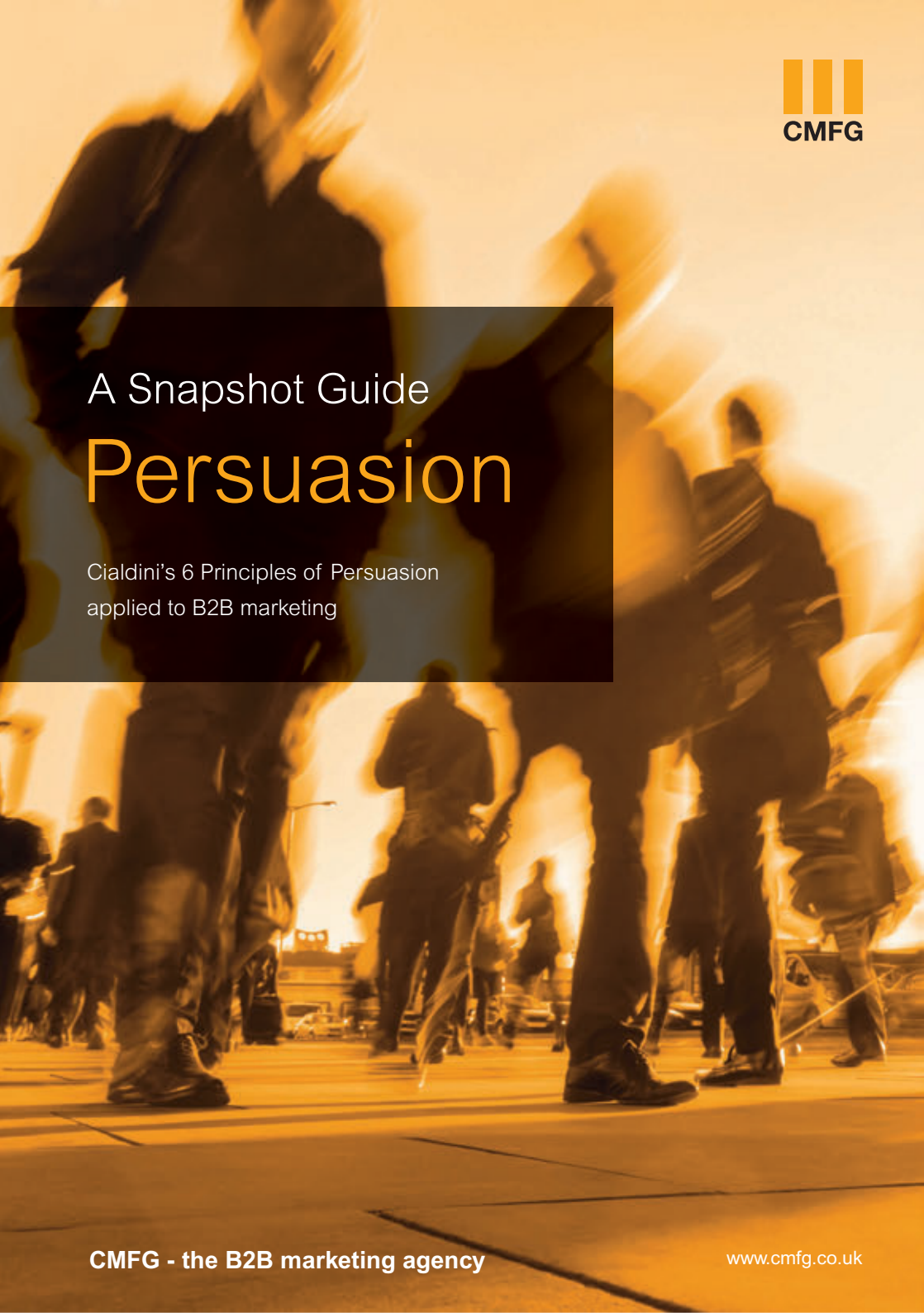

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A Snapshot Guide

Persuasion

Cialdini's 6 Principles of Persuasion applied to B2B marketing

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- Using Cialdini's principles to drive sales

Persuasion matters!

All communication and all content is ultimately created to persuade. Robert Cialdini, PH.D., in his seminal book 'Influence - The Psychology of Persuasion' - defined six clear principles you can employ to get prospects to take the actions you want!

