

TRANSMISSION.

THE *YES* ADVANTAGE

9½ behavioural biases that redefine how B2B
brands connect and engage with their buyers
to supercharge marketing effectiveness

THE FIRST-EVER STUDY CONDUCTED ON
GEN X AND BETA B2B BUYERS WORLDWIDE.

IN COLLABORATION WITH **RICHARD SHOTTON**

BEHAVIOURAL SCIENTIST AND AUTHOR OF *THE CHOICE FACTORY*





FOREWORD

THERE’S A TENDENCY TO BELIEVE THAT WHEN WE ARRIVE AT WORK, WE LEAVE OUR MORE HUMAN TRAITS AT THE DOOR. EMOTION AND INSTINCT GIVE WAY TO RATIONALITY; DECISION-MAKING BECOMES A MATTER OF COMPUTATION.

This is, of course, a myth.

We don’t stop being human just because we’re at the office. We’re swayed by the same psychological biases that shape every decision, even when choosing software rather than ice cream.

That’s where behavioural science comes in. It explores what actually influences decisions – work-based or otherwise – not what people say influences them.

And there’s growing evidence to show that professionals are indeed still human, even when in expert mode.

For example, the Australian government ran a fascinating experiment among doctors in 2018. The goal was to reduce overprescribing of antibiotics. The team identified 6,649 GPs – all at the upper end of antibiotic prescribing. One group got nothing. Another received an educational message about the threat of microbial resistance. And a third group got the same educational information plus a simple behavioural nudge: “You prescribe more antibiotics than 80% of your peers.”

The result? Information alone had a little effect. But the version including social proof – that one-sentence comparison with peers – cut prescriptions by 9.3%. An impressive impact for such a tiny tweak.

Even doctors – the supposed champions of evidence-based decision-making – are influenced by a single line of social comparison. It’s a strong signal that when weighing up work-based options, everyone is open to behavioural biases.

But up till now, much of the evidence on the impact of behavioural science in work settings focuses on public sector professionals.

So we decided to dig into the private sector. We ran ten experiments, across real business environments, to test whether behavioural science really works in B2B.

This report shows how small, inexpensive tweaks – rooted in behavioural insight – can lead to meaningful commercial gains. Not through big rebrands or new tech, but by understanding and working with human nature.

Because the truth is: rationality is overrated. And in B2B, behavioural science might just be the most underused competitive advantage out there.

RICHARD SHOTTON
Richard Shotton



DESPITE ALL THE DATA AVAILABLE TO MARKETERS, WE'RE OFTEN IN THE DARK ABOUT WHAT DRIVES HUMAN DECISION-MAKING.

THE YES ADVANTAGE: 9½ BEHAVIOURAL BIASES THAT REDEFINE B2B

TRADITIONAL ECONOMICS ASSUMES THAT HUMANS MAKE PURCHASE CHOICES BASED ON FACTS AND LOGIC. BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS SAYS OTHERWISE – WE'RE IRRATIONAL BEINGS, SHAPED BY COGNITIVE BIASES AND EMOTIONAL INFLUENCES, EVEN IN THE MOST HIGH-STAKES BUYING SITUATIONS.

In B2B, we mistakenly believe that buyers act in a rational, data-driven manner. It's understandable given they're often purchasing complex, million-dollar solutions that involve multiple decision-makers and long approval processes.

But here's the uncomfortable truth: this environment doesn't make our audience more rational. In fact, it makes them less so. Why? Because we're human beings, regardless of 'being in business'. We hate risk, we worry about blame, and we're hugely influenced by our peers and fellow colleagues. It creates the perfect conditions for biases to thrive.

In the context of B2B marketing, this presents both a challenge and a powerful opportunity.

Too many B2B brands today still produce forgettable creative and indistinct messaging that fails to move the needle. According to LinkedIn's B2B Institute, a staggering 75% of B2B ads score just one-star or lower for effectiveness – meaning three out of four campaigns fail to capture attention, resonate with buyer needs, or drive meaningful action.

But what if we flipped the script – and built marketing strategies around what truly drives buyer behaviour?

Behavioural science offers B2B marketers a powerful advantage. It can help us move beyond convention and tap into the full spectrum of emotional and motivational forces that influence decision-making. By uncovering the subconscious drivers behind how people choose, we can craft creative and messaging strategies that are not only distinctive, but also more predictable and effective.

In many ways, behavioural science can be a B2B marketer's secret weapon – a superpower that transforms one-star campaigns into five-star successes, proving we can create work with genuine emotional impact and long-term brand-building potential.

Unfortunately (and here comes the challenge), behavioural science is yet to take hold in B2B marketing.

While 58% of B2B marketers are 'very familiar' with behavioural science, only 24% truly believe it can effectively influence business buyers.

As a result, just 17% are consistently applying it to their strategies and campaigns. That's a striking 41% gap between understanding and execution.

There are two key reasons why:

- **Most of the proof lives in B2C** – the strongest evidence and case studies demonstrating the power of behavioural biases come from consumer marketing. As a result, 55% of B2B marketers remain sceptical about its relevance or effectiveness in their industry
- **We're unsure of where to start** – 33% are concerned about applying it in practice and struggle to integrate it into marketing campaigns, content, and engagement activities

"Only 24% of B2B marketers believe behavioural science can influence business buyers."

Discover the first-ever global study into the effectiveness of behavioural science in B2B marketing.

Working in partnership with behavioural scientist Richard Shotton and global research agency NewtonX, this groundbreaking piece of research will explore 9½ behavioural biases that influence B2B decision-makers at different stages of the buying journey – awareness, interest, and consideration.

Using original primary research experiments conducted in February 2025, we'll reveal:

- Which behavioural biases actually impacted and influenced B2B buyer decision-making – and the proof behind them
- How reactions to these biases vary between Gen X and BETA buyers
- How B2B marketers can put them into practice to strengthen marketing impact and effectiveness

We'll uncover the truth behind what B2B buyers will never tell you through intent data, surveys, or focus groups. How they actually behave in purchase journeys, what influences their choices, what stops them progressing, and what nudges them over the line to final brand or product selection.

No fluff, no theory for theory's sake. Just smart, evidence-backed ways to make your brand more memorable, your creative more effective, and your results more impressive.

THE VALUE OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE IN B2B MARKETING



In today’s noisy digital landscape, capturing attention and driving meaningful behavioural change is harder than ever. While new platforms and technologies are constantly emerging, the fundamentals of human decision-making remain remarkably stable.

That’s where behavioural science comes in. It offers B2B marketers a powerful toolkit for understanding how people actually think, feel, and choose – enabling campaigns that work with human nature, not against it.

As Shotton explains, behavioural science helps marketers craft more persuasive, memorable messaging by drawing on decades of psychological research and real-world advertising examples.

At its core, marketing is about influencing perception and behaviour – whether that’s encouraging brand switching, increasing purchase frequency, or building long-term brand equity.

Behavioural science, which Shotton defines as “the study of how people actually behave rather than how they claim to behave,” is uniquely suited to this task.

Unlike traditional methods like focus groups or surveys, behavioural science is grounded in rigorous experimentation. It reveals the often irrational, unconscious drivers of behaviour – insights that can be applied to everything from pricing and messaging to creative strategy.

As Shotton puts it, behavioural science helps marketers “work with the human operating system.” And in doing so, it gives brands a smarter, more effective way to cut through the noise and drive real results.

A QUICK NOTE ON ETHICS

When we surveyed senior B2B marketers in February 2025 on their perceptions of behavioural science, a recurring theme emerged: ethical concerns around its application. One CMO said:

“There is an ongoing perception of potential manipulation and whether the marketing is nudging a customer towards a decision that is potentially not optimal.”

CMO UNDISCLOSED

There’s no doubt that behavioural science equips marketers with a powerful lens to understand and influence decision-making. By tapping into cognitive biases, emotional triggers, and subconscious drivers, brands can create campaigns that resonate more deeply and drive measurable behavioural change.

But with this power comes responsibility. The same techniques that enhance effectiveness can also be misused – to manipulate, mislead, or exploit. Scarcity cues or urgency messaging, for instance, can prompt action. But if they’re exaggerated or deceptive, they risk eroding trust.

Shotton argues that ethical use comes down to transparency and intent. Marketers should use these insights to empower better decisions, not to maximise short-term wins. In his words:

“It’s about guiding, not coercing – helping people make better decisions, not just more profitable ones. Used with integrity, behavioural science builds not just performance – but trust.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHY BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE WORKS IN B2B

Stakes are high
Buyers hate risk. They lean on behavioural shortcuts that simplify and justify decision-making.

Collective scrutiny
Far more people are exposed to a bad choice. Biases ease fear of blame by providing validation and defensible choices.

Need for connection
In a world of automation and AI, behavioural science humanises messaging, making brands feel more relatable and trustworthy.

Still human after all
Emotions and instincts don’t switch off at work. Behavioural biases tap into these drivers to guide buyer choices and purchase decisions.

MEET THE

THIS REPORT IDENTIFIES THE 9½ MOST IMPORTANT BEHAVIOURAL BIASES EVERY B2B MARKETER NEEDS TO KNOW AND TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TODAY.

Each one:

- 1** Is an established psychological bias rooted in behavioural science
- 2** Has been tested on real B2B buyers using real B2B marketing experiments
- 3** Is easy to apply to your marketing strategies and campaigns to boost performance results today



B2B BIASES

BIAS 1

THE ISOLATION EFFECT

(THE VON RESTORFF EFFECT)

You're at the world's largest B2B expo for financial services, stood before a sea of towering stands and flashing screens. As Marketing Director, your brief was clear: make the brand unforgettable. But with hundreds of competitors all vying for attention, doubt was creeping in. Did we design something bold and distinctive enough to cut through the noise?



SOLO

BIAS 1: THE ISOLATION EFFECT

(THE VON RESTORFF EFFECT)

We notice what’s distinctive. People give more attention to and remember the things that differ or stand out from similar items in our surroundings.

That’s the essence of the **Isolation Effect**, also known as the ‘Von Restorff Effect’ – coined by German psychiatrist and paediatrician Hedwig von Restorff (1906–1962).

In the 1930s, von Restorff ran a simple experiment. She showed people a list of three-letter nonsense words, with one unexpected item – a string of number – slipped in halfway. See Figure 1.

BTX	TRL
MUR	HCA
630	JSD
GHV	

(FIG 1: THE ISOLATION EFFECT IN ACTION)

After a short period of time, the participants were asked to recall what they could remember. And you guessed it, the string of numbers received the highest recall rate.

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

The psychology behind the Isolation Effect lies in how our brains process and remember information.

Seeing something unique or different from the rest of our surroundings triggers and heightens our attention to the

distinct item, which leads to better retention of that information.

From a cognitive perspective, one of the key drivers of memorability is ‘ease’. We favour what feels fluent and frictionless. That’s cognitive fluency at work. When something is easier to process, it’s easier to remember and more likely to be believed.

That’s why novelty captures attention and sticks in memory.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

Since von Restorff’s experiment, there have been numerous Isolation Effect tests conducted on B2C consumers, but no formal experiments have been published with a sole focus on B2B decision makers.

That’s a concern. Maybe what works for the population as a whole differs from what works for professionals?

With that in mind, we recruited a robust 500-strong sample of B2B buyers across North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific (See our Methodology for the exact audience specification).

We then showed our subjects a list of logos from fictional cybersecurity brands. See Figure 2.

- **Six were blue** – our control set
- **Three used contrasting colours** – our distinctive outliers

The logos were then removed from view, and after a five-minute delay, participants were asked which ones they remembered.

HAVING A DISTINCTIVE LOGO
PROMPTED A 42.4% UPLIFT IN
BRAND MEMORABILITY.



(FIG 2: EXAMPLE OF LOGOS USED)

The results:

- 33% of B2B buyers recalled the control logos
- 47% of B2B buyers recalled the distinctive logos

That’s a **42.4% uplift** in memorability just by changing the colour. This proves that visual marketing assets that break convention will grab buyers’ attention and are easier to recall.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

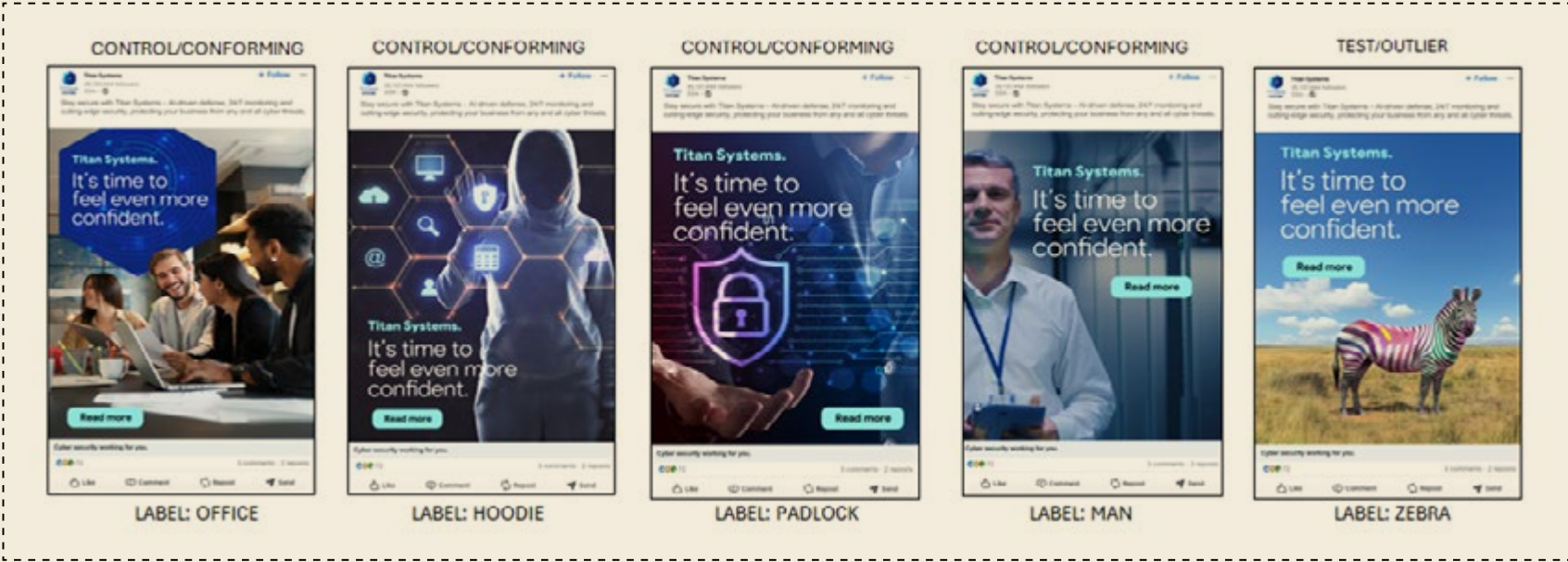
Distinctiveness drives attention and memory

When something stands out from its surroundings, it captures more attention and is more likely to be remembered. This is the core of the Isolation Effect – uniqueness enhances memorability.

TAKEAWAY 2

Ease reduces cognitive effort and boosts brand recall

People prefer options that require minimal mental effort. Making your brand or product easy to find, understand, and purchase helps form stronger, more positive associations, increasing the likelihood it will be remembered.



(FIG 3: CYBERSECURITY ADVERT EXAMPLES)

It’s important to note that distinctiveness comes in many forms, not just colour. It can be size, shape, position, words, or imagery. So, to make sure it wasn’t colour alone that influenced recall in the minds of our B2B buyers, we then asked the sample to view five different cybersecurity adverts from the same fictitious cyber brand. See Figure 3.

