



The  
Marketing  
Practice

inside the buyer's brain

# *captivate* your prospects

- ▶ build early-stage messages  
that ignite interest and action

# in pursuit of *prospects*

What role, if any, should emotion play in your business messaging?

While most marketers understand the value of showing quantified impact—stats, numbers, and metrics—in their messaging to persuade buyers, the debate over whether rational or emotional language is more persuasive rages on. Most marketing professionals believe it’s best to appeal to a buyer’s rational mind. There are also a few passionate advocates for using language that elicits an emotional response from buyers.

But in addition to what qualities of language work best—a worthy question, and one you’ll learn about in the pages to come—the question most people aren’t asking is: what else does a message need to effectively generate interest and motivate your prospects to respond?

The Marketing Practice, a global B2B marketing agency, wanted to answer this question for early-stage prospects. They commissioned B2B DecisionLabs and Dr. Nick Lee, behavioral scientist and Professor of Marketing at Warwick Business School, to find out which elements create an early-stage marketing message that prospects respond to favorably.

Researchers tested several messaging conditions to learn the following: would rational or emotional language win? How much does quantified impact matter? And what else—if anything—should you include in your message?

In this report, you’ll learn what they discovered.



**Doug Hutton**  
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# is *less* really more?

When it comes to marketing messages, taking a concise and rational route appears to dominate typical industry thinking.

In a recent B2B DecisionLabs survey, 80 percent of companies surveyed said “less is more” when it comes to messaging. And **only 30 percent said they use emotional, descriptive language a good deal of the time.**

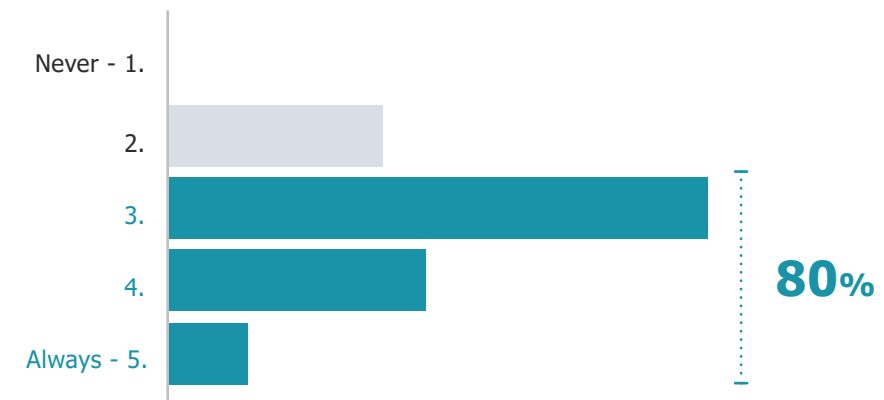
This probably won’t surprise you. But it should concern you.

Why? Because before you can persuade prospects to learn more, you have to get their attention. That’s not easy to do. Your buyers are bombarded with marketing messages on every platform. And most of your competitors have the same core competencies as you do.

You must tell your prospects something they haven’t already heard a dozen times before and tell them in a different way.

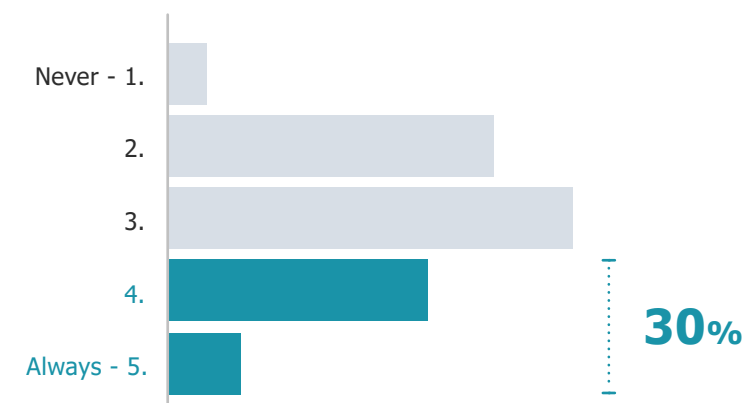
In this study, you’ll see what kind of language works best for early-stage messaging. And you’ll discover what else makes your marketing messages more motivating and memorable.

