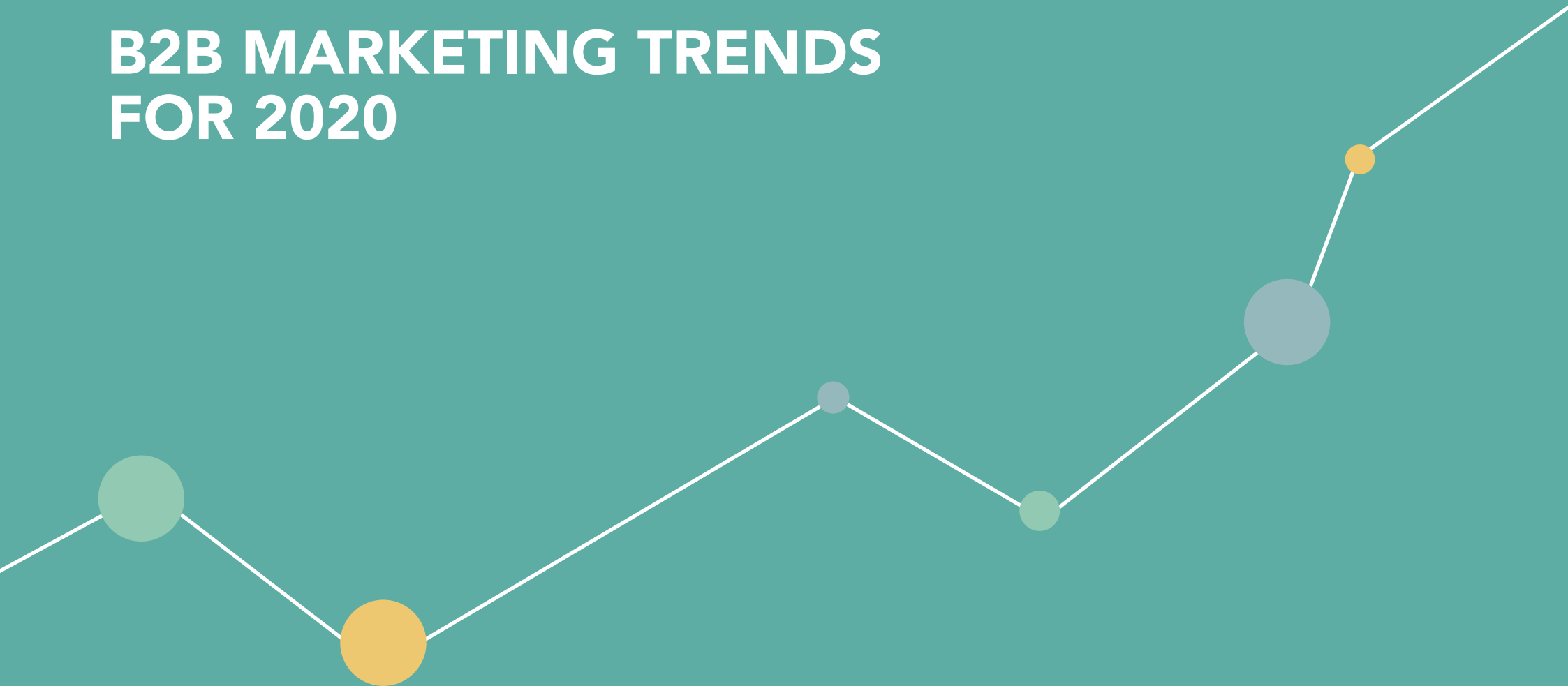



AGENCY INC INSIGHTS:

B2B MARKETING TRENDS FOR 2020



A GUIDE FOR SUCCESSFUL B2B MARKETERS

agency
inc

A decorative line with circles in teal, grey, and yellow colors, spanning across the top of the page.

In a time of rapid convergence – digital and analogue, art and technology, B2C and B2B – we B2B marketers need as much order and clarity as possible.

Amid all these changes, navigating the B2B marketing landscape is increasingly complex. Which is why we've collected our top 8 observations and trends for 2020, to guide forward-thinking B2B marketers into the year ahead.

We hope this guide helps to make the complicated simple. Because it is only when we find the simplicity at the heart of complexity, that we're able to make clear business decisions.

"Simple can be harder than complex: you have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains."

