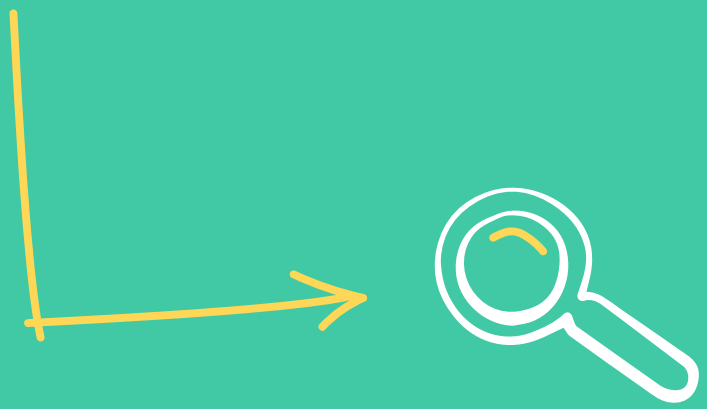
VansonBourne

Brand research

Our insight & analysis playbook



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Hey, we 100% get it, if you're reading this intro you almost certainly buy into the importance of brand. Inherently believing in a brand's ability to fully encapsulate your commercial proposition and its associated values; whilst helping underpin strategic direction and - when appropriately supported - bottom-line growth.

Okay, all of that is a given. How, though, do you establish the health of your brand - particularly within the context of a rapidly changing and evolving commercial landscape? Furthermore, how do you identify potential opportunities and threats? Plus, what about ascertaining the degree of brand value alignment with your customers and prospects? Brand research is a key diagnostic tool in helping answer these questions and in providing the associated business direction.

This, ultimately, is where the idea for an analysis playbook arose. In client calls and conversations we are often posed similar 'how would you approach?' and 'what would it look like?' type questions in relation to specific brand challenges and the related methodologies and outputs.

Our playbook is designed to share a number of the insight approaches we regularly employ in conducting brand research. That's not to say the document is entirely comprehensive - it can't be, given individual diagnostics and KPIs differ across businesses, verticals and territories. Equally, we don't know everything - it would be rather arrogant and hubristic if we thought we did! That said, we do know quite a lot, the team having conducted countless strategic brand audits, trackers and positioning activities over many years.

Delivering directional value

Brand level capabilities

Tackling brand challenges

Brand level capabilities

When executed well, brand research delivers marketplace analysis which reveals strengths and weaknesses in your positioning (in a competitive context). Providing actionable insight to support brand development and optimise go-to-market strategies

At an overarching level, brand research has the ability to support you in...

Landscape understanding

Trends (and shifts), new market entrants/ trailblazers, etc.

Brand value/ strength monitoring

KPI scorecard-ing, attribute profiling - assessment of success, etc.

Proposition decoding

Understanding the core DNA - through brand and experiential lenses

Customer acquisition analysis

Defining the sweet-spot for consumer targeting and prioritisation

Rejector diagnosis

Demographically behaviourally and attitudinally - identifying areas of consideration/ trial unlock

Marcomms refinement

Establishing the most impactful leavers to driving cut-through and advocacy

Tackling brand challenges

Establishing brand appeal, perceptions and strengths/ weaknesses - across audiences

Providing a snapshot view of how your proposition is perceived (within a competitive set content)

Informed through reputational benchmarking and diagnosis

Awareness	Experience and usage	Image
Recall (spontaneous)	Brands used	Associations
Recognition (prompted)	Future usage intent	Attributes:
	Brand change likelihood	Stability
	Satisfaction	Benefit
	Loyalty	Relationship
	Advocacy	Innovation
		Strengths/weaknesses
		Uniqueness

Identifying, as well prioritising, the levers and messaging to be focussed upon, in order to win

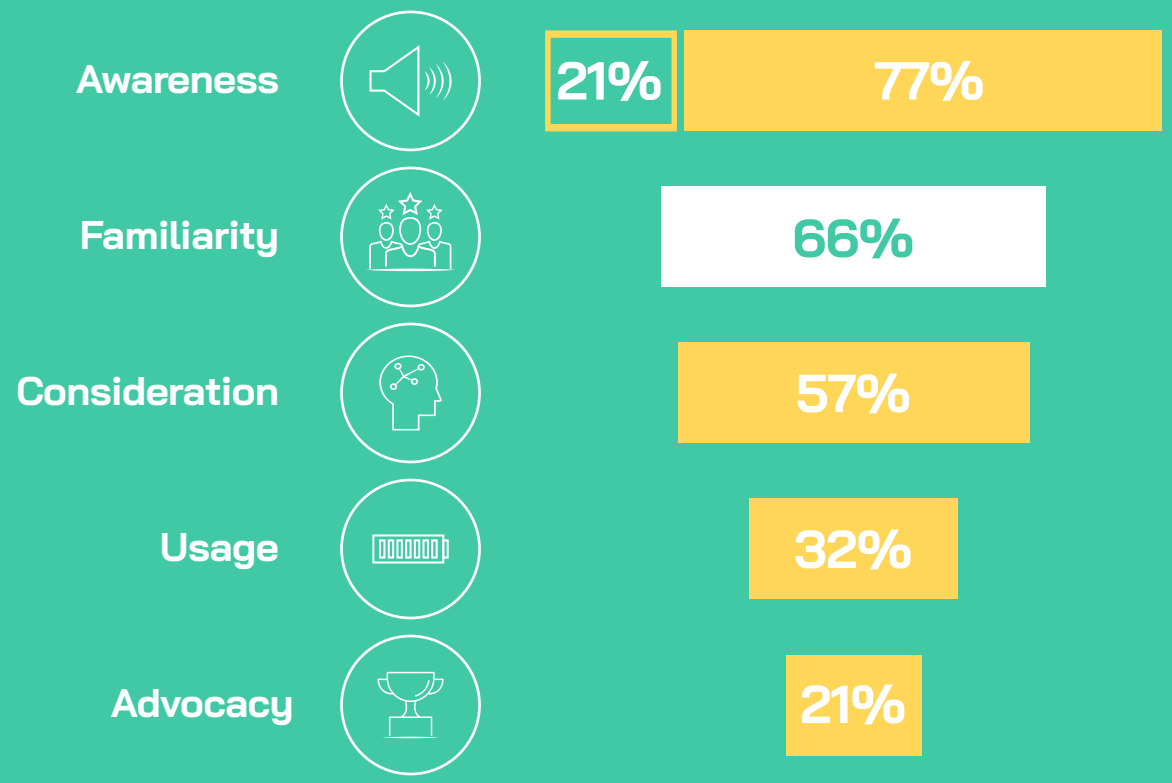
Allied to judicious message testing - establishing:

