offering. Participants can feel besieged by the process; complexity and decision making do not make

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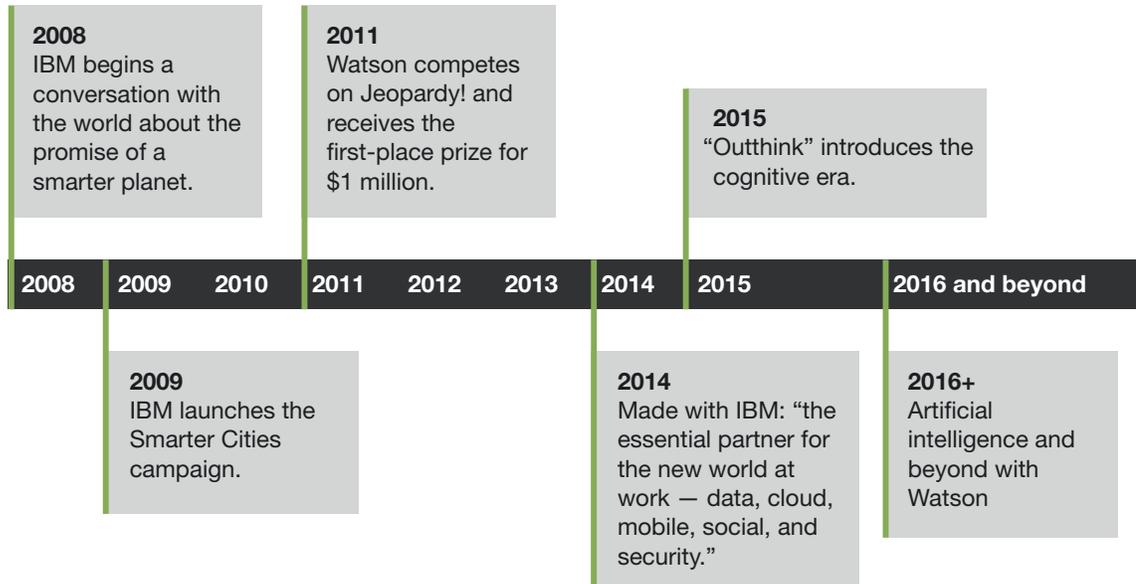
pleasant bedfellows. Evolution has predisposed us to abhor complex decision making, and we seek out the simplest and most effective ways to solve problems.<sup>6</sup> Brand is a symbolic proxy around which every evaluative aspect of the offering coalesces. Amid the clutter of information, brand essence works like a beacon. IBM has devoted decades to building an unassailable single equity — intelligence (see Figure 2). And Caterpillar’s now-retired Group President Stu Levenick describes the firm not as an equipment manufacturer but as an “organization that reflects heritage, pride, innovation, and trust.”<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 1** Most Customer Life-Cycle Diagrams Misstate The Importance Of Post-Purchase Stages To Customers



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**FIGURE 2** IBM Has Consistently Built Its “Intelligence” Equity

## Brand Is Vital To B2B Success

B2B brand marketers often do not place adequate or appropriate emphasis on the role of brand. A recent Forrester survey showed that nearly 20% of B2B marketers say their companies do not have a clearly articulated brand promise, and of those that have a brand promise, more than 40% of their marketers say their perspective is inward looking rather than customer focused.<sup>8</sup> Brand plays a significant role in B2B because:

- › **B2B cost and complexity heighten the importance of brand.** If you dislike your \$3 kale-pomegranate energy drink, you throw it away. When you’re unhappy with your new \$300 juicer, you hammer out nasty tweets. What do you do when your \$3 million ERP implementation goes downhill in a hurry? Most B2B transactions are much more complex than the average consumer purchase. This complexity creates an information asymmetry between buyer and seller. This disconnect is a fertile playground for brand, which steps in as a proxy to allay the fear of buyers. Because so much rides on big B2B decisions, brand attributes like trustworthiness, reliability, and confidence act as signals. Brand describes the essential personality of the B2B firm and, when applicable, stands as a character witness to the product and service promises that the firm makes.
- › **B2B’s strategic component makes brand critical.** Many B2B decisions have enterprisewide implications well beyond the immediate vicinity of the transaction. All of the 727 aircraft that Southwest Airlines puts in the air are Boeing 737s.<sup>9</sup> This uniformity, and the concomitant vendor lock-in, is part of Southwest’s grand plan to enhance its operational effectiveness. Having

