

# INCREASE THE ROI OF YOUR IN-PERSON EVENTS WITH A DIGITAL MAKEOVER



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B2B marketing program budgets are on the rise and physical events consistently grab the top spot on the spending list.

Even so, marketers have long been conflicted about the real value that these expensive, time-consuming endeavors return. With attendance dropping in some areas, the questions about value delivered become even more acute. Now is the time to update conferences, trade shows, and seminars with a digital rehab that can turn these standalone activities into more durable marketing assets.

**A January, 2015 report by Laura Ramos, VP and Principal Analyst with Forrester Research, Inc., explores how to convert high-potential face-to-face experiences into opportunities to generate more qualified demand and more loyal customer relationships that endure the test of time.**



For: CMOs

# B2B In-Person Events Need A Digital Makeover

by Laura Ramos, January 26, 2015

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **In-Person Events Top The B2B Budget Chart Of Popular Marketing Tactics**

Expected to consume 14% of B2B program dollars, absolute spending on conferences, trade shows, and seminars will likely surpass 2014 levels due to higher overall spending and put events at the top of the marketing budget stack. Despite retaining this lofty perch year after year, marketers don't treat events as strategic marketing assets.

### **As Standalone Activities, Events Fail To Earn Equivalent Returns**

Business buyers don't rate events highly as sources of purchasing information, so marketers must update event experiences to make them more engaging and valuable. Digital technologies that help leverage event content and gather attendees' data are essential to reaching broader audiences and amplifying the brand through event-specific experiences.

### **Integrating Digital Helps Turn Events Into Durable Marketing Assets**

Digital capabilities help marketers capture event data and assets and convert those into post-event insights and value. New mobile event applications — and emerging technologies like augmented reality — can better capture participants' activity, analyze interests, and help connect sales with those attendees who exhibit purchase potential during the show.



## B2B In-Person Events Need A Digital Makeover

by [Laura Ramos](#)  
with [Peter O'Neill](#) and Ryan Trafton

### WHY READ THIS REPORT

In-person events consistently grab the top spot on the business-to-business (B2B) marketer's program budget list. But marketers have long been conflicted about the value that these expensive time-consuming endeavors return. It's time for CMOs to update conferences, trade shows, and seminars with a digital rehab that can turn these standalone activities into more durable marketing assets. Tapping into our recent B2B marketing program budget survey results, this report explores how CMOs can deliver value to more digitally savvy and engaged attendees by integrating the physical experience with new mobile, analytic, and interactive technologies. It will also describe how to convert these high-potential face-to-face experiences into opportunities to generate more qualified demand and more loyal customer relationships.

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### Notes & Resources

Forrester used data from The Forrester/DMN 2014 North American Digital Marketing Online Survey in the writing of this report.

### Related Research Documents

[Direct Your 2015 B2B Budget Gains Toward Creating Exceptional Customer Experiences](#)  
January 20, 2015

[Focus B2B Marketing Budget Gains On Business Outcomes To Succeed In 2014](#)  
January 21, 2014

[B2B Marketers: Make Trade Shows Deliver Better Leads — And Value](#)  
March 13, 2008



## TRADE SHOWS TAKE A BIG BITE OUT OF B2B MARKETING BUDGETS

Participating in trade shows, sponsoring conferences, and hosting seminars are expensive time-consuming uses of B2B marketing resources. For more than six years, we have found that in-person events consistently burn through the biggest chunk of program budgets (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> The year 2015 will be little different since marketers anticipate a bigger boost to program budgets, and — while event spending as a percentage of budgets is decreasing — absolute dollar values are expected to increase relative to 2014 due to overall higher budgets.<sup>2</sup> CMOs should take note. Our budget survey also shows:

- **Getting together with customers remains essential in B2B marketing and selling.** B2B sales require a personal touch to build trust and negotiate details so that in-person events remain key elements in the marketing mix. Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed plan to spend money on events, making them the single largest line item in 2015 B2B program budgets. Together with promotions, sponsorships, and hospitality, face-to-face interactions will chew up about 21% of the average B2B program budget in 2015 (see Figure 2-1).
- **Marketers are shifting event dollars to digital.** While popular, most marketing execs feel conflicted about the role of events in the marketing mix, a trend that has persisted for years. When asked how they plan to change 2015 spending, 18% of respondents said that they expect to invest more in in-person events, while 19% said that they will likely scale it back (see Figure 2-2). In contrast, B2B marketers say that they are far more likely to invest in digital substitutes, like webinars, virtual events, and video. In 2015, 36% plan to increase spending here, while only 2% will decrease it.

