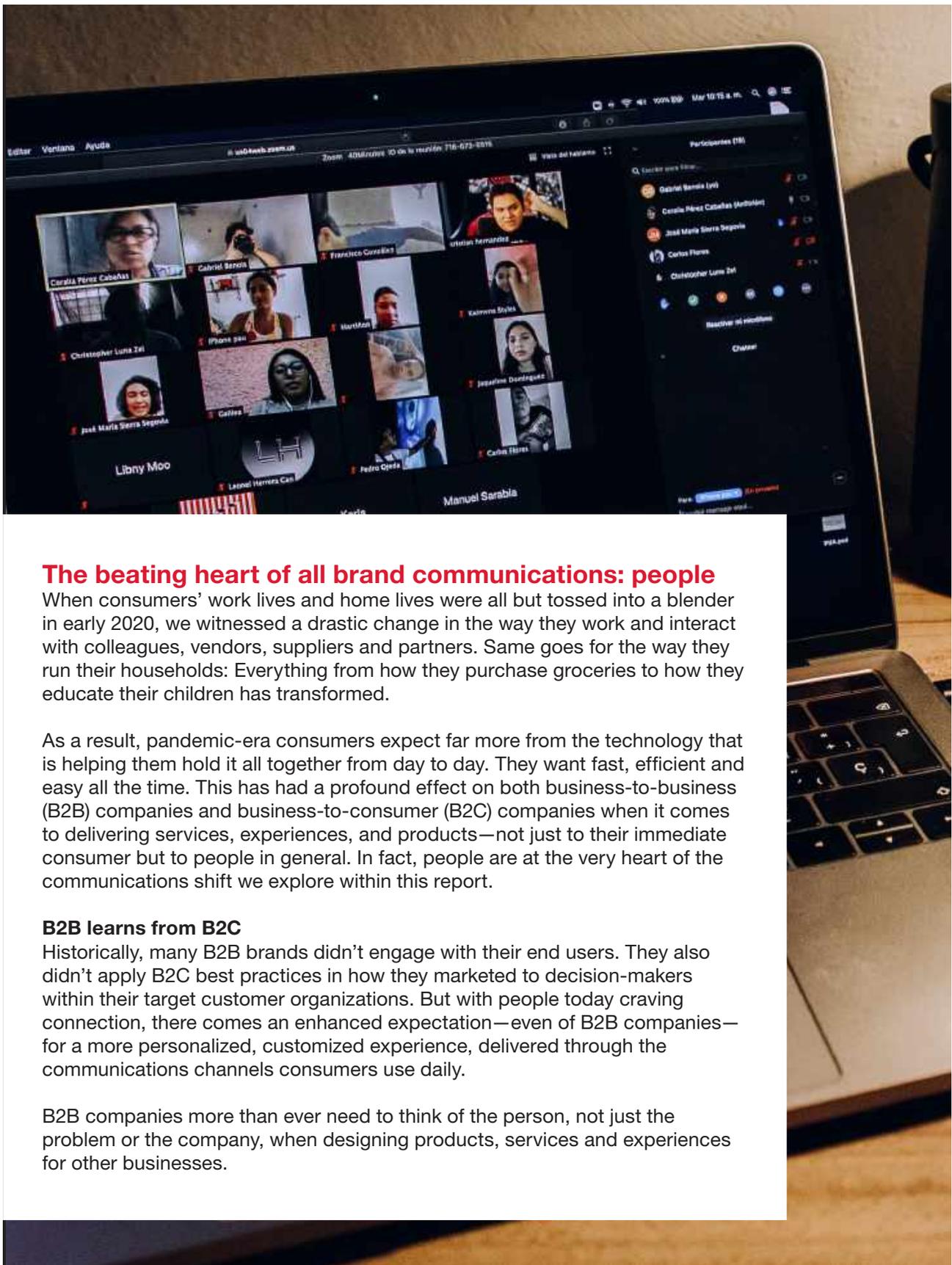


Red Sky Thinking

OCTOBER 2020

Rethinking B2B and B2C: A Case for Person-to-Person (P2P) Communications





The beating heart of all brand communications: people

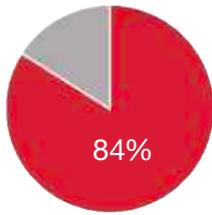
When consumers' work lives and home lives were all but tossed into a blender in early 2020, we witnessed a drastic change in the way they work and interact with colleagues, vendors, suppliers and partners. Same goes for the way they run their households: Everything from how they purchase groceries to how they educate their children has transformed.

As a result, pandemic-era consumers expect far more from the technology that is helping them hold it all together from day to day. They want fast, efficient and easy all the time. This has had a profound effect on both business-to-business (B2B) companies and business-to-consumer (B2C) companies when it comes to delivering services, experiences, and products—not just to their immediate consumer but to people in general. In fact, people are at the very heart of the communications shift we explore within this report.

