

The 2025 B2B

HUMAN MARKETERS REPORT

New Data for Navigating the Digital World Like an Actual Human

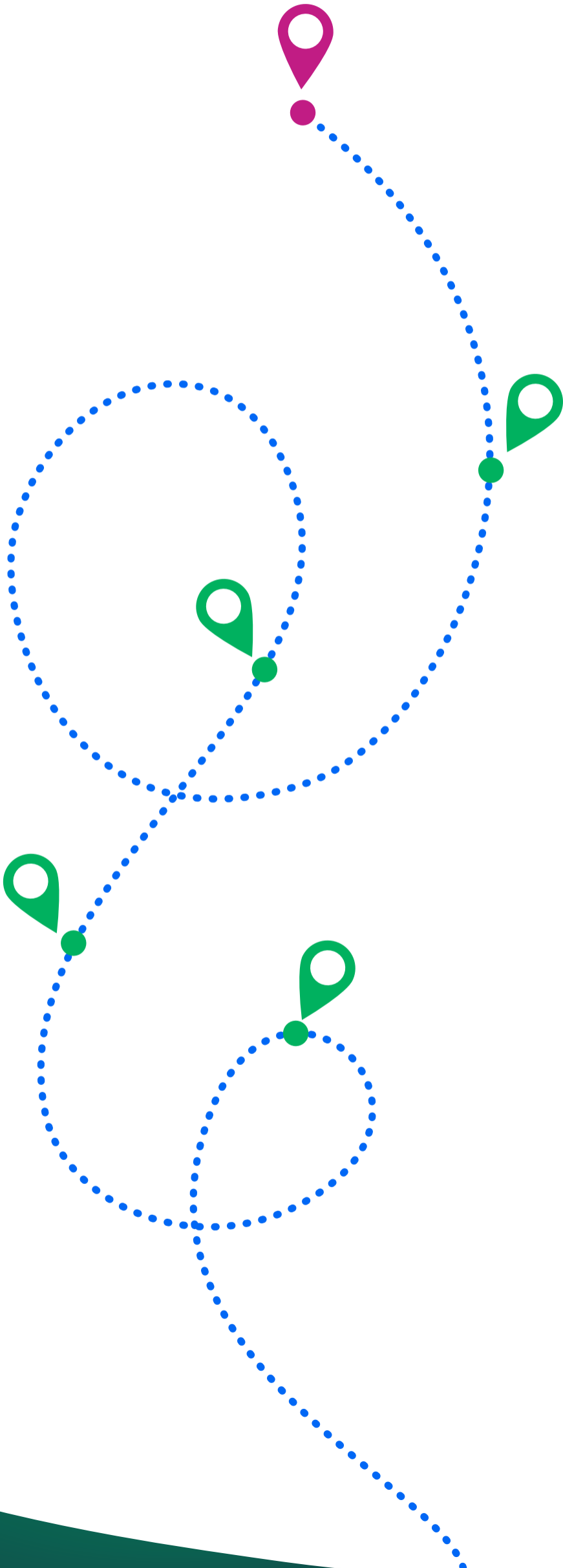


A joint study by:

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Personalization Paradox	4
Search Engines of the Future	9
Turning Off the Noise	12
The Surge of Online Communities	15
Doing More with Less	18
Demand for Human Marketers	23
Final Thoughts	26



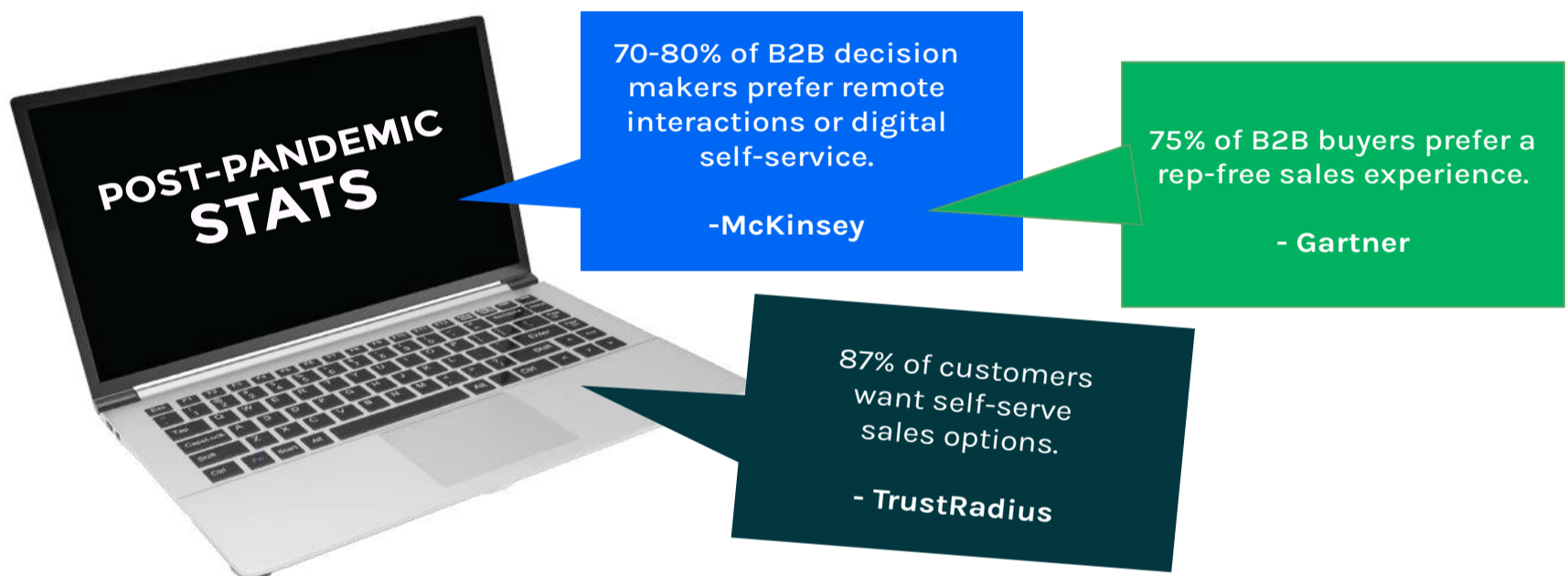
A joint study by:



This report is not about AI. It's about marketers. Human marketers.

Technology enthusiasts might have you believe that AI can solve every marketing problem, but they're missing the (literal) heart of the matter: customers are actual people. And people are complex and sometimes, enigmatic.

Yes, AI is reshaping the way that we work (and that's awesome). But it's also reshaping customer behavior, creating complex human conditions that can only really be understood by other humans. For example, during and right after the pandemic, studies indicated that customers were becoming antisocial. Remember these reports?



