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# TECHNOLOGY PR'S TUG OF WAR:

THE BATTLE OF BRAND VS. PRODUCT

**Every company has a technology story.** That's a given, especially at a time when tech underlies all that we do – from the ways we work to what we eat to how we communicate, learn and give back. Tech – whether by circumstance or intention – is now our societal, emotional and operational backbone.

Unsurprisingly, this year presented tremendous opportunities. But it's also been a time of great introspection.

We'll remember 2021 as synonymous with purpose, brand and authenticity. Now, more than ever, B2B and consumer tech brands are in the global spotlight – one that requires them to amplify not just their latest gadgets or services, but also to showcase how they, like consumer brands over the past few years, eat, breathe and sleep an authentic brand and hold true to a greater brand mission and purpose. After all, **customers, partners, investors and employees expect, if not demand, an evolution in how tech brands tell their stories.**

So, are tech marketing and PR teams rising to the challenge and prioritizing brand? We asked more than 1,000 technology marketing and PR decision-makers globally exactly that (and more). The answer? Not yet. **Technology storytelling is embroiled in a high-stakes game of tug of war.**

## Defining “Authentic”

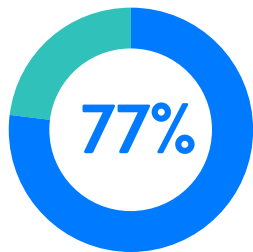
**Authentic brand:** A company that delivers on its promises in a sincere and engaging way, is clear and consistent about what it stands for, and is culturally relevant to its target market.

**Authentic stories:** Marketing and storytelling that successfully highlight the brand's mission, purpose, corporate commitments and overall values.

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tech brands are in the  
global spotlight.**

# THE BRAND VS. PRODUCT PARADOX

Behold the modern-day chicken and egg. When it comes to technology marketing and storytelling, which truly comes first: the brand or the product? Depending on whom you ask, what you sell and to whom, and where you work, the prioritization shifts.



**77% of tech marketing, branding and communications decision-makers worldwide – and across industries – believe in the power of authentic, brand-first storytelling to showcase a company’s value, purpose and mission.**

Even more (88%) also believe their

C-suite understands the value. To quote one respondent: “Brand authenticity, in my opinion, is no longer an option for companies looking to stay ahead of the competition.”

**But the data shows belief is not the same as reality.** Only 58% of respondents say their company truly prioritizes brand-focused campaigns, admitting to internal challenges standing in the way.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SAYING AND DOING

The C-Suite understands the value of brand-led storytelling, and 65% of CMOs globally are most likely to say their company prioritizes brand-related marketing and PR campaigns. **Yet, two out of five of all other decision-makers confess the C-suite continues to prioritize product or product feature-focused announcements over everything else.** What’s more, 42% say current marketing and PR campaigns remain largely product-driven. This is despite nearly half of decision-makers saying customers in their industry think the overarching brand, values and purpose are more important than products or product features.

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The lines between B2B tech and B2C have blurred over the years, which is why enterprise tech companies are putting more focus on their brand building and storytelling. At Databricks, we’re walking our talk. We’ve created a more humanized brand that matches our efforts to also make our product and messaging simpler and more accessible. Telling a good story is only one part of it; bringing our brand to life has been a cross-functional exercise that requires authenticity across the board.”

- KEYANA CORLISS

Senior Director, Global Communications  
DATABRICKS

The C-Suite understands the value of brand-led storytelling.

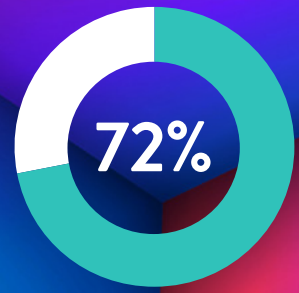
## THE SALES PULL

B2B and consumer tech decision-makers know that telling more authentic brand-first stories will pay off in spades for the company. Nearly three-fourths **(72%) of all respondents boldly say their customers make more purchasing decisions based on the overall strength of the brand, its mission and its values than they did three years ago.** The safe assumption here is technology's critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic certainly factored into this shift in thinking, as has the purpose-driven, more emotive approach consumer brands have spotlighted over the past decade. In the words on one respondent: "My company believes that fostering consumer's trust and loyalty is key, and nothing else is needed."

Do decision-makers outside the U.S. feel the same? Overwhelmingly, yes. Market by market, sentiments aligned in that **the U.S. (74%), U.K. (74%) and China (72%) all agree a brand's mission and values versus product or product features has more weight when it comes to consumer purchasing decisions than three years ago.** Similarly, 64% of B2B tech marketers and communicators feel industry partners consider a company's authenticity as very or extremely important when considering partnerships – and vice versa, with 71% of technology companies assessing a partner's brand, values and purpose before teaming up.



