

Be Bold

The value of
great design
in B2B
marketing



The Frameworks

An independent design consultancy.

We are The Frameworks, an independent design consultancy: a team of creative thinkers and problem solvers who help brands forge authentic connections with the people they're trying to reach.

We're driven by strategic insights, creative inspiration and a steely focus on audience experience. For us, that's great **design**.

Dare to be bold

Great design has the power to captivate audiences.
To make the hairs on the back of our necks stand up.
To make us stop, stare and wonder.

We've seen great design transform the fortunes of companies, inspire social movements and influence popular culture. In many ways, design shapes our understanding of the world and our experiences within it. Every app we use or ad we watch has been designed to communicate language, meaning and value.

Great design draws on universal human truths. Whether you're an armchair sports fan being exhorted to "just do it" or a tech entrepreneur being asked to "think different", you're drawing conclusions and forming opinions based on the same sensory stimuli.

And, of course, in the world of B2B marketing, our audiences are just the same. Sometimes a bit more starved for time, perhaps, but still humans with eyes and ears, hard-wired to respond to the right provocation. So why do so many B2B brands seem to play marketing by the numbers and settle for safer creative routes?

**Design
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That's not to say great design doesn't exist in the B2B space. It's just that it's not prioritised – strategically or financially – as much as it is in the B2C space.

According to the latest research, 41% of B2B organisations still conduct their marketing activities in-house, while a quarter allocate just 5% of their total budget to marketing. This is less than half the industry standard; the average B2B CMO reports that marketing accounts for 11.3% of their total company budget. What's more, anecdotal evidence suggests that during periods when revenues are tight, marketing spend is the first to fall by the wayside.

This lack of investment can often breed conservative attitudes and “safe” design, stifling boldness and creativity and perpetuating a by-numbers approach that will never move the needle in terms of investment or perceived value.

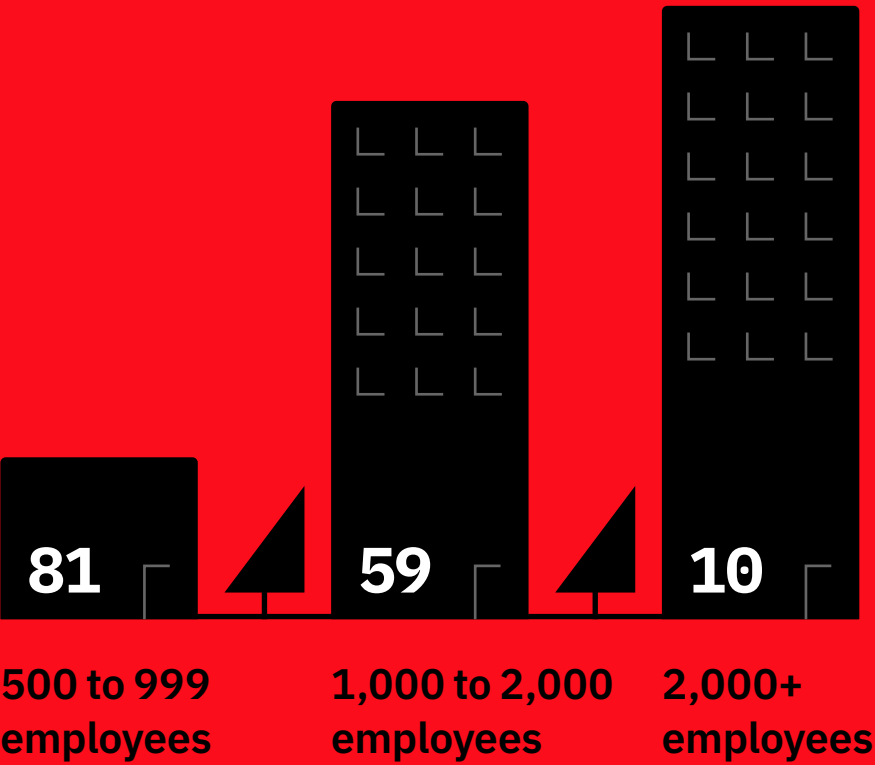
Many in the industry are only too aware of the missed opportunity. As Umesh Patel, Head of Global Customer Reference Program at Fujitsu, says, “I think it's very important to leave room for creative thinking and bold choices in the B2B world. B2B has a traditional stereotype, but the design element allows you to stand out and be different.”

At The Frameworks, we surveyed 150 B2B marketers at organisations with 500+ employees to find out more about the value of great design in B2B and the barriers that hold people back.

**B2B marketers
survey →**

A breakdown of the 150 B2B marketers at organisations with 500+ employees we surveyed

By company size



By job title



By industry sector

Architecture & Engineering 6	Arts & Culture 8	Education 13	Finance 26
Healthcare 9	HR 4	IT & Telecoms 14	
Retail 26		Sales, Media & Marketing 24	Manufacturing & Utilities 13
			Travel & Transport 6

We also spoke to senior marketers to get their take on the role and value of great design in a B2B context. This included: Bradley Neill, Associate Director Brand and Advertising at Grant Thornton; Florian Wagner, Senior Marketing Director at SAP; and Umesh Patel, Head of Global Customer Reference Program at Fujitsu.

Consider this: more than three quarters of B2B marketers (76%) say a lack of investment impacts their effectiveness as a marketer.

“Pressure to deliver stands in the way of boldness.”

Budget is a serious issue that is confounded by pressures to meet internal KPIs and metrics, which in many instances can suppress bold thinking and limit possibilities.

This theme was echoed in our research. We found that a resounding 96% of brand-side B2B marketers say “pressure to deliver against our marketing challenges stands in the way of boldness and original thinking.”

While the industry unequivocally feels the pinch of these pressures, B2B marketers are also highly cognisant of the benefits that an investment into design can bring. In fact, 71% of respondents say a greater investment in design would help their business generate greater revenue.

In this report, we’ll explore why a B2B proposition shouldn’t be a barrier to making bold, creative decisions. When armed with the right tools, language and creative strategy, B2B marketers can deliver on the promise of bolder thinking and inspire (or reinspire) their audiences.

What is design?

Traditionally, design has been viewed through a relatively narrow lens, with marketers focusing on visual elements such as brand, look and feel, or “colour schemes”.

While these elements do play a key role in design, the term itself encompasses a much broader spectrum of activities, spanning everything from language and graphic design to content, digital experiences and beyond.