*McKinsey, 2020, [How Covid-19 Has Changed B2B Sales Forever](#). *Gartner, n.d, [B2B Buying: How Top CSOs and CMOs Optimize the Journey](#). *VentureBeat, 2022, [Today's B2B Buyers Want Self-Serve, Not Salespeople](#)

This data made it look like customers wanted to interact with other humans as little as possible. And maybe for a while they did! Then came generative AI in 2022, which doubled down on that trend, producing more content to look at, more chatbots to talk to, and in general, more ways for customers to avoid human contact. But now? The pendulum is swinging the other way.

Our research indicates that customers crave human contact more than ever - illustrating the behavioral nuances that AI cannot address. Prospects want to talk to people, they just don't want those people spewing marketing jargon at them.

For this report, we gathered insights from 100 marketing professionals with experience at tech industry luminaries such as PayPal, Intuit, Capital One, and similar organizations. Each respondent has between 7 and 25 years of experience, was recommended by their peers as a marketing innovator, and vetted by our team. This way, we could be confident the results came from the industry's most informed and creative voices.

We hope you find this research helpful as you hone your craft of being a human.

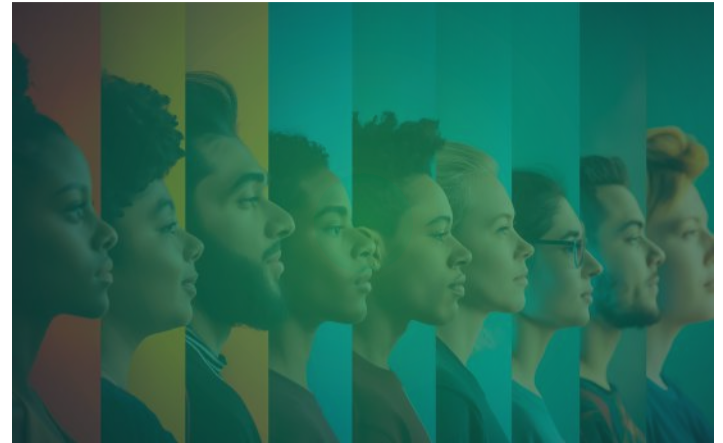
THE PERSONALIZATION PARADOX

Tailored messaging is a compelling use case for AI, but it's a double-edged sword.

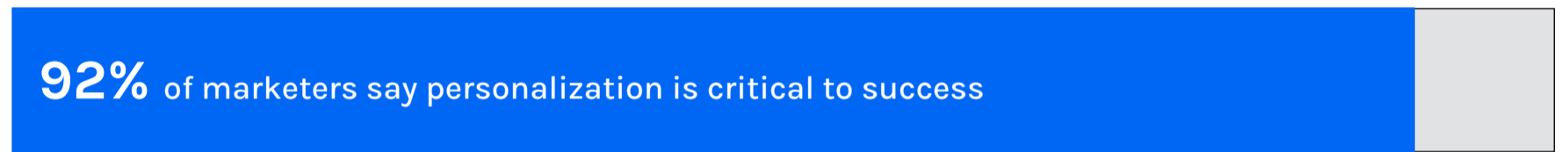


AI is Making Things Personal

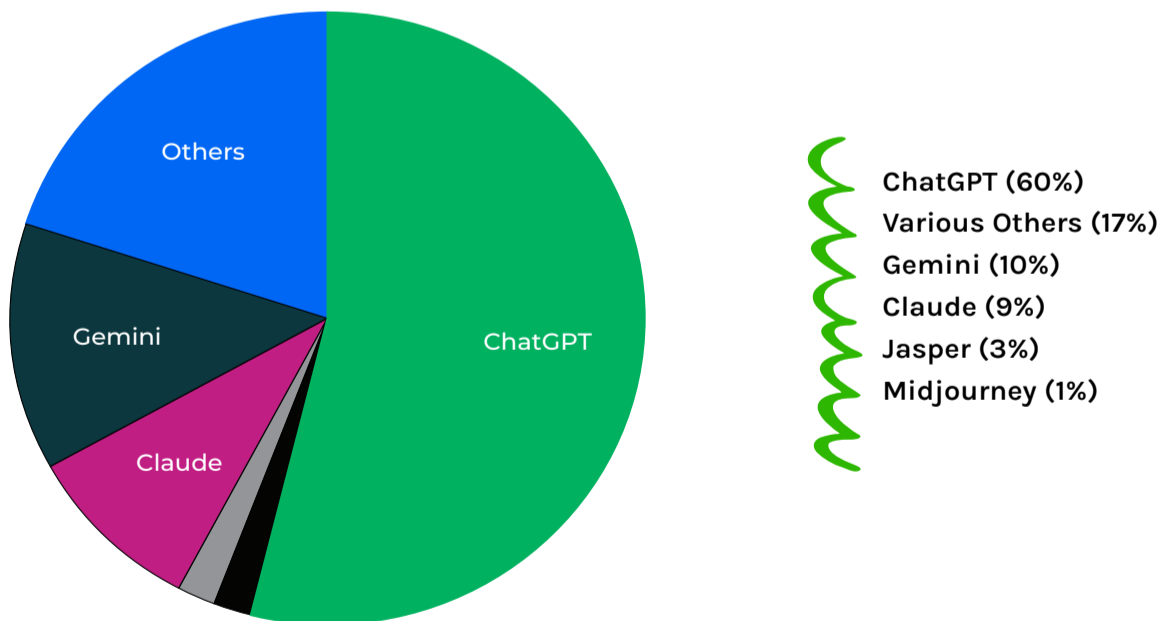
Marketers have always understood the importance of personalized messages. But up until recently, scaling that personalization was a challenge too big for most teams to tackle.



Now, with giants like Amazon mastering personalized buyer experiences, customers come to expect that same level from everyone. In fact, 92% of the marketers we surveyed said personalization is critical to success.



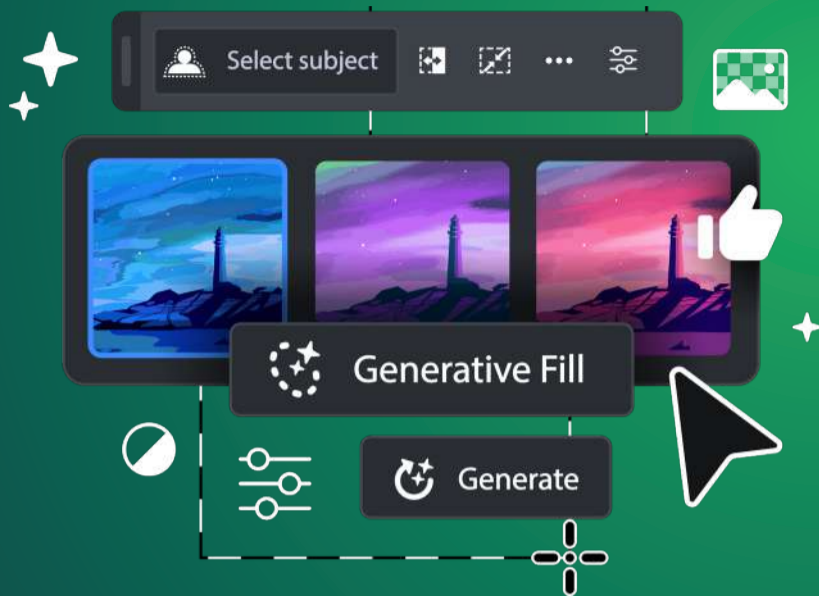
Tailoring landing pages, emails, and texts for specific industries or even specific people might be the most promising marketing use case for generative AI, with 45% of marketers finding it easy to personalize messages. According to our research, the top AI tool for content marketing is overwhelmingly ChatGPT, but other promising technologies are being used in the day-to-day:



According to McKinsey, companies that grow faster actually drive 40% more of their revenue from personalization than their slower-growing counterparts. And as marketers indicated to us, personalization is now imperative.

