

# 11 tests for quality B2B content





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by [Melissa Lane Porter](#)

In a July 2021 B2B marketer survey in North America, 66 percent of respondents said they planned to increase their B2B content marketing budget in the next 12 months (Statista, 2022). Fantastic. Now let's make it count.

B2Bs marketers have to do more with less. Buying cycles are longer while budgets are often shorter. And they are, in the words of best-selling B2B author and CMO Mark Choueke, often 'boring themselves' with lackluster content they're barely allowed to pitch until The Boring Content Police arrive to survey the area. Content makes and breaks B2Bs daily.

Here's a definitive guide on how to do it.

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# 01. Build a decent brief

## Why?

Briefs are rare, and good ones are even more uncommon. It's often faster and more effective to pick up the phone, interview team members and write one yourself.

## How?

Ask yourself and your team:

- What's the problem?
- How does this content help solve it?
- What should the audience be doing as a consequence of reading this?

Keep in mind that 'Build brand awareness', 'generate leads' and 'increase engagement' are solutions. Make sure you understand the problem you're solving first, both the obvious and the non-intuitive ones.

**Find out what matters to your audience, and what pain points you're solving. A 15-minute conversation with someone who knows or is closely connected with your target audience can easily trump a brief that took weeks to create.**



# 02. Check your authority

## Why?

Authority is the proof that the content is worth reading. Copyblogger calls it 'one of the most powerful psychological influencers out there'. This is why research based posts are shared most in B2B.

B2B buyers want vendors to 'use more data and research to support content,' according to DemandGen's 2019 Content Preferences Study.

## How?

Use statistics from reputable industries, media publishers, and websites, especially including those that are independent.

## 03. Write like you talk

### Why?

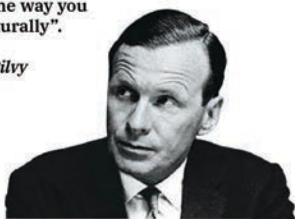
It works. Remember the first time you discovered you could write like you spoke and not be arrested? Monumental.

Conversational writing holds a reader's interest. Businesses contain decision-making readers. You can see where this is going.

“Good writing is good conversation, only more so.” — Ernest Hemingway. ‘But this is non-fiction, you say’, I’m not writing *The Old Man and the Sea*. Let’s ask Ogilvy.

“Write the way you talk. Naturally”.

David Ogilvy



Ogilvy’s in! Great — let’s run with this.

### How?

Skip the jargon, and look at the reader as someone you value, who values you. Just talk to them.

Tell them a story, ask them a question, help them solve a problem. Don’t work too hard to impress them. That’s a great conversation.



## 04. Use active verbs

### Why?

Active Verbs sell better according to neuroscience. SEO expert and content marketer Brendan Hufford reminds us that active verbs like ‘step’, ‘kick’ or ‘grabbed’ activate parts of your brain responsible for these movements.

“Your brain responds as if you’re actually swimming a stroke or sneezing. It’s called “sympathetic cognitive mirroring. BUT when you read any form of the verb “is” or “has,” no corresponding brain activity occurs. Likewise with abstract verbs such as “believe” or “love” or “remember.” No sympathetic cognitive mirroring happens.”

### How?

The simplest way to use active verbs is to keep them handy or to jump into an online thesaurus.

## 05. Be braver

### Why?

It’s what your audience wants. It’s what you want, the way you want to produce it. And it’s working for others who aren’t afraid to try it.

When was the last time you noticed truly original B2B content? Louis Grenier’s *Everyone Hates Marketers* podcast delights and surprises right from the name of his series, then brings content laced with humour and experience. It ranks in searches next to names like Copyblogger for a reason.

B2B agency Velocity interviewed with B2B legend Jason Miller (LinkedIn, Microsoft AI, Active Campaign), who wrote:

“You need to punch above your weight through hungry, imaginative, edgy thinking. You need to be a bit punk. Yes it matters that people know it’s your brand speaking to them – but it matters much more if you say something that makes them stop and listen.

“The capacity to surprise is so important that the best

screenwriters from William Goldman onwards have followed the principle of, “give the audience what it wants, but never in the way it expects.”

## How?

Look for unexpected ways to convey a solution. Talk to members of your team who you trust. Ask them what they’d do if they knew they could take the risk. Ask yourself.

## 06. Once more, with humour

According to the B2B Institute at LinkedIn, ads with humour or established brand characters scored even higher in 2020 than in previous years.

And if you haven’t already, please check out Cheetah Digital’s campaign with Mötley Crue Tommy Lee Jones and partner Brittany Furlan to sell the Signals conference.