– Steve Jobs

1 THE RISE OF THE INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER



Expect B2B buyers to go even further into their decision-making journeys before making contact

B2B buyers progress more than 70% of the way through their decision-making journeys before ever contacting a sales rep.¹

And 68% prefer to do their own research online, up from 53% in 2015.²

This percentage will increase as millennials, being digital natives, choose to do more of their own research online.³ This sets higher expectations on B2B companies to deliver relevant and valuable content to meet these growing information needs.

The outcome is a more self-sufficient B2B buyer, naturally sceptical of sales reps.³



68% prefer to do their own research online, up from 53% in 2015

2 BUILD A BETTER BRAND EXPERIENCE



Expect forward-thinking B2B marketers to not just aim for excellent CX, but excellent BX

Binet & Field's seminal research⁴ has taught us that regardless of whether you're in B2B or B2C, brands perceived as likeable, relevant and trustworthy will always fare better. So it's very important to make sure the experience customers have isn't just good CX (Customer Experience), but good BX (Brand Experience) too.

But delivering excellent BX isn't just about adhering to brand guidelines – it's much more fundamental. Every interaction must be anchored to the brand's core values, with a consistent personality, voice and behaviours. Most importantly, this should be embodied by the company's people, projecting the brand from the inside out.⁵

This ensures that wherever buyers are in their journey, whether reading a thought leadership paper or speaking with a sales rep, they have a consistent experience.⁶

Even with limited interactions, if a customer's experience is positive, it creates a 'Halo Effect', leaving them with a lasting, positive impression of the company as a whole.

Every interaction must be anchored to the brand's core values, with a consistent personality, voice and behaviours

3

BRING MORE HUMAN TO H2H



Expect forward-thinking B2B marketers to feature their people in meaningful ways

In the complex world of B2B, it's important not to forget to be H2H (Human to Human).⁷ And an essential part of delivering a human and authentic brand experience is to demonstrate the people behind the brand. This is especially important because as we know, buyers are leaving it later in their decision-making journey to make contact.

So, how do we create human interaction at the right touchpoints in a primarily digital journey? We need to consider ways to present the company's internal experts as brand ambassadors,⁸ happy to roll up their sleeves in a way that's approachable, helpful and not salesy.

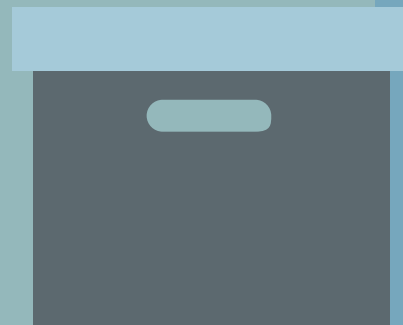
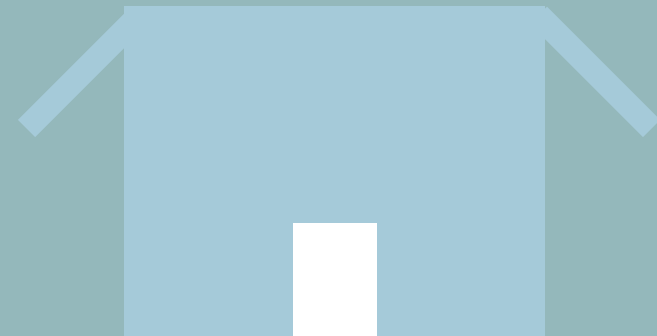
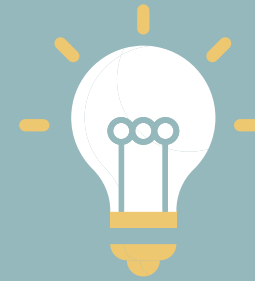
B2B marketers need to work harder to ensure that content like talking head videos, written interviews, and even personal LinkedIn posts, are more authentic and human.



agency
inc

4

THINK MORE LIKE AMAZON



Expect B2B pure play brands to think and behave more like consumer brands

Big B2C players like Google and Amazon have entered B2B categories and brought with them a new level of expertise. With this, they are setting a very high bar for pure play B2B brands, who have to engage buyers now accustomed to a higher standard of experience.⁹

The outcome is that pure play B2B companies need to think and behave more like B2C brands in order to stay competitive.

We expect to see more and more partnerships and collaboration between brands, extending outside of B2B categories, to deliver on this new level of 'consumer' expectation.

We're continuing to see strategic partnerships (like Google Cloud and NCAA)¹⁰ engaging buyers with an 'off-duty' consumer approach.