**When describing our capabilities, we believe in taking a concise “less is more” approach.**

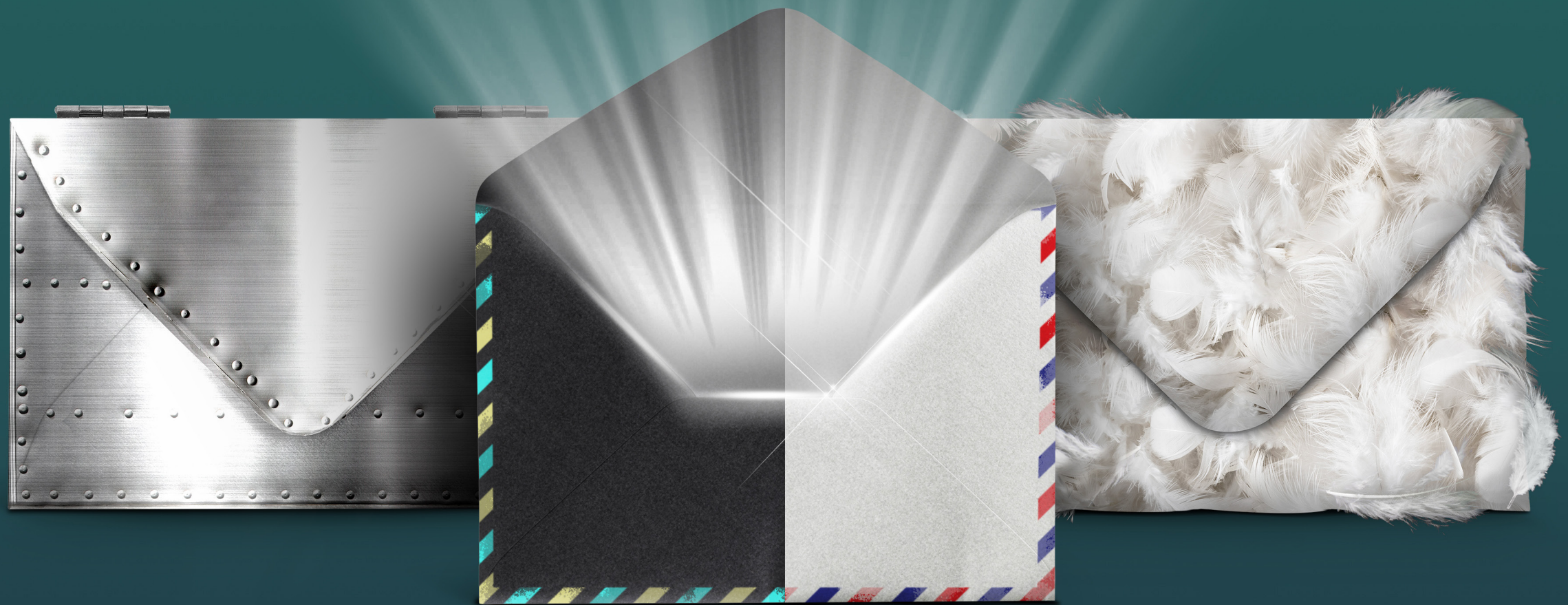


**80 percent** of sellers and marketers believe in taking a concise “less is more” approach at least some of the time.

**When describing our capabilities, we use descriptive, emotional language, even if it makes our messages longer.**



Only **30 percent** of sellers and marketers use emotional, descriptive language to describe capabilities most of the time or always.



make your prospects  
*think and feel*

Winning your prospect's attention and interest takes more than just numbers. Your prospects must not only think about but *feel* the value of your solution.

- ▶ **QUANTIFY YOUR BUSINESS IMPACT**
- ▶ **ENGAGE THEIR EMOTIONS**
- ▶ **SHOW VALUE THROUGH CONTRAST**

# the study

The Marketing Practice engaged B2B DecisionLabs and Dr. Nick Lee, Professor of Marketing at Warwick Business School, to conduct this research study with 500 B2B professionals, divided into five groups of 100 participants.

## **Researchers asked each group of participants to read one of five demand gen messages based on the following business simulation:**

*Imagine you lead customer service and support for your company and are accountable for providing great customer experiences that help keep and grow your customer relationships.*

*While you're always open to new ideas from outside services and technology providers, you are not currently in active discussions with vendors to support your initiatives.*

*As part of your job, however, you consistently receive unsolicited emails from potential vendor partners. One catches your eye thanks to an interesting subject line. You choose to open the email to learn more.*

After reading the email, each participant answered several "attitude" questions, rating their reaction to the email on a scale of 1–9. They also answered three multiple-choice "recall" questions to gauge how well they remembered the information they read.

You'll see specific examples of each message on the next pages.



# five message test conditions

Each participant group read one of the following five messages. The messages shown here are partial, not the full text used in the study. Bold text has been added to emphasize key differences—it was not included in the original test messages.



## 1. UNQUANTIFIED EMOTIONAL

This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It does not include quantified business impact or contrast.

