

Teamspirit

01  
Fame



02  
Always-on  
B2B



03  
The New  
Adviser



04  
AI Driving Emotional  
Moments



05  
From Diversity  
to Inclusion



06  
One Line  
of Sight



07  
Hyper-  
personalisation



08  
Long-  
termism



09  
Interactive  
Experiences



10  
Brands  
in Motion

11  
Business  
to Human

12  
References



# Intro

**Welcome to our annual Signals report, where we look at the marketplace direction that we believe will have a significant impact on how financial services communicate.**

Despite being unable to categorically rule out an end to the permacrisis, we are cautiously upbeat about two broad themes for the year ahead – an attitudinal shift and tech enablement.

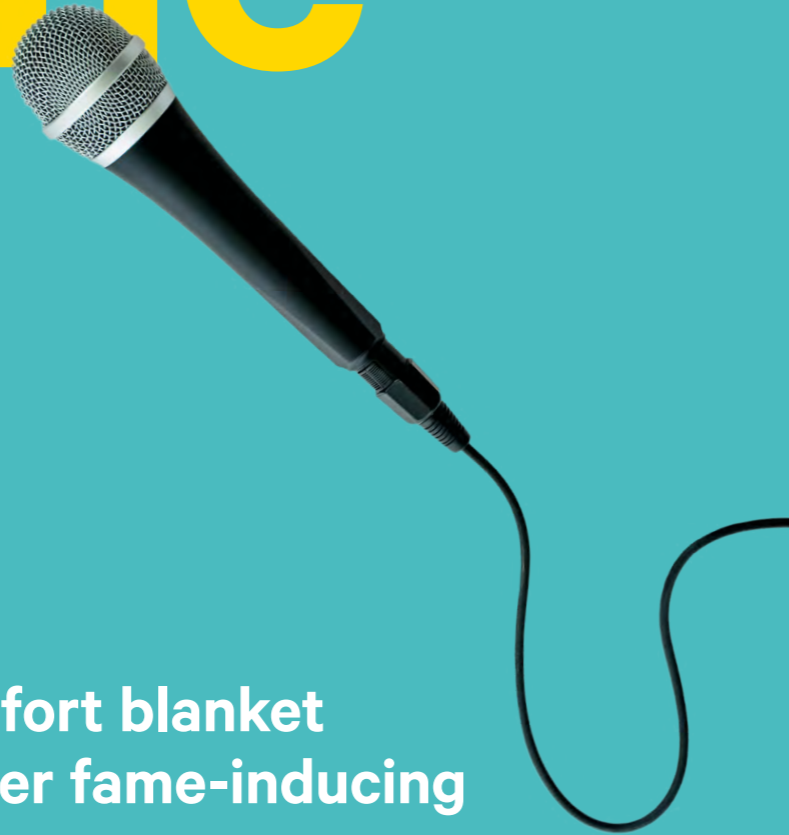
Taking each theme in turn, changes of attitude that we predict will be widely embraced are: the desire for Fame, doing fewer things better and securing greater impact; Long-termism with a focus on the ‘S’ as sustainability becomes embedded; Business to Human, as B2B communications become braver and go beyond product. Talking of which, 2024 will see Always-

on B2B bust the hitherto trade-off between brand and demand. While From Diversity to Inclusion explores why diversity-led communications are now central to marketing strategy.

In terms of tech enablement, of course no 2024 trends report would be complete without a view on AI. Very aware that there’s the good, the bad and the reality, AI Driving Emotional Moments is a fascinating review of positive application, as is Hyper-personalisation. Platform enablement is explored in both The New Adviser, which looks at the impact of TikTok on the advice market, and, in One Line of Sight, we outline how holistic financial services interfaces are meeting user expectations. More playfully, Interactive Experiences are now proving their worth with thumb-stopping content that cannot be ignored. And in our screen-dominated world, Brand Movement is at the top of many of our clients’ marketing to-do lists.

**Enjoy the read ahead.**

# 01 Fame



“Kick off the comfort blanket of ‘more’ for fewer fame-inducing campaigns.”

