

thought leadership
research results:
perspectives on
characteristics &
importance of
strong brands



hummingbird
CREATIVE GROUP

where ideas take flight



executive summary & study goals

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, Hummingbird Creative Group embarked on an initiative to gain better insight into the attitudes and perspectives of marketing decision makers with respect to the characteristics and importance of strong brands.

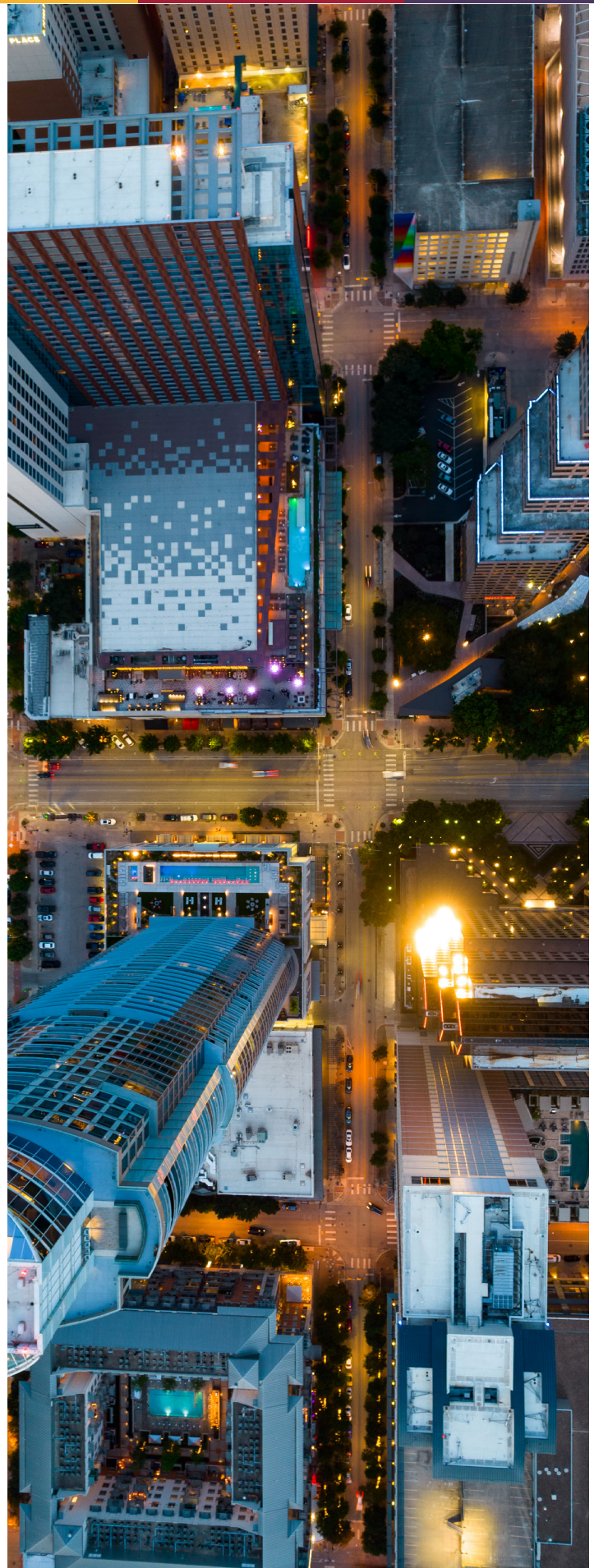
Hummingbird partnered with Audience Audit Inc. to design and field a custom quantitative attitudinal segmentation study of 153 professionals. All are decision makers when it comes to marketing spending in their organizations; 64% are the final decision maker.

The study has an overall margin of error of +/- 6.6 percentage points at a 90% confidence level.

STUDY GOALS

The study was designed to explore how professionals think about the value of a strong brand, and what characteristics they associate with strong brands. We were also interested in determining whether demographics, organization size, or other traits of the respondents are associated with particular attitudes or inclinations when it comes to spending to support brand development.