*Are you losing more customer revenue than you should each year due to **hidden “leaks”** in your customer support system? ...*

*These are just some of the **unseen cracks** inside your company’s support system workflow that can **slowly, silently let your hard-won customers leak out** – before you even notice they are gone...*

*Companies like yours achieve all of this and more when they use our workflow automation solutions. For a personalized assessment of **your potential missed opportunity**, click here to access our [\*\*online leak-fixing calculator\*\*](#).*



## 2. QUANTIFIED EMOTIONAL

This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for the solution only.

*These are just some of the **unseen cracks** inside your company’s support system workflow that can **slowly, silently let your hard-won customers leak out**—before you even notice they are gone.*

*We help companies like yours **find the cracks and plug the leaks** in your customer support processes and systems, resulting in:*

- *An average of **15% more revenue** from **more satisfied customers staying and spending more***
- *An average **18% cost savings** in unnecessary administrative and technology costs*
- ***More motivated** customer support staff that deliver a **better customer experience***





### 3. QUANTIFIED RATIONAL

This message uses rational language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for the solution only.

*Opportunities can be found by **finding and fixing** customer service inefficiencies, **reducing** incident management bottlenecks, and **improving** below-average customer engagement experiences. Those are just a few examples where our advanced workflow automation solutions have helped companies like yours achieve results like this:*

- **Retain and increase your customer revenue** *by 15%*
- **Reduce unnecessary administrative and technology costs** *by 18%*
- **Improve both support staff and customer satisfaction** *scores*



### 4. QUANTIFIED EMOTIONAL WITH CONTRAST

This message uses emotional language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for both the challenge and the solution.

*Companies like yours are typically **losing 15% more** customer revenue than you should each year. And most are **spending 18% more** than you should on administrative and technology each year.*

*And most don't even know how or why this is happening.*

*Imagine **finding hidden** customer service inefficiencies, **uncovering frustrating** incident management bottlenecks, or learning you have below industry average customer engagement experiences.*

*These are just a few examples of the **"value leaks"** we typically discover and fix when companies like yours bring us in to help improve your customer support processes and platforms.*

*The resulting benefits can be measured on both the top and bottom line:*

- **Keeping 15% more of your customer revenue** *each year...What's that worth to you?*
- **Saving 18% in unnecessary administrative and technology-related costs...That's real money!**

*And then **calculate the positive strategic impact** of improving both your employee and customer satisfaction scores due to a better customer service experience. **There's even more upside potential!***



## 5. QUANTIFIED RATIONAL WITH CONTRAST

This message uses rational language to describe the business challenges and solution benefits. It includes quantified business impact for both the challenge and the solution..

*Companies like yours are **losing 15%** of potential customer revenue and **spending 18% more** than they should on administrative and technology costs—on average, each year—based on our experience. Opportunities to fix both problems can be found by **finding and fixing problems** such as customer service inefficiencies, **reducing** incident management bottlenecks, and **improving** below-average customer engagement experiences.*

*Those are just a few examples where our advanced workflow automation solutions have helped companies like yours achieve results like this:*

- **Retain and increase your customer revenue** *by 15%*
- **Reduce unnecessary administrative and technology costs** *by 18%*
- **Improve both support staff and customer satisfaction** *scores*

*These results represent the average improvement companies like yours experience working with our workflow automation solutions. For a custom assessment, click here to access our [\*\*online leak-fixing calculator\*\*](#).*





## a consistent *winner*

**Participants' responses clearly and consistently speak to the benefits of including quantified, contrasting results and emotion in early-stage prospecting messages.**

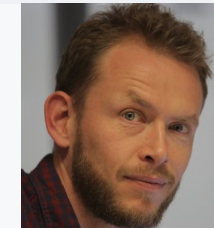
Emotional language unequivocally won out over rational language. And including contrast led to better recall than lack of contrast. All in all, results show the most differentiation between the quantified emotional with contrast message (message #4) and the quantified rational message (#3).

For example, when participants were asked how large of a problem they had after reading the email, there was a **23 percent difference in favor of the quantified emotional message with contrast** compared to the quantified rational message without contrast.

The quantified rational message without contrast was also significantly less urgent and less motivating than the emotional messages in the study. Based on these results, using both quantified impact and emotional language in your messages will motivate your prospects more than using either quantified results or emotional language alone.

You'll see more detail on each specific messaging element—and how to use it—in the next pages.

