

# the bottom line



**Lead smarter marketing.**

Tackle your biggest challenges with real insights from leaders who've been there.

# What does it take to lead in marketing today?

From AI and attribution to org design, burnout, brand-building, and perception in the C-suite — this series goes beyond hot takes to tackle the real questions.

In this executive summary, across 7 bite-sized chapters, get curated insights from CMOs and brand leaders navigating the pressures, pivots, and possibilities of modern marketing.

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## Meet the voices shaping the conversation



**Josh Golden**  
CMO



**Jay Baer**  
Bestselling author  
and Hall of Fame  
speaker



**Cynthia Kleinbaum**  
Former CMO



**MoneyLion**



**Michelle Golladay**  
Director of Customer  
Advocacy



# AI won't save your strategy

AI is transforming execution, but not what makes marketing great. Generative tools are accelerating workflows and giving teams the power to do more with less. But what still sets standout brands apart? Strategic thinking, emotional storytelling, and original insight.

As AI becomes increasingly commoditized, it's not what tools you use, but how. When everyone has access to the same technology, differentiation depends on bold ideas, sharp positioning, and a strong sense of brand — not volume or speed alone.

Delegating that to automation comes with risk. Without human-led strategy, brands begin to sound the same. The opportunity now isn't just to automate faster — it's to lead smarter, with thinking that's original, emotionally resonant, and unmistakably yours.

### Action items

- Use AI to buy back time — reinvest that time in strategy, insight, and ideation.
- Don't delegate brand thinking — keep storytelling human.
- Deliver ideas, not just outputs — position marketing as a driver of strategy, not just assets.

# How marketers are actually using AI

Marketing teams are using AI to accelerate production, generate content variants, personalize experiences, and speed up research. But the most forward-looking teams aren't stopping at efficiency gains. They're redirecting that saved time into more strategic work — like refining insights, testing creative faster, and deepening cross-functional collaboration.

This shift is also changing how teams are structured. As marketing orgs become leaner and less layered, individual marketers are expected to take on more ownership. Junior talent, in particular, is being asked to operate with more autonomy, which makes training, tools, and brand guardrails more essential than ever.

Forward-looking leaders build AI into how their teams think, work, and learn — not just how they produce. They model experimentation, encourage shared learning, and normalize iteration. These aren't just efficiency upgrades — they're the building blocks of a smarter, more resilient marketing culture.

### Action items

- Use AI as a first-draft partner — finish with human insight and oversight.
- Reinvest time unlocked by AI — channel it into strategy, creativity, and influence.
- Equip junior marketers to use AI well — with training, and brand guardrails.
- Keep customer insight human-led — that's where the magic lives.



# Brand vs. performance

The debate isn't brand or performance — it's how to combine the two. Today's most effective marketing teams understand that when brand and performance work in concert, they amplify each other's impact.

AI has made it easier than ever to optimize for clicks. But that same automation has raised the bar for what makes a brand memorable. Emotional connection, story, and brand consistency are now the key differentiators — especially as decisions are driven by word of mouth and influencer trust, not just CTR.

And with AI unlocking deeper visibility across the funnel, CMOs can finally tie brand investment to outcomes. But that also requires internal education: helping the org understand that brand value builds over time — not just quarters.

### Action items

- Ditch the false binary — brand and performance work best when aligned.
- Use AI to measure brand impact more effectively across the full funnel.
- Build internal alignment — show how brand drives business value.

# Is SEO dead?

SEO isn't dead — but the playbook has changed. AI-powered search, TikTok, GPTs, and voice tools are reshaping how people find information. Ranking for keywords is no longer the whole game.

Today's users want fast, relevant answers — and they're looking for them across many platforms. From creator content to AI summaries, trust is shifting from organic blue links to wherever credibility shows up. And most of those environments don't rely on clicks alone.

Ultimately, visibility is no longer just about keyword lists and backlinks. It's about becoming the answer, wherever the question gets asked.

### Action items

- Shift from SEO to answer optimization — focus on being findable across AI and social platforms.
- Track brand visibility beyond website clicks — monitor mentions, citations, and presence in AI tools.
- Build authority with relevant, trusted content — it fuels discoverability in zero-click environments.
- Update your SEO metrics — reflect how discovery really works today.