“Design is more than just the look and feel.”

As Fujitsu’s Umesh Patel states, “Design is more than just the look and feel – it’s also the structure of a campaign and the messages you share. I see it as a holistic approach where design is brought in from the start [and] all the way through.”

This goes some way to explaining why design thinking has been increasingly popular in shaping B2B experiences. As a discipline, it’s certainly a great way of forcing yourself to truly understand the end-user, challenging assumptions and redefining problems in their terms. And the result is usually well worth it: because you’ve anticipated users’ needs so well you can create experiences that, functionally, will fulfil them.

But there's still a danger that you might be missing the spark you need if you're going to appeal to your audience not as "users" but as human beings. This is where great marketers need to shine. To appeal to emotions, to inspire, to stand out and to make people think.

The best brands succeed in differentiating themselves by delivering on both the functional and emotional needs of a customer.

Florian Wagner, Senior Marketing Director at SAP says, "In my experience, B2B design is an underestimated part of the brand persona or corporate identity. I think there's often an underestimation of the role that subconscious experiences play in the way you experience a brand."

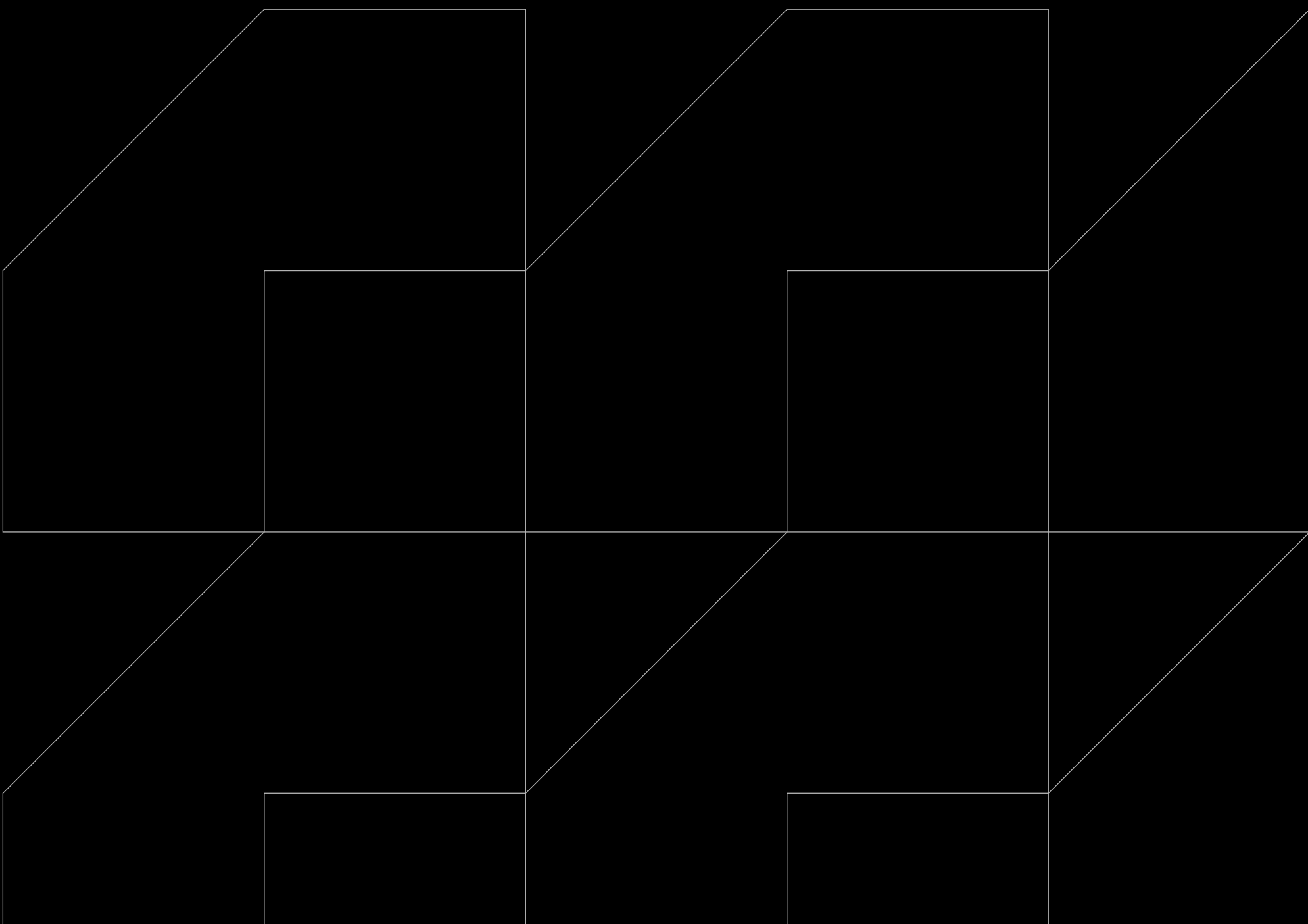
While some may draw a divisive line between "B2B design" and "B2C design", the truth is they are not distinct or separate. Good design is good design – whether it's being created to excite a consumer or educate an investor.

Many B2B marketers recognise this and strive to make design a strategic priority. In fact, more than two-thirds of B2B marketers say they "regularly try new ideas to improve marketing performance."

Despite the best intentions, though, this ambition is not often followed through. Some 90% of organisations with more than 2,000 employees say they are more likely to take the safer option than to try something different.

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To empower bold
thinking, B2B marketers
will need to find ways
to overcome barriers
that can hold
organisations back.



What's holding marketers back?

Marketers in the B2B space face numerous challenges when it comes to making bold, creative decisions across various platforms, channels and experiences.