The analysis was designed to organically reveal audience segments based on the attitudes they share with each other and which differentiate them from other groups in the study. The segment characteristics were not predetermined — they arose from the analysis of 33 attitudinal statements which each respondent rated in terms of their level of agreement or disagreement. The segmentation analysis did not incorporate any demographic or other information beyond the attitudinal ratings.





attitudinal segments

35%

of final decision makers are **Brand Believers**

33%

of final decision makers are **Metrics Masters**

32%

of final decision makers are **Disengaged Doubters**

The research identified three distinct attitudinal segments among the survey respondents. Each is defined by a different set of attitudes that are statistically linked for the members of that segment, in a way that they aren't for the other respondents.

1. BRAND BELIEVERS

Brand Believers are enthusiastic about the benefits of a strong brand. They believe it is instrumental in driving return on investment for their organization, and believe the financial investment required to develop a strong brand is worth it.

This segment is defined by 13 attitudes, and each member's level of agreement with each one of these attitudes is statistically connected to their level of agreement with all of the others.

- Having a strong brand is more important than ever
- Having a strong brand is critical if an organization wants to be a market leader
- The financial investment required to develop a strong brand is worth it
- Effective storytelling requires a strong brand
- A strong brand is:
 - Fundamental to driving word of mouth
 - Fundamental to driving ROI
- A strong brand has a big impact on:
 - Overall company value
 - Profitability
 - Marketing
 - Sales
 - Operations
 - The ability to hire and retain quality employees
- Our target customers want us to be involved in bigger issues or social good efforts that help others

In addition to connecting all of these attitudes together in their minds, they also agree more with all of these statements than other respondents.

"A brand is the heart and soul of a business. It is something perceived by others as well as controlling the inner workings of that business."

– Brand Believer



attitudinal segments

2. METRICS MASTERS

Metrics Masters focus on the analytics of a successful organization. They track everything from target customer personas and customer journeys to competitive activity. They see the impact of brand strength on their results, and focus on developing and improving their brand strategy.

Nine linked attitudes define this group. For each of the following, the extent to which they agree with each is statistically linked to the extent to which they agree with all of the others:

My Organization:

- Makes a point of considering impact on profitability when we are considering marketing initiatives
- Understands our target customer and has defined customer personas
- Spends time developing and improving brand strategy each year
- Does a good job of getting the attention of our target customers
- Does a good job of tracking key success metrics
- Does a good job of tracking the impact of our marketing efforts
- Has identified and tracks activities of our competitors
- Does a good job of tracking customer satisfaction and brand loyalty
- Has defined the customer journey and mapped out marketing initiatives to support every step of the journey

"A brand is the forward-facing image of your company that you would like advocates to share in a referral situation."

– Metrics Master

3. DISENGAGED DOUBTERS

Disengaged Doubters are much less likely to understand the elements of a strong brand or to think about branding often. They are less likely to base their marketing communications on brand strategy.

They are defined by four linked attitudes which they agree with more than other respondents:

- I'm not sure I know all the elements of a strong brand
- Branding isn't a topic I think about often
- Branding is an old-fashioned marketing activity that isn't as important for organizations today
- Branding efforts are mostly a waste of time

Their defining attitudes also include two with which they agree far less than other respondents:

- Our brand strategy dictates the voice and style of all our marketing communications initiatives
- I know a lot about achieving a strong brand

"Branding? Well our standards are done, so marketing should have everything they need to get it all done"

– Disengaged Doubter

OTHER ATTITUDES

Other attitudes that were not found responsible for defining different attitudinal segments nevertheless shed additional light on the perceptions of these marketing decision-makers:

- While overall all segments feel that the time investment required to develop a strong brand is worth it, Disengaged Doubters are statistically less likely to agree
- All segments agree that ultimately their target customers decide whether they have a strong brand or not
- All disagree that brands matter more to consumers than business buyers
- All disagree that branding efforts are mostly a way for marketing agencies to make more money



attitudinal segments

IMPLICATIONS

Even those intimately involved in making decisions around marketing and its financial support feel differently about brand strength. Not only do they vary with respect to how they feel their organization conducts and prioritizes brand marketing, but they even agree about how important a strong brand actually is — and how they're measuring that value.

Brand Believers are strong boosters of the benefits of a strong brand, but are in fact the least likely to be tracking success metrics and the impact of their marketing efforts.

