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Marketing Solutions

PROVING THE INVISIBLE POWER OF BRAND

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By Kirsteen Mackay

Brand is what lays the tracks before demand generation starts rolling.

Consider the well-worn phrase, **“Nobody gets fired for buying IBM.”** It's stuck around for a reason: the IBM brand is so trusted that the name alone makes the case for buying it. Decades of business leaders have followed this logic, and IBM still commands 63% of the global mainframe market[1]—helping the firm earn $67.5 billion in revenue in 2025.

[1] IBM offloaded its PC division to Lenovo in 2005

63%	$67.5B
Global mainframe market share	IBM revenue in 2025

Not every brand has a statistic that striking. For most companies, brand’s return is harder to point to—which is exactly why it’s one of the hardest marketing investments to defend. Compared with activities such as lead generation that have clear, countable metrics (forms completed, demos booked, meetings converted), brand’s core outcomes—awareness and trust—are more difficult to quantify. So, when budgets tighten, investment in brand awareness starts to seem like a luxury.

But the power of brand doesn’t operate on a quarterly cycle; it’s years of shaping what your customers come to know and trust, long before they’re actively buying. By the time they show up in your funnel, much of brand’s work is complete. That’s why its impact is easy to miss in marketing dashboards: most measurement is designed to capture immediate, in-funnel activity, not the months or years of exposure that put you a buyers on a shortlist in the first place. The issue isn’t whether brand creates value—it’s that standard tools and metrics we use to demonstrate ROI aren’t built to capture it. Proving that value takes a different kind of look at the data you already have, and that starts with understanding exactly what your funnel can’t tell you.

> *"You're not succeeding on demand without brand."*
>
> — Josh Jacobs, Director of Media Strategy, Just Global

01 The shortlist gets drafted *before you show up*

Consider a typical B2B purchase: “83% of purchase activity happens before buyers engage sales; 86% of buyers have a day-one shortlist, and 92% purchase from that initial consideration set[2]” says Josh Jacobs, Director of Media Strategy at Just Global, appearing at TechInformed Marketing Solutions’ July webinar. “You're not succeeding on demand without brand.”

[2] Josh Jacobs, speaking at "Are You Still Building Campaigns for a Buyer Journey That No Longer Exists?", TechInformed Marketing Solutions webinar, 21 July 2026. These figures track closely with LinkedIn B2B Institute's First Impression Rose research, which found that B2B buyers overwhelmingly award deals to the vendors who made their shortlist on day one.

In demand-gen terms: by the time a prospect fills out a form, replies to a sales rep, or books a demo, the shortlist of who to approach has already been made. Take a VP of finance who books a demo for expense-management software. She didn't start her search that morning—she'd been absorbing peer recommendations, podcast mentions, and reviews for months. When she went to fill out that form, she already had three vendors in mind, and you were one of them, having earned that spot months earlier, in impressions and conversations you didn’t directly participate in.

And there’s the problem: you can’t measure what you can’t see. Even the best lead metrics only measure what happens after you become a candidate—everything before that is invisible to your current dashboard. Your funnel data on that VP of finance looks pristine—demo booked, MQL scored, pipeline created, maybe even closed-won. Land this deal, and the dashboard calls it demand gen—but your data doesn’t capture all the shortlists you never made it onto, or why you didn’t.

The missing context is becoming even more important as buyers change how they research vendors. As Natalie Bahmanyar wrote in Where the Funnel Goes Dark, a growing share now go to an AI chatbot instead of a search engine.

> AI tools don't invent an answer from scratch—they draw on accumulated brand signal: mentions, reviews, citations, and discussion volume built up over time.

not a campaign that launched last quarter.[3] Madelaine Oppert, SVP of Global Marketing at TechInformed and iResearch Services, put it this way: “We're in a zero-click world at the moment... AI tools are surfacing and summarizing content on behalf of users. That means discoverability and visibility are becoming just as important as lead capture.”[4]

[3] Natalie Bahmanyar, Where the Funnel Goes Dark (TI Marketing Solutions, July 2026)

[4] Madelaine Oppert, quoted in "Saturation, Strategy, and Staying Power: A Conversation with iResearch Services SVP of Global Marketing Madelaine Oppert," iResearch Services, June 2, 2026.

