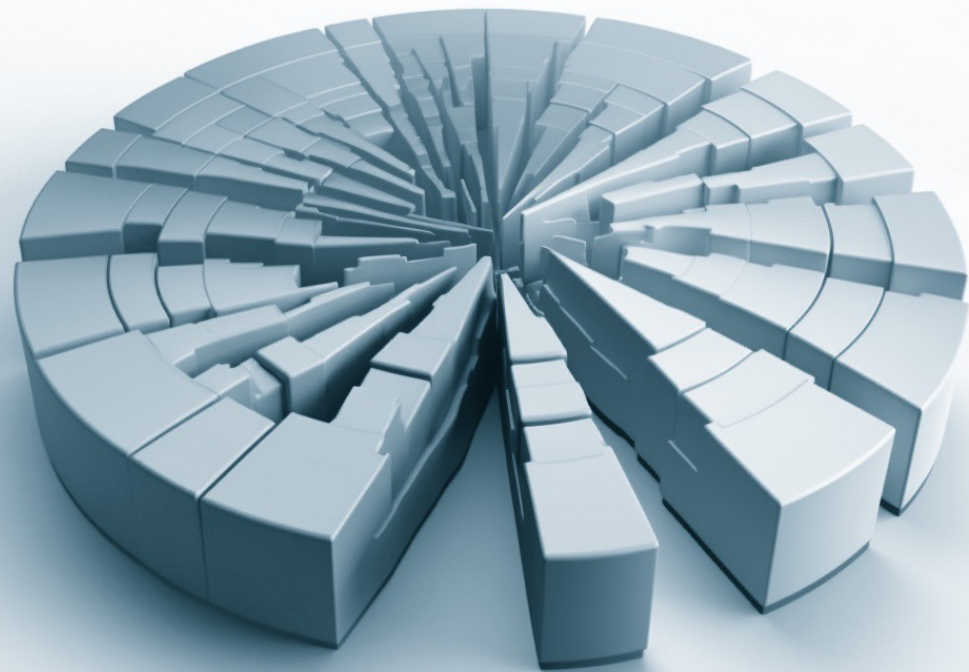


# How business relationships are affected by their marketing category

2023



aprais

# Why relationships matter

Over the years, we have compiled extraordinary evidence that stronger relationships:

- produce higher quality, more effective work
- are more cost-efficient
- build valuable shared knowledge
- motivate staff to go the extra mile for each other
- bridge the gap between corporate cultures
- expand the scope of work
- instil more trust.

It's clear, then, that team relationships are important, both internally and with external stakeholders.

But how are these business relationships affected by their marketing category?

## The data

This analysis is extracted from the Aprais database of more than 26,000 evaluations of relationships between marketers and their agencies globally, over a 20+ year period.

Our quantitative evaluations use a 100-point scale that enables us to create accurate benchmarks for comparison, trends and insights.

We also analyse the qualitative comments entered with each evaluation to provide context to the scores.

*“The client team exhibits strong, intellectually honest leadership about the challenges confronting the brand and engages the broader team in the development of aggressive, forward-looking solutions to those challenges. They generally operate with urgency and efficiency, understanding that time is always of the essence.”*

Automotive agency lead

# Categories matter

## The influence of marketing categories on client-agency relationships

Client-agency team relationships are significantly shaped by the marketing category in which they function. Different marketing categories have distinct attributes, hurdles and dynamics that profoundly affect how clients and agencies engage and collaborate.

## The regulatory and compliance factor

The marketing category itself is pivotal. In highly regulated fields such as pharmaceuticals or finance, agencies must negotiate intricate compliance mandates and adhere to strict rules. This often introduces additional communication and approval layers, which can cause friction in the client-agency relationship due to increased red tape and slower decision-making.

## Audience and consumer behaviour

The target demographic within a specific marketing category also shapes the dynamics between clients and agencies. Consumer behaviour and preferences fluctuate across various sectors. Understanding and reaching these target audiences demands specialised knowledge and proficiency. A team that flourishes in one marketing category may face challenges when transitioning to another due to differing nuances and consumer motivations.

