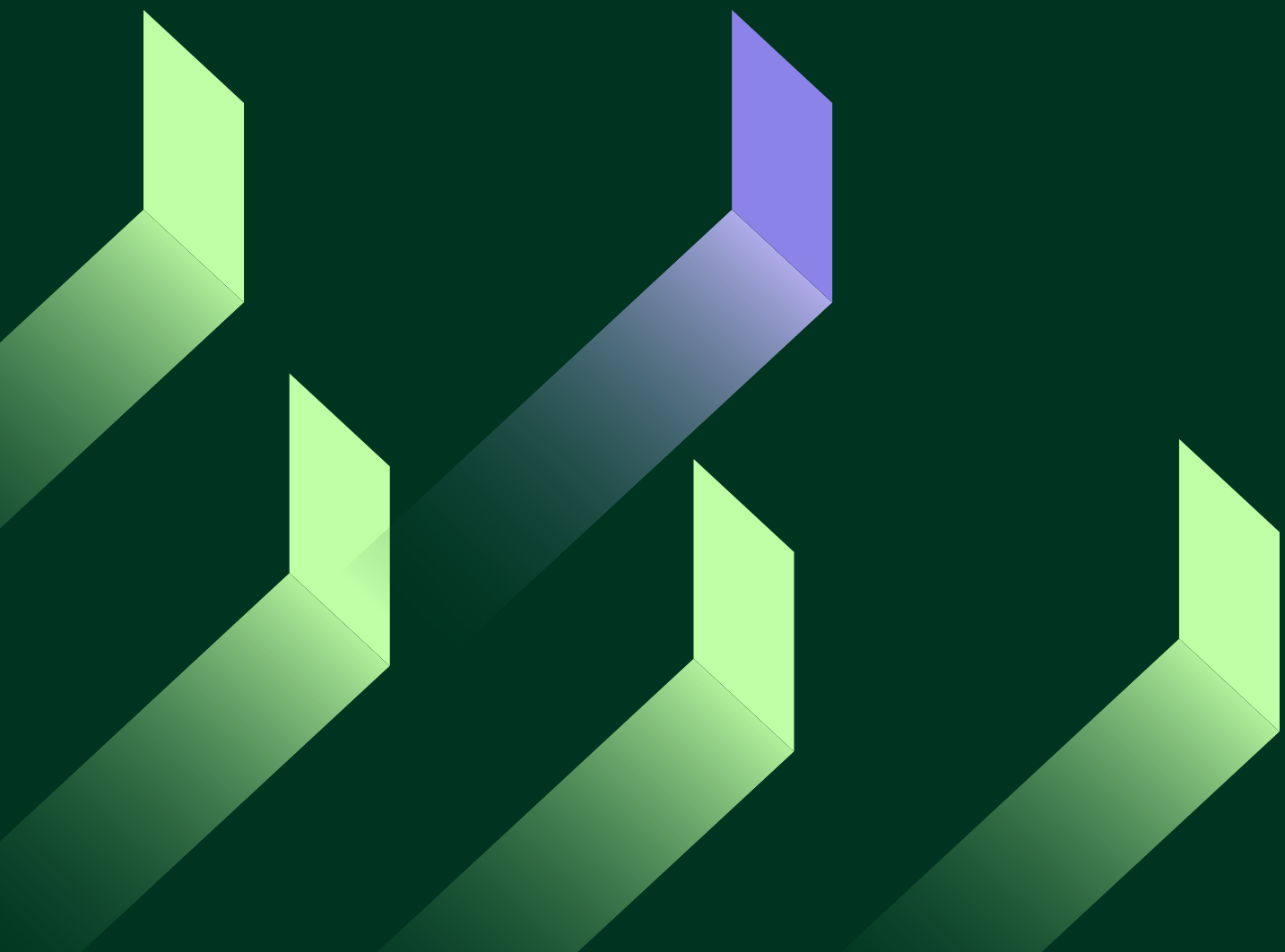
Brevo

Risky Business:

A Framework for Taking Responsible Risks

How B2B marketing leaders can help teams become more distinct without losing the plot



1 Executive summary

Marketing teams have become very good at answering what happened. We know how many people saw a campaign, clicked an email, opened a message, or entered a pipeline. We know how to report performance and optimise against a target. Marketers are wizards of accountability. But performance reporting has **trained teams to do more of what's already worked in the past** rather than discover what might work next, or differently.

AI is also playing its part in keeping this cycle going. It makes ideas and execution easier to produce, but it's also great at producing ideas already in circulation. **What's scarce now is distinctiveness.** As the bar for what looks relevant and distinctive keeps rising, standing out will require more than generating another good idea. It will require making bigger bets and taking responsibility for them.

> So how can we, as marketing leaders, create the conditions for our team to become more distinct, without becoming unhinged?

For one, we can't just ask our teams to be bolder. We need to **give them a way to make a strategic, calculated bet:** start with a real problem, define a defensible hypothesis, understand the upside, estimate what failure costs, agree on decision rights, and decide in advance what evidence will make the organisation continue, change or stop.

2 The risk we took

This paper starts with an awareness campaign we ran in Germany. The campaign gave us a bold idea and an uncomfortable internal debate that ultimately made us pull one of our ads. This experience gave us **a practical first-hand framework for distinguishing a stunt from a business experiment.**

This summer we had ten weeks to make an awareness campaign for the DACH market. We knew, based on a survey we conducted, that **too few people in Germany knew Brevo.** Smaller businesses didn't know us yet, or didn't realise that Sendinblue had become Brevo. Our challenge was to stand out in a market where almost every B2B brand sounds the same. With AI behind a lot of the thinking and writing in this space, almost every B2B brand speaks the same way. So we needed to break the script. The brief our CEO and I asked for was essentially this: **produce a 20-second video ad people would remember.** A marketer's dream brief.