Why are his six principles so effective? Because they are based on how people actually behave, rather than how they say they'll behave. They work at a powerful sub-conscious level tapping into the dominant emotional aspect of the decision-making process. They help to reduce perceived risk.

Not every brand has to focus on persuasion in quite the same way. If you are the cheapest provider in the market, the only provider in the market or the clearly dominant provider in the market, you might not need to think about persuasion quite as much. But most brands don't have that luxury, so persuasion should be front and centre of all your communication efforts.

In this Snapshot Guide, we look at how his six principles can be directly applied to your B2B marketing.

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Differentiated provider

You are one of several providers in the market. You don't have a unique offering but you are better in specific areas than most of your competitors. Sound familiar? This is most B2B businesses, and persuasion is fundamental to them winning and growing customers.

Unique provider of service

You are the only provider of a particular product or service. If it is in demand, you don't have to do anything but tell people how and where to buy. However, unless you have IP protection, competitors will rush in to capture this lucrative segment.

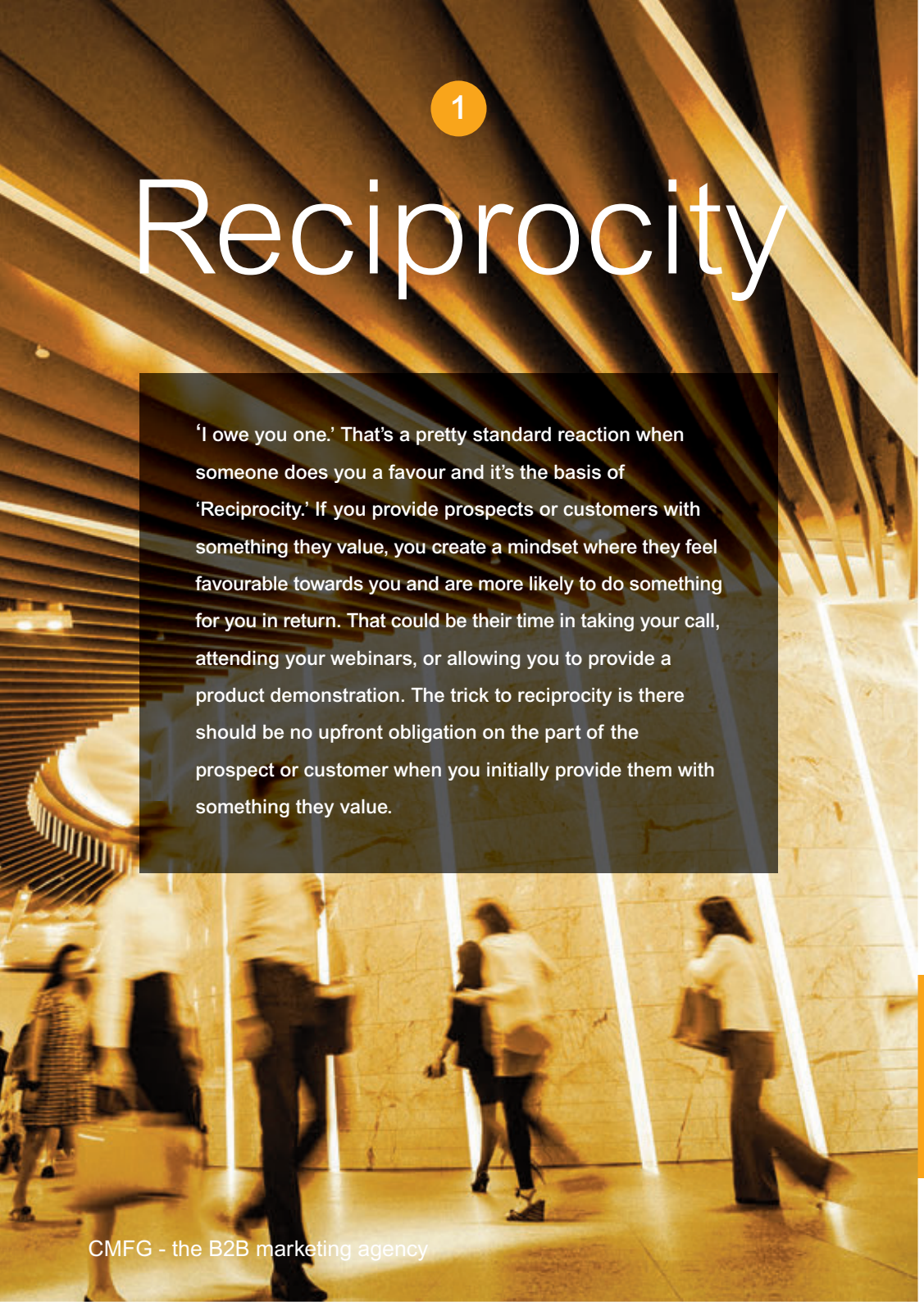
Lowest cost provider

You are the clear cost leader, and your communication focus is mainly around your cost advantage. There can only be one cost leader, and often, it is a 'race to the bottom' to achieve that position.

Dominant market provider

You are the dominant provider in the market, allowing you to swamp the competition in almost every area including share of voice. Normally, in this situation, legislators aren't too far away!

*Essentially Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies.



1

Reciprocity

'I owe you one.' That's a pretty standard reaction when someone does you a favour and it's the basis of 'Reciprocity.' If you provide prospects or customers with something they value, you create a mindset where they feel favourable towards you and are more likely to do something for you in return. That could be their time in taking your call, attending your webinars, or allowing you to provide a product demonstration. The trick to reciprocity is there should be no upfront obligation on the part of the prospect or customer when you initially provide them with something they value.