- **Four were ‘cliché’ B2B adverts** you’d typically see cyber brands promoting in the marketplace today
- **One of the adverts was distinctive** and unusual. It featured a zebra

After a five-minute delay, recall scores were:

- 31% of buyers remembered the ‘cliché’, conforming ads
- 58% of buyers remembered the distinctive zebra ad

The distinctive ad boosted brand memorability by an impressive 27%. Again, proving that the Isolation Effect holds true for B2B buyers.

“Conforming to category norms may seem like the safe thing to do but it won’t make people remember your brand. I hope the results of this study inspire B2B marketers to break conventions. It’s a surefire way to be noticed.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT THE ISOLATION EFFECT MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

Standing out isn’t a creative luxury in B2B – it’s a commercial imperative.

With the rise of generative AI, the risk of bland, lookalike creative is only increasing. When marketers use the same stock libraries, prompts, tone, and templates, they generate work that’s efficient but invisible.

This is where the Isolation Effect becomes a strategic advantage. It shows us that novelty isn’t just nice to have – it’s how memory gets made. When your creative breaks the pattern, it earns attention. And when it’s easy to process, it sticks.

Of course, standing out and being distinctive doesn’t mean you need to be overly loud, wacky, or risky. Distinctiveness can come in many forms, i.e., creating surprise, being humorous, or evoking curiosity.

As Orlando Wood outlines in *Lemon and Look Out*, the right hemisphere of our brains – responsible for attention and long-term memory – responds much better to storytelling, humour, characters, music, emotion, and surprise. Precisely the things most B2B brands leave out.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In a category where most brands look, sound, and behave the same, the Isolation Effect shows that making one element of your campaign stand out – visually, tonally, or structurally – dramatically increases attention and recall. Whether it’s a bold colour, an unexpected format, or a surprising message, distinctiveness makes your brand more memorable and more likely to be chosen. In short: if you don’t stand out, you don’t stand a chance.

APPLYING THE ISOLATION EFFECT

Here are some ideas for applying the Isolation Effect to marketing strategies or campaigns to help boost brand or product standout and memorability.

- **Introduce characters or mascots**
Characters are a powerful yet underused tool in B2B marketing – only 1% of B2B brands currently use them. They help humanise complex offerings, boost emotional engagement, and improve brand recall, ultimately driving loyalty and repeat business.

- **Break audio norms**
Catchy music or unique audio cues are powerful attention-grabbers, yet rarely used in B2B marketing. While many brands default to safe, generic stock tunes, this sameness makes it hard to stand out.

The opportunity lies in creating a sound that’s fresh, ownable, and instantly recognisable – without the hefty licensing fees. A memorable jingle or sonic logo can significantly boost brand recognition and engagement.

- **Create a distinctive icon or motif**
When used consistently across your marketing platforms and communications, unexpected icons or motifs that challenge the visual sameness of your category can be an effective asset for brand standout and recall. Because they don’t require words and use little space, they are especially powerful in digital or social awareness campaigns as a mental shortcut for recognition.

THE ISOLATION EFFECT: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

BETA buyers scored higher than their Gen X colleagues across both Isolation Effect experiments. However, the differences were relatively small and not statistically significant, meaning they could be due to chance rather than a true age-related effect.

- In the logo experiment, 47% of BETA buyers recalled the distinctive logos vs. 44% of Gen X buyers
- In the advert experiment, 50% of BETA buyers recalled the unusual zebra advert vs. 44% of Gen X

While age may not drastically alter the effectiveness of distinctive branding, it’s worth noting that BETA buyers have grown up in a digital-first environment saturated with visual content.

This constant exposure may make them more responsive to distinctive, attention-grabbing creative simply because they’re more practiced at filtering out communication that looks and sounds the same.

BIAS 2

THE HALO EFFECT

The cameras are ready, the script locked. As you scan the casting websites, your eyes drift to the all the polished models available for hire. With the brand launch looming, should you stick to actors who look more authentic and relatable to your customers or would beauty win more attention? The choice feels less like casting, more like a strategy.

**HALO**

BIAS 2: THE HALO EFFECT

When we form a positive impression based on a single trait, we tend to assume other positive traits follow.

For example, if someone appears physically attractive, we might also assume they're kind, intelligent, or friendly – even without any real interaction.

This mental shortcut is known as the **Halo Effect** – our tendency to let one positive trait influence our entire judgement.

The bias was first formalised in 1920 by psychologist Edward Thorndike. He asked army officers to evaluate a group of soldiers across 31 distinct traits, from leadership and loyalty to physical appearance and dependability. What he found was striking: when a soldier scored highly on one attribute, they were also rated highly on unrelated traits. A neat appearance, for instance, often led to higher marks for intelligence or character, even though the two weren't logically connected.

A similar study by Richard Shotton and Joanna Stanley asked 400 British consumers to evaluate a fictional greengrocer's product range. Half were told the grocer's shop sign had a typo – a rogue apostrophe. The other half weren't. The result? Those who noticed the typo were 17% more likely to assume the grocer had a poor product range.

Both Thorndike's and Shotton/Stanley's research show how the Halo Effect can influence judgment. When one positive trait stands out, we tend to assume others follow – often overlooking flaws in people or products. This bias can distort

our assessments and cause us to miss valuable opportunities or make poor decisions.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

Our brains like simplicity and shortcuts. When faced with ambiguity or incomplete information, we often take one evident, tangible trait – i.e., appearance – and use it to judge everything else.

It's a form of cognitive efficiency. Rather than weigh each attribute individually, we make assumptions. The clearer the signal, the more persuasive it becomes.

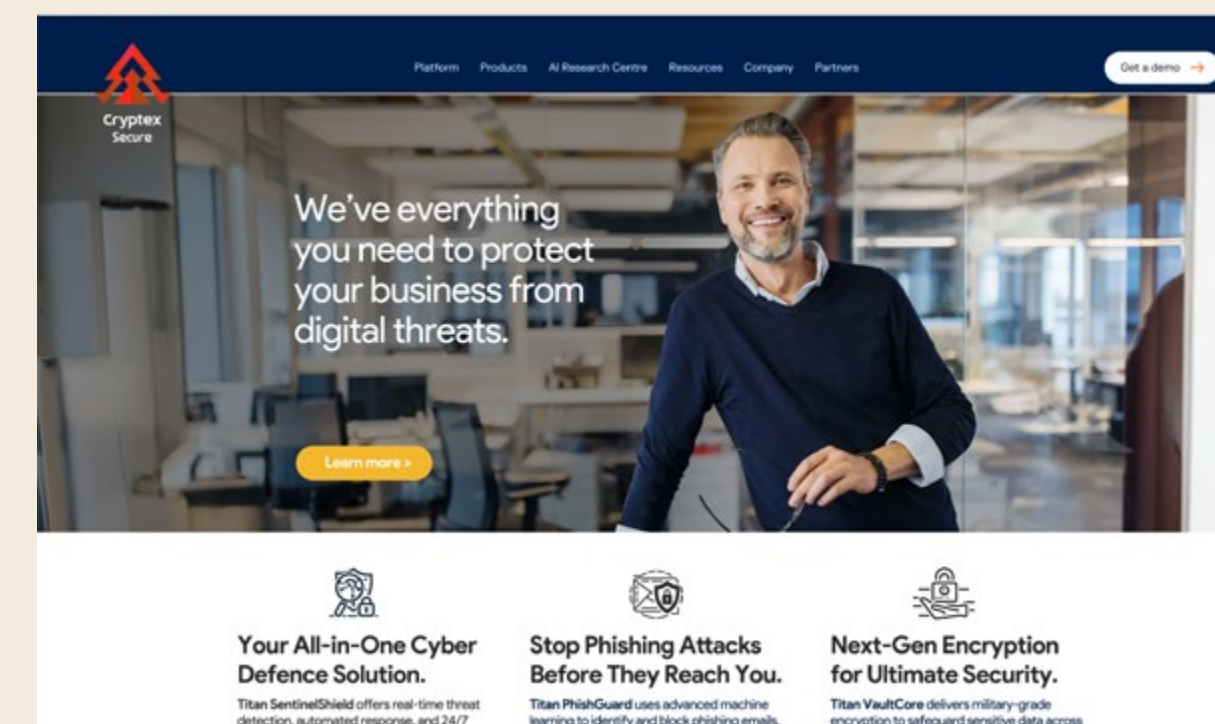
PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

While the Halo Effect has been widely studied in B2C contexts, there's limited academic research exploring its influence on B2B buyer behaviour – particularly when it comes to influencing perceptions of brand trust or expertise, for example.

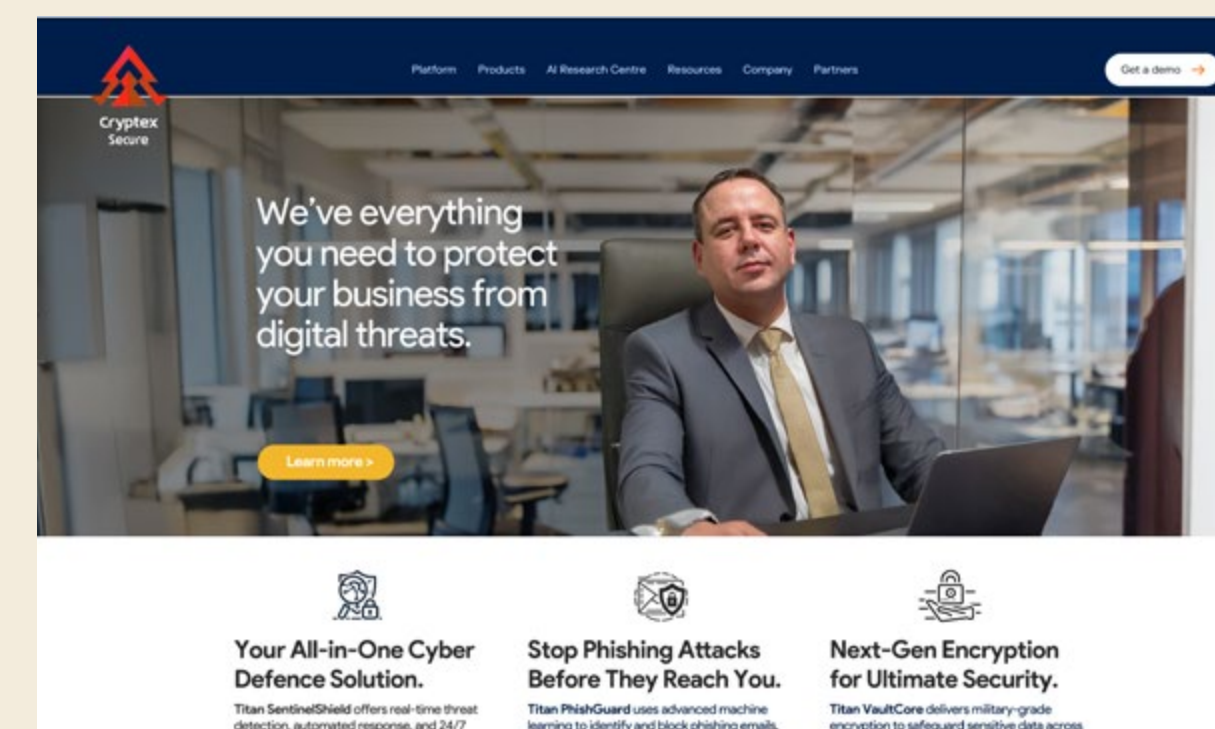
To investigate this further, we recruited 500 B2B buyers from global organisations and split them into four equal groups. Each group was shown the homepage of a fictitious cybersecurity brand named *Cryptex Secure*.

- **Group 1** saw a homepage featuring a businessman who was deemed 'attractive'. See Figure 4
- **Group 2** saw a homepage featuring a businessman who was deemed 'less attractive'. See Figure 5
- **Group 3** saw a homepage featuring a well-known celebrity

- **Group 4** saw the same homepage as Group 1, but the 'attractive' businessman was featured next to the logo of a well-known insurance brand who were working in partnership with Cryptex



(FIG 4: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)



(FIG 5: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Mental shortcuts shape perception

Our brains prefer efficiency, so we often form quick general impressions rather than evaluating each trait individually. This shortcut helps us make fast judgments but can also lead to biased assumptions.

TAKEAWAY 2

The Halo Effect thrives in ambiguity

When information is vague or intangible, people latch onto whatever seems clear and objective – like a confident tone or polished appearance – and use it to infer other qualities. This can distort how we perceive someone or something overall.

A 37% BOOST IN PERCEIVED BRAND QUALITY – JUST BY SHOWING B2B BUYERS A “MORE ATTRACTIVE” MAN.

The results revealed that level of attractiveness had a clear impact on how B2B buyers judged the Cryptex brand.

- 59% of buyers who saw the ‘more attractive’ man rated the cybersecurity brand as high quality, compared to 43% for the ‘less attractive’ version – a massive 37% uplift in perceived quality rating
- Brand trust and expertise ratings were 68% higher among those B2B buyers exposed to the ‘more attractive’ figure
- 44% of B2B buyers who saw the celebrity male rated the brand as ‘very trustworthy’ vs. 23% for the less attractive man. In high-stakes B2B decisions, celebrity status acts as social proof – signalling credibility and making the brand feel safer and more reliable
- When paired with a credible partner (a well-known insurer), perceptions of brand quality, expertise, and trust rose by a further 17% – showing that attractiveness and reputation together drive even stronger brand lift

“These results prove that B2B brands can obliquely pursue their goals. Showing your brand is trustworthy through a 60-second video is hard. But making your customer laugh? That’s much easier. And the Halo Effect suggests that if you improve a metric such as funniness or likeability, then others, like trust, will follow.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT THE HALO EFFECT MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

The Halo Effect reminds us that where the head follows the heart, and attention determines affection, a strong first impression goes far.

In B2B, those early impressions matter more than many assume. 86% of buyers already have their preferred vendors

in mind from day one of the purchase journey. Despite having thousands of suppliers to choose from, they typically shortlist just three to four brands for final consideration. Once that shortlist is made, 92% will choose the brand they shortlisted from day one.

Brands that have a strong, positive image at the start of the buyer journey will have a much better chance of winning at the end.

For marketers, the Halo Effect indicates that brands can accomplish their marketing goals indirectly. If positive association in one area, say brand image, can directly influence buyer perceptions in unrelated others, say product quality, then focusing all your marketing efforts on boosting just one metric could be extremely effective.

The Halo Effect is especially powerful when it comes to building brand trust. A 2024 Forrester report found that buyers are nearly twice as likely (85% vs. 48%) to choose a supplier when a sense of trust is established early, even if there’s no immediate need.

As Adam Scott, the Amazon best-selling author of *Millionaire Success Secrets* shares:

“The Halo Effect helps you build a foundation of trust. When customers already have a positive impression of your brand, they’re less likely to question your products or services, which makes closing deals faster and easier.”

ADAM SCOTT

Far too often B2B marketers make the mistake of telling their audience how trustworthy they are. In this situation, it’s hard for buyers to evaluate how believable those claims are. How does the buyer know if the brand is exaggerating and telling the truth?

WHY THIS MATTERS

When you align your brand with something already seen as credible or high-quality, those positive traits rub off on you. The Halo Effect helps marketers shape favourable emotional impressions early, making your brand feel more trustworthy and premium.