- **A** Appreciation
- **B** Brand fit
- **C** Communication impact (rational and emotional)
- **D** Desired effect

Doing so across audiences - customers and prospects alike, to aid appropriate message targeting

Understanding & unpacking brand funnel erosion

Brand funnel KPIs



The classic brand funnel remains a key conceptual framework in helping analyse performance - establishing areas of strength and weakness across the dimensions of awareness, familiarity, consideration, usage and advocacy.

As an illustration, 'indifferent' brands have very skinny funnels - with low levels of awareness, usage and advocacy. Brands which are liked, but not loved, exhibit high awareness and usage levels, but low advocacy - signalling a lack of a true emotional connection. Loved brands have the most robust funnels - with strong performance across all brand dimensions.

Additional brand KPIs

8.39

Brand health rating

Based on rational attribute scoring

35%

Top-of-mind perceptions

% completely positive

72%

Net promoter score (NPS)

% promoters - % detractors

81%

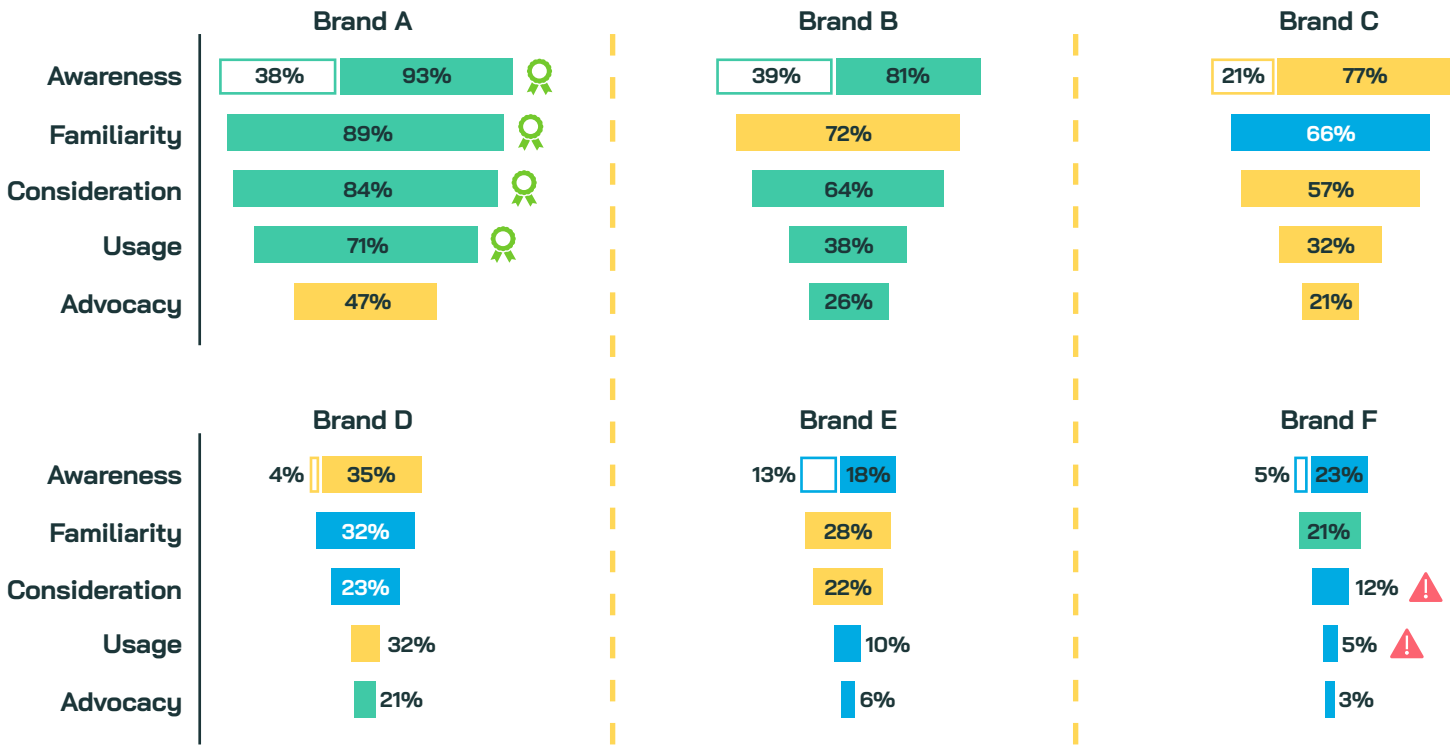
Trust

% very trustworthy

Framing within a competitive context

Whilst the overall shape of the brand funnel provides considerable insight, the illumination gleaned from the conversion rates between each funnel stage can be equally powerful. This is particularly the case in identifying potential pain-points across a brand's purchase-path.

Equally important is viewing the brand metrics within a competitive set context - providing associated benchmarking. Helping answer the question: 'Are these good scores?'