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What can something of value be? Let's be clear; it's not a bribe! Corporate hospitality is a classic example of reciprocity in business but it's extremely expensive. These days the value is based around providing knowledge that prospects and customers find directly useful in their job roles. Heads up, newsletters are very rarely seen as an example of reciprocity!

Whitepapers

Classic content such as whitepapers and videos are often one of the first interactions when researching possible vendors and the start of the reciprocity journey. Ideally, these look at broader market issues rather than product related information.

Webinars

Industry sector and issue focussed webinars are a powerful medium. If prospects have given up their time to attend multiple webinars, it demonstrates they see real value being provided.

Calculator Tools

Sometimes providing a simple calculator that highlights key savings (in time, money or people) is seen as a valuable tool that prospects will use to evaluate their options.

Research

Industry focussed research and surveys provide genuine value to prospects and customers. If done well, they also position you as the industry expert.

Provide value

2

Commitment

Small commitments from prospects lead to bigger ones – such as buying! In B2B lead development, the journey from considering options to final purchase can take years. Successful companies manage prospects along that journey generating a series of small ‘commitments’ for them along the way. So, when prospects have to make the final purchase decision, it feels like a small step rather than a big, high-risk one.

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Engaging prospects in small practical commitments is easier than you might think. Some of your existing marketing activities are likely already achieving this. The key to doing it well is ensuring the small ‘commitments’ provide clear value to your prospects.

Webinars

One of the simplest small commitment steps for prospects. They give up 30 to 60 minutes of their time in return for (hopefully) gaining valuable insight to support their job role.

Round Table Meetings

A commitment of 2-3 hours of a prospect’s time and a bigger commitment in terms of making themselves known as an individual in a face-to-face environment rather than just a name on screen.

