

Gartner Insights

Digital IQ: “Genius” Marketing Strategies That CMOs Should Emulate

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Initiatives: Functional Design; Build an AI-Powered Marketing Organization

Genius brands are achieving rapid growth in revenue and CX through effective AI usage. This analysis of brands that outperform all others in digital marketing reveals how leaders operate, providing CMOs with insight into what is possible and the tech and talent strategies required to achieve digital marketing excellence.

Overview

Key Findings

- Organizations characterized as AI leaders are more likely to embed AI into their core business processes and decision making than peers. ¹ For instance, Wells Fargo, a retail banking Genius brand, developed a “customer engagement engine” that drove 5x greater revenue within 2 years and +9pt NPS from AI-powered conversations.
- Genius brands replaced a higher share of their marketing tools across a 12-month period than peers, streamlining their multichannel marketing and advertising data management technologies. ²
- Across 1,139 brands, 6.4% more marketing roles were posted in Q4 2024 through Q3 2025. ³ During this period, Genius brands opened 31.6% more marketing jobs. ³ In particular, Genius brands increasingly sought marketing technologists with software and programming expertise to close a perceived, critical capability gap in marketing technology skills. ³

Key Recommendations

- **Drive AI adoption:** Enhance your teams' level of adoption of AI across workflows by addressing typical human barriers such as staff anxiety to change and distrust in the outputs of AI models. Empower managers to serve as change champions and embed ongoing activities that raise confidence using AI.
- **Build martech agility:** Increase your martech flexibility by moving toward a composable architecture. Connect new technologies into a central data layer rather than relying on point-to-point integrations. Begin with markets where AI has accelerated change, such as ad tech, channel marketing and CX.
- **Increase technical proficiency:** Define a strategy to increase the technical proficiency and “digital dexterity” of your marketing function, either through hiring technology experts or leveraging existing IT talent. Encourage knowledge sharing from tech experts to raise collective confidence using new solutions.

Introduction

In 2025, Gartner benchmarked the digital marketing performance of 1,139 brands from across 11 industries, with only the top 3% within each industry being classed as “Genius” brands (see Table 1). On average, these brands surfaced in 12.0x more Google searches than peers, ⁴ served 10.3x more social ad impressions ⁵ and received 18.7x more site traffic in 2025. ⁶ This level of performance takes investment, but moreover requires a dedicated pursuit of best practices, which all brands can learn from.

Table 1: The 2025 Digital IQ Genius Brands

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

Healthcare delivery organizations	Homecare and OTC	Insurance
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. AdventHealth 2. Baylor Scott & White 3. NewYork-Presbyterian 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tide 2. Clorox 3. Downy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progressive Insurance 2. Allstate 3. State Farm
Digital IQ Index: Healthcare Delivery Organization Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Home Care and OTC Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Insurance Best Practices
Luxury retail	Manufacturing and chemicals	Monobrand retail
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coach 2. Tiffany & Co. 3. Louis Vuitton 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sherwin Williams 2. John Deere 3. Delta Faucet 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Samsung 2. IKEA 3. Lenovo
Digital IQ Index: Luxury Retail Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Manufacturing and Chemicals Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Monobrand Retail Best Practices
Multibrand retail	Personal care	Pharma Rx
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Digital IQ Index: Multibrand Retail Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Personal Care Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Pharma Rx Best Practices
Retail banking	Wealth and asset management	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Capital One 2. Wells Fargo 3. Chase 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Charles Schwab 2. Fidelity Investments 3. E*TRADE 	
Digital IQ Index: Retail Banking Best Practices	Digital IQ Index: Wealth and Asset Management Best Practices	

