



Summit 2021: A summary

THE HIGHS AND LOWS IN ONE HANDY GUIDE

 THE BRAND TO SALES™ AGENCY

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from Octopus Group

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INTRODUCTION

The B2B Summit by PRWeek and Campaign brought together comms and marketing professionals to ponder the peaks and pitfalls of navigating the B2B sphere.

From curating creativity to making comms more human, no topic was off limits at the all-day virtual event. Featuring well-known names and rising stars from the B2B world, guests were treated to a deep dive into the areas that matter most: developing brand visibility, demographic reach, and better business partnerships.

Octopus Group was proud to serve as headline partner, with two of our directors – Billy Hamilton-Stent and Nicola Pestell – taking the virtual stage to partake in the wider discussion. Here's our round-up of the key themes, lingering ideas, and inspiring messages that piqued our interest and got us excited about what the future of B2B holds.





Supercharged B2B

At Octopus Group, we know what it feels like to have our work and our business supercharged. B2B needed to work hard to earn its share of the limelight, and today is certainly its time to shine. Octopus Group's Chief Strategy Officer Billy Hamilton-Stent took to our summit screens to share his fired-up take on B2B's ascent to glory – and beyond.



A supercharge happens when a high external pressure is applied to an internal system. Kind of like putting a jet engine in a Renault Clio.

Billy outlined that thanks to the external pressure of influential trends raising the scale and stakes of what we do, marketers are being asked to solve new and diverse business problems. These trends mean we have to think differently, broaden our services, and get creative to help our clients.



NEXT, BILLY OUTLINED THE FOUR MOST RELEVANT, INDUSTRY-LEVEL SUPERTRENDS:**The commitment to Net Zero across the energy sector**

Although distinct sectors, Billy pointed out that ‘they’re also interconnected, forming an ecosystem of dependencies that accelerate change and impact every industry.’

**Digitisation in finance and the advance of fintech**

Asking the audience for their definition of a business stimulated some exciting chat, before he moved on to discuss the four gaps that B2B marketing should look to fill: knowledge, culture, ideas, and digital. Plus, Billy let us into a surprising fact: the fastest-growing B2B industry is manufacturing. ‘There are a lot of sleeping giants in infrastructure that are changing things.’

**5G, fibre and cloud in connectivity and telecoms****Employee-centred healthcare and the COVID recovery in health**

Wherever you feel B2B sits on the sliding scale, it’s clear that the opportunity for substantial growth has never been more within reach.



KEY THEME

Future thinking

Panel discussion

DO B2B COMMS PROFESSIONALS AND CLIENTS ACTUALLY CARE ABOUT BRAND PURPOSE?

CHAIR: LUCY LINTHWAITE | External Comms Leader, IBM

CHARLOTTE WEST | Executive Director, Global Corporate Communications, Lenovo

MELANIE DEROME | Global Social Impact PR, Dell

EDEN BLACK | Head of Media Relations, Nationwide

Given the slightly provocative question, this panel discussion began with a straightforward round up of how the respective companies view the role of brand purpose: namely, integral to your marketing strategy.

Charlotte added that although the concept of brand purpose isn't new, some of the conversations around it are. 'Despite it being clear than many brands have simply jumped on the bandwagon, at least this provides an opportunity to force the discussion and drive change.'

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Brands should ask themselves: why do you exist? Would the world be better or worse if you and your company were not here tomorrow?

CHARLOTTE WEST

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GLOBAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS,
LENOVO



Explaining that there is a more pressure on brands to show not tell, Melanie stressed the urgency around championing ESG. 'There's been a shift from [being] goal-orientated to wanting to know what actions you are doing now.' Going on to state that companies are now deciding who to do business with based on their environmental activity, she touched on demands for common standards, namely that companies should provide commentary on their climate initiatives and actions.

