

Branding in the Digital Age

Harvard Business Review, December 2010 · David C. Edelman · Subtitle of the original article: “You’re Spending Your Money in All the Wrong Places”.

Across the companies studied, 70–90% of the marketing budget went into advertising at the awareness and purchase stages — while buyers were most open to influence during evaluation and after the purchase.

The mismatch

Edelman examined how companies allocate marketing money against the stages where buyers are actually persuaded. The gap was striking: budgets concentrated where attention is bought, while decisions were being formed where other customers speak. He describes the journey in four stages — consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy / advocate / bond — and notes that the strongest single influence in many categories is somebody else’s advocacy.

The loop that pays twice

The article also makes a point that matters for any business with repeat customers: when the bond after purchase is strong enough, the customer skips the consider and evaluate stages entirely on the next occasion and returns directly. Experience, made visible, therefore works twice — it convinces the next buyer and it shortens the journey for the previous one.

What this means for a hotel

Hotels rarely have the budget to outspend a large chain on advertising. They do not need to. The stages Edelman identifies as decisive — evaluation and post-stay advocacy — are precisely where an independent property can be stronger than a new arrival with a marketing budget, because those stages are built from accumulated guest experience rather than money.

[Read the original article on hbr.org](https://hbr.org/2010/12/branding-in-the-digital-age-youre-spending-your-money-in-all-the-wrong-places) →

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