**Richard Germain**  
Creative Director



## What's going on?

Mental availability is at an all-time low. A diminished ability of not only brands but everything – from celebs to world events – to own our attention. There's just too much stuff grabbing at our consciousness. Many businesses are now lost in what Gartner's recent CMO Quarterly calls an unprofitable 'cycle of more' – more comms, more messages, less engagement.<sup>1</sup> Being so

preoccupied with scattergun content, advertisers have neglected a simple truth: fame sells. It's why forward-thinking brands, including our clients, are focusing on creating 'catalytic customer experiences'; fewer, but more meaningful, interactions that have an emotional impact, motivating action and driving profits.

## Why does it matter?

Anyone can create content. But can they disrupt and engage? It's a crucial question for financial services and B2B brands. But if they can, the rewards are substantial and enduring – with Gartner finding that a single 'catalytic' interaction can increase a person's commitment to a previously unknown brand by up to

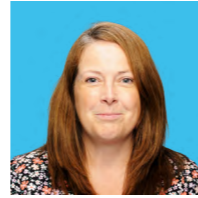
52%.<sup>2</sup> CMOs are under pressure to deliver more value with less budget. But as our fame approach with ABI's 'Pension Attention' campaign and Tesco pet insurance shows, ads at their most powerful can make people stop, think and act. They can generate their own headlines and, most importantly, results.

## What to do

- Kick off the comfort blanket of 'more' for fewer, more creative, fame-inducing campaigns.
- Focus on how your brand creates genuinely distinctive value for customers. Create fame not infamy – borrowed interest always needs to be paid back – with interest.
- Maintain the courage of your convictions; defending your decision to go bold while being sensitive to business

- constraints, championing strategically important and high-impact activities.
- Create something that people really enjoy watching or reading, underpinned by distinctive assets that anchor your brand in their brains. Give people ways to engage and share. Because fame doesn't exist in one mind, but many.

**Emma Evans**  
PR Board Director



## What's going on?

Will 2024 see the shift from campaign peaks to a more-constant, always-on approach to marketing activity? The rationale for a tail of activity aimed at permeating business owners' consciousness is brilliantly crystallised in Antonia Wade's book, *Transforming the B2B Buyer Journey*.<sup>3</sup> The book explores a new way to map buyer journeys, and

an alternative way for businesses to drive brand loyalty. Encapsulating how to balance the needs of horizon scanners (C-Suite and the marketplace, 95% of the time) and detail hunters (seeking information to inform purchasing decisions, 5%), is even more pertinent in today's omnichannel environment.

## Why does it matter?

With such seismic shifts in how we consume media, engage with brands and, ultimately, make our purchasing decisions, a new approach to how frequently, where and through which media businesses present information relating to their brands, is essential. Adopting an

always-on approach enables businesses to ensure their campaigns continue to percolate, offering repeated opportunities through a drumbeat of activity across a variety of marketing techniques, all aimed at building a consistent brand narrative.

## What to do

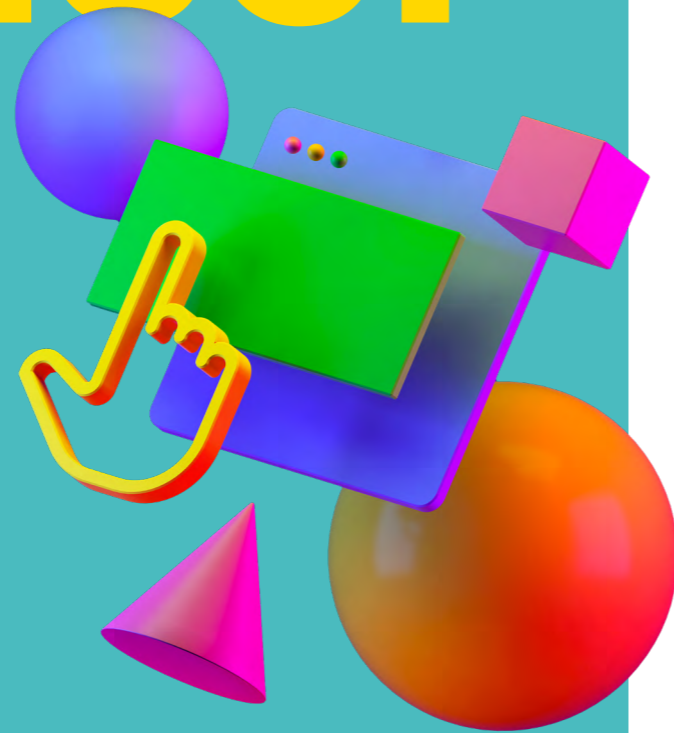
- Optimise the chatter with the shout – where the chatter represents the drumbeat of activity, and the shout is the hero/flagship content which all other activity leads towards.
- Align always-on marketing activity across earned media, to fully optimise results.
- Break down any silos between communication teams/ departments. Overcome any historical friction between sales and marketing functions, through shared roles and responsibilities.

