



WHAT BUYERS HEAR VS. WHAT MARKETERS SAY

How to Listen, Learn, and Land Messages That Move B2B Buyers

INTRODUCTION

Today's B2B buyers don't want more noise. They want relevance.

94.8% of marketers get their core message wrong.

Not because they're bad at their jobs, but because they're too far from the truth of how buyers decide.

We assume buyers make logical choices, read spec sheets, and compare feature grids. But neuroscience—and thousands of buying conversations—tell a different story.

B2B decisions are made emotionally, in milliseconds. Buyers rely on gut, not just Google. And most of the messages we send? They bounce off the brain before logic even kicks in.

This guide will help you close that gap.

 **94.8%** of marketers get their core message wrong.

YOU'LL LEARN HOW TO

Craft messaging that lands in the first 100ms

Run customer interviews that uncover emotional truth

Use first-party data to activate insights, not just store them

This isn't about making your marketing louder. It's about making it resonate.

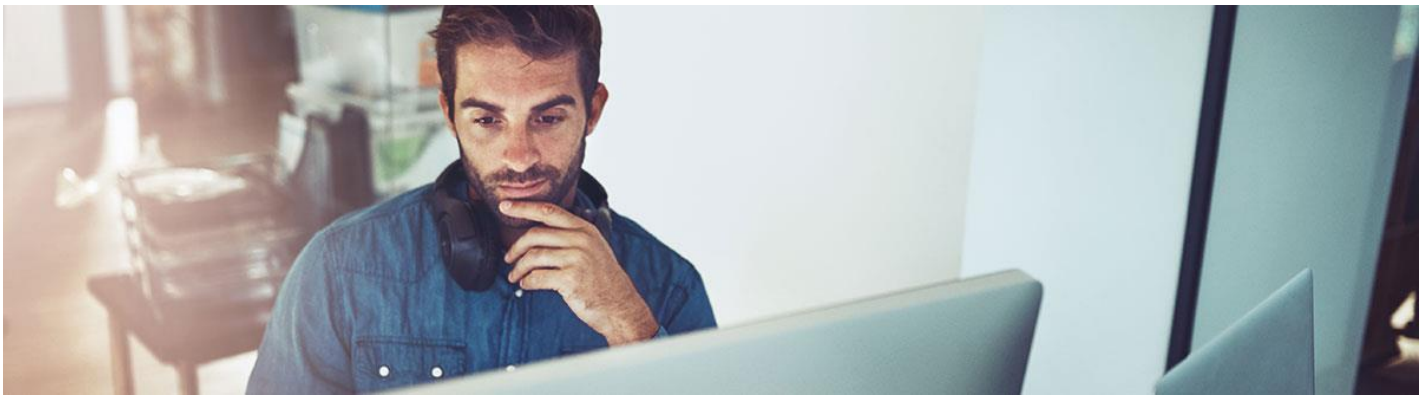
Let's find your buyer's truth—and use it to drive real pipeline.

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PART 1: HOW BUYERS ACTUALLY DECIDE

Insights from [Grant Gooding](#), Founder & CEO of [PROOF Positioning](#)



WHY 90% OF B2B DECISIONS ARE EMOTIONAL

While B2B companies invest heavily in feature comparisons and ROI calculators, neuroscience reveals a surprising truth: up to 90% of purchasing decisions—even seven-figure enterprise deals—begin with an emotional response that's later justified with logic.

This doesn't mean buyers are irrational. It means their brains are wired to respond first with **emotion**, then evaluate with **reason**. In B2B, emotion shows up as:

- A sense of safety or risk
- Trust in a vendor
- Excitement about solving a problem
- Fear of choosing the wrong solution

“We’re not as logical as we think. The brain makes emotional judgments in under 100 milliseconds—long before the rational brain even shows up.”

— Grant Gooding

THE 100 MILLISECOND RULE

In studies from Johns Hopkins and others, researchers found that the human brain begins evaluating stimuli emotionally within **100 milliseconds**—faster than the blink of an eye. If your message doesn't register in that brief window, the brain filters it out.

This is why vague, buzzword-filled messaging doesn't work. The brain is looking for **emotional relevance, clarity, and safety—fast**.

✘ WHAT MOST B2B MARKETERS GET WRONG

The messaging trap most B2B companies fall into is prioritizing credentials over connection. Generic claims like:

- “We’re an end-to-end solution provider...”
- “Award-winning performance...”
- “Trusted by leading brands...”

These fail the 100-millisecond test completely. Rather than triggering emotional engagement, they create immediate cognitive indifference.

In Grant’s research, company leaders guessed what mattered most to their customers—and got it wrong **94.8%** of the time.