The consequence of under-investing in brand is blunt. It's not just that a human buyer won't put you on their day-one shortlist. Increasingly, the tool building that shortlist on the buyer's behalf won't either—and demand gen can't fast-track its way into signal that took years to build.

02 Buyers want proof, but only from names they *already know*

Top purchase factors

54%
Features & functionality

47%
Cost

38%
Customer support

35%
Integration with systems

26%
Vendor reputation

15%
Scalability & future-proofing

Trusting a brand doesn't mean that buyers stop demanding evidence. TechInformed's 2025 Voice of the Buyer: The Great Disconnect reported that, when evaluating technology vendors, buyers identify features and functionality (54%), cost (47%), customer support (38%), and integration with existing systems (35%) as their top purchase factors.[5] Vendor reputation ranks in between, at 26%—it matters, just less than whether the product does what it says. Scalability and future-proofing (the kind of capability that's often found at the top of the vendor pitch) places last, as just 15% of buyers name it among their top considerations. The report also found buyers want proof points they can validate quickly: independent reviews, clear comparisons, and transparent pricing.

[5] *Voice of the Buyer:* The Great Disconnect (TechInformed, 2025). Buyer figures are drawn from TechInformed's Voice of the Buyer survey of 2,000 enterprise technology decision-makers, fielded October 2024.

On paper, that might look like a case against brand—buyers say they want proof, not pedigree. Yet buyers who demand hard evidence still pay a premium for names they already trust. Decades of research has verified that customers are brand loyal and willing to pay a premium for their favorites.[6] That advantage isn't primarily earned by superior features. One study found that, while service quality and product performance build loyalty, price premium is driven almost entirely by a buyer's sense of belonging to a brand's community.[7] The vendors buyers pay more for are rarely the ones with the best spec sheet; buyers simply trust the journey will be worth it.

[6] For an early example, see James G. Hutton, "A Study of Brand Equity in an Organizational-Buying Context," *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 6, no. 6 (1997): 428–39.

[7] Niklas Bondesson, "Brand Image Antecedents of Loyalty and Price Premium in Business Markets," Business and Management Research 1, no. 1 (2012): 32–47.

03 Looking ahead: Make your case in pipeline terms, not brand terms

While that trust doesn't show up on a spec sheet, it does leave a trail. And the evidence is often already sitting in your own data; you just need to know where to look. Instead of defending brand budget with 'awareness lift' and "sentiment" scores, make the case for it with the data you already have, based on the deals you've already won.

Take the deals you closed over the past 18 months and split them in two: the buyers who were familiar with your company before Sales got involved, and those who came in cold. Compare who was more likely to convert, how long it took them to do so, and how much they spent when they did.

The work is in capturing that "prior brand exposure"—looking for pre-contact web sessions, organic branded search (rather than generic category terms), event or webinar attendance, and even self-reported attribution on the form ("how did you hear about us?"). Most of that already sits in your CRM, marketing automation platform, or web analytics.

Granted, this is correlation, not proof. Buyers who already know you will have other things in common, such as size, readiness, and relationship fit. It's also important to segment your findings in case a few enterprise deals distort your numbers in either direction. But done properly, this type of attribution exercise shows your brand's influence, using numbers that your CFO or board already trust.

The case gets stronger downstream, too—brand doesn't just win new business, it protects the business you already have. Edelman's Trust Barometer found that consumers who trust a brand are more than twice as likely to stay loyal when a competitor launches something new (62% versus 29%).[8] In other words, don't focus only on your new-logo pipeline: remember to check your data on renewals and account expansion—you should see that accounts are easier to keep and grow when customers trust your brand.

[8] Edelman, In Brands We Trust? 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report (Edelman, June 2019), 2019_edelman_trust_barometer_special_report_in_brands_we_trust.pdf. Consumer (B2C) data from 2019, applied here to a B2B renewal/expansion context.

04 You can't convert a prospect *who's never heard of you*

Nobody gets fired for buying an IBM—but IBM didn't earn that reputation from one campaign. It earned it over decades, one impression at a time, long before any buyer filled out a form. Brand spend isn't competing with lead-gen initiatives; it's what makes lead generation work. You can't convert a prospect who's never heard of you.

So next time brand spend is under the microscope, be ready—not with vanity metrics, but with the deals that were easier to close because your buyers were already halfway down the track.

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