APPLYING THE HALO EFFECT

Here are a few ideas for applying the Halo Effect to marketing strategies or campaigns to strengthen brand reach and positive sentiment:

- **Design a hero asset that radiates quality**
Create one flagship piece – like a beautifully shot manifesto film or a microsite with cinematic UX – that sets the tone for your brand. This single asset becomes the benchmark that casts a positive glow over all other touchpoints
- **Use familiar faces in unfamiliar contexts**
Place a well-known and likeable figure (admired celebrity, filmmaker, sportsperson, or musician) in a surprising B2B setting like a factory floor or data centre. The contrast draws attention, and their presence will boost memorability and add credibility to your message. Celebrity endorsements can also help to humanise your brand and make unfamiliar solutions or services feel less risky
- **Associate with cultural moments**
Align your campaign with a high-profile event, trend, or movement like sustainability week, AI ethics, or creative awards season. The positive associations of the moment can rub off on your brand, especially if your contribution feels authentic and timely
- **Apply the shared stage strategy**
Host a virtual event, webinar, or roundtable in collaboration with another respected brand. The association will create a powerful spillover effect and boost brand credibility, trust, and quality assurance – especially if the partner is seen as a thought leader or visionary in a topic your audience care about, or has a similar brand purpose and values to you own

THE HALO EFFECT: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

Gen X buyers were influenced more by physical attractiveness than BETA buyers, rating the ‘more attractive’ man higher for likeability (74% vs. 48%), trust (44% vs. 30%), quality (65% vs. 52%), and compassion (42% vs. 25%). Gen X buyers grew up in an era where advertising heavily emphasised physical appearance – think glossy magazine ads – reinforcing subconscious links between attractiveness and positive traits.

BETA buyers were less swayed by looks, rating the ‘less attractive’ man higher for likeability (43% vs. 31%), which led to stronger brand scores for trust and compassion. BETA buyers often value diversity and authenticity more than their Gen X colleagues, making traditional standards of attractiveness feel less important.

When exposed to the Celebrity man, BETA buyers showed significantly higher ratings for brand quality, expertise, and trust than Gen X buyers – suggesting celebrity status resonates more with younger audiences. Both groups rated the Brand Partnership man similarly for likeability, but Gen X buyers were more influenced by the brand endorsement, giving higher scores for quality, expertise, and trust.

BIAS 3

CONCRETENESS

You stare at the blank screen. This paid media advert must resonate and impress C-suite leaders who are decisive and time-poor. Should the headline use words that signal authority and expertise in business strategy? Or should we stick to simpler language that's quicker to read and easier to remember?

**BRICKFACE**

BIAS 3: CONCRETENESS

Language tends to be more memorable and credible when it's concrete than when it's abstract. (Begg, 1972)

Let's try something. Below are eight two-word phrases. Read them slowly to yourself, then cover them up:

TRUE JUSTICE
GREEN SALAD
BRIGHT FUTURE
HAPPY CHICKEN
ETERNAL VISION
BASIC RIGHTS
MUDDY BOOTS
BRIGHT FUTURE
AUTOMATIC CLARITY

Now see how many words or phrases you can recall.
No peaking!

We bet you found the concrete words easier to remember over the abstract phrases.

If so, you have just experienced **Concreteness** – a bias that shows how we tend to process and remember information that's concrete, specific, and tangible (like 'chicken' or 'green') over information that's abstract, vague, or immaterial (like 'justice' or 'clarity').

This bias was first tested in 1972 by psychologist Ian Begg, who asked a group of students to read and recall a list of

two-word phrases. The result was that four times as many remembered the concrete phrases over the abstract ones.

That's because Concreteness doesn't just boost memory, it changes how we interpret and judge information. We subconsciously prioritise what feels real and tangible. Abstract language like 'innovation' or 'excellence' might sound impressive, but it rarely sticks or convinces.

More recently, researchers Packard and Berger found that using concrete language in sales messages increased purchase intent by up to 12%, and actual sales by 13-30%. The effect held across industries, delivery channels, and even foreign languages.

Vague ideas vanish. Specifics sell.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

When we hear a concrete word or phrase, we tend to visualise it. That simple act of mental imagery makes the information stick.

Begg speculated that this is why concrete language is easier to remember: it creates a picture in the mind, while abstract words like 'efficiency' or 'innovation' slip by without registering.

But this isn't just about memory. Concreteness also shapes how we judge credibility.

People are more likely to trust information that feels real, detailed, and verifiable. For example, *"This software is highly effective at reducing errors"* may sound nice, but *"This software reduces human error by 80% in two weeks"* feels true.

That's because the brain unconsciously prioritises specific, sensory-rich information over vague or generalised claims. It gives us something to mentally hold onto, which makes a difference when it comes to decision-making.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

Previous studies have shown how Concreteness influences consumer decisions. But no one had tested its impact on business buyers.

To close this gap, we recruited 500 B2B decision-makers and presented them with four social media ads from a fictional cybersecurity brand – some ads featuring headlines with concrete language, others with abstract wording.

Figure 6 illustrates examples of the headlines we used in the social media ads.

Keep sensitive files locked inside our digital fortress.

Proactively protect your digital ecosystem with next-gen threat intelligence.

Think of us as your cyber guard dogs: ready to attack intruders fast.

Accelerate the detection of cyber threats with enterprise-wide network security.

(FIG 6: EXAMPLES OF HEADLINES USED)

For reference, headlines one and three shown above contain concrete words. Headlines two and four contain abstract words.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Concrete language enhances memorability

When we hear specific, tangible words, our brains automatically create mental images – making the information more likely to stick. Abstract terms, by contrast, are harder to visualise and easier to forget.

TAKEAWAY 2

Specificity boosts credibility

People are more likely to trust information that feels real and verifiable. Concrete statements with clear examples or measurable outcomes (e.g., "reduces human error by 80%") are perceived as more credible than vague or general claims.

USING CONCRETE (VS. ABSTRACT) WORDS DROVE A 24.3% LIFT IN MESSAGE RECALL.

After viewing the ads, the sample were first asked which adverts caught their attention the most.

- 50% picked those with concrete words
- 37% picked the abstract versions

We then introduced a five-minute delay and asked the same participants which adverts they could now recall.

- 46% remembered the concrete ads
- 37% remembered the abstract ones

That's a **24.3% lift in total recall** – clear evidence that Concreteness works just as powerfully in B2B as it does in B2C.

"Vision is the most powerful of our senses. Using language people can visualise makes your message stickier. That's why 'Red Bull gives you wiings' is a more memorable slogan than 'Red Bull gives you energy'."

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT CONCRETENESS MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

As marketers, we know that language matters. One word in a headline or subject line can make a huge difference to media impressions, click-through rates, or SEO performance.

In B2B, we often default to complex, impressive-sounding messages, believing it builds credibility or authority. But this habit has become our Achilles' heel: overused business jargon that actually weakens clarity and memorability.

A study by Bospar and Propeller Insights found that 88% of B2B decision-makers believe clichés and buzzwords can actually damage brand reputation. Words meant to impress, like 'disruptive' or 'best-in-class', can make your brand feel insincere or disconnected.

Whereas concrete language does the opposite. It builds clarity, confidence, and connection.

APPLYING CONCRETENESS

Here are some practical ways you can apply Concreteness to your marketing efforts to improve the memorability and impact of your messaging.

- **Simplify your language**
Strip your marketing copy of abstract language and replace it with simple concrete terminology, especially in headlines.

A simple copy tweak can make your message over 30% more memorable. Where possible, use vivid words that can be seen or detected by the human senses – e.g., colour, shapes, objects. This will make your messages more relatable, clearer, and easier to remember.
- **Prioritise stories over statistics**
While data can inform, it often lacks emotional impact. Storytelling, especially through role-specific microstories, makes your message more relatable and memorable.

For example, "A compliance officer at a global bank used our platform to pass an audit in 48 hours" is far more persuasive than a generic claim. These concrete, job-relevant narratives help buyers visualise outcomes, connect emotionally, and better understand the value you offer.

WHY THIS MATTERS

B2B is dominated by business jargon, complex frameworks, and vague promises. Using specific, sensory, real-world examples helps buyers grasp value quicker and builds stronger trust in what you're saying. Whether it's a vivid customer story, a visual metaphor, or a concrete outcome, Concreteness makes your brand feel more grounded, credible, and relevant – especially when decisions are complex and stakes are high.

- **Turn stats into scenes**
Instead of saying "we reduced downtime by 40%", show it. Create a short 30-60 vertical video or animation that walks through a real-world scenario – like a factory floor or an air traffic control room – where that time-saving visibly impacts operations. Use concrete language in your captions and motion graphics to make the benefit feel tangible.
- **Visualise the before and after**
Use LinkedIn or Instagram carousels, interactive sliders, side-by-side dashboards, or animated transitions to show the transformation your solution delivers. Let users 'feel' the difference between the old and new ways, visually and functionally.

CONCRETENESS: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

BETA buyers show stronger total recall for ads that feature concrete language (57% vs. 39% for Gen X), while Gen X buyers responded better to ads containing concrete headlines (43% vs. 29% for BETA buyers). These results indicate that Concreteness has a greater impact on younger audiences. Why?

BETA buyers are more accustomed to fast, intuitive decision-making in digital environments. Concrete language, which is specific and easy to visualise, aligns well with this style of processing and helps them quickly grasp and retain information.

Growing up in a world of short-form, visually driven content (e.g., TikTok, Instagram, YouTube), BETA buyers are used to direct, tangible messaging. Abstract language may feel vague or less engaging, whereas concrete words provide clarity and immediacy.

Lastly, younger audiences often expect brands to be clear and straightforward. Abstract language can be interpreted as evasive or overly conceptual, which may reduce trust or recall. Concrete language, by contrast, signals confidence and relevance.

BIAS 4

RED SNEAKERS EFFECT

You watch your CEO step onto the broadcaster's set – immaculate suit, polished shoes, every inch the corporate leader. But today's live-streamed interview was about warmth, not authority. Millions of social subscribers across Europe would be watching. You sigh. Could formality deliver brand humanity? Or had the message been dressed too sharply to connect?



REDSTEP

BIAS 4: RED SNEAKERS EFFECT

When individuals display nonconformist behaviour, it leads others to perceive them as more competent, influential, or well-regarded.

This is the **Red Sneakers Effect**. It suggests that individuals who deviate from conventional norms (like wearing red sneakers in a professional setting), are giving a visible signal to others of their autonomy, power, and social status.

Take Mark Zuckerberg's hoodie or Steve Jobs' signature turtleneck – not just fashion choices, but statements of autonomy and influence.

In 2011, Harvard professor Dr. Francesca Gino put this theory to the test. At a conference teeming with smart suits and tailored dresses, she noted down every attendee's outfit on a simple continuum from scruffy to smart and then checked the number of peer-reviewed academic papers they had published.

She found a striking pattern. The more successful academics weren't the most formally dressed – they were the ones who broke convention and looked like they hadn't tried to dress up at all.

Conformity can be comforting, but in the right context, breaking from it can make you more memorable, more persuasive and, crucially, more credible.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

The Red Sneakers Effect relies on three key psychological cues:

Confidence – We expect the nonconforming individual to be self-assured and confident in the way they act or speak. If observers see the non-conformist behaving in a nervous or apprehensive way, then the bias doesn't work.

Status – Observers will often infer that a non-conforming person is in a position of status or power that allows them the freedom to act according to their own will, and to behave defiantly without fear of losing their place in the social hierarchy.

Intention – Observers must be aware and familiar with the expected social norms to recognise when someone deviates from them i.e., they must think the non-conformity is deliberate rather than an accident.

When these cues are present, small acts of nonconformity can elevate perceptions of competence, status, and trustworthiness, as shown in Harvard's Francesca Gino's 2011 study.

"Pinpoint the pointless norms in your category – and break them. Your brand won't just stand out; it will be awarded a higher status!"

RICHARD SHOTTON

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

Academic evidence of the Red Sneakers Effect working in a commercial environment is scarce.

We wanted to see how B2B buyers reacted to brands who broke convention, and whether it had an influence on their perceptions of brand trust, competence, and respect. We were also curious about their association with innovation, i.e., would deviant behaviour suggest a brand was more innovative or less so?

To do this, we split our sample of 500 B2B buyers into four equal groups. Each group was shown an image of a businesswoman speaking at cybersecurity conference. The woman was on stage representing a fictitious cybersecurity brand called *Sentris*.

Group 1 saw the woman wearing a suit and identified as the CEO. See Figure 7.



(FIG 7: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Nonconformity signals confidence and status

For nonconforming behaviour to be perceived positively, the individual must appear confident and be seen as having high status.

TAKEAWAY 2

Intentionality matters

Observers need to recognise that the nonconformity is deliberate and meaningful. If it's clear the person is intentionally deviating from norms, it enhances the perception of authenticity and authority.

50% MORE B2B BUYERS RATED THE BRAND AS COMPETENT AND TRUSTWORTHY AFTER SEEING THE CEO IN CASUAL CLOTHES.

Group 2 saw the woman wearing a suit and identified as a Junior IT Developer.

Group 3 saw the woman dressed in a t-shirt and red sneakers, identified as the CEO. As shown in Figure 8.



(FIG 8: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

Group 4 saw the woman in the same casual clothes and identified as a Junior IT Developer.

The results were striking.

81% of B2B buyers who saw the CEO-titled businesswoman in a t-shirt and red sneakers associated the Sentris brand with high competence, respect, and trustworthiness – compared to just 54% of B2B buyers who saw her in a formal suit. That’s a combined 50% uplift in brand perception based solely on appearance.

The same pattern held for perceptions of innovation: 67% rated the casually dressed CEO as forward-thinking, compared to 47% in formalwear.

Even the example labelling her as a Junior IT Developer saw a jump. When wearing the casual outfit, 84% of buyers rated

the brand positively, compared to just 57% who saw her in a suit. This indicates that her unconventional appearance had a greater impact on perceptions of trust, respect, and competence than her job title – highlighting the influence of the Red Sneakers Effect.

WHAT THE RED SNEAKERS EFFECT MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

The Red Sneakers Effect shows that in B2B marketing, credibility alone isn’t enough – distinctiveness matters.

Brands that confidently break category norms signal not recklessness, but mastery. By doing the unexpected, whether through bold partnerships, unconventional media, or a surprising tone of voice, they stand out in a sea of sameness and earn deeper trust. This is especially powerful for newer or challenger brands competing against long-established players. Buyers may be risk-averse, but they’re also drawn to confidence and originality.

Think of Lego partnering with Pharrell Williams. It wasn’t the obvious choice, but it redefined the brand from a children’s toy to a creative platform for all ages. That kind of move doesn’t just attract attention; it reshapes perception.

In B2B, the same principle applies. Playing it safe rarely shifts opinion. The brands that win are those that lead with credibility and surprise – those that show they know the rules well enough to bend them.

The true sign of expertise is the confidence to express it in unexpected ways. It’s not about being loud for the sake of it; it’s about being memorable, meaningful, and unmistakably different. That’s what earns attention, trust, and long-term advantage.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Red Sneakers Effect challenges the assumption that professionalism must always look conventional. For B2B brands, this means that standing out with bold creative choices, unconventional formats, or a more human tone will actually enhance credibility or expertise rather than undermine it. Breaking expected norms doesn’t just get you noticed – it builds trust by signalling that your brand knows the rules well enough to break them.

APPLYING THE RED SNEAKERS EFFECT

Here are some ideas for applying the Red Sneakers Effect to marketing strategies or campaigns.