So how did we approach it?

First, **the constraints and the goal.** We had a budget, a plan for who to reach and where, and ten weeks this summer to deliver. We also knew what message we wanted to get across.

What we didn't know was how big a risk to take. So we brought in an agency for the creative idea to let expertise balance the risk instead of gut alone. Call that doubt or call it wisdom. The idea we presented the agency with came straight from what Brevo does. We help companies send the right message to the right person at the right time, so the campaign should show the opposite: **a message that lands at exactly the wrong moment.**

One of the agency's pitches made us laugh. Then we spent a long time debating whether we laughed because it was funny, or because it was a bit uncomfortable. And was that a bad thing? **We decided to run it.**

Of the four versions we made, one hit some resistance at upload. **YouTube flagged it**, so we made a second version which they accepted. This felt like the perfect sweet spot. We found the border of pushing it and staying safe. We also found out YouTube has a very different tolerance than our team internally, and within half an hour we pulled one of the versions and let the other three run.

In week one on YouTube in Germany, we reached **88% of our forecast audience** at the cost per person we planned, with a **CPM 8% under the benchmark** for SaaS in Germany. Coverage reached as far as Australia and Korea with positive reactions.

So was this experience a bold bet or a stunt? Was it a success?

We all have a version of this story, an idea we backed on instinct that we wanted to test. **We don't lack courage; we lack a shared method for deciding which risks are worth taking.**

The rest of the paper takes this example and runs it backwards into **a framework for taking risk.** What are the questions we asked along the way, and which ones did we miss? And which ones should every marketing leader ask their team before a bold idea becomes a public decision?

3 The framework: stunt or business experiment?

A stunt is a risk that ends with attention. A business experiment is a risk you can defend, and that gives the organization insight and direction. This framework will challenge your team to measure their ideas and make that distinction before pitching it.

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1 Define the problem and success

What evidence-backed problem is this solving, and which numbers are we trying to improve and by when? If the result takes months to see impact, do we have a way to measure short-term success? For our campaign, the problem was a lack of awareness of who we were. **Our long-term goal was to increase brand lift**, measured through a follow-up survey.

The short-term signals we used included cost per view and watch time. They gave us an immediate indication of whether the content was reaching people and whether they were staying with it. **Those metrics were useful, but they were not the final answer.** A campaign can be efficient at generating views without changing what people know or think.

A responsible experiment defines the problem and success before it defines the creative.

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2 Why this idea?

What about your idea solves the problem? What does the idea connect to in the audience's experience? What do we want people to feel, remember or do? **How does the idea serve the message rather than simply attract attention?** Our product helps businesses send the right message to the right person at the right time. Our campaign flips the script, showing awkward, relatable, funny moments our audience will remember.

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3 Do the right people see it before it ships?

Bring in the few people who would catch what marketers can't (legal, local market, platform rules). **Inform everyone else. Don't seek approval from the whole company.** But do educate people about what you are doing and why.

This campaign was meant to push boundaries. We aligned on the brief and goal with our CEO and consulted legal. **The creative decision itself had to remain within marketing's expertise.** That was our judgement call to make. But colleagues needed more context about the concept before they encountered the final execution. We had preserved autonomy, but **we had not created enough shared understanding.**

The lesson is not that everyone should approve bold work. It is that **everyone should know who owns the decision, what is being tested, and how the organisation will respond if the risk materialises.**

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4 Do you know where the line is and how to pull out or do damage control?

Where is "too far," and what makes you pull it? **Agree on this before launch.**

In our case, we weren't sure where the line was. We worked with an external agency exactly for this reason, to steer risk in the right direction. The ad platforms themselves also provide their own boundaries. As this was a digital campaign, our exit strategy was simply to remove the ads.

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5 What is the cost of being wrong?

We will all face failure. This step isn't to discourage teams from thinking creatively, but to frame their idea practically. **Can the business survive if this idea fails? Are you willing to own this failure?** We made four films, so removing one didn't cost us a campaign.

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6 What will we learn, and what next?

What do we need to learn about our audience's response? Did people notice the idea, recognise themselves in it, remember the message or change their perception of the brand? Did different audiences respond differently? What did we learn about the creative choices that helped or hindered that response? And what will we learn about our own organisation? Where was our tolerance for risk? Who needed more context? Which decisions were clear, and which were not? Finally, **what evidence will make us continue, change, stop or repeat the experiment?**

A responsible risk is not just designed to produce an outcome. **It is designed to help us learn about the audience, the idea and the organisation,** and to turn that learning into direction.

4 Cultivating big ideas: the CMO has to empower risk

As CMOs, we need to create the space for responsible risk as part of the routine. We don't need rebellious ideas for their own sake; **we need well-thought-out moves.** Marketing teams live by metrics, which is a strength. Data makes us more accountable and helps us build intuition. What we need to do is **give our teams a way to act on that intuition**, because that is where our differentiation lies.

The CMO has to create another routine alongside reporting: **a routine for discovery.** That means making space for ideas that are not fully proven, while still requiring them to be connected to a real problem and a clear learning objective. It means asking not only, "What will this deliver?" but also, "What are we trying to find out?"

A framework gives creativity a structure strong enough to survive scrutiny. It also changes the conversation after the campaign. If teams believe that only successful ideas will be celebrated, they will avoid ideas with uncertain outcomes. Leaders should ask what the team expected, what happened, what surprised them, what they would repeat and what they would change.

A failed idea can still be a valuable experiment if it produces a better decision. A successful campaign can still be a weak experiment if the team cannot explain why it worked or what to do next.

That's the role of the CMO... **To create the space for risk, sharpen the bet, and build a mindset of discovery.**

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