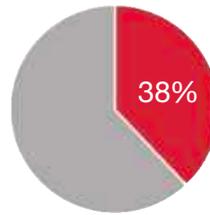
B2B learns from B2C

Historically, many B2B brands didn't engage with their end users. They also didn't apply B2C best practices in how they marketed to decision-makers within their target customer organizations. But with people today craving connection, there comes an enhanced expectation—even of B2B companies—for a more personalized, customized experience, delivered through the communications channels consumers use daily.

B2B companies more than ever need to think of the person, not just the problem or the company, when designing products, services and experiences for other businesses.



84 percent of people think companies should communicate honestly about their commitments and promises.



Only 38 percent of people think they do indeed communicate honestly about their commitments and promises.

—Meaningful Brands study, powered by Havas

Importantly, people are wanting news, views and updates to be delivered similarly at work and in life. The shift in the types of information they expect brands—both B2B and B2C—to share about their business has been accelerated by the pandemic and the social issues now at the forefront of global conversation. Some brands have responded well, but the rules of engagement are changing, providing new opportunities for brands (particularly B2B) to step into a more human and relatable territory to engage a wider audience.

A voice for all brands

With this shift in how people engage with brands, the traditional roles of B2B and B2C communication have been disrupted. Consumers not only want products, services and experiences tailored to them, they also bring to the table new expectations for how brands today communicate with them and what they should communicate about.

The current political climate is placing brands on the front lines of the discussion around crucial topics like social justice, inequity, climate change and privacy. Brand messaging needs to be going beyond simply the product or service on offer, exploring (and communicating) how the business can tangibly improve people's lives and helping them understand the role it plays in society. Particularly now, purpose must be more than a token gesture—and it must benefit people on a functional, personal and collective level.

This presents an incredible opportunity for brands to engage people through the lens of purpose—building deeper relationships with customers, but also with a broader audience they did not typically engage before.

The future of communications is now **person-to-person (P2P) led**.

Not all communications should be the same; rather, they must be tailored to audiences across specific channels.

To move from a monologue to a multilogue, the imperative is to take one story and give it many shapes. Think about how Adobe's mission to inspire creativity everywhere and within everyone is omnipresent across its social channels. Or how effectively Salesforce has humanized its brand by featuring real humans—its employees—on its social channels and regularly interacting with its audiences.

As a global micro-network specializing in Merged Media (earned, social and experiential storytelling with content and data at the heart), this concept is core to Red Havas' proposition and view on where the future of communications is heading.

Rules of Engagement for P2P Communications

1. Prove your purpose.
2. Engage through EGC.
3. Play up partnerships.
4. Elevate experiential.

1. Prove Your Purpose

Even before the pandemic, audiences were corralled around purpose. Our own [Meaningful Brands study](#) shows that 77 percent of brands could go away and people wouldn't care—and this number has increased over time. There is a growing expectation that people globally will expect brands to prioritize purpose, particularly millennials.

COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter movement accelerated this expectation—and now, brands need to be identifying how they can authentically lean further into purpose—through helpful, tangible actions—and come together as people, businesses, industries and as a global community. A recent [study](#) by USC Annenberg noted that 84 percent of PR professionals surveyed agree that corporations should take a public stand on societal issues directly related to their business, most often citing diversity and inclusion. Climate change is second on the list,

and almost half of the younger members of the PR profession believe that business should engage on issues outside of the current corporate comfort zone. France's [INSEAD](#) has noted that European CEOs and companies have lagged behind their American counterparts in social activism but that recently they have started to catch up, recognizing the public's demand for corporations taking a stand.

Further, audiences will be looking for brands to stay true to their purpose as it is tested like never before in today's significantly challenged business environment—for example, in the sustainability space—and not abandon these longer-term priorities during times of crisis. Collaboration is also key to purpose—consumers don't want to see brands just looking out for themselves but banding together where possible to serve a greater purpose.

In a P2P world, purpose is even more critical—it is an area where B2B and B2C come together. Although audiences may not be direct consumers of a product, they want any end product or service they buy to be sourced from companies with purpose.

Audiences can readily access research that explains a company’s purpose and offers insight and transparency. They now have the opportunity to see CEOs’ plans in action directly on LinkedIn, and as supply chains shorten and shift due to the pandemic, they have an opportunity to supply products from suppliers with like-minded, purpose driven priorities. A good example of this is Danone, whose CEO Emmanuel Faber is joining other European CEOs in [pledging](#) for a “green recovery” that includes a commitment to both economic results and fighting climate change.

Purpose also brings meaning to employees, regardless of product or service, improving their job satisfaction and loyalty to a company.



