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Leadership Priorities for 2026

Gartner 2026 Priorities for Tech CMOs

Introduction

AI is transforming the marketing landscape, presenting tech CMOs with both new opportunities and significant risks. In 2026, tech CMOs must harness AI as a growth engine, not just a cost-saving tool. Tech CMOs who use AI to fundamentally reshape their organizations will lead the way. As the impact of marketing continues to shift from lead generation and content creation to securing brand trust and true revenue growth, tech CMOs must act quickly to modernize operations, amplify differentiation and evolve their own role.

Future-forward tech CMOs will demonstrate impact by providing strategic insights to key stakeholders, rather than focusing solely on operational efficiency. The most effective leaders will demonstrate behaviors that help their organizations navigate the complexities of AI-driven marketing and buying decisions.

Key questions addressed

- What are the major **trends** affecting tech CMOs?
- What are tech CMOs' top **priorities** for the year ahead?
- What **actions** must tech CMOs and their teams take to succeed?

3 key trends shaping the tech CMO's role in 2026



Tech marketing organizations are not yet positioned to unlock AI's full value.

While the initial expectation a couple of years ago was that rapid AI deployment would drive growth, efficiency and cost savings, the 2025 reality is that most AI initiatives fail because success depends first on process, data and people — not just the technology itself.



AI is changing how buyers make buying decisions.

As AI-driven tools increasingly filter and summarize options, there is a growing risk of commoditization and “sameness.” This shift means buyers may rely less on product features and more on brand reputation and trust when making choices.



Executive demands are redefining the tech CMO role.

As AI accelerates market disruption and cross-functional expectations grow, the tech CMO's responsibilities are expanding — often without a corresponding increase in resources.

3 priorities and actions for tech CMOs

PRIORITY

01

Build an AI-powered marketing organization

Tech CMOs must build AI-native operating models that fundamentally redefine how marketing creates value — starting with processes, data and people.

> ACTION

Prioritize strategic direction, process mapping and talent implications before putting AI to work.

PRIORITY

02

Amplify differentiation in an AI-mediated world

Tech CMOs should focus on building a strong, recognizable brand and clearly communicating what makes their offerings unique. By doing so, they can ensure their brand stands out and remains trusted, even as AI presents options in a more uniform way.

> ACTION

Prioritize brand and differentiation as a strategic lever for standing out and being found in an AI-mediated world.

PRIORITY

03

Become a future-forward tech CMO

Demonstrate impact by providing strategic insights to key stakeholders rather than focusing solely on operational efficiency in order to gain recognition and trust in your role.

> ACTION

Lead with strategic insights on customers and markets to deliver commercial impact.