## strikingly different



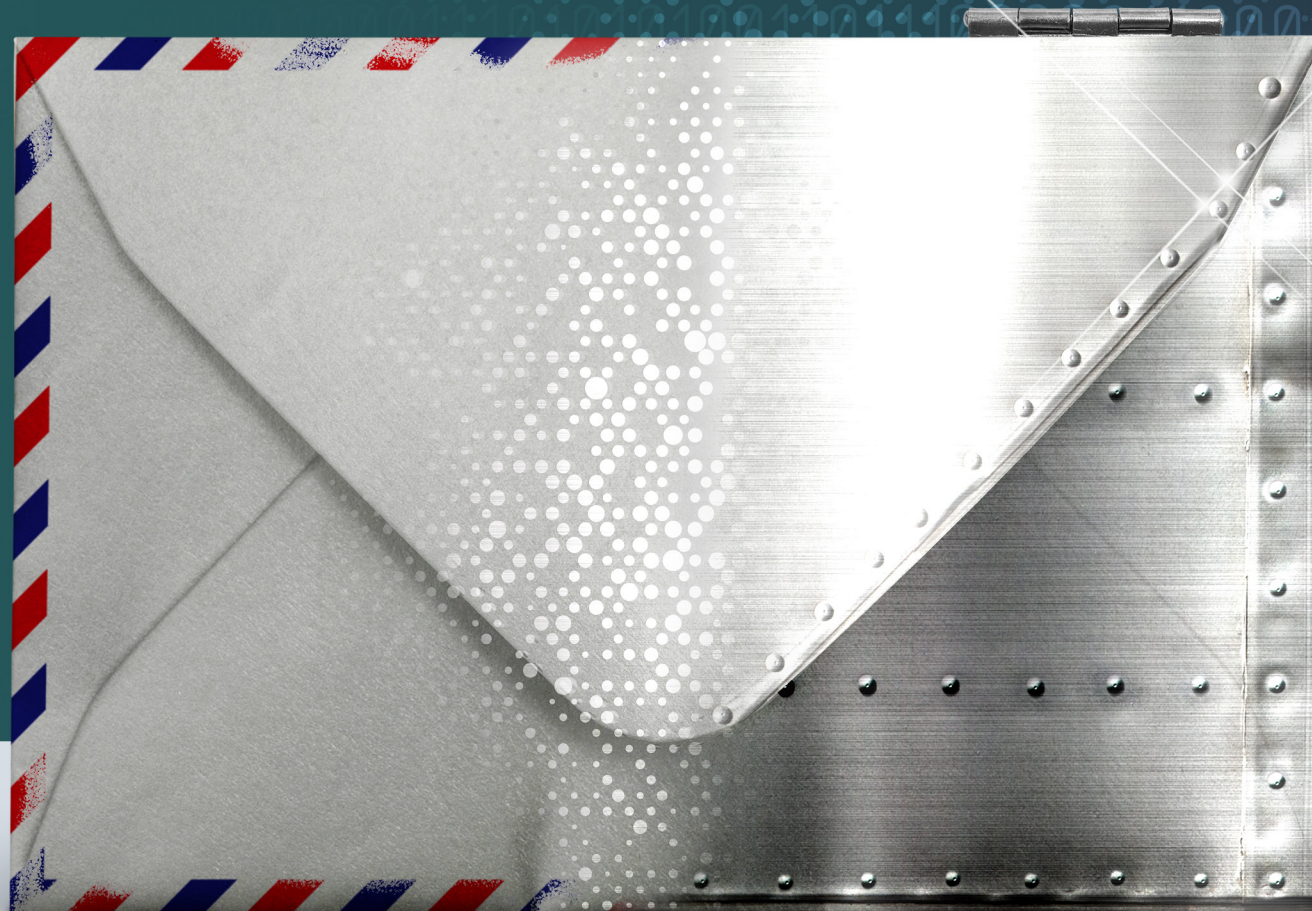
**David van Schaick**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
The Marketing Practice

Alongside quantified impact and emotional language, contrast was surprisingly compelling to participants in this study.

Contrast, according to Oxford English Dictionary, is the "state of being strikingly different from something else."

**What are your prospects willing to do to be strikingly different than what they are today?** What are they willing to do to remove or mitigate the risk of the unknowns or undervalued threats—market changes, industry trends, or hidden competitors?

You need to make the contrast between their current risky state and their possible future state very clear. It's a key part of a persuasive early-stage message.



make your prospects think *and* feel

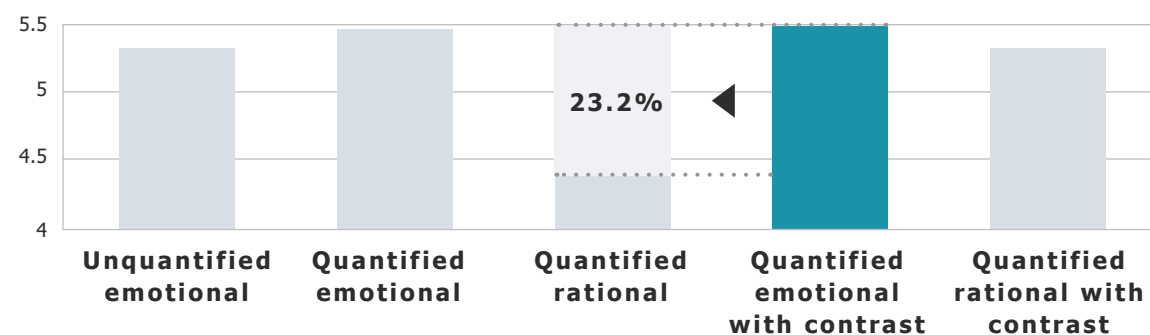
*quantify* your business impact

# quantified, by the numbers

The results of this study show that using specific numbers in your messaging to demonstrate business impact is more persuasive to early-stage prospects than unquantified claims.