- Nonconformist thought leadership**
 Ask your executive team or SMEs to create and publish insightful content that feels less scripted and visually polished than you’d typically promote to signal greater authority and self-assurance.
- CEO unfiltered mini-series**
 A five-part video series following your CEO through a typical week – one video per day, blending their personal and professional life in a way that feels unfiltered and relatable. The CEO is shown in casual clothes, working from a train, a café, or a messy desk, not a pristine corner office. Throughout the day, we see flashes of personality. A dry sense of humour in a team huddle, a moment of doubt before a big pitch, or a candid voice note to a colleague. The day ends not with a grand conclusion, but with dinner half-cooked, emails still unread, and a sense that leadership is as much about team collaboration as it is about having all the answers.
- Contrarian social campaigns**
 Design a series of social posts that challenge industry or market expectations, or critique common practices. Don’t be afraid to say you disagree or have a different point of view but obviously, do so respectfully.

THE RED SNEAKERS EFFECT: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

After seeing our nonconforming speaker, BETA buyers rated Sentris significantly higher for brand competence, respect, trustworthiness, and innovation than Gen X buyers – indicating a stronger Red Sneakers Effect in younger audiences.

BETA buyers are digitally native consumers and tend to value authenticity, creativity, and self-expression. Nonconforming dress signals confidence and originality, which aligns with their ideals of innovation and leadership.

Gen X buyers showed greater brand salience for conforming speakers, suggesting they may associate traditional appearance with credibility and competence.

BETA buyers trusted the conforming Junior IT Developer more than the CEO, while Gen X buyers showed the opposite pattern – implying younger buyers are more sceptical of hierarchical status and authority.

BIAS 5

MAKE *IT* EASY

The white paper was ready – months of research and analysis distilled into insight. You hover over the upload button. Gate it to capture leads? Or leave it open to maximise reach? One promises data, the other engagement. Under pressure to deliver results, you face a classic trade off: friction or flow?

**BLINK**

BIAS 5: MAKE IT EASY

Small, seemingly inconsequential barriers have a disproportional effect on human behaviour. (Qiu & Wang, 2011)

There are times when people gravitate toward options that are simpler, more convenient, or require less effort – a natural tendency known as the **Make it Easy** bias.

Seemingly minor details in our environment can create friction – subtle barriers that disrupt the path between intention and action. This could be a longer wait time or a confusing interface. These small hurdles can lead us to abandon our original goal or opt for an easier alternative, even if it’s less ideal.

In 2017, Harvard psychologists Peter Bergman, Jessica Lasky-Fink, and Todd Rogers explored this in a sign-up experiment.

Parents were invited to enrol in a course. Those who had to fill out a form saw sign-ups of just 1%.

When the process changed to a simple ‘Start’ reply, it rose to 8%. And when parents were told they were already enrolled (default sign-ups), they jumped to 97%.

This dramatic difference illustrates how even small barriers – like filling out a form – can drastically reduce engagement.

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

Make it Easy stems from our brain’s preference for conserving mental energy. When faced with a choice, we’re wired to

prefer the option that feels easiest to understand and act on – even if it’s not the most rational or optimal.

This effect is rooted in cognitive fluency, a principle that suggests people tend to trust information that’s easy to process and understand. This ‘cognitive ease’ then leads to positive feelings and trust in the information, even if it’s not actually true. Essentially, the simpler something is, the more likely we are to accept and act on it.

In B2B buying, where choices are complex and stakes are high, this bias can have a huge impact. Brands that strip away friction and complexity don’t just get more attention; they earn more trust and action.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

The Make it Easy bias is particularly relevant in B2B where buying journeys are more complex, involve multiple stakeholders, and transaction value is higher compared to B2C. Yet, little academic evidence exists to prove its effect on B2B buyers.

To change this, we recruited 500 senior business decision makers and split them into three groups.

Each group was shown a mock email from a fictional cybersecurity brand, *Helios Solutions*. The email contained 200 words outlining Helios’ value proposition and the key features and benefits of its cyber offering.

For each group, the content was identical in meaning but varied in format:

Group 1 saw an email featuring dense, jargon-heavy copy written in long chunked paragraphs.

“Our cyber platform provides pre-emptive visibility into your security posture, real-time incident detection, and autonomous response to known and unknown threats – whilst simplifying security team operations and strengthening cost efficiency.”

Group 2 saw the same message, but the copy layout was unchunked (i.e., broken into bullet points).

Our cyber platform provides:

- *Pre-emptive visibility into your security posture*
- *Real-time incident detection*
- *Autonomous response to known and unknown threats*
- *Simplified security operations*
- *Stronger cost efficiencies*

Group 3 saw the same unchunked bullet points as group 2, but instead we used short, simple, human language.

Our platform helps you:

- *Spot potential risks before they happen*
- *Detect incidents as they occur*
- *Automatically respond to new and familiar threats*
- *Make security operations easier*
- *Reduce costs*

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Cognitive ease drives decision-making

People are naturally inclined to choose options that are easier to understand and act on, even if those options aren’t the most rational.

TAKEAWAY 2

Simplicity builds trust in B2B

In complex B2B environments, simplifying choices and reducing friction not only captures attention but also builds trust. Brands that make things easier to process are more likely to influence action.

64% OF BUYERS WERE MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE WITH A B2B BRAND WHEN THEY USE UNCHUNKED AND SIMPLE LANGUAGE.

After viewing the emails, participants were asked to recall the features and benefits after a five minute delay, and then rate their likelihood of visiting the brand’s website or following them on social media.

When we used dense, jargon-heavy copy in a chunked format, only 37% of buyers from Group 1 remembered the message. Breaking it into bullet points (unchunking) improved recall levels from Group 2 to 51%.

But the biggest shift came by combining unchunked messaging with simple, human language: 56% of buyers from Group 3 remembered the key features and benefits from the value proposition – the highest of all.

This wasn’t just about memory. The group exposed to the simpler language (Group 3) was also 64% more likely to visit the brand’s website and 56% more likely to follow them on social media.

These results show that small changes – clearer language and cleaner structure – can unlock stronger recall and deeper engagement.

“These results show that even experienced B2B buyers – often assumed to be rational and detail-oriented – are influenced by cognitive ease. When information is easier to process, it feels more credible, trustworthy, and actionable.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT MAKE IT EASY MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

Simplicity is more than a stylistic choice. It’s a sign of respect for your audience’s time and attention, and a competitive advantage.

Shotton argues that removing friction is the fastest way to change behaviour – far easier than trying to motivate a buyer to want to change in the first place. He warns against the temptation to look intelligent or appear masterful by using complex language or business jargon, and instead urges marketing teams to spend more time and budget simplifying customer journey. In his words:

“Removing friction should come first if you want to change behaviour, especially when buyers are often overwhelmed by information and risk. It can be the difference between action and abandonment.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

Shotton also recommends marketers reduce the amount of choice they offer potential buyers. Evidence shows that too much choice can cause decision-making to grind to a halt. This is what psychologists call ‘choice paralysis’.

In B2B marketing especially, where buying decisions are high-stakes and involve multiple stakeholders, choice paralysis can:

- **Delay purchase decisions:** Buyers often postpone action due to fear of making the wrong choice
- **Erode brand trust:** If the decision feels too complex, buyers question the clarity or credibility of the offering
- **Drive buyers to competitors:** Simpler, more curated alternatives may feel safer or easier to act on

APPLYING MAKE IT EASY

Here are some ideas for applying Make it Easy to marketing strategies or campaigns to help boost brand or product standout and memorability.

WHY THIS MATTERS

If your messages, content, or buying process feel even slightly difficult to understand, your audience is more likely to disengage. Ease signals credibility, trust, and value. Simplifying language, reducing steps, and removing friction makes your brand feel smarter, faster, and more trustworthy – qualities B2B buyers crave. In 2025, easy isn’t lazy, it’s strategic.

- **‘One-scroll stories’ on LinkedIn**
Design a series of single-scroll carousels that deliver one key message per frame. Each post unchunks a complex concept into one insight or stat, and one useful takeaway in bullet point format. Use simple language in the headers and visual metaphors to make the message instantly digestible.
- **‘First 15 seconds’ video series**
Create a video series for your solution, product, or service where the first 15 seconds deliver the core value proposition message. Structure the video in three to four visual ‘chunks’ (e.g., problem → insight → proof → CTA) and use bold text overlays or voiceovers to front-load the value. Keep total runtime under 30 seconds and include a visual cue (e.g., a countdown or progress bar) to signal ease and reward time-poor decision-makers.
- **‘Ungated, unchunked’ content drops**
Once a week, re-release an existing piece of published content without the form fill gate, but for a limited time only – say 24 hours. Instead of long, copy-heavy PDFs, create a five to eight-page summary version that lists out the key findings and takeaways in unchunked bullet point format and encourage users to share with their colleagues.

You could also consider turning a 20+ page whitepaper or report into 10 snackable LinkedIn posts or a carousel. Each post would deliver one clear idea, insight, or takeaway and tease viewers into downloading the full gated content to maintain lead capture.

MAKE IT EASY: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

BETA buyers respond strongly to this bias. 98% recalled features and benefits when exposed to chunked, short, simple language. Only 14% would engage with a brand after seeing complex, unchunked language, but this jumped to 46% with simplified messaging – a 228% increase in engagement.

Gen X buyers were less affected 83% recalled simplified, chunked messaging, but surprisingly, 85% recalled complex language – suggesting they’re less influenced by simplicity. This may be because Gen X professionals have spent much of their careers navigating traditional, often jargon-heavy business communication. They may associate longer, more complex language with credibility, depth, and professionalism – making them less sensitive to the benefits of simplified formats.

Overall, the Make It Easy bias significantly influences younger B2B buyers, driving both recall and action. In contrast, Gen X buyers appear more resilient to complexity and less responsive to simplified formats.

BIAS 6

THE ILLUSION OF EFFORT

The new product launch is looming. You need a high impact ad campaign that audiences will notice and get excited about. Using AI could deliver the campaign in hours – literally! It would be efficient and cost effective. But would it feel soulless? Would audiences sense the shortcut? Outsourcing to a creative agency means more time and budget, but also more heart. You weigh up speed against substance, automation against authenticity.

**STITCH**

BIAS 6: THE ILLUSION OF EFFORT

We tend to value things more when we see the work behind them. (Morales, 2025)

If you want to change someone’s behaviour, generally, you remove friction – as explained in our last bias, Make it Easy. But sometimes, adding just the right amount of friction can boost perceptions of value and quality.

This is the **Illusion of Effort**, also known as the Labour Illusion. It’s the idea that we tend to value products and services more when we believe significant effort has gone into creating, acquiring, or maintaining them. Whether it’s rating a handcrafted item more highly or willingly downloading a 50-page white paper – we get a sense of visible depth and diligence, elevating both trust and appreciation for the effort made.

Andrea Morales, an assistant professor at the University of Southern California, explored this with a group of apartment hunters. Half were told their estate agent spent nine hours researching options. The other half heard it took just one hour.

The ‘high effort’ agent was rated 36% more favourably – even though the final property list was identical.

In Shotton’s *The Illusion of Choice*, we also learn that the time or effort made by a brand or product must be transparent, i.e., buyers must be clear that work is going on.

Here are some other great brands who have applied this bias effectively:

- **Dyson** – Who proudly promote that they tested 5,127 prototypes before building the perfect vacuum
- **Online flight finders, Kayak** – Who adds a deliberate a 10-15 second pause before showing you their ‘carefully curated’ holiday deals
- **Domino’s Pizza** – Who offer customers a livestream feed of their pizza being made in store

All of this extra effort might be theatre, but it subconsciously creates the feeling of care and credibility without having to overly promote it.

“Don’t assume people will recognise the amount of work that has gone into your solution or product offering – you need to make your efforts transparent if you want buyers to recognise the value you bring!”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

The Illusion of Effort is closely linked to a bias known as the Reciprocity Principle, a psychological phenomenon where people feel a natural tendency to replicate and return kindness or attention. In other words, we often respond to a positive action with another positive action.

In the context of purchasing products or services, consumers will often associate greater effort with greater value or quality.

When a brand puts in more effort, others often assume the outcome is more deserving or superior.

This is because effort is seen as a signal of dedication, sincerity, or authenticity. It makes us feel like we’re getting our money and time’s worth, which influences judgments and decisions.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

The Illusion of Effort relies on the visibility of human labour, time, and craftsmanship – but what happens when AI is introduced? Does perceived effort drop when buyers are told a product is powered by machine learning? Do buying committees question the authenticity or quality of work from an IT consultancy using ChatGPT to give advice?

To find out whether AI weakens the effect of the Illusion of Effort, we recruited 500 B2B buyers worldwide and split them into three equal groups.

Each group was shown the same social media advert from a fictitious cybersecurity brand called *Titan Systems*. See Figure 9.

- **Group 1** was told the ad took 10 minutes to create using AI
- **Group 2** was told the ad took one week to create by a London-based creative team
- **Group 3** was told the ad took over three months to create by a London-based creative team in collaboration with a Japanese origami expert.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Effort signals value and sincerity

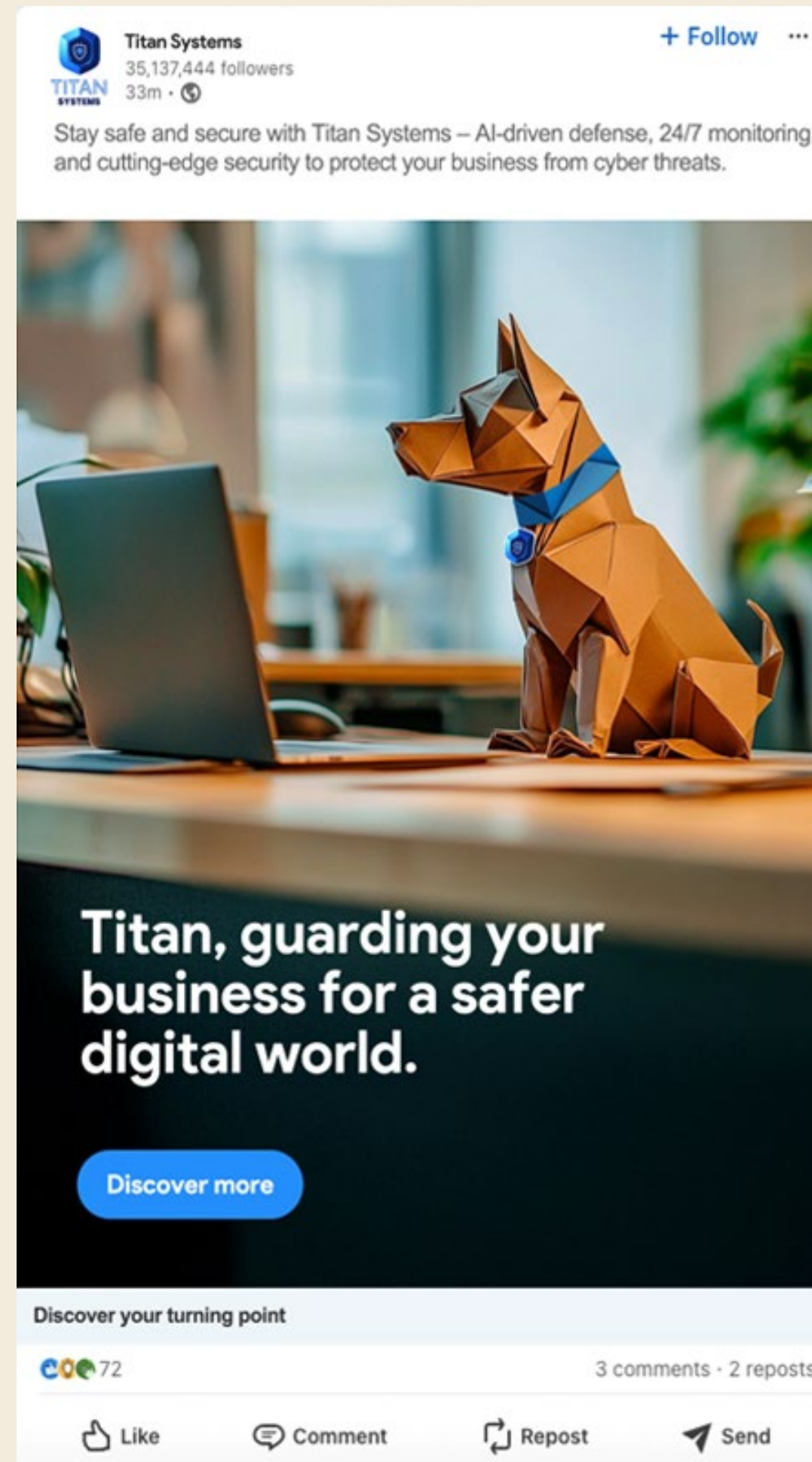
When a brand visibly puts in effort, people tend to perceive the offering as more valuable or higher quality – even if the actual outcome is the same. Effort becomes a proxy for authenticity and care.