“Employees see purpose as a way to bring meaning to their work and understand the contributions they are making to the company, as well as society.” — PwC



Nine out of 10 B2B professionals say purpose is important to their business, yet only one in four have activated on purpose, or embedded it across their company culture. — The Harris Poll

63%

of consumers prefer to purchase from purpose -driven brands. — Accenture

2. Engage Through EGC

In recent years, user-generated content, also known as “UGC,” has become a staple in many marketers’ content strategy frameworks. UGC offers an authentic and cost-effective means of creating quality content that can help communicate a brand’s message across users’ channels individually as well as on branded social channels and beyond through reposting and publishing.

Since the pandemic hit, many brands have navigated the content production restrictions by engaging and activating audiences through UGC while they are more captive. At the same time, we’ve seen a new type of surprisingly effective grassroots ambassador rise through the social ranks: employees!

Too often untapped as brand ambassadors, employees are a powerful source of truth when it comes to advocating company purpose or product offerings and

engaging external audiences. As such, employee-generated content (EGC) is becoming increasingly popular and adopted by major brands—often striking a powerful balance between B2B and B2C in the process.

For marketers, employees can provide more credible ways of relating to both B2B and B2C audiences with authentic content.

Starbucks is a leading example of EGC making an impact. A pioneer in this space, the company has created specific social channels for its employees—which it calls “partners”—and has provided them with a set of social media guidelines. Among other things, these best practices call for Starbucks employees to share their passions, take the high road—oh, and not to forget to use the company’s #tobeapartner hashtag.



Why EGC?

1. Content shared by employees receives eight times more engagement than content shared through branded channels.
2. Employee posts get reshared up to 24 times more than branded posts.
3. 92 percent of consumers turn to people they know for referrals above any other source.

(Source)

3. Play Up Partnerships

Partnership marketing is not new—for years, it’s been a proven and practical way to expose a brand to new audiences in both the consumer and B2B space. Traditionally, the incentive of a partnership was cross-promotion, and it was often driven by advertising and focused on increasing sales. But now the objectives of partnerships are changing, and the net is widening in terms of the opportunities they offer.

Also widening is the very definition of partnership. Taking their cue from consumer brands, B2B brands are reaping the benefits of expanding their definition of partner to include influencers. After all, today influencers are brands in their own right and can help B2B companies grow their audiences.

There’s an important distinction, however. While consumer brands may seek mega-influencers who can guarantee millions of eyeballs, a more targeted effort—deploying micro- or nano-influencers who hit that relevant sweet spot—is typically a smarter approach for B2B brands. This is particularly true given the importance of authenticity for successful partnerships.

Business software solution giant SAP has been an early advocate and adopter of influencer marketing programs as a means to help close the [customer experience gap](#), and it regularly shares its POV on the topic at events and in the media. This global best-practice player harnesses both internal and external influencers to serve as brand ambassadors and champions who educate, inform and excite. In fact, influencers have become integral to its annual Sapphire event—one year driving [25 percent](#) of all social media impressions.

But you don’t need to have the deep pockets of a global B2B company to deploy an influencer marketing campaign. Efforts can easily be scaled, enabling organizations of all sizes to harness the power of partnerships.



4. Elevate Experiential

Experiential and event marketing is commonplace in B2B strategies today, but budgets and events have gone into lockdown because of the impact of COVID-19. A recent survey by the [World Federation of Advertisers](#) found that 55 percent of marketers were planning on cutting back investment in events/experiential.

Even before the pandemic, a brand experience did not have to equal an event. While it remains unclear how long-lasting this decline will be, there's ample opportunity to reimagine, rethink and pivot brand experiences to make more meaningful P2P connections. Brands are looking to virtual events and experiences as a potential replacement, but there is no playbook on how to shift.

One example of this is Microsoft's Build developer conference. Rather than canceling entirely, Microsoft opted for an all-virtual

event that didn't try to recreate its in-person conference online, but rather created a unique 48-hour livestream event to accommodate different time zones. As a result, it saw more than 230,000 attendees registered for the online-only event, compared with the 6,000 who attended in person last year, with participants engaged for an average duration of 173 minutes.

Hybrid events that merge physical and digital are not likely to be a temporary effect of the pandemic, as our expectations of technology in the workplace have permanently changed. Pop-up experiences and installations that promote conversation and UGC do not have to mean in-person interactions. Instead, brands can take the opportunity to identify the heart of these experiences to thoughtfully create a more streamlined virtual event that puts those key messages front and center.



With social media usage up while users spend more time at home during the pandemic, this can be leveraged to create experiences that are shared to that now-larger online audience. Product interactions—sampling, “curbside solutions” or seeding products with influencers—allow for personal brand experiences and connections. And of course all these experiences create opportunities for content building and EGC.

