

Omniscient

SIGNALS IN THE NOISE



*How Marketing
Leaders Are
Navigating AI,
Attribution, and
Growth in 2025*

By Omniscient Digital



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There’s a lot of noise out there.

From LinkedIn thought leadership to constant AI announcements to the seemingly dozens of marketing podcasts that pop up every week, there’s no shortage of information.

There is, however, a shortage of signal.

We decided at the beginning of this year to seek out signals, namely by interviewing a few dozen marketing leaders across B2B software companies. Some current clients, some VCs looking after a large portfolio of startups, some enterprise giants, some early stage startups.

We wanted to hear directly from marketing leaders with boots on the ground:

- What’s keeping them up at night?
- How are they structuring marketing teams and programs?
- What are they most excited about?
- What’s working, what’s not working, and what’s changing?

We learned a lot. Of course, every marketing leader is coming in with a different context, set of priorities, team size, and industry. So there was a lot of variance in the responses.

But what was most surprising were the commonalities. In fact, we converged on three major themes throughout our 20 interviews:

1. The impact of AI on marketing
2. Challenges with data and attribution
3. Standing out in crowded markets and channels

While there were a few interesting fringe issues and anecdotes that came up (and we’ll cover them), much of the conversations centered around these three dimensions.

Here we’ll compile the data we collected, tie in third party data and research, and also run through our own experiences working with hundreds of clients over the years including brands like SAP, Hotjar, TikTok, Adobe, Asana, Loom, and many more.

What follows aims to be a useful approximation of the most pressing issues facing marketing leaders in 2025 as well as data and advice to help take action and continue driving pipeline, users, and performance in a rapidly changing environment.

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AI's Impact on Marketing

It's rare to have a conversation in 2025 that doesn't, in some way, involve AI.

As such, our interviews reflect this, with 100% of marketing leaders mentioning AI across our conversations.

At Omniscient, we've not only watched this trend play out, but we've been involved at the ground level, for instance, helping Jasper build their organic growth program from scratch and seeing the impact of AI on content creation.

Now, we're seeing AI affect many dimensions of marketer, both on the input-side as well as the channel and distribution side. While we've seen varying levels of maturity across companies, we have not talked to a single person who is not, at the very least, experimenting with AI.

Some brands are diving head first, being first movers in generative engine optimization (GEO, or optimizing for brand visibility in AI tools) or building agents to automate or augment workflows across content creation, SEO, paid acquisition, email, etc.

Fundamentally, AI is redefining what "organic" means, and marketing leaders see this change as both an exciting opportunity and a source of uncertainty.

Executive Summary

- Every leader we interviewed, across size, industry, and growth stage is at least experimenting with AI, and early movers are building Generative Engine Optimization programs that redefine what "organic" means
- Enthusiasm for an AI-driven industry is high, but confidence is mixed. 55% of marketing leaders remain skeptical about real-world ROI, wanting a repeatable playbook for how to use AI to add value
- 80% of marketing leaders say LLM-generated summaries at the top of search results are eroding clicks, rewriting the SEO playbook. Three quarters of leaders don't know how LLMs surface brands, and success will require harder-to-fake authority signals

Marketing leaders have varying sentiments regarding AI and its impact

The topic of generative AI had been buzzing since the end of 2022, and AI generally has been in and out of the tech zeitgeist the past several decades. What distinguishes this latest wave is a surge in specialized, niche use cases of these tools. New products are designed to deliver differentiated value, rather than serving as a catch-all to perform a wide array of functions.

This function-specific AI development and constant evolution make these tools attractive for businesses, with the promise of adding efficiency in project management, business development, and customer engagement. It also raises questions about where AI truly adds value and where it may fall short.

Everyone has a different idea on its impact: from reshaping society, redistributing the work force, and transforming company operations.

Our interviews reveal that most marketing leaders want to utilize AI to its fullest potential, but they are having trouble deciphering its value-delivering capabilities from just talk. A whopping 100% of respondents follow the AI discussions closely, and 55% of these leaders are not believing the hype, either skeptical or holding mixed opinions over the practical benefits of its use. They lack a clear playbook for which functionality should be augmented with AI, how to maintain quality controls and performance feedback, and how to best govern AI usage across teams and organizations. For startups specifically, it's often unclear whether the return is worth the investment.

Illustrating that skepticism is one respondent who works across portfolio companies at an early stage venture capital firm:

"AI doesn't feel like it's quite there yet. I think people are stuck in the old way of doing things versus what could be new. I think people are excited about what could be with the new technology, but I haven't seen many companies where they're doing something with AI and absolutely crushing it, beyond making people more efficient."

Of course, efficiency gains are great, even at the individual level. But one of the biggest challenges seems to be cascading this efficiency throughout an organization, which is where you truly see the impact on performance and efficiency.

Our respondent noted this as well:

"It seems like a big opportunity to train people on what the next iteration of generating demand looks like. How do you get traffic in this new AI world? There's a lot of fluff out there on what the world is going to look like in the future. I don't think there's that much tactical advice on 'here's what you should do.' If my organic traffic just fell off a cliff, should I invest in different channels? Is it creating a different type of content so you're found in this AI overview? Like, what should you do?"

Stay tuned, and we'll have some advice on AI Overviews and generative engine optimization overall.



How marketers are currently implementing AI

“The future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed.” – William Gibson

Log onto LinkedIn, and you’ll quickly feel FOMO. Everyone, it seems, is spinning up autonomous agents that are driving (and closing) millions in pipeline, fully automating customer support, and publishing thousands of high performance website pages.

Turns out, that’s mostly hype.

We know that from our experience working with clients, some being the SaaS companies we all look up to. The reality is that the implementation of AI is highly variable across companies, and while there are some common use cases, very few (outside of cases like engineering productivity) are seeing step change differences in their outcomes.

The four most common pillars we discovered through our interviews are:

- 1. Content Creation
- 2. Strategic Insights
- 3. Business Process Optimization
- 4. Core Product Enhancement

Around 85% of these leaders use AI to generate content, implementing tools like Surfer SEO to automate keyword research and outline generation, Midjourney for images, and trying to programmatically produce content with AI.

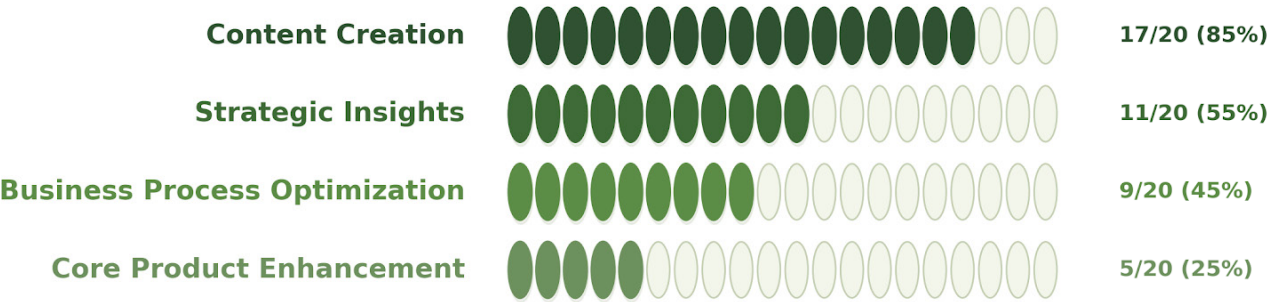
As Peep Laja and the Wynter team discovered in their survey of 100 CMOs, a full 68% of teams are using AI for content creation and copywriting – by far the most common use case in their research.