TAKEAWAY 2

Reciprocity drives positive response

When consumers sense that a brand has gone the extra mile, they feel a subconscious urge to reciprocate – often by trusting the brand more, engaging with it, or making a purchase. This taps into our innate desire to return favours and maintain social balance.

B2B BUYERS ARE 55.26% MORE LIKELY TO TRUST A BRAND WHEN THEY PERCEIVED HIGHER HUMAN EFFORT BEHIND THE MESSAGE.



(FIG 9: EXAMPLE OF AD SHOWN)

Although all groups viewed the same advert, perceptions of the Titan brand varied significantly.

Group 1, who saw the 'low-effort' AI version, rated the brand notably lower in appeal, trust, and innovation – only 38% reported trusting the brand.

In contrast, 59% of Group 3 who viewed the 'high-effort' origami version expressed trust – that's a 55.26% uplift in perceived brand trust.

This demonstrates the Illusion of Effort bias: when people perceive greater human effort behind a message, they attribute higher value and credibility to the brand. Conversely, low-effort cues – such as AI-generated content – can diminish brand perception.

WHAT THE ILLUSION OF EFFORT MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

In B2B, we often celebrate speed and simplicity – the promise of seamless transactions and efficient solutions.

But buyers are complex. When something feels too fast or too easy, it can seem cheap or rushed.

The Illusion of Effort reminds us that visible effort can be as persuasive as ease. Buyers love to know what's happening behind-the-scenes in your business. They're curious about how you operate, what makes your development process unique, and the level of expertise applied.

For B2B marketers, this is a cue to pull back the curtain and become more operationally transparent. Let audiences see how your product is built, the hours of testing, or the team's dedication. It will create a sense of trust and credibility, and will reassure buyers that they're getting real value – not just a quick fix.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Showing effort builds trust. While simplicity is valued, buyers often equate visible effort with quality. Sharing behind-the-scenes processes – like testing, development, or team dedication – can enhance credibility.

Transparency reassures buyers they're investing in substance, not shortcuts, and strengthens belief in the value of your offering.

APPLYING THE ILLUSION OF EFFORT

Here are a few ideas for applying the Illusion of Effort to marketing strategies or campaigns to strengthen brand credibility, and perceptions of quality, care, and value.

- **'Behind the build' campaigns**

Show the real, human process and behind-the-scenes effort that went into developing your brand or products – whether it's hand-drawn scamps, post-it notes on the wall, or the early prototype plans. Use captions like *"This took 17 versions to get right"* Or *"3 years of team effort"* to make the final output feel more valuable.

- **'Humanise the AI' stories**

If AI features heavily in your value proposition, then pair it with stories of human ideation, oversight, iteration, or collaboration to restore the sense of effort. Introduce the product team, data scientists, or strategists who shaped the AI and share their thinking, challenges, and the human judgements they made.

- **'AI + Human' attribution tags**

In content or product UI, visually tag what was generated by AI vs. what was refined or approved by a human. Use icons, colour coding, or side-by-side comparisons. Add microcopy like *"AI-drafted, human-edited"* or *"Human insight, AI-scaled."* It transparently shows effort and reinforces the value of human input.

THE ILLUSION OF EFFORT: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

The Illusion of Effort bias impacts BETA buyers more than Gen X. Just 38% of BETA buyers found the low-effort ad appealing, compared to 70% who preferred the high-effort version.

Gen X responses were more balanced: 48% liked the low-effort ad, 49% the high-effort one. BETA buyers may interpret visible effort as a sign of authenticity, care, and quality. They value storytelling and emotional depth, making high-effort ads more engaging. Despite being digitally fluent, they're often sceptical of low-effort, automated content, which can feel impersonal.

Gen X buyers, on the other hand, may prioritise clarity and practicality over perceived effort. For them, relevance and usefulness matter more than how much effort went into the ad.

Across both groups, higher effort correlated with stronger perceptions of brand trust and innovation, though BETA buyers rated these attributes slightly higher.

BIAS 7

TAILORED SOCIAL PROOF

—

You're reviewing this year's ABM strategy – five customer segments, one tight budget. Tailored messaging to each persona feels out of reach. Could a single, well-crafted customer endorsement ad speak to all? Would relevance suffer for the sake of efficiency? As deadlines grow ever closer, you weigh up precision against practicality, wondering if one voice could echo across many.



ECHO

BIAS 7: TAILORED SOCIAL PROOF

We follow the common course of behaviour, particularly when we see others as similar to us. (Cialdini, 2008)

Tailored Social Proof (also known as the Bandwagon Effect), is the tendency for individuals to be more influenced by endorsements or behaviours of people who are perceived to be like them. This could mean people in the same industry, role, company size, or country. The more relatable the source of the endorsement, the more persuasive it becomes.

Muzafer Sherif first noted this in 1935, but it was Robert Cialdini’s hotel towel experiment that really brought it to life.

At the Holiday Inn in Arizona, guests saw one of three messages. The first was generic: *“Help save the environment by reusing your towels.”* Only 35% complied. The second message shared what others did: *“Join your fellow guests – almost 75% reuse their towels.”* That boosted reuse to 44%.

But the most effective message was tailored to feel personal: *“75% of guests who stayed in this room reused their towels.”* Reuse shot up to 49% – 40% higher than the generic message.

This study is a foundational example of how Tailored Social Proof can drive behaviour change. Rather than appealing to abstract values (like environmentalism), the message worked better when it was more relevant and showed that ‘people like you’ are already doing the desired behaviour.

“The power of social proof is that thousands of people can’t be wrong.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

Social proof taps into two of our most powerful psychological instincts: the need to belong and the need to feel safe.

When we see that others have chosen a particular brand – especially people like us – we instinctively assume it’s a good choice. Something we often refer to as ‘herd mentality’.

This is known as **Informational Social Influence**: in moments of uncertainty, we look to the herd for guidance, trusting that the majority must know best.

There’s also **Normative Social Influence**: our deep-seated desire to fit in and avoid rejection. We’re social creatures, after all, and we feel safer when we’re aligned with the group.

In B2B buying, these forces are even stronger. High-stakes purchases carry real risk, so seeing that peers have chosen a solution isn’t just reassuring – it’s a powerful shortcut to trust.

In this environment, Tailored Social Proof becomes more than a nice-to-have. It becomes a crucial driver of credibility, trust, and decision-making.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

The theory of Tailored Social Proof has been tried and tested in B2B marketing for decades. We know buyers rely heavily on customer case studies, peer testimonials, and user reviews to guide decision-making and purchasing choices.

Understandably then, social proof is one of the most robustly researched psychological biases. Yet, surprisingly, the only formal behavioural study that records the impact of this bias on B2B buyers is focused on public sector professionals –

conducted by HMRC and the Government’s Behavioural Insights Team in 2011.

To understand how Tailored Social Proof influences private sector buyers, we recruited 500 business decision-makers across multiple regions and sectors.



(FIG 10: EXAMPLE OF AD SHOWN)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1 Tailored Social Proof reduces uncertainty

When people are unsure – especially in high-stakes decisions like choosing a new provider – they look to others for guidance. Seeing peers endorse a brand (e.g., from the same country or industry) provides reassurance and makes the choice feel safer and more credible.

TAKEAWAY 2 Social proof taps into our need to belong

Beyond logic, people are driven by a desire to fit in. Aligning with what others are doing – especially within a relevant group – helps individuals feel part of the norm, reinforcing trust and increasing the likelihood of action.

B2B BUYERS WERE 43% MORE LIKELY TO TRUST TRUSTSHIELD WHEN SHOWN INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC SOCIAL PROOF VS. GENERAL SOCIAL PROOF.

The sample were split into four equal groups and shown a social media advert from a fictional cybersecurity brand, *TrustShield*. The only difference was the social proof message. See Figure 10.

- **Group 1** saw no social proof (our control group)
- **Group 2** saw a generic claim: *"8/10 customers recommend TrustShield"*
- **Group 3** saw industry-tailored social proof: *"8/10 customers in Logistics would recommend TrustShield"*
- **Group 4** saw country-tailored social proof: *"8/10 customers in Australia would recommend TrustShield"*

After viewing the ad, participants were asked to give their initial impression of the TrustShield brand and rate levels of perceived quality, expertise, trustworthiness, and customer-centricity. They were also asked to assess how likely they were to visit the TrustShield website for further information.

The study confirmed that social proof – whether general or tailored – positively influences B2B buyer behaviour. When no social proof was shown, only 30% of participants believed the brand offered a high-quality solution. This rose to 50% with tailored social proof, a 66.67% uplift in sentiment.

Tailored messaging, customised by industry or country, consistently outperformed general social proof. Trust in the brand increased from 47% with general proof to 67% with tailored proof – an impressive 43% uplift. These results highlight the power of personalised social proof in strengthening trust and emotional connection, both of which are critical in B2B decision-making.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Generic proof builds awareness. Tailored proof builds belief. B2B buyers don't care that 10,000 companies trust you – they care that someone just like them does. When social proof is specific to their role, industry, or challenge, it becomes persuasive, not performative. Relevance is what earns trust.

WHAT TAILORED SOCIAL PROOF MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

Social proof is one of the most robust and powerful behavioural biases. But marketers often fail to use it to its full potential because they apply it too literally rather than laterally or in a tailored way.

In an article for Marketing Week, Shotton explains that while generic social proof (e.g., *"9 out of 10 people do X"*) can be effective, tailored social proof – where the message is made more personally relevant to the audience – is significantly more powerful.

Shotton's view highlights why Tailored Social Proof is often misunderstood – marketers assume that more proof (logos, stats, testimonials) is better, when in fact, more relevant proof is what truly shifts behaviour. It's not about showing that everyone trusts you – it's about showing that someone like me does.

In fact, when marketers showcase social proof that's too broad (*"Trusted by 10,000 companies"*), it can actually backfire – creating distance instead of connection. A vague number doesn't help a healthcare CIO, a fintech founder, or a procurement lead feel seen. It's abstract, not actionable.

APPLYING TAILORED SOCIAL PROOF

Here are a few ideas for applying Tailored Social Proof to marketing strategies or campaigns to help buyers validate their decision-making and strengthen feelings of brand trust, expertise, and customer-centricity.

- **'Proof-as-a-Service' widgets**
Embed dynamic testimonial widgets on your site that change based on the visitor's industry, job title, or location – i.e., a CFO from retail sees a quote from another retail CTO, a cybersecurity architect in healthcare sees a case study from a peer in the NHS. It delivers hyper-relevant proof at the moment of interest or consideration – without the user needing to search for it.
- **'Proof by problem' microsite**
Create a campaign landing hub organised by pain points, not personas. When arriving, ask buyers to answer one quick question, i.e., *"What is the greatest operational problem you're facing in your role today?"* Provide a list of 6-8 possible answers and, based on which one they select, dynamically serve up case studies or testimonials from customers who faced similar challenges and have solved them thanks to your brand. This tailors the proof to the buyer's context, not just their category. It also provides immediate verification your organisation can help them.
- **'Most popular among your peers' and scarcity ads**
Run a series of social ads that combine Tailored Social Proof with the Loss Aversion bias. Also known as the Scarcity bias, Loss Aversion taps into our fear of missing out (FOMO) or falling behind which can be particularly powerful for buyers wanting to keep up with their peers. Try these time-sensitive or limited availability messages:
 - *"The most-requested platform by CEOs in manufacturing. Free compliance audit ends this month."*
 - *"Previously sold out in the USA. Now available to UK procurement teams for a limited time only."*
 - *"Voted the best-selling solution for Finance Directors. Last chance to lock in 2024 pricing."*

TAILORED SOCIAL PROOF: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

BETA buyers are far more influenced by Tailored Social Proof than Gen X, using it to shape both brand perception and engagement. When messaging is aligned with their country or industry, BETA buyers' likelihood to visit a brand's website jumps from 29% (no social proof) to 52% (country-tailored) and 48% (industry-tailored).

They also rate brands like TrustShield higher on trust, innovation, and customer-centricity when exposed to tailored messaging.

In contrast, Gen X buyers show only modest engagement increases (31% to 38%) and minimal shifts in perception, suggesting social proof plays a smaller role in their decision-making. This generational difference can be explained by BETA buyers' digital upbringing. Having grown up in an era of hyper-personalised content, they expect brands to reflect their specific context – making tailored messaging feel more relevant and trustworthy. They also rely more on peer validation and social cues, using them as shortcuts to assess credibility and reduce uncertainty. Gen X buyers, however, are more self-directed, focusing on product features, experience, and reputation over personalisation.

BIAS 8

PRECISION

You can barely contain your excitement. A renowned analyst firm had just published a glowing review of your brand's software, complete with dazzling business performance stats. It's just the PR needed to improve audience engagement. But now comes the dilemma: publish the precise 47.6% uplift or round it to 50%? Truth or impact? Credibility or clarity?



DOC

BIAS 8: PRECISION

Round numbers (e.g., 50%) are often treated with scepticism. Precise numbers (e.g., 48.2%) are more believable. (Schindler & Yalch, 2006)

It's a quirk of human psychology: rounded figures seem like guesses. Precise numbers, by contrast, suggest accuracy and expertise.

That's the **Precision Effect** – our tendency to trust information that's detailed and specific.

Psychologist Michael Santos demonstrated this bias in an unlikely setting. Homeless peoples who asked for “any loose change” got little. But those who requested 17¢ or 35¢ got 60% more donations. The precision of their request made people take notice.

Shotton highlights that precise numbers have value beyond distinctiveness. They are judged to be more credible and trustworthy too.

In *The Illusion of Choice*, he cites a 2006 study by Rutgers marketing professor Robert Schindler, which presented participants with mock ads for a hypothetical deodorant.

When the ad claimed the product reduced perspiration by 50%, people rated it as less credible than an ad claiming either 47% or 53%. The precise figures, even though lower, increased perceived accuracy by 10% and overall credibility by 5%.

This effect arises because, in our daily experience, we associate individuals who speak precisely with confidence

and true expertise. Whereas, those who give vague information or loose generalities appear less knowledgeable and trustworthy.

