


# WHEN MACHINES MAKE MARKETERS MORE **HUMAN**



Turns out AI isn't replacing human marketers. It's making them more human than ever. Through comprehensive research and real-world observation, we document how marketing—one of business's most human disciplines—is learning to work alongside machines.

For modern day marketers, AI isn't just a new paintbrush. It's an entirely new canvas that stretches to infinity in all directions. Imagine the possibilities when human creativity, empathy and compassion are unshackled from the tyranny of constraint.

— ELIZABETH MAXSON, CMO, CONTENTFUL

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## INTRODUCTION

As researchers embedded within a legacy publisher, we spend our days obsessing over how stories get told, how our audience engages with our writing, and how words create impact. So when we set out to understand artificial intelligence's role in marketing, we weren't asking about tools and tactics alone. We were asking about creativity itself. Can artificial intelligence actually make marketing more human?

The answer, according to 425 marketing leaders around the world whom we surveyed, is a resounding “yes”. But not in the way you might expect. The teams seeing the biggest gains are using these tools to amplify human insight rather than replace human creativity, in ways that were impossible months ago.

To understand how marketing leaders are navigating this transformation, Atlantic Insights, the marketing research division of *The Atlantic*, partnered with Contentful to survey 425 marketing decision makers across industries and geographies, supplemented by real-time diary studies in which we watched marketing professionals use these tools in their work environments.

What emerges is a portrait of an industry experiencing whiplash at scale. One day you're arguing about whether machine-generated content “counts as real marketing,” and the next you're watching your junior coordinator produce campaign assets that would have required your entire creative team 18 months ago.

Here's what we found: CMOs are all-in on AI; 96 percent are prioritizing adoption. But the follow-through? That's where things are less clear. Only 65 percent of companies are making meaningful investments (\$100,000 or more invested team-wide in AI-related marketing tools or initiatives), and just 18 percent of marketers say AI has reduced their reliance on developers or data teams—even though one of AI's core promises is to free up the modern marketer.

So, the hype is real. But the impact? Still very much a WIP. And this gap between aspiration and execution is far more than a technical problem; it's a strategic one. It creates what we call the “optimism-execution gap”—where teams are testing with intent but have yet to rush to full deployment.

Our reporting is built to close that gap. It's your blueprint for turning AI from promise to practice, from pilot programs to measurable performance. Marketing teams are thriving and drowning, often in the same afternoon. Backed by exclusive data from marketing leaders across industries, this report breaks down the specific strategies, mindsets, and organizational changes that separate the marketing teams charging ahead from those barely keeping up.

# WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE



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In an AI world where anyone can create unlimited, untethered content for any audience at scale, it's difficult to believe your content is inherently more special than your competitor's. The real differentiator will be the experience and engagement you craft around it.

— SHANNON RYAN, CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER,  
VALTECH

This report goes beyond the question of whether to adopt new technology. That ship has sailed. **Instead, you'll find the tactical playbook that 89 percent of marketing leaders are already implementing, including:**

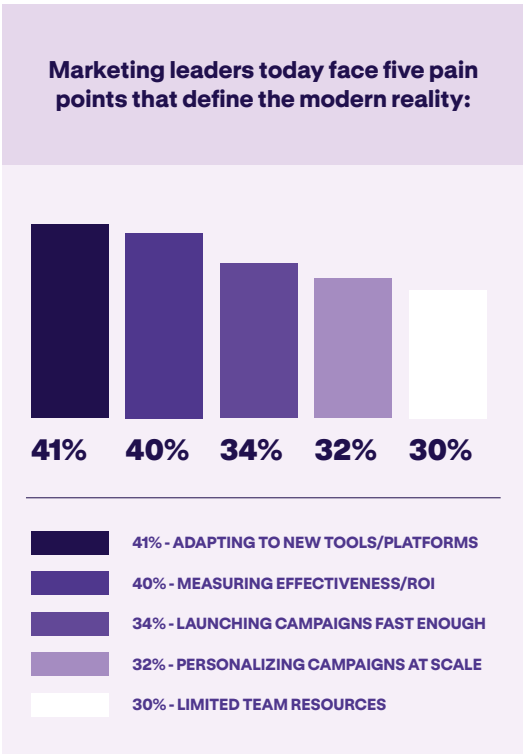
- **C-suite perspectives** on the \$500K+ investments reshaping marketing operations
- **Exclusive workflow insights** from our diary studies showing how top performers structure their days
- **Data-driven skill hierarchies** revealing which capabilities achieve results
- **Budget allocation frameworks** that successful teams use to balance speed, quality, and personalization
- **Organizational design principles** for teams that refuse to choose between creativity and efficiency
- **Regional insights** revealing differences between U.S. marketers and their EMEA counterparts
- **Personas** designed to help modern marketers land their own AI strategy, win over hearts and minds within their organizations, and fine-tune their operational approaches to thrive with AI

The implications extend far beyond faster content creation. They touch every aspect of how modern marketing organizations function, from skill development to budget allocation to team collaboration.

