



# 2026 Gartner Marketing & Communications Awards

*Recognizing world class achievements from  
Marketing and Communications functions  
worldwide*

## Category Guide

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## 2026 Categories

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# Chief Communications Officer of the Year

***Honoring CCOs who have elevated Communications through strategic leadership, innovation, and enterprise-wide impact.***

Technological advancements, shifting audience dynamics, and increasing organizational complexity require Chief Communications Officers (CCOs) to adapt and strengthen their role as a true business leader. CCOs must lead their functions into the next era by successfully managing three simultaneous priorities:

- 1) Driving successful change comms that enable successful enterprise AI transformation;
- 2) Defining reputation management protocols to manage the risk of widespread AI-fueled truth decay;
- 3) Increasing Communications' data and analytics capabilities to meet business partner expectations of Communications' value in an AI-enabled organization.

This award honors an individual who exemplifies exceptional leadership in navigating the unique challenges faced by Chief Communications Officers, driving remarkable performance within their team and function. Judges will look for evidence of outstanding achievement in the role, specifically how the leader has elevated their team by establishing themselves as a strategic business partner—guiding enterprise-wide decision-making and contributing to tangible success for their broader organization.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrate how a CCO has:

- Successfully established credible, collaborative, and trusted partnerships with the executive leadership team and/or the board of directors.
- Updated or expanded the ways in which they and their teams add value to their organizations, especially in response to the availability of AI technologies (e.g., by introducing data and analytics capabilities or internal consulting services).
- Led or influenced cross-functional initiatives (e.g., implementation of AI technologies) that has generated business impact and reinforced the CCO's role as a business leader.
- Effectively managed Communications through adversity, such as budget cuts, talent challenges, or other organizational obstacles.
- Successfully transitioned into the CCO role and/or built or rebuilt a Communications function from the ground up.

# Chief Marketing Officer of the Year

***Honoring transformative CMO leadership who have driven innovation, growth and business impact.***

Successful Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) must serve as Future Forward CMOs, leading their functions to manage disruption, drive long-term business growth, and accentuate the strategic value of Marketing. Future Forward CMOs manage marketing as a strategic capability, positioning the function as a proactive business partner that drives enterprise-wide value. They steward their functions from achieving AI-driven efficiencies to transformational AI value, and they bridge strategy and operations to drive long-term, customer-aligned growth.

This award celebrates an individual who has excelled in overcoming complex challenges, significantly elevating the performance of their team and function. Judges will seek examples of how the leader has achieved exceptional success in their role, specifically by advancing Marketing's strategic role, fostering business-wide alignment and championing innovative strategies for sustained, long-term growth.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrate how a CMO has:

- Successfully transformed Marketing's business value and strategic partnership within the enterprise.
- Led the function to maintain a constant focus on customer needs, shape market opportunities, and deliver differentiation.
- Successfully managed Marketing through adversity, such as budget cuts, talent challenges, or macroeconomic pressures.
- Served as a change leader and champion, guiding their team through disruption and transformation.
- Spearheaded growth or innovation initiatives that introduced capabilities new to the organization, industry, or customers, with demonstrable positive impact.
- Drove functional and strategic business value through the incorporation of technology, generating efficiency as well as revenue opportunities.

# Audience Driven Content Excellence

***Awarding excellence in audience-centric design, storytelling, and channel orchestration for internal and external audiences.***

Great content is the cornerstone of audience engagement and powers the experience audiences have with your organization. In an environment where the customer journey is increasingly non-linear, the ability to deliver relevant, personalized content must be matched by the internal capacity to support that experience. Content capabilities and distribution must scale across channels, geographies and business units to serve audiences that include external customers and/or internal stakeholders.

This award honors leaders and teams who have excelled in audience experience, fostering customer advocacy and/or employee engagement through leveraging content as a strategic asset. Judges will be seeking examples of how a unified, strategic team or cross-functional partnership has deeply understood the needs of their audience and responded with an intelligent content supply chain, powered by technology, to deliver exceptional business results.

Submissions in this category may demonstrate how a team has:

- Designed and executed an audience-centric content strategy that delivers high-impact experiences and ensures message resonance across diverse global or multi-segment audiences.
- Crafted compelling narratives and messaging to engage, inspire, and influence behavior among external customers and/or internal stakeholders, translating brand promise into meaningful audience value.
- Enabled dynamic, personalized content experiences that adapt to audience needs and preferences, leveraging technology to deliver the right message at the right moment throughout the journey.
- Scaled content operations and production using advanced platforms and technologies—such as CMPs, DAMs, AI, and automation—to streamline workflows, maximize asset reuse, and maintain brand consistency at scale.
- Developed sophisticated audience insight capabilities by sensing, analyzing, and proactively responding to audience behaviors and feedback, utilizing data platforms and analytics to refine content and experience strategies.
- Orchestrated seamless multi channel content distribution and innovative digital experiences—including interactive storytelling, guided selling, and emerging technologies (AI, AR, VR)—to drive conversion, advocacy, and engagement while eliminating organizational silos.