“If someone stops you in the street and said, ‘How old’s your brother or sister?’ You would say, ‘She’s 39,’” Richard explains. If someone said, ‘How old is Bob, who lives 10 doors down?’ You’d say, ‘Oh, he’s in his 60s.’ You’d give a general answer because you don’t really know. And over time, these things become fused – people associate precision with accuracy and truthfulness.”

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

We all love a nice round number, especially one ending in zero or five. It's simpler to remember and makes mental maths a lot easier. When heating up a cup of coffee in the microwave, I bet most of us turn the dial to 30 seconds, rather than the recommended 27. It feels comfortable.

Yet, when it comes to assessing the credibility of information, we're more likely to prefer precise numbers over round numbers. This is because our brains associate precision with rigor, effort, and truthfulness. When we see a specific figure, we subconsciously assume it's based on real data, making it more objective and believable. As Daniel Kahneman puts it:

“Rounded numbers often serve as mental shortcuts, simplifying complex information. However, when accuracy is vital, precise figures can influence judgments and decisions more effectively.”

DANIEL KAHNEMAN

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

To investigate whether the level of detail and precision in marketing information influences B2B buyers' preferences and their decision-making processes, we recruited a sample of 500 B2B buyers across the USA, Europe, and APAC.

Participants were split into three equal groups and shown a media banner advert from a fictional cybersecurity brand called *Cryptex Secure*. Each advert featured a different business performance claim.

- **Group 1** saw a claim that featured a rounded number (“Customers experience 40% faster threat resolution”) See Figure 11.



(FIG 11: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

- **Group 2** saw a claim that featured a higher precise number. (“Customers experience 42.4% faster threat resolution”)
- **Group 3** saw a claim that featured a higher precise number. (“Customers experience 36.6% faster threat resolution”) See Figure 12.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

Precision builds credibility

People perceive precise numbers (e.g., 47% or 53%) as more accurate and trustworthy than round numbers (e.g., 50%), because they signal effort, expertise, and data-backed confidence.

TAKEAWAY 2

Specificity drives action

Precise requests or figures disrupt expectations and increase noticeability, making individuals more likely to respond or comply – demonstrated by higher donation rates when people were asked for exact amounts like 17¢ instead of vague requests.

34.2% OF B2B BUYERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO TRUST A BUSINESS PERFORMANCE CLAIM WITH PRECISE NUMBERS – COMPARED TO ROUND NUMBERS.



(FIG 12: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

The results clearly demonstrate the influence of Precision Bias on buyer perceptions and engagement.

38% of buyers exposed to a rounded number claim perceived it as credible. This increased to 48% when the claim used a high precise number, and further to 51% with a low precise number – that's a 34.2% uplift in perceived reliability.

Ads featuring precise numbers also led to stronger perceptions of quality and trustworthiness compared to those with round numbers.

Interestingly, ads with lower precise numbers scored slightly higher in credibility (51%) than those with higher precise numbers (48%), even though the performance output was lower. This shows that the presence of precision matters more than the magnitude of the number.

The findings confirm that using precise numerical claims in marketing communications can enhance credibility and positively influence brand perception – particularly in terms of trust and quality.

In B2B marketing, precision goes beyond establishing brand credibility – it's about cultivating perceived trust, a critical driver of buyer behaviour, especially in high-risk, high stake business environments. Buyers are more likely to trust *"a 17.4% increase in conversion"* than *"a significant improvement"* – even if the difference is marginal.

This subtle psychological cue signals confidence, accuracy, and authority, helping marketers cut through skepticism. In a landscape where trust is hard-won and easily lost, applying Precision bias can enhance message believability and influence decision-making. It's not just about sounding smart – it's about being perceived as real and reliable. For marketers, leveraging this bias can mean the difference between being considered... or ignored.

Precision also makes your messages more memorable and differentiates you from vague competitors. *"Used by 67.2% of UK procurement teams"* is more likely to stick than *"used by over 60% of UK procurement teams"*.

APPLYING PRECISION

Here are a few ideas for applying the Precision bias to marketing strategies or campaigns to strengthen brand trust and drive greater levels of buyer engagement and consideration.

- 'The power of 27.3%' social campaign**
 Take a notable business performance stat or a customer case-study result, i.e., *"27.3% reduction in operating costs"*, and launch a social campaign promoting the benefits and value of your solution or product. Use a LinkedIn carousel or a short 30-second video that translates the precise stat or result into a tangible commercial outcome that your buyers are KPI'ed on or care about – making it easier for the decision maker to visual the impact.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In B2B, where buyers are risk-averse and accountable to others, vague or rounded claims can feel like marketing fluff. But when marketers use precise figures – like *"27.3% improvement"* instead of *"30%"* – it signals accuracy, confidence, and credibility. That subtle shift can make the difference between a claim that's believed and one that's dismissed.

An example could be:

Slide 1: *"27.3% reduction in operating costs"*

Slide 2: *"That's £1.3M saved across 12 months"*

Slide 3: *"That's 3 fewer suppliers. 2 fewer systems. 1 stronger P&L"*

Slide 4: *"That's what our platform delivered for XCUSTOMER"*

Slide 5: CTA: See the full story →

- 'Every percent counts' video series**
 Turn five of your strongest customer success stories into a short-form video series, each anchored by one exact business performance stat – like *"41.7% less downtime"* or *"32.4% higher revenue growth"*. In concise, recorded virtual interviews, customers explain the real-world impact of that single percentage: how it changed workflows, improved employee experience, or delivered measurable value to their own customers.
- 'The exact advantage' personalised microsites**
 Drive high-value accounts to a hyper-personalised microsite that highlights the precise, quantifiable business outcomes achieved by companies just like theirs. Instead of broad claims, use exact metrics – like *"41.7% reduction in downtime"* or *"£18,740 saved in support fees annually"* – to build trust and credibility.

Deepen the personalised experience with a dynamic ROI calculator that uses publicly available data (e.g., company size, industry benchmarks, revenue, employee count) to generate precise, predictive business outcomes that can be gained when using your solution or offering.

PRECISION: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

Both BETA and Gen X buyers rated business claims with precise numbers as more credible than those with round numbers, confirming the presence of the Precision Bias across age groups. However, the effect was slightly stronger among BETA buyers, who gave higher overall credibility ratings to both precise-numbered adverts.

When it came to brand perception – specifically attributes like quality, expertise, and trust – BETA buyers again rated the brand more positively when exposed to precise figures. While Gen X buyers also responded positively, the difference between the two groups was modest (around 10%) and not statistically significant.

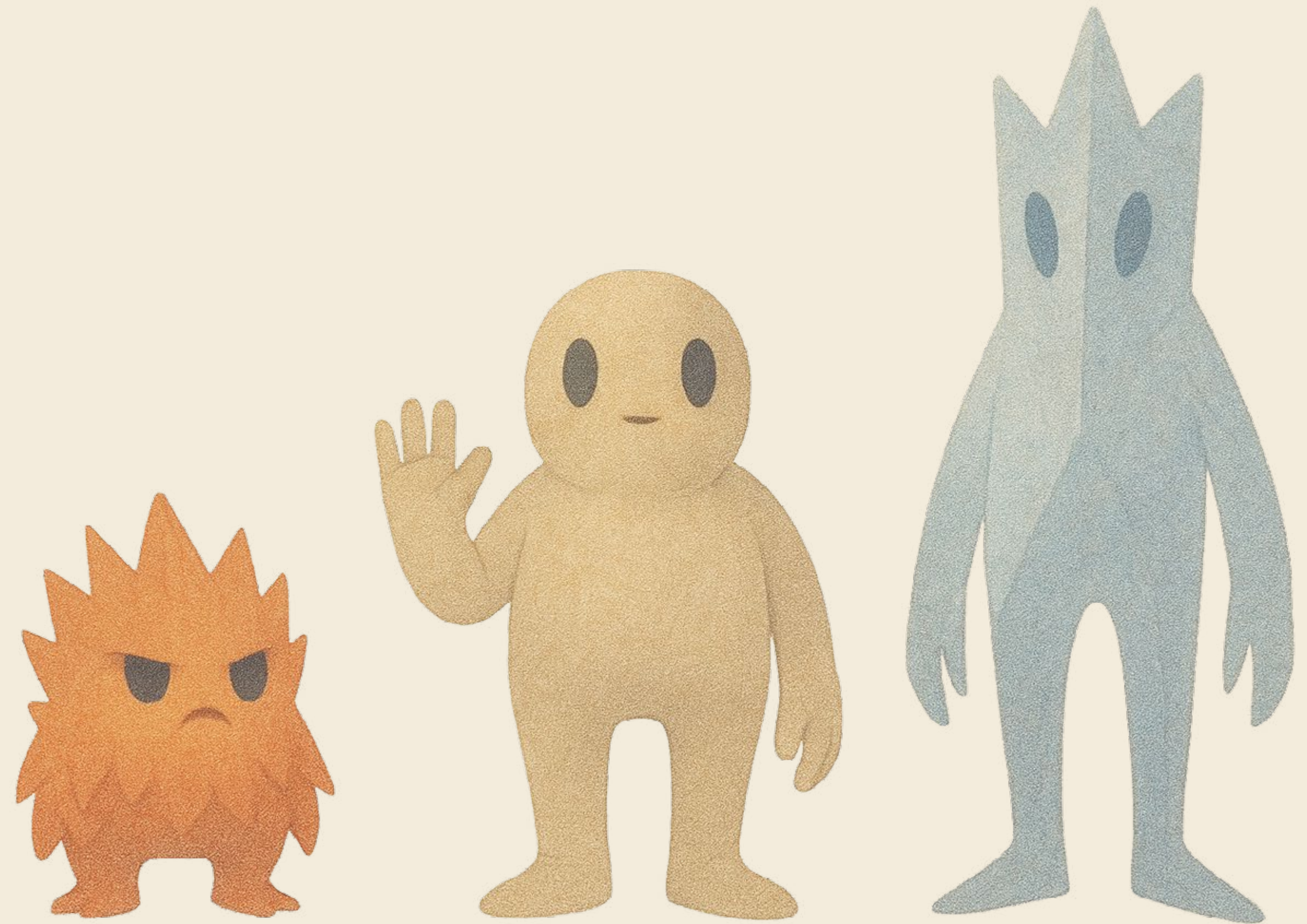
In summary, while the Precision bias influences both generations, it has a more pronounced impact on BETA buyers. BETA buyers have grown up in a data-rich, information-heavy environment. As a result, they're more attuned to detail and more likely to associate specificity with credibility. Precise figures signal effort, accuracy, and transparency – qualities that resonate with their expectations of modern, data-driven brands.

In contrast, Gen X buyers may rely more on experience, intuition, or brand reputation when evaluating claims.

BIAS 9

EXTREMENESS AVERSION

The new pricing page of your site is ready to go live. There are two subscription options to choose from. Of course, you want customers to select the more expensive option – it would make such a difference to this quarter's sales targets. But you fear the basic, lower-priced plan will be more appealing. Should you bring the standard option price down a bit? Or raise the basic? Every choice feels like a trade-off. Growth or value? You hesitate, torn.

**MALCOLM**

BIAS 9: EXTREMENESS AVERSION

When presented with three numbers, we tend to pick the middle one. (Tversky & Simpson, 1992)

Extremeness Aversion, also known as the Compromise Effect, describes our tendency to avoid options that feel too extreme – either too cheap or too expensive.

In uncertain situations, people often perceive the lowest-priced option as poor quality and worry it may reflect badly on them. Conversely, the highest-priced option can feel excessive or showy. As a result, many gravitate toward the middle option, which feels like a sensible compromise balancing quality and cost.

In a study at a McDonald's outlet run by Sharpe, Staelin, and Huber (2008), people were asked to choose between a range of different drink size options. Regardless of the size options offered, 80% chose the medium size.

Marmite applied Extremeness Aversion brilliantly to boost sales of their standard £3.25 Marmite jar by introducing a new brand called Marmite Truffle, priced at £4.50. They quickly found that consumers who were previously picking a cheaper alternative were switching back to the standard Marmite again. The cheaper alternative felt like a compromise on quality and the truffle version seemed too extravagant – so the standard Marmite became the attractive option again.

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

People habitually pick the middle option because it often feels like a balanced and reasonable choice, especially when faced with uncertainty or when choices are framed in a way that

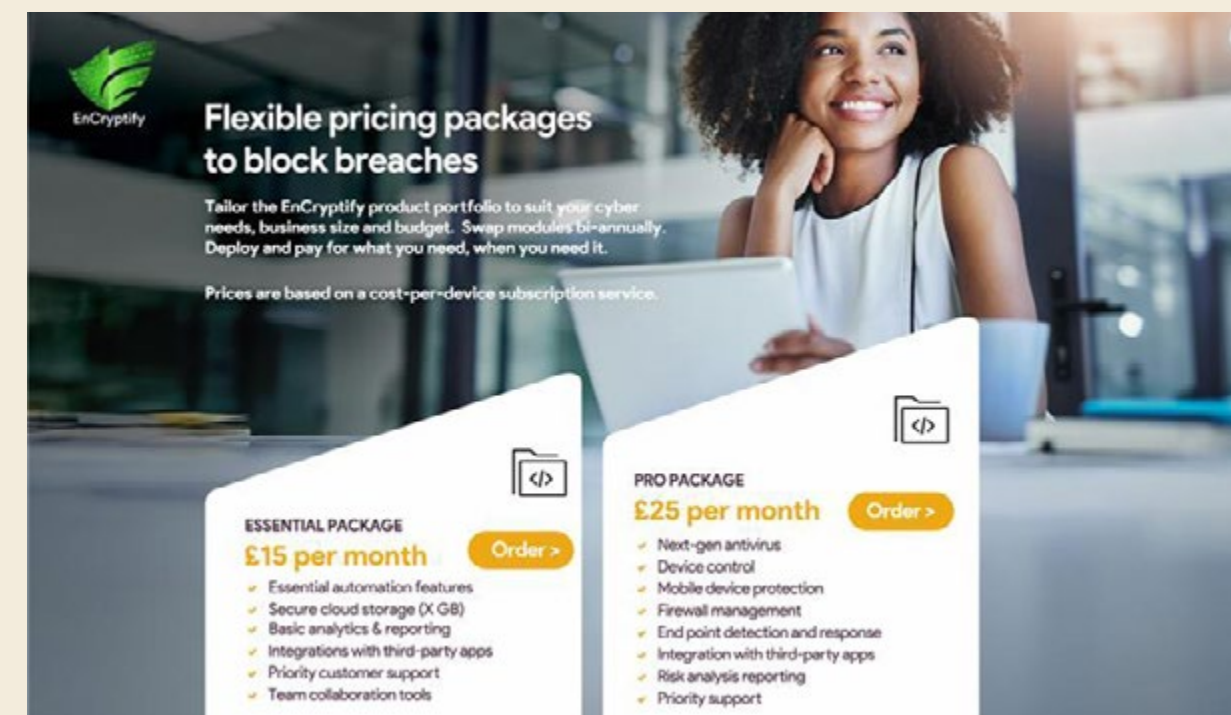
highlights the advantages of moderation. Many individuals also have a natural tendency to avoid extremes because they can be perceived as risky, less desirable, or less socially acceptable. The middle option appears safer and more socially appropriate, i.e., it's what most other people would choose.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

Most academic research on this bias has been conducted on consumers. Very little evidence exists on the impact and influence of Extremeness Aversion on business professionals, especially at a global level.