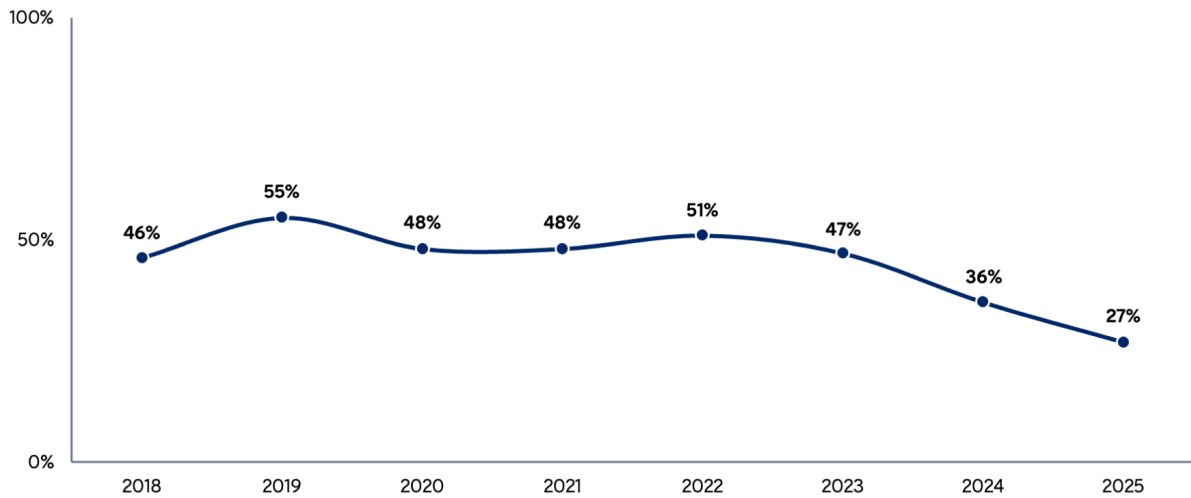
Source: Gartner (March 2026)

Historically, high turnover of brands in top positions in Digital IQ rankings was inevitable due to ever-changing best practices. Today, however, amid a backdrop in which AI adoption can supercharge marketing performance, Genius brands are increasingly retaining their leads (Figure 1). Rather than driving up performance in all cases, AI is magnifying existent strengths or weaknesses, pushing leaders further ahead.

Figure 1: Percentage of New “Genius” Brands Each Year

Percentage of New “Genius” Brands Each Year

Brands ranked in the top 3 of a Gartner Digital IQ Index that did not rank in the top 3 the year prior



n = 33-45 brands classified "Genius" in Digital IQ Index reports; number varies by year
 Source: Gartner Digital IQ Index reports (2017-2025)
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CMOs hoping to emulate Genius success must understand the specific operational strengths that enable growth-driving transformation. Gartner’s analysis of how Genius brands’ strategies collectively differ from lower-ranked peers reveals the primary drivers.

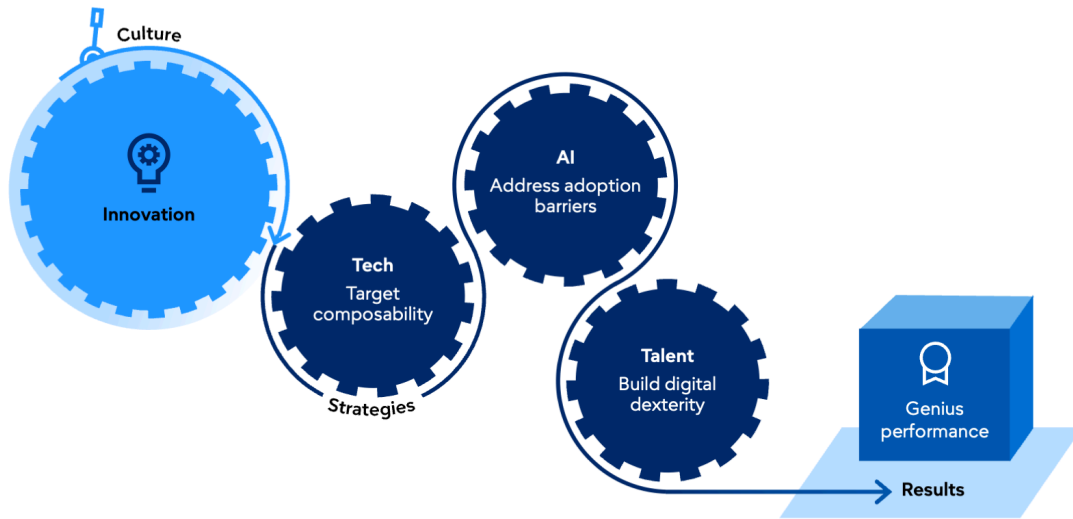
Innovation Culture, Not Media Strategy, Distinguishes Genius Brands