Over half of the respondents use it for strategic insights, having ChatGPT lay the groundwork for future planning and expansion briefs. Using human insights to lay the groundwork for these tools, leaders have found AI can synthesize information while removing bias and looking at the big picture. On a more granular scale, companies are using Clay and Apollo to target accounts and help

with outbound campaigns, scraping LinkedIn, and enriching data for clients. Just less than half use it for business process optimization, focusing on automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, enhancing cross-functional alignment, and handling workflow handoffs. Marketers see AI being very helpful in sales processes, reducing the need for manual work by sales teams by listening to earnings calls to target accounts.

For about a quarter of the companies, they integrate AI directly into their product or service to enhance user experience or create new functionalities. The focus here is on creating interactive content in the form of quizzes and calculators. They view this function as a way to capitalize on personalization, adding in voice interaction and AI demos to their products. All of these use cases help with organic search and collecting new customer data.

Most Common AI Use Cases



The Impact of AI Overviews on Organic Traffic and Click-Through-Rates

While marketing leaders are trying to figure out how they can best use AI for their benefit, they are already aware of the major challenge AI is posing to their traditional SEO strategies.

The pace of change has left many feeling like the playbook for organic growth is being rewritten in real time. The strategies that delivered predictable results months ago are in flux, and every new feature moves the goalpost even further.

In our survey, 80% of respondents agree that AI-generated summaries at the top of the SERP are impeding on organic search.

This consensus reflects a growing realization: the appearance of AI-generated content above traditional organic listings is a fundamental change in how users interact with search engines, and by extension, how brands compete for attention.

Across the board, in both B2B and B2C companies, and large brands and startups, every industry is being forced to revisit what “winning” looks like. Some teams are seeing declines in click-through rates while others are working with data gaps from zero-click sessions.

Before, a valuable tactic to get traffic was making sure your brand’s content lands high on the

SERP. Pick a keyword, create a page optimized for that keyword, build some backlinks, and rank position #1. Do all that, and you get traffic. That was the agreement.

Now, users have the answer to their query summarized succinctly and accurately at the top of Google or Bing’s page, so they have little reason to click on a brand’s site, or even to scroll past the answer already given to them.

21 in search results. Meaning, you could rank well in LLMs while ranking poorly in traditional search if you optimize for those environments by utilizing Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques and ensuring your pages are crawlable.

Still, nine of the leaders we interviewed noted that AI tools are specifically hurting top-of-funnel informational content and that old methods of gaining traffic are not as easy as they used to be. They feel torn between traditional SEO methods that aren’t delivering results like before and new AI strategies that haven’t been mastered. They want to utilize AI to their advantage when it’s also the reason their old methods are declining.

One responding looking after go-to-market for dozens of VC portfolio companies noted that AI Overviews are simply a fact of modern SEO strategy:

“Search now, even with paying for keywords on Google, it’s like partially dominated by AI Overviews. And so you’ve got to account for that. You’ve got to figure out what’s feeding the AI Overviews and integrate that with the money you’re investing in content and keywords and formats.”

For these leaders, there is no sense in resiting the shift. AI Overviews are an inescapable fixture in organic search. Instead, forward-thinking teams are coming to terms with changing their SEO strategy.

This requires an adoption of new best practices, where the goal is no longer to rank, but to be the “source of truth” AI draws from when providing users with answers.

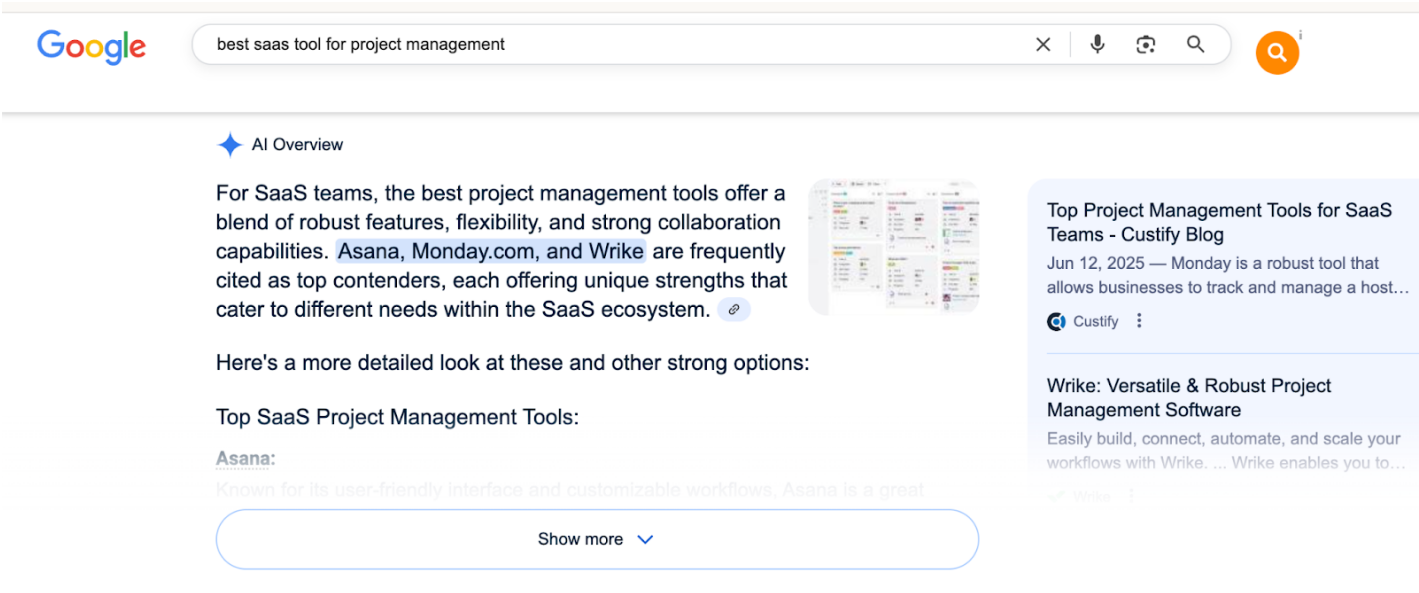
The Director of Go-to-Market at a public SaaS company noted strong pessimism with regards to AI Overviews and their impact on traffic and performance:

“These days, whenever you search for something online, the first result you get is usually AI-generated. In my opinion, that’s a huge negative. We can have a different conversation and you might disagree, but I see it as a big drawback for SEO. Until you can compete in that space, it’s a challenge. Lately, when I Google something, I don’t even click on the first, second, or third link. Google often satisfies my question right there in the search results.”