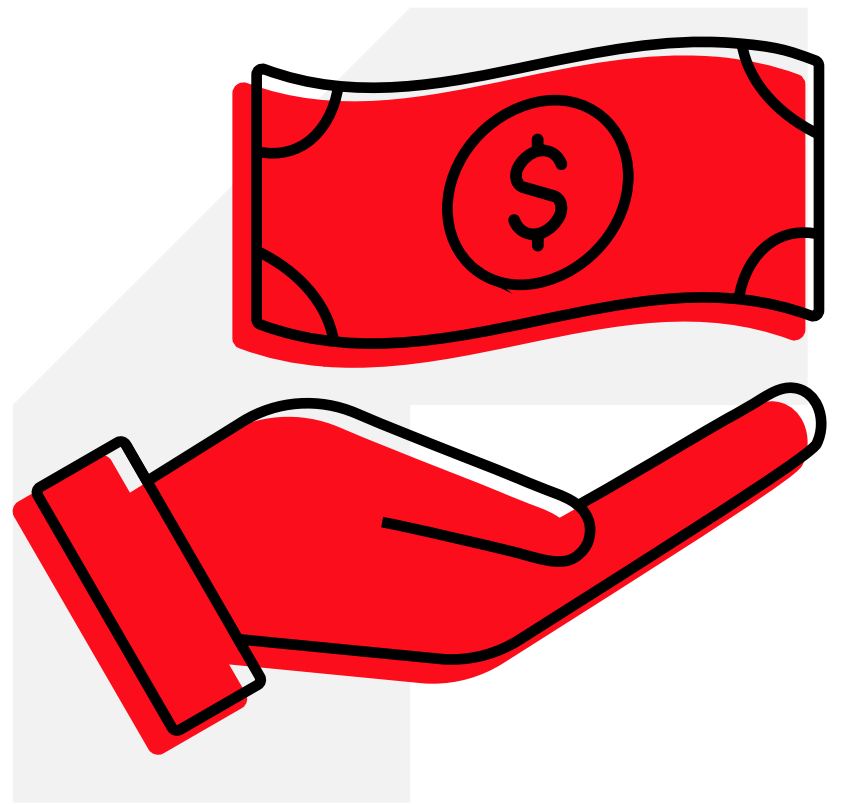
It's not that creativity isn't valued in B2B – quite the opposite, in fact.

Our research suggests that the problem comes when short-term targets and demands put great design on hold in favour of more “practical”, quick-win strategies.

In this section, we highlight three of the top challenges that marketers face and look at how these may act as barriers for bold decision-making.



A lack of investment



Budget has a key role to play in any marketer's ability to translate creative ideas into real-world campaigns. Some 76% of respondents say a lack of investment impacts their effectiveness as a marketer, which helps explain why many feel pressured to stick with tried-and-tested formulas.

As a consequence, financial pressures have a direct impact on the boldness of creativity and design. In fact, 70% of B2B marketers say they are "more likely to take the 'safer' option than to try something different."

For larger organisations, these pressures are compounded, with 9 in 10 reporting that the safer option is usually preferred. Those B2B marketers who are frustrated by this may need more support in making a stronger business case for bolder design to senior stakeholders and decision-makers.

The over-prioritisation of KPIs and short-term deliverables



B2B marketers have always been beholden to internal pressures and KPIs. These performance-based metrics mean that business units are often hyper-focused on numbers, which can heavily influence the priority and role of creative design.

“There’s definitely value in design and creativity, but the biggest challenge is that purse strings are measured around KPIs and performance,” notes Fujitsu’s Umesh Patel. “A lot of the budget is driven by quantifiable benefits and numbers, rather than the emotional benefits of engagement.”

“The biggest challenge is that purse strings are measured around KPIs and performance.”

The extent to which this impacts bold decision-making is quite stark. Given that 50% of all respondents cite “improving demand generation” as the top challenge impacting their marketing function, it’s understandable that many marketers revert back to past campaigns that have been shown to drive a degree of positive performance.

The problem is, past performance doesn’t necessarily indicate future results. While 70% of respondents agree that creative thinking is a fundamental part of how they work, it’s clear that pressures to meet certain targets can dissuade marketers from making bold choices.

Umesh Patel adds, “Too many B2B marketers are obsessed with the idea that if it doesn’t have a tangible metric, it shouldn’t be created. My view is that numeric KPIs such as clicks or views are not necessarily valuable. You could have 100 views or one view, but as long as that one view converts into a business result then it was worth it.”

“It’s clear that pressures to meet certain targets can dissuade marketers from making bold choices.”

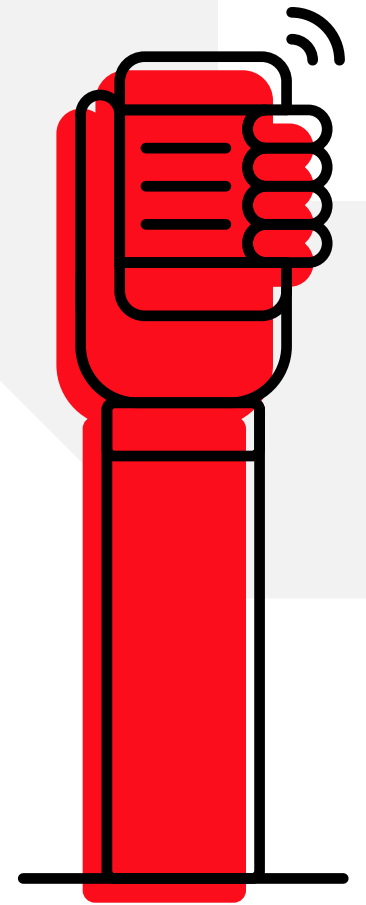
Capturing attention is tough (but no-one's told the boss)

Changing marketplace demands and a reshuffling of the business landscape mean it's harder to capture attention than ever before. These issues have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, which has indiscriminately impacted marketing budgets and heightened competition.

These ideas are borne out in our research, with nearly three quarters of respondents (73%) agreeing it's harder to capture attention and engage B2B audiences than it was 12 months ago.

Optimism at the top of organisations does appear higher, with 30% of CMOs reporting that it's not harder to engage B2B audiences than it was a year ago. However, director- and manager-level employees are far less confident in their assessment; an overwhelming 86% say capturing the attention of B2B customers is harder now than it was last year.

This struggle to engage and connect with prospects can further encourage “safe” decision-making, especially when budget-holders may not agree with the need to try something new. While existing practices may not be achieving the desired cut-through, these tactics are known quantities. In times of difficulty, it's easier to rely on the status quo than it is to try something bold and new.



What activities do B2B marketers currently prioritise?

To better understand what activities B2B marketers prioritise, we asked respondents to rank how various functions are emphasised in day-to-day business operations.

They cited these areas as **not being emphasised enough**:

Artworking and production

30%

Media planning

26%

Graphic design and storyboarding

25%

They cited these areas as **receiving too much emphasis**:

Marketing automation

36%

Graphic design

33%

Copywriting

29%



Here, it's worth noting that the primary objectives of B2B marketers differ depending on role and level of seniority.