As business context is critical to media strategy, the commonality is not these diverse brands’ preference for any particular channel, site feature or content format. Aggregated across industries, analysis of the online channels that Genius brands choose to invest in shows little difference to their non-Genius peers. Customer-centricity is a shared Genius trait, but one that many other brands also feature, meaning it does not in itself distinguish top performance.

Discussions with Genius brands and analysis of their strategies reveals shared focus on innovation and safe experimentation as the element that drives continued excellence. This focus permeates Genius AI, talent and tech strategies, underpinning their abilities to improve their CX, operational and business performance (Figure 2). These AI, tech and talent strategies offer a blueprint to achieve greater results for CMOs of any brand, regardless of budget or industry. The research below details critical components for CMOs to prioritize in their own organizations, regardless of business context.

Figure 2: Innovation-Led AI, Talent and Tech Strategies Enable Genius Brands' Success

Innovation-Led Talent, Tech and AI Strategies Enable Genius Brands' Performance



Source: Gartner 843535

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Analysis

Address Human Barriers to Achieve Value From AI

The range in AI maturity among organizations is vast. Most organizations leveraging AI are focused on low-risk use cases that drive productivity and efficiency, though leaders in AI are already embedding AI into their core business processes, aiming for transformational benefits such as amplified revenue generation or competitive advantage. ¹ Many Genius brands are leading in AI-powered innovation within their industries, and have already realized significant, measurable benefits from their AI initiatives.

Wells Fargo, a Genius brand in the Retail Banking Digital IQ, sought to increase revenue generated from its owned marketing channels without negatively affecting customer experiences, as can happen by simply sending more messages. To overcome this business problem, it developed a customer engagement engine (CEE), which determines customers' eligibility and suitability and their likelihood of completing the suggested action. This enables marketers to target specific outcomes rather than needing to prioritize different options for digital impressions.

The CEE now powers 5 billion decisions per month on “next best messages” for customers to receive. It has driven a 5x revenue increase in the 2 years since its launch. It also helped the bank to reduce the number of irrelevant messages it sends, leading to a 9pt NPS improvement following CEE-powered conversations.

Wells Fargo understood that user trust would be critical to the CEE’s adoption. To achieve this, they developed a world-first “Explainability Tool,” which provides transparency into why each decision is taken. This tool aimed to dispel any “black box” feelings that can be detrimental to AI deployments. It also helped stakeholders across different lines of business to understand and trust why certain customer messages were being deprioritized, by explaining the impact on business outcomes.

(For more information, see their Measurement and Reporting Excellence award-winning entry in the 2025 Gartner Marketing and Communications Awards.)

Wells Fargo’s AI deployment highlights how the human element of transformation must be tackled to achieve success. In reality, a lack of confidence, lack of consistent investment in AI literacy and staff hesitancy are oftentimes barriers to AI pilots and greater adoption (see Build an AI-First Workforce). Another Genius brand, Lenovo, shared how their manager training program supported AI pilots.