# The Investment Reality Right Now: Where Smart Teams Are Buying—and Spending

The old marketing playbook was built around scarcity: never enough time, never enough budget, never enough chances to get it right. The new one assumes you can create more, test more, learn more. Which can also create its own problems. Turns out infinite possibilities can be just as paralyzing as no possibilities.

Here’s what caught our attention: Marketing leaders experience integration fatigue, not technology fatigue. The real challenge is connecting new tools to existing workflows smoothly. We’re calling this **“platform purgatory”**: The same technology causing integration headaches is simultaneously viewed as the solution to those headaches.



## WHAT TEAMS ARE USING RIGHT NOW

While everyone was debating whether to adopt new technology, marketing teams just...did it. Forget the hype. Forget the fearmongering. They’re past the experimentation phase. Our data shows that **89 percent of marketing teams are already using these tools**—actively implementing them right now instead of planning to use them.

The landscape has quickly sorted itself into practical, everyday applications:	
PRODUCTIVITY SOFTWARE COPILOTS (GOOGLE WORKSPACE, MICROSOFT 365)	49%
GENERATIVE TOOLS FOR CONTENT CREATION (COPY, IMAGERY, VIDEO)	48%
DESIGN TOOLS (LAYOUT, VIDEO EDITING)	46%
WORKFLOW AUTOMATION (TASK ROUTING, CAMPAIGN OPS)	44%
CHATBOTS OR CONVERSATIONAL TOOLS (CUSTOMER SERVICE, LEAD GEN)	44%

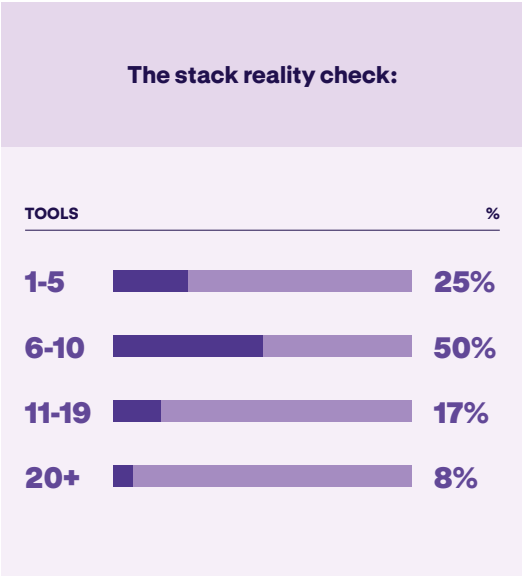
**platform purgatory**  
The beautifully ironic situation in which the technology causing your workflow nightmares is also the only thing that can save you from those nightmares.

**stealth integration**  
The sneaky way that useful technology is adopted: through individual marketers quietly discovering that it makes their work easier rather than company-wide training sessions or implementation road maps.

Productivity software tools are leading the pack: The most successful adoption happens through what we call 🗖️ “**stealth integration**” rather than grand digital transformation initiatives. Much like learning to ride a bike, marketers are learning through daily work and training programs.

**THE STACK SWEET SPOT**

For years, the marketing technology conversation revolved around 🗖️ “**stack sprawl**”—the endless accumulation of tools that created more complexity than capability. Our data suggests we’ve turned a corner. Marketing teams have found their sweet spot.



**stack sprawl**  
The inevitable accumulation of marketing tools that happens when every vendor promises to be “the last platform you’ll ever need.”