Key: Top brand ; Top third ; Middle third ; Bottom third ; Bottom brand ;
Colour coding based on conversion from previous measure, relative to other brands shown. Awareness shown as unaided and aided

Core brand equity metrics

Usage

Familiarity & consideration

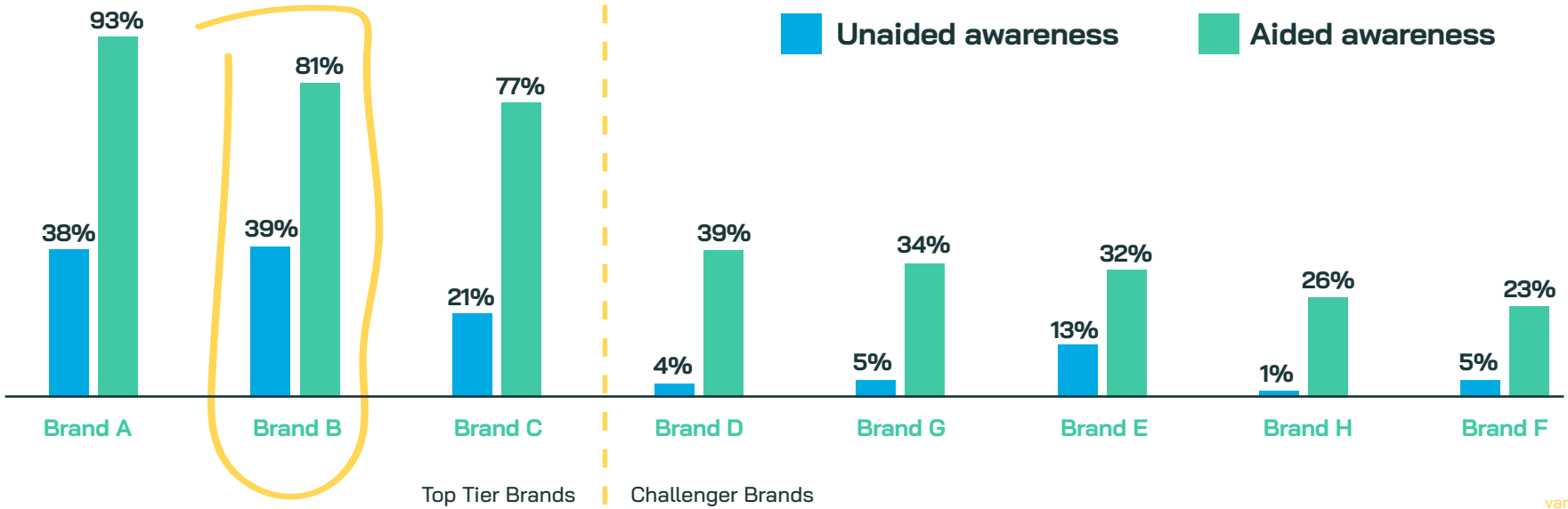
Perceptions

Brand awareness provides a read on the degree of familiarity with your brand, such a measure is though, in itself, a relatively blunt instrument. To more effectively gauge how impressionable your brand is, you really want to assess 'unaided' and 'aided brand' awareness.

Unaided awareness enables you to gain a measure of those who express knowledge of a brand on a spontaneous, unprompted, basis (recall). Whilst aided awareness establishes those who express knowledge of a brand when prompted (recognition).

Through intelligent question design (and inclusion of a mix of closed and open-ended questions) you can incorporate both dimensions.

It is worth highlighting that unaided awareness is strongly correlated with brand consideration, preference and loyalty. Whilst aided awareness is often a symptom of latent consciousness - an unclear, residual, reminiscence of the brand and/or a lack of relevance.



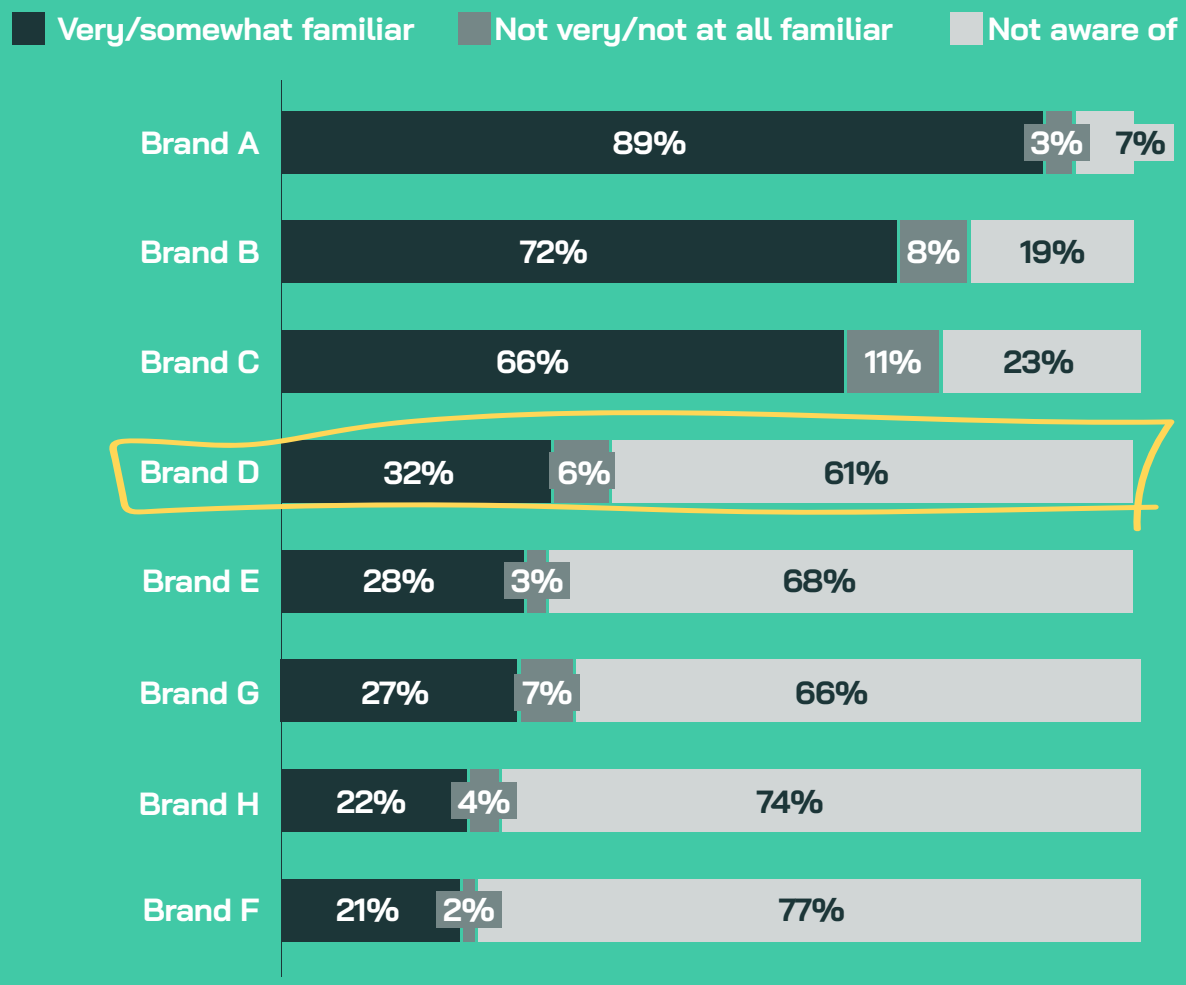
Familiarity

Awareness is good. Familiarity is better.