Metrics Masters not only believe in the value of a strong brand, but have the data to prove it — tracking virtually all aspects of customer experience and engagement.

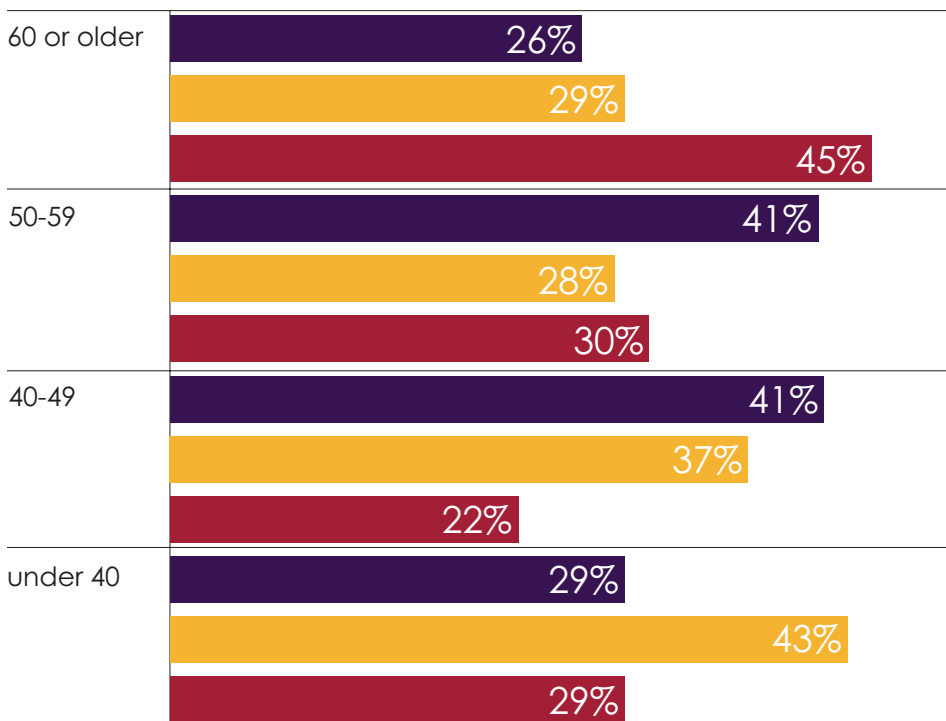
And for Disengaged Doubters, branding is something they admit to knowing little about and also spending little time considering.



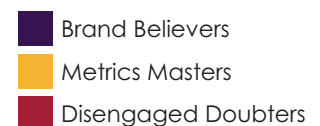


respondent characteristics

AGE SEGMENTS



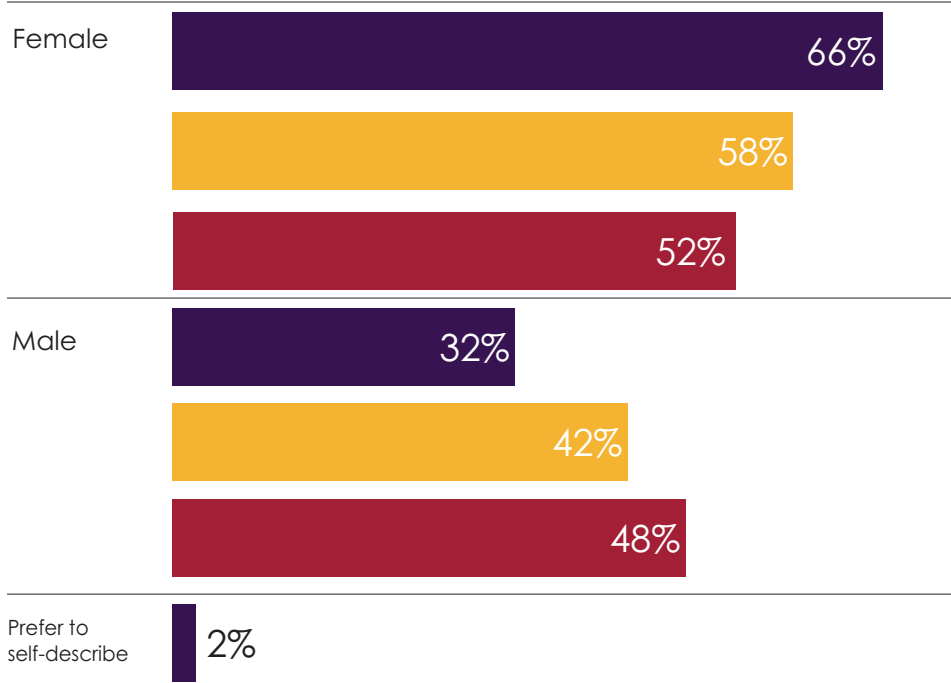
Respondents are well-distributed between age ranges, with 27% 60 or older, 33% in their 50's, 29% in their 40's and 10% under 40. All segments are found in all age groups, but **Disengaged Doubters are more likely to be over the age of 60 than respondents in other segments.**