# 02 Always-on B2B

“**Brand or demand is a false trade-off.  
It needs to be both.**”

# 03 The new Adviser

“People are actively seeking out financial advice; they’re just not using traditional channels.”



**Dan Perry**  
Strategy Director



## What's going on?

Nature abhors a vacuum.

The 'advice gap' in the UK is estimated to be made up of over 12 million people, with only 9% of adults actively receiving financial advice from an adviser.<sup>4</sup>

While 72% of people believe that getting financial advice is important, 35% of people are 'not quite sure' where

they should start looking for it.<sup>5</sup> Instead, people are seeking out information from other sources. 44% of Gen Z believe they can source good financial advice on social media, and over a fifth of investors aged 18-34 are taking investment advice from Instagram.<sup>6</sup>

## Why does it matter?

People are actively seeking out financial advice; they're just not using traditional channels.

And that's leading to worse outcomes and exposing people to foreseeable harm.

58% of under-40s who have invested in high-risk investment products, say their decision was based on

hype on social media and the news.<sup>7</sup>

With the FCA reconsidering the advice/guidance boundary, new opportunities to meaningfully engage with a wider audience are emerging for advisers willing to put themselves out there and capture this hungry audience – offering people the help they want at the time they need it.<sup>8</sup>

## What to do

- Fish where the fish are. Reddit and YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and X are the top five platforms where the under-40s look for financial advice.<sup>9</sup> Rethink your channel strategy. Show up.
- Make yourselves accessible. The average content produced by investors ranks closer in comprehension

to academic papers than to financial media.<sup>10</sup> Reconsider your tone of voice. Be conversational.

- Dramatise the value of quality. 44% of people who do not use a financial adviser, have said that it is due to a lack of understanding of what an adviser can offer them.<sup>11</sup> Reprioritise your messaging. Prove your worth.

**Crispin Heath**  
Head of Digital



## What's going on?

There's a fascinating evolution occurring with AI, as it harnesses natural language tools, automated contextual targeting and search enhancements, to drive emotional moments. Natural Language Processing (NLP) tools enable AI not only to understand the semantics of human expression, but also to discern the emotional nuances embedded within. Simultaneously, automated contextual

targeting tools leverage this understanding to deliver content in a highly personalised and emotionally resonant manner. The improvement of search functionality, powered by AI, ensures that users receive more relevant and emotionally impactful results, creating an ever-more seamless integration of technology into the human experience.

## Why does it matter?

The confluence of matters profoundly, as it transforms digital interactions into emotionally intelligent experiences. By deciphering emotional context from user inputs, AI can craft responses that resonate on deeper levels, fostering a sense of connection. Automated contextual targeting further refines this, delivering content that aligns with users' emotional states and

preferences. Heightened emotional engagement not only enhances user satisfaction, but also opens new possibilities for marketing, content delivery and UX personalisation. Ultimately, as AI becomes more adept at driving emotional moments, it enables a shift in how technology connects with human emotions, making interactions more meaningful and enriching.