Brand fame and familiarity are fundamentally different concepts. In essence, awareness is the basic recognition that the brand exists - its name recognition. Being known though is not the same as being known *for something*.

Brand familiarity comes in degrees, it means an individual retains enough base knowledge to hold a related opinion. It is imperative to building and maintain a powerful brand - letting your customers and prospects know who you are, what you offer, why you offer it, as well as why it is important.

To make optimal brand decisions, a business needs sight of both the awareness and familiarity metrics.



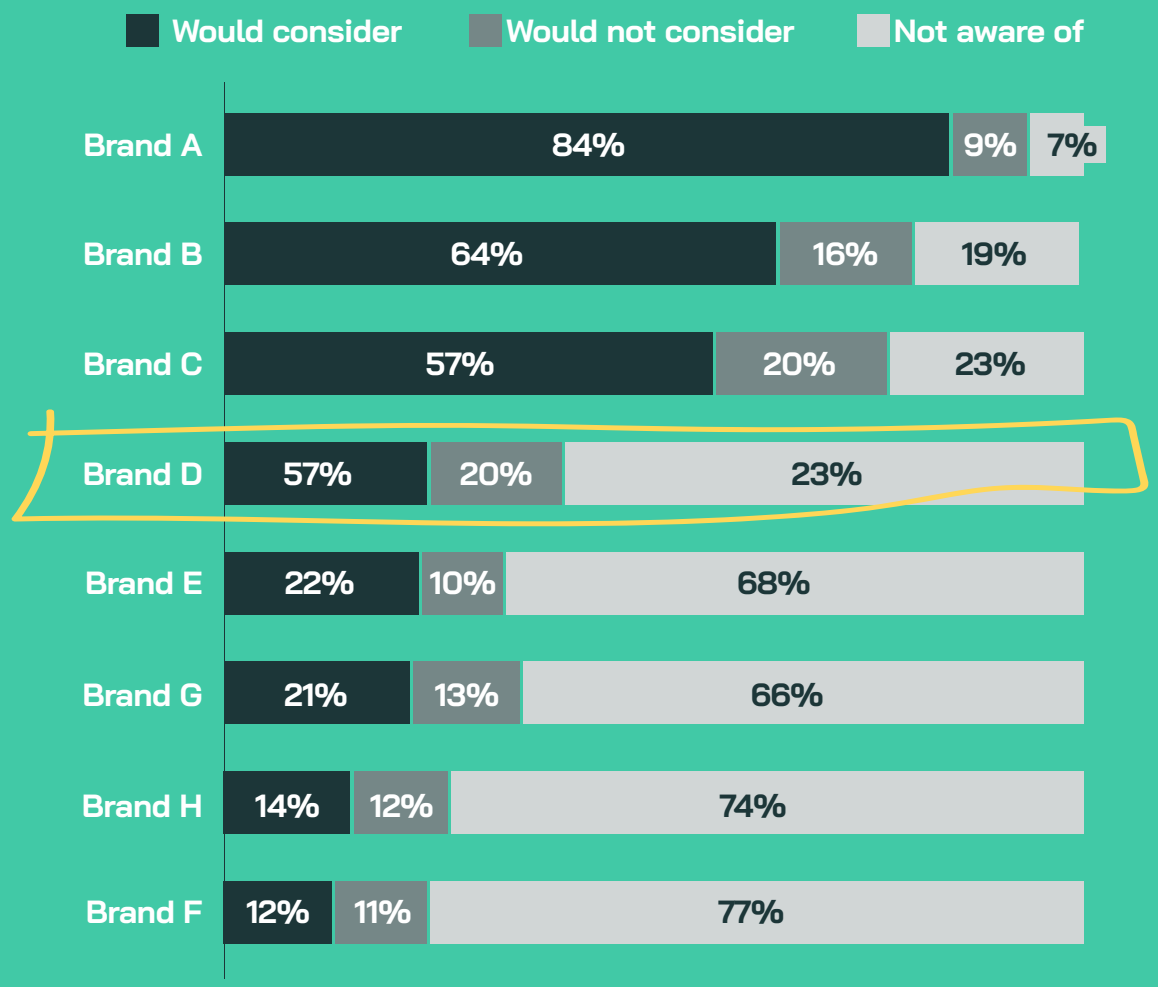
Consideration

Consideration is whether or not an individual will contemplate purchasing from a brand.

For many businesses the metric often gets lost in the marketing mix - with general awareness building activity, as well as conversion tactics, taking precedence. The short sightedness in doing so neglects the reality that a whole swathe of prospects can be aware of a proposition, but will never buy the brand offering.

Clearly, existing customers are already aware of a brand - and, by definition - actively consider it. It is however highly important to acknowledge that this set of customers is much smaller than those who are aware of your brand. So, how do you get more buyers? By driving brand consideration.

Brand consideration is essential to building brand relevance - it is therefore an important dimension to measure. Equally, it can help inform and shape the trusted content required for customer growth - positively impacting the purchase journey.