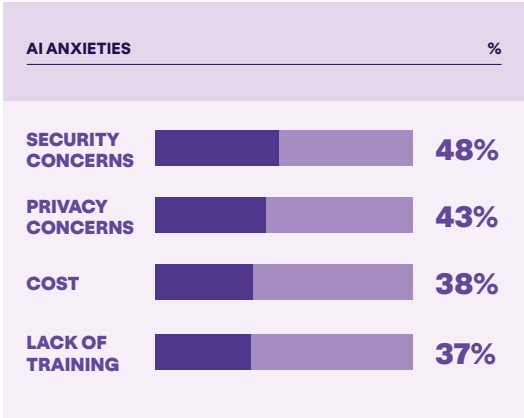
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[AI can take] my workday from six hours’ worth of work down to two. It doesn’t take it down to zero—but it definitely makes this a lot more efficient of a process.

— SHANNON RYAN, CHIEF GROWTH OFFICER, VALTECH

The **concentration around 6 to 10 tools** suggests marketing teams have discovered an optimal configuration. This challenges conventional wisdom about stack sprawl and indicates we've moved from proliferation to consolidation.

Still, real barriers persist as organizations grapple with AI-related anxieties.




This creates the  **“optimism-execution gap”** —96 percent of CMOs are prioritizing AI adoption, but **only 65 percent of teams are making meaningful investments**, and **just 18 percent of marketers report reduced reliance on other teams**. Teams are testing with intent but haven’t rushed to full deployment. The hype is real. The impact? Still very much a WIP.

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[I use these tools on an] everyday basis; it’s company-wide integrated.

— EXECUTIVE, FINANCIAL SERVICES

 **optimism-execution gap**  
The treacherous chasm between “AI is going to revolutionize everything!” and “Why is this chatbot telling customers to eat glue?”





# THE CAMPAIGN ARCHITECT

## YOU'RE A:

- VP of demand generation
- Head of marketing strategy
- Director of marketing operations

## YOUR CURRENT REALITY IS

You're investing heavily in MarTech and AI, but struggling to translate that investment into efficiency. Tools are in place, but usage is inconsistent, and ROI seems more aspirational than actual. The pressure isn't only to adopt, but also to prove outcomes: faster launches, fewer handoffs, and visible performance gains.

## THE PATH FORWARD

### → Shift your mindset

Your stack is infrastructure, not an experiment—so track adoption and impact by outcome. Ask yourself where AI is saving time, reducing handoffs, or speeding up launch.

### → Empower your team

Use AI copilots—Google Workspace, Microsoft 365—in your team's daily work. Leverage them for summarizing briefs, auto-tagging assets, or writing first drafts.

### → Anchor in data

Simplify before you expand by focusing on connecting existing tools to reduce workflow friction.

92%

92% of successful marketers plan to invest further in MarTech, yet 38% of all marketers cite cost as a primary barrier to AI adoption.

49%

49% of marketers use AI copilots in productivity software, making them the most common AI entry point.

56%

56% of marketers cite faster content creation as the most meaningful AI-driven workflow improvement, but only 28% of successful teams report greater output with fewer resources. This gap underscores why leaders must connect budget and tools to get measurable results.

The New Marketing Skill Set:

# The Rise of the Data-Savvy Creative

WHY DATA LOVERS ARE THE NEW CREATIVE DIRECTORS

Remember when “creative” and “analytical” were considered opposite personality types? Those days are gone.

“We’ve been talking for decades about evolving from data to knowledge to action,” Shannon Ryan, chief growth officer of Valtech, says. “AI can finally make that leap—interpreting the data, testing multiple variations, and picking the winner faster than any human team could.”

But what’s even more remarkable is how quickly the entire profession pivoted.

“Marketers shouldn’t be singularly ‘creative’ or ‘analytical’. They must be both,” says Elizabeth Maxson, CMO of Contentful. “Data helps us understand what’s working, but creativity is what makes people care.”

EMEA marketers are leading the way in strategic AI implementation: **58 percent are “testing AI tools selectively, with a defined plan,” versus 43 percent of U.S. teams.** This methodical approach positions EMEA teams for more sustainable, compliant implementations as AI governance becomes critical globally.

These European marketers are pioneering the governance skills that will define marketing’s future: **32 percent prioritize “governance (brand voice, compliance, quality standards)”** as frameworks such as the EU AI Act reshape the landscape. Meanwhile, U.S. teams focus more heavily on **“campaign testing and optimization” (37% vs. 26% EMEA),** reflecting different market priorities rather than maturity levels.

The same European firms that spent years wrestling with the General Data Protection Regulation’s (GDPR) labyrinthine privacy requirements have developed a kind of regulatory muscle memory.