## What to do

To leverage the full potential of AI-driven emotional moments, businesses should prioritise integrating advanced NLP capabilities into their platforms and applications. Recognising and responding to user emotions requires sophisticated natural language understanding. Additionally, investing in automated contextual targeting tools can refine content delivery, ensuring that users receive personalised and emotionally

resonant communications. Continual refinement and incorporation of machine learning and user feedback is crucial to providing consistently improved and emotionally intelligent content. Embracing these technologies empowers creators to build applications that not only meet functional needs, but also forge emotional connections, enriching the human-technology interface in unprecedented ways.



# 04 AI Driving Emotional Moments

“The confluence of AI technologies matters profoundly, as it transforms digital interactions into emotionally intelligent experiences.”



# 05 From Diversity to Inclusion

“Comms strategies must evolve to be both inclusive and effective.”

**Sandy Downs**  
Senior Account Director



## What's going on?

Diversity isn't a new concept in the City – but the regulator's recent clamp-down has ruffled some feathers.<sup>12</sup> The FCA has made it clear that it expects firms to set clear targets and disclose employee data, in an effort to increase diversity in financial services. And the move to 'inclusion' has taken many by surprise. Both

internally and externally, financial services companies must ensure they're being inclusive of their diverse workforce and, critically, their diverse customer base. This is a notable element of the Consumer Duty legislation, which includes a mandate to consider disability, mental health and financial literacy when dealing with vulnerable customers.

## Why does it matter?

Businesses are under scrutiny from both society and the regulator, and need to put their money where their mouth is; 'diversity washing' won't cut the mustard. Talking about International Women's Day, Black History Month or Pride without any visible efforts to improve DE&I internally, is becoming a significant reputational risk.

Communication is integral to inclusion. From factsheets for new products and ad copy to customer service calls and PR – comms is the direct line of contact between a firm and its audience. As that audience gets more diverse, comms strategies must evolve to be both inclusive and effective.

## What to do

- Know where you stand with employee representation and pay gaps. Be honest, if there's work to do internally before you can champion a cause externally.
- Consider every channel a tool for inclusion. Zurich had immense success training its vulnerable customer team in 'empathy', putting it in the FCA's Consumer Duty good books, while creating a better experience for customers in need.<sup>13</sup>
- As no-one can get it all right, run your ads and videos past as diverse a team as you can.
- Clarity of message and audience is key – narrowcasting isn't going anywhere. So balance inclusion with smart targeting.

Wendy Watherston  
PR Director



## What's going on?

In the current business landscape, nurturing customer relationships and lasting brand loyalty is critical. If a customer experience is cumbersome, not intuitive and, perhaps most importantly, doesn't feel personal or beneficial to them, engagement will wane. For financial services, spearheaded by the new Consumer

Duty regulation, this has never been more important. With the imperative to deliver good outcomes, and support customers to meet their financial goals, open finance capabilities help them do just that. Enabling them and their customers to have a holistic view of their finances and tailor products to their individual needs.

## Why does it matter?

Open finance capabilities allow individuals to connect every aspect of their financial world in one place. Alongside nudges and insights that help them make better long-term and personalised financial decisions. There is a clear trend emerging. From Musk's ambition to transform X into an 'everything app', encompassing social

media, e-commerce, payments and banking.<sup>14</sup> To Standard Life's announcement that it's partnering with Moneyhub, to use its open finance infrastructure to support its commercial pensions dashboard.<sup>15</sup> Allowing savers, through its Money Mindset app, to see all their financial products, alongside finding and viewing their pension data.

## What to do

- Don't get left behind. The race is on to ensure customers feel they're really being put first and are receiving highly personalised bespoke interactions. It builds trust and confidence, and in turn loyalty and advocacy.
- Learn from others. Seek out partnerships and tailorable APIs that help you achieve your ambitions.
- Communicate what you are doing, to support your clients in understanding their financial worlds better, and enable them to make the right decisions for their long-term financial wellness.

# 06 One Line of Sight



“Offering a holistic view of finances and tailored products to individual needs is becoming a table stake.”



07



# Hyper- personalisation

“AI reduces the need for manual audience segmentation, allowing marketers to more quickly develop campaigns at scale.”

