Adobe × Econsultancy

2024

Digital Trends

B2B Journeys in Focus

INTRODUCTION

- This *2024 Digital Trends—B2B Journeys in Focus* report from Adobe and Econsultancy zeroes in on how B2B organisations are approaching customer journeys against a backdrop of complex and extended buying cycles.

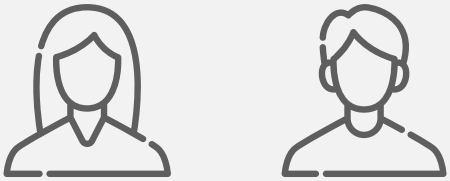
- It is a companion to the Adobe *2024 Digital Trends* report, now in its 14th year. This year's report reveals how digital experiences are still not living up to customer expectations, despite brands having more data than ever about their customers.

- Here, we spotlight B2B organisations, and explore how Market Leaders—those B2B organisations that significantly outperformed their sector in 2023—are using data and technology to personalise at an individual and organisational level and how they are adopting new technologies, such as generative AI, to fast-track content production.

B2B industry sectors covered in this report

Technology	26%
Manufacturing & engineering	20%
Healthcare & pharmaceuticals	8%
Retail & ecommerce	8%
Media & entertainment	7%
Professional services	5%
Other	16%

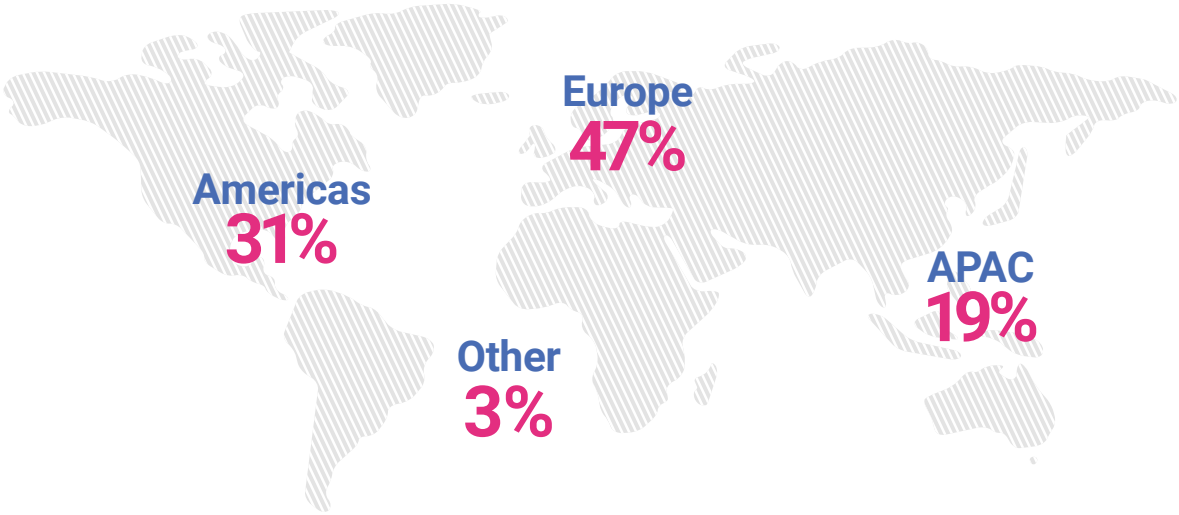
This report focuses on the perspective of **2,041** client-side marketers and CX Professionals in **B2B organisations**, including:



721
In C-suite / senior leadership positions

1,320
Practitioners, e.g., marketing managers, CX managers

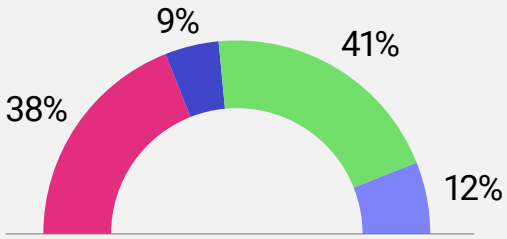
Global reach



The digital disconnect

Addressing B2B customer experience shortfalls

38% of B2B organisations acknowledge that their digital customer experience "sometimes lags" or "consistently falls below" customer needs, **and only 12%** agree that their digital CX is "exceptional and can surprise and delight the customer."



