



Executive  
Marketing Recruitment.

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# Time for a reality check on B2B: Purpose vs. Positioning? Lessons from the frontline

A report from tml Partners from their recent roundtable debate with marketing leaders in the B2B sector.

Event in association with:





A really good event. I get invited to several of these roundtables and the quality of the content is always mixed. I would say this was by far the best one I have attended!

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# Introduction

tml Partners recently hosted a roundtable bringing together Chief Marketing Officers and Marketing Directors from leading B2B firms to discuss purpose versus positioning. The attendees list included:

**Abhinav Kumar**, CMO, Tata Consultancy Services  
**Antonia Wade**, CMO, Capita  
**Craig Welch**, Head of EMEA Marketing, MSCI  
**Frances Fenemore**, CMO, ComplianceOnline  
**Isha Chander**, Marketing and Sales Director, 6point6  
**Jamie Moran**, CMO, JLL  
**Jane Wilkinson**, Executive Adviser to B2B Companies  
**Julia Chester**, European Marketing Director, Autovista  
**Kate Cox**, CMO, Moneypenny  
**Kay Baldwin-Evans**, Group Head of Brand and Marketing, QuinetiQ  
**Lucy Canning**, Director of Brand, Marketing and BD, Grant Thornton  
**Paul Osgood**, Global Head of Internal Comms, Clifford Chance  
**Peter Richards**, Director of Marcomms, Protolabs  
**Sarah Speake**, CMO, Speake Up Consulting  
**Shallu Behar-Sheeha**, CMO, Starleaf  
**Stephen Yeo**, EMEA Marketing Director, Panasonic B2B

Rosa Wilkinson, B2B lead at Clear, M&C Saatchi group's global strategy consultancy, started the conversation with her thoughts on this topic.

Rosa began her presentation by looking at definitions of these two strategic focus areas.

**Purpose** is an articulation of an organisation's ambition and beliefs: what it wants to become, achieve or create. It is for internal alignment and codifies culture and priorities. It should inform decision-making at every level.

**Positioning** on the other hand is an articulation of the unique promise the organisation offers to its customers in the marketplace. It relates to customer needs now and drives the go-to-market approach.

Rosa then outlined and expanded on her seven lessons from the frontline.

1. Business is inherently emotional, so purpose and positioning matter more.
2. Choose the right tools for the job, what do you need to do first – decide this by looking at what you're trying to achieve.
3. Purpose isn't a marketing job, it's much bigger than this. It's organisation-wide, top to bottom.
4. Purpose can fall flat if it's expected to do the job of positioning on its own.
5. What is there already, do you actually need a new purpose or position?
6. Look at the risks of a purpose/ positioning project and mitigate these before starting.
7. Be mindful of the power of a single organising idea.

The conversation then opened up around the table to a lively discussion which centred on five main themes.

1. What should come first, purpose or positioning?
2. Who owns purpose?
3. What makes a compelling purpose?
4. What impact does purpose have on a business?
5. What is the role of the CMO?



**Simon Bassett**  
Managing Director

simon.bassett  
@tmlpartners.com

0203 908 4444



## What should come first, purpose or positioning?

Before looking at which should come first, it's important to understand if the business is ready for a project of this sort. Timing is everything. "Is the organisation ready and is the timing right", asks Stephen Yeo. The status of the business should inform what sort of project the business should undertake. Projects of this sort need engagement at every level in order to be successful, it needs to be driven from the top down.

Both purpose and positioning were seen as essential parts of a business' operation but they shouldn't be worked on at the same time, as it's too confusing for internal and external stakeholders. As Rosa highlighted in her introduction, they play very different roles within organisations and so need to be articulated clearly and separately, yet support one another.



### Purpose shouldn't change, positioning should

In terms of which should come first, purpose was seen as a constant, underlying part of the business that needs to be uncovered not created. "Purpose shouldn't change, positioning should" commented Rosa, which was widely agreed with. That said, purpose is perhaps the first port of call for a business, then "use the purpose as a lens to inform positioning" said Antonia Wade. This shouldn't be confused with purpose doing the job of positioning, it just needs to resonate with and inform it.





# Who owns purpose?

The conversation then turned specifically to purpose and its ownership: where should it sit in an organisation? It's not just a marketing idea, the CMO can't be the most senior person on the project, it needs to have stakeholder involvement and needs to engage at all levels. On the flipside, it can't be a directive from the CEO either. Without the whole organisation on board, it won't be successful.

Getting the board involved is key, and their involvement needs to be open and inclusive. "Boards can be engaging and boards can be insular" said Sarah Speake. Deciding behind closed doors on the purpose of the organisation and then giving an instruction to the rest of the business is not the way to communicate purpose. Businesses which promote their purpose successfully and meaningfully have involved and empowered their

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people at every level to input to, and be part of, the purpose.

Within a business there tend to be many different departments that want a piece of the purpose project. "Branding sits with marketing, HR wants to own employee engagement" comments Jane Wilkinson. "It's legal and compliance as well" adds Jamie Moran. In addition, the ethics committee will also want to align with a strong organisational purpose. This is why "it has to come from the top down" said Stephen. Leadership and the board need to work together to bring their organisation together for the common purpose.