These are the skills that matter most right now to marketers:	
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION	46%
DIGITAL EXPERIENCE DESIGN:	40%
PERSONALIZATION STRATEGY	37%
PROMPT ENGINEERING (WRITING FOR AI TOOLS)	37%

They've learned that you can innovate within constraints—and sometimes even because of them. While American companies can be paralyzed by compliance uncertainty, Europeans are treating AI regulation like just another puzzle to solve on the way to getting things done.

This represents a meaningful shift in what it means to be “creative” in marketing. It's not about replacing creativity with data; it's about combining the two. We call this 🌸 **“evidence-based creativity.”**

The best marketers now generate breakthrough ideas while validating and optimizing them through data. Digital experience design coming in second is telling. It reveals marketers are thinking like engineers now. They're not only creating individual pieces of content but also designing holistic customer journeys.

“AI has done a really good job of helping to promote new content and a new way of speaking,” says a demand generation manager working in B2B retail. “Sometimes I get lost in my own tone. So being able to utilize AI kinda just helps me break out into a new creative approach, because sometimes it's hard to change your own tone.”



**evidence-based creativity**

A marketing approach where creative professionals use data to inform their ideas instead of defending them with interpretive dance.

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AI is really helping me work faster, more efficiently. It's just also making me more aware of the work that I do, and thinking about audiences.

— MARKETING MANAGER, LEGAL



# THE DIGITAL EXPERIENCE STRATEGIST

**YOU'RE A:**

- VP of digital experience
- Director of personalization strategy

**YOUR CURRENT REALITY IS**

You're driving personalization and modular content strategy, but AI adoption varies across teams, and creative output remains uneven. The vision is clear. Execution is not.

**THE PATH FORWARD**

- **Shift your mindset**  
Build AI into workflows with defined human guardrails. Assign AI clear roles (e.g., first draft, variant generator), and build structured checkpoints for review.
- **Empower your team**  
Make creative fluency part of AI training. Train teams on brand-safe prompt writing, tone QA, and post-editing.
- **Anchor in data**  
Design creativity to be testable. Use A/B frameworks, preference testing, and prompt versioning to validate ideas before launch. Build feedback loops that tie performance directly to creative decisions.

**25%**


Only 25% of marketing teams use AI for audience segmentation and personalization, even though it's a top strategic priority.

**45%**

45% of organizations are already offering AI training, a clear marker of maturity.

**33%**

33% of marketers rank campaign testing and optimization as a top skill, reflecting a shift toward data-informed creative instincts.



# The End of Either-Or: How Elite Teams Learned to Create Better ...and Ship Faster

Here's what we discovered about successful marketing teams: They've shattered the either-or mentality. Gone are the days when you had to choose between fast execution and high quality, broad reach and deep personalization, creative excellence and strong metrics.

This represents what we call the "agility paradox": teams want to move fast, scale smart, and stay personal—but trade-offs remain everywhere. The data shows that while **40 percent of marketers say "fast and efficient execution" defines success**, **42 percent also cite "high content quality and consistency."** Meanwhile, personalization sits at a cross-roads between obstacle and ambition; **32 percent of marketing teams cite it as a top challenge while 31 percent cite it as a top opportunity.**

## SUCCESS IN THE AGE OF EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, ALL AT ONCE

**When marketing teams consistently nail their campaign launches, here's how they define success:**

HIGH CONTENT QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY	42%
FAST AND EFFICIENT EXECUTION	40%
FLEXIBILITY TO ADAPT QUICKLY TO NEW PRIORITIES, TOOLS, OR FORMATS	37%
STRONG PERFORMANCE METRICS OR ROI	34%
ABILITY TO PERSONALIZE AND SCALE CONTENT ACROSS MULTIPLE CHANNELS	31%

The numbers reveal something interesting about how different markets think about winning.

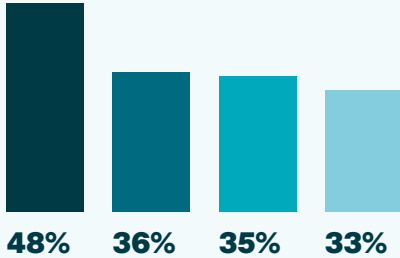
European marketing teams have become masters of operational excellence; **43 percent prioritize "fast and efficient execution,"** which makes sense when you're navigating complex regulatory landscapes and justifying every budget line to finance teams who read the fine print. They're also notably better at stretching budgets: **27 percent focus on optimizing delivery costs, versus 17 percent of U.S. teams,** probably because they've had years of practice making GDPR compliance budgets work miracles.