*McKinsey, 2021, [The value of getting personalization right—or wrong—is multiplying](#)

But Will AI Personalization Lead to Brand Blandification?



Solving the personalization challenge with AI is a win, but it also might inadvertently create cookie-cutter brands. And unfortunately, some leaders are not asking enough questions before rolling out aggressive AI initiatives.

In fact, McKinsey reported that 92% of companies plan to increase their AI spending over the next three years, yet only 1% rate themselves as being “very mature” in deployment.

*McKinsey, 2025, [Superagency in the workplace: Empowering people to unlock AI's full potential](#)

35% of marketers believe that AI will diminish brands and their impact.

The wide variety of tools being used in different ways is leading to inconsistencies that could ultimately weaken brands, leading to aggressive customer mistrust and disengagement.

WHY?



AI Writing is a Little Off

Unless you can enrich prompts with your brand voice and guidelines. AI-generated content doesn't always sound like the brand. So, if your personalized messages aren't unique to your voice, they are doing nothing to build recognition, equity, and trust with your customers - or differentiate your brand in a crowded market.



New SEO Realities Might Add Insult to Injury

AI-driven search optimization is shifting away from using traditional brand elements like logos, colors, and fonts. Instead, queries return the bare bones information about the brand's product offering, making it even more important to have a distinct brand voice in your written content.

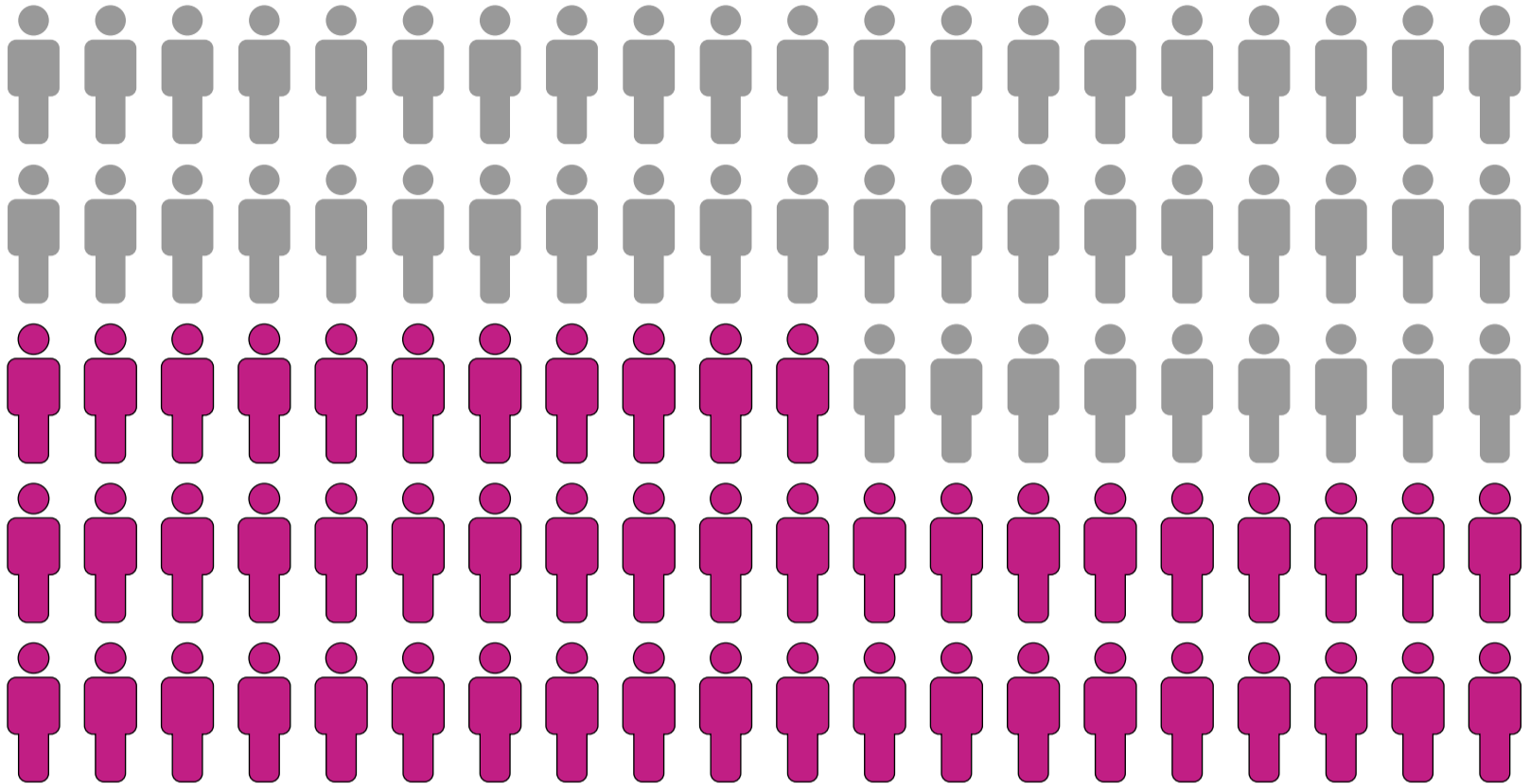


Cybercriminals Look Like Marketers...and Vice Versa!

Just as marketers have capitalized on generative AI, so too have cybercriminals who use the same process and tools to scale their cyber attacks. So, if your personalization isn't perfectly on-brand, your prospects might even mistake it for a scam.

A Lack of AI Guidelines is Also Causing Friction

51% of marketers are generally worried about the potential risks of using AI in marketing and communications.



Marketers handle sensitive customer data, and some are worried they might accidentally take personalization too far by using AI the wrong way. They're also nervous about potential oversights, AI hallucinations, plagiarism risks, and the future impact of AI-created content on SEO rankings.