## What makes a compelling purpose?

A compelling purpose "needs to be relevant for all, and that is a difficult brief" said Stephen. Internally, it needs to engage employees at every level. Externally it may have to engage clients across multiple service lines or perhaps relate to global markets. So how do you achieve this enormous task? The group centred on simplicity as being the most sensible strategy. "You shouldn't have to go and find a purpose, it's sitting there to uncover" said Rosa. It should be something that is already in the DNA of your organisation.

When starting a project around purpose, organisations need to look at what's already there and use this rather than create a new purpose. In the current business world, being genuine is what customers find compelling. Clients will quickly see through a synthetically created purpose.

A compelling purpose shouldn't be too specific. It needs to be able to filter down through an organisation and all its business units. Returning to Rosa's first point in the introduction, business is emotional and so purpose needs to be something that people can grab hold of on that level and internally, commit to and externally, engage with. "You have to prove it and commit to it" said Antonia.





## What impact does purpose have on a business?

The group gave many examples of purpose impacting positively on organisations. Internally, staff engagement and retention statistics were often higher for purpose-driven organisations. "Performance is better with clear purpose" said Jamie. These organisations are also able to attract the best talent. "It's quantifiable by the number of people drawn to organisations because of clear purpose" highlights Simon Bassett. "The millennial workforce wants to be associated with a brand with purpose" comments Shallu Behar-Sheeha.

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Companies like to work with companies that are socially sensitive and have a social purpose

Externally, brand loyalty tends to be higher when a clear purpose is articulated. "Companies like to work with companies that are socially sensitive and

have a social purpose" continued Shallu. Investors are also making purpose a factor in their due diligence on potential investments, they're looking at "where exactly their money is going and not just the return" said Craig Welch.

On the flipside, purpose can impact profitability. Everyone agrees that people like to do business with purposeful organisations, but "this can diverge when purpose starts to drive business decisions away from the most profitable path" highlights Jamie. However, there is a sea change in the focus of business and the direction of flow appears to be towards purpose rather than pure profitability, so ultimately early adopters should win out in the end. Paul Osgood highlights the purist perspective as "not looking to gain market share but thinking about the core of the organisation and our attraction in the market". Perhaps this is the way in which business will go.



## What is the role of marketing?

“Marketing can’t own purpose, but they can know how to leverage it” said Craig. Externally, it is the role of marketing to feed purpose into communications and promote a consistent message that clients can engage with. Internally, “marketers can help the top bite, and make purpose successful within an organisation” said Jane.



When we look at purpose, how do we measure it?

“When we look at purpose, how do we measure it?” asks Abhinav Kumar. It is also the role of the CMO to demonstrate

to the business the impact that purpose has on their organisation. The metrics for purpose can be a little hard to define but they are there. Internally, you have employee engagement, staff retention and recruitment statistics to measure. Externally its “client retention, input at the top of the funnel, net promoter score and brand recognition” said Stephen.

The CMO can pull together these metrics and provide the business with evidence of the impact that purpose has had, ultimately with the aim of increasing buy in, maintaining investment and ensuring the longevity of an organisation’s purpose.

## Conclusion

“Differentiation is hard in the B2B space, purpose presents an opportunity, use it to define your organisation’s positioning” said Antonia.



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From a marketing recruitment perspective in the B2B space “the biggest driver to businesses tends to be martech, transformation and automation” said Simon Bassett. “However, the upper quartile of B2B companies are starting to have conversations about purpose. This is something we’ve seen far more of in the consumer world and it looks like B2B is going to follow suit”.



# About our Co-Hosts, Clear M&C Saatchi

Clear is a global strategy consultancy specialising in brand, experience & innovation.

Our speaker, Rosa Wilkinson leads the thinking and growth for our B2B and Corporate practice. She delivers global engagements, combining a broad range of brand and marketing disciplines, including insight, strategy, identity, innovation, capabilities and internal engagement. She particularly enjoys working with clients in regulated environments or with complex stakeholder sets and value chains.

A history graduate, Rosa has 15 years' experience in brand consultancy. She started out at The Value Engineers and developed a deep specialism in branding businesses at Dragon Rouge (where she led the London Corporate strategy team). Over the course of her career she's been proud to support clients such as British Airways, Chartered Accountants Worldwide and ICAEW, Allen & Overy, Dentons, Rio Tinto, Invesco, National Grid and Givaudan.



## **Rosa Wilkinson**

Director, Corporate & B2B  
Clear Strategy

[Rosa.Wilkinson@clearstrategy.com](mailto:Rosa.Wilkinson@clearstrategy.com)

0203 735 1802







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tml Partners is an international executive recruitment firm specialising in senior marketing appointments.

With a team of highly experienced consultants, we provide specialist marketing expertise that is unrivalled by generalist headhunters and in-house resourcing teams. We network extensively in this community continually adding value with thought provoking events and

publications to help facilitate the agenda for the marketing leaders of tomorrow.

Finding the right marketing talent is far from obvious and ineffective hiring is high risk. tml Partners mitigate this risk with a truly dynamic perspective on hiring the best marketing talent. We're trusted and connected networkers in the senior marketing community and spend a lot of time understanding the motivations and building meaningful relationships with the best, hard to find, passive talent.



**Simon Bassett**  
Managing Director

simon.bassett  
@tmlpartners.com

0203 908 4444



**Charlie Green**  
Partner

charlie.green  
@tmlpartners.com

0203 908 4446