**Figure 1** B2B Marketers Have Long Struggled Under The Trade Show Budget Burden

| Budget year | % of spend | Spend ranking | % planning to increase | % planning to decrease |
|-------------|------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| 2015        | 14%        | No. 1         | 18%                    | 19%                    |
| 2014*       | 20%        | No. 1         | 21%                    | 30%                    |
| 2010†       | 20%        | No. 1         | 21%                    | 25%                    |
| 2009‡       | 20%        | No. 1         | 16%                    | 49%                    |

Base: 132 B2B senior marketers at companies with 100+ employees

\*Base: 56 marketing leaders at companies with 50+ employees

†Base: 249 B2B marketers at companies with 50+ employees

‡Base: 317 B2B marketers at companies with 50+ employees

Note: Predictions for 2015 are combined from two surveys with identical questions deployed separately to different populations of marketers.

Source: Forrester/DMN 2014 North American Digital Marketing Online Survey and Forrester's Q4 2014 North American B2B Marketing Budget Online Survey

\*Source: Forrester's Q3 2013 North American B2B Marketing Budget Online Survey

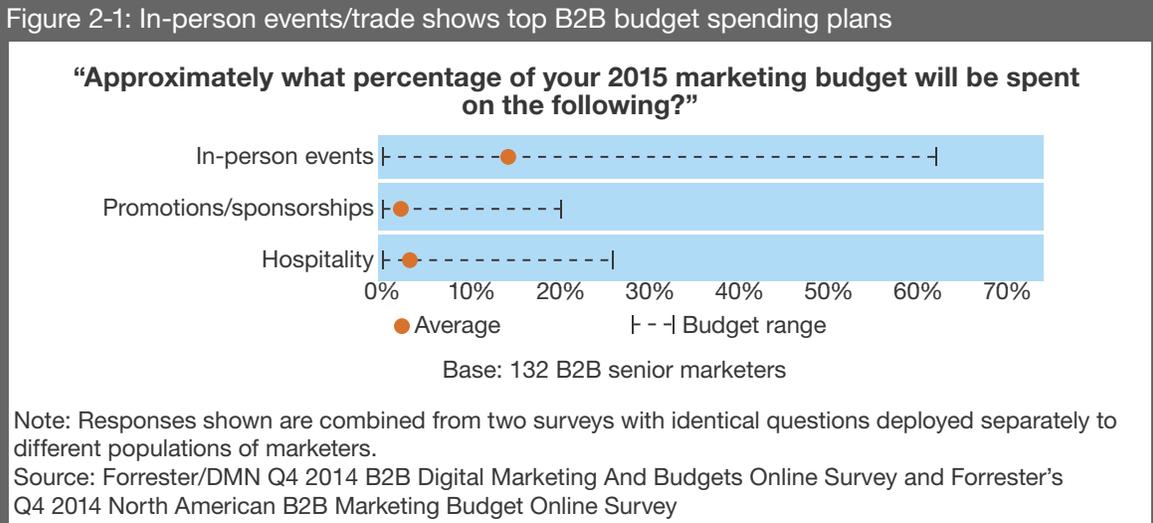
†Source: Forrester Q1 2010 B2B Marketing Budgets And Tactics Online Survey With MarketingProfs

‡Source: Forrester Q1 2009 B2B Marketing Budgets And Tactics Online Survey With MarketingProfs