In 2025, 40% of senior marketing leaders reported that staff anxiety is a moderate or significant barrier to efforts to pilot or experiment with AI. ⁷

To overcome this issue, Lenovo, a first-time Genius brand in the Monobrand Retail Digital IQ, established a multifunctional group responsible for empowering managers to become effective, empathetic drivers of change. This AI change-management team helps managers transition from reporting outputs to articulating outcomes in a way that aligns with business priorities. For example, instead of only reporting time savings from AI, a manager might share how that time was reinvested in learning new skills, opening up new business opportunities and advancing Lenovo’s innovation agenda.

Lenovo’s focus on preparing middle managers to lead AI-driven change resulted in 88% business satisfaction with AI tools, demonstrating the impact of manager readiness on successful transformation.

(For more information, see Case Study: AI Adoption and Change Management Support for People Managers.)

Leverage Composability to Upgrade Martech Stacks

CMOs typically face two significant challenges in their marketing technology strategies:

1. Rapid developments among vendors makes it hard to predict which partner will offer the greatest impact across the lifetime of a contract.
2. Demands from C-suite peers to rationalize or reduce tech outlay in today's cost-pressured environment, are pushing most organizations to streamline their marketing technology stacks.

Across 1,051 Digital IQ brands, 16.3% fewer tools were used in support of digital marketing in 2025 versus 2024. ²

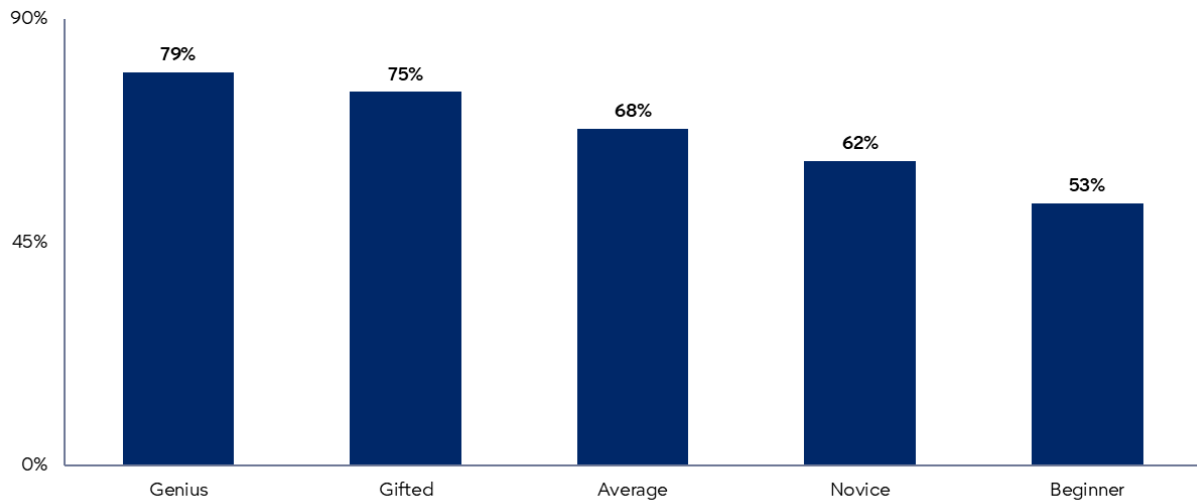
Compared to lower-ranked brands, Genius brands replace tech vendors more frequently, rather than removing platforms and features from their stacks altogether. In the 12-month period ending December 2025, top performers replaced a higher share of their tools than lower-ranked brands, but only reduced the total size of their stacks by 12.6%. ² As such, Genius brands can be seen to focus less on pure cost savings and more on establishing a best-of-breed suite of technologies, compared to lower performers.