5

GET DEEPER BENEATH THE SURFACE



Expect successful B2B marketers to invest more in primary research

Being more H2H means we need better audience insight. Over the last decade, there's been more of an emphasis on readily-available engagement data, which has resulted in less investment in primary market research.¹¹

This is a problem. It limits our ability to get a deeper understanding of how the audience ticks – what they need, what their challenges are, how they interact with their peers and what makes them look good in their organisation. These are the human elements that drive decision making.

In order to get this deeper level of insight, we need to rebalance our research approach; to incorporate social listening, in-depth interviews, focus groups and roundtables to build a better picture of our B2B audiences.



6

THINK MORE WITH YOUR HEART



Expect forward-thinking B2B marketers to harness emotional creativity

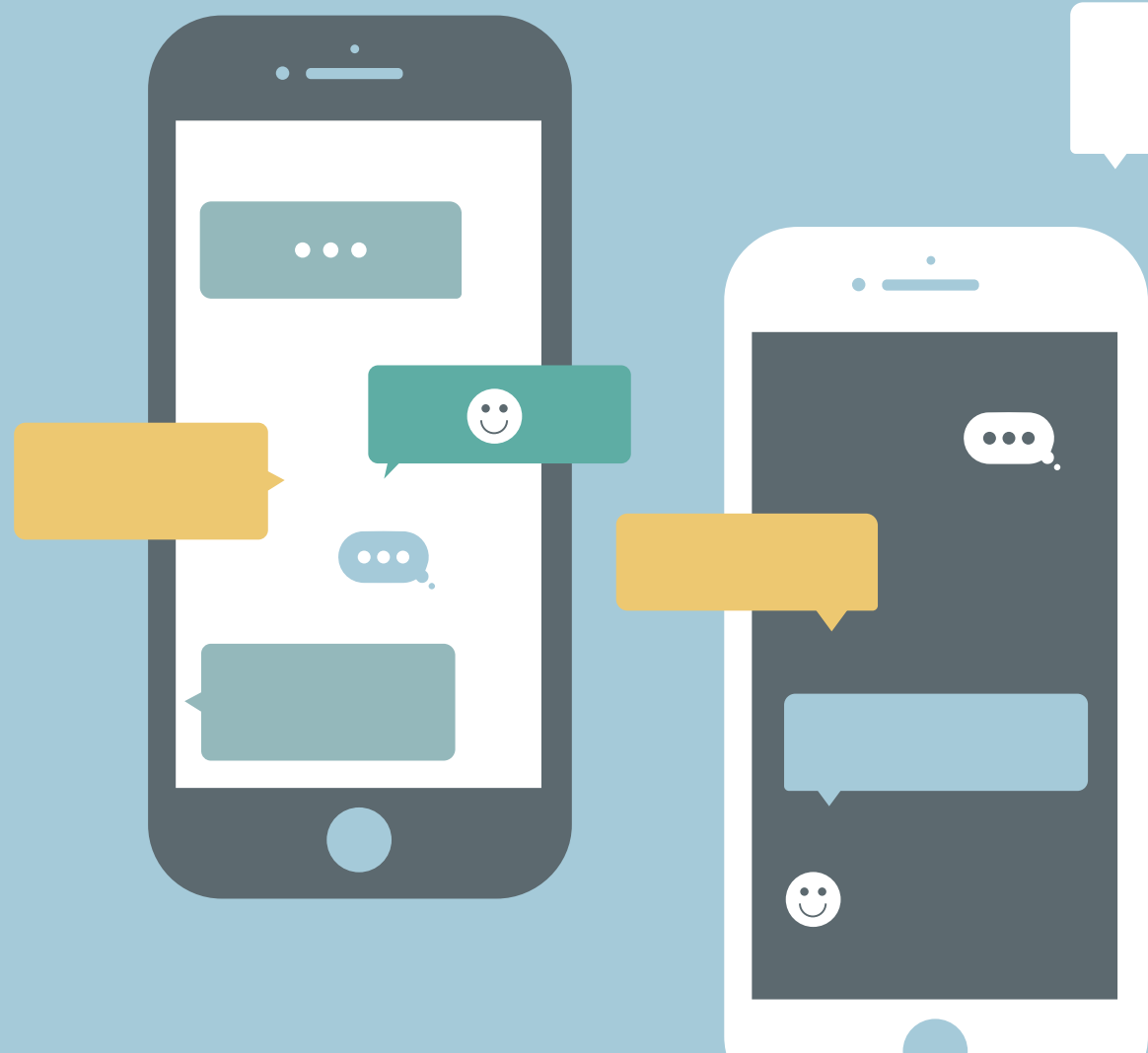
The shift to H2H in B2B also highlights the importance of connecting emotionally with buyers. Contrary to popular belief, there's more of an emotional connection between customers and B2B brands than with B2C. This is because stakes are much higher in a business environment – make the right decision and you could get promoted, but get it wrong and you could be out of a job.⁵