<p>78% of marketers say their companies place a high or very high emphasis on the ethical use of customer data.</p>	BUT	<p>Only 25% of marketers say their companies have a detailed strategy for using AI internally and externally.</p>
--	------------	--



It can be frustrating when companies don't have guidelines around AI – especially as it applies to content writing and thought leadership. On one hand, AI is seen as this shiny tool that promises to make our lives easier, but on the other, companies are worried it will hurt our credibility if we rely on it too much. It feels like mixed messaging – we're told AI is great – use it! But also, don't use it!



-Millicent Skiles, Marketer

Balancing AI with Brand Consistency

The truth is, we don't know exactly how AI will impact the future of brands. But if personalization and other mass content practices are eroding brand voice as we know it, then it's best to get ahead of the curve by putting rules and processes in place.



Evaluate Personalization Compliance

New technologies bring new implications, so it's crucial to conduct quarterly reviews of your AI tools to ensure compliance with privacy regulations like GDPR and CCPA.



Decide When and Where AI Can Be Used

Collaborate to define AI usage in your workflow, involve legal for compliance, and create an accessible document outlining these guidelines.



Align on AI Tools and Prompting

Limit AI tools to two options for content marketers, train them on your brand voice, and document guidelines for consistent prompting. Update your team regularly with AI best practices.



Unleash the Brand Police

Designate a brand evaluator to ensure content follows guidelines, and evolve your editorial process to include AI with checklists for writers and time for cross-checking. Integrate this process into your project management tool to ensure content meets brand standards.

SEARCH ENGINES OF THE FUTURE

AI is changing the way people search, and marketers need to adapt by thinking like humans.



“

As content marketers, we need to think about how to be present in that new world... people are going to be walking around their homes, asking Alexa or Siri for information.

-Ileana Street, Marketer

”

“

Authentic expertise stands out in a world of AI-generated content. Offer real insights, unique perspectives, and detailed, valuable content that AI can pull from.

-Daniel Gehant, Marketer

”

Forget traditional Google searches. Users are now using AI to answer complex questions about products they're interested in - and marketers are starting to feel the impact of this new consumer preference. **30% of the marketers we surveyed have seen a drop in website traffic as AI becomes more integral to SEO.**

However, this change may not necessarily be negative, according to the SEO experts we interviewed...

AI Can Drive Higher-Intent Traffic

When people search for AI solutions, they often head straight to the vendor websites listed in the results. If they've made it that far, they're probably pretty serious about buying, making that traffic much more valuable. While the overall traffic might be lower, it's coming from prospects who are genuinely ready to make a purchase—unlike the broad, less relevant traffic that Google sometimes sends.

Voice Assistants to Become the Norm

Alexa and Siri are becoming our old friends at this point, so SEO is shifting to focus more on conversational, question-based content. And now that voice search is becoming the norm, marketers can expect longer, more specific queries that need content to be optimized for spoken language. This means content creation will need to adapt to make sure it's clear and easy to access through voice-enabled devices.

SEO is in flux, but marketers should adapt to these new AI and voice search trends now.

Think Like a Human to Get Ahead of AI-Driven SEO Trends



The future of SEO is trending towards LLMs like Perplexity, ChatGPT, AI driven search, AI-driven answers, and there seems to be a very strong correlation with the ubiquity of mentions in relation to categorical keywords and your appearance in LLMs for those terms. So if you're looking to play into the future of Search and LLMs, this is an excellent way to start.



- Alex Birkett, Marketer



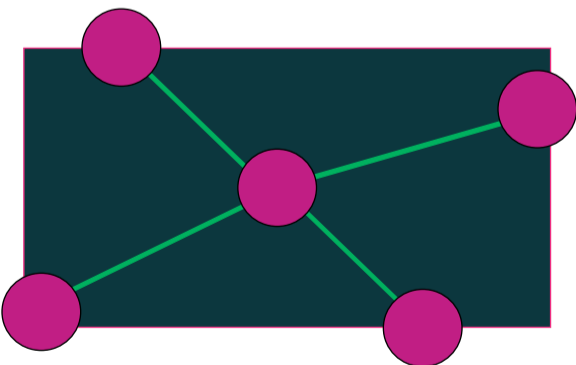
Write Like People Talk

Think about the questions your audience might ask aloud to a voice assistant and shape your content around them. Remember to target long-tail keywords and create direct, concise, and conversational content that makes it easy for voice assistants to understand. Also, don't forget to include FAQ sections which help voice assistants answer questions easily.



Prioritize Quality Over Quantity

LLMs focus on relevance, context, and user intent, so the old strategy of flooding your site with keyword-heavy content is not effective. Instead, marketers should think about creating fewer, high-quality pieces that directly address user needs and provide valuable, in-depth insights.



Focus on Ubiquity

SEO has shifted away from ranking for specific keywords to showing up across multiple relevant search results. This means you need to be present on search engines, third-party review sites, aggregator lists, and even competitor pages. The more touchpoints you create, the more likely large language models (LLMs) will prioritize your brand in their results.

TURNING OFF THE NOISE

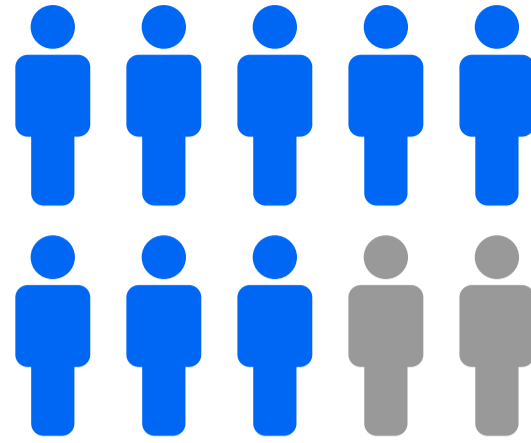
More content isn't always more effective...even if it's good.