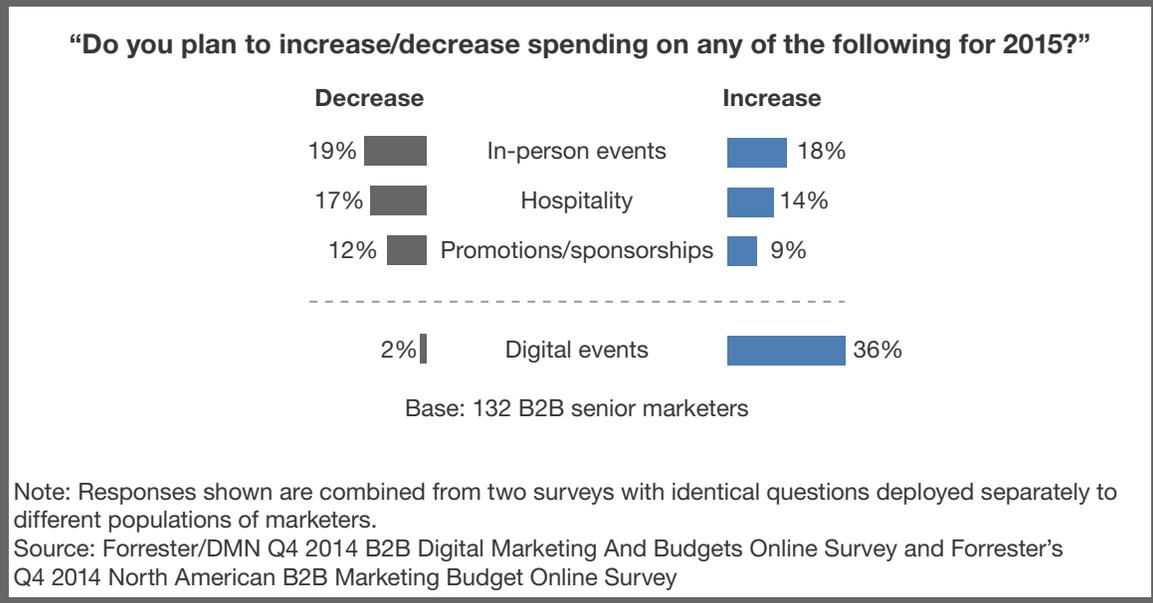
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Source: Forrester Research, Inc. Unauthorized reproduction or distribution prohibited.