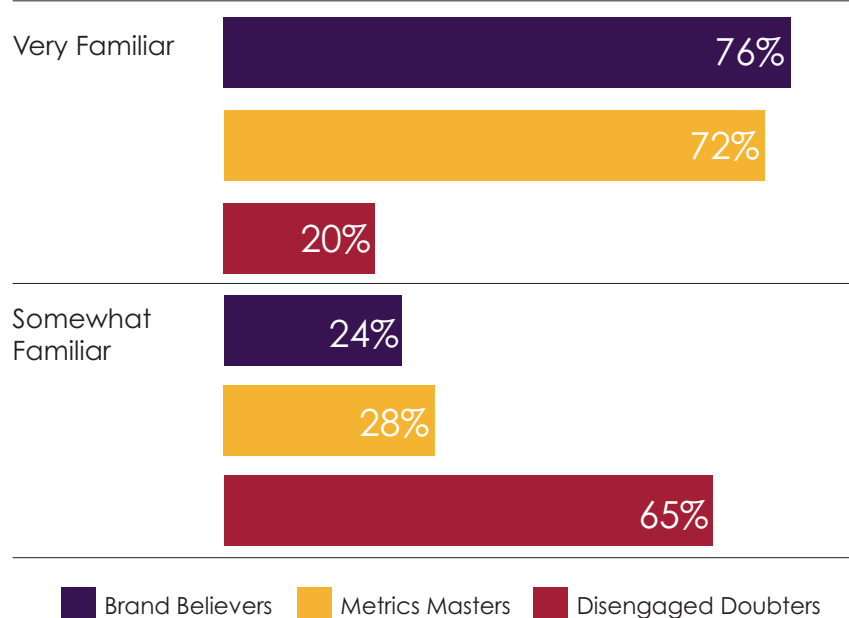
respondent characteristics

GENDER



59% of respondents are female. **Brand Believers** are slightly more likely than other segments to be women (66%).

FAMILIARITY WITH BRAND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES



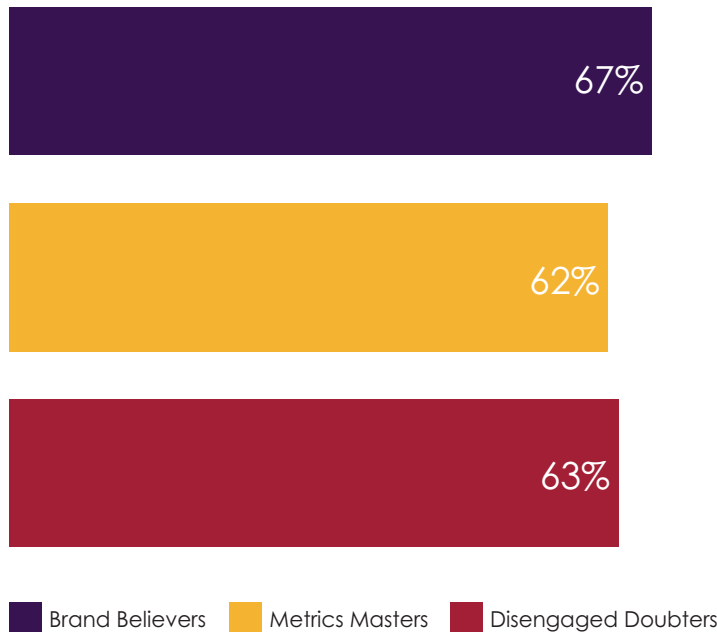
Disengaged Doubters are more likely to be in senior leadership/ownership roles than other segments (78%). **Metrics Masters** are most often in a marketing role (76%). **Brand Believers** are equally represented in both roles.