## Competitive pressure and client expectations

The competitive landscape within a marketing category can also influence the client-agency relationship. Some industries are fiercely competitive, with multiple contenders battling for market dominance. In these circumstances, clients may exert more pressure on agencies to create unique and compelling campaigns that eclipse competitors. This situation often leads to escalated expectations, stringent deadlines and elevated stress levels, potentially challenging the client-agency relationship.

## Technical complexities and communication challenges

The intricacy and technical nature of certain marketing categories, such as technology or automotive, can pose challenges for effective collaboration. Agencies must have an intimate understanding of the industry's complexities, stay abreast of evolving trends and articulate technical ideas in a simple and concise way. A misalignment in comprehension or insufficient domain expertise can obstruct communication, impact the quality of outcomes and strain the client-agency relationship.



# The top line

As is clear from this chart, when assessing their relationships, agencies tend to score clients higher than clients score agencies.

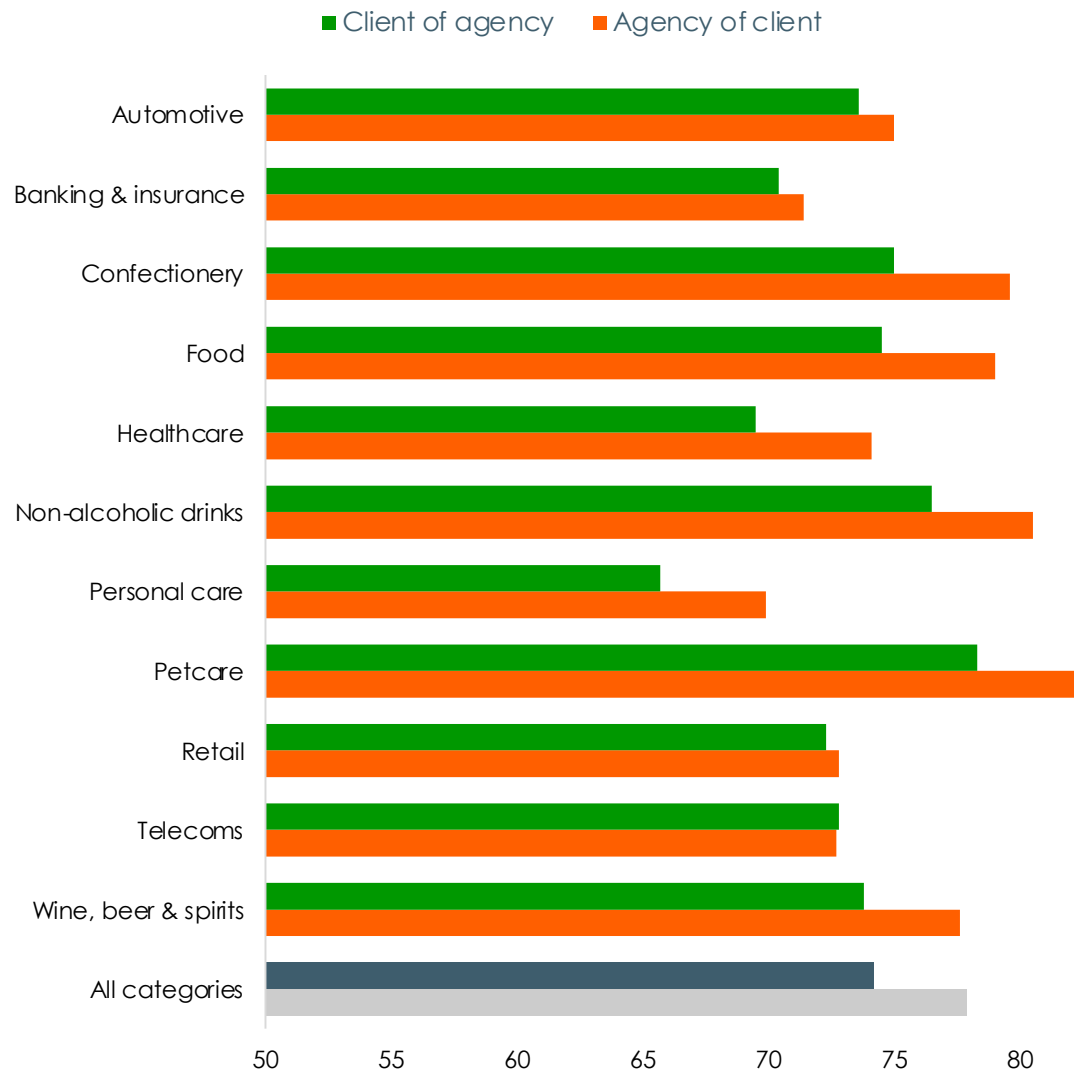
In an ideal world, scores from both sides would be equal. Interestingly, relationships appear to be more equal in some categories than others.