# Marketing's visibility problem

Marketing has long been misjudged — too often viewed as a cost center rather than a growth engine. Even in the C-suite, many still lack clarity on what marketing actually does and how it drives business outcomes.

Part of the challenge is perception. Because marketing feels familiar, personal opinions are often mistaken for strategic insight. At the same time, marketing is expected to deliver immediate results — even when the work is long-term, like brand repositioning or narrative shifts. The mismatch in timelines can undermine marketing's credibility and impact.

To earn a stronger seat at the table, marketing leaders need to educate as well as execute. That means delivering results and clearly communicating the thinking behind them. It takes strong cross-functional relationships, internal alignment, and storytelling that's just as sharp inside the company as it is outside it.

### Action items

- Reframe marketing as a growth driver — make the work visible and tie it to business outcomes, clearly and often.
- Align goals to timelines — advocate for multi-quarter or multi-year marketing objectives when the work demands it.
- Build cross-functional trust — strong relationships increase visibility, influence, and impact.

# Process vs. chaos: Finding flow again

In many teams, process has become performance theater. Endless approvals, unclear ownership, and bloated workflows create friction without forward motion.

The real cost? Momentum. When teams spend more time aligning than creating, execution slows, creativity suffers, and marketers lose the space to do their best work. But speed and structure aren't enemies. The strongest teams create clarity — with just enough process to stay focused, move fast, and scale what works.

The unlock isn't less process, it's better process. Built around outcomes, not optics. With the right systems and tools, marketers can reduce drag, sharpen decisions, and stay in flow by focusing on the work that truly matters.

### Action items

- Map your friction points — identify where process delays work rather than supports it.
- Rebuild around flow — prioritize tools, timelines, and rituals that help teams execute faster and think clearer.
- Scale what's working — turn successful workflows into shared templates and systems others can adopt.

# The capacity crunch is real

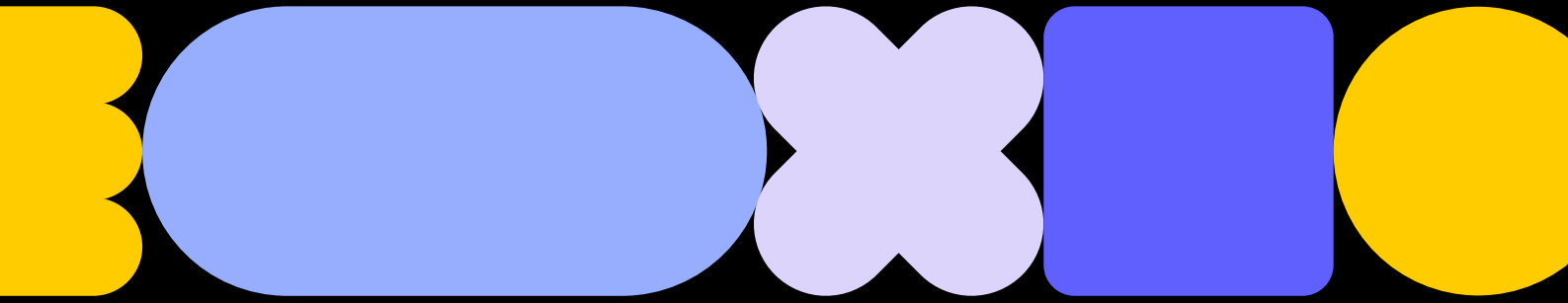
Marketing teams are under pressure — but the biggest constraint isn't always headcount. Often, it's structural: too many layers, unclear ownership, and outdated assumptions about how work gets done.

Misaligned incentives don't help. Many orgs still reward headcount over outcomes, and ownership over execution. That leads to bloated teams, fuzzy priorities, and burnout disguised as being “understaffed.” Meanwhile, AI and automation are changing what capacity looks like. Repetitive tasks are being offloaded, freeing up time for deeper, more strategic work. But only if orgs evolve to match.

The takeaway? Capacity isn't just a headcount problem, it's a leadership one. The strongest teams are intentionally designed: built for speed, clarity, and adaptability. That means fewer layers, smarter systems, and empowering every marketer to lead with impact — alongside the AI tools reshaping what's possible.

### Action items

- Rethink org charts — structure teams around execution, not hierarchy.
- Empower junior talent — push decisions closer to the work with clear guardrails and support.
- Leverage digital “colleagues” — use AI and automation to free up human focus for strategic work.



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