Exercise: Try the Happy Birthday clapping experiment. This simple test is a classic demonstration of the curse of knowledge. The idea that once we know something, we assume others do too. In Grant’s research, participants expected 50% to guess correctly, but only 1 in 40 did. The exercise reveals how easily we overestimate the clarity of our message, because we already know what we’re trying to say.

“We assume buyers care about the things we care about. But they’re hearing the clapping—we’re hearing the song.”
— Grant Gooding

How to run it

1. Choose a well-known song (e.g., Happy Birthday, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star).

2. Have one person tap or clap the song’s rhythm without giving clues.

3. Ask another person to guess the song based on the tapping.

4. Before guessing, ask the tapper to estimate how likely the guesser will get it right.

5. Compare the prediction to the result—you’ll likely notice a big gap.

✔ THE MESSAGING RESONANCE CHECKLIST

Use this to evaluate whether your messaging is likely to trigger emotional resonance:

✔ Does it trigger an emotional reaction in under 100ms?

✔ Is the message clear and singular, not a feature pile?

✔ Would it make your buyer feel something (trust, fear, relief, urgency)?

✔ Could your competitor say the same thing?

✔ Would your message still land if your brand name were removed?

✂ TRY IT YOURSELF: THE “5 MESSAGE GUT CHECK”

Take the five most common messages you use to explain your product or solution.

Now ask:

1. Which one evokes emotion the fastest?
2. Which one could be said by any competitor?
3. Which one makes your customer feel safe, understood, or excited?

Keep the strongest. Kill the rest.

📁 BONUS: THE “FILE CABINET” TEST

The brain organizes messages like a file cabinet:



If it sounds like a tab (“Save Time,” “Avoid Risk”), the brain stores it.



It gets tossed if it sounds like a slogan (“Transforming Tomorrow with Innovation”).



Rewrite your top-level messaging to pass the tab test.

PART 2: HEARING WHAT BUYERS REALLY MEAN

Insights from [Paul Slack](#), Founder & CEO of [Vende](#)



Why Interviews > Assumptions, Personas, or Sales Calls

Every marketer wants to stand out. But most don't get close enough to the customer to understand what matters.

“If your messaging feels flat, it's usually because it's written by people who haven't listened closely enough.”

– Paul Slack



When you take the time to interview real customers, not just scrape insights from a few Gong calls, you unlock:

- The actual words they use to describe their challenges
- The emotional triggers that led to their decision
- The moments in their journey when they felt stuck, afraid, or excited

Buyer truth doesn't live in your ICP slide—it lives in your customer's stories.

The 11 Questions That Uncover Real Buying Motivation

Use these in live interviews with current customers. Ask one at a time. Go slow. Listen for emotion, not just facts.

<p>1</p> <p>How did you first learn about our solution?</p> <p><i>Uncovers what created awareness and demand.</i></p>	<p>2</p> <p>What were you trying to accomplish?</p> <p><i>Reveals their “job to be done” in their language.</i></p>	<p>3</p> <p>How were you doing this before?</p> <p><i>Gives you the “old way” they tried—and sets up your “new way” narrative.</i></p>
<p>4</p> <p>What problem were you trying to solve?</p> <p><i>Uncovers the pain (keep asking “Why?” to dig deeper).</i></p>	<p>5</p> <p>What was the tipping point that made you take action?</p> <p><i>This is gold. Their answer is the emotional catalyst.</i></p>	<p>6</p> <p>What kept you from moving forward sooner?</p> <p><i>Reveals objections, uncertainty, and internal friction.</i></p>
<p>7</p> <p>What other options did you consider?</p> <p><i>It helps you understand their mental shortlist and how they made tradeoffs.</i></p>	<p>8</p> <p>What do you like best about our solution?</p> <p><i>Reveals what truly creates value for them, often surprising.</i></p>	<p>9</p> <p>How is your situation different now?</p> <p><i>Gives you transformation stories and language for testimonials.</i></p>
<p>10</p> <p>What would you type into Google if you were looking for this solution?</p> <p><i>Reveals actual search behavior and buyer vocabulary.</i></p>	<p>11</p> <p>How would you describe us to a peer?</p> <p><i>This is how your customer naturally talks about you to others.</i></p>	

PRO TIPS FOR BETTER INTERVIEWS

- Ask **one question at a time**. Don't stack. Don't rush.
 - "Why was that a problem?"
 - "Can you expand on that?"
 - "What do you mean by that?"
 - "What happened next?"
- Watch for **emotion in their voice**: a sigh, a laugh, a long pause. That's where the truth lives.
- Research shows that you'll typically uncover 80% of the major patterns by the seventh interview. By 15, you've likely captured 95%. Focus on quality conversations, not quantity.