Many organizations struggle to replace marketing technologies at the pace of Genius brands due to the complexity of untangling point-to-point integrations, which can add to onboarding times and the total cost of ownership. A composable architecture can alleviate this by leveraging a “hub-and-spoke” model, which reduces the need for work on adjacent platforms when a solution is separated from wider systems. High performers in marketing are more likely to use a composable stack than lower performers. ⁸

The “hub” of a composable architecture is often tied to a unified, scalable, centrally governed data system such as a cloud data warehouse (CDW). High performers are significantly more likely than lower performers to use a CDW. ⁸ Analysis of Digital IQ brands also shows that digital marketing performance correlates with likelihood to leverage a CDW, with Genius brands the most likely to use these technologies (Figure 3). ²

Figure 3: Share of Brands With a Cloud Data Warehouse

Share of Brands With a Cloud Data Warehouse By 2025 Digital IQ Class



n = 1,176 brands benchmarked in Gartner Digital IQ Index reports; January 2026.
Source: Gartner analysis of BuiltWith data
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Leveraging a centralized data platform for enterprise use is more common among high performing marketing functions.⁸ This facilitates the establishment and governance of AI agents with wide-ranging use cases, promising greater business value (see *Agentic AI Hype Outpaces Reality: CMO Lessons From Top Performers*). As already noted, several Genius brands are already succeeding with transformational AI use cases.

Projects to redesign technology architecture can be complex and costly to undertake. CMOs hoping to drive a transition to a composable architecture should know that incremental steps are workable. CMOs can change integration methods when replacing any solution within their stack.

To sequence the integration of platforms using a composable approach, CMOs should prioritize markets where best-of-breed functionalities are evolving fastest. Here, we can learn from changes within Genius brands' martech stacks. The biggest changes occurred within:

- **Ad tech** (e.g., audience and data management platforms and demand-side platforms)
- **Channel marketing tech** (e.g., email and mobile marketing platforms)

- CX tech (e.g., customer engagement centers, chatbot providers and VoC tools)
- Digital experience monitoring and analytics

These markets are being transformed by AI-powered features faster than many others. Among channel marketing and customer engagement tools, for instance, AI agents, predictive analytics and large language models are enabling unprecedented scale in automated communications. Among ad tech tools, data management and targeting workflows are being improved using more advanced attribution, synthetic data and propensity models. The turnover rate of CX technologies has nearly doubled in one year among Genius brands, as AI chatbots have disrupted methods for servicing customers. In all four of these markets, Genius brands have not reduced the total number of tools they use. By replacing vendors in these particular markets, Genius brands evidence their strategy of innovating processes to achieve greater results.

Build Talent Strategies to Support New-to-World Innovation and Agility

In 4Q24 through 3Q25, non-Genius brands posted 0.8% more marketing jobs on LinkedIn than the 12 months prior.³ During that same period, Genius brands increased the number of marketing roles they hired for by 31.6%.³ Analysis of the roles targeted shows this hiring activity sought to increase their proficiency using advanced technologies such as proprietary AI models.

The 2025 Gartner 2025 CMO Spend Survey revealed that high-performing organizations saw marketing technology as their largest critical capability gap to achieving their goals (Figure 4).⁹ To address this need, Genius brands posted 2.5x more job openings for marketing technology professionals than non-Genius brands in 2025.³

Figure 4: Top Performers Saw Martech as Their Top Capability Gap

Top Performers Saw Martech as Their Top Capability Gap

Sum of top 3 rank shown

	Lower Performers (n=112)	Average Performers (n=191)	Higher Performers (n=99)
Marketing technology	25%	30%	36%
Marketing operations	12%	14%	32%
Sales enablement	17%	18%	29%
Marketing data and analytics	35%	34%	23%
Demand generation	20%	19%	21%
Brand management	9%	9%	20%
Customer analytics	26%	23%	20%
Multichannel marketing	26%	21%	20%
Digital commerce	19%	18%	19%
Market insights	21%	19%	17%
Customer experience	11%	15%	17%
Content development and management	14%	15%	12%
Marketing leadership and strategy	12%	16%	11%
Product marketing	5%	11%	10%