Finishing off by discussing the effect of the pandemic, conversation centred on the rise and benefits of remote working, with Charlotte pointing out that 'tech has been a fundamental part of how the world has continued through the last 18 months'.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Even if brands are not saying anything of significant value, at least they're driving the wider conversation
- Sustainability initiatives are becoming essential for organisations to attract new business
- Brand purpose – especially the storytelling element – is an integral aspect of your marketing strategy



Fireside chat

BOOMING BETAS AND THE RISE OF TECH-NATIVE BUYERS

STEFAN DOERING | Brand Strategy Lead, PWC

For the unfamiliar, BETA is an acronym that stands for:

- B** Blurred boundaries
- E** Evolving
- T** Tech-native
- A** Activist

Essentially another term for techy millennials, this acronym more or less encompasses the (relevant) qualities they possess. Importantly, this group are now moving into senior decision-making roles in the B2B space. In fact, Stefan relayed that millennials will make up 44% of the workforce by 2035.

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We need to humanise B2B. Talking in an authentic and humble way is a lot more likely to cut through the noise.



What makes BETAs tick? How do we communicate things that are important to them? When targeting such a time-sensitive bunch, it's important to cut through the noise and make sure content is easily accessible. For example, Stefan confirmed that the smartphone has topped laptops and tablets as the number one device used at work.

Finishing with the point that the development of new tech is only going to ramp up, and so many things are only in their infancy, Stefan left us wondering with the question: what's next?



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Millennials are moving into senior roles and now make up a majority of key decision makers
- They are tech-focused, time-poor, and environmentally proactive
- Content needs to be short, snappy and accessible to cut through the mud and target them successfully



RO-Why?

LOOKING BEYOND MEASUREMENT AND ROI

BARNABY BARRON | Head of UK Analysis, Cision Insights

‘ROI is a function of the benefits that you provide to the business.’ Getting the ball rolling with this short and sharp definition, Barnaby acknowledged that it’s incredibly difficult to prove ROI when so many different factors are at play; for example, bad UX could limit sales. Barnaby’s box of tricks extended to explaining strategy in the form of a striking visual metaphor:



PR is placing the seed of an idea in your audience. Advertising nurtures and waters that idea, making sure it continues to grow. And sales harvest the crops.



Barnaby then went on to explain that the focus needs to rest across different metrics to understand what is and isn't successful. Relying on a single metric doesn't work because there's not enough information.

Finally, a reminder that actionable insights are in the eye of the beholder: a business could have the best insights in the world, but if the stakeholder doesn't engage and actually put them into practice, they are meaningless. Understanding your stakeholders allows you to tailor your approach, and serves as a crucial step in proving your worth.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ROI is very difficult to prove, especially when multiple factors come into play
- One metric doesn't cut the mustard: you need several to gain the insights you need
- Know your stakeholder to target their needs specifically



KEY THEME

Power of people

Pivoting PR

TRANSFORMING YOUR STRATEGY TO STAY HUMAN IN AN AGE OF DIGITALISATION

CLAIRE GOSNELL | Global head of Brand, Comms, and Marketing, Clifford Chance

Claire began with the question:

How do we stay human in B2B?

We can all recognise the tendency for B2B to lean towards a more robotic approach. ‘There is a misconceived notion – a fallacy, even – that B2B is based on facts, and this clouds our judgement,’ acknowledged Claire. But fundamentally, people are at the heart of every business. Asking ourselves what those people are interested in and how we engage with them are ways for businesses to cut through and become more ‘human’.



Claire highlighted her three key themes for a 'Human to Human (H2H)' charter:

- Ask yourselves: do we really understand what our organisation stands for?
- Let's think about our audiences as *people*; not as customers, clients, or users
- Embrace diversity. It's crucial to understand how different people experience the world

Claire ended by sharing a personal experience of being enthralled by the cavernous hold of a container ship while visiting on a work assignment; but then pointing out how she failed to communicate that buzz within the ensuing comms. 'Despite the fact we know that it starts with people, we forget to factor it in.'