Meanwhile, American marketers are obsessing over **"high content quality and consistency" (45%)** and **"flexibility to adapt quickly" (39%)**—the marketing equivalent of having your cake and eating it too, which feels very American indeed.

Both approaches work, but they reflect fundamentally different business cultures: **Europeans build sustainable systems that won't break the bank, and Americans bet big on creative excellence and rapid iteration.**

Modern marketing success requires hitting all these targets simultaneously. The emphasis on flexibility reveals something crucial: In an environment where consumer preferences, platform algorithms, and competitive landscapes shift weekly, speed of adaptation becomes a means of survival as well as an advantage.

### What separates winners from everyone else:



- 48% - AI-POWERED CONTENT TOOLS THAT STREAMLINE PRODUCTION
- 36% - CLEAR PROCESSES AND WORKFLOWS
- 35% - STRONG EXECUTIVE SUPPORT
- 33% - CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAM ALIGNMENT
- 33% - EFFECTIVE INTERNAL TRAINING OR ONBOARDING

The most successful teams combine technological capability with operational excellence. But technology alone lacks the magic-bullet quality. The second-highest enabler—"clear processes and workflows"—reveals that impact multiplies when combined with organizational discipline.

The diary studies brought these statistics to life in unexpected ways. Work became more interesting rather than just easier.

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Having [AI as a] thought partner really helps to get a better product in the end.

— VP COMMUNICATIONS, LEGAL INDUSTRY



# THE PERFORMANCE- DRIVEN MARKETER

## YOU'RE A:

- VP of growth
- Director of lifecycle and retention

## YOUR CURRENT REALITY IS

You're chasing speed and scale but struggling with content bottlenecks and creative burnout. Work is shipping fast, but at the cost of quality, consistency, or relevance.

## THE PATH FORWARD

### → Shift your mindset

Speed is strategic only if it's repeatable. Systematized test cadences, launch protocols, and asset versioning will help you deliver velocity without chaos.

### → Empower your team

Creating modular templates by format or audience will help you build for reuse (not reinvention) and empower teams to adapt content (not start over).

### → Anchor in data

Track throughout the process, not just results. Measure how long it takes to go from brief to launch and how often content is reused across campaigns.

40%

40% of marketers define campaign success as fast and efficient execution.

28%

Only 28% say they've increased content output with fewer resources. Reuse remains underleveraged.

33%

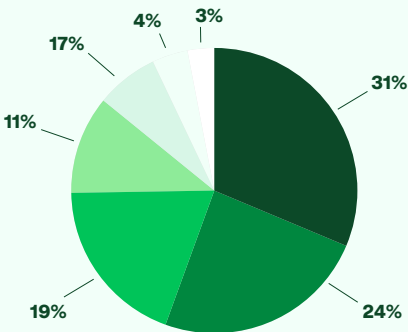
33% of high-performing teams report faster time-to-market as one of the top outcomes of a successful campaign or digital experience launch.

# The Investment Playbook: Where Smart Marketing Leaders Place Their Bets

## HOW MARKETING TEAMS ARE BETTING BIG ON AI

Organizations are putting serious money behind AI investment instead of talking in circles about it.

Here's what they're\* investing over  
the next 12 to 36 months:



\$100,000–\$499,999	31%
\$25,000–\$99,999	24%
\$500,000–\$999,999	19%
\$1,000,000–\$1,999,999	11%
Less than \$25,000	7%
\$2,000,000+	4%
Not sure	3%

\*chart inclusive of U.S. and EMEA respondents

Investment patterns reveal different strategic approaches across regions. U.S. organizations are making larger initial investments, with **39 percent allocating at least \$500,000 toward AI**—reflecting a market environment that rewards rapid scaling and aggressive adoption.

In Europe, **81 percent of marketing teams are planning to invest at least \$25,000, with 24 percent investing \$500,000 or more**. While more modest than their U.S. counterparts, EMEA investment levels signal that AI has crossed the threshold from “nice to have” to “essential infrastructure.”

## TURNING AI SPEND INTO STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

The marketers in our study are beyond talking about AI—they’re funding it at levels that make it a core part of the marketing operating system. But spending more doesn’t automatically deliver better outcomes. The most successful teams make deliberate trade-offs across three performance pillars: speed, quality, and personalization.