n = 392 CMOs

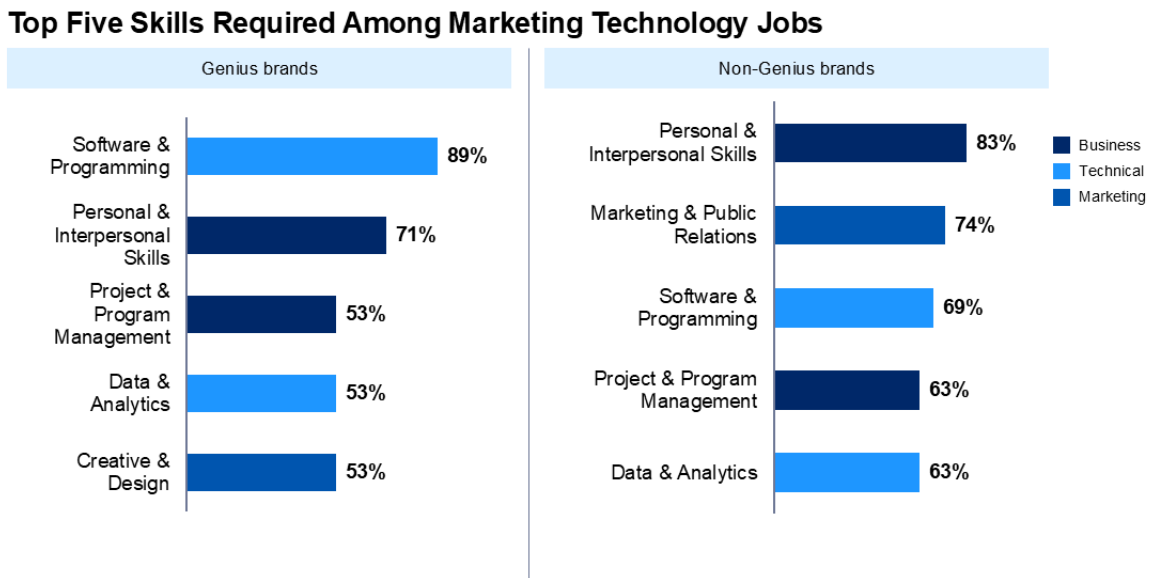
Q. In what areas do the largest gaps exist between your marketing organization's current capabilities and the capabilities needed to meet its business goals?

Source: 2025 Gartner CMO Spend Survey
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Eighty-nine percent of Genius brands' marketing technology job listings targeted software and programming skills (e.g., computer science, Python, programming or algorithm design) in 2025.³ This represents a significant increase versus 2024 in the share of Genius brand openings that targeted software skills, and is also far higher than non-Genius brands (Figure 5).³ Here, we see Genius brands' working at the forefront of AI advances, looking to build proprietary models rather than wait for embedded AI within vendor solutions to become available. This shows the drive of Genius brands to innovate beyond their peers but may not be appropriate for all organizations, as vendor-provided AI often carries lower development costs.

Figure 5: Top Five Skills Required Among Marketing Technology Jobs



n = 220 LinkedIn job postings for Marketing Technology roles, 01 January 2025 to 31 December 2025
 Source: Gartner analysis of Coresignal data 843535

To meet the increased speed of change in the vendor landscape, Genius brands’ talent strategies have evolved. In prior years, Genius brands targeted talent to increase utilization of specific platforms. Now, these brands instead seek to increase their digital dexterity.

Gartner defines “digital dexterity” as the ambition and ability to use new technologies for better business outcomes.

Digital dexterity is the skill that senior marketing leaders say will be the most needed two years from now.⁷ It is also an area those leaders say their teams have the second-lowest level of proficiency in.⁷ Given the fast pace at which new tech-powered opportunities are emerging, the ability to quickly learn and embed new systems will become a differentiator in competitive industries.