**Figure 2** In-Person Programs Take The Biggest Bite Out Of B2B Program Budgets



**Figure 2-2: In 2015, B2B marketers plan to spend more on digital than on traditional events**

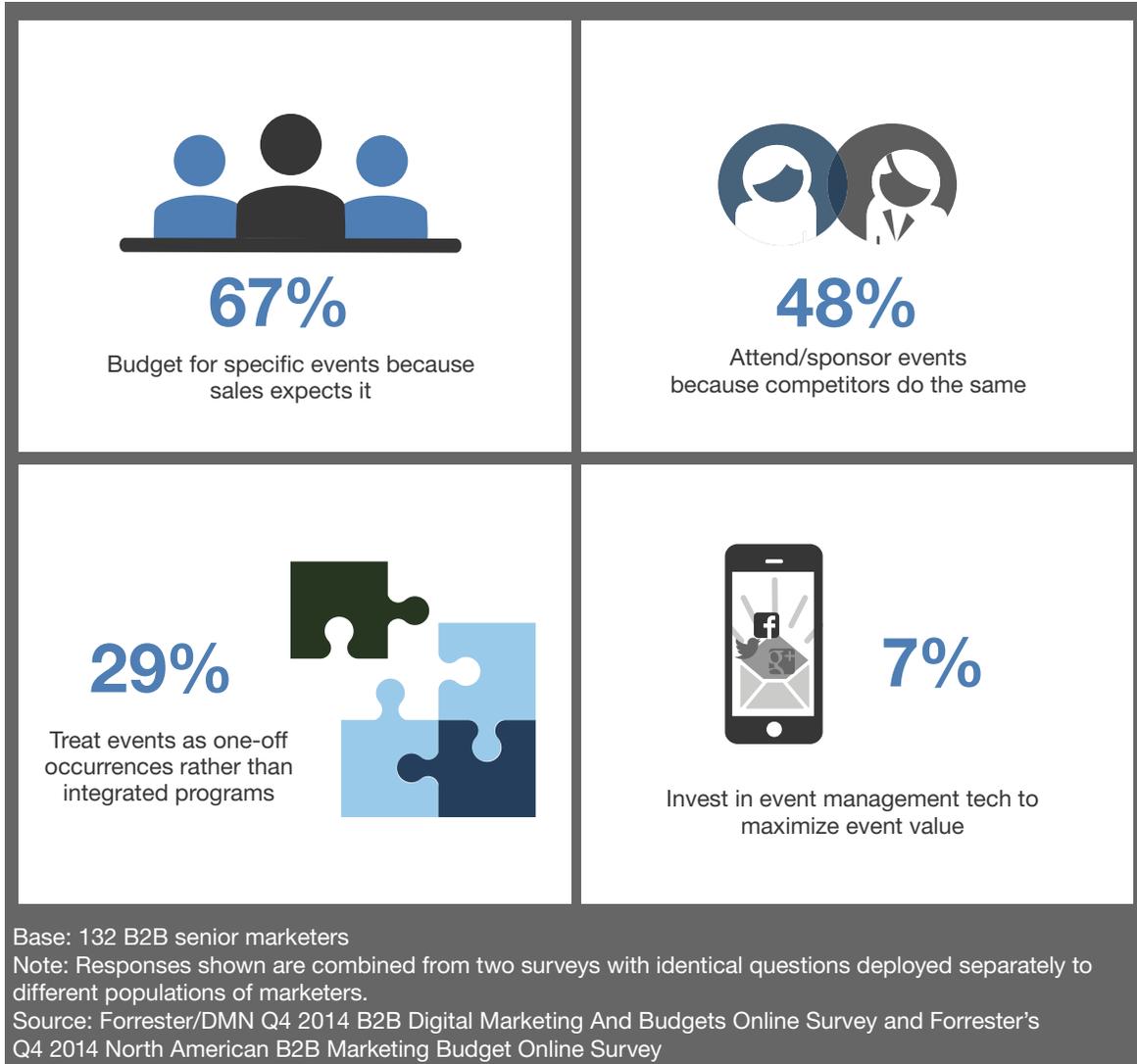


## CMOs Waste Their Money When Treating Events Just As A Tactic

B2B marketing budget holders continue to carry on a love-hate relationship with conferences, seminars, and trade shows because they treat events like standalone tactics rather than strategic marketing assets. When it comes to setting event strategy, our survey found that most B2B marketing execs:

- **Go along with the crowd.** Salespeople like to attend events to rub elbows with clients and prospects. Many see marketing as the party planners, and marketers do little to dissuade them of this notion. In our survey, 67% admit to caving into sales demands when prioritizing events (see Figure 3). Another 48% justify event sponsorships based on what their competitors do, not what buyers want or what's best for the business.
- **Focus on the event and not on the outcomes delivered.** While 54% of respondents said that they budget for digital promotion and follow up consistently around events, almost one in three (29%) admit to operating events in isolation from the rest of the marketing mix. Worse yet, only 7% have invested in event management technology to help them collect data, measure returns, and connect event activities to business value.
- **Fail to deliver value to choosy business buyers.** With a wide variety of information sources available today, business buyers find events less useful when exploring solutions. Business and technology decision-makers say that in-person events, like industry conferences or vendor events, have only average influence when they are discovering ways to meet fundamental needs or exploring options for doing so (see Figure 4).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, peers, technical websites, and analysts have much higher impact in early-stage buying. Compared with other less costly components of the marketing mix, events have less relative impact.