WHAT YOU'RE LISTENING FOR

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stories (sequences of events, not opinions)• Frustrations, fears, and "aha" moments• Their own words—not marketing phrases | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contradictions or hesitations• Words they repeat more than once |
|--|--|

"The best messaging comes from your customer's mouth. Interviewing is how you learn their language."



PART 3: HOW TO TURN INSIGHT INTO ACTION

Insights from [Ryan Paul Gibson](#), Founder & CEO of [Content Lift](#)



WHY FIRST-PARTY DATA IS NOW YOUR SUPERPOWER

The demise of third-party cookies isn't the end of B2B marketing—it's a reset—a shift back to **knowing your buyer** directly, not guessing through proxies.

“When you rely too heavily on third-party data, you lose context control. First-party data is how you win it back.”

— Ryan Gibson



What does that mean in practice? You must collect your high-context buyer data through interviews, conversations, and smart tracking. Then, you need to act on it by crafting content, messaging, and enablement that is aligned with what buyers want and how they decide.

UNDERSTANDING THE DATA TYPES

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
First-Party	Data you collect directly (CRM, forms, interviews)	Highly relevant, exclusive to you	Takes effort to collect and maintain
Second-Party	Partner or platform-shared data (e.g., trade shows, marketplaces)	Pre-qualified, often deeper context	May not be directly relevant
Third-Party	Purchased or scraped data from outside sources	Broad reach, often anonymous	Low trust, declining accuracy, privacy risks
Zero-Party	Info customers give you voluntarily (calculators, preference centers)	High intent, willingly shared	Must be earned through value and trust

First-party ≠ just names in a database. It's context-rich signals about what your buyers value.

PLUG THESE 10 FIRST-PARTY DATA LEAKS

Want better messaging and pipeline? Fix these gaps:

1. CRM fields missing job role or function
2. Disconnected form fields (no persona-enrichment logic)
3. Sales call recordings have not been reviewed or tagged
4. No structured customer interview program
5. Over-reliance on outdated personas
6. NPS scores collected—but never acted on
7. Incomplete tracking of event or webinar behavior
8. Email lists with no engagement scoring
9. No alignment between marketing and sales notes
10. Campaign data stored—but not mined for learning

🧠 What to Collect Across the Funnel

FUNNEL STAGE	WHAT TO COLLECT	WHY IT MATTERS
Awareness	Job roles, industries, and common pain points	Tailor campaign targeting and copy
Consideration	Key objections, language they use to search, peer influence	Create relevant messaging + enable sales
Decision	Evaluation criteria, tipping points, triggers	Build content that reduces risk and accelerates buying

"The more context you collect, the less content you need. Precision trumps volume."



🎯 FROM DATA TO ACTION

Once you have emotional data (Part 1) + buyer voice (Part 2) + structured data signals (this section), you can activate it across:

- Landing pages: rewrite above-the-fold copy with emotional hooks
- Sales decks: shift from logic-led to buyer-validated proof points
- LinkedIn posts: lift copy directly from customer interviews
- Email: segment by decision triggers or roles, not just firmographics
- Campaigns: build creative around actual fears, not assumed pain
- Enablement: align talk tracks to interview patterns and persona emotions

"Real marketing strategy isn't about data collection. It's about **data-backed storytelling.**"



CONCLUSION



If you've made it this far, you're already ahead of most marketers—because you're choosing to listen. Neuroscience shows how fast decisions are made. Interviews reveal what buyers truly value. First-party data helps you act with precision, not assumptions.

So start small:



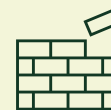
Interview a customer.



Rewrite a message.



Fix a data leak.



Build one new campaign.

When you do, you'll stop marketing at buyers and start building trust, momentum, and real revenue with them.

That's the power of aligning your message to the Buyer Truth.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



PAUL SLACK

Founder & CEO, Vende

Paul is a 25-year B2B marketing veteran and visionary behind Vende's Pipeline Growth Agency model. He helps mid-market companies align sales and marketing around how buyers buy—driving real pipeline, not just leads.



GRANT GOODING

Founder & CEO, PROOF Positioning

Grant is a leading voice in emotional data and decision science. His neuroscience-backed PROOF Method helps companies understand why customers buy—so they can craft messaging that resonates at the emotional level.



RYAN GIBSON

Founder, Content Lift

Ryan is a first-party data strategist who helps B2B brands build messaging that reflects real customer insight. With deep expertise in customer interviews and positioning, he helps teams close the gap between buyer truth and brand story.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Want more help? Check out the additional resources below:

BLOG

[First-Party Data Strategies for B2B Marketing in the Cookieless Age](#)

BLOG

[Top 10 B2B Marketing Attribution Data Leaks Draining Your Pipeline](#)

GROWTH SHOW REPLAY

[Best Practices for Conducting Customer Research](#)

RESOURCE

[Customer Interview Guide](#)