Content Overload is Driving Human-Centered Marketing

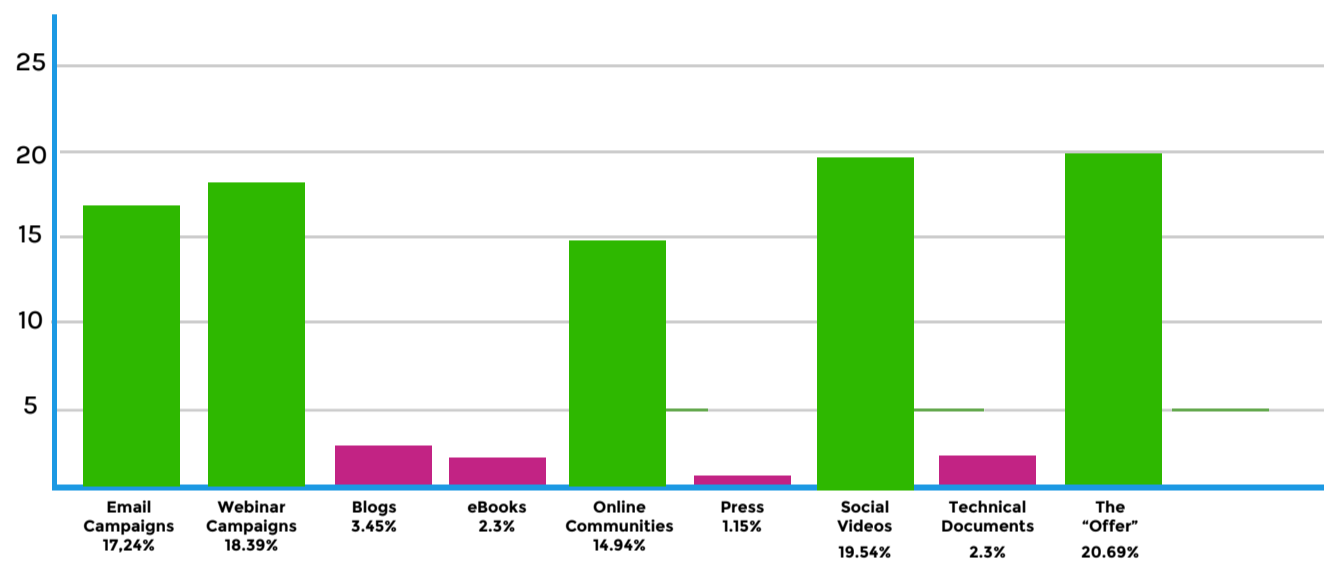
AI gives marketers the ability to crank out five articles in the same amount of time it used to take to write one. But is producing more content the right approach?

8 in 10 marketers say content saturation is a major challenge in reaching their target customer.



So much content is dizzying prospects and sending them into cognitive overload. As a result, they are bypassing marketing content in favor of talking to a human who will give them the bottom line.

From Visitors to Prospects



We asked marketers which activities are most impactful in converting visitors into prospects, and, by far, they pointed to the ones that involved seeing or interacting with other humans. There are some interesting specifics to some of these activities:

- ➔ **Email:** Marketers still see this as a viable channel, but not for lead generation or prospecting. The real value of this channel is using it within a land-and-expand strategy that upsells current customers. In fact, one marketer realized \$13 million in revenue from running this type of campaign.
- ➔ **Video:** While flashy, high-produced videos are the preference of most marketers, Zoom videos doctored with animation perform better because they are seen as more authentic. One marketer received 5x more engagement on these types of videos than on customer videos with high production value.
- ➔ **Webinars and Online Communities:** The marketers we surveyed were the most excited about person-to-person conversations that didn't resemble marketing, pointing to online communities as low-cost, high-reward channels. More on this in the next segment.



54% of marketers say customer reviews are the most important aspect of the customer journey.

That statistic shouldn't be too much of a shocker. Customer reviews usually have no biases, so prospects have to wonder less if a product does all the things they need it to do. And while many marketers reported that their sales teams are constantly on their case to gather more customer case studies and reviews, what prospects really seem to want is the opportunity to engage one-on-one with a current customer and ask specific questions.

It's a tall order, but marketers are coming up with some interesting solutions for this.

“

“Prospects need information but don't want to be sold to—so we invite them into safe spaces where they can engage with current customers directly.”

-Kari Balderston, Marketer

”



Bright Idea: Curated Customer Confabs

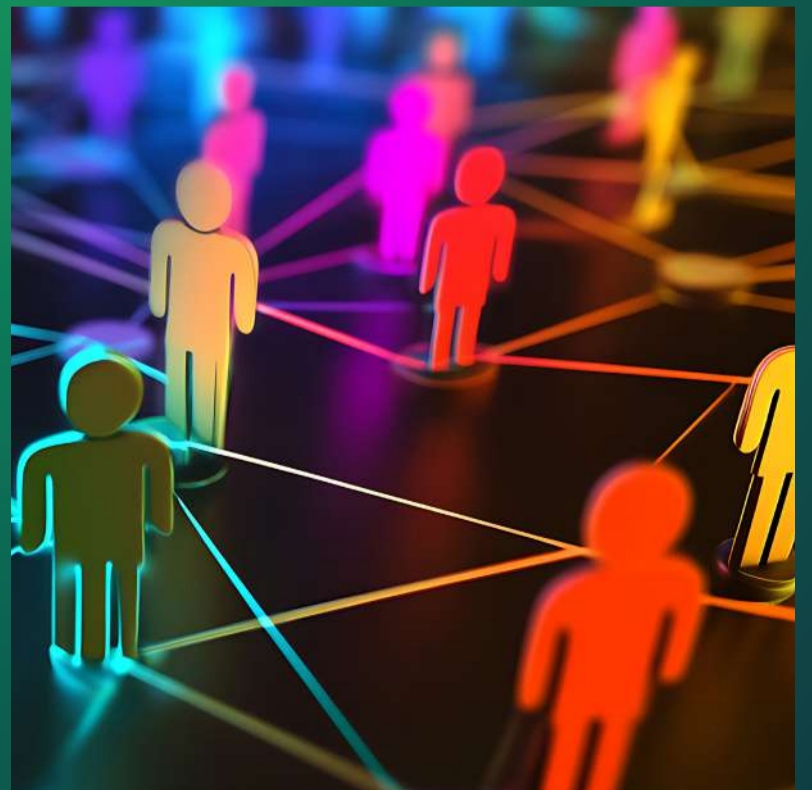


“One of the most effective strategies I've used is bringing a customer into the room with prospects to foster real, open conversations. By grouping prospects with customers who've faced similar challenges, we created a space where they could share their experiences and solutions. This isn't about sales pitches—it's about letting prospects hear firsthand how others solved their problems. We kept it informal, without recording, to ensure a comfortable, candid dialogue. This approach not only builds trust but also gives prospects the confidence to make informed decisions based on real-world experiences.” -

-Sabina Iyengar, Growth Marketer

THE SURGE OF COMMUNITIES

Online communities are becoming the hub for unbiased reviews.



The Surge of Online Communities

Some marketers create opportunities for customers and prospects to talk, but what's most effective? When marketers and sellers aren't in the room at all. This is why online communities are becoming some of the most effective (and low-cost) channels for converting prospects into customers.



Reviews are great for product validation, but may not answer all of a prospect's questions. Online communities are an unbiased forum for customers and prospects to share valuable information about products and services.

“

“In an increasingly online and fragmented world, people are seeking real, human connections with others... So you have to develop and engage your community, build relationships, and keep in touch in meaningful ways.”