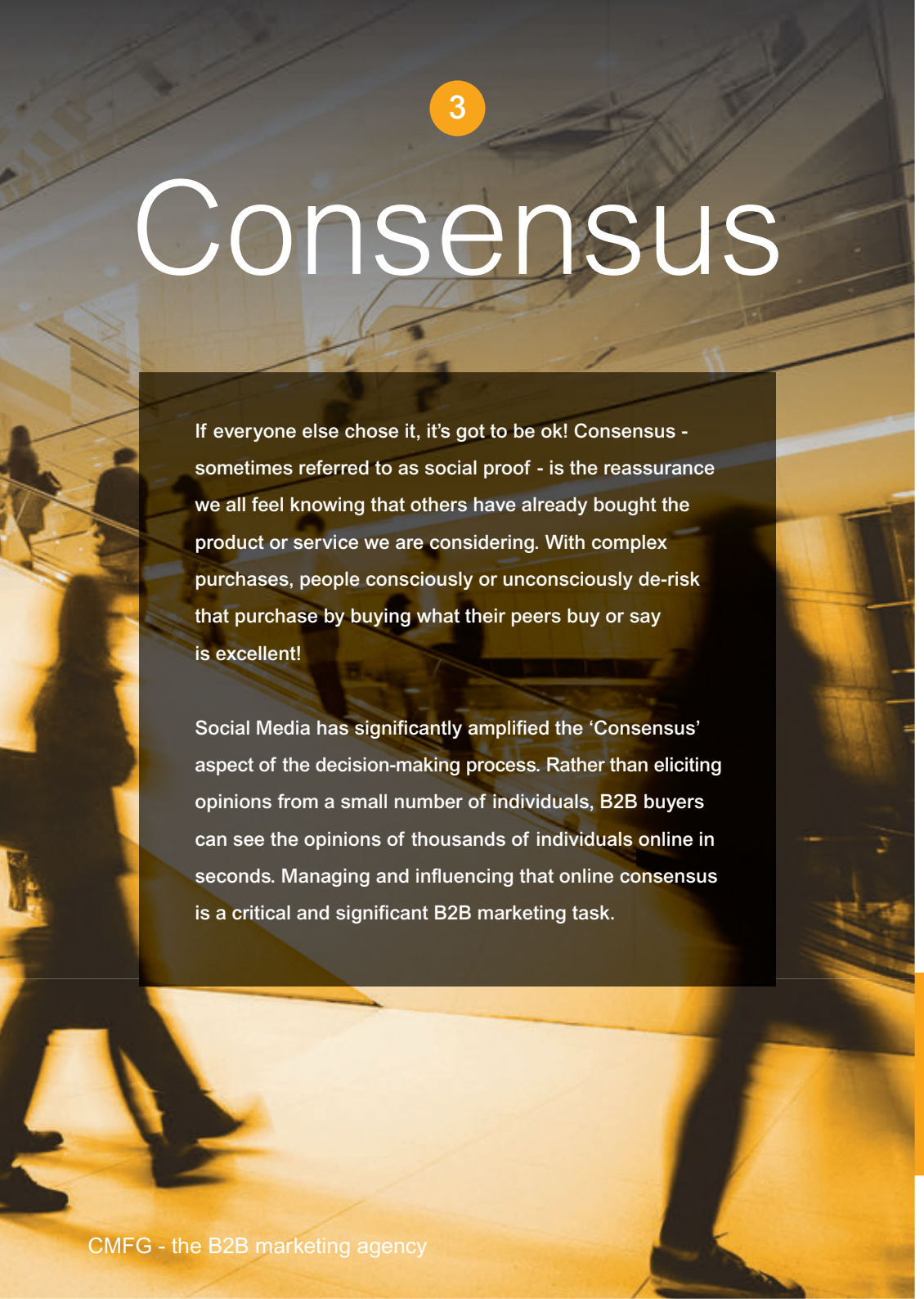
Product Demonstrations

If your prospect agrees to a product (or service) demonstration, it’s a significant commitment. They have clearly flagged they are ‘in market’ and you are at least on the long list of potential vendors.

Free Trials

Taking a free trial is another significant commitment. It typically involves a number of people within the prospect’s business, so isn’t entered into lightly. Once set up, the trial significantly reduces the perceived risk involved in the final purchase.

Get prospects to commit



3

Consensus

If everyone else chose it, it's got to be ok! Consensus - sometimes referred to as social proof - is the reassurance we all feel knowing that others have already bought the product or service we are considering. With complex purchases, people consciously or unconsciously de-risk that purchase by buying what their peers buy or say is excellent!

Social Media has significantly amplified the 'Consensus' aspect of the decision-making process. Rather than eliciting opinions from a small number of individuals, B2B buyers can see the opinions of thousands of individuals online in seconds. Managing and influencing that online consensus is a critical and significant B2B marketing task.

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This is a big task! It would be optimistic to say you can ever truly manage social proof online. However, you can ensure you are actively engaged with it and it forms a central part of your content and PR planning. Social proof initiatives can cover a wide range of audiences and activities.

Customers

Customers are key. Utilising case studies, testimonials and positive feedback is a great starting point. It doesn't have to be formal, and it can be as simple as engaging with them on the social channels they use.

Industry Groups & Forums

Generally, in any business sector, several active groups discuss vendors, best practice, etc. These need to be monitored and ideally actively engaged with. LinkedIn is always a great place to start.