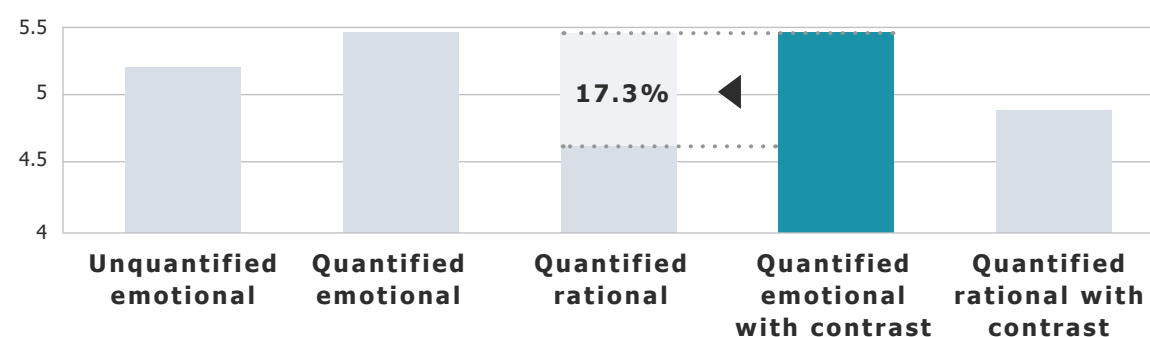
But just how much of an impact does quantified messaging make? Take a look.

## How large a problem do you believe you might have?



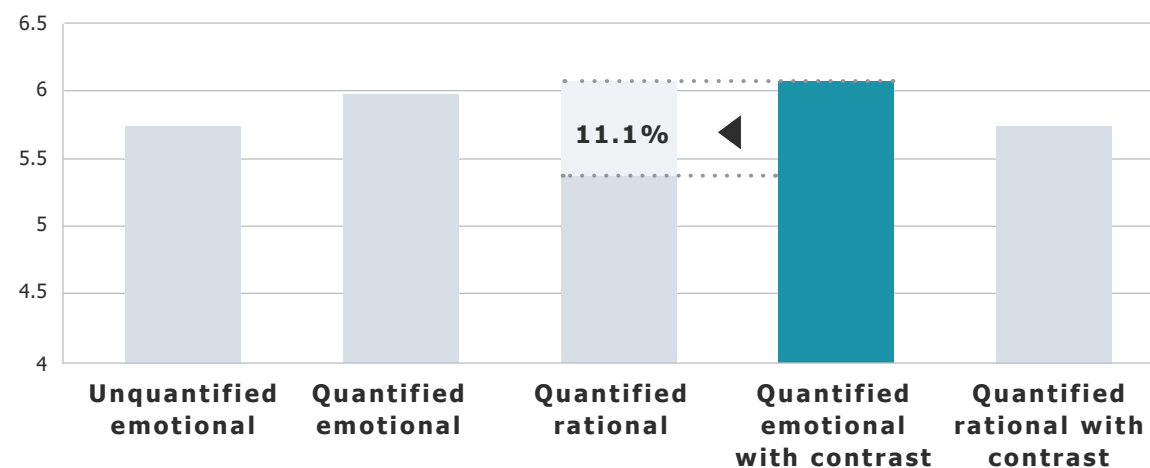
Quantified emotional messages made the problem feel more impactful than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message was less impactful by a **difference of 23.2 percent**.

## How urgent is it that you fix the problem?



Participants felt more urgency to act after reading quantified emotional messages than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message provided the least urgency by a **difference of 17.3 percent**.

## How willing are you to investigate solutions to this problem?



Participants were more willing to investigate a solution after reading the quantified emotional messages than other messages in the study. The quantified rational message lost by a **difference of 11.1 percent**.



## how numbers *persuade*

Quantifying the impact of the prospect's business challenge and your solution adds specific and tangible value to your message, making it more persuasive.

To early-stage prospects scanning your message, numbers stand out as concrete, actual, and real. They give prospects something to "grab on to" where nothing existed before.