For more junior marketers, the day-to-day task of managing projects and driving marketing automation will be a more conscious objective and concern. For senior marketers, however, the daily minutiae are less significant than the delivery and execution of larger-scale strategic initiatives.

For example, nearly one in three marketing managers say marketing automation is given too little emphasis, while 40% of CMOs say it's given too much emphasis. By contrast, CMOs (26%) are twice as likely as marketing managers (13%) to say campaign strategy is not given enough emphasis.

As such, CMOs, heads of marketing and marketing directors have a responsibility to champion bold thinking and lead from the top. While day-to-day activities are important, these are the people who can have a disproportionate impact on an organisation's ability to make great design a key priority.

As Florian Wagner, Senior Marketing Director at SAP, says, "If leadership instils the importance of design in marketing, then it tends to stick around. Twenty years ago, SAP hired a CMO from a consumer brand who completely changed the culture around design and design innovation. That culture still remains to this day."

Champion bold thinking

Real-world examples of great B2B design

Pushing against the status quo requires a degree of boldness and courage. The right creative idea can influence design, language, digital experiences and much more. This helps brands differentiate their proposition and connect with prospects and customers on a deeper level.

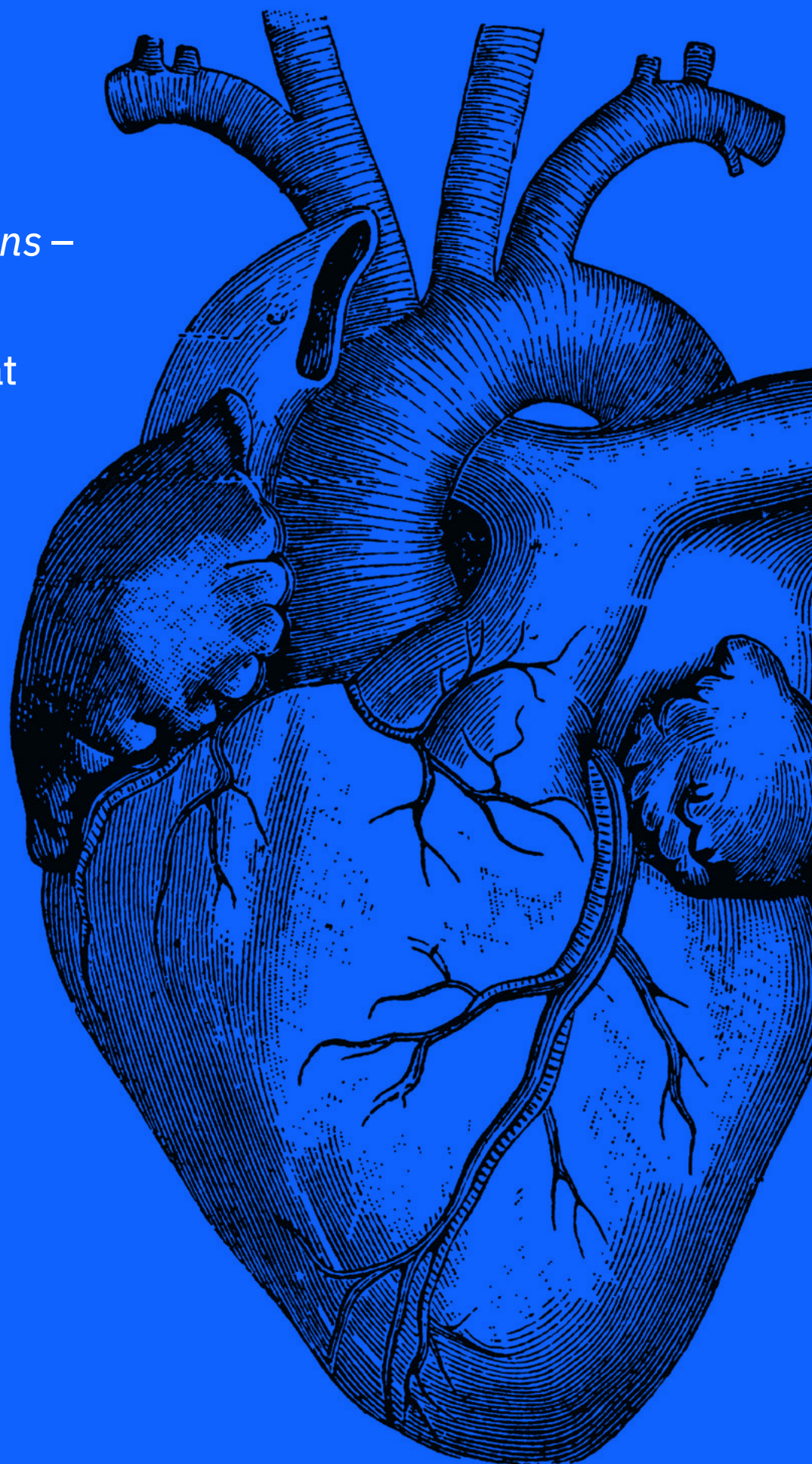
As Bradley Neill, Associate Director Global Brand and Advertising at Grant Thornton, says, “B2B marketers are definitely learning from the B2C world, whether it’s in the personal approach or the types of engaging content they produce. Our feedback from clients is that they want a more personal relationship, so creative ideas need to be tailored and delivered in a way that’s engaging and dynamic.”

To demonstrate how bold thinking can make a difference, we’ve included a few examples from our own portfolio. We’re not making claims to design greatness – we’re far too British for that – but they are all moments when we championed something a little unexpected (certainly for B2B marketing) and were rewarded when we stuck to our guns. More importantly, though, the boldness paid off for our clients too.

Driving lead progression

IBM came to us with an idea: a co-creation space where IBM experts and client leaders come together to use modern design techniques and IBM technology to solve specific business challenges. It already had a name: The IBM Garage.

Our concept for this account-based marketing campaign – *Where it happens* – focused on the space itself and the amazing, transformational change that can happen inside the IBM Garage.

