



Gartner®

The CMO Report

Gartner answers top CMO challenges

3Q26

Maximize your impact as a CMO

Each quarter, Gartner analyzes CMOs' highest-priority questions, evaluating based on inquiry volumes, content consumption, analyst conversations, evolving environmental trends and proprietary surveys.

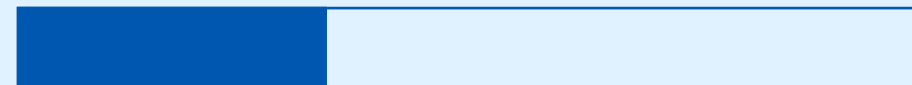
Use this edition of The CMO Report to:

- **Benchmark priorities** against peer CMOs
- **Address top marketing priorities** with key recommendations
- **Increase stakeholder influence** through effective communications

CMOs are under pressure to drive enterprise growth, yet

only 34%

of senior marketing leaders are **seeing the returns they expected from their AI investments.**



Source: Gartner



AI implementation and maturation

Key focus areas:

- AI and GenAI use cases in marketing
- Marketing organization and design

Gartner analysis of in-demand client questions shows that CMOs are seeking guidance on selecting AI and GenAI use cases, closely followed by questions around marketing organizational design.

As organizations accelerate AI adoption, CMOs are navigating the balance between identifying AI-driven opportunities for efficiency and growth and implementing the operational, structural and process changes required to scale success.

While 70% of CMOs consider AI leadership a critical goal for 2026, an equal proportion report having immature internal AI processes — highlighting a significant gap between ambition and execution.

Top CMO questions

AI and GenAI use cases in marketing

1

How can AI be integrated into marketing strategies?

2

How should marketing mature its AI roadmap?

Marketing organization and design

3

How should marketing teams optimize organizational structures?

4

What capabilities will a future-forward marketing function need?

Source: Gartner

Focus area: AI and GenAI use cases in marketing

- **Prioritize AI for outcomes-focused revenue growth, not just efficiency:** AI's greatest potential is realized when expectations are set around revenue growth. Reframe AI's goals in marketing to include revenue growth (not just productivity or efficiency) and prioritize use cases that enable strategic decision making.
- **Define what must remain human-owned vs. AI-automated:** As AI use cases scale and become more agentic, confidently establishing governance and oversight requirements will be critical for long-term success. Make the default human-in-the-loop and iteratively establish the conditions necessary to relax oversight. Progress depends on both AI capabilities and the organization's confidence in those capabilities.



81%

of marketing leaders using AI still
**evaluate its effectiveness based
on time saved.**



Source: Gartner

Focus area: Marketing organization and design

- **Operate like a franchise and centralize as much as possible for your context:** The most effective franchisors centralize the systems, governance and resources that drive scale and consistency while empowering business units to execute locally. This will be particularly important as effective AI execution will require centralized and connected data and processes. Assess your context based on intricacy and size of your organization, complexity of your markets and the expanse of the CMO remit.
- **Plan to evolve from a focus primarily on execution as a marketing organization to an adaptive, governed growth system:** Marketing functions that organize around campaigns, channels and manual coordination will struggle to safely scale, justify resources and demonstrate strategic value as AI absorbs executional work. In contrast, organizations that reorient marketing around decision making, learning and governance will be better positioned to achieve business goals, control growth investments, manage risk and maintain trust at scale.



73%

of CMOs report that their **marketing function structure is fully or mostly centralized.**

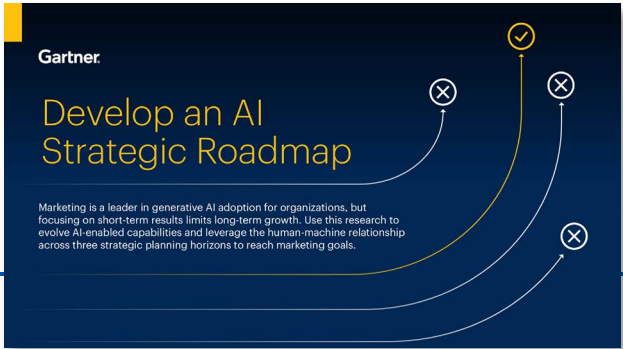


Source: Gartner

Take action with Gartner resources



Use [this report](#) to build an AI strategic roadmap, strengthen AI-enabled capabilities and optimize the human-machine relationship to achieve marketing goals across three planning horizons.



[Schedule a call](#) with a Gartner analyst to prioritize AI initiatives that drive business outcomes, establish effective governance and operating models, and accelerate your marketing organization's AI maturity.



Already a client?

Use **AskGartner** to explore:

[How should marketing mature its AI roadmap?](#) ↗



Adapting to AI-enabled customers

Key focus areas:

- Changes in customer behaviors and preferences
- Investments for AI-mediated exploration

CMOs are increasingly seeking guidance on answer engine optimization (AEO) as customers turn to answer engines for online search.

While only 17% of consumers typically use GenAI tools during their shopping journeys, usage has doubled over the past two years. B2B buyers are even further ahead, with 45% using AI tools to identify suppliers. Yet marketing investments have not significantly shifted to reflect these changing behaviors, with spending on both search advertising and SEO continuing to grow.

To keep pace, CMOs must understand how customer discovery behaviors are evolving and determine the additional investments — including roles, metrics and vendors — required to adapt to answer engines.