**Sarah Lewis**  
Senior Social &  
Content Strategist



## What's going on?

The advancement of AI is resulting in the ability to uncover deep audience insights from numerous data sources. Sophisticated algorithms, incorporating the likes of predictive analytics, NLP and reinforcement learning, are allowing brands to easily understand their customers' preferences and future behaviours.

This level of automated data capture and analysis is hugely beneficial when it comes to marketers' ability to segment and target audiences with precision, optimise creative, and inform media buying decisions. So eliminating more manual processes leads to increased efficiency, and therefore the ability to develop campaigns at scale.

## Why does it matter?

A business's targeting strategy is paramount to success. Testing audiences and retargeting allows brands to understand their customers at each stage of the funnel. And in today's saturated ad landscape, hyper-relevancy and personalisation are critical for cut-through. The right messages, served to the right people, at the right time, help to enhance the customer experience, meaning

increased brand affinity – ultimately impacting the bottom line. Getting this right, however, requires constant commitment. Without leaning on AI, it can be difficult to identify improvement areas. This can lead to missed opportunities and budget inefficiencies, while hurting brand perception in the process.

## What to do

- Assess your current strategy for weaknesses and turn them into opportunities.
- Once you've identified weak spots, research which AI tools can help to provide the right solutions. AdParlor and Peak leverage multiple data sources, such as your CRM and social media platforms, to help generate audience segments that best align with your goals. Pattern89 and

- Phrasee can help optimise targeting, messaging and ad spend by analysing historic campaign data.
- While AI can boost marketing efforts, it's no replacement for human understanding and application. Treat AI-generated recommendations as useful rather than doctrine, and always sense-check and troubleshoot any tactical decisions.

Fiona Couper  
CMO



## What's going on?

Long-termism is a mood shift, that can be seen from politics and the City to even communicating in a more low-key way with Gen Z.

Autumn UK and US elections will mean long-term policy chatter. Despite the ESG performance debate, flow

## Why does it matter?

Falling foul of long-term behavioural standards legislation, such as Consumer Duty, risks easily avoidable reputational damage. Monzo has been called out for escalating fees<sup>17</sup> and the FCA is rebuking unfair 'buy now, pay later' terms.<sup>18</sup> The latest disclosure framework from the net zero Transition Plan Taskforce, the gold standard for best practice sustainable behaviour, now requires companies

## What to do

- Be clear on your purpose. Short-term responses to economic headwinds cannot come at a cost to investing in what makes you meaningfully different in the first place.
- Be confident in communicating this difference. Fewer, bigger, better is a good starting point for campaigning activity, with a focus on creating catalytic experiences.<sup>21</sup>

continues into ESG funds, with increased focus on the 'S' for social impact.<sup>16</sup> While former Lord Mayor of the City of London, Nicholas Lyons, has created in the Mansion House reforms a long-term legacy to secure capital into high-growth British businesses.

to report on how their strategic ambitions will positively advance social equity.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile demand for better behaved brands and to work for companies that do the right thing continues, particularly for Gen Z, who will comprise 27% of the workforce by 2025 and represent \$7 trillion in purchasing influence.<sup>20</sup>

- Hold fast in doing the right thing for the long term. As Ginni Rometty, former Chairman and CEO IBM, says in her book, *Good Power: Leading Positive Change in Our Lives, Work, and World*, "How we lead is as important as what we achieve."<sup>22</sup>

# 08 Long-termism

“How we lead is as important as what we achieve.”

09

# Interactive Experiences

“Thumb-stopping content forces users to stop and engage to get to an answer.”



## What's going on?

Interactive experiences in marketing have big benefits, and businesses are starting to finally recognise this. Engagement rates on games, quizzes, polls and tools are more attention-grabbing and engaging than static content. And higher engagement means higher conversion rates – twice as many as more passive content.<sup>23</sup>

## Why does it matter?

In the same way that making digital display brighter, bolder and more interactive increases engagement, where users land should do the same. Providing thumb-stopping content is vital for encouraging users to want to learn more, rather than just rolling on past. The time taken for them to engage

## What to do

- Create something the user can control to some degree, and make the process of understanding what you can offer them more personal.
- It should be snappy, quick and easy to engage with, and make users think about their inputs.