”

- Leilani Yau, Content Marketer

“

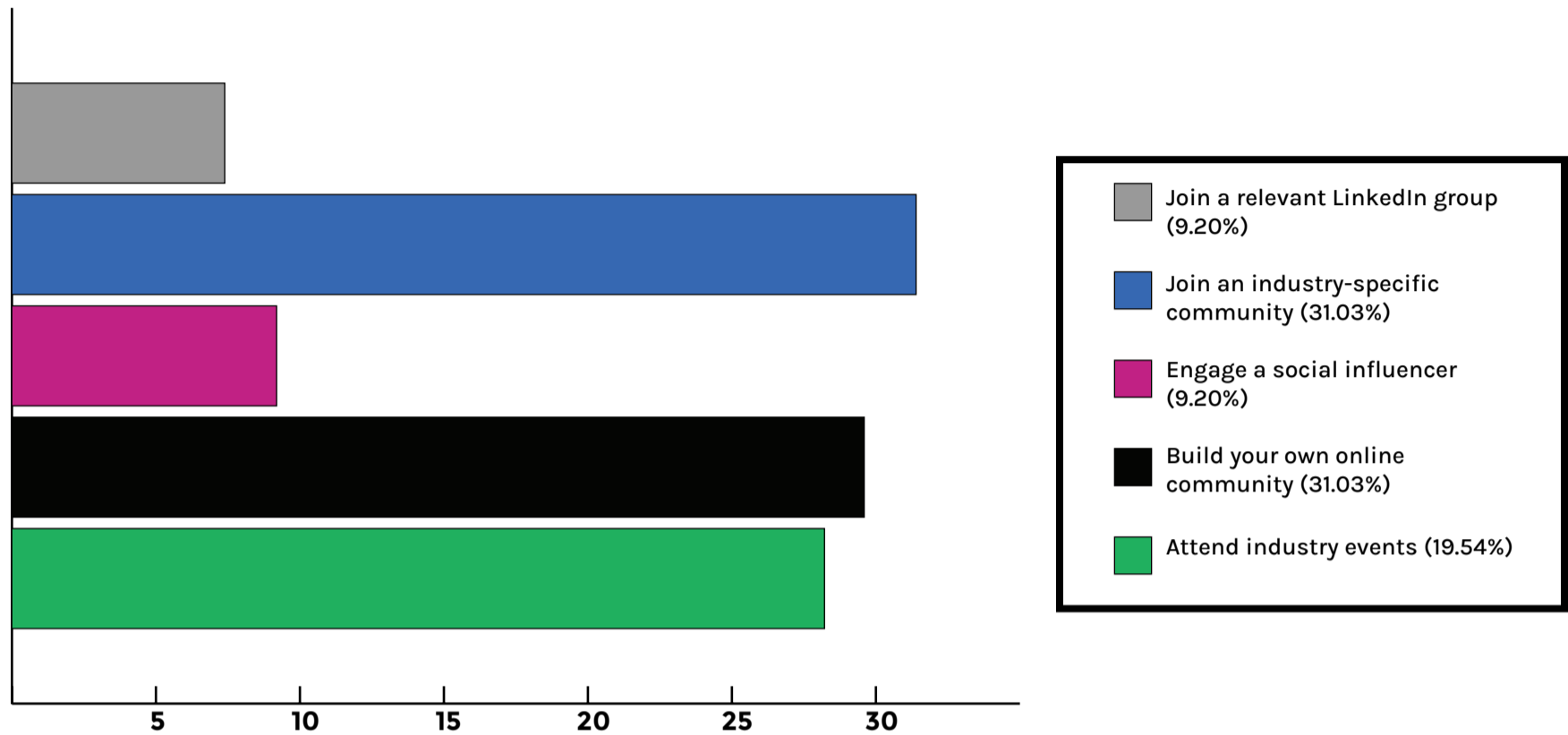
“The conversion rate from influencer channels can be 50%, 60%. The CAC is so low, it's amazing. You just test some other folks and see what happens.”

”

- Maz Jamasbi, Growth Marketer

The Most Effective Types of Online Community

The marketers we surveyed believed it's better to be as specific as possible when engaging a community, with 37% saying that joining an industry-specific community is most effective, followed by 35% who said building your own community is best. But whatever you do, don't go in there behaving like a marketer. It will kill the vibe and not help your objectives.



Lowering Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC)

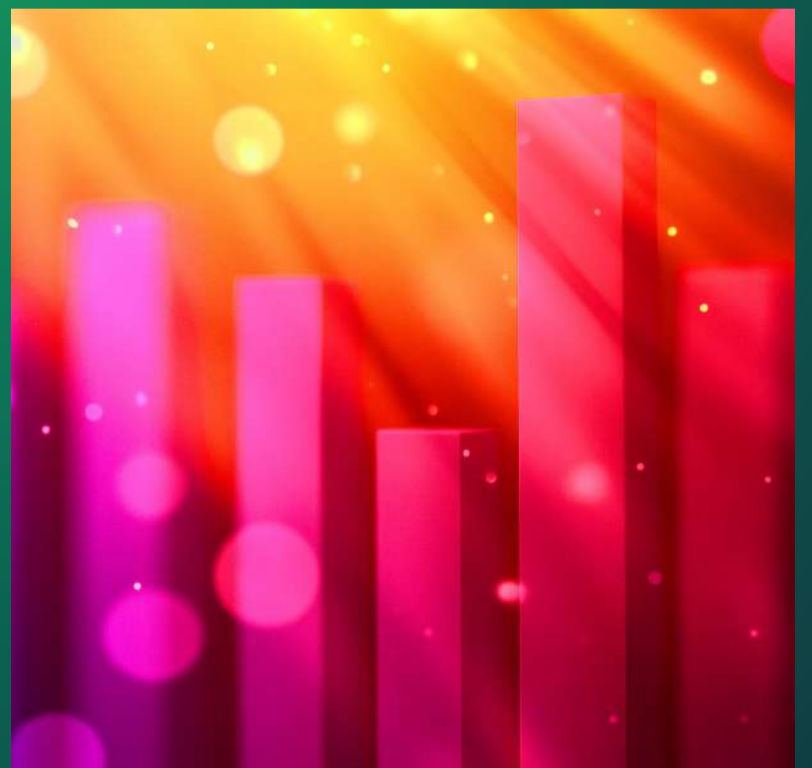
When brands join the kind of communities where real, unfiltered conversations happen, customers are more likely to engage without the usual resistance that comes with a sales pitch. This organic engagement creates a more genuine connection, leading to lower CAC for many marketing teams. In fact, 39% of the marketers we surveyed said that online communities have significantly lowered acquisition costs.

As these communities grow, influencers—whether they're loyal customers or content creators—become natural advocates for the brand. As a result, personalized exchanges that humanize the brand and increase confidence and trust.



DOING MORE WITH LESS

Attribution is becoming a marketing imperative as teams get more specific about ROI.



Marketing Maximizers Are a Commodity



Marketing budgets shrank by 15% from 2023 to 2024, according to Gartner and marketers everywhere are feeling the squeeze. And according to that same study:

73% of marketers feel the pressure to achieve more results with less budget.

*Gartner, 2024, [Gartner CMO Survey Reveals Marketing Budgets Have Dropped to 7.7% of Overall Company Revenue in 2024](#)

WHY?