With this level of personal investment, the key to connecting with B2B buyers is to harness emotion through creativity, especially important in the early stages of a customer's decision making journey. In doing so, B2B brands are more likely to break through other messages competing for the buyer's attention.⁴

In B2B, the emotional stakes are much higher

7

MAKE IT PERSONAL, FASTER



Expect forward-thinking B2B marketers to move to a state of continuous and agile optimisation

We've already talked about how higher standards of B2C experiences influence B2B buyer expectations.⁹ As consumers, B2B buyers have come to expect a 'right here, right now' experience,¹² behaviours that will increasingly influence channels and formats used by B2B marketers.

What this means for traditional 'Awareness to Advocacy' journey mapping is that we must continuously optimise and provide relevant content, in an agile way.

95% of buyers buy from someone who gives them the right content at each stage of their journey,¹³ so delivering highly relevant and personalised messaging becomes especially important.

Using engagement, lead data, sophisticated analytics and artificial intelligence will help marketers better understand and respond to their audiences.

95% of buyers buy from someone who gives them the right content at each stage of their journey

8

A STRONGER SALES & MARKETING INTERLOCK




Expect successful B2B companies to prioritise seamless collaboration between their marketing and sales departments

Our final point is arguably the most important for driving results. Marketing teams might be doing all the right things by developing their brands and generating leads, but there can often be a hiccup, when eventually there is a sales conversation.

If marketing and sales aren't in sync, the sales rep will often underestimate their prospect's knowledge of the company's solutions and competitive advantages. The prospect has, of course, usually completed the majority of their research online. The salesperson then delivers their pitch at the wrong level. This is not a seamless CX.

90% of companies say their sales and marketing teams are not aligned,¹⁴ while 48% say that this disconnect prevents them from closing deals.¹⁵ All this highlights the critical interlock between marketing and sales: they need to be closely aligned to work towards the same goals and not against each other. Getting this right presents a huge opportunity — sales and marketing alignment can help businesses become 67% better at closing deals.¹⁶



90% of companies say their sales and marketing teams are not aligned

REFERENCES

1. Erskine, R. (2017). How To Turn B2B Buyers Into Sales Leads, According To Data. [online]. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryanerskine/2017/12/28/how-to-turnb2b-buyers-into-sales-leads-according-todata/>
2. Wizdo, L. (2019). Welcome To The B2B Marketing Renaissance. [online]. Forrester. Available at: <https://go.forrester.com/blogs/welcome-to-the-b2b-marketing-renaissance/>
3. Bryan, J. (2019). What Sales Should Know About B2B Buyers in 2019. [online]. Gartner. Available at: <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/what-sales-should-know-about-b2b-buyers-in-2019/>
4. Binet, L and Field, P. (2019). Effectiveness in Context: A Manual for Brand Building. [pdf]. IPA.
5. D'Esopo, M and Glynn, S. (2018). B2B Brands in the Human Era. [pdf]. Lippincott.
6. Chatterjee, D. (2017). It's Time For B2B Brand Equity To Step Out Of The Shadows. [online]. Forrester. Available at: <https://go.forrester.com/blogs/its-time-for-b2b-brand-equity-to-step-out-of-the-shadows/>
7. Kramer, B. (2014). There is no B2B and B2C. Human to Human: #H2H. [pdf].
8. Maechler, N et al. (2017). Finding the right digital balance in B2B customer experience. [online]. McKinsey. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/finding-the-right-digital-balance-in-b2b-customer-experience>
9. Green, B. (2019). Why B2B ecommerce needs to replicate the B2C experience. [online]. B2B Marketing. Available at: <https://www.b2bmarketing.net/en-gb/resources/blog/why-b2b-ecommerce-needs-replicate-b2c-experience>
10. Wagonfield, A. (2019). Turning data into NCAA March Madness insights. [online]. Google Cloud. Available at: <https://cloud.google.com/blog/topics/inside-google-cloud/turning-data-into-ncaa-march-madness-insights>
11. IPA. (2019). IPA Bellwether Quarterly Results 2019. [online]. Available at: <https://www.marketingweek.com/ipa-bellwether-q2-2019-marketing-budgets/>
12. Gevelber, L. (2017). Micro-Moments Now: 3 new consumer behaviors playing out in Google search data. [online]. Think with Google. Available at: <https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/consumer-insights/micro-moments-consumer-behavior-expectations/>
13. Bottom, J. (2015). Buyersphere Report 2015: A comprehensive survey into the behaviours and attitudes of the B2B buyer. [pdf].
14. Gleanster Research and Act-On. (2015). Rethinking the Role of Marketing: In B2B Customer Engagement. [pdf].
15. Emmons, M. (2017). More Evidence that B2B Sales and Marketing Have an Alignment Problem. [online]. LeanData. Available at: <http://learn.leandatainc.com/routing-rules-leandatas-sales-and-marketing-blog/more-evidence-that-b2b-sales-and-marketing-have-an-alignment-problem>
16. Thornberry, S. (2016). Dynamic Duo: Close More Deals with Sales and Marketing Alignment. [online]. Marketo. Available at: <https://blog.marketo.com/2016/04/dynamic-duo-close-more-deals-with-sales-and-marketing-alignment.html>