Natalie Willoughby  
Head of Digital Experience



Interactive content tends to also be more shareable on social, compared to static formats. When users find something engaging, entertaining or informative, they are more inclined to share it, increasing your reach and visibility – the most shared quiz in the last five years has had a whopping 5.4 million social interactions.<sup>24</sup>

and think (just for a second) can improve the odds of the message sticking with them, by almost 80%.<sup>25</sup> Increased engagement and time spent on site leads ultimately to lower bounce rates, longer session times, shareability and deeper content engagement – all big pluses in improving SEO.

- Think gamification and leaderboards that tap into a user's competitive nature. Tools that give instant gratification, or simply a few quick-fire questions to identify areas of focus in terms of their personal finances (or indeed give them validation that they're a superstar saver and should tell all their friends about how we've helped them along the way).

**Paul Hunt**  
Senior Designer



## What's going on?

Social media has transformed how we consume information. Entertainment on demand has eradicated the need to sit through the standard 3½ minutes of ads in the middle of your favourite TV show. Take Gogglebox – a single show that gives an overview of all the other shows – effectively turning them into bite-

sized bits of content to consume quickly. It's the same with social media – Forbes reports the average number of platforms per person being six or seven. Attention spans are shrinking. Globally, over half of all videos created are under two minutes. Welcome to the age of short-form.<sup>26</sup>

## Why does it matter?

In the last 15 years, attention spans have reduced from 12 to just 8.25 seconds.<sup>27</sup> It's clear that with audiences retaining 95% of a message when watching it on video (vs 10% through text), they're less likely to remember (or even see) content that doesn't move.<sup>28</sup> Like little T-Rexes

– our vision is based on movement. We need to ride that wave. The wave that crashes into motion. Or risk getting lost in the sea of dull communication, stranded by the feed-refresh.

## What to do

In order to remain relevant, our content and our brands need to be in motion. This doesn't need to be complex, hand-drawn animation masterpieces or the next Blade Runner (although they go down quite well). But adding some movement – a simple, well-executed logo animation

or animated titles – clearly adds value and increases the chance of engagement and retention. A simple logo movement executed beautifully with grace and purpose goes a long way. So let's add a little motion. Let's keep ourselves afloat on the waves of short-form content.

10

# Brands in Motion



“

**Movement adds value and increases the chance of engagement and retention.”**

# 11 Business to Human

“Let’s leave B2B marketing in better shape for the next generation. Let’s make it more human, than humanly possible.”



Kirsty Maxey  
CEO



## What’s going on?

In the past, everyone has treated B2B and B2C separately, but really it’s all business to human. If you want to move products, you need to move people. And if you want to move people, you need to move their minds. So we need to create content that engages on a human level

– that’s what B2B marketing should be all about. If we spent as much time really engaging with our audience, as we did on perfecting the features and benefits and the performance marketing funnel, we would start to see the quality of sales leads improve dramatically.

## Why does it matter?

As the world becomes more digital, we appreciate real human engagement and conversation more than ever. If you really want to drive growth in your business, it’s time to wake up to the power of branding, purpose, storytelling and emotion. This will help your brand become more meaningful in the minds of your audience.

Business audiences want more from you than product features or benefits. They want to be entertained, educated and made to feel special. They’d love to know what your business cares about, what you value. Crucially, they want to be treated as human beings, not as buying machines.

## What to do

- It doesn’t mean performance marketing should be ditched. Instead, consider tone of voice alongside conversational and colloquial language, and simplify complex topics and themes as if talking to a friend, and reel them in with a story where people need to hear the ending.
- Become experts in people, emotion and storytelling. Become a trusted educator for your customers; learn for yourself and experiment. Find out what your customers are really experiencing when they engage with you.
- Be more human. It will make you more likable, and if you’re more likable, the chances are you’ll be more profitable, too.

12

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of the Signals in this report, drop us a line  
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