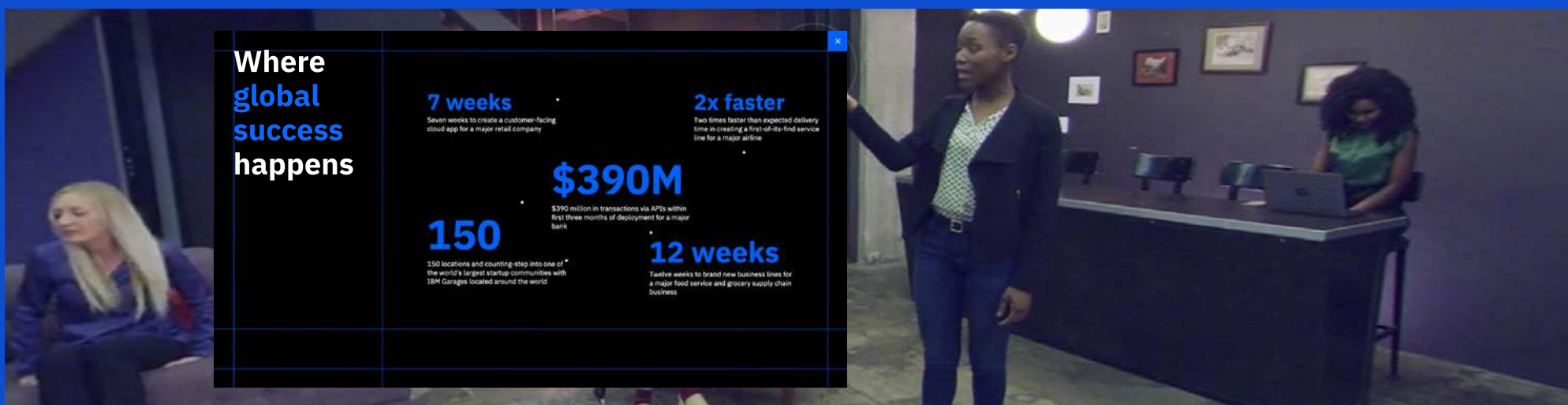




Central to the campaign was a premium hardback book full of striking layouts, interactive elements and an invitation...



... to see inside an IBM Garage via an interactive 360 video and a Google Cardboard headset.



A bold, personality-driven rebrand

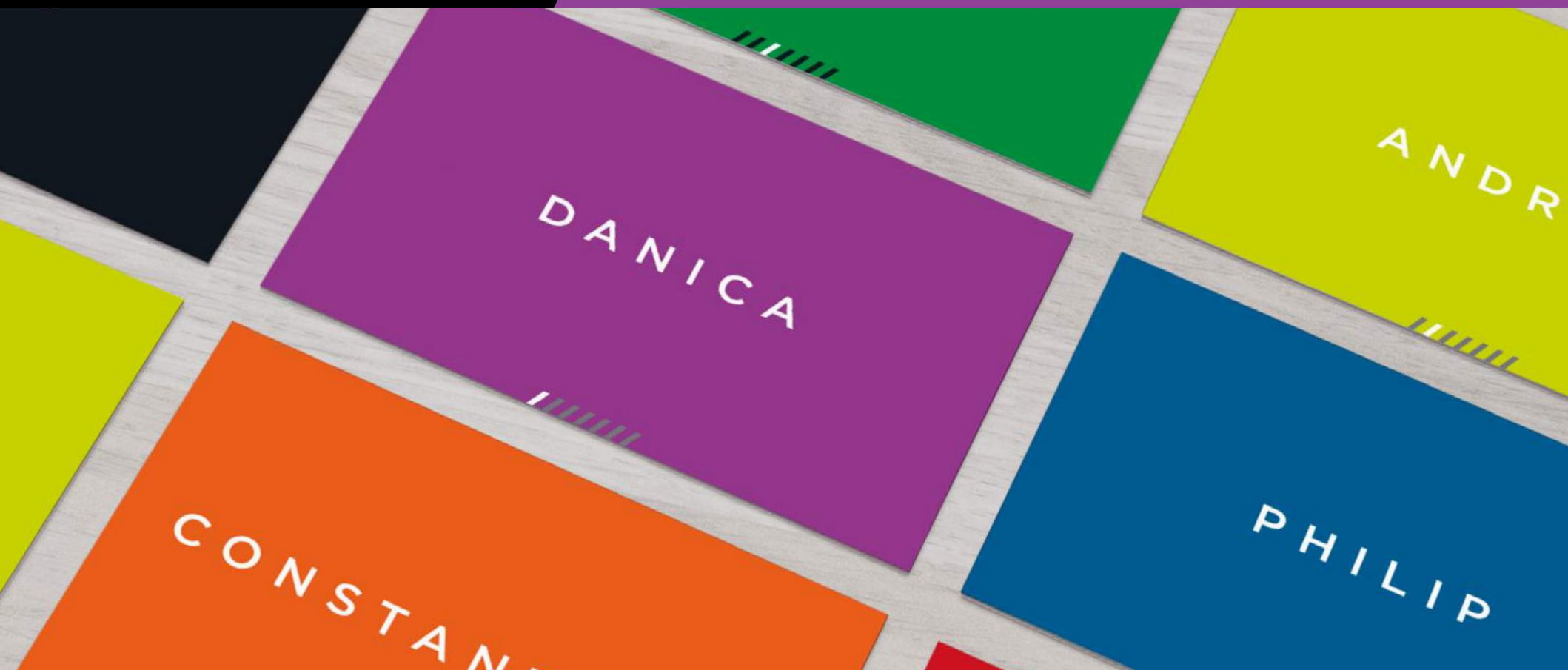
Charged with creating a new identity for a boutique financial services firm, it was clear from our research that we needed to focus on its people and the relationships they build as a primary differentiator.

We took this one step further, not just putting the people first making them the building blocks of the brand itself. First Names Group was born.

FIRST/NAMES
GROUP

GERALDINE





We interviewed people at all levels of the business to gain a true picture of the challenge and opportunity. Putting those same people in the launch video only added to the authenticity of the new brand.