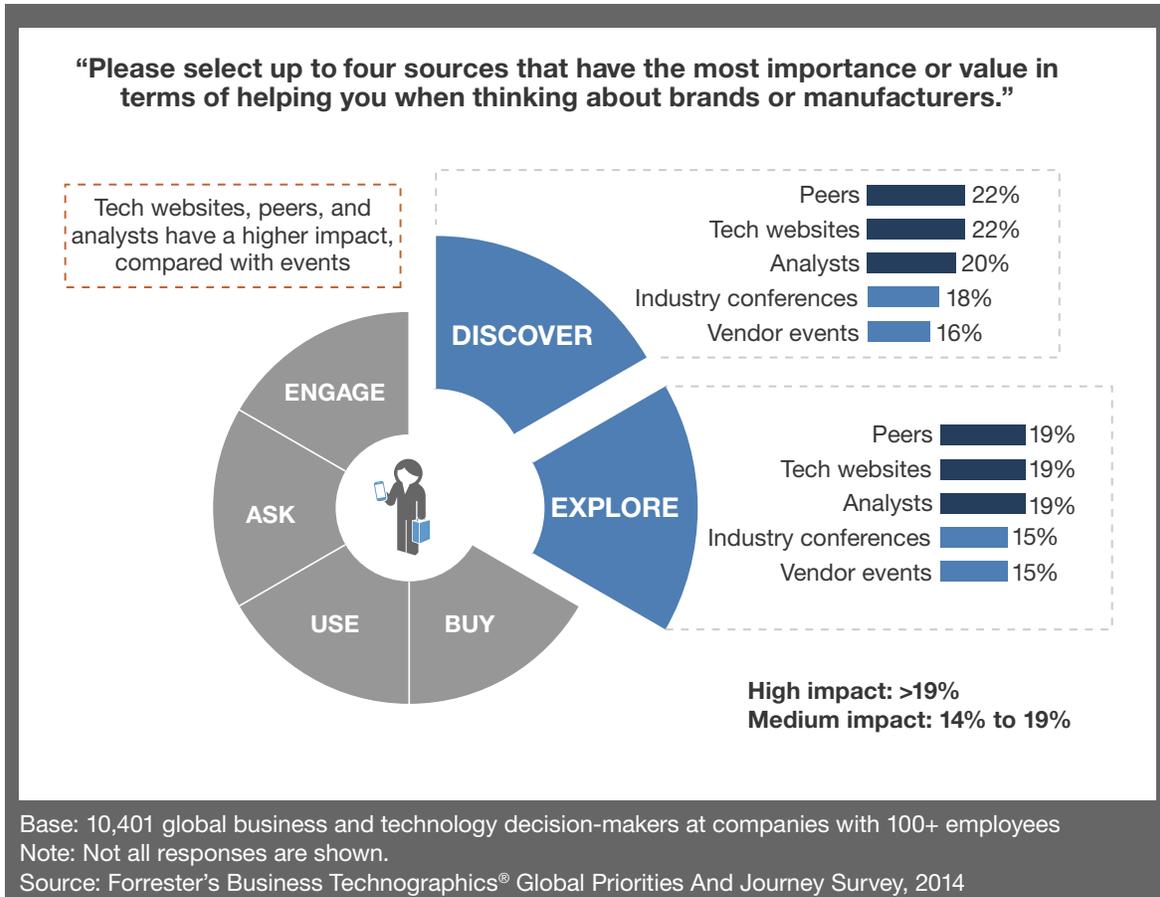
**Figure 3** B2B Marketing Execs Lack Strategies For In-Person Events



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**Figure 4** B2B Buyers Find That Events Only Have An Average Impact On Their Purchase Journey



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## DIGITIZE EVENTS TO TURN THEM INTO DURABLE ASSETS

To make event dollars pay off, we counseled B2B marketers way back in 2008 to treat in-person events as part of an integrated program, to invest in professional management, and to use events to get closer to customers.<sup>4</sup> While this advice remains sound, B2B CMOs must now ensure that the events their teams sponsor deliver value to more digitally savvy and engaged attendees — who have higher expectations, shorter attention spans, and lower tolerance for uninspired content. Today, marketers struggle to get attendees to pay for events with their attention more so than their money. To create valuable and engaging in-person experiences, B2B CMOs must also:

- **Focus on specific audiences to make events more relevant.** While events like the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) and Dreamforce draw huge audiences, we found that most B2B marketers (60%) believe that smaller executive events offer the best way to connect with customers, which is a margin of 2:1 over those who prefer going the conference route. To get

sales and line of business leaders to forgo the annual user conference in favor of smaller venues, the CMO of a security software company hosted simultaneous gatherings at top restaurants, like the Le Monte in Pittsburg and the Westin St. Francis in San Francisco, which featured telepresence on the menu. By holding the events simultaneously, he could create face-to-face executive interactions — or invite headlining thought leaders to share insights — while cutting out the time and inconvenience of flying busy company officers around the country.