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confidence in the Boeing brand is essential to the airline's strategy. When hospital administrators evaluate medical product companies, they know that the wrong choice of stent manufacturer will antagonize their physician community and, worse, endanger the well-being of their patients. When customers sign on with a provider, they enter into a commitment for an extended, mutually beneficial relationship.

- › **Brand drives purchase and value.** There is a myth that brand plays a much bigger role in B2C than in B2B. Lippincott, a brand strategy consulting firm, busted this myth by running analytical simulations to gauge preferences for tablets in both a B2B and a B2C setting. While brand drove 29% of the consumer purchasing decisions (price and features were responsible for the rest), that number rose to 37% for business purchasing decisions.<sup>10</sup> For the same product, brand played a more important role in B2B. And Forrester research with B2B decision makers has shown that progressive B2B brands with a customer-focused brand promise are far more likely to exceed their revenue goals than are brands that have an inside-out brand promise focused on their portfolio and capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

## Strong B2B Brands Are Built On Emotions

Forrester has written extensively on the human science of branding and the role of emotions in intelligent branding.<sup>12</sup> Among the many misconceptions that surround the comparisons between B2B and B2C branding, a particularly egregious one is that B2C is emotionally rich while B2B is just a cold calculation of hard numbers and data. Emotions certainly play a role in everyday consumer categories, but they are equally apparent in business relationships.

- › **There isn't a separate B2B brain.** We may have divided brands into tidy alphabetic buckets of B2B, B2C, and B2B2C, but that is not how decision makers organize their thinking. There is but one brain — and it is neither a B2C brain nor a B2B brain. The very same CFO who changed her cell service from AT&T to Verizon last night comes to work in the morning to cast a vote for a multimillion-dollar ERP system. If we know that 99% of our decision making is based not on rational evaluation but on emotional algorithms and we also know that B2B is characterized by informational complexity that makes rational evaluation difficult, we should be connecting the dots to reveal a primary role for emotions.<sup>13</sup>
- › **Emotions supercharge brand.** In the extended cycle of B2B brand relationships, each impression and exchange creates memories, some of which get coded into long-term memory. The role of emotions in this process is to supercharge memories; those laced with emotion-rich content are much more salient. When the customer faces a decision on buying or recommending a product, she searches her memory to seek guidance on whether to react in a favorable or unfavorable manner. When faced with renewing a contract, buying additional equipment, or engaging a new vendor, customers and prospects will be swayed by that one sales rep they can truly trust, by the incredible midnight recovery by customer service, and by vivid and relatable testimonials from peers.

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- › **Emotions cut through the clutter.** The role of brand as a symbol is to expedite decision making by providing a much more accessible proxy for a glut of functional data. Given that internal, emotion-driven algorithms trigger decision making, it is no surprise that the symbolic nature of branding relies on the emotional attributes of brands. For example, CA Technologies' Modern Software Factory campaign states: "Executives realize the power of the software factory and yet have a hard time understanding its technical aspects. The guide makes it simple: if you're going to compete in the app economy, the answer is CA Technologies."<sup>14</sup> "We see the pressure our customers feel to make the right technology decisions," says CMO Lauren Flaherty. "Our Modern Software Factory guide is meant to be a proxy for both trust and know-how."<sup>15</sup>
- › **Emotionally connected brands deliver better results.** The case for emotion in B2B branding must connect to value. According to Motista Co-Founder and Chief Intelligence Officer Alan Zorfias: "[emotion] is a harder concept for B2B; it isn't something that is as culturally familiar as a practice. Unless emotion is tied to some business metric, it will be just an ad hoc concept." After applying its predictive metrics to several B2B categories, such as shipping, software, professional services, and printing, Motista found that only 11% of emotionally disconnected customers in the networking category expect to buy that brand in the next six months, while 75% of emotionally connected customers expect to do so. Emotionally connected customers are almost 4x more likely to try new products from the brand and 5.5x more likely to feel the brand is worth paying more for. Building emotional connection isn't just an advertising nice-to-have; it's a key factor in boosting customer value.<sup>16</sup>