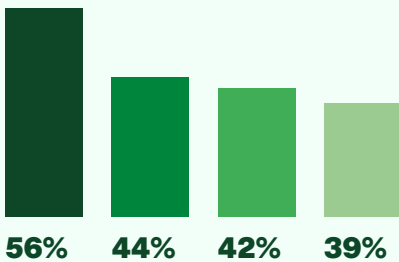


**STEP 1: IDENTIFY YOUR AI PRIORITIES.**

**Our survey shows the most widely adopted and impactful tools are:**

- **49%**  
Productivity copilots
- **48%**  
Generative AI for content creation
- **46%**  
AI-powered design/creative tools
- **44%**  
Workflow automation  
& Chatbots/conversational AI
- **42%**  
AI-enabled search and knowledge  
management (e.g., semantic search)
- **38%**  
AI-powered A/B testing and optimization  
& AI-powered CRM enhancements  
(e.g., lead scoring, churn prediction)

**These tools are fueling the top workflow improvements:**



- 56% - FASTER CONTENT CREATION
- 44% - IMPROVED CAMPAIGN PLANNING/FORECASTING
- 42% - MORE PERSONALIZED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES
- 42% - INCREASED TESTING OR OPTIMIZATION
- 39% - FEWER MANUAL/REPETITIVE TASKS

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Cost, or at least reducing the cost, is a barrier. Moving forward with new tech and digital processes is great, but it's expensive.

— MARKETING MANAGER,  
FINANCIAL SERVICES

**STEP 2: MAP TOOLS TO BUSINESS OUTCOMES.**

We group these capabilities into three strategic pillars that marketing leaders must balance to maximize ROI:



PILLAR	PRIMARY OUTCOME	COMMON AI USE CASES
<u>SPEED</u>	Reduce time-to-market, clear bottlenecks	Productivity copilots, workflow automation, A/B testing tools
<u>QUALITY</u>	Maintain creative excellence, protect brand voice	Generative AI content, AI-powered design, AI-enabled search/knowledge management
<u>PERSONALIZATION</u>	Deliver relevance at scale	Chatbots, recommendation engines, predictive analytics, audience segmentation

**STEP 3: ALLOCATE BUDGET PROPORTIONALLY.**

Using adoption rates, reported impact, and typical cost benchmarks, we recommend the following starting-point allocation. Marketers can dial these numbers up or down based on maturity, market conditions, and strategic focus.



BUDGET TIER	SPEED	QUALITY	PERSONALIZATION
Lean (\$25K–\$99K)	40%	35%	25%
Growth (\$100K–\$499K)	35%	35%	30%
Enterprise (\$500K–\$999K)	30%	35%	35%
Enterprise+ (\$1M+)	30%	30%	40%

**WHY IT WORKS:**

- Lean budgets are biased toward speed to generate quick productivity wins.
- Larger budgets expand investment in personalization infrastructure—data-driven capabilities that take longer to mature but compound over time.
- Quality remains steady across tiers, ensuring creative output and brand integrity are never sacrificed for efficiency or reach.

**THE BARRIER REALITY**

Despite widespread enthusiasm, marketing teams face real obstacles:	
SECURITY CONCERNS	48%
PRIVACY CONCERNS	43%
COST	38%
LACK OF TRAINING	37%
RISK OF SHARING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION	33%

The dominance of security and privacy concerns reflects mature thinking. These are concerns about responsible implementation, not about whether tools work.

**PRO TIP:**

Treat these ratios as living numbers. The leaders we spoke with revisit their allocations quarterly, shifting dollars toward the pillar that delivers the clearest, most measurable returns.



# THE STRATEGIC MARKETING EXECUTIVE

## YOU'RE A:

- VP of brand and innovation
- Head of strategy and planning

## YOUR CURRENT REALITY IS

You're placing real budget behind AI—not as a test, but as infrastructure. You're trying to make smart bets across speed, quality, and personalization. But with multiple tools in play and outcomes still unclear, the real challenge isn't adoption. It's alignment. The organization needs coordination in parallel with conviction.

## THE PATH FORWARD

### → Shift your mindset

To guide resource allocation and performance review, use the three-pillar model (speed, quality, personalization) to tie budget to outcomes, not tools. Ask yourself if you're getting what you paid for—and if you're paying in the right place.

### → Empower your team

Fund AI like a system, not a side project. Build cross-functional ownership with legal, brand, and ops to lead rollout and manage risk.

### → Anchor in data

Build credibility by showing your work. Successful teams don't just roll out AI tools; they prepare by benchmarking performance, codifying brand guidelines, and training employees early. Use internal success stories—faster launches, higher engagement—to rally organizational buy-in.