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- B2B can typically fall back on facts rather than embracing a more human approach
- Implementing a 'Human to Human' charter will help you to create more people-focused comms
- Diversity, understating your organisation, and changing the way you think about your audience are the first steps you should take



Snackable content

MAKING COMMS EASILY DIGESTIBLE

AMY LAWSON | Executive VP and Global Head of comms, Sage

The first of many call backs to the theme of humanising B2B, Amy started with the statement: ‘humans will be humans.’ She added that our brains are structured to respond in differently to words or pictures, concluding that the very best comms combine the two.

Amy then moved onto our increasingly shorter attention span. ‘There’s a price to pay for 24-hour news. Being constantly bombarded by content, we’re becoming more selective as a result.’ Although this has been reinforced by the pandemic, a study from 2019 shows that it’s actually been a long time coming. Looking at a variety of media – twitter data, books, film tickets – the research concluded that content was getting shorter and more succinct to cater for our depleting concentration levels.



We want short form content served in a format we’re already engaging with, or a very novel new format that plays to our attention span.



Moving on to discuss marketing strategy, Amy stressed that ‘personality wins over polish. It doesn’t matter if things are rough round the edges if that’s right for the format’. Referencing data gathered by Gartner, Amy finished by highlighting that traditional formats can drive people away, and brands should think about new and innovative ways to differentiate themselves. ‘Make sure your content stands out as a snack, not as another sausage roll on the buffet.’



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Human brains are adapted to respond better to a combination of content
- Embrace innovation and new streams of content sharing to differentiate your brand
- Our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter – so our comms must reflect that



Fireside chat

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN B2B COMMS: WHERE ARE WE GOING WRONG?

RAJIV PATTNI | Media Relations Manager, Allen & Overy

Starting by outlining that diversity and inclusion conversations are always going to be difficult, and that change doesn't happen overnight, Rajiv set a realistic tone for the discussion. He went on to list different initiatives that the law firm Allen & Overy were implementing to combat diversity issues; for example, a solicitor apprenticeship scheme and workshops around Black History Month.

Acknowledging that although the perception may say otherwise, Rajiv went on to state that 'the city is accessible; it shouldn't be a closed shop or old boy's network'. As for brands being better, he agreed that 'if you're not authentic in your messaging – not backing it up – you really risk reputational harm'.

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In order to broaden the pool, companies need schemes and initiatives that target non-traditional career routes.



Rajiv finished by stressing the importance of creating a safe space for employees to discuss diversity and inclusion, mentioning that sometimes organisations do get it wrong when internal experiences don't match external messaging.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Although conversations around diversity can be difficult, it's important to remember that change doesn't happen overnight
- Brands need to have genuine, authentic messaging, or they risk damaging their reputation
- In addition to this, brands should ensure their external messaging matches up with internal culture



KEY THEME

Curating creativity

Cultivating creativity

WHY B2B IS BORING NO MORE

CHAIR: MARK CHOUKE | Marketing Director, Mention Me
ISOBEL SITA-LUMSDEN | Head of B2B Marketing Europe, TikTok
TESSA CHEN | Corporate and Financial Comms, Dropbox
DAVID ARGUELLO | Head of Marketing, Flor de Cana
ALEXANDRA FREAM | Head of Corporate Affairs, Starling Bank

Alexandra kicked off with an inspirational quote from Maya Angelou: ‘you can’t use up creativity: the more you use, the more you have’. Continuing the positivity, Isobel enthused that creativity and joy were at the heart of her campaigns – plus, working for a challenger brand opens up the opportunity to be disruptive.

Next we heard from David, who made a case for the importance of brand storytelling, cementing that the more unique your brand proposition is, the more engaging it becomes.

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You have to know your audience. If you don’t have a defined story, you have to look inside of yourself and ask: why are you in business?

DAVID ARGUELLO
HEAD OF MARKETING, FLOR DE CANA



Mark then brought everyone back down to earth with the reminder that ‘creativity can be difficult to sell into boards as it’s expensive and the value is hard to measure’. Alexandra hit back by championing Starling Bank’s ‘dare to fail’ culture. An environment where employees are encouraged to share ideas and are not scared to fail is certain to cultivate creativity, and is bolstered by building a diverse and eclectic team.