### For example:



*The unquantified emotional message says, "Reduced unnecessary administrative and technology costs by finding efficiencies."*



*The quantified emotional message says, "An **average 18 percent cost savings** in unnecessary administrative and technology costs."*

The more specific quantified message scored better across every variable in this study. So, when possible, use specific numbers to illustrate the impact for your buyer.

## on justification



**Doug Hutton**

SVP Products  
B2B DecisionLabs

When you're trying to make a persuasive business case about your solution, you need to show your prospects the numbers. Which sounds more compelling and convincing?

*Sixty-three percent of SaaS enterprises see an uplift in new subscribers within seven days when they use our platform. Or Many SaaS enterprises see an uplift in new subscribers over the first week when they use our platform.*

If you said the one with the numbers, you're in good company.

In your demand gen messages, numbers stand out, representing promise and potential. They also seem firm and "real," helping your prospects make a business case to other stakeholders for investing in your solution.

But there's a catch: research in the field of Decision Science shows that **people make decisions on an emotional level before the rational part of the brain kicks in to justify those decisions.**

That means you need to give your potential buyers something to chew on that will elicit an emotional response.



make your prospects think *and* feel

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engage their *emotions*



# turn up the *emotion*

If marketers have avoided emotional language in their messaging, it's probably because they worry that it'll be perceived as "over the top" or dramatic. They don't want to make their buyers worry or feel "negative" feelings.

But the study results were clear: **participants responded more favorably to emotional language than to rational language, no matter what other messaging conditions were present.**

Emotional language is specific language that brings a problem to life. It helps you paint a picture your prospect can feel and experience at an (almost) sensory level. Use vibrant words and phrases that tap into one or more of the five senses by mentioning something a prospect could see, smell, hear, touch, or taste. You can also use words that evoke a strong emotional state, like "frustrating."

## Consider the differences between emotional and rational language used in the study:

 DO use emotional language:	 DON'T rely solely on rational language:
"hidden 'leaks'"	"finding and fixing"
"unseen cracks"	"reducing"
"your potential missed opportunity"	"improving"
"slowly, silently let your hard-won customers leak out"	"retain and increase your customer revenue"
"losing 15% more customer revenue than you should"	"losing 15% more customer revenue"
"value leaks"	"improve your customer support functions"
"frustrating"	"our advanced workflows solutions have helped companies like yours"

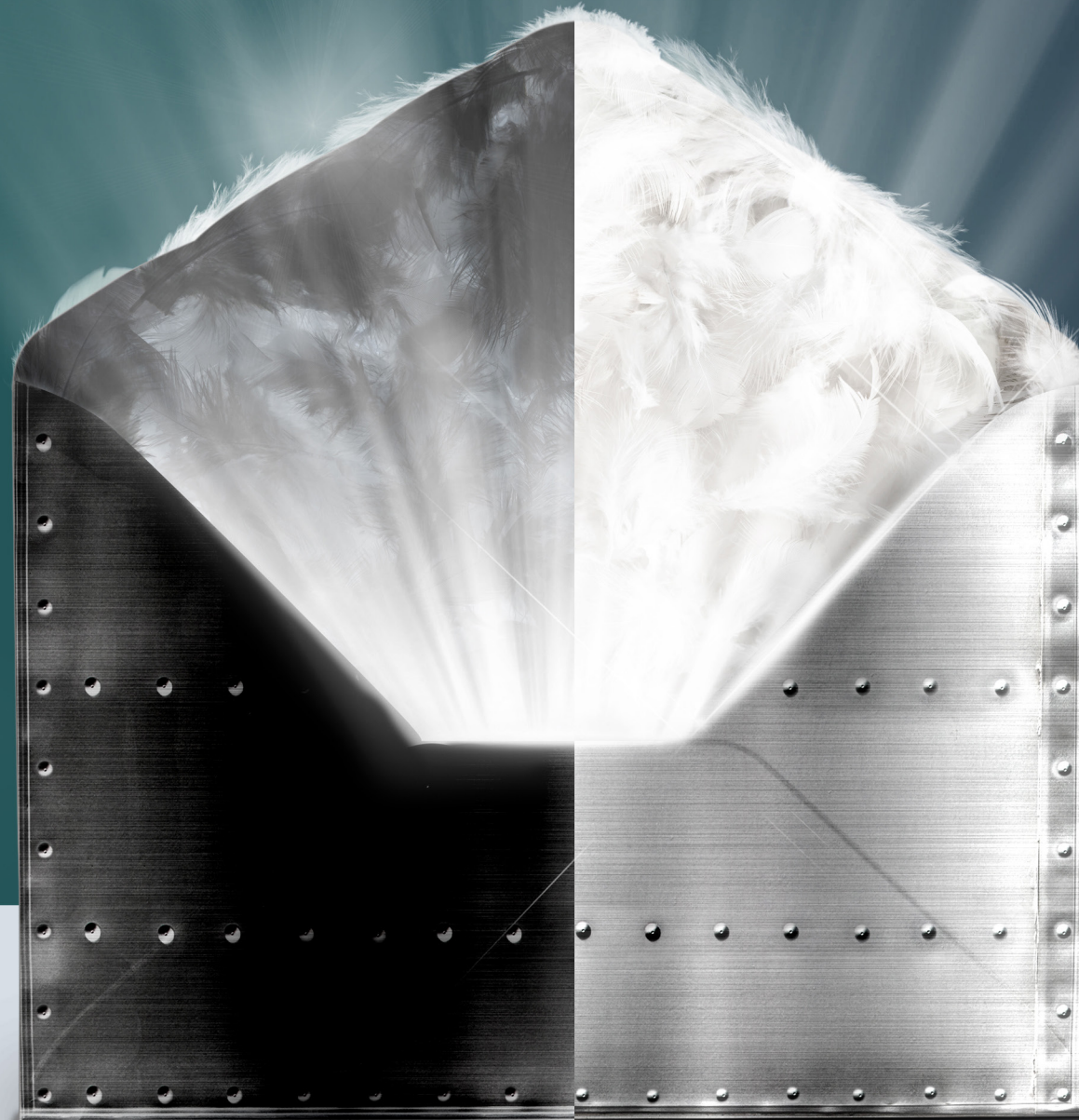
## Copywriting guidance from The Marketing Practice:

You don't have to be overly poetic or heavily negative in tone with your emotional language.

Instead, take the same ideas you'd use with rational language and inject them with a distinct emotional "flavor," mood, or disposition. This helps your prospect connect to the lived, human experience of their business challenge.

Your goal is to affect your prospect's emotions in an authentic and relatable way—*not* to be emotional for emotion's sake.





make your prospects think *and* feel

show value through *contrast*

# contrast

makes it memorable

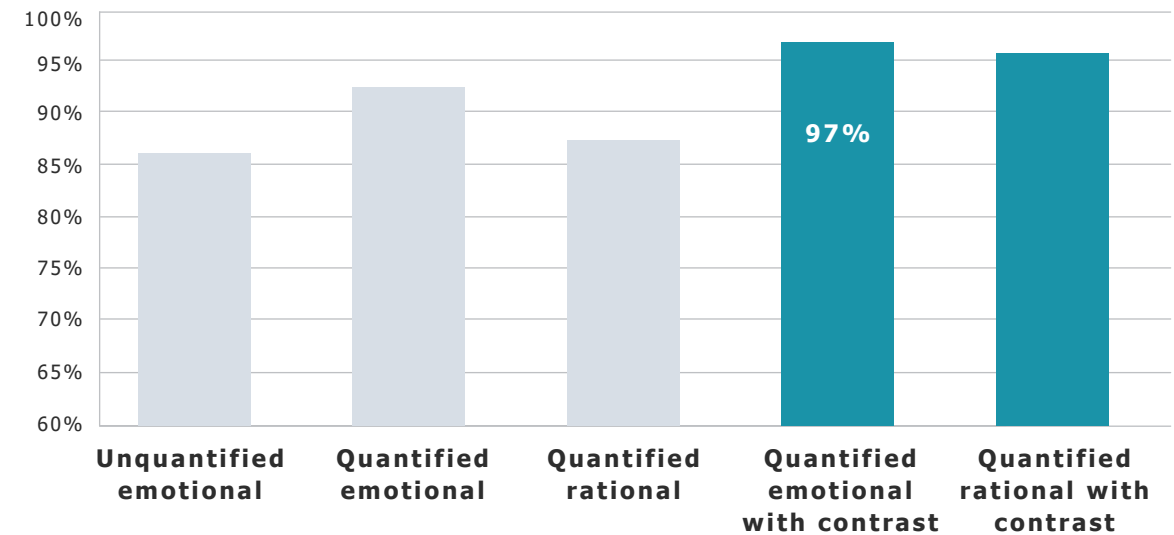
Contrast was the dark horse in this race.

'Contrast,' here, means comparing the risk and pain of the prospect's current state with the benefits and relief of the possible future state, so that they can see (and feel) the difference.

In the study, every test message condition with contrast beat every test message condition without contrast. And message number four—the **quantified emotional message with contrast**—was the most memorable of the five test conditions.