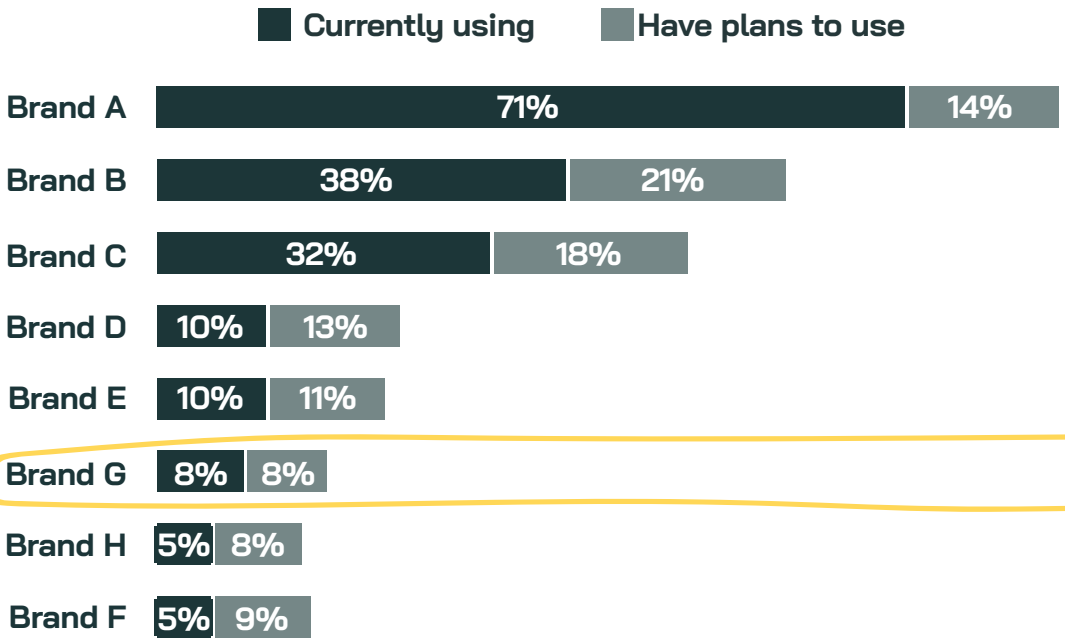


Usage

The usage metrics largely speak for themselves. That said, competitive set framing is always contextually beneficial (to assess relative performance).

Equally, gaining a read across geographies and audience demographics can be most illuminating - helping direct areas of focus and targeting activity (given specific instances of brand under/over-indexing).

Future or planned usage intent is also of value - providing a measure of the latent potential that a brand could or should unlock.

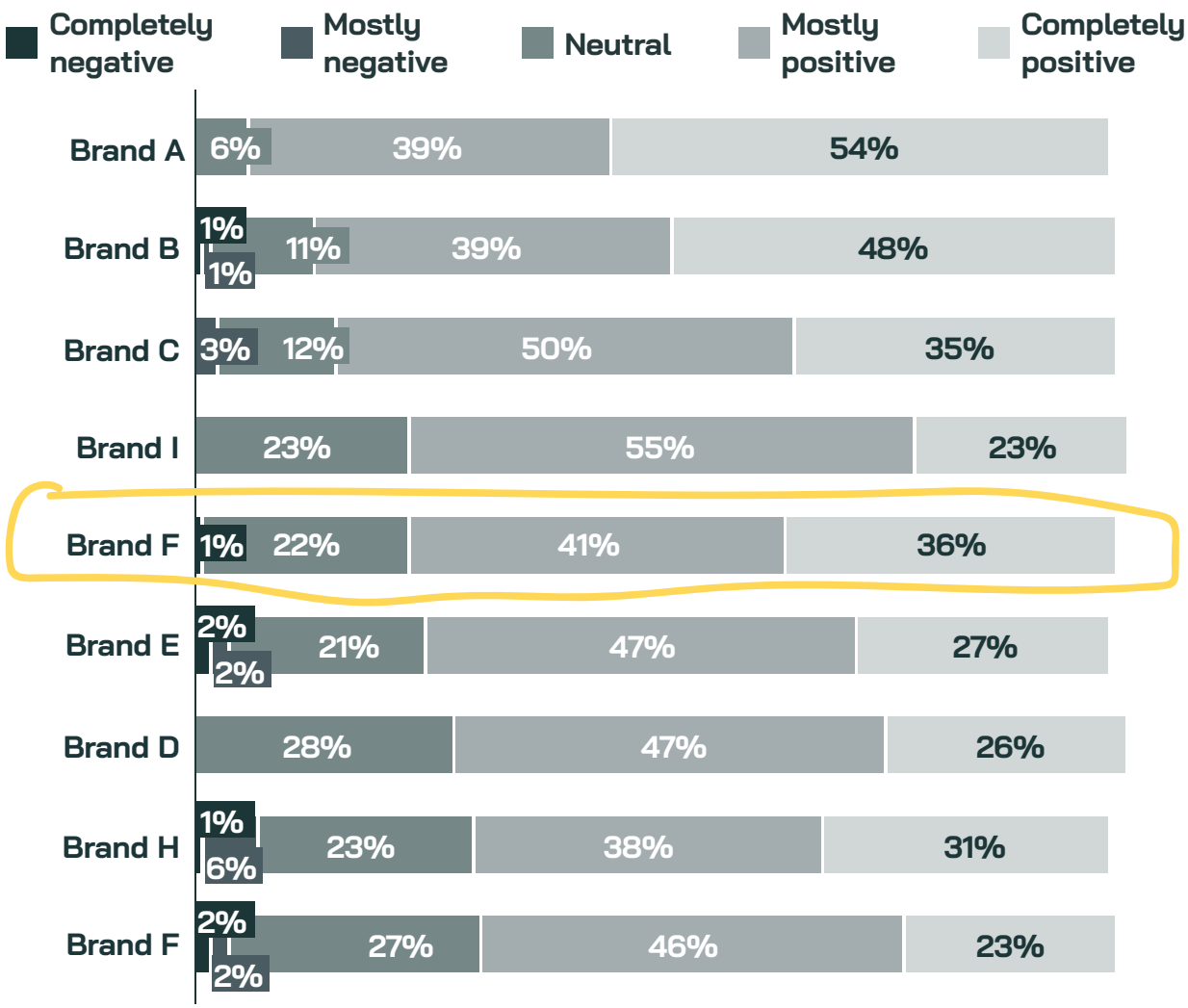


	US (200)	UK (100)	1,000 - 2,999 employees (116)	3,000 or more employees (184)
Brand A	68%	79%	73%	70%
Brand B	41%	31%	35%	39%
Brand C	36%	24%	36%	29%
Brand D	13%	6%	11%	10%
Brand E	9%	12%	11%	9%
Brand G	6%	14%	5%	10%
Brand H	6%	5%	6%	5%
Brand F	4%	7%	5%	5%

Perceptions

Brand perception is essentially how a brand is viewed - its qualities and degree of differentiation - shaped via a multitude of awareness/comms channels, as well as through direct proposition interaction(s). Let's also remember that positive perception is an essential plank of creating and maintaining brand loyalty.