This perspective stands in contrast for those trying to adapt. For some, the dominance of AI Overviews feels more like a threat, undermining the work they have put into building SEO. The visibility they have worked so hard for can be lost to automated answers that rarely give credit to the source. This leaves them questioning the dynamics of search all over again, and feeling their influence is diminished.

Of course, with AI Overviews also comes the emerging surface area of getting your brand surfaced, discovered, and recommended within AI tools. Some call this Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) or Generative Engine Optimization (GEO).

Whatever the case, it’s clear this is an emerging and potentially major channel for brands and publishers.



Clearly, regardless of any specific data regarding impact of traffic, such a prominent module eventually impacts search behavior and consumer behavior. It is yet to be determined what the future implications of this will be. Beyond Google’s static AI-overview is the introduction of

AI Mode, a fully conversational chat tool powered by Gemini that answers users’ questions without a strenuous search. We know that Google explicitly hopes to solve for Delphic Costs, or the time, effort, and cognitive load involved with finding an answer. Even when reading AI-overviews,

the median user only reads the first third of each session.

It may seem like there is no longer value in ranking highly, even if your brand ranks first page. However, a recent Semrush report found that almost 90% of the time, LLM results pull pages that rank over position



The shift from SEO to GEO (Generative Engine Optimization)

One silver lining for marketing leaders is that getting your brand mentioned in AI Overviews or other AI engines is a high leverage channel for product discovery and information gathering.

While classic SEO still dominates in terms of traffic referrals to websites and daily active users, AI engines are growing rapidly with no signs of slowing down. Additionally, classic search is beginning to incorporate more and more AI features, such as AI Mode, as the first layer of user experience.

Thus, we’re seeing a shift from ranking in Google to being ubiquitous across search surface areas, which some are calling “Search Everywhere Optimization.”

75% of the marketers we spoke with are worried about how they must change their strategy from SEO to GEO, stating they are unclear how the algorithms work, how they rank pages, and how constant updates to the algorithms will change and bury their content. This knowledge gap is creating fear in some, stating that their old strategy of creating high-volume content with broad, generic keywords is no longer going to be effective.

We understand that LLMs are trained on a vast amount of data, and that data comes from both static datasets and receive constant updates by crawling the public web. Companies have the ability to appear in LLMs by publishing fresh content with specific, credible topics that make your brand worth mentioning. While there may be overlap between legacy methods and new strategies, SEO tactics do not directly cross over to GEO because LLMs don’t rank content the same way Google does. Rather than focusing on ranking top-of-page, companies must focus on showing up in multiple sources, making their brand top-of-mind to the consumer.

Hard-to-fake signals like brand mentions and natural recommendations in forums like Reddit and Quora are playing a much bigger role now, leading to the breakdown of marketing silos; SEOs must now work hand-in-hand with product marketing, brand, public relations, and customer marketing to effectuate change (this is a good thing, in our opinion).

Still, despite the differing tactics, several of our marketing leaders found strong correlations with classic SEO foundations, e.g. between Bing rankings and ChatGPT mentions, showing that foundational SEO strategy may have

significant overlap in GEO strategy. This quote from a VP Marketing illustrates that well:

“Back in November, I was deep into SEO work, and one of the principal product managers overseeing Microsoft’s search products shared some insights. They’d seen a strong correlation between how you rank on Bing and how frequently you’re cited or appear in ChatGPT results, which makes sense, given Microsoft’s connection with OpenAI. So, we’re keeping a close eye on all of this, but we’re not making any dramatic strategy changes yet. We need to hedge our bets a bit.”

While many marketing leaders don’t understand exactly what is the key to GEO success yet, they are trying to figure it out. One VP Marketing talks about experimenting with what keywords influence results in ChatGPT.

At another company, the VP Marketing reported that their number one self-reported source of gaining customers is ChatGPT, though Google traffic is still much higher:

VP Marketing: “I actually have different sources of attribution data to understand how people are finding us. One of them is self reported through our onboarding. And so the very interesting thing that I saw today is, in the last six months, I saw a massive shift in the self-reported data of people saying that they’re finding us in ChatGPT. Now our number one source is ChatGPT and no longer Google.”

Alex Birkett (Interviewer): Your number one source in self-reported is ChatGPT?

VP Marketing: Yes, but by far 2x what Google is today.”

Another VP Marketing we interviewed said their team is heavily focused on figuring out optimizing for LLMs, but they don’t feel confident in their playbook, saying, “if there were a crash course on optimizing for LLMs, we’d definitely be interested in that.”

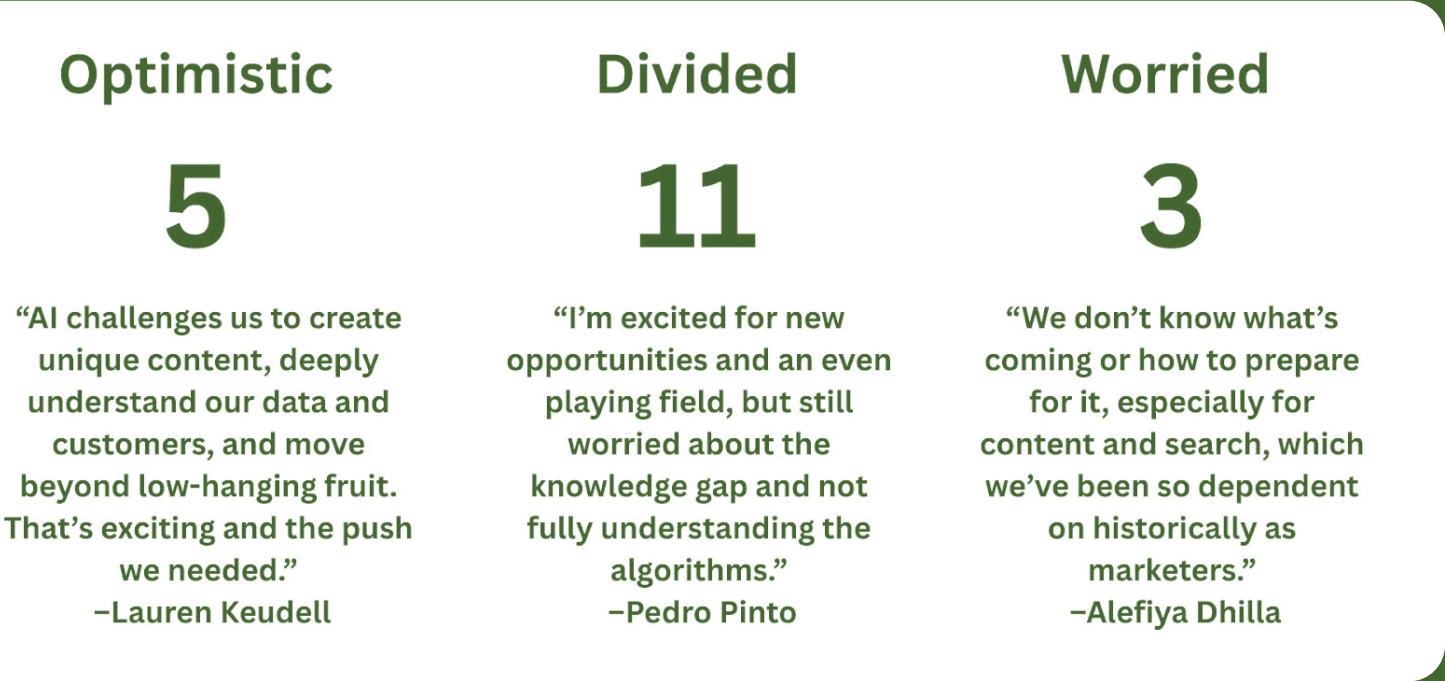
One Director of Global Content and SEO summed up the state of search well, explaining that it’s no longer about linear inputs and outputs, but a diverse marketing mix that spreads across customer touchpoints and channels:

“That means we have a pretty large playing field in terms of touchpoints, but it also means the customer journey isn’t necessarily linear or predictable. So, we have to cast a really wide net. That net is made up of the typical mix of channels you’d expect in an organic program. The blog is obviously the biggest one — despite changes in the industry, our blog and keyword strategy remain core pillars.

At the same time, we’re embracing AI and closely watching the impact that AI overviews, ChatGPT, Perplexity, and other search engines will have. We continue to see a connection between how you appear on the SERP and how you appear in AI chat results. They rely on reliable sources and banks of content.”

How marketing leaders are predicting and preparing for an AI-first future

Each of the leaders we talked to are sitting at a different perspective of this shift in terms of apprehension vs excitement. While there is concern for having to uproot entire strategies and reinvent the way of SEO, others are excited for this change and see it as a new opportunity to create value for their target audience and are coming at it with a more optimistic perspective.



AI is changing the landscape of organic growth and the consensus is met with both uncertainty and optimism. Marketers know they need to shift towards LLM optimization and creating original, differentiated content. However, there is not a clear playbook on what is the best strategy to accomplish these new goals.

Challenges with Data and Attribution

While many of the conversations centered on AI and technological changes, marketers leaders are still preoccupied with something quite fundamental and long-standing: data and attribution.

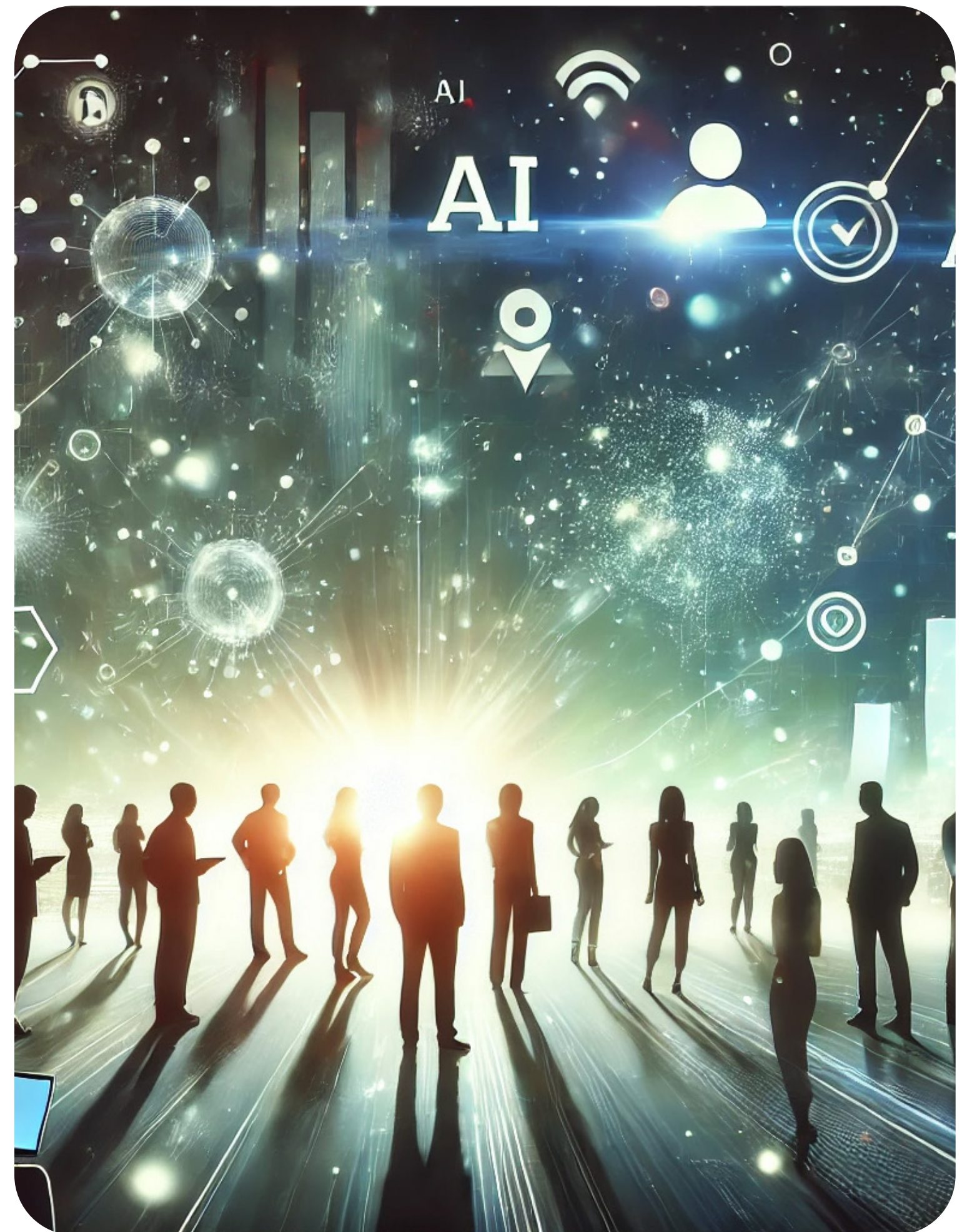
Without clear insights into who your customers are and how they engage, it's difficult to make effective decisions on channel and resource investments. Data lets you measure the success of strategic initiatives, but the customer journey is getting murkier and harder to track. With changes in privacy and compliance, increasing proportions of "dark traffic" that is untrackable with digital telemetry, and data integration complexities, it's harder for CMOs to get a full picture of how their marketing is contributing to a company's revenue.

Sitting on a mountain of data is only as useful as the insights you are able to pull. To close that gap, we wanted to understand the state of these businesses' data processes now and how it will shape their future.

Executive Summary

Every leader, even those piloting cutting-edge AI, said fragmented tooling, privacy gaps, and "dark traffic" make it hard to see which channels actually create pipeline. CRMs aspire to be the "single source of truth," yet bad hygiene and patchy integration force leaders back to reliance on spreadsheets or manual hacks, undermining attribution and cross-functional alignment.

Metrics are shifting from vanity to value. CMOs are de-emphasizing traffic and keyword rankings in favor of revenue, pipeline, conversion rates, and share-of-voice.