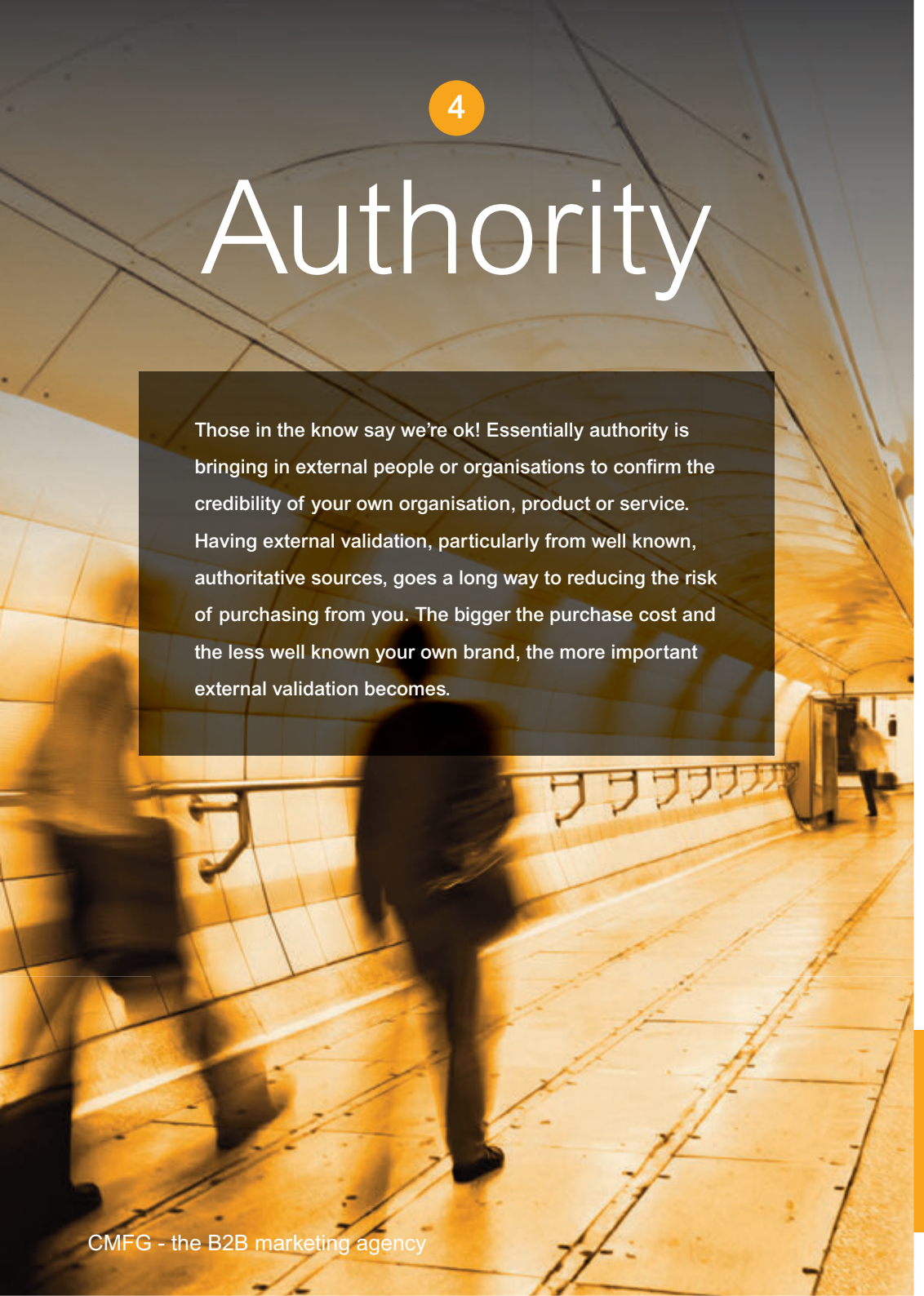
Reviews

Online reviews can play a significant role in B2B as much as B2C. 5 star ratings from the like of TrustPilot, Capterra, and CrowdReviews are compelling endorsements.