Mark finished the session by recounting how certain tube stations back in 2008 started playing classical music to deter anti-social behaviour, an idea he regarded ‘so creative and different you wouldn’t pitch it to a board’. With this technique still in use today, this story serves as a cautionary tale for reluctant stakeholders to give creativity a chance.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Storytelling is essential part of your brand proposition: the more your narrative relates to your audience, the better
- Fostering a culture where employees aren’t scared to try out new ideas is crucial to curating creativity
- Building a diverse team of people from a variety of backgrounds is the best strategy to develop creative ideas



Panel discussion

TALENT TINDER: DO YOU NEED TO BREAK-UP WITH YOUR TECH?

CHAIR: LEOR FRANKS | Business Development & Marketing Director, Kingsley Napley

NICOLA PESTELL | Director, Octopus Group

SARAH JENKINS | Managing Director, Saatchi & Saatchi

SCOTT ALLEN | Microsoft Global Marketing Development & Strategy Director

Scott kicked off with a thought-provoking statement: modern marketing needs to be part scientific, part creative. Combining the power of the machine with the power of the human is what paves the way to successful creative work.

Sarah Jenkins echoed this passionate stance, exclaiming that there's 'never been a more extraordinary time to be a marketer: it's exciting, it's chaos'. Sarah went on to reassure everyone that although an important cog in the wheel, tech can't emulate creativity. 'We'll have human beings in ad agencies in one hundred years' time.'



It will be interesting over the next five years as B2B buyers become more savvy to see how they move towards more extensive platforms.

NICOLA PESTELL

DIRECTOR, OCTOPUS GROUP



Our very own OG director Nic continued the creativity thread with her own two cents. ‘You have to be just as creative as you do analytical, because the creativity needs to go into the platforms to generate the interest.’ But on top of that, Nic mused that it’s worth remembering that B2B can still be unsophisticated. Between relying on legacy technology and sales and marketing teams not communicating efficiently, there is a lot of opportunity to evolve.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The best marketing takes a Frankenstein approach: part scientific, part creative
- Tech is important – even essential – but it will never replace the value of human creativity
- There’s a lot of opportunity to evolve and shake off those stereotypical B2B tropes



Getting to grips with the new generation of B2B marketing

FROM THE ROBOT REVOLT TO REVOLUTIONISING ABM

ZOE HOMINICK | Head of Business Marketing and CEX, 02

Zoe jumped right in by asking: in the world we live in today, how can ABM help you achieve personalisation?

Rather than leaving us hanging, she quickly went on to offer three key tips:

- 01 Start from the customer out.** Take time to understand their challenges and discover how they are evolving. Tailor your offer and make sure you stay relevant
- 02 Think beyond the organisation.** A humanised B2B world is about connection. What are the creative approaches you can take to inspire people?
- 03 It's a two-way street.** Do you really understand your customers' perspective of you? Getting your head around that relationship is crucial

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True ABM starts with the customer: either one to one, or one to few. One to many is just good marketing.



Essentially, Zoe's crucial takeaway was to know your business and tailor your marketing approach, but that ultimately it all comes back to balancing the size of the prize vs the investment you make. After all, ABM is labour intensive – but it can be an incredibly powerful tool.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ABM is ripe and ready to give you the personalisation needed for individual targeting
- Bring it back to the human and make it about people to get under their skin
- It can be a more costly approach, so make sure you're balancing out effort put in with expecting outcome



Conclusion

Bursting to the brim with insights, the range of topics stimulated thought-provoking moments and memorable declarations galore. A number of key themes kept cropping up throughout: how to make B2B more human; the role of curating creativity and whether tech can ever replace it; and the importance of building a more diverse workforce. There was something for everyone, delivering value across the board and leaving us with a lot to think about.

Octopus Group were not only thrilled to participate, but also excited to be a part of something so much bigger: a supercharged B2B world.