But here's the kicker: When it comes to working with sales, the priorities shift. The high degree of enthusiasm to capture customer attention through more authentic storylines falls to the back burner. **One out of four decision-makers admit to sales pushing a product-only approach to influence customers.** While the finding itself is not a revelation, what confounds these respondents is that sales sits in the marketing driver's seat, even though the majority of decision-makers (55%) agree **one of the most appealing benefits of telling more authentic brand stories is, in fact, the increase in sales.**



## Purchasing Power

Technology brands across industries agree purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by the strength of the overall brand, its mission and its values. Which industries are emerging as the biggest brand believers, and which lean toward the product plays?

### TOP 5 BRAND BELIEVERS

1. Social Media (95%)
2. SaaS/IPaaS/PaaS (77%)
3. B2B E-Commerce (70%)
4. FinTech (68%)
5. Telecom/Mobile (68%)

### TOP 5 PRODUCT PROMOTERS

1. Devices/Infrastructure (67%)
2. Aerospace/Defense (62%)
3. Health Tech (61%)
4. Gaming (59%)
5. MarTech (55%)

**"Internally, it's difficult to accomplish successful integrated marketing communications or breakthrough marketing without employees who understand and care about the [company] vision."**

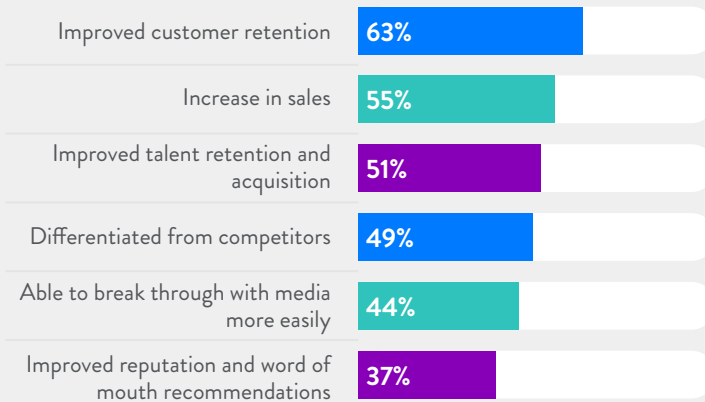
- Anonymous Survey Respondent

## THE TRUTH ABOUT AUTHENTICITY

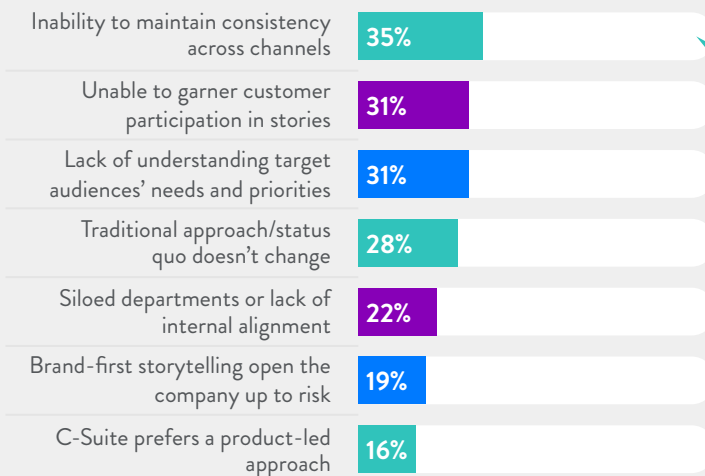
So, if the customer is always right and craves brand-led stories, is sales the only obstacle? Not exactly. “I am still not sure about becoming a more authentic brand because the process of it can overcomplicate things,” one respondent elaborated.

Shaking up the status quo is just scratching the surface of global experts’ fears. **Lack of alignment, exposure to unnecessary risk, channel inconsistency and more challenge 97% of tech marcom pros**, who’d otherwise double down on a more authentic approach.

### THE BENEFITS OF BRAND STORYTELLING



### THE BARRIERS TO BRAND STORYTELLING



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It’s critically important for companies to align on vision, purpose and values before ploughing headfirst into a product strategy. But that doesn’t mean that product PR is dead. Far from it, in fact. The smart companies weave brand and purpose-driven messages into product conversations. Those who do it authentically will strike gold.”

- RANDY CAIRNS

Vice President of Business and Product Communications, HPE

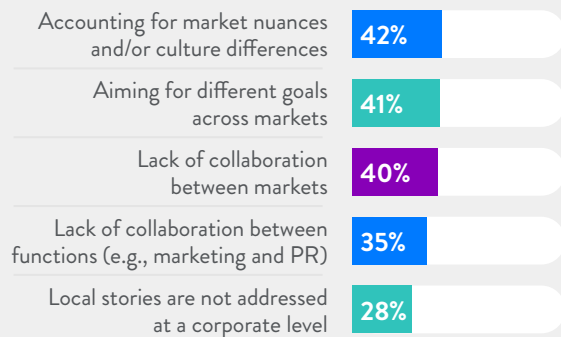
One in seven global marketers confess platform variance is their greatest pain point to date. Out of all markets, Germany-based teams most often cite inconsistency across touchpoints as their No. 1 challenge to authenticity.