The chart suggests that less regulated categories like non-alcoholic drinks, petcare and confectionery tend to have a more positive view of their relationship.

More technical and regulated categories, such as healthcare and finance, have lower scores, suggesting that their gravity is transmitted to the teams that drive them.

Highly competitive marketing categories like telecoms and retail show remarkably similar scores between the client and agency teams. One could venture that in a high-frequency, high-pressure environment, trust is imperative and fosters stronger alignment between teams.

This chart compares the total scores given by marketers of their agencies and the corresponding scores given by the agencies of their clients. The totals at the bottom provide all-industry averages for comparison.



# The best versus the rest

Another way to compare categories is to see the difference between the top and bottom-performing teams in each category.

The chart below shows the gap in scores between the top 10% in each category and the bottom 10%, as scored in the Aprais system. This gap indicates the potential for poor performers to improve.

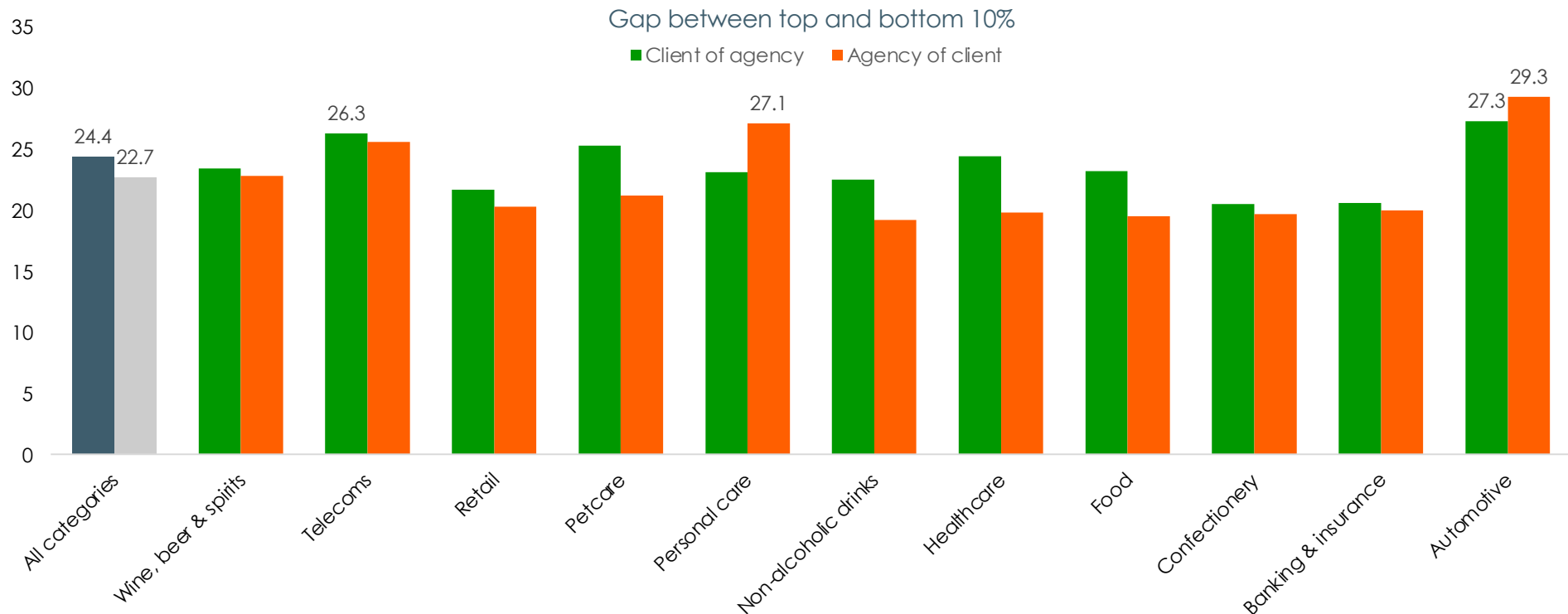
The automotive category stands out, having the highest gaps for both clients and agencies.