# Brand and Reputation Excellence

***Recognizing excellence in building, protecting and activating organizational brand and reputation.***

In a highly competitive environment, delivering a truly differentiated brand message and experience is more important than ever. Brand's role in transformational growth requires leaders to connect the brand's value directly to business strategy. Successfully activating a brand and/or reputation management strategy requires galvanizing broad internal support to bring the brand to life externally to customers in a way that truly resonates. Furthermore, as guardians of reputation, organizations must implement proactive strategies to manage reputation amidst widespread AI-fueled truth decay.

This award celebrates leaders and teams who have transcended traditional approaches to brand differentiation and reputation strategy, seamlessly integrating internal alignment with impactful external execution to achieve measurable results. Judges will be seeking submissions that highlight how distinctive insights inspired innovative brand and reputation strategies, fostered a deep internal understanding of the brand, and empowered the organization to activate the brand in fresh, compelling ways that shift audience awareness, perceptions and behaviors.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrated teams who have:

- Driven innovative approaches to internal brand understanding throughout the organization that empowered brand activation.
- Changed the perception of legacy brands to enter new markets or improve competitive differentiation in the age of AI.
- Refreshed corporate and/or product brands, or evolved brand positioning in response to untapped market opportunities.
- Delivered memorable brand experiences that changed audience perspectives and behaviors.
- Developed and activated a corporate narrative to improve stakeholder advocacy.
- Measured and communicated the business benefits of brand differentiation, showing how brand changes (rather than simply increased spend) drove meaningful changes internally and externally.
- Demonstrated an exceptional enterprise-wide reputation management strategy with concrete impact on business outcomes.

# Customer Growth and Market Impact Excellence

***Recognizing initiatives that have driven customer acquisition, demand generation and market influence.***

The modern buyer moves freely between digital channels and sales interactions. The greatest commercial successes are achieved when Marketing, Sales, and other internal functions work together to drive revenue growth among new and existing customers. Marketing leaders must adapt to changing buyer behaviors by adopting a zero-based approach to channel strategy and designing for a customer-first journey. This requires evolving collaboration to ensure alignment around a unified Go-to-Market (GTM) framework.

This award recognizes teams that have achieved sustained commercial success through innovative collaboration and impactful digital customer engagement, demonstrating strong strategic alignment and operational partnership with Sales. Judges will be looking for entries that showcase effective demand generation and commercial excellence, highlighting how seamless coordination with Sales has driven measurable business results and supported customers throughout their purchasing journey.

Submissions in this category may include examples of how the entrant has:

- Co-created an omnichannel strategy that enhances customer engagement, moving the customer forward on their journey.
- Developed sophisticated methods of sensing and proactively responding to customer needs.
- Collaborated effectively with Sales and other teams to reduce operational gaps or redundancies, eliminating information and data silos that impede strategic productivity.
- Used innovative UX techniques and other progressive technologies (e.g., AI, AR, VR) to deliver digital experiences that drive conversion and advocacy.
- Developed and executed creative digital commerce experiences that impacted the path to purchase resulting in commercial growth.

# Employee Engagement through Change Excellence

*Highlighting impactful internal communications that fostered alignment, behavior change and employee experience through times of change.*

The only thing that's constant is change. Evolving AI technologies deployed amid one world event after another continue to reshape business markets and organizational landscapes, demanding that Communications functions embrace their mission-critical role in driving successful internal change for enterprise transformation. Communicators remain on the front lines, ensuring that employees understand the change and feel capable of taking action. Success in this area ensures that the internal brand, culture, and ability to meet customer needs become stronger and more competitive.

This award recognizes leaders and teams who have made a significant impact on the employee experience by driving meaningful and creative change within their organizations. Judges will be looking for submissions that showcase how these leaders have successfully guided employees through major organizational transformations—such as digital or AI initiatives—ensuring that individuals not only understand the changes but also feel empowered to take action. Winning entries will demonstrate how these efforts have strengthened organizational performance and enhanced the ability to meet evolving stakeholder needs.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrate:

- Successful communication of significant organizational changes—such as digital or AI-enabled transformation, restructures, or the implementation of hybrid work practices—to different employee groups.
- Sensitive management of change fatigue, information overload, and apprehension around new technologies, particularly AI.
- Effective outreach and equitable engagement of frontline, non-wired employee segments, such as those working away from desks or in facilities without regular access to digital communications.
- Ongoing tracking of change impacts and employee acceptance to identify emerging risks and proactively adjust communication strategies.
- Strong collaboration with cross-functional leaders, HR, or other internal support teams to manage communications and deliver a consistent, positive employee experience.

# Innovation in Tech, Data and Measurement Excellence

***Honoring transformative use of technology, data and analytics to advance marketing and communications outcomes.***

Technology is a mission-critical component of the modern organization. Marketing and Communications leaders rely on a technology stack to improve business outcomes; efficient and innovative use of data and Artificial Intelligence is essential to leading effectively. Building an AI-powered Marketing and Communications organization and overcoming data and analytics challenges are the keys to standing out among the crowd.