MEET THE AUTHORS



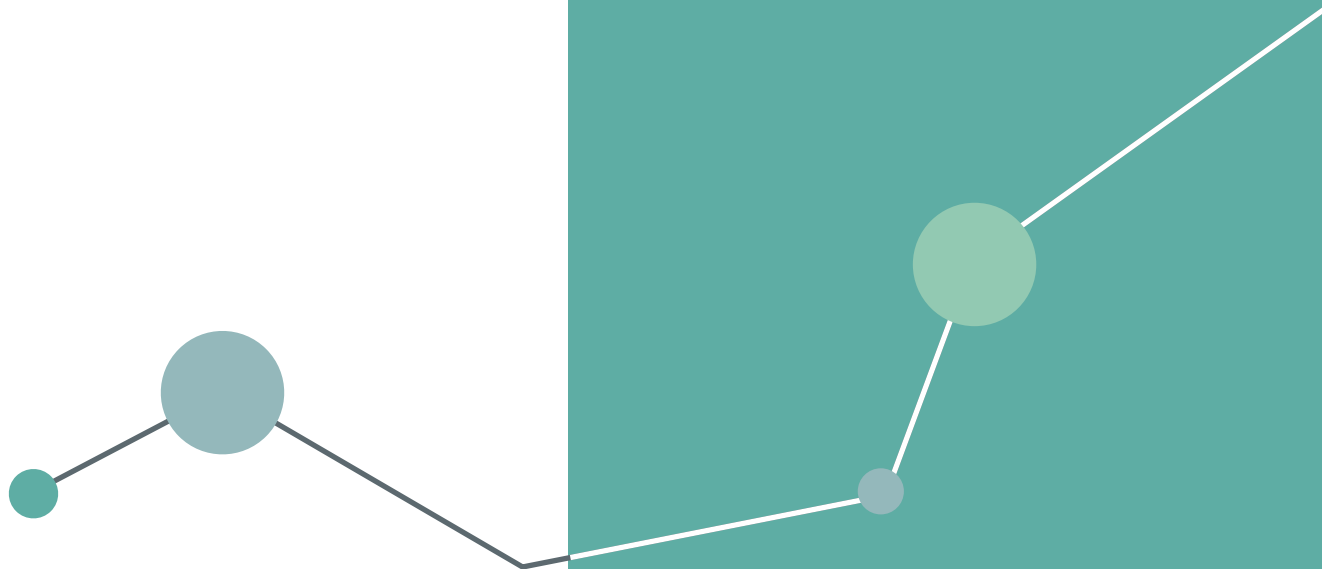
Nikki Guevarra
Business & Strategy Director



Nina Mynk
Strategic Consultant

ABOUT AGENCY INC

Agency Inc is an award-winning marketing agency, specialising in B2B. We partner with global clients to deliver strategic and creative solutions across brand, campaigns and content.





WE MAKE THE COMPLICATED SIMPLE