The majority of Brand Believers (76%) and Metrics Masters (72%) say they are very familiar with brand development activities. Only 20% of Disengaged Doubters say the same — the majority of them are somewhat familiar.



respondent characteristics

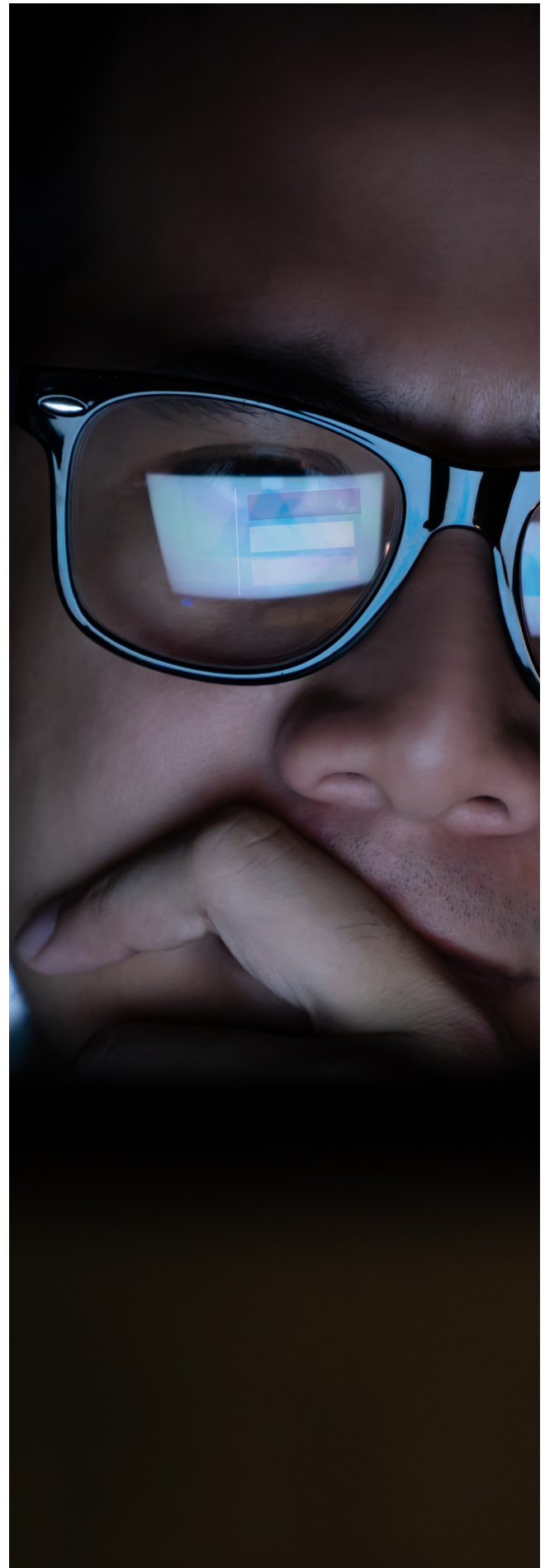
**% PER SECTION OF THOSE WHO
ARE FINAL DECISION MAKERS**



The three segments are equally as likely to be the final decision maker when it comes to marketing spending — 67% of Brand Believers, 62% of Metrics Masters and 63% of Disengaged Doubters.

IMPLICATIONS

Roughly 35% of final decision makers for marketing spending are Disengaged Doubters — unfamiliar with branding development in general, and unlikely to say that it's a priority for them. Marketing leaders need to anticipate this issue and work to educate decision makers in their organizations.





BRAND INVESTMENT

90% of respondents say their organization has devoted resources to brand development in the last five years.

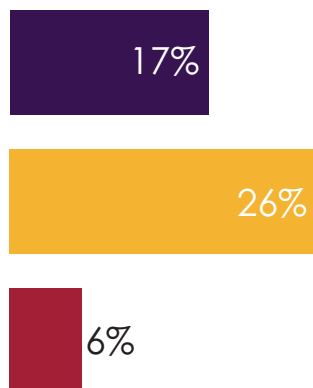
Among Disengaged Doubters, this percentage is significantly lower — 80%, vs. about 95% among Brand Believers and Metrics Masters.

