

B2B CMO's need to be a little bit braver, bolder in 2021



By [Warren Mbss](#)

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In light of what went on in 2020, it's no surprise that so many B2B marketers have been making safe choices. There's been plenty of consolidation, a fair amount of contraction and a lot of maintaining the status quo. But the trend I'd really like to see for 2021 in the B2B marketing space, is B2B marketers taking more chances.



Warren Mbss is the founder & CEO of Demographica

State of Plague

We largely understand the effects that Covid-19 is going to have on our lives and work now – there's no longer much uncertainty around what's going to happen. We're in a recession, and we're going to have a hybrid work-from-home / work-from-office setup for the foreseeable future, thanks to a combination of large-scale and regional lockdowns.

Companies have largely gone into conservative states and those who have had a mediocre year will be going into cash preservation mode, despite sentiment largely growing more positive, as lockdown has eased.

Nobody ever got fired for hiring IBM

This conservative, preservative mindset has seen many B2B marketing directors making very defensive decisions. Defensive decisions are, by nature, easy to defend in the glare of the spotlight. Unfortunately, easily-defended positions are not those that are best for the company – just the best-justified in the face of a slow market.

It's the 21st century iteration of 'Nobody ever got fired for hiring IBM' – taking the safe route, admitting that you're not going to shoot the lights out, but knowing that you're not going to make a mess of things, either. The converse of that is that 'nobody ever got promoted for hiring IBM' – because 'safe and dependable' isn't necessarily going to get your company noticed.

It's easy for CMO's to make decisions that are safe, which can be backed up by data, because there's no data to support a bold decision. Bold decisions require a gut instinct, an intuition that something will be successful. If you get it wrong at the wrong time, you can do large-scale damage to the company, and your professional reputation.

A little bit brave, a little bit bold

We're currently in a sea of sameness. The kind of vanilla communication we're seeing at the moment isn't going to move the needle. By showing a little bit of boldness, a little bit of bravery, there's an opportunity for the right B2B CMO to make moves that can help their company own a category, dominate a market and completely capture an audience in 2021.

If you think of the current state of B2B, there's not a bank, a telco or an ICT business that absolutely owns a category. There are a plethora of opportunities for B2B CMO's to start making decisions that their gut tells them is right, but that they can't back up with data.

The time, then, to take those decisions is when everyone else is behaving conservatively – you just need to be a little bit brave, a little bit bold, to stand out when everyone is huddled up and the wagons are circled.

There's an argument that there's no room for bold ideas because there's no budget. In our experience, that's wrong - budgets may have been cut, but there's still more than enough money to do something creative.

“ *'Creative' doesn't equate to 'expensive'.* ”

The world's greatest, career-defining B2B campaigns – the ones that catapulted a business to market leadership in their territory – were built on the back of intuition.

Look at the Volvo Trucks 'Epic Split' campaign with Jean-Claude Van Damme, State Street's Fearless Girl or General Electric's 'Imagination at Work' – these instinctive campaigns were those which took businesses which were number two, three or four in their market to number one on the back of a bold call.

There was no amount of data to back them at the time – they were done because the business was prepared to do something different, and the rewards are there for all to see.

This is the opportunity to do something significant, with less risk than before. Hindsight will show you in a year or two's time that the opportunity to be a little brave and a little bold was when everyone else was consolidating under Covid.

Once the pandemic has passed, there'll be more money in the system and more people feeling bolder – and it'll be much harder to get noticed by doing amazing things.

So my rallying cry to B2B CMO's in 2021 is to take the chance to be different – it's never been easier to do so, in recent history. All it takes is a bit of bravery, a bit of boldness. What an opportunity.

ABOUT WARREN MOSS

Warren Moss is the founder & CEO of Demographica, a full-service specialist agency focusing on Business to Business (B2B) and niche consumer markets. What makes Demographica unique is the fact that anthropology (the study of human societies and cultures and their development) is at the heart of all of their strategies. Warren and Demographica have been recognised by winning some major business and marketing awards. Warren is also currently the Chairman of the Direct Marketing Association of South Africa.

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