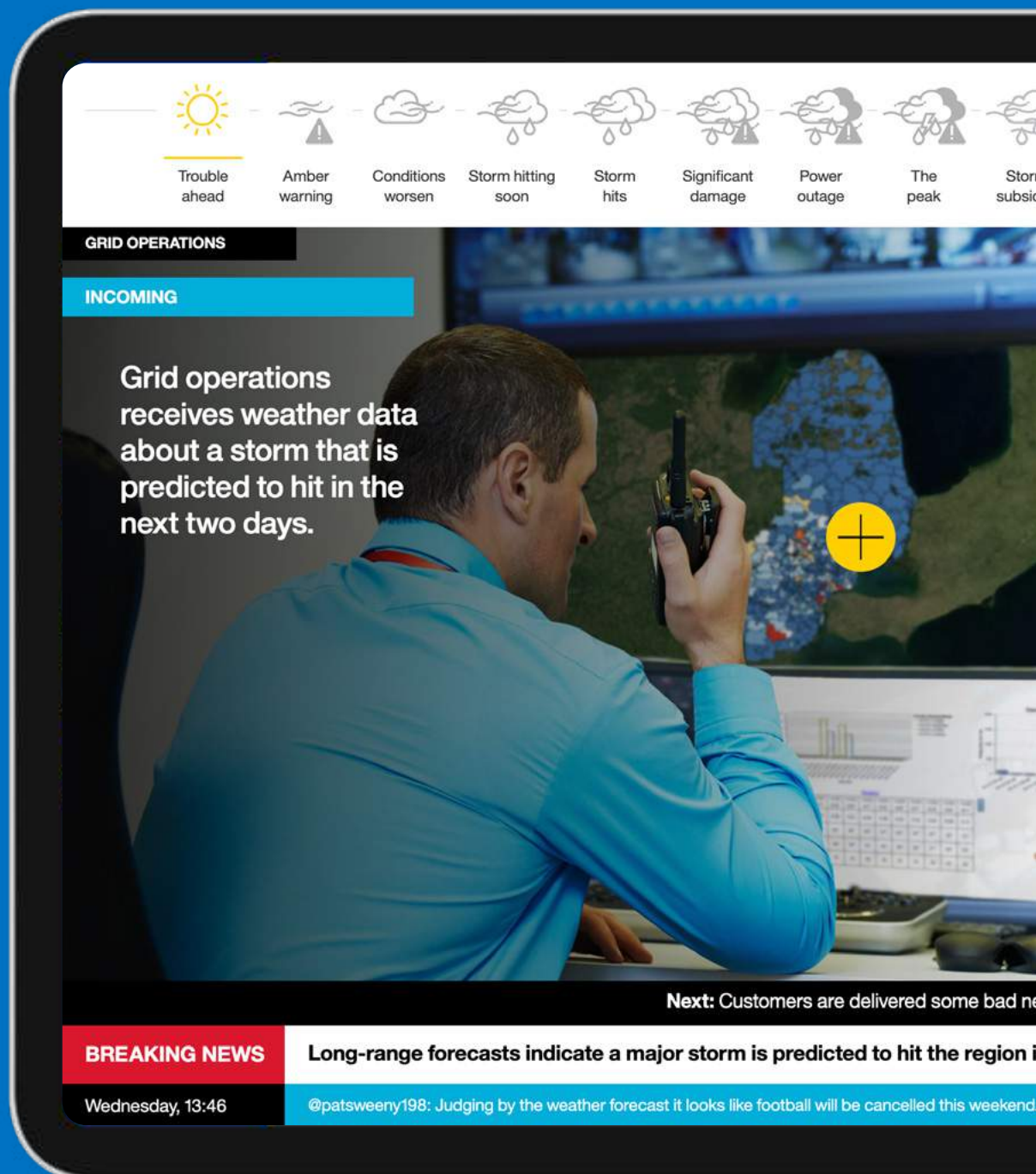


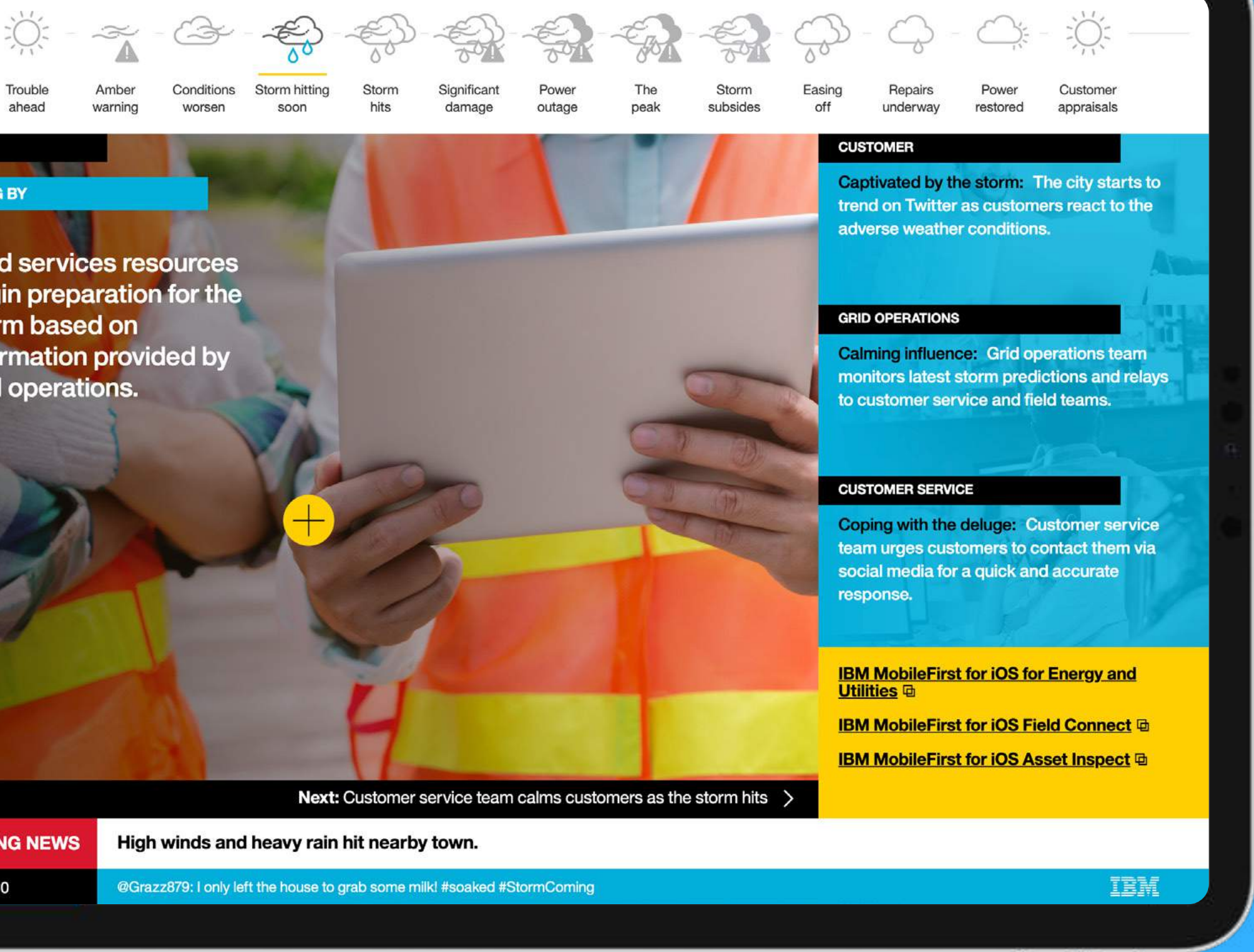
Taking a cue from CNN to cut through complexity

Sometimes the value of a story lies in its complexity. But you still need to find a clear way to tell it.