- **Reach broader audiences through shared digital experiences.** Fifty-two percent of our respondents say that they digitally enhance events to extend the experience or increase engagement. We believe that most of this activity is limited to general-purpose tools that don't easily capture event-specific activity. While hashtags and live blog posts can create visibility and buzz, only one in three of those surveyed say that they use technology designed to capture reactions and share event-specific activity. KPMG offers CMOs a model to follow in its social media aggregation site for the World Economic Forum (Davos).<sup>5</sup> During the Annual Meeting, WEFLIVE captures topics discussed via a real-time interactive infographic that tracks trending topics and participation from around the world. Nonprofits Ted and TedMed simulcast content from their leading-edge conferences to more than 100,000 viewers and make presentation replays widely and freely available as a way to build audience and spread ideas.<sup>6</sup>
- **Use mobile moments to increase engagement.** Event attendees are no longer content to sit quietly and listen to speakers. Empowered with smart devices in their pocket or purse, participants want to join the conversation and engage with each other. B2B CMOs who are looking to satisfy these digital natives are turning to mobile event application platforms from companies like Cvent, DoubleDutch, EventMobi, and QuickMobile. These applications provide not only personalized agendas, speaker profiles, and session locators but also interactive capabilities that let attendees share profiles, take polls, give feedback, and take part in promotions. Or through the use of location technology like iBeacon, they can guide attendees to sessions or exhibitors of interest.
- **Amplify the brand by energizing advocates.** B2B event experiences must strike the right balance between education and excitement to engage the audience. Happy customers help share the love with prospective buyers when marketers give them opportunities to share their stories and contribute their voices. Adobe sets the bar here by inviting its annual Summit attendees to sneak a peek at upcoming features. Product managers ask conference participants to vote for their favorite feature via Twitter and include the top vote-getters in the next release. Adobe extends interactions to philanthropy with its “Tweet for Good” program by donating money for every hashtag-carrying tweet posted during talks by high-profile speakers like Robert Redford and Sal Khan.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

**DIGITAL ENHANCES EVENTS WHILE CREATING ENDURING EXPERIENCES**

Digital capabilities available today make it possible for marketers to capture event assets and share experiences more widely than ever before. By using technology to tap into audience interests, it is possible to turn events into more durable and strategic assets that deliver value long after take-down crews leave the exhibit hall. B2B CMOs should get 2015 events off on the right foot by investigating technology and service solutions that can help marketing and sales teams:

- **Get to know their audience.** With an abundance of mobile event applications entering the market, it's never been a better time to tune into attendees and find out what turns them on. B2B CMOs should task their head of events to investigate the different options available for capturing participant interactions, analyzing their interests, and gathering real-time feedback. Event apps should collect not only activity information but also audience response activity like check-ins, comments, shares, and influence scores as well as preference information like speaker scores, topic popularity, and exhibitors ranked by traffic and ratings.
  - **Use event data to tailor sales conversations.** Event data can reveal unique insights about attendees' interests. CMOs should ensure that event management investments offer the right combination of visual reporting and real-time analysis to help event managers connect sales with those attendees who exhibit purchase potential. Armed with information like activity per person, session rankings, and reviews, SAP Swiss Events matched attendees to interests and shared this information with each respective sales rep. Insights about the topics that attendees rated or sessions that they attended helped reps tailor conversations post-event and increase the number and size of deals closed, compared with events that did not use the interactive app.<sup>7</sup>
  - **Explore new ways to individualize the event experience.** To capture the intimacy of small gatherings in large venues, CMOs must learn how to use attendees' data to structure interactions and content around each individual in a more proactive, continuous, and emotionally appealing manner.<sup>8</sup> Augmented reality — technologies that superimpose information or images on a view of a physical object or scene — offer one new avenue for event marketing leadership to explore in this quest. Top CMOs are using solutions from companies like Gravity Jack and Marxent Labs to not only replace banners, signage, and backdrops with interactive experiences but also design exhibitions and demos that take advantage of tablet and smartphone technology to give attendees a private tour of their products and solutions.<sup>9</sup>
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## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

### Methodology

The Forrester/DMN 2014 North American Digital Marketing Online Survey collected data from 1,133 marketing professionals from the Direct Marketing News (DMN) membership list. In conjunction, Forrester launched its Q4 2014 North American B2B Marketing Budget Online Survey and collected responses from 103 marketing professionals. For this report, Forrester screened responses to include only those respondents from firms that sell primarily or in part to other businesses, who work at companies with 100 employees or more, and who have budget or management responsibility at their firms. For quality assurance, we required respondents to answer basic questions about their firm's 2014 revenues, industry, and job title/role.