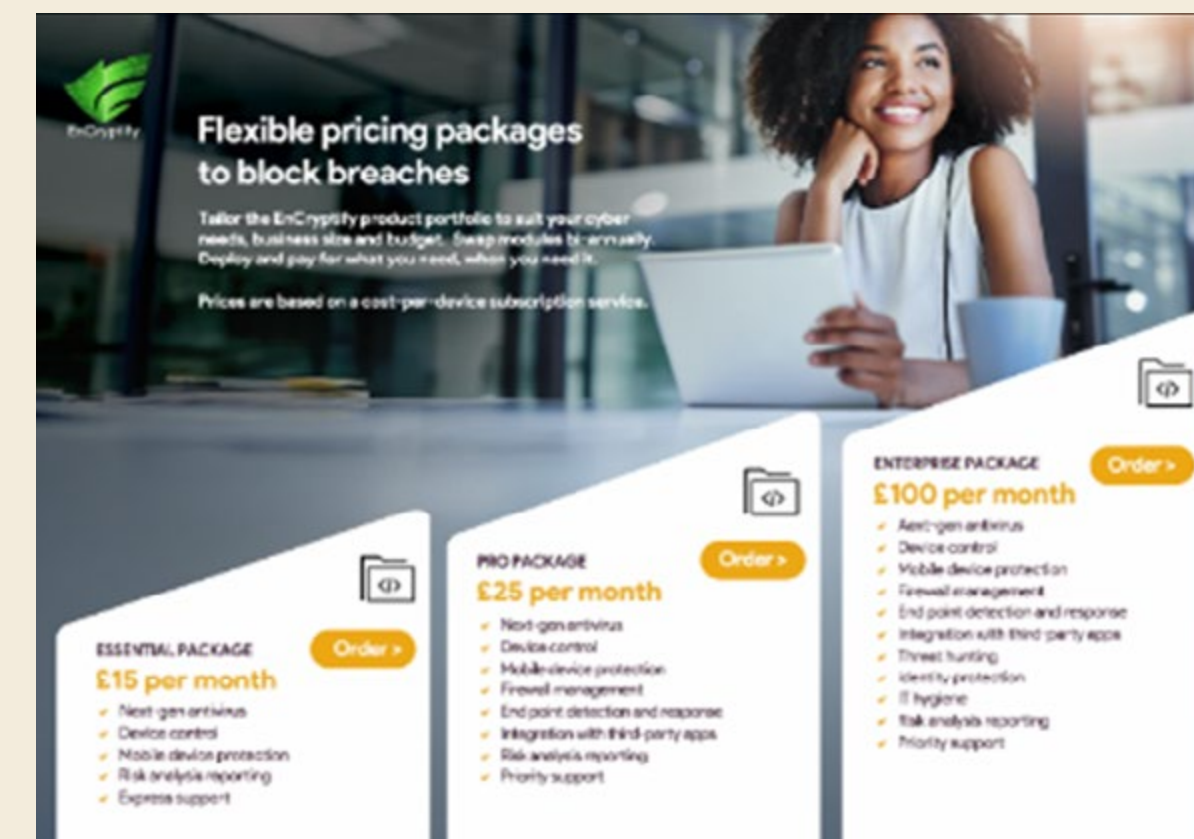
To change that, we questioned 500 B2B decision makers working in enterprise organisations across the world. Participants were split into three groups and shown a webpage containing different software subscription pricing packages from a fictional cyber brand called *EnCryptify*.

- **Group 1** saw two pricing options – the 'Essential Package' for £15/month and the 'Pro Package' for £25/month. See Figure 13.



(FIG 13: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

- **Group 2** saw three pricing options: the 'Essential' and 'Pro' packages, and the 'Enterprise Package' for £42/month.



(FIG 14: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

- **Group 3** saw all three pricing options, but this time the 'Enterprise Package' was priced at a much higher £100/month. See Figure 14.

The experiment confirmed that Extremeness Aversion is a powerful lever in B2B decision-making.

When presented with two pricing options, 72% of buyers in Group 1 found the cheaper 'Essential Package' more appealing, but when presented with three pricing options, the majority (59%) found the 'Pro Package' more appealing.

Only 12% of buyers still voted for the cheaper 'Essential Package' – that's an 83.33% decrease in preference for the 'Essential Package' when the middle package was introduced.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

The power of the middle

People often choose the middle option because it feels like a safe, balanced choice – especially in uncertain situations or when moderation is subtly framed as the smart or popular path.

TAKEAWAY 2

Avoiding extremes

Extremes can feel risky or socially awkward, so the middle option becomes a socially acceptable default – what most people are perceived to choose.

ADDING A THIRD PRICING TIER SHIFTED B2B BUYER PREFERENCE BY A STAGGERING 83%.

This proves that B2B buyers leaned heavily toward the lower-priced option when only two choices were available, but as soon as three choices were offered, they were happy to pay for a higher-priced option.

Interestingly, 64% of the participants who saw the higher priced 'Enterprise Package' for £100/month opted for the middle-priced option. Whereas only 59% of participants who were offered the 'Enterprise Package' for £42 made the same choice. While only a 5% difference, introducing a third, higher-priced option shifted buyer preference and increased the appeal of the £25 middle option. This is clear evidence of the Extremeness Aversion bias influencing how B2B buyers make purchase decisions.

"This research shows that introducing a third, super-premium option – even if few choose it – can be a powerful pricing strategy for B2B brands. It reframes the middle option as better value, nudging more buyers toward it and ultimately increasing revenue."

RICHARD SHOTTON

WHAT EXTREMENESS AVERSION MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

In today's price-sensitive economic environment, Extremeness Aversion offers B2B marketers a powerful behavioural insight to guide pricing strategy, reduce decision friction, and increase conversions – especially when buyers are under pressure to justify spend and minimise risk.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In B2B, where decisions are high-stakes and buyers are under pressure to justify spend, the way you present your pricing tiers can make or break a deal. Extremeness Aversion tells us that buyers tend to avoid the cheapest (too risky) and the most expensive (too indulgent) options – and instead gravitate toward the middle.

Buyers want to avoid overspending, but also fear underinvesting in a solution that might not deliver. The middle option becomes a psychological safe zone: not too cheap to seem ineffective, not too expensive to seem indulgent.

Extremeness Aversion can also be used in non-pricing specific way. For example, it can be used to influence decision-making across content formats, event engagements, product demos, and even sales meetings (see application examples below).

For B2B marketers, this means the middle-tier offer isn't just a fallback – it's a strategic anchor. By designing marketing strategies with this bias in mind, you can reduce decision friction, increase perceived value, and guide buyers toward the solution you want them to choose.

APPLYING EXTREMENESS AVERSION

Here are some ideas for applying Extremeness Aversion to marketing or pricing strategies to increase perceptions of value and drive conversion rates.

- **Three-tier pricing with a strategic middle**
Design your pricing page with three clear tiers. Make the middle tier your 'hero' price, i.e., the one you want buyers to adopt the most. This will ensure the middle tier becomes the 'safe' and most valued choice – not too risky, not too extravagant.

Use contrast to anchor value by making the top-tier offer slightly extreme to make the middle one feel like an even smarter compromise.

- **'Choose your perspective' content formats**
Offer three content perspectives to guide engagement and interest towards your offering: The Beginners view (e.g., *"What is X and why it matters?"*), the Strategic view (e.g., *"How X can drive growth for your company?"*), and the Futurist view e.g., (*"Where X is going in 2023?"*). The strategic middle option will feel relevant and actionable without being too basic or speculative.

This structure will help to position your brand as both accessible and forward-thinking, whilst nudging users towards the most valuable of the content pieces.
- **Product demo hooks**
Give prospects more control over how they explore your product. Offer three demo formats: a self-guided tour, a live 30-minute walkthrough, and a full custom session. The live demo hits the sweet spot of effort and value – offering enough depth to engage, without demanding too much time. It's the option most likely to convert.

EXTREMENESS AVERSION: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

When presented with two pricing options, both BETA and Gen X buyers found the 'Essential Package' significantly more appealing than the 'Pro Package'. However, BETA buyers showed a stronger preference, with 80% rating it appealing compared to 60% of Gen X buyers.

When a third option (Enterprise Package) was introduced, the appeal of the 'Essential Package' remained slightly higher among BETA buyers, though the difference was not statistically significant. Gen X buyers showed a slight, non-significant preference for the 'Enterprise Package' over BETA buyers.

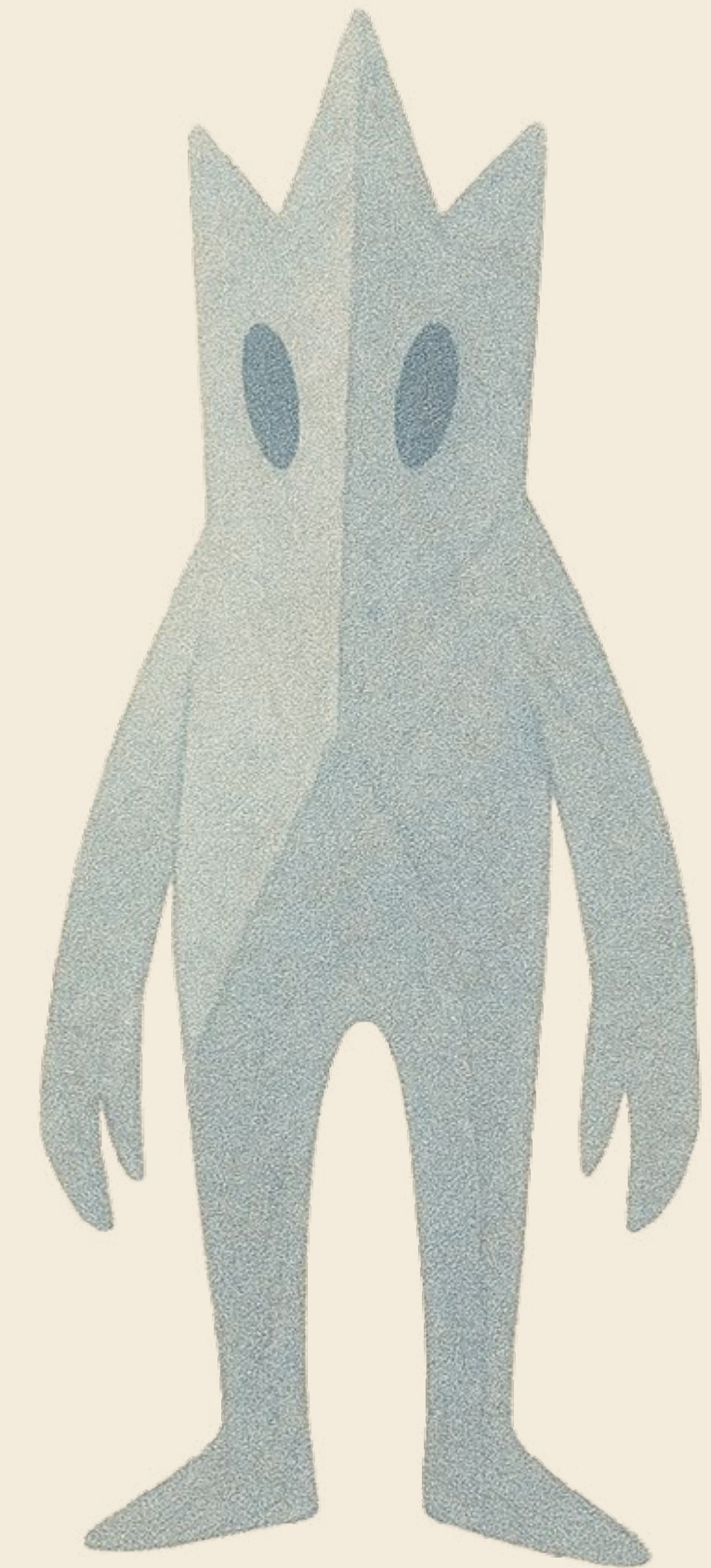
Interestingly, both groups responded similarly to the 'Pro Package' when it was positioned in the middle, suggesting that the Ordering Effect – the tendency to choose the middle option – is not influenced by age.

BONUS BIAS

THE ORDERING EFFECT



Great news! Your CFO just approved a third 'premium' tier for your software subscriptions. Now, increasing buyer appeal towards the standard plan feels more realistic. But a new dilemma emerges. Should you list the subscription options from lowest to highest price to ease price-sensitive buyers in – or highest to lowest to anchor value towards the standard option? First impressions matter. You hesitate, weighing up different perceptions.



BONUS BIAS: THE ORDERING EFFECT

The sequence in which information is presented can significantly influence how people update their beliefs or make decisions. (Hogarth & Einhorn, 1992)

This is the **Ordering Effect** – the idea that the position of an item in a list will influence how it’s judged and remembered.

In 2012, psychologist Donald Lichtenstein put it to the test in a Colorado bar. He gave customers menus listing 13 beers, sometimes starting with the cheapest option (\$4), other times starting with the most expensive (\$6).

When the beer menu started with the cheapest drink, customers spent less. When it started with the most expensive, the average spend rose by 24 cents.

The difference in spend was driven solely by the order.

WHAT’S GOING ON HERE?

The Ordering Effect works through psychological mechanisms related to how the humans brain processes, remembers, and compares information. There are three main factors that influence it:

- 1. Anchoring:** The first option seen sets a mental reference point. Everything that follows is judged in relation to it. For example, if the first beer on the list is \$10, a \$6 option feels like a bargain. But if the first beer is \$4, that same \$6 choice suddenly feels like a splurge.
- 2. Cognitive load:** Under pressure or faced with complexity, we’re more likely to grab the first thing that feels good

enough. Our brains save effort by sticking with what’s easy to process.

- 3. Attention and fatigue:** Early options get more of our energy. By the time we get to later ones, attention wanes and decisions become more rushed – even if those later options might have been better.