Well, economic uncertainty has something to do with it, but there are other factors. If you work in tech, you probably remember a time in recent history when the goal was “growth at all costs” as companies prioritized high valuations over actual profitability. Marketing invested in expensive top-of-funnel campaigns with elusive metrics, from big billboards in even bigger cities to glossy digital ads – all to give the perception of market dominance (even if the math didn’t exactly support that story).

Pressured by the public obsession with unicorn companies, CEOs often made costly, last-minute pivots inspired by their competitors’ flashy moves – sometimes in the middle of the night, two days before a launch. Basically, it was a bonfire of marketing dollars.

Those days are over.

A combination of economic challenges and the introduction of generative AI has put an end to discretionary spending. Investors have closed their pocketbooks to high-valuation companies that focus on user counts instead of profitability, and as a result, executives are scrutinizing real metrics like customer acquisition costs, not impressions. This new sober approach to profitability has implications for every team, but maybe especially for marketing.

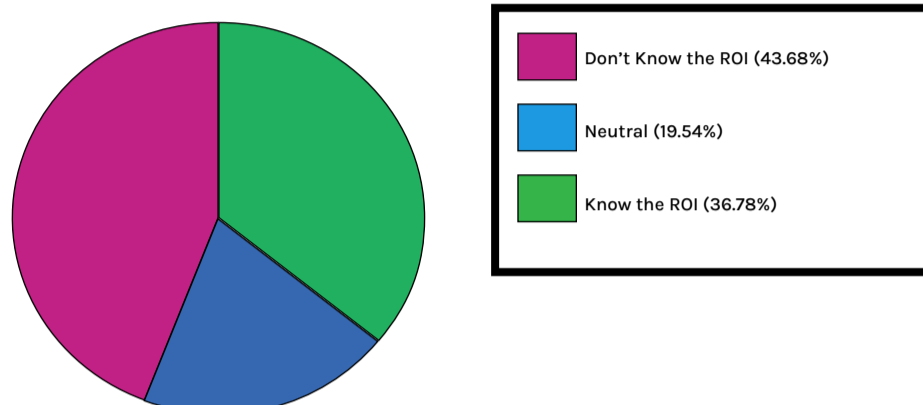
Here, marketers have three challenges:

- ✓ Measuring how top-of-funnel activities result in paid customers
- ✓ Getting access to the same metrics sales has
- ✓ Understanding what the heck they’re looking at

Measuring ROI

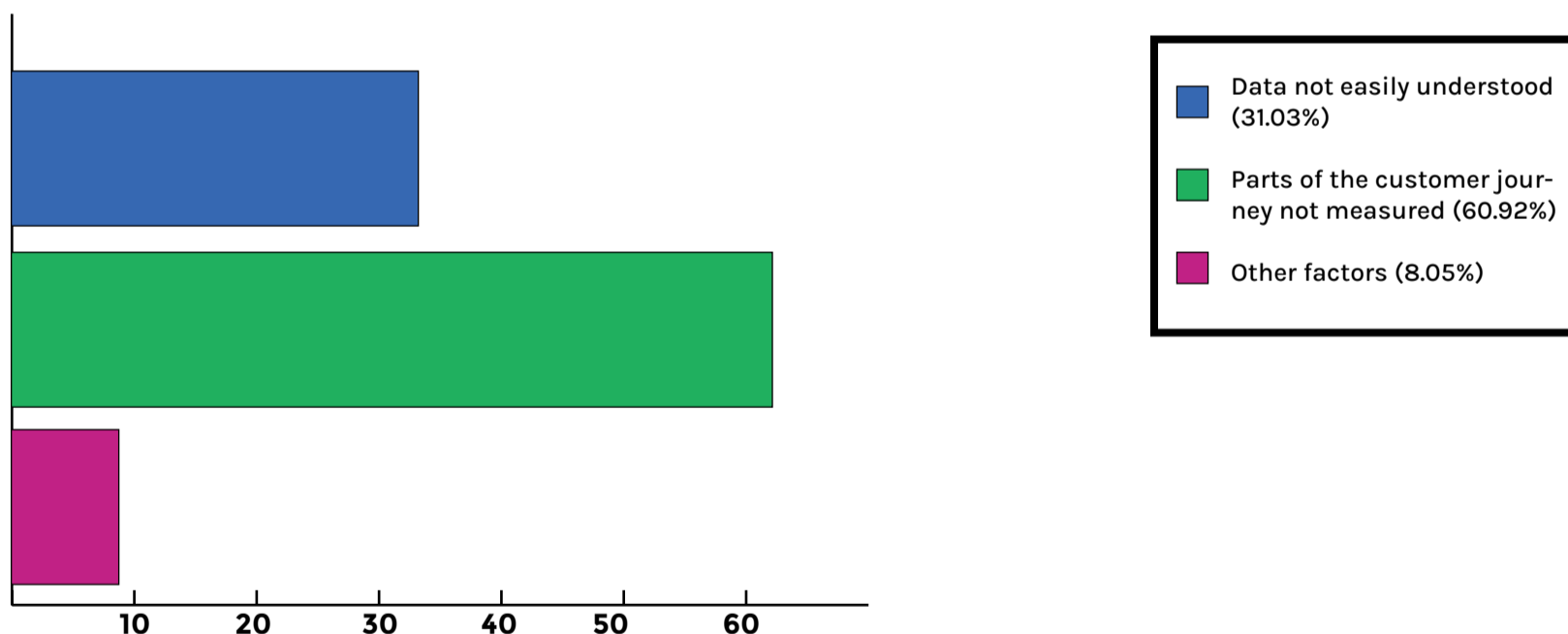
Marketing ROI has often been measured by the total marketing dollars spent, divided by the number of marketing-qualified leads generated. But now, many teams are trying to measure programs individually. It's much easier to measure the ROI of the last touch of a marketing campaign: the customer came to a landing page and filled out a form. Done. But how do you prove the ROI of top-of-funnel initiatives? The C-suite wants to know.

We asked marketers if they know the ROI of their content marketing efforts, and the results were....mixed.