Clients in personal care (27.1) and agencies in telecoms (26.3) also show large gaps. It's difficult to be certain why these categories seem to be outliers without delving into the detail of each, but this highlights the fact that categories do have an influence on client-agency teams.

The average gap between the best and the worst across all categories is 24.4 for agencies and 22.7 for marketers.

Within each category, the bottom 10% agencies and marketers should aim to close the gap to their top-performing peers. Later in this report, you'll find suggestions to help you do this.

[Download our specific category report](#) for details.



Source: 26,000 Aprais evaluations.

# Functional disciplines that make a difference

## Job-specific skills

The fundamental characteristics of client-agency performance revolve around job-specific skills. These functional disciplines include skills such as timing, briefing, process and financial management for clients, and creative, strategy etc. for agencies.

As will be explained in the following pages,

these skills remain crucial, but they are no longer the only consideration in building stronger business relationships.

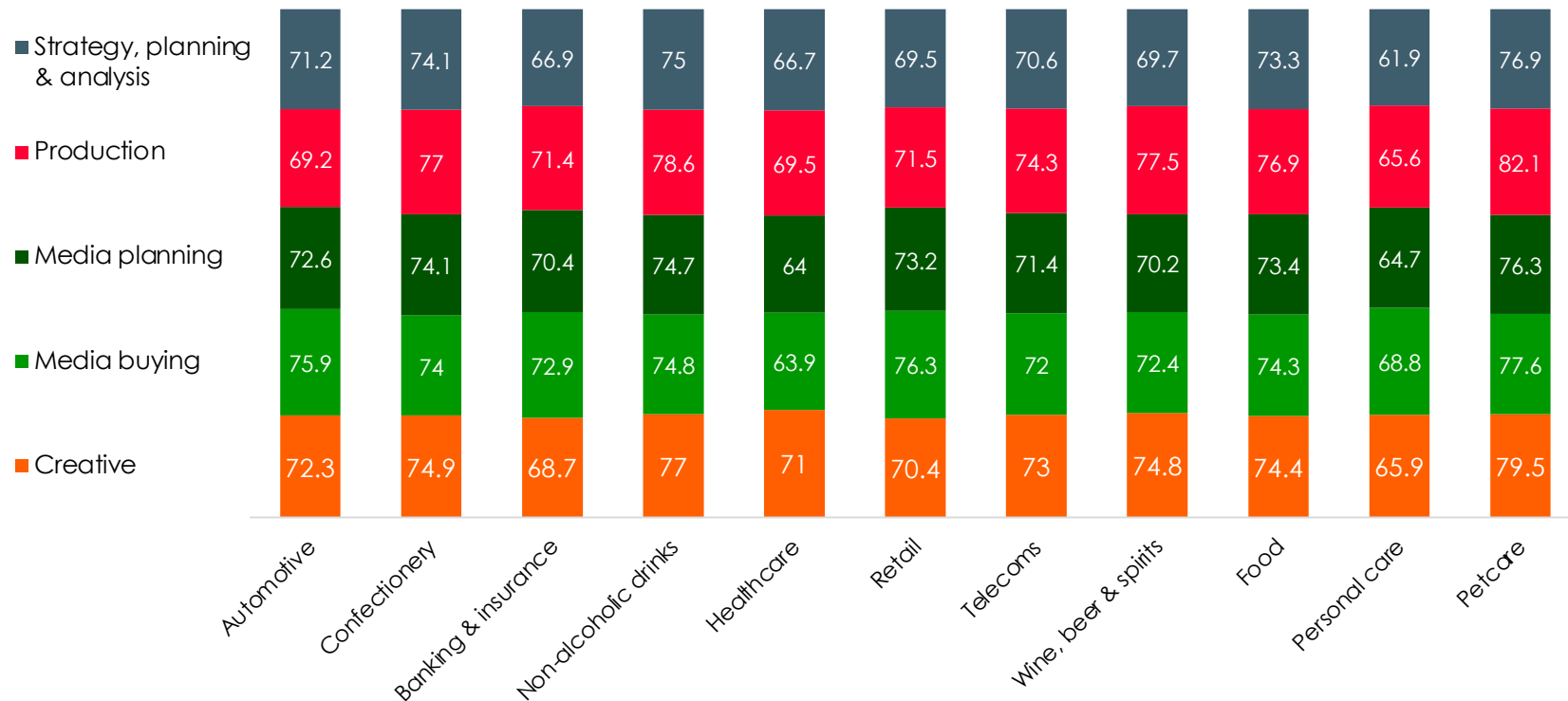
## Comparing skills by category

The graph below shows marketers' scores of their agency disciplines across various categories. For example, we can see that scores for creativity and production skills

are particularly high for categories such as petcare, compared with healthcare and personal care.

Our [individual category reports](#) provide more detail on these findings and explore the agency view of their client performance against their unique skill set.

Client scores agency



# Team behaviours that make a difference

Rigorous analysis of our database has identified seven behaviours that have the greatest influence on team performance<sup>1</sup>.

The chart below shows the client scores of agency behaviours, highlighting the top three scores in each category.

## Trust is key

Trust is consistently the highest-scoring behaviour, underlining its universal importance in relationships.

In most categories, trust is followed by communication and accountability.

Goals features strongly in the non-alcoholic drinks, food and petcare categories.