## Make Your Emotional Strategies Specific To B2B

While the underlying brand fundamentals are the same across B2C and B2B, the engagement dynamics of the latter call for a different approach to formulating emotional strategies. Your B2B emotional strategy should be:

- › **Role driven.** As in a Shakespearean drama, a whole cast of characters enter and exit over the course of a B2B relationship, each with a different role to play. A B2B brand navigating this journey must pay special attention to these characters, the roles they play, and their timing on stage. For example, among global technology decision makers, the CxO role is much more influential in the early purchase cycle than the IT manager role (see Figure 3). To a CEO who sits in judgement, the right play may involve demonstrating innovativeness and creativity, as IBM does at Wimbledon or Hewlett Packard Enterprise hoped to accomplish with its Paramount Pictures' *Star Trek Beyond* partnership.<sup>17</sup> But to an IT manager who will have to live with a protracted and often painful deployment, testimonials on collaboration and support may be much more welcome than knowing IBM's Chef Watson can concoct a Wimbledon-inspired strawberry carpaccio.<sup>18</sup>
- › **Story driven.** Storytelling is not just a B2C buzzword. It has a particular relevance to B2B because the meaningful, extended engagement that usually characterizes B2B relationships provides a ripe opportunity to craft epics. Our brains have an inbuilt defense mechanism against persuasive

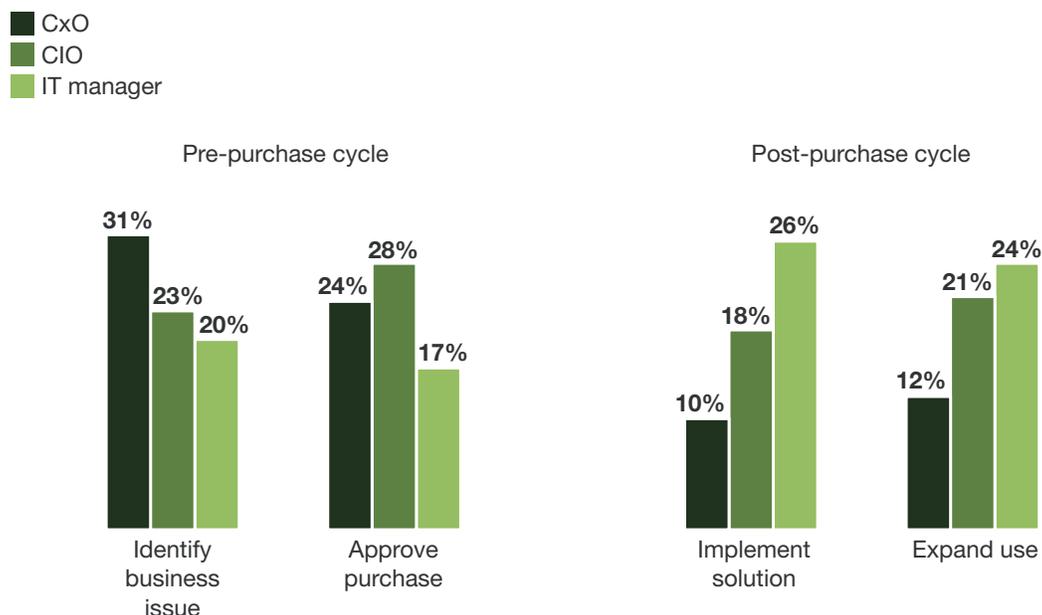
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marketing, but we let that barrier down when we empathize with stories. Stories work because, as we have demonstrated, brands are symbols; these symbols are emotionally rich; and the most effective way of communicating these symbols is through immersive stories.<sup>19</sup> The 3M brand team adopts a story-driven strategy and: “gives client-facing representatives lively and actionable examples of 3M innovations as part of a detailed brand guidebook. Representatives are not only familiar with the brand’s innovative themes, but they also have interesting facts and stories to share about the products they sell.”<sup>20</sup>