40%

40% of marketing teams say measuring effectiveness/ROI is their top challenge.

89%

89% of marketing teams are investing in AI, but only 18% say it's reduced their dependency on development or IT teams.

42%

Successful teams prepare for AI adoption by taking care of internal processes first: 42% of them began by “benchmarking metrics for tasks and outcomes” and “documenting or formalizing brand guidelines.” Nearly half began facilitating employee training sessions.

# WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Marketers are under pressure to move faster, scale smarter, and prove value more clearly than ever—all while absorbing new technologies like AI into every part of the workflow. Many marketers are testing. Some are transforming. Few feel fully in control.

The data reveals a marketing profession that has moved beyond transformation into optimization. This focuses on developing new capabilities, new processes, and new ways of thinking about marketing work rather than adopting new tools.

AI holds promise, but it lacks magic-wand qualities. The impact remains uneven: While 56 percent cite faster content creation as a meaningful result, only 18 percent report reduced dependence on other teams, and just 33 percent see greater content output with fewer resources. This suggests AI is changing how work gets done—not necessarily who does it (yet).

## WHAT MARKETING LEADERS NEED TO DO

### → **Make data fluency nonnegotiable**

Data analysis and interpretation isn't just trending. It's now the foundational skill that separates winning marketing teams from the rest. Marketing leaders need to invest in developing analytical capabilities across their teams: training content creators to read performance metrics, teaching campaign managers to identify statistical significance, and ensuring brand strategists can translate data patterns into audience insights. The goal isn't to turn everyone into data scientists, but to create teams in which marketers can ask the right questions of the data and act on what they find.

### → **Stop experimenting, start systematizing.**

The most successful marketing organizations have moved beyond ad hoc experimentation to systematic, planned implementation across workflows. This means establishing formal integration road maps with quarterly milestones, creating cross-functional teams that include IT from day one, and building standardized evaluation criteria before testing any new tool. Instead of letting individual team members try

## WHAT MARKETING LEADERS NEED TO DO (CONT.)

random platforms, winning teams audit their current tech stack, identify specific workflow gaps, and then pilot solutions with clear success metrics and rollout plans. They document every integration decision, create training protocols for new tools, and assign ownership for ongoing optimization. Experimentation time is over. Implementation time is now.

### → **Optimize, don't accumulate.**

Successful marketing teams optimize and integrate their existing technology stacks instead of continuously adding new tools, often with AI enhancements. The future belongs to teams that do more with less, not teams that do more with more.

## WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

Marketing has always been about understanding people. What's changed is the gap between understanding and execution, which is shrinking fast.

"As your homepage stops being the front door to your brand," Valtech chief growth officer Shannon Ryan says, "you need to amplify your presence inside communities—where your customers are already talking—so they become the voice of your brand."

The teams winning right now aren't obsessing over having the perfect tech stack, the latest AI tool, or the most sophisticated attribution model. They're obsessing over speed: how fast they can test an idea, kill what doesn't work, and scale what does. They've realized that being ruthlessly efficient while staying genuinely creative isn't a contradiction. It's the entire game.

What today's marketers need are platforms that enable intelligence rather than just promise it: tools that empower nontechnical teams, systems that flex and scale without friction, AI that works alongside (not above) the marketer, and workflows that prioritize adaptability, consistency, and brand voice.

Every marketer knows the special hell of watching a brilliant idea die somewhere between the creative brief and the final approval. What's different now is that those ideas can make it from concept to market before anyone thinks to kill them. The creativity was always there. The bureaucracy is finally optional.

**STOP HIRING “AI STRATEGISTS.”  
START DEVELOPING AI ORCHESTRATORS.**

The future belongs to marketers who’ve figured out something the tech world keeps missing: The best human-AI partnerships look nothing like what Silicon Valley promised us. These aren’t the people writing perfect prompts or obsessing over model parameters. They’re the ones who can look at 500 AI-generated headlines and instinctively know which three might make someone stop scrolling.

They spend their days in a peculiar dance with machines—teaching algorithms what “on-brand” is (surprisingly hard to codify), translating data patterns into human motivations (even harder), and making those split-second creative calls that separate memorable from forgettable. It’s part art direction, part behavioral psychology, part digital whispering to very sophisticated but ultimately clueless computers.