# THE GLOBAL GAP

Brand authenticity cannot exist without consistency. At the highest of levels, this premise seems intuitive. Yet, international tech companies – defined as businesses that operate in two or more countries (68% of the research pool) – openly struggle with global alignment and channel consistency, especially when it comes to their marketing and PR campaigns.

Now, throw in the competition between brand versus product storytelling, lack of channel consistency, and the discussed C-suite perceptions versus the reality in execution, and global tech PR has some serious whiplash.

## TOP CHALLENGES TO GLOBAL CONSISTENCY:

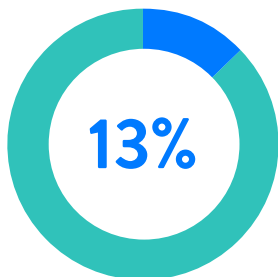


## Market Insights

1. **Decision-makers in China and Germany are the most likely to blame the lack of global alignment on the poor collaboration between functions** (whether that is marketing and PR or engineering and marketing), which may point to underlying structural problems in the organization as well.
2. Globally, in-market teams are at a stalemate when it comes to the product vs. brand debate. **China's belief in a brand-first path outpaces that of the U.K and U.S., whose shared 49% is a far cry from the 70% of China-based marketers and communicators who deem values and company purpose as a priority.** A true headscratcher, given all markets overwhelmingly agree customers make more purchasing decisions based on the strength of an overall brand, its mission and its values.
3. No matter the market or respondent title, two things are certain: **honesty and a deep understanding of target audiences are mission critical to building an authentic brand** – one that resonates with a company's core customer base.

**Brand authenticity cannot exist without consistency.**

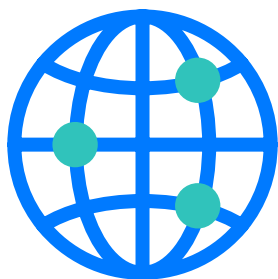
## THE DISPARITIES



1. **Only 13% of marketing decision-makers at international tech companies strongly believe their employer tells a consistent, brand-first story across all relevant markets.** Let's remember 72% feel customers make more purchasing decisions based on the strength of the overall brand, and 88% feels their C-Suite understands the value of an authentic brand. **So, can tech companies really afford to have so many respondents worldwide questioning - or even struggling with - brand consistency, goals and localization?** Simply put: **No.**

2. **Enter the title divide... again.** In particular, CMOs are the most likely to agree consistency lacks across their local markets (27%). On the flip side, director and manager-level marketers are more likely to feel their company does so (61%). Clearly, **there's a major disparity between the orchestrators and creators of the message and those on the frontlines who must deliver these messages locally.**

One solution? International companies must have a consistent playbook and regional marketing kits that help them achieve their goals market by market while ensuring they maintain consistency globally. Just like a brand guide, marketing and PR teams need to gain executive leadership buy-in on taking a brand-first approach, define what authenticity means to their company and how this corresponds with company and country culture, align on overarching and individual market goals, metrics and reporting, and then execute against that playbook from Day 1.



3. **Is global consistency in question in some areas more than others? At the industry-level, yes.**

International B2B tech pros feel they have strong global alignment (60%) with cybersecurity, marketing tech and cloud/big data companies leading the pack. **Consumer tech – while not too far behind B2B with 53% noting their companies tell a consistent brand story – does see way more variance at the industry level.** The biggest swing?

E-commerce. B2B e-commerce led the greater pack with 89%\* agreeing they eat, breathe and sleep global storytelling consistency. Meanwhile, B2C e-commerce is one of the lowest in the consumer tech realm at 44%\*. Personal electronic brands trailed even further behind at 36%\*.

Regardless, **no matter the brand – from B2B to consumer tech and artificial intelligence to telecom – global marketing and PR pros agree that poor collaboration, varying goals and difficulty accounting for market nuances are the thorns in their sides.**

# CONCLUSION

Clearly, technology PR is evolving. The traditional days of hyper-focused comms around speeds, feeds and services are waning. Media and core audiences want to know more than just what a company does. They want to know why you do it.

Does that mean tech companies abandon all product marketing and PR to adopt a brand-only mindset? Absolutely not. Overcorrecting toward brand-first storytelling will present similar challenges. After all, the products and services are what give companies credibility, establish trust and provide C-Suites with the authority to speak to the greater issues at play.

An either/or approach to brand vs. product will only lead to frustration and misalignment – internally and externally, locally and globally. It's time to drop the rope. Tech decision-marketers must strike a storytelling balance and end the exhausting – and at times, pointless – game of tug of war.

**So, we ask you: is your company's PR hanging in the balance? Contact us at [techtalk@allisonpr.com](mailto:techtalk@allisonpr.com) to chat tech, brand and everything in between.**

## Methodology

Allison+Partners' Research + Insights group surveyed 1,002 technology marketing and communications decision-makers who work at B2B and consumer tech companies, ranging from 500 to more than 10,000 employees, across the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Singapore and China. The survey was fielded using the Qualtrics Insight Platform and panel was sourced from Rep Data. Fielding was executed in September and October 2021.

\*Sample size below 30N, directional data only.

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