PUTTING IT TO THE B2B BUYER TEST

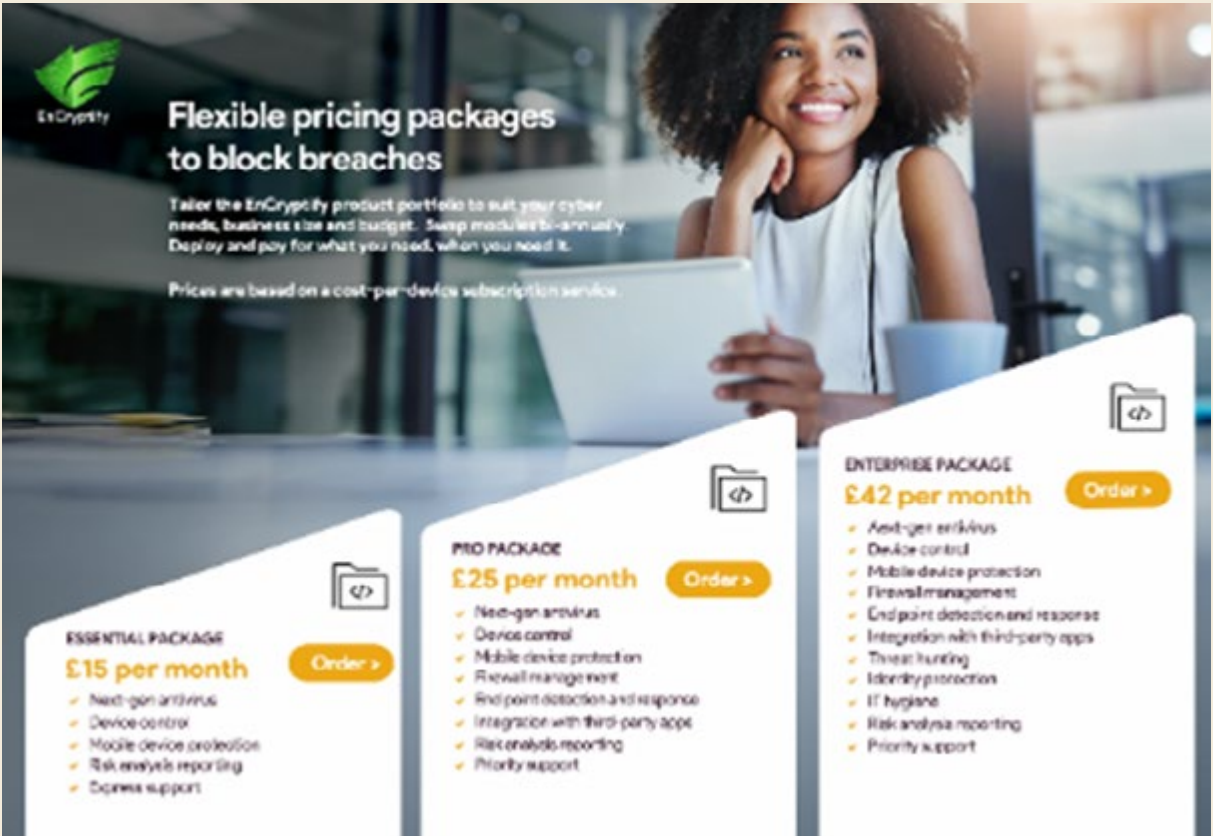
There are very few academic studies published on the impact of the Ordering Effect on B2B buyers. Certainly, the bias has been cited numerous times in reference to the design of audience surveys and A/B testing, but little has been published outside of the research sphere.

We wanted to see if the Ordering Effect held true in a world of spreadsheets and risk assessments, where B2B buyers must weigh up choices that can carry hefty price tags.

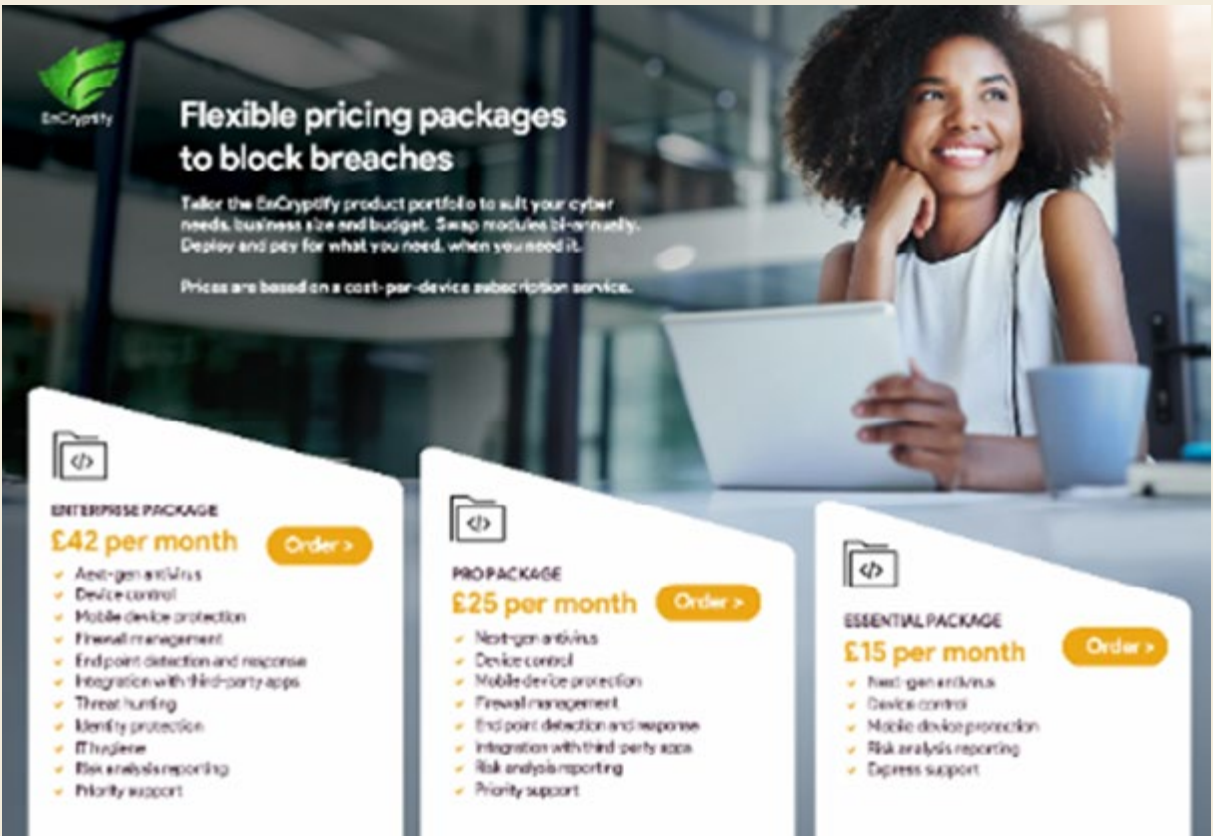
For our experiment, we presented 500 B2B buyers with the same *EnCryptify* webpage containing software subscription packages – as shown in Bias 9, Extremeness Aversion.

This time we split the sample into two equal groups and asked each group to rate the appeal and perceived value for money of each pricing package.

- Group 1** saw the pricing options listed from lowest (£15/month) to highest (£42/month). See Figure 15.
- Group 2** saw the pricing options listed from highest (£42/month) to lowest (£15/month). See Figure 16.



(FIG 15: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)



(FIG 16: EXAMPLE OF IMAGE SHOWN)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

TAKEAWAY 1

First impressions shape judgment
The initial option presented acts as an anchor, heavily influencing how subsequent options are perceived. This means that even a decent idea or presentation might seem weaker if it follows a particularly strong one.

TAKEAWAY 2

Decision quality declines over time
As people move through a list, their mental energy and attention drop. This makes them more likely to accept early options and overlook or undervalue later ones, especially under pressure or when faced with complex choices.

PRICES SHOWN FROM LOWEST TO HIGHEST (VS. HIGHEST TO LOWEST) BOOSTED B2B BUYER APPEAL BY 19%.

When pricing was presented in ascending order (from lowest to highest), 59% of participants found the middle-tier Pro Package most appealing, and 70% believed it offered the best value for money.

However, when the pricing order was reversed (descending from highest to lowest), appeal for the Pro Package dropped to 48% – an 18.6% decrease – and perceived value for money fell to 58%, a 17.1% decline.

These results offer strong evidence for the Ordering Effect Bias in B2B pricing decisions, particularly in how the sequence of options influences both appeal and perceived value for money.

Starting with a low-priced anchor makes the mid-tier feel like a balanced, high-value choice – the classic primacy effect (favouring the first exposure). When the order is reversed, the middle pricing option remains attractive, although the appeal of the product and perception of value fell, showing that the recency effect (favouring last exposure) in B2B buyers is less powerful.

WHY THIS MATTERS

In B2B, buyers are often navigating budget constraints, procurement scrutiny, and internal justification. Starting with the lowest-priced option creates a sense of accessibility and psychological safety. As they move up the tiers, buyers can better appreciate the added value of higher-priced options – rather than being put off by a premium anchor upfront.

WHAT THE ORDERING EFFECT MEANS FOR B2B MARKETERS

Warren Buffet once said: *“The single-most important decision in evaluating a business is pricing power. If you’ve got the power to raise prices without losing business to a competitor, you’ve got a very good business. And if you have to have a prayer session before raising the price by a tenth of a cent, then you’ve got a terrible business.”*

The Ordering Effect can give B2B marketers that pricing power. By understanding how buyers use mental shortcuts, marketers can present options in a way that feels fair and balanced.

B2B buyers rarely evaluate price with cold rationality. They’re busy, risk-averse, and faced with countless decisions every day. They judge value on instinct – through quick, intuitive rules of thumb.

Marketers who align their pricing communication with these biases aren’t being manipulative. They’re meeting buyers where they naturally are and giving them the confidence to choose.

APPLYING THE ORDERING EFFECT

Here are two suggestions for applying the Ordering Effect to marketing strategies to strengthen how buyers engage with your content, offers, and pricing – which in turn shapes the performance of your campaigns.

- **‘Start small, scale smart’ social campaign**

For brands offering modular solutions, or wanting to appeal to growth-focused SMEs, create a series of LinkedIn or Instagram carousel ads that walk buyers through three levels of your solution, from entry-level to your full-suite of capabilities.

Start with the lower-cost, essential package, then introduce scalable add-ons. This low-to-high order builds trust with price-sensitive buyers and positions your offering as flexible, future-proof, and growth-aligned.

- **Capability progression in product pages**

Structure solution or product features from basic to advanced. Start with foundational capabilities and then build toward more strategic or technical features.

This will help buyers feel progressively more confident as they move from familiar to more complex benefits – making the full proposition feel more accessible and easier to implement.

THE ORDERING EFFECT: BETA VS. GEN X RESULTS

When prices were shown in ascending order (low → high), 64% of both Gen X and BETA participants found the Pro Package most appealing. 73% of BETA and 67% of Gen X believed it offered the best value for money. This shows that age has no impact on these buyers’ preferences when prices are presented this way.

However, when prices were shown in descending order (high → low), the appeal of the middle tier pricing option dropped from 64% to 49% for BETA buyers, and to 47% for Gen X – that’s a massive decline of over 25% for both groups, but not statistically significant to prove that age is a factor in this bias.

CONCLUSION: BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE IS B2B'S UNTAPPED SUPERPOWER



This report set out to answer a bold question: can behavioural science meaningfully improve B2B marketing effectiveness? Through ten original experiments, conducted with over 500 senior decision-makers across global markets, we've shown that this belief is not only outdated – it's actively holding marketers back.

The truth is, B2B buyers are just as human as anyone else. They're influenced by emotion, instinct, and cognitive shortcuts. They're under pressure, juggling risk, and often looking for reassurance as much as information. And that's where behavioural science comes in – not as a gimmick, but as a powerful, evidence-backed toolkit for understanding and influencing real-world decision-making.

From the Isolation Effect to the Illusion of Effort, from Tailored Social Proof to Extremeness Aversion, this report has demonstrated how small, strategic changes rooted in behavioural insight can drive significant uplifts in attention, recall, trust, and conversion. These aren't theoretical ideas. They're practical, proven interventions that can be applied today to make B2B marketing more effective, more human, and more commercially impactful.

What's striking is how little of this thinking is currently being used. While 58% of B2B marketers say they're familiar with behavioural science, only 17% are applying it consistently. That's a 41% gap between understanding and execution. And it's a gap that presents a huge opportunity for those willing to act.

Why the hesitation? Partly, it's because most of the case studies and evidence have historically come from B2C. There's been a lack of proof that these principles work in complex, high-stakes, multi-stakeholder environments.

This report changes that. It provides the first large-scale, global evidence base for behavioural science in B2B – showing that these biases don't just apply, they thrive in business contexts.

It also addresses the ethical question head-on. Behavioural science is powerful, yes – but it's not about manipulation. It's about empathy. It's about designing marketing that aligns with how people actually think and decide. Used ethically, it builds trust, not just performance. As Richard Shotton puts it, *"It's about guiding, not coercing – helping people make better decisions, not just more profitable ones."*

SO, WHAT SHOULD B2B MARKETERS DO NEXT?

Start small. Pick one bias. Test it. Measure the impact. Then scale. Whether it's reordering your pricing page to leverage the Ordering Effect, simplifying your messaging to apply the Make it Easy bias, or showcasing behind-the-scenes effort to tap into the Illusion of Effort, every nudge counts.

Think laterally. Don't just apply these biases to ads. Use them in sales decks, onboarding flows, product demos, and pricing strategies. Behavioural science isn't a channel – it's a mindset. It's a way of thinking about every touchpoint in the buyer journey.

And most importantly, think human. The best B2B marketing doesn't just inform, it connects. It doesn't just explain, it resonates. Behavioural science helps us do that. It helps us move beyond generic messaging and create work that feels relevant, memorable, and emotionally intelligent.

In a world where 75% of B2B ads fail to make an impact, this matters more than ever. Attention is scarce. Trust is fragile. And sameness is everywhere. Behavioural science offers a way to cut through the noise – not by shouting louder, but by speaking smarter.

It's not about abandoning logic or data. It's about complementing them with insight into how people actually behave. It's about recognising that even in the most rational-seeming environments, emotion and instinct still play a role. And it's about using that understanding to create marketing that works with the grain of human nature, not against it.

In short, behavioural science is B2B's most underused competitive advantage. This report proves why. The brands that embrace it won't just see better campaign results. They'll build stronger brands, deeper relationships, and more sustainable growth.

The opportunity is clear. The evidence is here. Now it's time to act.

METHODOLOGY

HOW WE RAN THE RESEARCH

To explore how behavioural biases shape B2B decision-making, we designed a pioneering study grounded in real-world marketing scenarios.

Working with behavioural scientist Richard Shotton and research specialists NewtonX, we created a 15-minute online experiment that included 10 distinct, lifelike simulations – each based on a typical marketing interaction B2B buyers might encounter. These scenarios were built around a fictional cybersecurity brand developed specifically for this research.

Each scenario targeted a different cognitive bias and was mapped to a particular stage of the B2B buying journey, from awareness and first impressions to consideration and final decisions.

We surveyed 500 senior decision-makers at companies with 500+ employees across North America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Participants spanned a diverse range of industries – financial services, manufacturing, healthcare, energy, and IT among them.

To get a clearer view of how biases work in practice, we focused on three key metrics: attention, recall, and emotional engagement. Together, these offer a snapshot of what truly resonates with B2B buyers.

AUDIENCE BREAKDOWN

- **Regions**
US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Singapore, Australia, India
- **Industries**
Financial services, Insurance, Manufacturing, Energy, Healthcare, Pharma, Logistics, Tech
- **Job roles**
Heads, Directors, and VPs across IT, Operations, Risk, Compliance, and Finance
- **Seniority**
66% Gen X – aged 41+
33% BETA Buyers – aged 21-40

ABOUT US



RICHARD SHOTTON

Richard Shotton is a pivotal figure in the fusion of behavioural science with marketing. Author of the best-selling book, *The Choice Factory*, Richard travels the world consulting and training global brands on how to use behavioural science to solve diverse business problems.

Beginning his career as a media planner, Richard has had the privilege of working with high-profile accounts such as Coke, Lexus, and comparethemarket.com. His journey from media planning to behavioural economics enables Richard to deliver presentations that offer a rare blend of scientific rigor and actionable advice that marketing leaders will find intellectually stimulating and immensely practical.

Find out more: www.richardshotton.com



NEWTONX

NewtonX is the research and insights platform that empowers businesses to solve their toughest challenges with confidence. Trusted by Fortune 500 companies, NewtonX provides custom-recruited experts, tailored surveys, and in-depth interviews with end-to-end research support.

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TRANSMISSION

Transmission is the world's largest independent global B2B marketing agency. Our mission is to elevate the role of marketing to the board, combining data-driven intelligence with curiosity, creativity, and innovation to craft powerful, behaviour-changing engagement with audiences to create lasting impact and success.

With offices in eight countries worldwide, Transmission has the global agility and experience to help B2B brands drive the now and define the next.

Find out more: www.transmissonagency.com