Metrics Masters are far more likely to say their organization considers brand building a high priority (26%). Only 17% of Brand Believers and 6% of Disengaged Doubters say the same. Only 2% of Disengaged Doubters think brand building should be a top priority for their organization — compared to 28% of Metrics Masters and 36% of Brand Believers.

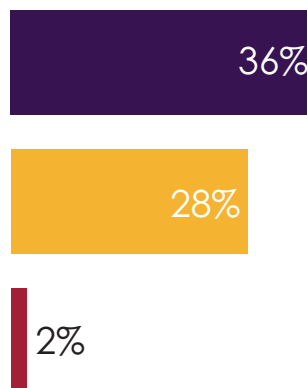
Brand Believers are substantially more likely to say brand building is a top priority for them than to say that their organization treats it as such. Metrics Masters and Disengaged Doubters are more likely to align closely with the priority their organization places on brand building — very high in the first case, much lower in the second.

% SAYING BRAND BUILDING IS A TOP PRIORITY

Organization Priority



Personal Priority

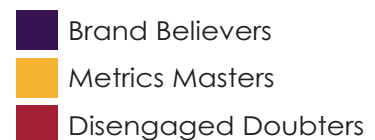


brand development activities

IMPLICATIONS

Metrics Masters — those with the best understanding of the customer journey and their fingers on the pulse of analytics — are the most likely to say their organizations make brand building a top priority.

While it may be that organizations like this are predisposed to brand building and hire Metrics Masters to watch things closely, it could also be that the visibility into the impact of brand building efforts have reinforced setting a high priority on those activities.





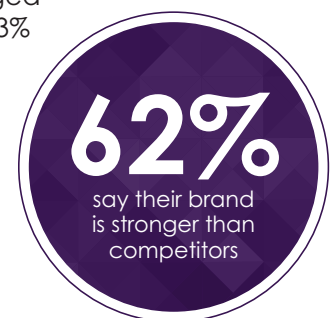
brand development activities

BRAND STRENGTH AMONG TARGET CUSTOMERS

While respondents include both B2B and B2C organizations, both types overwhelmingly feel that their buyers place emphasis on their providers having a strong brand. **Those in B2C organizations are more likely to feel customers and prospects place a great deal of emphasis on a strong brand (40%, vs. only 19% among respondents in B2B organizations).**

20% say their organization's brand is very strong in the minds of target customers — 49% say it's fairly strong. However, the combined total of very and fairly strong is 84% among Metrics Masters, while only 60% among the other two segments.

62% say their brand is stronger than that of their competitors. Disengaged Doubters are less likely to say so (45%) vs. 69% of Brand Believers and 73% of Metrics Masters.





aspects & elements of branding

IMPORTANCE OF BRANDING ELEMENTS

Position of expertise or thought leadership	5.4
Web Design	5.3
Messaging driven by Voice of the Customer	5.3
Brand Story	5.2
Content for digital communications	5.1
Style of writing for written content or communications	5.1
Brand "Voice"	5.1
Brand or organization name	5.0
Logo	5.0
Brand mission statement	4.9
Visual style for video communications	4.8
Collateral design (brochures, business cards, letterhead, etc.)	4.8
Brand vision statement	4.7
Colors	4.5
Font	4.2

All respondents rate the four aspects of branding (strategy, identity, awareness and loyalty) as very important.

Many brand elements are also important to most respondents, with a position of expertise or thought leadership rated the most highly.

IMPLICATIONS

Few disagree on what elements make a strong brand, or how important they are — even Disengaged Doubters appear to align with the other segments on the importance of various elements for a brand.

The difference, then, appears to rest strongly on opinions about how important having a strong brand is for an organization.