Marketing industry heavyweights often underline that it can take between 3-5 years to dramatically change brand perceptions. A statement which intuitively feels as if it holds water - even if it's difficult to definitively prove.



Brand analysis drill-down

Potential growth

Differentiation

Standouts

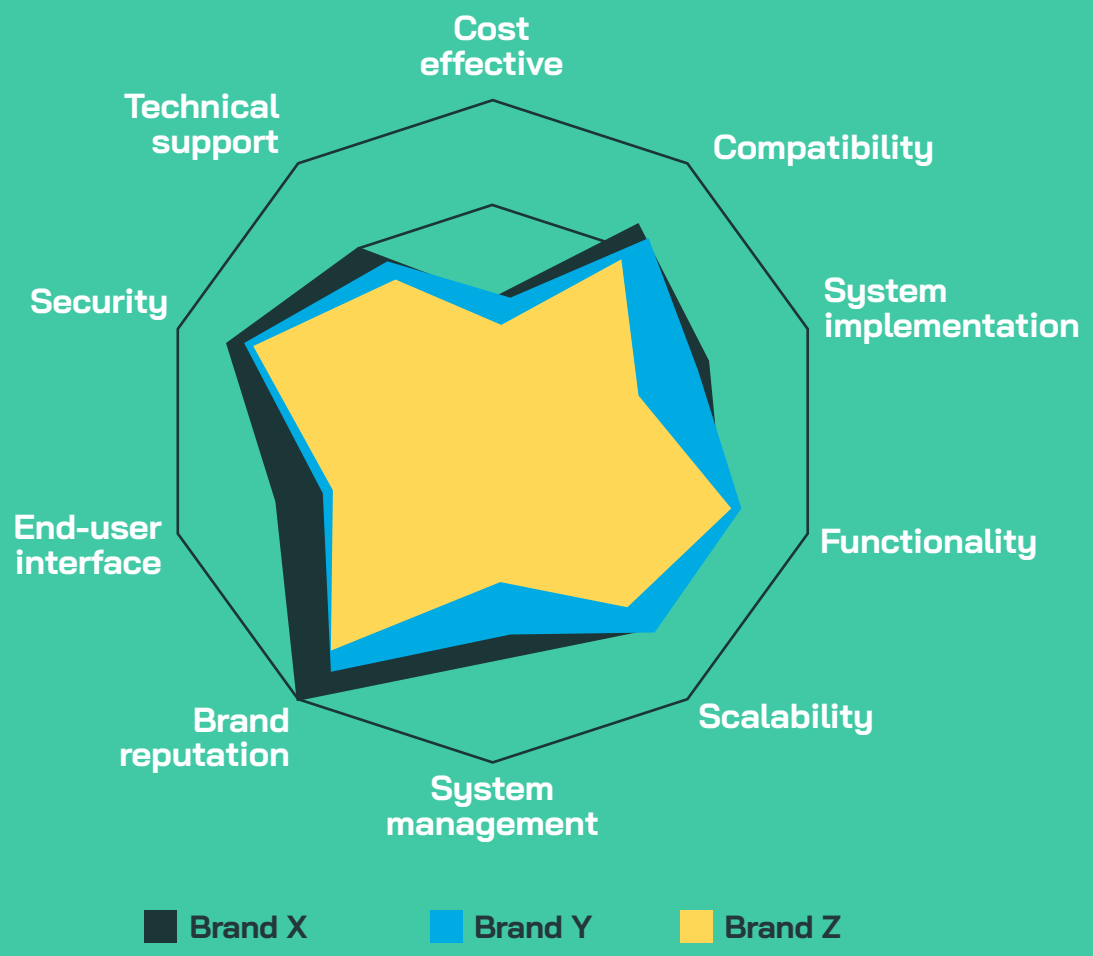
Mapping attributes of standout, differentiation and growth (potential)

As we're all highly aware, brand attributes are a bundle of features which create the physical identity and personality of a vendor proposition. Reinforced through image, action and presumption.

Mapping of these brand attributes - particularly within a competitive-set context - is another tool which can support purchase journey optimisation and identify territory in which the brand should 'play'.

More specifically, the attribute mapping of brands can help:

- Identify the closest competitors - highlighting the optimal territory to 'stake out', as well as any 'clear-blue-water'
- Ascertain the greatest differentiating factors/dimensions
- Establish the degree of positive, as well as negative, associations

