

LIONS B2B Summit: B2B's evolved (and evolving) marketing mandate.

Key takeaways from the LIONS B2B Summit in Cannes 2026



Stein.

Introduction

This year's LIONS B2B Summit in Cannes (in partnership with LinkedIn, Microsoft, Stein and IAA in addition to Insights Partner Bloomberg) reflected a continued and pronounced shift in the narratives and models leading B2B marketing forward. This evolution — better said, a reset — was apparent at the IAA Singapore B2B Summit held in April. It will be front and center at the 5th annual IAA Global B2B Brand Summit in New York on October 14. [Read more here.](#)

What's clear is that the conversation about brand-led marketing in B2B has definitively moved on from "how much does it matter" to "just how much it matters." The discourse is now focused on how leaders are activating it, proving it and achieving outcomes as a result. Among the key drivers:

- The role of brand in driving demand and the need to seamlessly integrate both. Brands from ServiceNow to SAS to HPE | Juniper Networks have made an incontrovertible case.
- The adoption of Buyability principles — foremost among them that buyers don't just buy products, they buy decision defensibility. The need to build category fame, day-one shortlist prominence and collective confidence among target and hidden buyers rises high among B2B marketing jobs to be done.

Together with these, we've synthesized several essential takeaways from the Summit that we believe B2B marketing leaders should be considering in their planning for the remainder of 2026 and into 2027.

- The C-suite and boardroom are ready to invest in brand — if you speak their language.
- The brands winning are the ones with the conviction to extend beyond category convention.
- Greater creativity as a strategic asset for B2B enterprises requires intentionally building a company-wide culture over time.
- AI is only as effective as the quality and clarity of strategic thinking that powers it.



Buyability drives decision defensibility.

The momentum around Buyability as the mental model for B2B marketing success continued to build at the Summit. Presented by LinkedIn's Jann Schwarz and Mimi Turner, and Bain's Rishi Dave, the research-based model reframes the role of brand.

What moves a brand from out of market... to day-one shortlist...to closed-won... isn't rational product superiority claims. It's collective confidence and decision defensibility across the entire buying group. The confidence and defensibility that drive more closed deals are in turn driven by the 3 Rs of Buyability: Recommendations, Relationships and Relatability.

Newly released LinkedIn research provided evidence of Buyability's effect. Campaigns leveraging at least three Buyability signals (see below) are more than twice as likely to deliver incremental revenue.

Top 5 Buyability signals:



Working styles matched ours



Recommended by customers like us



Recommended by colleagues



Wanted to be a strategic partner



Specific focus on companies like us

These signals also make campaigns more defensible to CFOs. LinkedIn research revealed that CFOs are more willing to fund a campaign that manifests Buyability signals. Specifically, 64% of CFOs express willingness to invest when multiple Buyability signals are built into a campaign.

LinkedIn also added a diagnostic layer that highlighted the absolute imperative of being on the day-one shortlist: 80% of deals are won by brands on the list. In fact, unless a brand is on the list when a buying process begins, the likelihood of winning is almost nil. Buyability doesn't start when a process starts — the signals need to be always on.



Clicks, leads, cost per click, cost per lead, attribution models, marketing sourced pipeline, marketing influenced pipeline. You know what's missing in all of these metrics? The customer.

Jann Schwarz, Senior Director of Marketplace Innovation, LinkedIn

The boardroom is ready. Are you?

The CMOs on stage during the day — including Colin Fleming from OpenAI, Rachel Thornton from Adobe, Siddharth Taparia from JLL and LinkedIn's Jessica Jensen — were unified in their approach: they had identified the need to stop making the “marketing case” and focus instead on the “business case.”

- Fleming correlated brand investment directly with net new pipeline.
- Thornton described a similar shift at Adobe, where net-new pipeline was traced from brand through demand to create a revenue-tied business case.
- Taparia shared how four years of investment, iteration and performance led to brand being elevated as one of six pillars in JLL's Accelerate 2030 five-year strategic plan.