Top CMO questions

Changes in customer behaviors and preferences

1

How is GenAI transforming the customer journey?

2

How do we need to evolve digital strategies for answer engines?

Investments for AI-mediated discovery

3

What investments are required for SEO in an AI era?

4

How can we ensure brand presence and preference in a world of answer engines?

Source: Gartner

Focus area: Changes in customer behaviors and preferences

- **Target brand presence around customer tasks suited to answer engines:** Focus AEO on tasks where customers are already using these tools, namely learning about, comparing and selecting best-fit options. Customers are less likely to turn to answer engines for activities such as identifying their needs or completing a purchase.
- **Rectify the negative customer impacts of GenAI tools:** While usage of GenAI tools during a purchase process positively impacts commercial outcomes, relying heavily on them has negative impacts. Overreliance is where customers turn to GenAI tools as a primary source of information and directly follow GenAI recommendations to make decisions. Prevent overreliance by creating digital experiences that prompt customer reflection and critical thinking.



45%

of B2B buyers **use AI tools to identify suppliers**, while 17% of consumers typically use GenAI tools during their shopping journeys.



Source: Gartner

Focus area: Investments for AI-mediated exploration

- **Ensure SEO talent is AEO ready:** Good AEO is built on the foundations of good SEO but requires some additional skills such as optimizing citation likelihood and monitoring AI visibility. Make sure your team is appropriately upskilled and ready to take on AEO.
- **Incorporate zero-click performance metrics into measurement efforts:** Answer engines are increasingly producing zero-click experiences. As these AI answers satisfy search intent directly, traditional organic clicks are declining. Without adapting measurement, CMOs risk misdiagnosing performance declines, misallocating spend and ceding visibility to competitors. Add answer engine visibility (e.g., share of answer, citations, brand mentions, etc.) to existing dashboards to capture demand signals that no longer result in site visits.
- **Prioritize AEO content production to augment visibility and build brand awareness:** Content planning, development and amplification must be updated, engaging human buyers and machines (e.g., AI search, assistants and agents), ensuring your content is discoverable, machine-readable and compelling. Establish formal programs to provide authoritative content that supports AEO and strengthens brand credibility.

By 2027,
85%

of digital channel marketing teams in large enterprises will have **fewer personnel executing technical work** than they had in 2025.

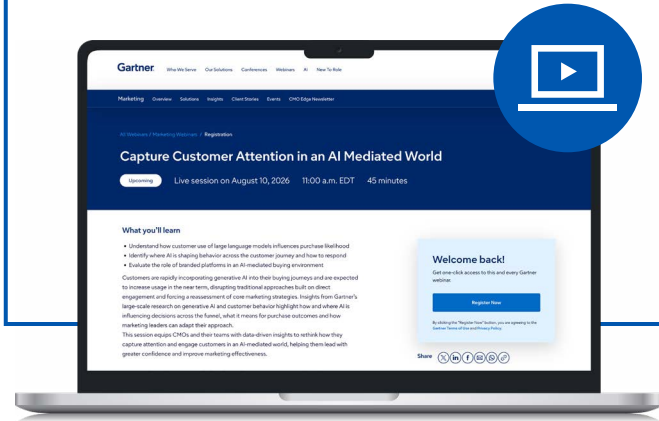


Source: Gartner

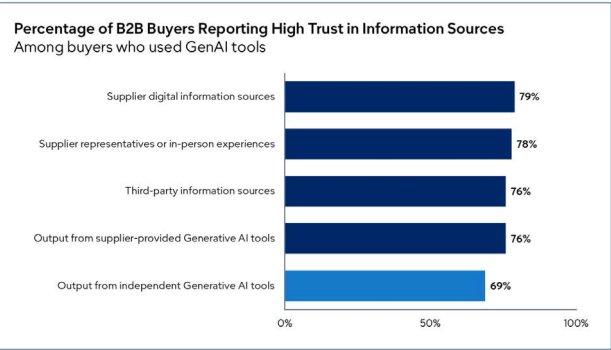
Take action with Gartner resources



Watch our webinar on [How to Capture Customer Attention in the Age of AEO](#) to learn how AI is influencing purchase decisions and what marketing leaders can do to adapt and improve effectiveness.



Learn how [B2B buyers' evolving relationship with AI tools](#) is reshaping purchase decisions and what it means for marketing leaders.



Already a client?

Use **AskGartner** to explore:

[How is GenAI transforming the customer journey?](#) ↗





Advance your marketing strategy by attending a Gartner conference.

Join The World's Most Important Gathering of CMOs and Marketing Executives™ to tackle priorities including marketing strategy, customer experience, marketing analytics, marketing technology and AI to drive growth in your organization.

Don't miss out.

View the Conference calendar today and find the conference that's right for you.

→ [Explore the Calendar](#)



Gartner is the world authority on AI

See how on gartner.com/ai

510,000+
client interactions

6,000+
AI-related
written insights

4,000+
AI use cases
and real-world
case studies

Gartner®

Connect with us

Get actionable, objective business and technology insights that drive smarter decisions and stronger performance on your mission-critical priorities.

U.S.: 1 855 322 5484

International: +44 (0) 3300 296 946

[Become a Client](#)

Learn more about Gartner for Marketing Leaders

gartner.com/en/marketing

Stay connected to the latest insights



Attend a Gartner conference

[View Conference](#)