Here’s what makes those successful marketers invaluable: They understand that infinite creative possibilities aren’t a gift—they’re a burden. Someone still has to choose. Someone still has to say “this resonates” or “this feels hollow.” Someone still has to remember that behind every data point is a person trying to solve a problem or feel something.

The truth is, brilliant marketers with mediocre tools will always outperform mediocre marketers with brilliant tools. But brilliant marketers with brilliant tools? That’s where the magic happens. Your competitive advantage isn’t choosing between human intuition and technological capability—it’s building both simultaneously.

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With AI, content is virtually unlimited and relatively inexpensive to produce. While that solves a big problem, it creates a new dilemma that needs to be solved: How do we make sure that all that content is compelling, on-brand, and connects with audiences on a human level?

— ELIZABETH MAXSON, CMO, CONTENTFUL

# HOW WE DID THIS RESEARCH



This research was conducted by Atlantic Insights in partnership with Contentful and included three primary components:

→ **Quantitative Survey**

425 marketing decision makers across industries, company sizes, and regions, executed by Cint

**Sample composition:** 300 U.S.-based respondents, 125 EMEA-based; 103 CMOs; 80% with responsibility for \$50,000+ in regular business purchases; 72% from organizations with \$10M+ in annual revenue

**Eligibility:** Director-level or above, responsible for annual business spend of \$5,000 or more

→ **Diary Studies**

Ten-day live user testing with marketing professionals using AI tools in their real workflows, executed by Dscout. Participants completed eight activities, including content creation, campaign optimization, translation/localization, personalization, and A/B testing, while recording their screens and providing commentary.

→ **Subject Matter Expert Interviews**

In-depth interviews with Contentful executives, team leads, and partner organizations to contextualize quantitative findings and capture emerging best practices.

All survey data was collected and analyzed using advanced statistical methods to ensure reliability and significance of findings.



# MARKETING INTELLIGENCE GLOSSARY

## A field guide to your new marketing vocabulary



### agility paradox

*noun*

The marketing equivalent of being asked to juggle flaming torches while riding a unicycle on a tightrope—except the torches are speed, scale, and personalization, and your CEO insists you can definitely do all three at once. Teams caught in this paradox spend their days explaining why you can achieve “faster and bigger and more personal” only by breaking something important. Often results in impressive PowerPoint presentations about “having it all” followed by quiet conversations about which two priorities actually matter this quarter.



### evidence-based creativity

*noun*

The radical idea that your brilliant campaign concepts should work. A marketing approach where creative professionals use data to inform their ideas instead of defending them with interpretive dance. Practitioners combine artist and scientist roles and remain entirely tired of explaining why their gut feelings need spreadsheet backup.



### integration fatigue

*noun*

The exhaustion that comes from trying to make 17 software platforms play nicely together, like herding cats but with monthly subscription fees. This specifically targets the soul-crushing realization that your “productivity tools” are making you less productive. The marketing equivalent of an assembly-required Ikea Hemnes bookcase.



### optimism-execution gap

*noun*

The treacherous chasm between “AI is going to revolutionize everything!” and “Why is this chatbot telling customers to eat glue?” A phenomenon in which 96 percent of CMOs are absolutely certain AI will transform their business as they discover that security, privacy, and cost concerns make implementation feel like defusing a bomb blindfolded. Teams experiencing this gap can be identified by their enthusiastic conference presentations about AI’s potential followed by hushed conversations about why their pilot program is still “in testing” six months later.



### platform purgatory

*noun*

The beautifully ironic situation in which the technology causing your workflow nightmares is also the only thing that can save you from those nightmares. It’s like being stuck in traffic while googling directions to avoid traffic. Marketing leaders experiencing this phenomenon often develop a thousand-yard stare and an unhealthy relationship with productivity podcasts.



### stack sprawl

*noun*

The inevitable accumulation of marketing tools that happens when every vendor promises to be “the last platform you’ll ever need.” Characterized by dashboards that no one remembers purchasing, forgotten login credentials, and the haunting question “Wait, what does this one do again?” Often leads to subscription audits that seem like archaeological expeditions.



### stealth integration

*noun*

The sneaky way that useful technology is adopted: through individual marketers quietly discovering that it makes their work easier rather than company-wide training sessions or implementation road maps. Like evolution, but for workflow efficiency. Often goes unnoticed by IT departments until the annual software audit reveals mysterious usage spikes.

## THE PARTNERS

This research was conducted by Atlantic Insights in partnership with Contentful.

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