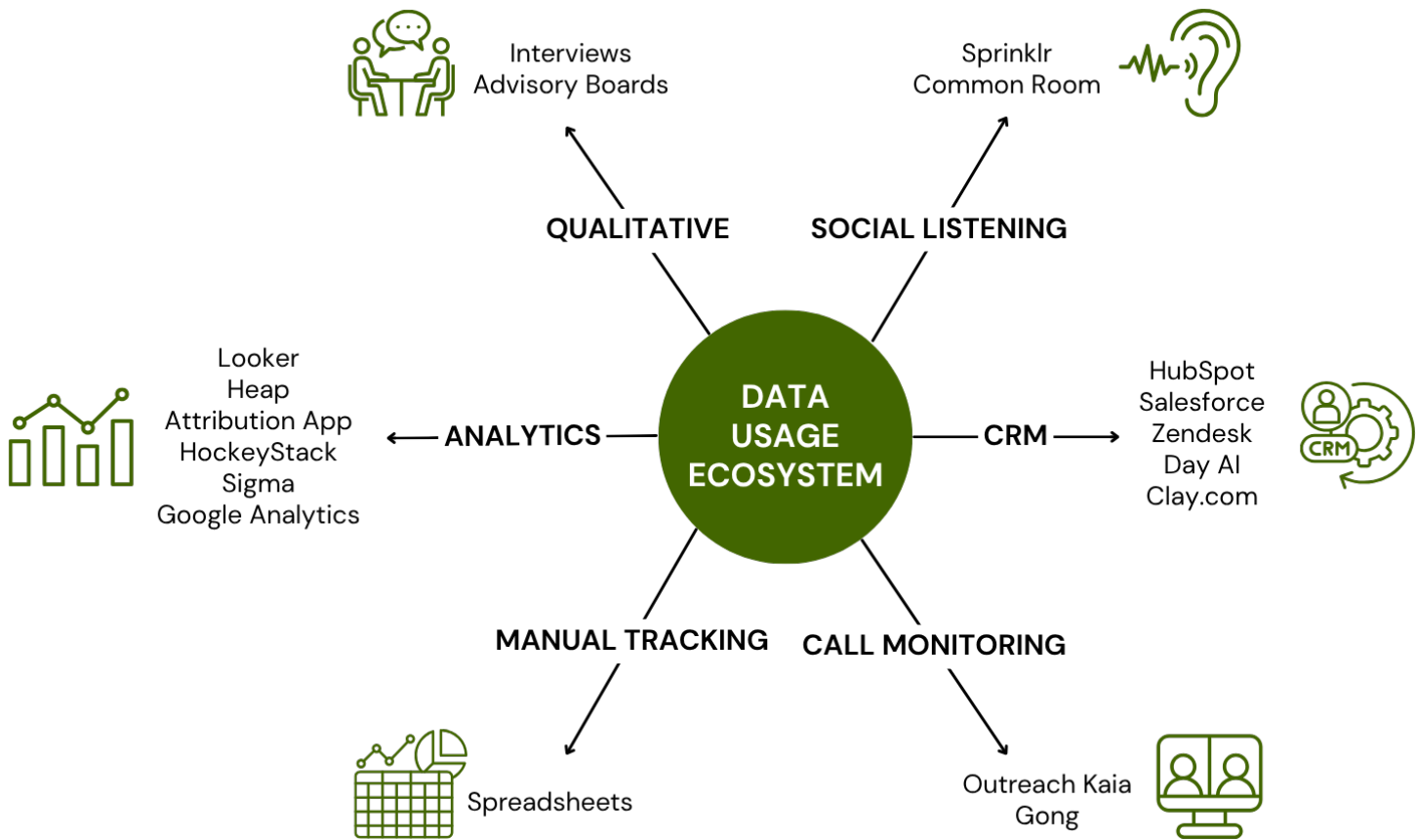
How Marketing Leaders are Using Data

Across the board, the main goals for data usage at these companies are tracking customer attribution and creating cross-functional alignment. Most teams rely on CRMs like HubSpot and Salesforce to track leads, opportunities, and sales, with the promise that these platforms will connect data to the broader business strategy.

For many, the CRM acts as a “single source of truth,” unifying sales, marketing, and customer success data to optimize the entire funnel. Leaders emphasized that a well-integrated CRM not only supports day-to-day decision making but is crucial for long-term planning.

Yet, this vision becomes a reality only when the underlying data is accurate and comprehensive. Several leaders expressed concerns about CRM attribution, caused by messy or fragmented data. As a result, many teams are investing in improving their CRMs to better support inbound and outbound account-based marketing. When set up effectively, these enhancements can help resolve classic attribution challenges and provide a clearer view of the customer journey.

For more advanced data analysis, marketing teams use platforms like Looker, Sigma, and Heap to build dashboards and track performance metrics. Tools such as Attribution App and HockeyStack were noted to be beneficial in granular insights, weighing multiple touchpoints and tailoring attribution models to specific business needs.



These tools allow leaders to drill down on campaign performance, segment audiences, and quickly share insights across teams. They offer the flexibility to adjust spend or tactics based on what’s actually influencing pipeline and revenue, responding to changes in demand or market trends.

Social listening tools (Sprinklr, Common Room) and qualitative methods (interviewing, advisory boards) are being used to capture customer sentiment and “dark social” touchpoints, while sales call monitoring tools (Outreach Kaia, Gong) help to understand customer pain points.

This combination of quantitative and qualitative data reflects the push towards holistic measurement, where metrics are enriched with real feedback from customers and prospects. This approach allows them to course-correct on messaging and communication to better connect with their target markets.

Yet, six leaders explained they are still using manual methods and tracking in spreadsheets, serving as a reminder that technology alone doesn’t solve business process gaps. Some rely on Excel for full reports, where others supplement CRM data with Excel analysis.

Manual analysis can be practical for small projects, but it falls short in being a scalable, repeatable solution, especially as businesses look to grow their data capabilities. As one Director of GTM Strategy described:

“If I want to measure how many leads have had a touchpoint with an ebook, it is possible to do that today — but it’s a lot of manual work. Right now, I have my team manually check each incoming lead to see if they’ve had any interaction with an ebook. Then we pull all that data and compile it in an Excel sheet. So, when it comes to market analysis, I wouldn’t focus on that today because there are some internal changes happening. But I do need to tackle this at a larger scale so we can have better reporting.”

A VP Marketing at a fast growing startup also reflected on their multiple tools and fragmented data:

“We use Common Room, which is a tool that connects to some of our social media channels and lets us see who’s engaging with us. Then we try to pump that information into HubSpot. So right now, we have a pretty fragmented way of trying to see the whole picture — very fragmented, actually. A lot of it still relies on a leap of faith, like, ‘Oh, I’ve been looking at this data daily, weekly, and monthly, so I can sometimes spot trends and sense when something’s happening.’ For example, I’ll notice, ‘Hmm, it seems like something’s happening on YouTube,’ and then I’ll go dig into it. But we’re struggling to connect all these pieces, so I’m actively exploring ways to improve that.”