We were asked to demonstrate the ways IBM technology helps multiple different groups through their concerns and responsibilities during a major power outage.

Our solution to delivering this complex narrative was an interactive experience in the style of a rolling news feed that tracked different groups in “real time” throughout the storm event.



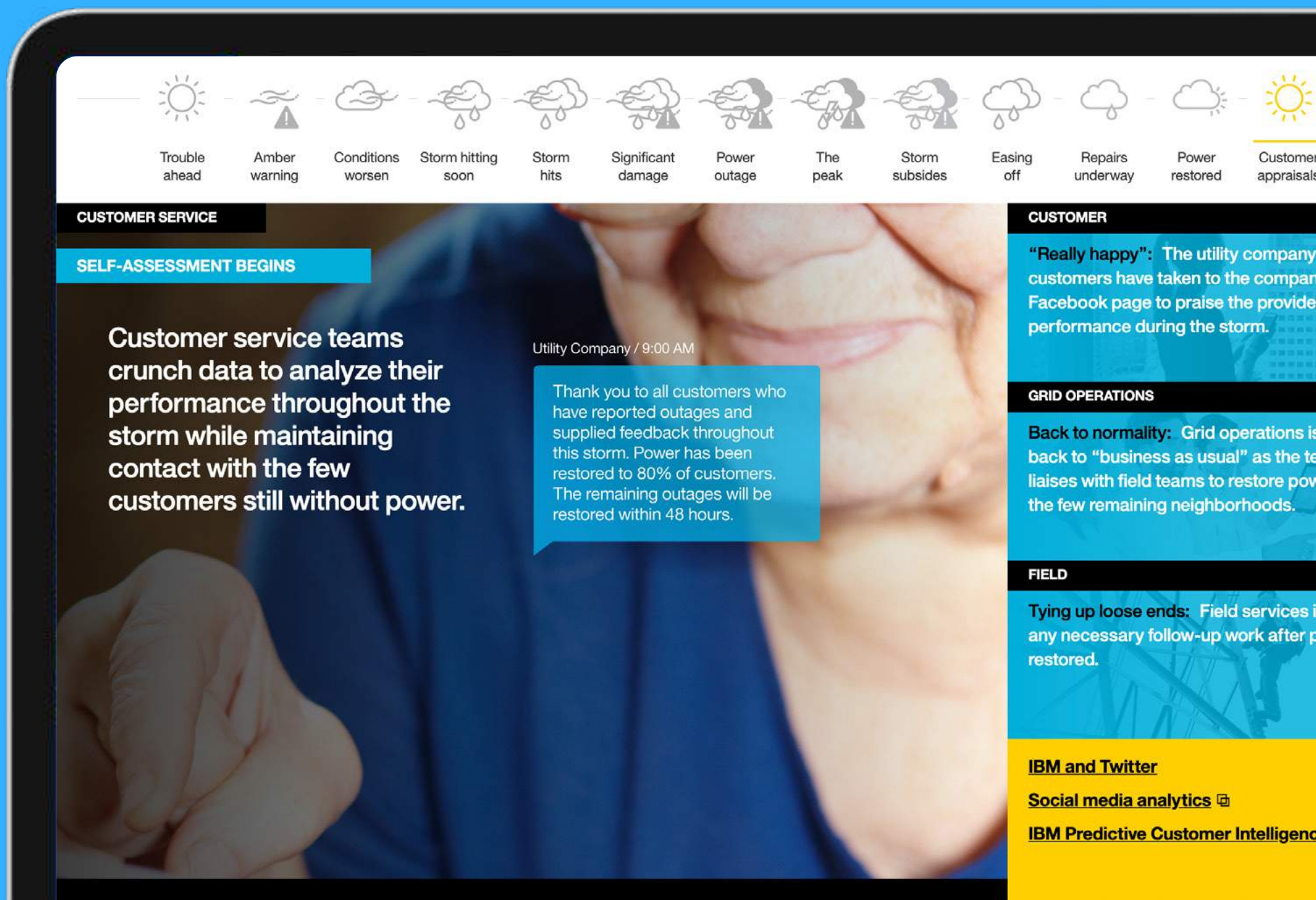


NG NEWS

High winds and heavy rain hit nearby town.

@Grazz879: I only left the house to grab some milk! #soaked #StormComing

IBM



CUSTOMER SERVICE

SELF-ASSESSMENT BEGINS

Customer service teams crunch data to analyze their performance throughout the storm while maintaining contact with the few customers still without power.

Utility Company / 9:00 AM

Thank you to all customers who have reported outages and supplied feedback throughout this storm. Power has been restored to 80% of customers. The remaining outages will be restored within 48 hours.

CUSTOMER

“Really happy”: The utility company customers have taken to the company Facebook page to praise the provided performance during the storm.

GRID OPERATIONS

Back to normality: Grid operations is back to “business as usual” as the team liaises with field teams to restore power to the few remaining neighborhoods.

FIELD

Tying up loose ends: Field services is completing any necessary follow-up work after power is restored.

IBM and Twitter

Social media analytics

IBM Predictive Customer Intelligence

New law. Sorted.

Design can be as much about words as imagery, as we showed for Lawyers on Demand, the original pioneer of a new take on legal services.

We helped them celebrate their journey with a playful campaign that hinged on that alternative perspective.

NORMAL WEDNESDAY

WE ONLY DREAM SAND

LORDS NAMED WAYNE

MANY READ OLD NEWS

New law. Sorted.