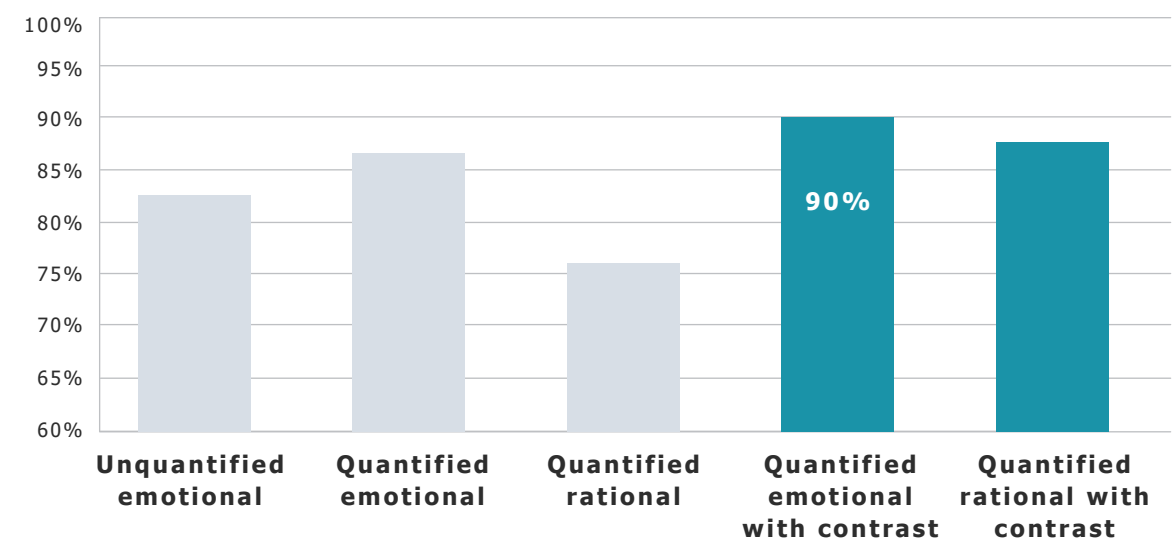
Adding contrast bolsters the buying vision by providing even more detail. When you include contrast, you remind your prospect of the risks of staying with the status quo. And you show them a future in which those challenges are solved by your solution.

What were the biggest problems the vendor described?  
(% correct)



Participants who read the emails with contrast remembered the problems described by the vendor more accurately than other groups.

Percent of recall questions answered correctly



Participants who read the emails with contrast answered more recall questions correctly than other groups.





# make your prospects *think and feel*

Getting prospects to notice you in a sea of messages on every platform is possibly the biggest challenge for marketers today.

But you don't have to guess what messaging works best to engage and persuade early-stage prospects. Now you know the three messaging elements that, when combined, set you apart and make your prospect pay attention.

Build early-stage messages that make people think *and* feel. It's a human way to talk to your prospects before they even know they need you. And when they realize you're speaking to them and their exact business challenge, they're primed for a deeper sales conversation.

## ► **QUANTIFY YOUR BUSINESS IMPACT**

Illustrate the business challenge and the solution through stats and metrics.

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## ► **ENGAGE THEIR EMOTIONS**

Include specific details people can feel.

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## ► **SHOW VALUE THROUGH CONTRAST**

Compare the current risk against the future benefits.



## about B2B DecisionLabs

B2B DecisionLabs is the only B2B research firm dedicated to studying how decision-makers frame value and make choices. Unlike traditional market research and advisory firms, B2B DecisionLabs conducts rigorous research studies based in several Decision Science disciplines:

- **Behavioral studies** – understand why buyers behave the way they do.
- **Neuroscience research** – observe what's going on inside their brains.
- **Field trials** – validate your approach in the real world.

[CONTACT B2B DECISIONLABS](#)

## about The Marketing Practice

The Marketing Practice (TMP) is the global, integrated B2B marketing agency built to provide a growth platform for technology enterprises. Three hundred and fifty specialist B2B marketers across six offices deliver measurable marketing results from brand to demand. Big name brands and fast-growth companies come to TMP for:

- **Brand strategy and activation.**
- **Account based marketing and demand generation** (direct and via the channel).
- **Media strategy and buying.**

[CONTACT THE MARKETING PRACTICE](#)

## authors



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Doug Hutton leads all product development and management activities at B2B DecisionLabs. He works with scientists and research partners to create a scientific foundation for solutions that help sales, marketing, and customer success teams have more successful customer conversations. Doug is co-author of *The Expansion Sale: Four Must-Win Conversations to Keep and Grow Your Customers*.



**David van Schaick**  
Chief Marketing Officer  
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David van Schaick has spent 15 years designing and running B2B marketing programmes for the likes of Salesforce, ServiceNow, and Xerox, as well as building one of the most successful agencies in B2B. He's a regular speaker and commentator on B2B marketing and behavioural science's role in interpreting and influencing buyer behavior.

## lead researcher



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