

Gartner

The CMO Report

Gartner answers top CMO challenges

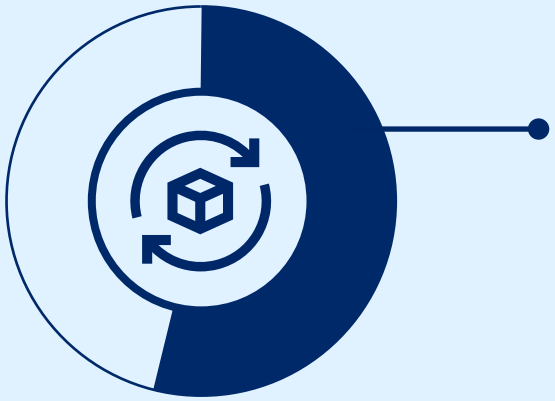
4Q26

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 peers' to identify emerging issues
- **Learn** how CMOs are addressing their top challenges
- **Communicate** key issues, trends and insights across your organization



54%

of CMOs say their operating models require significant change.

Source: Gartner

Human trust amid rising AI usage

Key focus areas: Protecting customer relationships and guiding employees through AI change

Gartner analysis highlights a growing leadership challenge for CMOs: as AI becomes more embedded in marketing and customer interactions, there's a premium placed on human trust. Customers continue to seek human validation in AI-mediated experiences, with only 43% of consumers reporting greater reliance on real people for shopping information due to the emergence of AI.

On the internal side, successful AI transformation depends on employee confidence and trust in the changes being made and the tools being implemented.



Top CMO questions:

Protecting customer relationships

- How do I leverage critical customer moments to build the brand?
- How do I build customer trust at both human and AI touchpoints?

Guiding employees through AI change

- How do I drive employee AI fluency (e.g., usage and efficiency)?
- How do I build a culture of learning and adaptation?

Focus area: Protecting customer relationships

- **Actively manage your customers' human experience (HX):** In an increasingly AI-mediated world, trust becomes a competitive advantage. HX creates meaningful connections between brands and customers, focusing on authenticity, expertise, belonging and reliability. This requires monitoring and governing the human experience across owned, partner, paid, earned, customer, experiential and proxy touchpoints to ensure trust is consistently built. To start, map where human trust is scarce and where only human interactions can influence decisions; then prioritize high-impact human touchpoints to demonstrate credibility, judgment and relationship building.
- **Leverage the unique capabilities of both large language models (LLMs) and humans:** Today, brand trust has two audiences — machines and humans. Machines evaluate a brand based on information accessibility, consistency, verifiability and comparability. Humans, on the other hand, build trust based on reassurance, accountability and visible escalation. Build trust through both mediated and direct interactions by ensuring the brand is consistent and interpretable through AI intermediaries, as well as prioritizing places of human escalation in sensitive or impactful places.



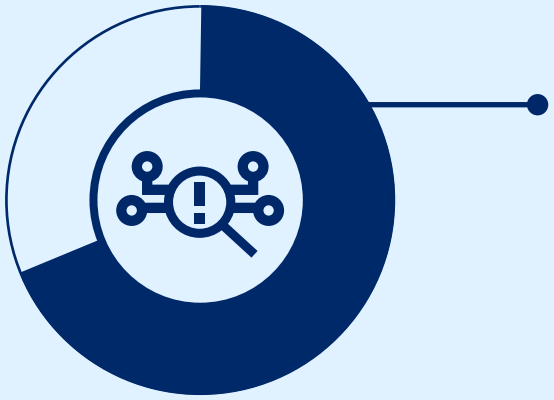
69%

of B2B buyers prefer to validate GenAI-generated information with a sales representative.

Source: Gartner

Focus area: Guiding employees through AI change

- **Equip and empower managers to be confident change leaders:** Sixty percent of employees look to their manager first during times of disruption, but nearly 60% of managers do not feel prepared to lead their team through change adoption at the pace the organization requires. Empower managers to be change agents by surfacing their concerns, equipping them with conversational guides and building manager communities of practice. Help managers frame AI-driven changes as opportunities for creativity, strategic focus and higher-order decision-making, rather than an identity threat to employees.
- **Erode employee AI resistance by focusing on communication, use-case prioritization and skill development:** Show how AI bolsters, not eliminates, roles and marketing value. Mandate AI adoption with transparent communication and clear expectations on what "good" adoption looks like. To drive natural adoption, look for AI use cases that target disliked marketing work (e.g., time-consuming, logistically tedious) and upskill through investments in formal and standardized AI training, alongside shared lessons such as prompt libraries.