- Lags or falls short
- Meets customer needs
- Don't know
- Surprise and delight

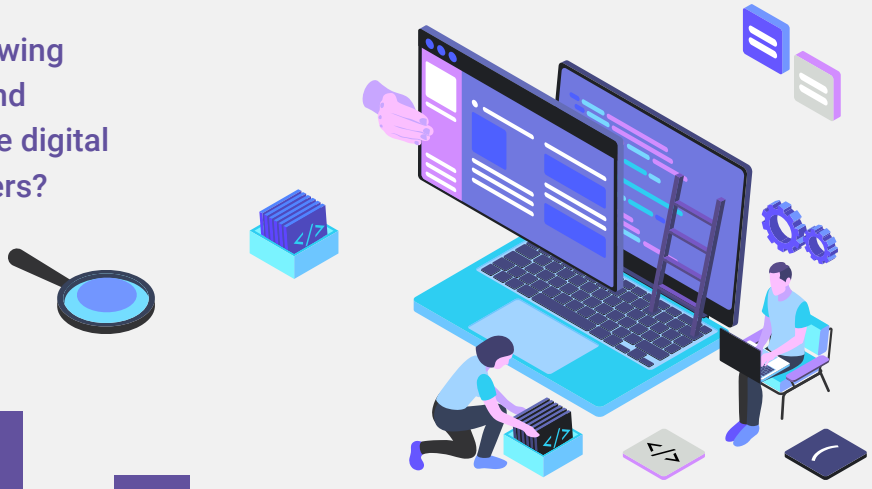
Account-based buying complicates B2B personalisation.

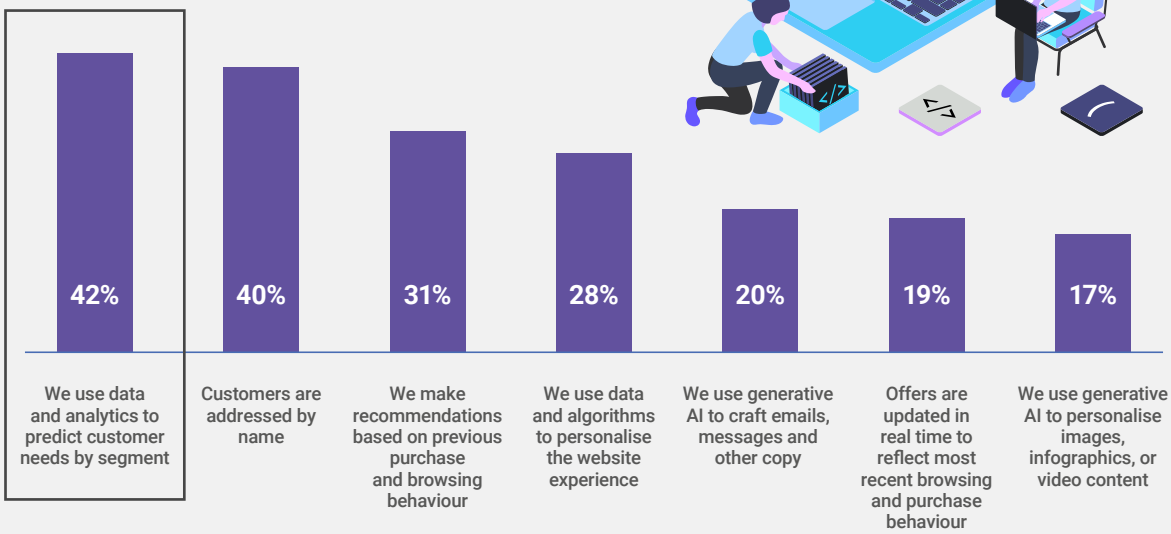
Not only is personalising digital experiences not easy, but B2B organisations must also contend with the added complexity of engaging with customers at both the account level and one-to-one. Purchase decisions are often made by a committee, and individual or departmental agendas can easily introduce additional layers of complexity.

B2B organisations most typically lean towards an account-based approach, with 42% using data and analytics to predict customer needs by segment. Fewer routinely personalise one-to-one experiences, such as the web experience (28%), and only one in five routinely update offers in real time to reflect recent behaviour.

We will see later in this report how generative AI represents a significant opportunity for B2B brands. Today, however, use of generative AI by B2B organisations is still in its early stages, with just 17% using the technology to personalise images and other content.

In which of the following ways does your brand routinely personalise digital content for customers?



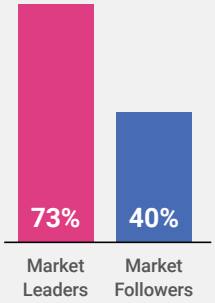


Sample size: 982 practitioners

Successful B2B brands meet and exceed customer expectations by personalising across channels.

Market Leaders—those who significantly outperformed their sector in 2023—are almost twice as likely as Market Followers, those who underperformed or kept pace, to say their digital experiences meet or exceed customer needs.