The surveys were fielded in October and November 2014. Respondent incentives included a complimentary copy of this report. Exact sample sizes are provided in this report on a question-by-question basis. Survey responses are not guaranteed to be representative of the population at large. Unless otherwise noted, statistical data is intended to be used for descriptive and not inferential purposes.

Forrester's Business Technographics® Global Priorities And Journey Survey, 2014, was fielded to 13,822 business and technology decision-makers located in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, New Zealand, the UK, and the US from SMB and enterprise companies with two or more employees. This survey is part of Forrester's Business Technographics and was fielded from January 2014 to March 2014. Research Now fielded this survey on behalf of Forrester. Survey respondent incentives include points redeemable for gift certificates. We have provided exact sample sizes in this report on a question-by-question basis.

Forrester's Business Technographics provides demand-side insight into the priorities, investments, and customer journeys of business and technology decision-makers and the workforce across the globe. Forrester collects data insights from qualified respondents in 10 countries spanning the Americas, Europe, and Asia. Business Technographics uses only superior data sources and advanced data-cleaning techniques to ensure the highest data quality.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Since late 2007, Forrester's B2B research has tracked marketing mix and budget trends. As early as December 2007, we found that trade shows consistently take the top place on the list of marketing budget line items. See the December 12, 2007, "[B2B Marketers' 2008 Budget Trends](#)" report, see the April 24, 2009, "[B2B Marketers' 2009 Budget Trends](#)" report, see the March 23, 2010, "[B2B Marketers' 2010 Budget Trends](#)" report, see the February 1, 2011, "[Investing In Tech Marketing, 2011](#)" report, and see the January 21, 2014, "[Focus B2B Marketing Budget Gains On Business Outcomes To Succeed In 2014](#)" report.

- <sup>2</sup> Forrester and Direct Marketing News (DMN) jointly surveyed a new crop of 132 marketing executives about 2015 budget plans. The results reveal that B2B CMOs marketers expect program budgets to increase in 2015 to an average 7% of revenues (compared with 4% of revenues in 2014). With highly fragmented funding demands and little change in strategy, however, marketing leaders continue to struggle to show how marketing programs influence the business. See the January 20, 2015, “[Direct Your 2015 B2B Budget Gains Toward Creating Exceptional Customer Experiences](#)” report.
- <sup>3</sup> To remain consistent with our budget survey, we included survey respondents from companies with 100 employees or more. Source: Forrester’s Business Technographics Global Priorities And Journey Survey, 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> In our first report on B2B trade shows, we recommended that B2B marketing leadership focus on quantitatively measuring results and treating events as part of an integrated marketing investment rather than as a series of one-off occasions. We also warned against scrimping on talent to manage these big consumers of marketing budget dollars and institutionalizing the planning process. See the March 13, 2008, “[B2B Marketers: Make Trade Shows Deliver Better Leads — And Value](#)” report.
- <sup>5</sup> WEFLIVE is an interactive social media aggregation and data visualization service that analyzes the conversations emanating from world business, political, and civil leaders in Davos as well as what the world is saying in response. Source: KPMG (<http://www.kpmg.com/wef>).
- <sup>6</sup> Started as a conference in 1984, Ted covers topics from science to business and global issues in more than 100 languages. Independently run Tedx events help share ideas in communities around the world and TedMed is dedicated to unlocking ideas in health and medicine. Source: Ted (<http://www.ted.com/>) and TedMed (<http://www.tedmed.com/>).
- <sup>7</sup> For more details about how SAP Swiss Events used technology to engage its attendee audience, visit the DoubleDutch website. Source: DoubleDutch (<http://doubledutch.me/clients/sap.html>).
- <sup>8</sup> Over the past decade, marketers have become adept at using customer data to personalize recommendations, offers, and messages. Now, a flood of customer data, fueled by smart technologies and a proliferation of sources, is giving rise to more individualized marketing that will raise the bar on experience quality for most CMOs. See the December 9, 2014, “[Personalization And The Rise Of Individualized Experiences](#)” report.
- <sup>9</sup> Source: Gravity Jack (<https://gravityjack.com/>) and Marxent Labs (<http://www.marxentlabs.com/>).

## About Forrester

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« CATHERINE MELISSA OLIVER, client persona representing CMOs