Ten years of seeing things differently.

As the original pioneers of New Law, we've been helping legal teams see things differently for ten years. We offer passionate, proactive lawyers with exactly the right experience whenever you need them. And nothing when you don't.

Search **Lawyers On Demand**



Snap happy

For a global awareness campaign for a French software giant, we knew we needed something bold to capture the imagination of an executive audience not yet familiar with the brand.

A crucial facet of the campaign was a series of specially commissioned photographs that captured striking future possibilities that the firm's software could help unlock.

It turns out B2C advertisers don't have a monopoly on award-winning photography.



IF WE want more room,
how quickly can we add it?
Modular skyscrapers –
a dream our software could bring to life.



3DEXPERIENCE

It takes a special kind of compass
to understand the present and
navigate the future.

3DS.COM/CONSTRUCTION

3S DASSAULT SYSTEMES | The **3DEXPERIENCE** Company

IF WE can fly with confidence,
why can't we invest
the same way?
Financial services that inspire trust –
a dream our software could bring to life.



3DEXPERIENCE

It takes a special kind of compass
to understand the present and
navigate the future.

Find out more:
3DS.COM/FINANCIALSERVICES

3S DASSAULT SYSTEMES **IF WE** ask the right questions
we can change the world.



IF WE want sustainable
energy, can we harness
ocean currents?
Tidal kites – a dream
our software brought to life.



3DEXPERIENCE

It takes a special kind of compass
to understand the present and
navigate the future.
Find out more:
3DS.COM/3DEXPERIENCE

3S DASSAULT SYSTEMES **IF WE** ask the right questions
we can change the world.



explore its resources,
is this the next giant leap
for mankind?

Lunar mining –
a dream our software could bring to life.

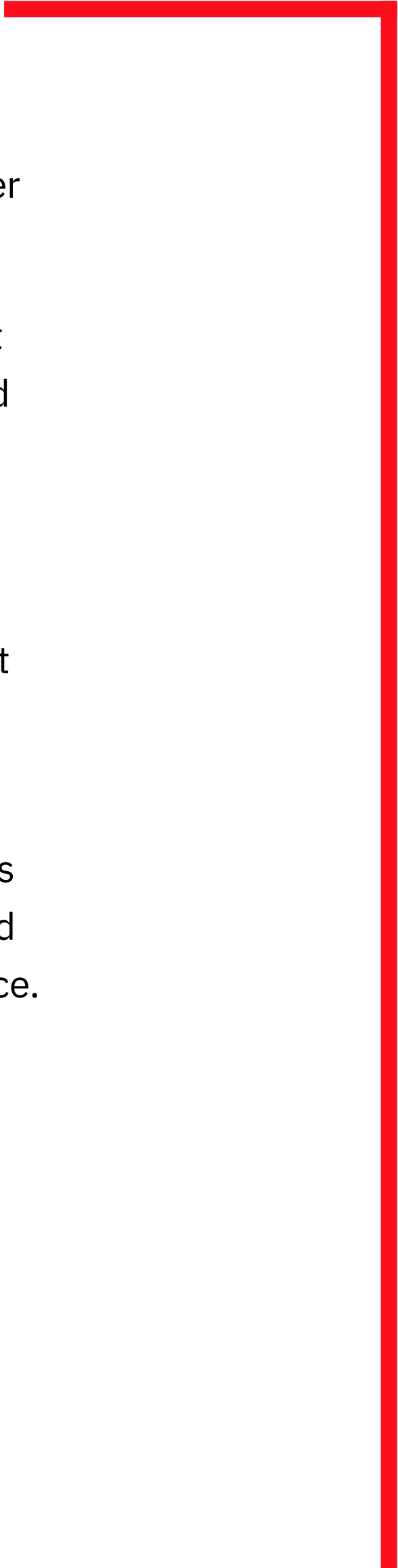


3DEXPERIENCE

It takes a special kind of compass
to understand the present and
navigate the future.

[3DS.COM/NATURAL-RESOURCES](http://3ds.com/natural-resources)

The value of boldness, creativity and new ideas



B2B marketers know that bold, creative thinking can help add value to the business, but there are a number of hurdles they must overcome to effect real change.

Whether it's a lack of investment or the need to meet short-term KPIs, B2B marketers need to look beyond the roadblocks in order to embrace the meaningful impact of great design.

As Umesh Patel notes, “An obsessive focus on KPIs limits bold thinking and forces people to go with what they know and are comfortable with.”

By contrast, the right creative idea can help brands do more with less, pivot towards the right KPIs (sales or meetings attended rather than clicks or views) and capture attention in a crowded and noisy marketplace.

It's not about design for design's sake. Given that well over two-thirds of B2B marketers agree that an investment in design would enhance profitability, there's a clear commercial case to be made as well.

To move the needle and drive performance over and above the competition, B2B brands should not shy away from bold thinking.

Here are five practical steps to help move this agenda forward:

1

Define results and metrics

Invest time in defining a set of results and metrics that are meaningful to the business and then educate all levels of stakeholders on why you're taking this approach. And be thoughtful about what a good result looks like. Don't allow yourselves to fall back on black-and-white KPIs that might stifle creative freedom.

2

Select good partners

Work with agencies to build a strong case for investment around a bold creative idea. A good agency can help you to build consensus and secure investment in an idea and creative route. An agency should also help you with the narrative that will build support around the idea, not just come up with the idea in isolation.

3

Seek inspiration from others

Look at what other companies are doing and don't be afraid to look beyond your own industry for ideas. Industry awards and their websites, for example, are a great source of inspiration. You can then use this information to educate key stakeholders on what can be achieved through investment in bold design.

4

Take risks and have fun

Don't underestimate the energy and fun that comes with taking a risk. It's much more fun doing something out of the ordinary that may not have been done before. If you're having fun delivering a bold creative idea, then chances are your audience will enjoy consuming it, too. If the last 18 months has taught us anything, it's that enjoyment is a precious commodity.

5

Learn, grow and evolve

Remember, not everything is going to work. Taking bolder decisions means you'll inevitably have to be honest with yourself if something's not hitting the mark. But don't be tempted to return to safer options that may have had their day. Learn from what's happened and build those insights into your next adventure.

**Let's put the bold
back into B2B
marketing.**

Ready to be bold?

Email

hello@theframeworks.com

to arrange a 30-minute
discovery call.