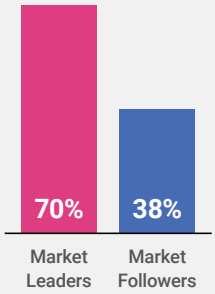
Our digital experience "meets customer needs" or is "exceptional"



In 2024, B2B customers expect their experiences to be connected and consistent across all channels and interactions. Personalisation is critical to achieving this goal.

Senior B2B Executives who are Market Leaders are nearly twice as likely to report that their organisations are highly effective at omnichannel content personalisation.

Our omnichannel content personalisation capabilities are "above average" or "best in class"



Complex buying conversations result in complex customer data.

True personalisation demands a clear view of the customer across all touchpoints. In the B2B sector, that means capturing a diverse range of interactions, from qualitative information learned in sales meetings to engagement on your website, and ultimately turning all that into usable insights. With data streaming in from marketing, sales and CX functions, it's not surprising that only 43% of practitioners say their customer data system gives them consistent data that is updated in real time across all touchpoints.

Having the right customer data systems makes all the difference. B2B organisations with CX tech stacks made up of technology from the same vendor are more likely to have consistent data driving engagement across all touchpoints (56%) and are better able to deliver rapid insights for personalisation (55%), compared to organisations with CX tech stacks made up of technology from multiple vendors.

Effectiveness of Customer Data Systems
B2B organisations with single-vendor SaaS solutions vs. multi-vendor solutions

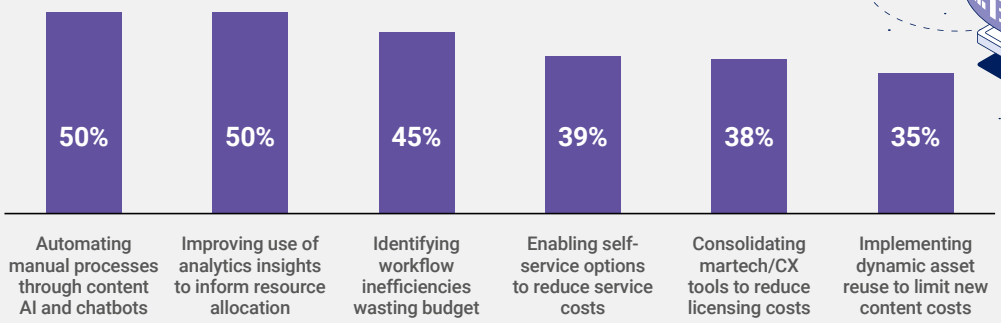
Market Leaders use technology to connect with customers before the sales conversation starts, propelling them ahead of the competition.

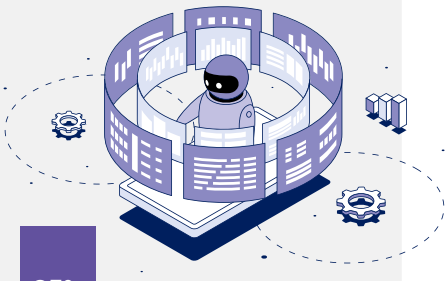
Half of B2B organisations seek to automate manual processes through content AI and chatbots in 2024. An additional 39% are enabling self-service options to reduce costs, with the figure rising to 48% for Market Leaders.

However, the benefits of self-serve and automation extend beyond cost savings. In today's B2B buying environment, customers often research and create shortlists of potential vendors independently before engaging with sales teams.

By providing high-quality, personalised content and interactive tools via self-serve channels, B2B brands can build awareness with potential customers early in the buying process. This allows them to influence purchase decisions and grow their business even with limited sales headcount.

What are the key ways you seek to adapt workflows to drive efficiency and cost savings in 2024?





Sample size: 680 senior executives

Generative AI will transform content creation and workflows in 2024.

With conversations with buying organisations taking place at multiple levels, B2B marketers know they need to up their game when it comes to content. They need to find ways to create large volumes of personalised content and get it out to the right individuals at the right time.

As we saw earlier, one in five B2B organisations are already turning to generative AI to help craft messages and copy, reducing the burden of performing routine tasks on creative teams.

And, with the proliferation of content, there is an increased focus on gauging content performance. Content optimisation is seen as the CX improvement that would have the greatest impact on B2B organisations' businesses in 2024 (44% place it among their top three improvements). Here, AI can help as well, with 27% of practitioners reporting that they will use generative AI for optimising campaign performance through testing and analysis.

The AI-powered path to personalised B2B content

1 Create

38%
of B2B practitioners will use generative AI for content creation in 2024, making it the number one use case.

2 Automate

61%
of senior executives who are Market Leaders say they are ready to integrate generative AI into content workflows, versus 39% of senior executives who are Market Followers.