This award celebrates leaders and teams who have driven innovation and transformation by integrating technology, data, and robust measurement practices in their functions—recognizing each as a critical pillar of success. Judges will be seeking entries that illustrate how organizations have harnessed these elements in tandem to reimagine engagement with their audiences, delivering heightened relevance and measurable impact.

Submissions should highlight not only progressive uses of technology but also sustainable approaches to implementation, adoption, and adaptation that strategically advance organizational goals. Additionally, judges will look for evidence of sophisticated, outcomes-driven data and analytics strategies that capture real behavior change and tangible business results.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrate:

- Implementation of technology to create better, innovative interactions and experiences for customers, buyers, employees, and other stakeholders.
- Use-case driven strategies that combine technology innovation with consolidation or simplification of technology stacks, reducing total cost of ownership and increasing ROI
- Deployment of AI—including generative AI or AI Agents—to produce content for internal and external stakeholders, orchestrate customer interactions, accelerate functional workflows, uncover hidden patterns and trends in data, and inform impactful marketing or communications decisions.
- Cross-functional collaboration with business, IT, and other data partners, leveraging customer, marketing, communications, and HR data to deliver meaningful business outcomes.
- Development of measurement capabilities that utilize outcomes-focused metrics, targeting specific audiences or business objectives, and capture actual behavior change and business impact.

# Strategic Leadership and Operational Excellence

**Celebrating teams that have achieved tangible organizational impact through outstanding strategic direction and operational mastery.**

The context organizations operate in never ceases to evolve, and effective operational strategy and execution are critical for the enterprise's ability to sense and respond to change. To deliver greater results than ever before, Marketing and Communications leaders must make strategic decisions regarding structure, operating models and workflows. Great strategic leadership and operational mastery improve the productivity of Marketing and/or Communications' work and enable scalable, ongoing cross-functional alignment and collaboration.

This award recognizes teams that have delivered sustained strategic and operational impact through effective organizational design, process optimization, and governance practices. Winning entries will showcase how specific transformation initiatives improved key outcomes such as increased functional speed or agility, enhanced stakeholder satisfaction, and greater organizational efficiency. Judges will be looking for submissions that demonstrate how innovative approaches elevated the function's business impact.

Submissions in this category may include entries that demonstrate how a leader has:

- Successfully executed organization design decisions that demonstrably improved the quality and efficiency of how their function organizes resources to plan and execute work.
- Established clear criteria for determining when and how to collaborate, and employed governance tactics to keep integrated initiatives moving forward more efficiently.
- Successfully implemented new tools and processes that streamlined operations and/or enabled improvements in work planning, management, and approval.
- Eliminated information and data silos that impeded strategic views of functional productivity, operational performance measures, or consistent internal messaging.
- Launched internal capability-building programs that embedded operational best practices and fostered a culture of continuous improvement within the function.
- Built robust scenario planning capabilities with demand sensing mechanisms that enable rapid pivots of current and planned work when triggered.

# Submission Criteria: All Categories

## **Step 1: Add an Executive Summary** (required, max. 100 words)

Summarise the key elements of your entry. Consider this your entry's elevator pitch.

## **Step 2: Business-Relevance of the Work** (required, max. 300 words)

In this section, share more about the business problem that your work helped solve and/or the business goal that your work helped achieve. Make sure you articulate why your CEO (or equivalent) cared about what you did.

## **Step 3: Implementation** (required, max. 800 words)

Provide full details of your entry, including:

- Your target audience.
- The steps you took.
- How you took a strategic approach in your work.
- Examples of relevant tactics or deliverables.
- Cross functional collaboration with shared goals in mind (e.g. with Sales, IT, HR)
- Use of vendors, technology, agencies to support your work
- Challenges you faced along the way - not every plan is perfect the first time

## **Step 4a: Evidence of Business Impact** (required, max. 400 words)

In this section, provide evidence of your business impact. Submissions that can link the work to business-relevant measures or outcomes (e.g., increased sales, revenue, wallet share, sales conversion rate, share price, employee retention, employee productivity, etc.) will be looked upon more favorably.

## **Step 4b: Evidence of Behavioral Impact** (required, max. 400 words)

In this section, provide evidence of how your work influenced people's behaviors in ways that supported a positive business impact (e.g., people's behavioral change, qualitative feedback from stakeholders, increased customer referrals, attendance at events, requests for product demos or more information, etc.).

## **Step 5: Examples of Your Content and/or Impact** (required, max. 5 attachments)

In this section, you are encouraged to share at least one supporting attachment but a maximum of 5 attachments that demonstrate the quality of your work and the impact it had on your function and/or the broader organization (e.g., specific slides from presentation decks, internal or external recognition of your work, dashboards, reports etc.).

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