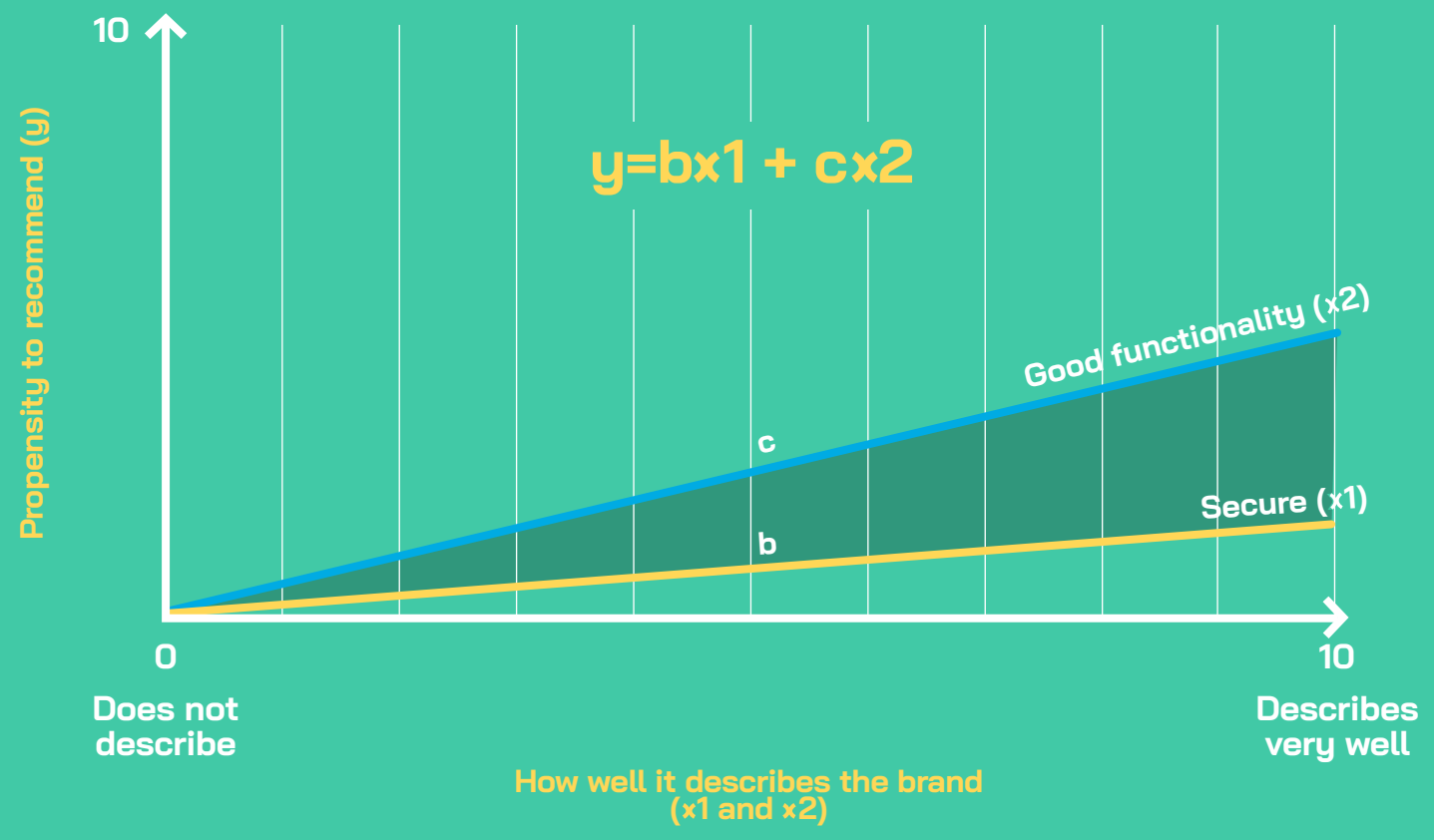


Advanced analytics

A number of research tools can prove highly illuminative in brand research studies.

For example, advanced analytics, namely regression, can help to understand the relationship between the perception of certain brand proposition features or attributes and the propensity to recommend.

Such an approach can be particularly effective in focusing time and effort in areas which will have the greatest brand impact, through the identification of proposition strengths (as well as unmet needs).



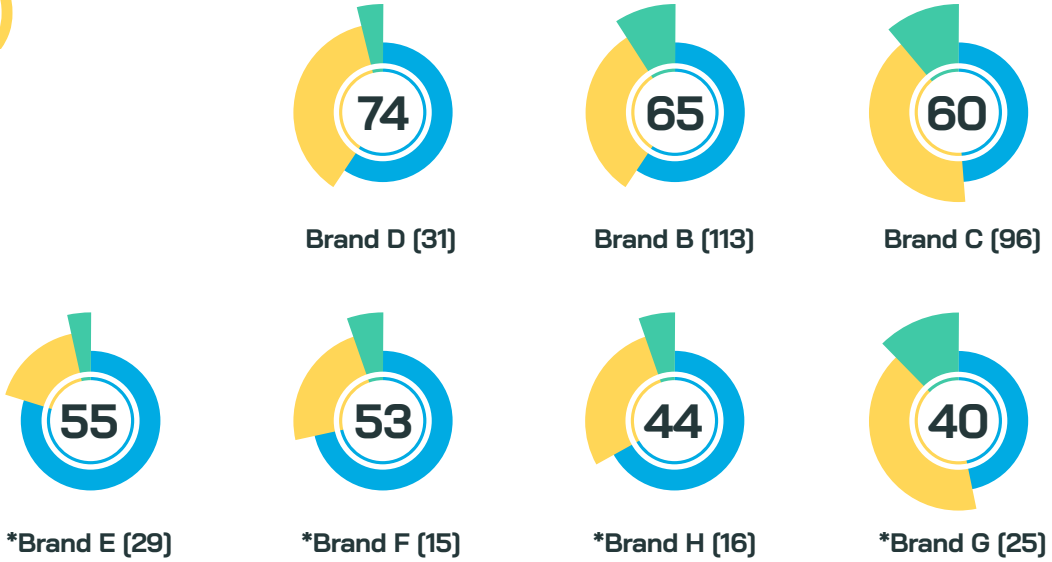
Net promoter score (NPS)

We're all probably fairly comfortable with NPS (Net Promoter Score) as a performance metric. Here's a very brief recap though for anyone less familiar.

Survey respondents are asked to rate on an 11-point scale the likelihood of recommending the brand to a friend or colleague. Based on their rating, customers are then classified into one of three categories - detractors, passives and promoters (as outlined).

NPS is determined by subtracting the percentage of customers who are detractors from the promoters - generating a score between -100 and 100.