Omniscient’s co-founder, Alex Birkett, attests to this personally through years working with data and analytics stacks, both with agency clients and in his previous career working on experimentation:

“Almost every analytics setup is broken to one degree or another. There’s never perfect data, but most companies would benefit from cleaning things up and making sure their decisions are based on trustworthy numbers.”

Tracking the Customer Journey

In these teams, the common goal of data collection, monitoring, and analysis is to track the customer journey. Marketing leaders are increasingly rethinking their strategies to get a more holistic view of how customers are finding them, interacting with their brand, and ultimately converting to a customer.

The focus on understanding the customer journey is increasingly critical as buying processes grow more complex and less linear. With customers discovering brands across a wide range of digital and offline channels including organic search, AI tools, forums, and paid ads, marketers want clarity on how these diverse touchpoints are contributing to revenue.

Google Analytics, the previous front-runner in analytics tools for measuring traffic, is showing its limitations in capturing the full customer journey, as many marketing leaders have expressed frustrations with the platform.

The ongoing shift to AI engines is further obfuscating traditional web analytics tracking. Of course, it's important for these businesses to capture that value and understand how AI tools are impacting their customer acquisition efforts.

As AI-driven experiences become a bigger part of the discovery process, brands are losing visibility into key stages of the funnel. For example, if prospective customers rely on AI-driven search, they may discover the brand through a conversational chatbox or AI Overview and bypass

the brand's website entirely, or visit directly, which would not register any channel acquisition data to learn from. Traditional metrics wouldn't account for this, possibly painting a murkier picture of customer acquisition and channel effectiveness when in reality, leads came in from a confluence of factors, efforts, and channels.

These new AI touchpoints require marketers to develop fresh approaches to measurement, seeking new engagement signals beyond website clicks and page views. Marketing leaders expressed the need to capture these attribution blind spots that aren't visible in traditional reports. Currently, the most precise way to track pipeline or conversions from LLMs is by self-reported attribution, given clear gaps in click-based attribution with AI engines

Stage 2 Capital has a helpful article that explains how to shift your marketing strategy to be compatible with LLM search, suggesting using Peec or Profound to track LLM visibility.

We suggest a layered framework for tracking LLM appearances beyond self-reported attribution – start with visibility baselines using tools like Peec or Profound, then measure referral traffic or website log files from AI crawlers, and then run self-reported attribution or incremental pipeline analysis to connect the visibility data to the conversion data. Many marketing leaders spoke about multi-touch-attribution (MTA) – commonly and historically debated in marketing circles In the past, marketers

have relied heavily on last-touch attribution, or looking at the final place the customer ended up before they landed on the brand's site. Another method is first-touch attribution, and can be useful when the first discovery is the most important indicator of capturing new customers. These methods are straightforward, easy to track, and point ROI to one specific source.

In reality, marketers know the journey is not that simple, and relying only on this data can lead to inaccurate, oversimplified views of engagement. 80% of marketing leaders we interviewed expressed a need for better customer data tracking. So, there is now a shift to heavier investment in MTA models to map the customer journey, with four marketers mentioning investing in MTA.. They really want to know each touchpoint's impact on the customer, how they flowed through information, and ways to capture value in each touchpoint. However, a highly tracked system like MTA, requires more robust data with the ability to customize how they read in and organize data, weighing different touchpoints more or less heavily, which can present political battles and analysis paralysis if not managed well. Still, no matter how sophisticated the model, it will never fully capture and represent the reality of purchasing decisions, as one VP Marketing noted:

"So, for someone who wakes up not planning to buy a pair of shoes but sees a pair they like – they buy them and that's it. But that's not how it works in our case. The foundation of our program is education, and it continues to be, especially as we see macroeconomic trends, industry shifts, changes in employment rates, and advances like AI. All of these factors influence people's desire to even begin the journey."

Another VP Marketing at a scaleup talked about centralizing customer journey touchpoints in a tool like HockeyStack:

"Using something like HockeyStack would let us see the most common customer paths – for example, people who visit a certain blog post or type of content, then get retargeted on LinkedIn, and eventually come back through branded PPC. That whole journey doesn't always show up clearly in Google Analytics. But if I had a better understanding of this, especially tied to the dollar value of opportunities in the pipeline, that would be incredibly valuable."

80% of marketing leaders we interviewed expressed a need for better customer data tracking.



Metrics for success

One of the big trends in 2025 is the death (or at least the weakening reliance) of vanity metrics. In all channels, marketing leaders are mapping efforts to business outcomes, such as conversions, revenue, and pipeline.

A Director of SEO at a public SaaS company told us about this shift:

“From an SEO standpoint, we take a more holistic approach to our goals now. We’re looking much more closely at conversions than we ever did before, using them as indicators of what’s happening with our traffic. Unfortunately, we still spend a lot of time looking at rankings, which is something I’ve been trying hard to shift away from. But rankings have been a core anchor for measuring success — we’ve traditionally focused on whether we’re growing keyword visibility.”

Last year, for example, we did what we called a ‘core keyword strategy,’ where we identified about 200 keywords that were top drivers of pipeline and revenue for our business, and that became a very targeted SEO goal. So it really depends on the year. Ideally, instead of focusing so much on rankings, I’d like to look at things like market position and share of voice. I’d even love to explore metrics like pixel depth tracking, which I know is possible, just to help offset our reliance on rankings.”

Fundamentally, the metrics you choose to track and display affect behavior and decisions, so defining the metrics that matter is important in aligning teams and their efforts.

Often, we’ve heard of the shift from volume (of leads, traffic, activity) to a more targeted approach. One FinTech startup VP told us she focuses on measuring the quarterly milestones of specific accounts, rather than the overall pipeline. She also expressed the contrarian view that measuring Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) creates a rift between sales and marketing. Another marketing leader tracks Marketing Educated Leads (MELs) in addition to MQLs, since they have a higher intent to purchase.

At two different companies (one late stage startup, one very large public company), they are focusing more of their efforts on Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO), making sure that traffic is leading to conversions in their pipeline and running experiments

to validate what works, putting more emphasis into doubling down on effective conversion patterns.

Despite tracking these evolved metrics along with traditional metrics (LTV, CAC, ARR, traffic, conversations, video performance, and rankings), data inefficiencies are persistent.

Here’s the thing: measurement and attribution is tricky. Especially for organic channels, and particularly when you try to drill down into the impact of a single touchpoint or page. It will never be perfect. However, the rigor that goes into bottoms-up forecasting helps align teams, efforts, and outcomes, as one VC illustrated well:

“I’d say actually committing to a significant part of a forecast is probably the biggest thing. When you’re looking at content, the goal is to increase organic traffic — that’s really what it comes down to. It’s the same with SEO. If you’re doing paid, you need to have a target efficiency number in dollars along with the number of visits required to hit your CAC.

Organic, ideally, helps lower your CAC because you’re investing in content, which means you can spend less on ads over time. So, the thing I try to focus on — and this goes back to data — is that you can’t have a solid forecast or structure without real, bottoms-up data in some form. That should tie back to a core financial model.