Tech transformation projects increasingly involve cross-functional collaboration, with IT and marketing often sharing responsibilities. ⁸ Effective communication skills are key for success in these projects. Meeting this need, a higher share of Genius brands' martech job openings targeted communication skills compared to non-Genius brands (featured within "personal and interpersonal skills" in Figure 5). ³ Strong communication skills also support efficient knowledge sharing to increase the proficiency and cohesion of broader teams. To increase the utilization of available tools, high-performing marketing functions display more tech enablement activities than peers, with a higher likelihood to establish regular cross-departmental best practice forums (e.g., communities of practice) and martech enablement centers of excellence. ⁸ These structures are valuable but require a well-aligned talent strategy to achieve results. A cohesive tech and talent strategy focused on continual innovation is the common thread across Genius brands.

Contributors

Allison Reiling, Chelsea Young, Adriel Tey, Lew Sears, Michael Buhrmester

Evidence

¹ Gartner 2025 AI Buying Behavior Survey.

² Gartner analysis of BuiltWith data (n = 857 tools used by 1,051 Gartner Digital IQ index brands, from January 2024 through December 2025). BuiltWith is a third-party web domain profiler that focuses on tracking technologies that underpin customer-facing web domains. BuiltWith indexes over 673 million websites, covering technologies related to advertising, e-commerce, web hosting and web content management.

³ Gartner analysis of CoreSignal data (n = 25,134 LinkedIn job postings, from January 2024 through December 2025).

⁴ Gartner analysis of Google search data (n = 1,139, from January 2024 through December 2025). Gartner has developed proprietary crawlers for collecting results and other unique elements on Google search engine result pages (SERPs). Our tool collects SERPs for over forty thousand keywords daily, rotating through roughly sixteen thousand city-level locations across the United States to obtain a representative landscape of results. These results should still be taken directionally as they do not wholly reflect the targeting parameters that are available to search marketers.

⁵ Gartner analysis of Pathmatics data (n = 1,139 Gartner Digital IQ index brands, from January 2024 through December 2025). Pathmatics is a third party data source that captures digital advertising data. Pathmatics estimates impressions and spend data based on panels of hundreds of thousands of mobile users across most social channels, with an additional desktop panel for Twitter.

⁶ Gartner analysis of Similarweb data (n = 1,139, from January 2024 through December 2025). Similarweb is a third party data source that captures website traffic and engagement, email referral traffic, and LinkedIn traffic. Similarweb gathers data from a panel of hundreds of millions of monitored desktop and mobile devices, local internet service providers, public data sources, and directly from sites' first-party analytics.

⁷ Gartner 2025 Marketing Transformation Survey.

⁸ Gartner 2025 Marketing Technology Survey.

⁹ Gartner 2025 CMO Spend Survey.

Gartner analysis of BuiltWith data (n = 857 tools used by 1,051 Gartner Digital IQ index brands, from January 2024 through December 2025). BuiltWith is a third-party web domain profiler that focuses on tracking technologies that underpin customer-facing web domains. BuiltWith indexes over 673 million websites, covering technologies related to advertising, e-commerce, web hosting and web content management.

Google Search (Digital Performance Benchmarks). Gartner analysis of Google Search data (n = [#], from [# Month] through [# Month Year]). Gartner has developed proprietary crawlers for collecting results and other unique elements on Google search engine result pages (SERPs). Our tool collects SERPs for over 40,000 keywords daily, rotating through roughly 16,000 city-level locations across the United States to obtain a representative landscape of results. These results should still be taken directionally as they do not wholly reflect the targeting parameters that are available to search marketers.

2025 Gartner AI Buying Behavior Survey. This survey was conducted to gain insight into the current and future state of AI adoption within enterprises, focusing on usage patterns, vendor engagement, outcomes, and satisfaction levels. The research was carried out online in November and December 2025, with participation from 556 respondents across North America (n = 276), Western Europe (n = 207), and the Asia/Pacific region (n = 73). Participating organizations represented a diverse range of industries, each with planned enterprisewide revenue of at least \$50 million USD (or equivalent) for the fiscal year 2025. All organizations surveyed had implemented at least one AI use case. Qualified respondents held IT or business unit roles and possessed knowledge of AI use cases across their enterprises or within specific business units or functions. Their primary responsibilities included setting or influencing the organization's AI strategy and planning, determining which AI use cases to deploy, and managing the implementation of these use cases. Disclaimer: The results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the perspectives of the respondents and organizations surveyed.