<sup>1</sup> Reports: [Seven behaviours that set the best teams apart from the rest.](#)

# Building stronger teams

As this report has shown, each business category can place different demands on the marketer and agency teams that drive them.

Subject-matter expertise can build stronger client-agency relationships. Here's why.

## Effective communication

Allows marketers to effectively communicate goals, requirements and expectations to the agency team and vice versa. When team members have a deep understanding of their industry, target audience and marketing strategies, they can clearly articulate their needs, provide specific guidance and answer questions more accurately.

This leads to better collaboration and ensures that both parties are on the same page, minimising misunderstandings and streamlining the workflow.

## Trust and credibility

When marketers demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of their field, they gain the confidence of their agency teams. This credibility facilitates a more respectful and cooperative relationship, as the agency team recognises the marketer's knowledge and expertise.

The same is true of the client view of an agency team. Trust is crucial for successful collaboration and fosters a stronger, more productive partnership.

## Efficient problem-solving

With a deep understanding of their industry and marketing practices, marketers and agencies can anticipate obstacles and provide valuable insights to each other. Leveraging this expertise may stimulate proactive solutions, saving time and resources for both parties. This proactive approach contributes to a more efficient and streamlined working relationship.

## Strategic guidance

Subject-matter expertise also enables better strategic guidance based on deeper insights into industry trends, consumer behaviour and emerging opportunities. By leveraging this knowledge, teams can develop more effective marketing campaigns and strategies that align with their business objectives. This strategic guidance strengthens the collaboration and helps teams exceed expectations.



## In conclusion

The marketing category in which a client operates significantly affects the client-agency team relationship. Understanding the unique characteristics, challenges and dynamics of each category is crucial for building strong and successful partnerships.