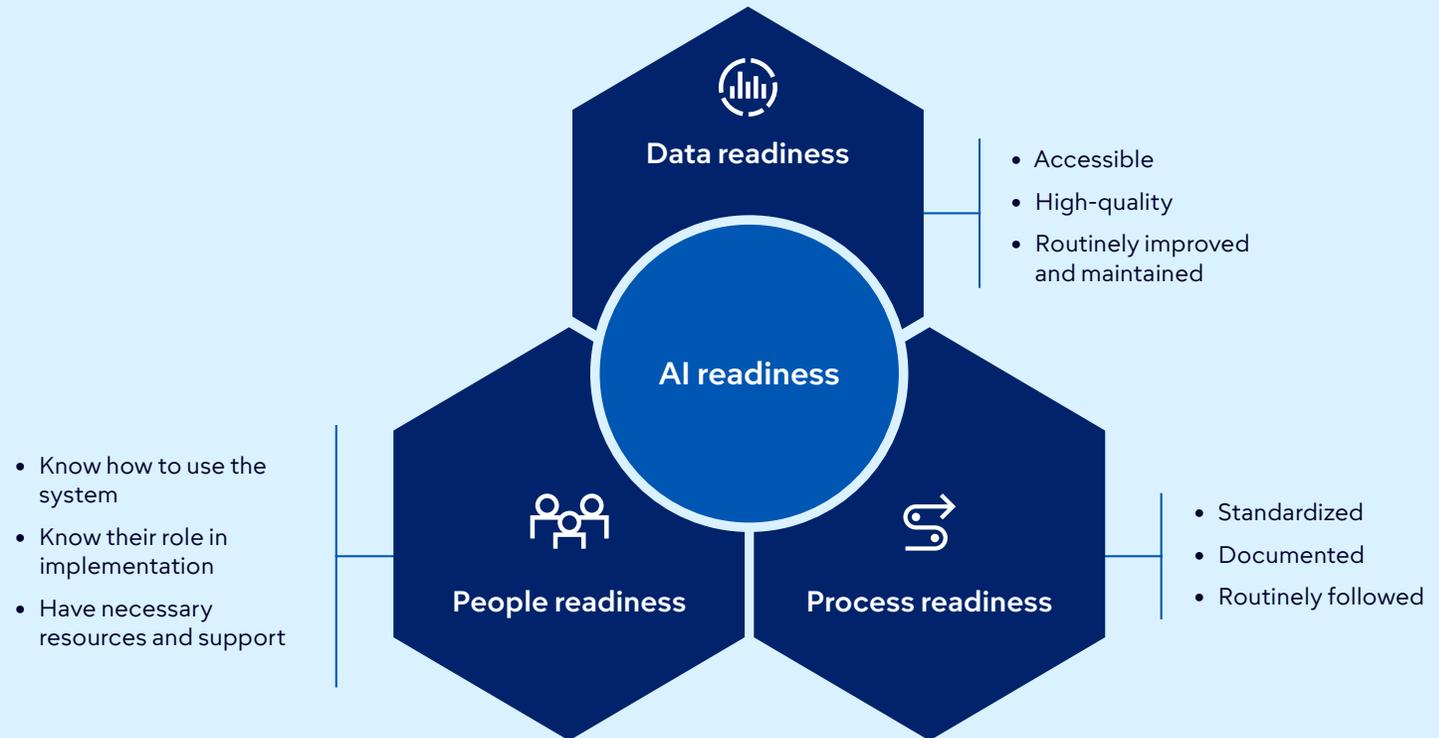
ACTION

01

Build an AI-powered marketing organization

Most AI initiatives fail because the first step in a successful implementation is not the AI; it's the process, data and people. Tech CMOs must make AI a growth engine, not just a cost saver. Those who use it to reshape the business will lead.

Determine readiness for AI



Source: Gartner

ACTION

02

Amplify differentiation in an AI-mediated world

Brand is no longer just a marketing asset, it's a strategic lever for navigating disruption, guiding innovation and building trust with both humans and AI.

Brand and differentiation is critical in the AI-driven buying journey



Trust and authority

Build your **brand's reputation** so AI are most likely to recommend you.

If your **brand is seen a leader**, AI search tools will show it more often. If not, you might get missed.



Differentiation is a noisy market

When AI makes products look similar, buyers will trust **strong brands**.

A differentiated and distinctive brand is **more likely** to be noticed and recommended by AI.



Shorter human decision-making windows

Strengthen your brand so AI agents **include you on buyers' shortlists**.

A trusted, recognizable brand ensures **consistency and builds trust**, even when AI handles interactions.

Source: Gartner

ACTION 03 Become a future-forward tech CMO

The tech CMO role is undergoing a once-in-a-generation transformation. Future-forward tech CMOs will lead through strategic insights as opposed to prioritizing operational excellence.

Market shapers lead through strategic insights
Four behaviors distinguish these leaders



Source: Gartner

Actionable, objective insights

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for product marketing leaders:

Insights

3 Steps to Make Brand a Growth Engine

Bridge brand strategy to business outcomes.



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Webinar

The State of AI and AI Agents in Marketing

Learn how to integrate AI into existing workflows and martech stacks and develop a strategic roadmap for ongoing innovation.



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