- › **Motivation driven.** At work, B2B decision makers play a part stipulated by their profession, but this part is inextricably connected to many other parts that extend beyond their cubicle or corner office to the lives they live and the people they live it with. We do not work with job titles; we work with people. Motista found that when B2B customers connect their personal values and motivations, such as professional credibility, success, and influence, to a brand — rather than to just strong perceptions of business value like features, functionality, and service — they are twice as likely to make a purchase, pay a premium, and advocate for the brand.<sup>21</sup> Lippincott has found that across B2B companies, from electronics to commodity chemicals, the attribute “I enjoy doing business with them” is the strongest influencer of brand equity.<sup>22</sup>

**FIGURE 3** Roles Vary In Influence Through The Different Stages Of The Purchasing Life Cycle



Base: 18,277 global business and technology decision makers and influencers

Source: Forrester Data Global Business Technographics® Priorities And Journey Survey, 2017

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**Recommendations**

## Infuse A New Emotion-Driven Brand View Through The Organization

CMOs: A successful B2B brand goes well beyond the traditional strictures of marketing. It requires a shift in organizational mindset to:

- › **Widen the branding lens to encompass the organization.** To get the most out of your branding strategy requires elevating branding beyond a rigidly defined marketing support role.<sup>23</sup> This requires buy-in from the uppermost echelons of the organization, especially revenue-owning departments, for the idea that the brand is at the core of the promise and the delivery. A brave marketer must step up and lead the charge, often without direct authority, to shape the activities of your organization around a central promise. At a more tactical level, infuse these brand activities into performance assessments; brand metrics should share real estate on business dashboards to highlight the interconnectedness of brand building and value creation.
- › **Focus on emotions to build brand.** B2B branding should capitalize on the significant advances in our understanding of how humans make decisions. These findings are especially pertinent in the B2B space, which often sees complex purchasing decisions and extended interactive relationships that define the customer experience. Use tools like Forrester's brand energy framework to create a tactical plan to power your B2B brand by identifying the specific emotions that drive its brand energy. Marketing communications and customer experiences across all touchpoints must effectively align to this core emotional essence and deliver on it. This targeted, emotion-driven plan will stimulate customer outcomes like purchase, willingness to pay a premium, and advocacy, allowing you to monetize your brand value.
- › **Build an emotionally intelligent organization.** Your firm's employees play a much more vital role in B2B relationships than in B2C transactions. They personify the relationship, be it the salesperson who pitches your offering, the subject matter expert who exemplifies your capabilities, or support teams that troubleshoot. To build an emotion-driven brand, these people need to be ambassadors of your brand essence. But it is much easier to write down this essence on a carefully scripted sell sheet than it is to have your people communicate it, so your people strategy is a vitally important part of your B2B brand strategy. Every aspect of your people strategy — hiring, training, coaching, reviewing — should align to the aspirations of your brand. An emotionally intelligent organization will tell an emotional brand story.

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## Supplemental Material

### Survey Methodology

The Forrester Data Global Business Technographics® Priorities And Journey Survey, 2017 was fielded between January and March 2017. This online survey included 18,277 respondents in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from companies with two or more employees.

Forrester Data Business Technographics ensures that the final survey population contains only those with significant involvement in the planning, funding, and purchasing of business and technology products and services. Research Now fielded this survey on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives include points redeemable for gift certificates.

Please note that the brand questions included in this survey should not be used to measure market share. The purpose of Forrester Data Business Technographics brand questions is to show usage of a brand by a specific target audience at one point in time.