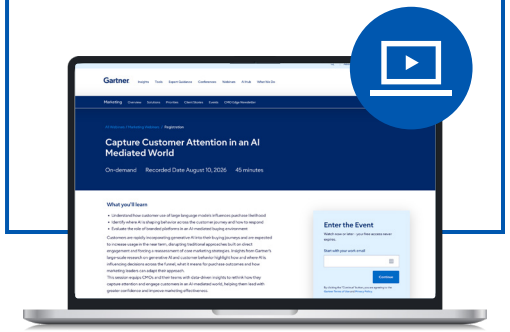
40%

of marketing leaders say staff anxiety is holding back AI pilots and limiting ROI.

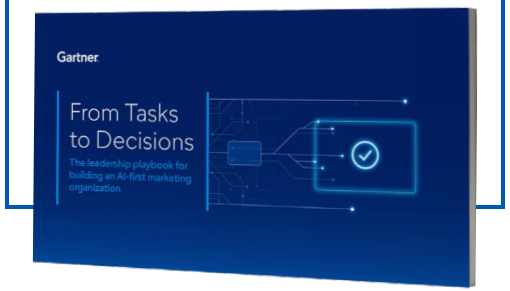
Source: Gartner

Take action with Gartner resources

Watch our webinar, Capture Customer Attention in an AI-Mediated World, to learn how AI is transforming customer behavior and what marketing leaders can do to respond.



Download our playbook, From Tasks to Decisions: Build an AI-First Marketing Organization, to identify the marketing decisions that need governance and apply AI with greater confidence.



Already a client?

Use **AskGartner** to explore:

How do I build customer trust at both human and AI touchpoints? ↗

Elevating marketing's role

Key focus areas: Reasserting the CMO's strategic role and driving growth-enabling collaboration

AI is creating a pivotal moment for CMOs to redefine both their own and marketing's broader strategic value within the organization. While 65% of senior marketing leaders believe AI will dramatically change the role of the CMO in the next two years, only 15% of CEOs believe their CMO is strongly AI-savvy. This credibility gap creates pressure for marketing leaders to demonstrate that they can not only effectively adopt AI but also solidify marketing's role as a strategic growth lever and shaper of enterprisewide transformation.

Yet, realizing AI's full value necessitates broader alignment and collaboration — data must be available, handoffs must be coordinated, governance must be established and cross-functional technology must be integrated. In particular, CMOs must renegotiate their relationship with IT to clearly delineate which activities are marketing-led and which are IT-led. However, effective collaboration remains a challenge: 92% of senior marketing leaders struggle with high collaboration drag, saying it takes too long to make decisions, there's too much peer feedback, too many meetings and decision-making accountability is unclear. If cross-functional collaboration is not improved, organizations will struggle to deliver growth and realize a return on AI investments.

Top CMO questions:

Reasserting the CMO's strategic role

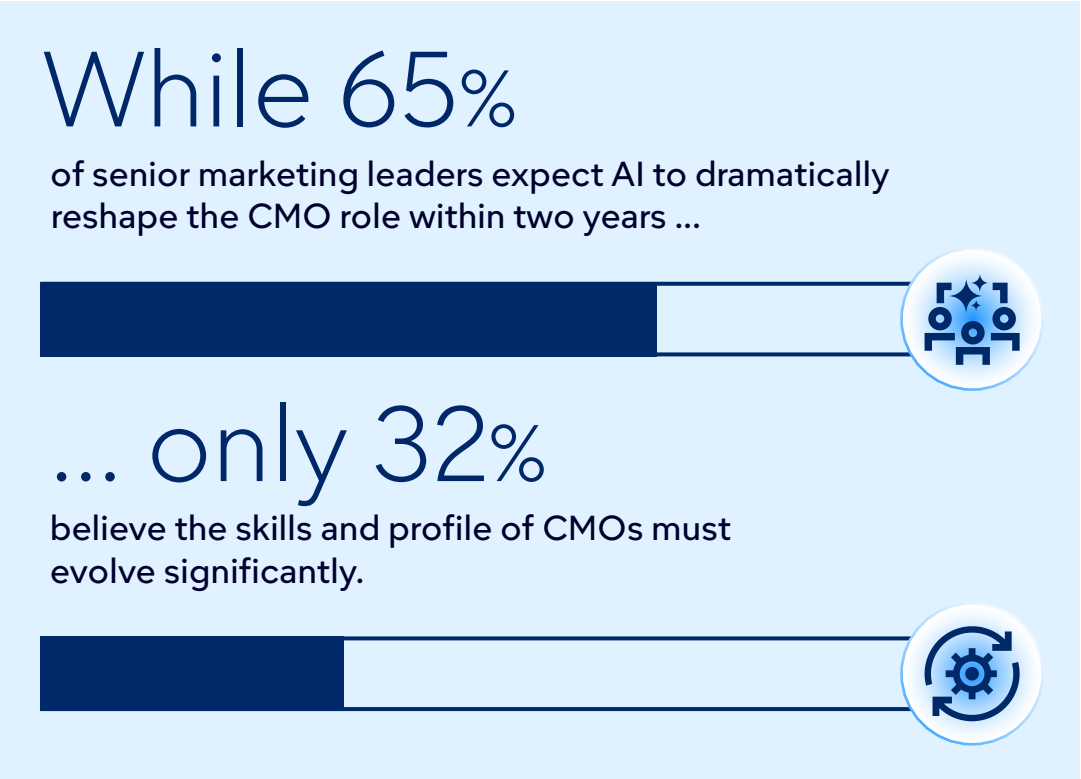
- How does AI shift the CMO role?
- How should I communicate the value of marketing to other leaders in an era of uncertainty?

Driving growth-enabling collaboration

- How do I drive cross-functional collaboration to get the most out of AI?
- How should I redefine responsibilities across IT and marketing to accelerate AI outcomes?

Focus area: Reasserting the CMO's strategic role

- **Use AI to augment and enhance market-shaper abilities:** CMOs who shape markets through innovation, positioning and customer insights consistently outperform those focused primarily on navigating organizational complexity. AI creates opportunities to amplify these market-shaping proficiencies by using AI to monitor shifting customer needs, synthesizing customer signals, running rapid innovation experiments and translating macrosignals into strategic choices.
- **Proactively build CMO AI literacy skills to address emerging gaps in strategy, technology and management:** CMOs are underestimating the capabilities required to lead in an AI-enabled future. CMOs should proactively build their AI literacy to be able to identify high-value use cases, build technical know-how in prompt engineering, and enforce AI agent accountability. Those who do will be better positioned to accelerate transformation, strengthen marketing's strategic influence and maximize the business value of AI.



Source: Gartner

Focus area: Driving growth-enabling collaboration

- **Target multiple organization levels to facilitate collaboration among executives, between functions and within marketing:** Collaboration done well drives growth. However, done poorly, it can impede progress. CMOs can reduce this friction by strengthening executive alignment, clarifying cross-functional roles and responsibilities, and upskilling marketing on project management and strategic thinking.
- **Embrace CMO-CIO interdependency and work to develop co-leadership on consumption costs, AI policy and data integration:** Organizations that embrace co-leadership between C-suite executives and the CIO are twice as likely to exceed business performance targets, yet relatively few (18%) have adopted this model. CMOs must work to establish a long-term partnership with IT. Start by reviewing your martech roadmap to identify new or evolving places for collaboration (such as consumption-based pricing and AI agents), aim to adopt success metrics that focus on what capabilities martech enables (e.g., multichannel personalization), and develop cross-functional templates for technology onboarding and testing.



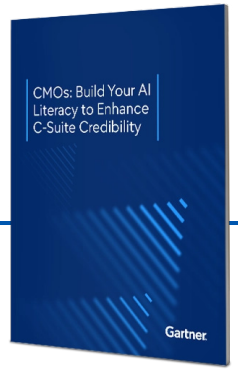
Source: Gartner

Take action with Gartner resources

Download our eBook, How Market-Shaping CMOs Exceed C-Suite Expectations, to explore the market-shaping strategies that help CMOs exceed C-suite expectations and drive innovation.



Download our CMO AI Literacy Playbook to close the AI readiness gap, build the skills needed for AI-driven growth, and enhance your influence across the C-suite.



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Use **AskGartner** to explore:

How do I drive cross-functional collaboration to get the most out of AI? ↗

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