Jensen closed by highlighting the consistent pattern and calling for a unified measurement framework that spans brand, trust, Buyability and conversion — connecting brand to the metrics that matter in the boardroom: Win rate. Cost of acquisition. Revenue growth. Competitive resilience.

Bloomberg's analysis of C-suite earnings calls reinforced why this lands with impact: business leaders already think about brand as a financial lever — one that supports pricing power and buffers against market volatility. Speak that language and you're not making an argument, you're speaking a language they already understand.



Enterprise creativity is a culture, not a campaign.

To date, the Creative B2B Lions category has been dominated by brands targeting SMBs or brands that are essentially B2B2C. Enterprise level work across almost all categories has largely gone unawarded.

The reason being: structural disadvantage. Complexity of offerings and messaging, larger buying groups, more internal stakeholders to navigate all make creative ambition harder to achieve and sustain.

As Tom Stein, Chairman of Stein, put it: getting organizations that are inherently risk averse to understand creativity's game-changing possibilities requires taking an enterprise on a journey — a highly intentional effort to build a culture of creativity. Without it, breakthrough ideas are often stalled by internal stakeholders before they ever have the chance to succeed with external audiences.

Monique Elliott, Chief Brand Officer at Schneider Electric and Jennifer Chase, CMO of SAS, showed what culture building looks like in practice. When Schneider recently rolled out its new brand positioning and identity, Elliott and team created a “brand fan club” across the entire organization.

At SAS, Chase launched a methodology and program within her global marketing team called “DYNAMIC,” each letter standing for a creative characteristic she wanted the team to bring to the work. For example, “D” is for daring: an idea bold and unexpected enough to capture the audience’s attention.

The summation: creativity is a journey. But once the enterprise is bought in — once the culture shifts — brand and creativity stop being marketing’s job alone.

D ARING	Is this bold, unexpected enough to capture our audience's attention?
V ISIONARY	Does it emphasize the new SAS through storytelling and design while bringing a future-focused, optimistic vision?
N IMBLE	Is this responsive to market changes, customer feedback and emerging trends?
A UTHENTIC	Is it aligned with our brand voice, and tone? Does it reflect our values, mission and messaging in a language without jargon?
M AGNETIC	Does it have a broad appeal, and is it relevant to our target audience?
I MPACTFUL	Does it uniquely set SAS apart from competition in a measurable way?
C ULTURALLY RELEVANT	Does it include global moments that matter to bring more relevance to our brand?

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Creativity is a journey a company needs to go on together. It has to be incredibly intentional.

Tom Stein, Chairman, Stein

The AI reality check.

Wendy Walker, CMO of Global Dairy Trade and the 2025 Creative B2B Lions jury president, provided the Summit a provocation worth sitting with: if your brand strategy is unclear, AI will scale that confusion. If your creative is generic, AI will make it more so. The technology doesn't fix weak thinking. It exposes it.

Walker named three leadership missteps she's seen play out:

- Confusing acceleration with strategy: AI lets teams produce more — more output, more variants, faster — but volume of activity should not be mistaken for strategic clarity or marketing effectiveness.
- Letting dashboards become the brief: Easy-to-measure metrics like clicks and traffic start to dictate what the work optimizes for, rather than what matters strategically.
- Cutting junior roles rather than redesigning them: Removing entry-level roles for speed hollows out the next generation of marketing judgment (that AI can't supply) before it develops.

The practical frame: automate the how, protect the why. Speed and efficiency are table stakes now. The differentiator is quality of thinking, sharpness of point of view and the conviction to develop work that sounds like no one else.

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Automation is oxygen for craft, not a replacement for it.

Wendy Walker, CMO, Global Dairy Trade



You already employ your best creators.

The instinct in a resource crunch is to do less. The better move is to look for capability you already have and haven't activated. Every B2B company has subject-matter experts whose knowledge would make genuinely compelling content — most just aren't being asked to create any.