» By digging into the 'why' behind the NPS score, you can identify actionable insights - helping drive performance improvement and increased brand engagement



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Detractors	Passives	Promoters
4%	30%	66%
(9%, total sample)	(21%, total sample)	(47%, total sample)

Net promoter score = % Promoters - % Detractors

Figures in brackets represent the number of ITDMs responding on each brand, * = Low base size (<30)

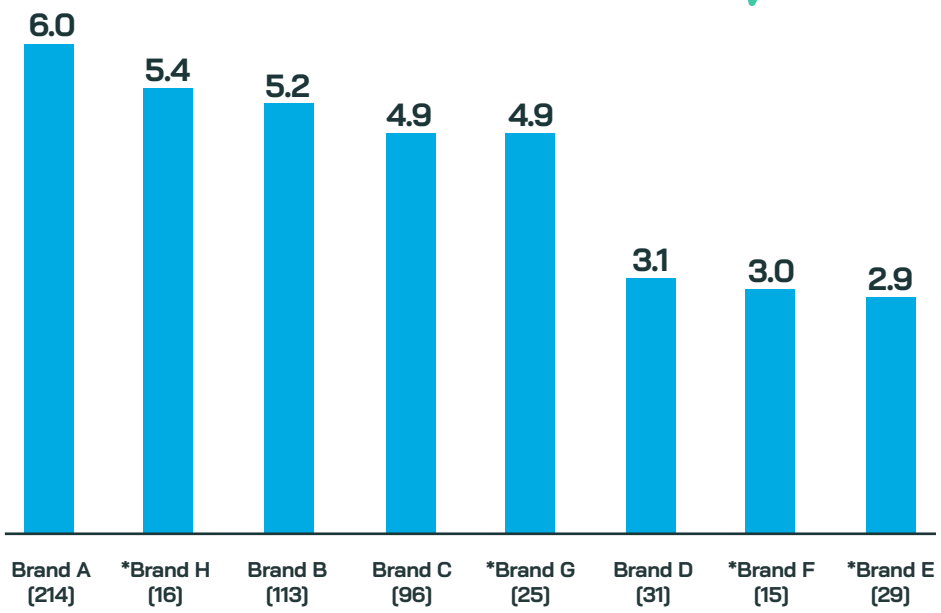
Service provider tenure

This type of analysis can support much of the associated strategic and commercial thinking.

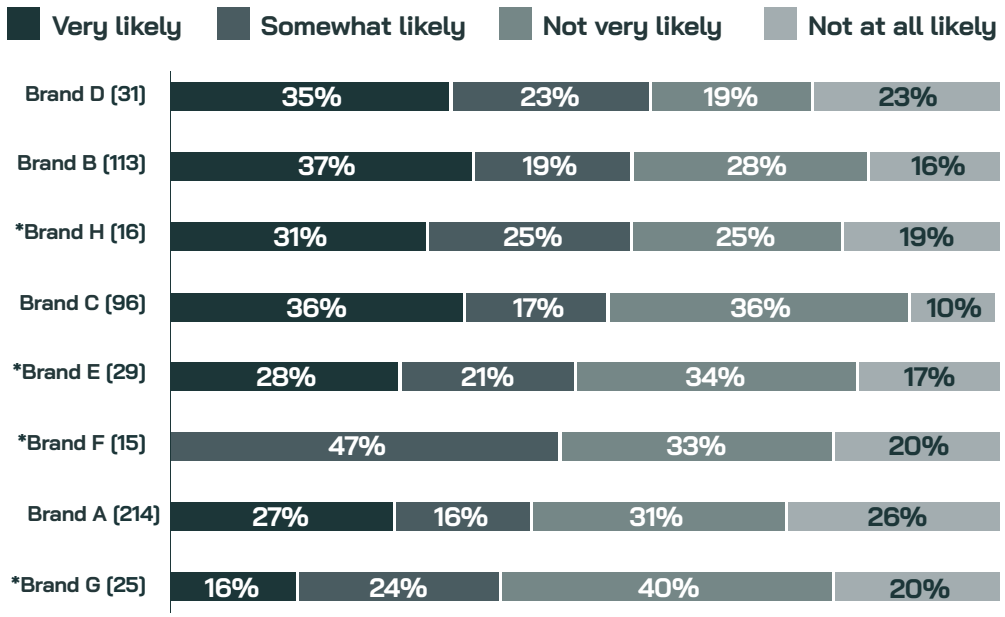
Inclusion of questioning specifically relating to brand tenure can be incredibly powerful. Helping uncover the varying degrees of 'stickiness' once specific (branded) propositions have been 'sold in' - potentially identifying the offerings to go after.

Such exploration can also provide a flavour of the fluidity of the vertical landscape as a whole. Are commercial partners starting to explore new solutions (possibly given recent technological innovations)? If so, which prospects (based on demographics and/or geography) are worth targeting?

Average tenure (years)



Likelihood of reviewing service provider within 12-18 months



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A holistic, inter-connected, research offering

We leverage the appropriate insight tools as required - framed by your needs

Target market understanding

- Category due diligence
- Consumer trends
- Market segmentation

Brand management and growth

- Health audit
- Perceptions tracking
- Strategy research

Marcomms optimisation

- Communications support and enhancement
- Advertising testing and tracking
- Experiential activity assessment

Customer experience enrichment

- Customer satisfaction surveys
- Brand communities
- Touchpoint CX tracking

Proposition development

- Ideation and concept screening
- Pricing strategy research
- In-the-wild product testing

Behavioural purchasing analysis

- Path-to-purchase mapping
- Purchaser observations
- Retail safaris (across digital and non-digital channels

A few final thoughts

We genuinely hope our analysis playbook has helped demystify a few of the approaches employed in establishing brand health, as well as identify potential horizonal opportunities and threats.

As you will have picked up, context is all. Benchmarking performance against the brand category behemoths, as well as new, agile, market entrants can be incredibly informative. Particularly in understanding what success looks like, along with the associated coordinates.

Whilst our playbook focuses upon the insight, illumination and direction gained from the appropriate application of specific market research techniques, it's equally important not to view such outputs in isolation. Any highly successful brand research should ideally 'layer-in' additional data-points (financial, voice of the customer (VOC), voice of the employee (VOE) etc.) to truly triangulate the truth.

Don't hesitate to shout if further guidance would be helpful, if you require an expert sounding board, or would value having an experienced agency in your corner. We'd love to chat through over a coffee (virtually or face-to-face!). Don't hesitate to holler if you're interested.

Want to know more? Get in touch with us to discuss how we can help your brand grow:

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