Tim Glomb, VP of Content stated to The Drum about their massively successful campaign, “We’re talking to people, not machines.” For the ad Glomb kept circling back to the question, “how can we f\*\*king jazz this up so it doesn’t feel like work?”



## 07. One simple message sells

### Why?

According to Kantar Millward Brown’s Link database, which tested advertising effectiveness, “the more messages you try to land with an audience, the less successful you are likely to be.”

There is beauty in singleness of purpose.

### How?

Ask yourself, ‘If I could just leave them with one message today, what would it be?’ You get one. Know it, write it on your hand, and do not stray. Anyone found meandering will be sent directly back to the brief.

“We’re talking to people, not machines.” For the ad Glomb kept circling back to the question, “how can we f\*\*king jazz this up so it doesn’t feel like work?”

*Tim Glomb*

## 08. Make it relevant

### Why?

People reading your work don’t want a needlepoint expression, they want a genuine benefit.

According to Longitude Influence Impact E Book, “To be relevant, you have to know your audience intimately. Find out what matters to them and ensure that you match



the right message with the right audience. This means striking a careful balance between reach and relevance. Many content producers want as many people as possible to consume their content, but that is not always wise. In aiming for reach, you can end up sacrificing relevance because your content's appeal is too broad."

## How?

Take the time to understand what keeps the reader awake at night. Ask yourself if you're helping them do something that matters to them. If your writing is relevant and useful it will add value.

# 09. Listen

## Why?

People who listen write more empathetically. They're also more likely to understand a brief, to connect and ask relevant questions during a guest interview, and to have multiple ways of looking at how to create unique content. A good writer wants to help the reader, and the reader knows this.

Leor Franks, CMO and Board member at Kingsley Napley attribute listening to his success rewriting his company strapline. "As part of the rebranding, I did a lot of work with Kingsley Napley's strapline and created 'When it matters most'.

I interviewed every one of our 71 partners, asked questions, and listened to the language they used about client situations,



*Photo Credit: Karsten Winegeart*

the types of advice we'd give, and why our clients chose us. The support I received for the strapline was overwhelming. And this came from simply using the consulting techniques of asking questions, listening and synergising the responses."

## How?

Spend time with people in your company — stop by their desk, ask about their roles, ask things about the business you don't know. Interview people externally who work in fields you write about, especially the ones at the top of their game. Interview businesses seeking services that you provide, without selling to them. Listen.

Ann Hadley cites empathy as a key ingredient in quality content. "Empathy means you relentlessly focus on your customer. You view the entire world through his or her eyes..." — Ann Hadley, Everybody Writes.

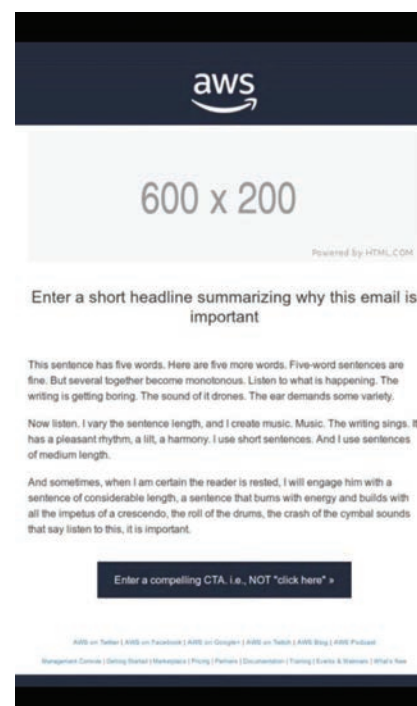
"Empathy means you relentlessly focus on your customer. You view the entire world through his or her eyes."

*Ann Hadley*

# 10. Vary sentence length

## Why?

It keeps your reader awake. Amazon AWS sent an email template out by mistake which explains what sentence length does, and why it's important. (See below)



**Enter a short headline summarizing why this email is important**

This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. The ear demands some variety.

Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length.

And sometimes, when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbal sounds that say listen to this, it is important.

**Enter a compelling CTA i.e. NOT “click here”**

## How?

Literally check that your sentence length varies. If you use 2 or three short sentences, follow it by a longer sentence. Follow that by a short CTA.



*Photo credit: Joakim Honkasalo*



*Photo credit: Elise Wilcox*

# 11. Use the right images

## Why?

Lesley Vos from CMI marketing quotes the ‘picture superiority effect’ which has been demonstrated in multiple studies that your brain will remember pictures more than words.

## How?

Use images in B2B content marketing that are humorous, simple and relevant. Be careful with stock images, because they tend to lack a genuineness that communicates credibility. Use Unsplash, or Pexels, for less stock-like photos, and don’t forget to credit them. That in itself speaks for your brand.

Successful B2B marketing starts and ends with better B2B content.



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