That was the wager behind one of the Summit's sharpest case studies. Nicole German, Global CMO of HSBC's Corporate & Institutional Bank, and Adam Biddle, CEO of GH05T, described relaunching a newly merged business across 46 markets in 12 weeks, with no incremental budget — an impossible brief for a traditional model.

Their answer was to turn HSBC's own bankers into the primary creators, producing over 700 pieces of content in eight months that carried the authority of actual experts.

The takeaway travels well beyond banking: the fastest, most credible content pipeline most B2B brands have isn't a bigger budget — it's the expertise already inside the building.

What clients really want isn't just strong products — it's knowledge and expertise to help them navigate what's actually happening in their world.



The conviction gap.

The jury for the Creative B2B Lions — in its fifth year as a Cannes category — had two jobs at once: honor the best work and point at where B2B creativity needs to go next. Ty Heath, Global Director, Thought Leadership and GTM Strategy at LinkedIn, Kelly McConville, VP of Marketing at Fourthline and Benedict Buckland, Managing Director at alan. Agency found three threads running through the work that won, and they all come back to conviction.

- **Proof over promise** is conviction backed by evidence.
- **Investment in ecosystems over one-off campaigns** is conviction sustained beyond the short term.
- **One idea, strongly held, communicated with real emotional weight** is conviction that compounds effectiveness.

The Grand Prix winner made all three explicit. SKF — a bearing manufacturer whose purpose is fighting friction — partnered with tidal energy company Minesto and Faroese state energy company SEV to launch the Faroe Islands Space Program: a space program that never leaves Earth. The insight was simple but bold — tidal energy is fundamentally moon power, generated by the same lunar pull that drives the tides.

Instead of sending a craft into orbit, the campaign sent one into the Atlantic, dressed in full space-mission mythology: spacesuits, a “spacecraft,” even a renamed launch site. It’s not a safe idea. It takes a company committing fully to a specific belief and following it all the way through, rather than settling for something easier to get approved.



The jury’s advice reflects the same idea: every B2B company is part of a bigger story — follow that chain until you find something genuinely interesting and hold onto it. While emotion provides the path, it is not the destination — memorability is.

The 2023 jury president, Tom Stein, noted that enterprise brands have won very few Creative B2B Lions over the past five years despite representing the vast majority of global B2B spend. **From the jury’s POV, that’s not a creative problem; it’s a conviction problem.**

Inside the Jury Room: Creative B2B Lions



Ty Heath

Global Director, Thought
Leadership, GTM Strategy
LinkedIn

Kelly McConville

Marketing
athline

Benedict Buckland

Managing Director
alan. agency

The through-line.

Every session at the 2026 LIONS B2B Summit in Cannes pointed to the same truth: the B2B brands building durable advantage right now aren't optimizing harder within the old model. They're operating from a different model entirely.

Buyability over attribution. Business language over marketing metrics. Human judgement over AI volume. Internal experience over outsourced creators. Creative conviction over caution. Creative culture-building over complacency.

The gap between the brands doing this and those still debating it is growing harder and harder to close. In the B2B Decade, the question isn't whether to act. It's whether you're moving fast enough.

For deeper exploration of these themes and their application to your organization, connect with us at steinb2b.com

Tom Stein

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Stein.

Accelerating growth from brand to demand.

Stein helps build the world's most demanded B2B brands by unifying brand and demand — strengthening each to the benefit of both. Through its Brand-to-Demand Experience (BDX™) model, highly awarded creativity, and full-funnel media capabilities, we drive differentiation, distinction and growth for clients worldwide. Stein was ranked #1 B2B Agency in the World by The Drum in 2025. Stein has also been named an ANA Agency of the Year 14 times over the past 16 years, most recently in 2026. Stein also is the only B2B agency to have won WARC Awards for Effectiveness (Gold) at Cannes across consecutive years.

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