Getting clear commitments to own a particular area is really valuable, especially when you’re bringing in external partners due to a lack of experience or internal bandwidth. That’s what you’re relying on. And if those partners can scale what they own, that’s huge — you want to see how they step up at critical times for the business.

So, really, it comes down to commitment: having a forecast and making sure the business is clear on it so you can stay aligned. That’s where I land on it.”

It’s not, then, about the perfect measurement protocol or attribution model, but a useful one wherein you can align teams, commit to input metrics, and monitor the health of the system against stated outcomes and targets.

Common Data Challenges

There is a significant struggle shown by all 20 leaders in their team’s application of data.

One Director of GTM Strategy still relies on manually tracking leads, despite having several analytics tools available. A CMO said they do not fully attribute sources as organic or paid due to lack of trust in the analytics bucketing, and a Director of SEO says their reporting is messy in Salesforce (who has heard that before?).

Even the most seemingly sophisticated setups are, as one VP Marketing at a fast growing startup put it, “very fragmented.” Some have basic implementation issues that cause untrustworthy reports (e.g. signup process breaks the session), which results in lost organic attribution. Several marketing leaders also emphasized wanting and needing additional qualitative data around customer insights and sentiment tracking.

One marketing leader emphasizes that buyers are becoming more knowledgeable with this unlimited access to resources, requiring companies to be able to address questions and concerns in each point of the funnel (or perhaps even disrupting our idea of the linear “funnel”).

For B2B brands, companies are focusing on targeting individual stakeholders, rather than account-based marketing (calling it Person Based Marketing). Brand awareness is hard to track for several companies, but something they want to invest in.

The real challenge with data inefficiency is tracking it all back to ROI. Executives want to see what is converting into revenue, and without accurate

information, they tend to pull the plug on certain initiatives without giving them time to let the returns show. As a VC put it, the inefficiency in data often comes from the lack of data storage and organization, especially as data tools proliferate and sometimes increase the silos of information:

“The real challenge I see is that very few companies take a truly data-first approach to go-to-market. Most don’t even have a data warehouse. Even if you’re sales-led and don’t have millions of users, if you’re not operating from a warehouse-first mindset, you can’t be as flexible, you can’t personalize effectively, and you can’t really execute on true multi-touch attribution — which actually isn’t a myth, but very few people know how to do it well.

So, the biggest gap I see right now is that many teams simply don’t know how to leverage a data warehouse or build the foundations to make this possible. That’s a major challenge they need to overcome.”

Effective data-driven decision making is more than procuring cutting-edge tools. It requires a clear goal in mind of how to measure success, organized process flows, and a descriptive vision of the customer journey. By moving toward attribution models that accurately reflect user behavior, standardizing your business’s metrics, and closing the gaps in data organization, brands can invest confidently in both long term programs and short term initiatives or experiments, tying efforts to outcomes, and spending less time debating minute details in attribution models.



How to Break out of the Noise to Make your Brand Stand Out

“Time is a flat circle.” – Rust Cohle

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” – Ecclesiastes 1:9

Despite all the change – technological, cultural, behavioral – one thing remains unchanged: the power of the brand.

If anything, the emergence of brand and brand marketing has been effectuated by increased digital efficiencies (through AI and automation). When much has been automated away, where is the moat? Where is the alpha? How do you stand out?

In a word, brand.

Brand infiltrates everything you do, and everything you do impacts brand – from product, to customer support, to content and campaigns.

One thing that was very clear from our twenty interviews is that everywhere, across industries and company stages, people are struggling to break through the increased noise in digital ecosystems. They are seeking now to stand out from the sea of sameness.

Executive Summary

- When AI and automation level the playing field, the only durable differentiator is a brand that buyers recognise, trust, and actively seek out– across SERPs, AI Overviews, social feeds, and communities.
- Volume does not equal visibility. With AI flooding the web with generic copy, undifferentiated content blends into the noise. Winning teams automate the commodity layer, but invest human effort in proprietary data, sharp points of view, and experiences that cannot be created by AI.
- Lead with value signals, embedding brand into every touchpoint with consistent guidelines and a distinct voice to earn trust and grab attention by both users and LLMs.

Content quality diminishing with AI, oversaturating the market with undifferentiated content

AI-generated content lowers the barrier to content creation. This is great, in a sense. It now costs less to get drafts live, which unlocks voices, experiences, and expertise that previously didn’t exist.

However, the second order effect is that there is a flooding of content into the marketplace, which makes it more difficult to be seen and stand out. It is now very easy to use AI to create assets, and companies are pushing out a high quantity of undifferentiated content. 9 marketers mentioned this leads to a massive oversaturation and an abundance of noise. Then, the company’s content sounds generic, lacking a brand voice and point of differentiation. Users then develop a distrust of these sources, as they are low quality, which hurts brand reputation and discourages users from finding high-value assets.

A VC put it well:

“The worst approach is just having ChatGPT write your content, barely editing it, and then publishing it as-is. My personal take is that AI should only be a starting point. You need to add unique value — something grounded in real insight, like an interesting piece of data you publish annually or quarterly that establishes you as an authority. That could come from what you know as a founder, your background in the industry, or what you’ve learned from your customers and how they use your product.

That’s what’s going to stand the test of time. All the other generic content probably won’t hold up for long with Google’s algorithm and how they’re monitoring this stuff.”

There’s a smart way to incorporate AI workflows into your marketing systems, which is to automate table stakes and augment your human intelligence to create unique value for your users. Simply pumping out higher quantities of mediocre assets will, in the scheme of things, be dilutive and ineffective.

Another prominent VC spoke eloquently and in-depth about the problem of noise in channels, messaging, and products:

“Here are a couple of challenges I’m seeing specifically related to growth. The first is that there’s just so much noise right now — and this is broader than just growth; it’s a go-to-market challenge in general. From a consumer perspective, there’s a lot of AI fatigue and messaging fatigue. Everyone sounds the same, making big promises, and startups are struggling to figure out how to stand out. On the messaging side, they’re asking: How do I break through the noise? How do I say something different? How do I articulate a vision without losing my audience, who are clearly feeling burned out and a bit disillusioned by all these grand claims?

So, breaking out from the noise is a huge challenge. Right behind that is the issue of general saturation. Everyone’s saying the same things in the same channels, which makes it even harder for startups to get noticed. Of course, standing out has always been difficult for startups, but right now — with the AI boom — there’s also a growing sense of distrust and fatigue among prospects because so many companies are repeating the same promises in the same places.

The second big challenge is about changing search behavior, which ties back to this saturation. People are starting to ask: Does SEO even make sense for me anymore? Are people still searching the same way? Will my audience move away from Google and instead use tools like ChatGPT or Perplexity? It’s forcing startups to rethink their growth strategies in a world where search and buyer behavior are evolving rapidly.

So you have these two challenges: one is about today’s environment — if we keep running the same playbooks we’ve used for the past decade, we’re just adding to the noise in an increasingly competitive space. The other is about the future — how do we prepare for what’s coming, especially when it comes to content and search, which have historically been so central to marketing but might not look the same going forward?”