Presence

An odd one, but just having a more significant online presence can make a big difference. A 'thin' search presence, with only a few mentions of your company or product, can make you look dangerously small or new to the market. A larger 'thicker' presence, with independent references and links, makes you appear more established and secure.

Manage
social proof



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Authority

Those in the know say we're ok! Essentially authority is bringing in external people or organisations to confirm the credibility of your own organisation, product or service. Having external validation, particularly from well known, authoritative sources, goes a long way to reducing the risk of purchasing from you. The bigger the purchase cost and the less well known your own brand, the more important external validation becomes.

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External validation delivers credibility and generates trust in your brand. It can come from a range of sources.

Industry Body Memberships

Most industry sectors have membership bodies that provide frameworks and standards for operating in that sector. They also often include professional indemnity insurance. Membership of these bodies tells customers you meet a minimum set of standards.

Partner Accreditations

Particularly in the world of resellers, partner accreditations are essential. For example, suppose you are selling Microsoft services as part of your offering. In that case, your staff may need Microsoft Certification, and your business is likely to have a reseller accreditation such as 'Gold Partner.'

Customer Testimonials

Personal testimonials from customers are a powerful endorsement of your business. They don't always have to be from a named individual but they should include the company and job title to have credibility.

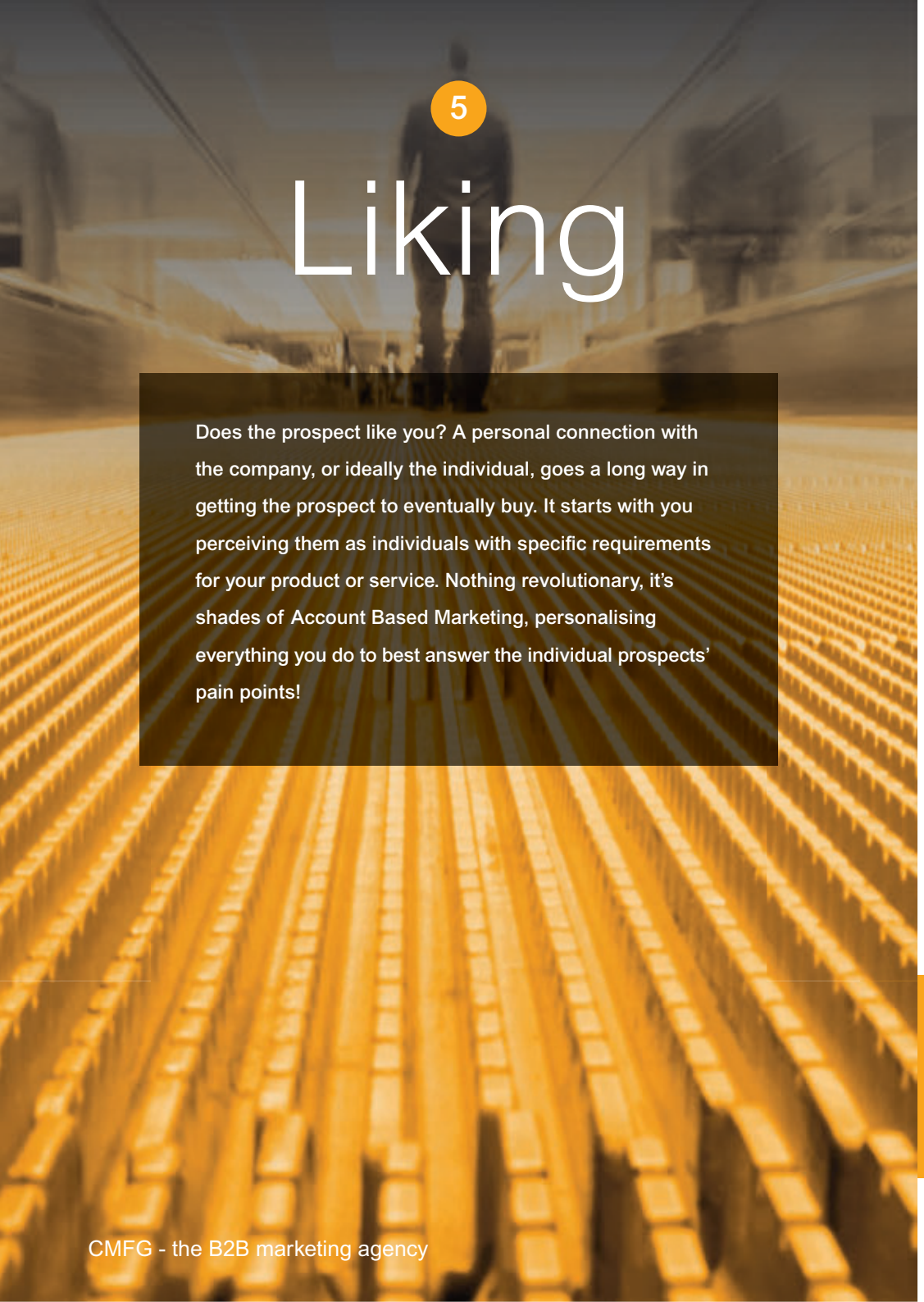
Project Case Studies

Similar to testimonials, client case studies should focus on the project objectives, scope and results. Case studies where it is clear who the client is, are far more effective than 'anonymous' case studies, so use names and logos wherever you can.

Analyst Recommendation

Analysts such as Forrester, Gartner, IDC, etc, particularly in the tech sector, have a huge amount of 'authority'. To be rated highly by them is sometimes all that is needed. Pity it takes so much work and expense to achieve!

Obtain external validation



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Liking

Does the prospect like you? A personal connection with the company, or ideally the individual, goes a long way in getting the prospect to eventually buy. It starts with you perceiving them as individuals with specific requirements for your product or service. Nothing revolutionary, it's shades of Account Based Marketing, personalising everything you do to best answer the individual prospects' pain points!

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There are many ways to build rapport and establish a connection with prospects. They take a lot of planning as every prospect's needs will differ slightly.

Personalise

Personalising communication to prospects reflects how you see them as individuals. At a basic level, this is using their name and the company name. It gets more impressive when communication content is tailored to reflect the prospect's interests.

Provide Bespoke

Demonstrating how your product or service can answer the prospect's specific pain points go a long way to them seeing you as a potential long term vendor partner.