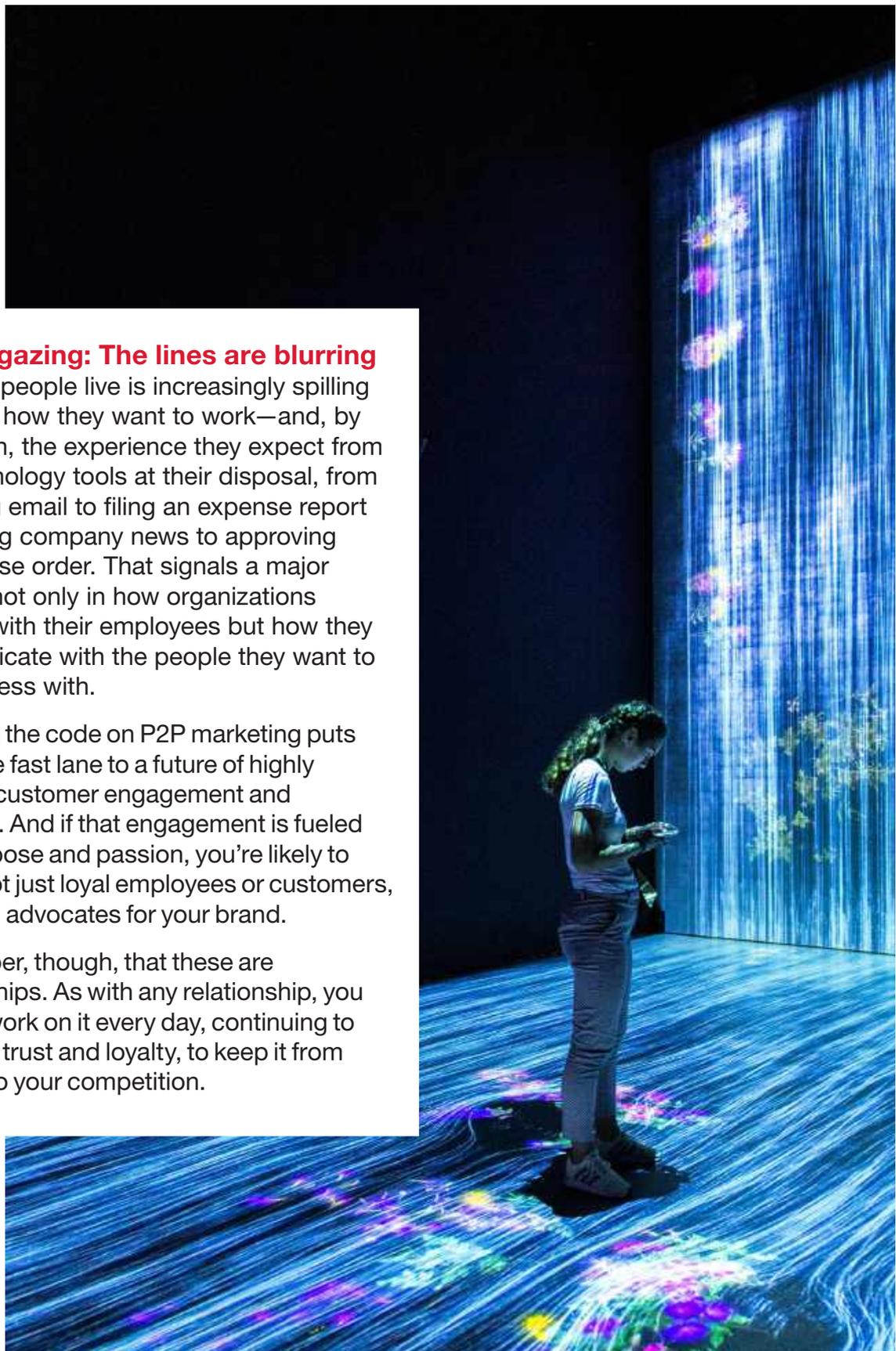
Brand experiences are not just a flash; they must resonate afterward with meaningful purpose. The pandemic has only heightened the need for transparency and authenticity in content. Creating memorable brand experiences can create the personal connection and customized experience people are seeking.

Future-gazing: The lines are blurring

The way people live is increasingly spilling over into how they want to work—and, by extension, the experience they expect from the technology tools at their disposal, from checking email to filing an expense report to reading company news to approving a purchase order. That signals a major change not only in how organizations engage with their employees but how they communicate with the people they want to do business with.

Cracking the code on P2P marketing puts you in the fast lane to a future of highly efficient customer engagement and retention. And if that engagement is fueled with purpose and passion, you're likely to create not just loyal employees or customers, but vocal advocates for your brand.

Remember, though, that these are relationships. As with any relationship, you have to work on it every day, continuing to earn that trust and loyalty, to keep it from moving to your competition.



Undeniable Passion Fearless Ambition Incredible Ideas

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