Need for novel value, using proprietary data

The solution to breaking through the noise and standing out is to create original content that cannot be replicated easily by AI. This means going beyond surface level information and text – using images, audio, and video in your content. These examples are not only favored in LLMs, but captures the attention of users as well and gets through the oversaturation. There are many ways your brand can do this, by collecting first-party data, releasing market surveys, publishing case studies, aggregating data from outside sources, or creating product-led experiences.

One marketing leader noted that they are focused on leveraging their in-house data to create free calculators for their users to drive value before they ever purchase or request a demo. By turning first-party data into useful tools, you create a valuable experience that gets picked up by LLMs and real users.

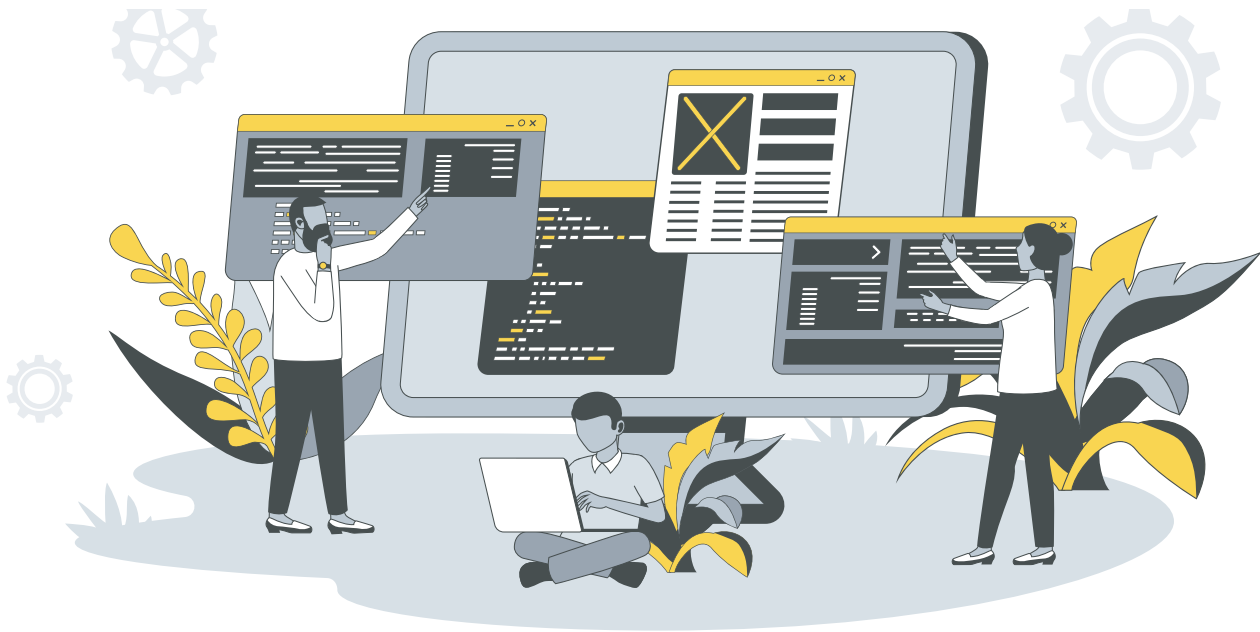
11 leaders mentioned investing more in YouTube videos and podcast creation, as they have observed a change in search behavior and customer preference for video. Youtube is the fourth most referenced site in Google’s AI overviews, with the majority of users who leave the SERP going here.

Additionally, Quora, Reddit, LinkedIn, and other forums are the most significant sources of information for LLMs since they are hubs for new information. 65% of companies are focused on thought leadership, trying to create new information that their customers are both searching for and have not seen before. Strategies for this type of content include diving into competitive intelligence and market insights.

There is a gap between knowing the novel value brands need to create, and putting their ideas into action. As a VC expressed:

“The content that people are searching for is different from the content that we generally push out to our target accounts. We need to produce high quality content that Google sees as authoritative and people want to consume. They need to find it coherent, interesting, teachable, and digestible for them to share it.”

65% of companies are focused on thought leadership, trying to create new information that their customers are both searching for and have not seen before.



Brand underpins everything

Beyond differentiated and original content using alternative media, the best way to use your resources is to tie everything back to brand. The content you put out should be novel and useful, but the ultimate goal is to build credibility. In Kevin Indig’s research, when brands are clicking out of AI-overviews it is because they have gone to that source in the past and trust they will be getting valuable additional information. We are creatures of habit, so search behavior for each individual is not changing drastically over time.

A company’s goal should be to become that go-to click so that every time they search for a similar topic, they choose your brand every time. Once you’re in, you’re in. It’s the Matthew Effect in action: once your brand is the familiar, trusted click, every new mention, backlink, and AI citation reinforces that lead. This makes it progressively harder for late entrants to catch up. Visibility begets loyalty, loyalty begets more visibility, and a virtuous flywheel emerges. Design programs that feed this compounding loop with hard-to-fake signals (original data, expert voices, standout experiences) and you’ll own the default choice set in search, social, and LLM outputs alike.

This is also a moment to step back and ask, “how am I creating value? How am I standing out?” This is especially true in content strategy, where past playbooks have been built on summarizing and writing information that already exists, whereas now we need to think beyond glossaries and ultimate guides.

As one Director of Content Marketing & SEO put it:

“I really believe this is a reset moment for content and SEO. We have to get back to producing high-quality content and figure out what truly differentiates our brand. We need to be more transparent about the value we’re creating for our customers and provide them with real data and insights that actually help them. We can’t just throw up glossary pages and expect to move up the SERPs anymore – it doesn’t work like that.”

Beyond content and SEO, brand impacts everything, and everything impacts brand. We cannot look at brand as an isolated effort anymore, as it eminently impacts things like LLM visibility, click-through-rates, and ROI of performance channels.

A Director of GTM Strategy summed it up:

“What constitutes a brand is everything – from your website, one-pagers, and presentations to your videos, infographics on LinkedIn, and even how your blog posts are worded. All of it falls under the concept of brand. That’s why it’s so important to have clear guidelines in place to make sure everything comes together cohesively.”

The brands who will win moving forward are brands who harness proprietary data, experiment with diverse media formats, and embed their content with their authentic brand voice. By weaving these strategies together, you can stay ahead of the shift towards GEO, utilize robust data, and stand out from the competition.

Quick Wrap-Up

Orchestrating AI, Data, and Brand into Compounded Growth

- 1. Leverage AI as your amplifier, not your compass. Generative tools redefine “organic” reach, but without a clear playbook, they risk multiplying noise instead of value.
- 2. Ground every initiative in rock-solid data. Clean attribution and unified metrics shift your decisions from guesses to guarantees, ensuring you invest where pipeline and revenue actually grow.
- 3. Invest in brand as your ultimate compounder. When AI levels the tactical playing field, only a trusted, distinctive brand- built on proprietary insights and consistent voice- wins the habitual click, earns LLM citations, and fuels a self-reinforcing flywheel.

Put simply- automate the commodity, measure what matters, and invest where algorithms can’t compete: your brand. When those three engines run in sync, momentum isn’t linear; it accelerates.

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