Agencies must adapt their approach, acquire specialised knowledge and develop tailored strategies to navigate the specific demands of each marketing category, fostering a harmonious and fruitful collaboration with their clients.

*“The planning team not only understands the business, they take discussions to the next level, challenging the status quo, contributing to the creation of robust strategies that build towards business and communication objectives.”*

Financial services marketer

# Building stronger teams

## How agencies can do better

1. Become a subject-matter expert in the category. In a world of generalisation, specific industry knowledge is valued.
2. Know the criteria that won you the business. Measure and monitor them to ensure you keep up with the client's expectations.
3. Make sure the team is aware of the criteria for good performance and is challenged to deliver on them.
4. Be enthusiastic about the client's business. People who are interested and engaged in a brand or category are likely to deliver better work.
5. Acknowledge and respect client members at all levels. Problems at a junior level can become senior headaches.
6. Be courageous and transparent. If you disagree, say so. All good relationships are built on trust.
7. Tackle issues before they become problems. Regular and frequent client-agency evaluations provide an objective platform for open dialogue.
8. Never be complacent. Think of all the other agencies who would love your client.
9. Have a 'can do' attitude. But if you say 'yes' be sure to deliver. If you deliver on your promises, the client is more likely to accept those times when you have to say you 'cannot'.
10. Good work is the best insurance. Effective solutions seal partnerships and provide great momentum and stickiness in a relationship.

## How marketers can do better

1. Set mutually agreed, realistic and quantifiable objectives.
2. Instigate a regular 360° review of progress against these objectives.
3. Push for directness, trust and chemistry between the agency and client teams.
4. Make sure there are equally talented people on both sides who are motivated by shared incentives and principles.
5. Demand ongoing, transparent feedback in both directions.
6. Always respond to work with the positive first. Get cycles of positivity going, then turn the conversation to more critical feedback.
7. Empathise with their pressures. Care about the issues and celebrate their achievements. Forgive them their foibles and try to see things from their point of view.
8. Give agencies the opportunity to get under the skin of your business. Allow them to immerse themselves in every aspect of your operation. Enable them to understand your culture and openly share information and intelligence with them.
9. Create an atmosphere of excellence. Demand excellence. Inspire excellence. Recognise excellence and reward it.
10. Encourage your agencies to work together. Relationships that are better orchestrated can deliver substantially better performance.

# Other reports

This report is one of a series focusing on how team relationships are affected by marketing category.

The first report introduces the topic.

The other reports each focus on an individual category and cover the behaviours and disciplines that set the best teams apart from the rest in that category.

1. Automotive
2. Banking & insurance
3. Confectionery
4. Food
5. Healthcare
6. Drinks (non-alcoholic)
7. Personal care
8. Petcare
9. Retail
10. Telecoms
11. Wine, beer & spirits

Download the report for your category [here](#).

Understanding business relationships in the food category

2023



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Understanding business relationships in the petcare category

2023



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Understanding business relationships in the automotive category

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Understanding business relationships in the healthcare category

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Understanding business relationships in the retail category

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Understanding business relationships in the banking and insurance category

2023



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Understanding business relationships in the (non-alcoholic) drinks category

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Understanding business relationships in the telecoms category

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Understanding business relationships in the confectionery category

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Understanding business relationships in the personal care category

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Understanding business relationships in the wine, beer and spirits category

2023



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## About Aprais

We are the global pioneers in building stronger business relationships.

Since we established the category 20+ years ago we have advised the world's leading marketers and agencies on more than 26,000 evaluations, with multiple clients in over 70 countries, in 13 languages.

This has enabled us to build a large bank of data that allows companies to accurately compare their business relationships with those of their peers.

## Contact us

Request a free consultation for your organisation: [aprais@aprais.com](mailto:aprais@aprais.com)

Learn more: [www.aprais.com](http://www.aprais.com)

Don't miss out on the latest information about building stronger relationships.

Click to [sign up for our newsletter](#)