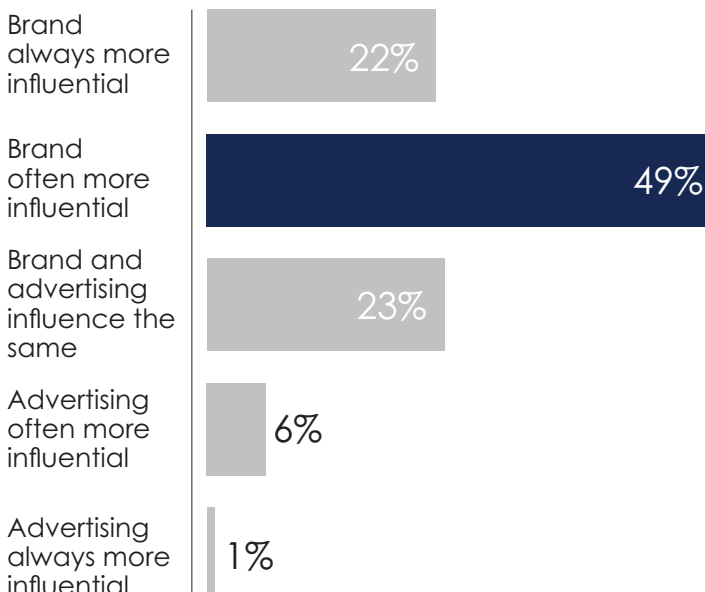


impact of brand vs. advertising

BRAND VS. ADVERTISING

Respondents overwhelmingly say that a provider's brand would always or often have a greater impact on them than the provider's advertising. 71% say so overall, while 86% of Brand Believers, 70% of Metrics Masters and 56% of Disengaged Doubters say so.

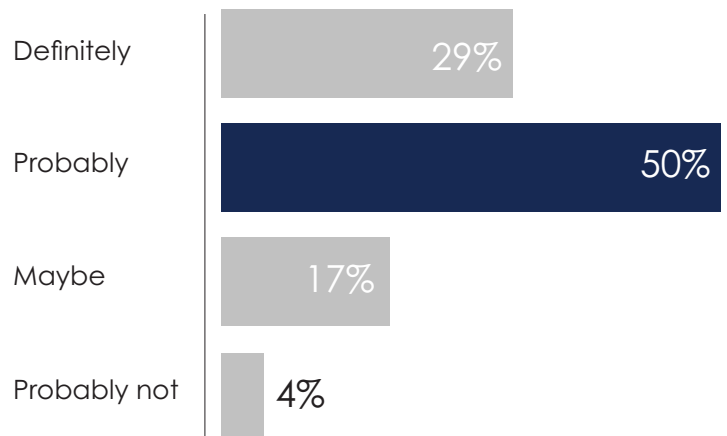
WHICH IS MORE INFLUENTIAL



HAVING A STRONG BRAND

In addition, 83% of respondents said that a provider having a strong brand would definitely or probably make them more likely to continue working with the provider, and 79% said it would make them more likely to recommend the provider to someone else.

DOES A STRONGER BRAND IMPACT RECOMMENDATIONS OF SAID BRAND?



IMPLICATIONS

These figures should certainly reassure marketers that advocating for brand building resources and activity are worth the effort.

Even a majority of Disengaged Doubters recognize the likelihood that a strong brand will impact a provider's ability to gain and keep customers and generate referrals.

"There is so much advertising these days, it's hard to know what is real. It may make me consider a company or visit their website, but brand and testimonials would make me hire them." – Brand Believer



FINAL THOUGHTS

From this study, we learned that perceptions about the benefits and strength of branding by those intimately involved in making decisions around marketing are split equally three ways between Brand Believers, Metrics Masters, and Disengaged Doubters. Luckily, over recent years there has been a shift in understanding about branding that has led professionals to understand that thought leadership and brand story trumps the importance of corporate colors and font, elevating the perception of how branding ties to a bigger business picture rather than just corporate identity. And most importantly, we can definitively say that respondents believe a stronger brand orientation results in stronger customer loyalty and more referrals. This study shows that brand strength has now overtaken advertising in terms of impact!

BECOME A BRAND BELIEVER

At Hummingbird Creative Group, we are on a mission to turn Disengaged Doubters and Metrics Masters into Brand Believers! Our goal is to create enduring and meaningful interactions between our clients' brands and their target audiences. Through identifying and communicating strong brand differentiation, we can help you drive ROI and increase your business value.

conclusion

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