3 Personalise

31%
of practitioners expect to use generative AI to personalise content based on customer interests and preferences, making personalisation a top three use case for digital marketing and CX.

4 Optimise

44%
of senior executives believe content optimisation will be one of the most important CX improvements they can make in 2024 for business impact.

Balancing the transformative potential of AI with robust governance

As the use of generative AI grows, issues related to governance and ethics will be at the forefront of B2B practitioners' minds.

The top two challenges are:

#1
Ensuring quality and customer trust (57%).

#2
Monitoring AI content, e.g., for potentially harmful outputs (53%).

Senior executives in B2B organisations are grappling with how to quickly harness generative AI to stay competitive but also do it in a measured and safe way.

Market Leaders feel somewhat better prepared, with:

57%
saying they are adequately prepared when it comes to developing and implementing policies (versus 52% of Market Followers).

57%
implementing governance and ethical guidelines (versus 49% of Market Followers).

Conclusions and recommendations

Creating a digital customer experience that lives up to expectations in the B2B sector is especially challenging because of the number of people involved in buying committees and long, complex sales cycles. Successful organisations already use data, analytics, and insights to address this complexity. Moreover, the insights derived from the Adobe *Digital Trends 2024* study point to three areas where B2B brands can improve upon their digital CX to maximise their business impact:

Stop customer data from evaporating. Data has no value unless the people who need it can access it and act on it at the right moment. Be sure customer-facing employees and teams driving customer engagement have access to a live, unified view of the customer, for example via a single customer data platform that standardises and connects data in real time.

Get noticed by potential customers before the sales conversation starts. Use your knowledge and understanding of customers to predict needs and shape the conversations that take place behind closed doors. Data-driven digital engagement will allow you to maximise your business growth, no matter how big (or small) your sales resources are.

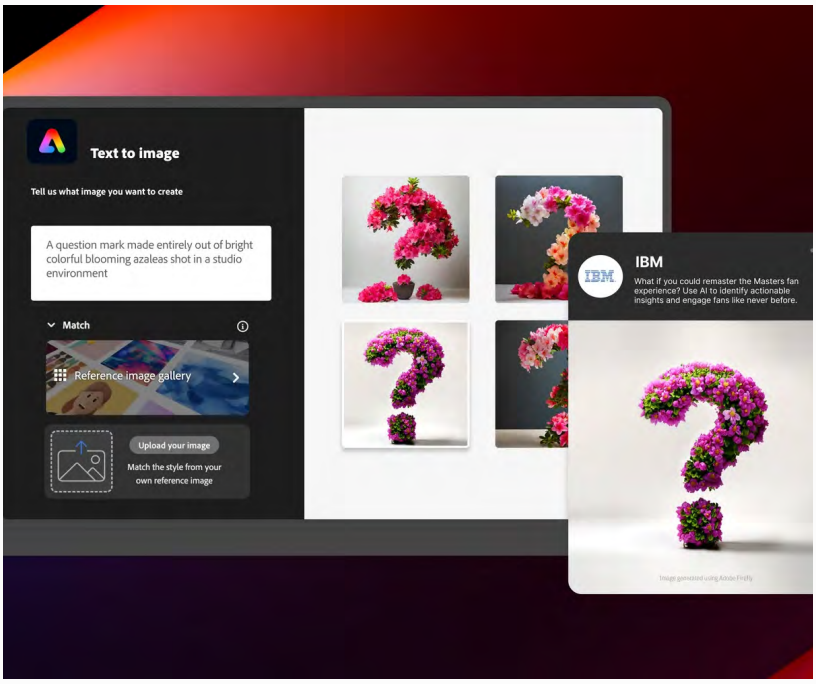
Use generative AI to elevate content. Generative AI can help you create and personalise content faster and, crucially, optimise that content for increased ROI. Getting the most out of this technology, however, requires customer data to be connected and accessible.

It's clear that having the right technology in place to use customer data effectively and supercharge personalised content will be critical for B2B businesses to stay competitive and go from Market Followers to Market Leaders.

Learn more about Adobe's comprehensive B2B marketing solutions.

Case Study: IBM "Let's Create"

For its "Let's Create" brand campaign, IBM used Adobe Firefly generative AI to generate 200 assets and over 1,000 marketing variations for the campaign in a matter of minutes. The campaign performed well above IBM's benchmark, driving an impressive 26 times higher engagement, and reaching valuable audiences, with 20 percent of respondents identified as C-level decision-makers.



"Creatives spend too much of their days on mundane tasks that can now be automated with generative AI. The productivity gains are incredible, but even more exciting is the time we can make available for creative ideation."

Billy Seabrook
Global Chief Design Officer, IBM Consulting

Read their story

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