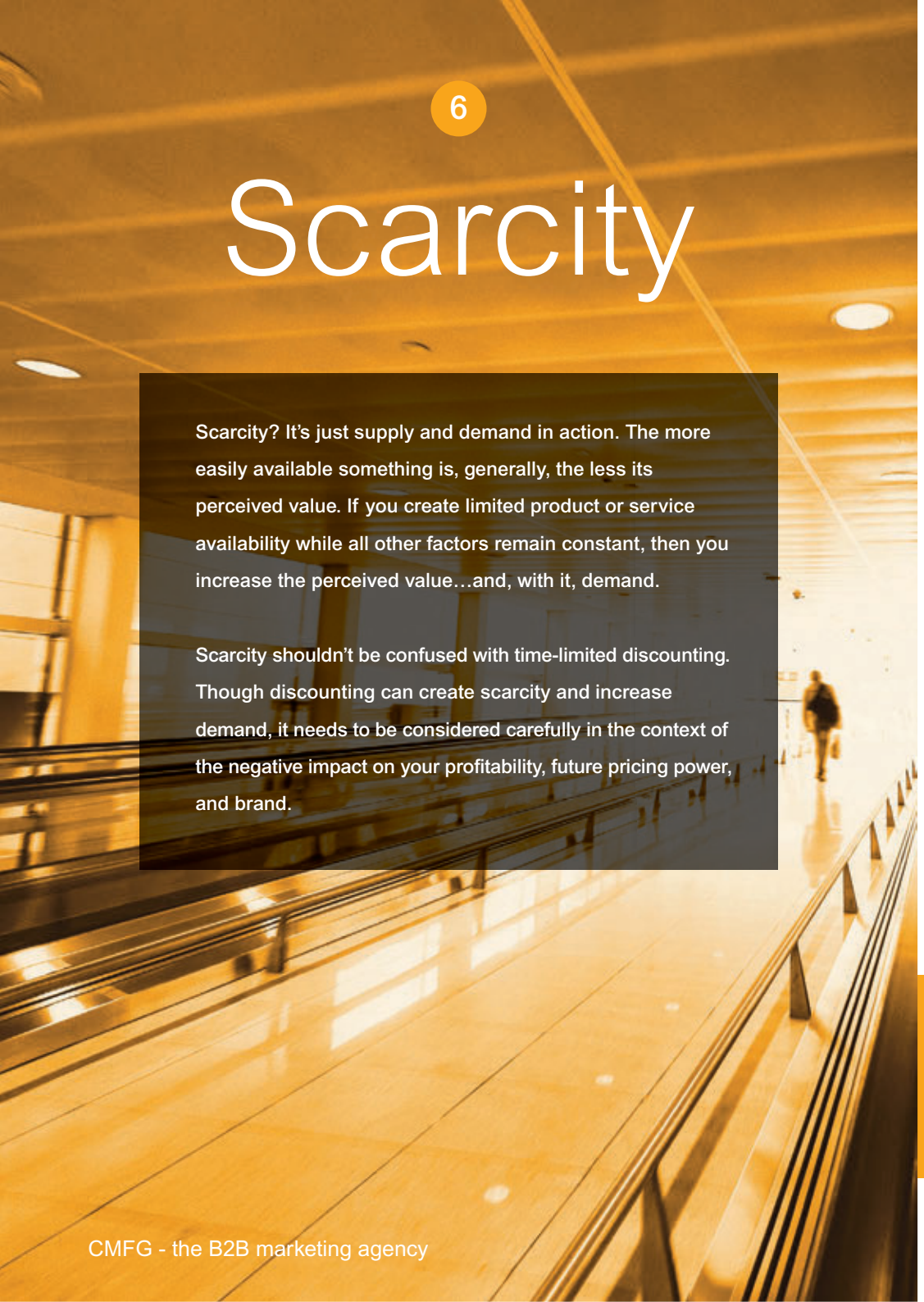
Do Something for Nothing

In the reciprocity section, we saw how providing something of value, without expectation of return, creates a sense of obligation. When done well at an individual level or a corporate level, it will also help you build a stronger rapport with prospects. So those charitable initiatives and positive social policies actually help you sell.

Meeting them

Becoming a real person to them, rather than just a name on a screen or phone, makes a big difference. Networking and meeting prospects face-to-face goes a long way to building a rapport.

Build a rapport



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Scarcity

Scarcity? It's just supply and demand in action. The more easily available something is, generally, the less its perceived value. If you create limited product or service availability while all other factors remain constant, then you increase the perceived value…and, with it, demand.

Scarcity shouldn't be confused with time-limited discounting. Though discounting can create scarcity and increase demand, it needs to be considered carefully in the context of the negative impact on your profitability, future pricing power, and brand.

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How do you create scarcity without straightforward discounting? If you look to add value to your product or service for a limited time, a range of options are available.

Bundling

Add together two or more elements, usually sold separately for a limited time. Price point at a level cheaper than buying the two products separately. This provides added value but protects your headline price point.

Special Editions

Create limited edition versions of your product or service with a limited production run or period of availability. Very common in the car industry. It's very much, 'when they are gone, they're gone!'