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**Companies Interviewed For This Report**

CA Technologies

Motista

**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> See the Forrester report "[The Rise Of Intelligent Branding.](#)"
- <sup>2</sup> Source: Forrester Data Global Business Technographics Marketing Survey, 2016.
- <sup>3</sup> See the Forrester report "[The Perspective Problem In The Customer Life Cycle.](#)"
- <sup>4</sup> See the Forrester report "[Emotions Fuel Your Brand Energy.](#)"
- <sup>5</sup> Source: Interview with Lauren Flaherty, CMO of CA Technologies, June 12, 2017.
- <sup>6</sup> See the Forrester report "[The Rise Of Intelligent Branding.](#)"
- <sup>7</sup> Source: "Caterpillar Group President talks about Built for It Campaign," YouTube video, March 4, 2014 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq1xh8h4Lu8>).
- <sup>8</sup> See the Forrester report "[It's Not About You: B2B Marketers Need To Change How They Think About Branding.](#)"  
Source: Forrester's Q1 2017 International B2B Marketing Panel Online Survey.
- <sup>9</sup> Source: "Southwest Corporate Fact Sheet," Southwest Media (<https://www.swamedia.com/channels/Corporate-Fact-Sheet/pages/corporate-fact-sheet#fleet>).
- <sup>10</sup> Source: Simon Glynn and Michael D'Esopo, "B2B Brands in the Human Era," Lippincott (<http://lippincott.com/insight/b2b-brands-in-the-human-era/>).
- <sup>11</sup> See the Forrester report "[It's Not About You: B2B Marketers Need To Change How They Think About Branding.](#)"
- <sup>12</sup> See the Forrester report "[The Rise Of Intelligent Branding.](#)"
- <sup>13</sup> Source: Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, Harper, 2017.  
  
See the Forrester report "[The Rise Of Intelligent Branding.](#)"
- <sup>14</sup> Source: "CA Technologies Launches New Global Marketing Campaign: 'The Modern Software Factory,'" CA Technologies press release, May 15, 2017 (<https://www.ca.com/us/company/newsroom/press-releases/2017/ca-technologies-launches-new-global-marketing-campaign-the-modern-software-factory.html>) and "Modern Software Factory: The Answer," YouTube video, May 15, 2017 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOwJOAJwato&feature=youtu.be>).
- <sup>15</sup> Source: Email correspondence from Lauren Flaherty, CMO of CA Technologies, September 7, 2017.
- <sup>16</sup> Source: "Impact of Emotion in B2B," Motista presentation provided to Forrester.
- <sup>17</sup> Source: Jen Clark, "Watson serves up AI at Wimbledon 2017," Internet of Things blog, IBM, July 3, 2017 (<https://www.ibm.com/blogs/internet-of-things/watson-serves-ai-wimbledon-2017/>) and Simon Bowers, "Star Trek Beyond: The Machine's Next Frontier," Hewlett Packard Enterprise, June 6, 2016 (<https://news.hpe.com/star-trek-beyond-the-machines-next-frontier/>).
- <sup>18</sup> Source: "Wimbledon inspired recipes with IBM Chef Watson," YouTube video, July 7, 2016 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Q9NX7dikNE>).
- <sup>19</sup> Immersion is important because the listener then identifies with some aspect of the story, activating mirror neurons whereby they feel the same emotions as their counterpart in the story. This is the process of building empathy.

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<sup>20</sup> Source: Simon Glynn and Michael D’Esopo, “B2B Brands in the Human Era,” Lippincott (<http://lippincott.com/insight/b2b-brands-in-the-human-era/>).

<sup>21</sup> Source: “Impact of Emotion in B2B,” Motista presentation provided to Forrester.

<sup>22</sup> Source: Chuck Kent, “The EQ of Branding – Branding Roundtable No. 30,” Brandingmag, April 28, 2017 (<https://www.brandingmag.com/2017/04/28/the-eq-of-branding-branding-roundtable-no-30/>).

<sup>23</sup> See the Forrester report “[The Model For Modern Marketing.](#)”

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