2025 Gartner Marketing Technology Survey. This survey aimed to explore the key aspects of marketing technology including utilization, composability, scalability, measurement and collaboration. It also examined the implications of AI and data strategies on marketing technology. Conducted online from June through July 2025, the research included 413 respondents from North America (n = 186), the United Kingdom (n = 91) and Europe (n = 136; including France, Germany, Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). Qualifying organizations reported enterprisewide annual revenue for fiscal 2024 of at least \$100 million, with 77% of the respondents coming from organizations with \$1 billion or more in annual revenue. The respondents came from a diverse range of industries: IT and business services (n = 48), manufacturing (n = 48), insurance (n = 38), retail (n = 38), consumer products (n = 37), financial services (n = 36), travel and hospitality (n = 36), healthcare (n = 33), tech products (n = 33), media (n = 33), and pharmaceuticals (n = 33). All the respondents were required to be senior decision makers of their company's marketing technology strategy, where the majority of their daily responsibilities aligned with either business- or IT-focused marketing. Eighty percent of respondents were aligned to the marketing function, 10% to product marketing and management, 7% to IT and 2% to brand management or other business units. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

2025 Gartner Marketing Transformation Survey. This survey was conducted to explore what CMOs are thinking about the near future (i.e., the next one to two years) of the marketing organization amid the disruption of AI and how they are approaching organizational structure changes and marketing operations management in 2025. The survey was administered online from August through October 2025 and includes data from 402 senior marketing leaders. These results represent marketers from North America (n = 189) and Europe (n = 213). Respondents were required to have decision-making authority over marketing budgets and strategy at an organization with at least \$100 million in annual revenue. Fifty-eight percent of respondents came from organizations with at least \$2 billion in annual revenue. Respondents came from a wide variety of industries, including technology products (n = 59); banking and financial services (n = 55); consumer products (n = 47); retail (n = 47); manufacturing and natural resources (n = 43); healthcare (n = 41); insurance (n = 33); pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and life sciences (n = 23); media (n = 22); IT and business services (n = 20); and travel and hospitality (n = 12). Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

2025 Gartner CMO Spend Survey. This survey explored top-line marketing budgets with the goal of understanding how changing customer journeys, pressures from the C-suite and cost challenges affect marketing's spending priorities and channel effectiveness. Conducted online from January through March 2025, the research included 402 respondents from North America (n = 202), the United Kingdom (n = 97) and Europe (n = 103; including France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden). Participants were required to be involved in decisions related to setting or influencing marketing strategies/planning, aligning marketing budgets/resources, or leading cross-functional programs and strategies with marketing. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents represented organizations with annual revenue of \$1 billion or more. The respondents came from a diverse range of industries: manufacturing (n = 52), financial services (n = 50), insurance (n = 43), consumer products (n = 43), healthcare (n = 42), travel and hospitality (n = 37), IT and business services (n = 36), retail (n = 36), pharma (n = 32), and media (n = 31). Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

Document Revision History

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Digital IQ Index: In the Company of Genius 2023-2024 - 15 March 2024

Digital IQ Index: In the Company of Genius, 2022-2023 - 27 February 2023

Recommended by the Authors

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Data Story: Gartner Digital IQ Index Score Breakdown

Inside the Gartner Digital IQ: A Guide to Methodology and Use

Leadership Vision for 2025: Chief Marketing Officer

Optimize Your Marketing Tech Like a Genius Brand

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Digital IQ Index: Retail Banking Best Practices

Digital IQ Index: Wealth and Asset Management
Best Practices

Source: Gartner (March 2026)

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