First to Buy

Similar to limited editions, with a fixed production run, the principle can be flipped, so the offer, normally an enhanced product or service offering, is only available to a very limited number of customers. For example – 'First 10 customers to buy will receive…'

Highlighting Demand

Typically used in online B2C sales, this works with messages such as '94 people are looking at this product right now.' The same principle can be used within an online B2B context, particularly if there are obvious limits to your scalability.

Create
limited availability

Persuade

So the six principles of persuasion can be directly applied to the planning and implementation of your B2B marketing and communication. The principles do overlap. For example, attending a webinar can create Reciprocity and Commitment, while client case studies build Authority and Consensus.

So figure out which principles are most applicable to your brand and at what point in your prospect's journey you need to use them. If you're applying one in every communication, you'll probably be more effective!

One principle stands out from the rest. It's number two, 'Commitment.' Significantly, this provides an excellent framework for planning your lead conversion journeys, providing clear objectives and activities to progress prospects from cold contacts, to MQL, to SQL – and finally to a new customer!

1. **Reciprocity – provide prospects with content or tools they value.**
2. **Commitment – get your prospects to engage with you in small steps.**
3. **Consensus – remember, people buy what other people buy!**
4. **Authority – make sure you belong to the bodies that matter.**
5. **Liking – be personal at an individual level and do good at a corporate level.**
6. **Scarcity – show you are in demand.**

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