So what's the biggest challenge for them? You guessed it: the parts of the customer journey that can't be measured. Take a look at this one:

Biggest Barrier to Measuring ROI



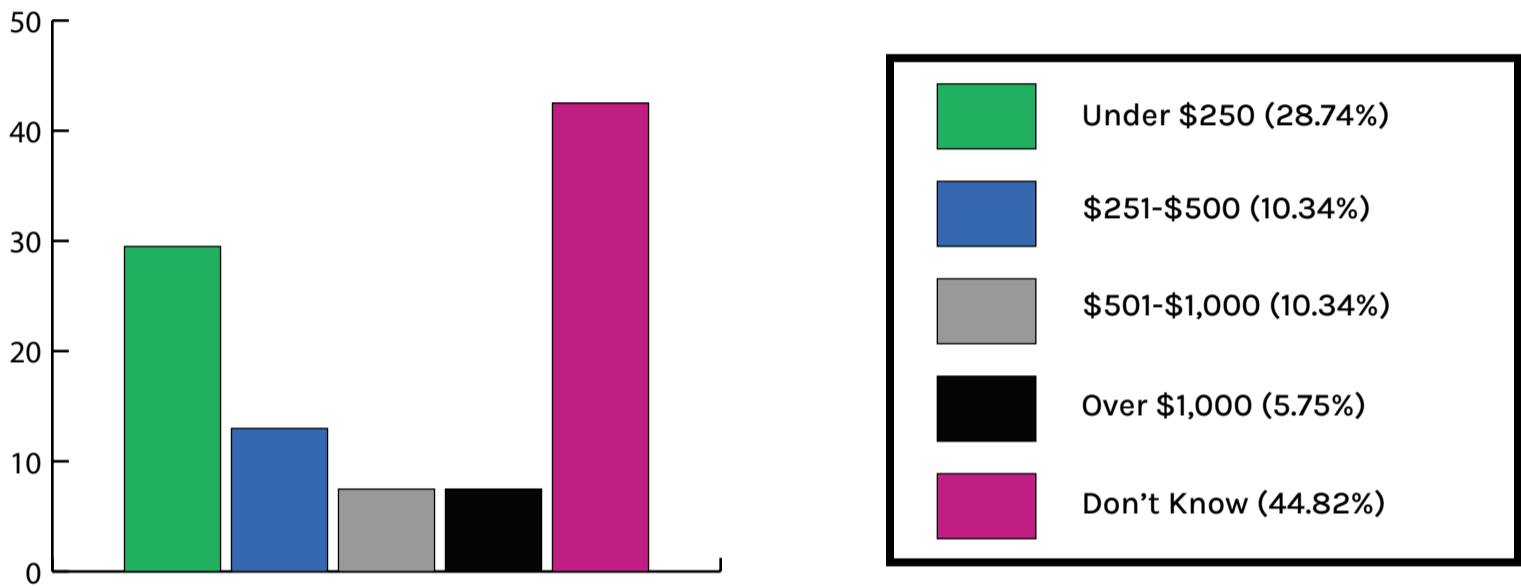
On top of not being able to measure all activities, about 41% of marketers aren't given access to the right data, which is a huge problem. The new environment demands that marketers know the ROI of every effort - even top of funnel.

Becoming More Specific About ROI

Leadership is urging many marketers to be able to prove their ROI down to the cent. For some companies, leads or even Marketing Qualified Leads (MQLs) are not counted for marketing ROI. Instead, leaders want to see how marketing efforts contributed to Sales Qualified Leads (SQLs). That’s why measuring Customer Acquisition Costs (CAC) is becoming one of the most important marketing activities, and being able to do so is becoming one of the most sought after marketing skills (which you’ll learn in our final segment).

Measuring CAC

CAC is usually measured by the costs it took to generate paying customers, divided by the number of paying customers. Here are the average CACs in B2B tech:



Again, marketers are having trouble understanding their customer acquisition costs because they aren’t given access to sales data or other platforms they need in order to understand their metrics. Marketers will need to push their leadership to break down silos and get the tools they need to succeed in delivering on new expectations.



“

Attribution is always a challenge. Everyone wants credit, but incrementality testing is tough because it’s hard to prove the impact of a channel. It’s difficult to show that a marketing effort was truly responsible for revenue.

”

- Patrick Lundbom, Marketer

Food for Thought:

Using Data to Become More Human

A marketer's ultimate goal is to keep customer acquisition costs low—especially with all these budget cuts. Now, some traditionalists argue that tracking and accountability stifle brand creativity, but consider this: the data we have at our fingertips is actually a goldmine for creative innovation.

Instead of limiting us, data helps us understand what types of media our customers actually connect with, allowing us to spin up brand ideas and content that actually engage, not just what we (as the marketers) think is creative. Data sets the stage and we - the artists - innovate within the boundaries of deeper personal connections with our audience.



DEMAND **FOR** HUMAN MARKETERS

Marketers are desperately needed to solve business problems creatively.



Bringing Human Creativity to Complex Business Challenges

Let's do a quick check-in. So far, we've heard that:

AI can scale personalization, **BUT** new brand guidelines need to be put in place...

Marketers can make 5x more content, **BUT** SEO protocols are changing...

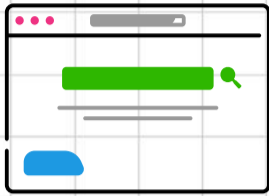
Communities are a powerful marketing channel **BUT** marketers can't be in them...

Marketers need to accurately measure ROI **BUT** data silos make that impossible...

Are you noticing a pattern here? Yep, new trends and technologies are creating new business challenges as quickly as they solve old ones. Which is exactly why marketers should approach their work less like creative artists and more like creative problem solvers.

Analysis of Top Marketing Skills

Every week, tech companies from Silicon Valley and beyond engage EM Marketing to find them elite marketing talent using a white glove approach. Their wishlists tend to be more specific, as leaders search for difficult to find skillsets. So, we ran an analysis of the most recent batch of job requests and employer interviews to identify the most in-demand marketing skills. What we found is that the most sought-after skills had a little something to do with being business-minded.



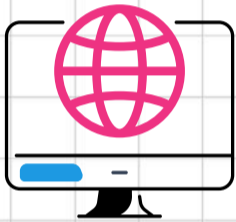
Tools Expertise

Employers want to ensure that the marketers they hire understand how to use their technologies to 1) maximize their return on software investment and 2) maintain consistent processes. The top requested tools are Google Analytics, Salesforce, Marketo, Hubspot, Tableau, Trade Desk, and Google Search Console.



Data Analysis Skills

Marketers need to understand what data they should be looking at, how to analyze it, generate insights, and make data-driven decisions. This often includes experience with SQL, Excel (including advanced skills), and potentially other programming languages like Python or R.



Cross-Channel Strategy

Most employers want marketers to understand cross-channel and cross-platform marketing strategy, and have experience with paid search (SEM), programmatic display, paid social media marketing, SEO, email marketing, ABM marketing, and content marketing.



Campaign Execution

Strategy is nothing without execution; marketers need experience in both. This involves planning, building, launching, and optimizing campaigns across various channels, including developing marketing strategies and resulting campaigns and understanding the marketing funnel and core channels.



Content Creation Skills

AI might be helpful in content creation, but real human writers need to be at the helm. Employers still want copywriting skills, including the ability to write compelling marketing content, such as articles, customer stories, SEO-driven content, product-focused content, case studies, whitepapers, and social media copy, while adhering to brand voice and style guidelines.



Communication

Written and verbal communication skills are consistently emphasized by employers. This includes the ability to clearly articulate insights to a wide range of audiences, presentation skills, and the ability to build strong relationships.



Organization

Being able to manage multiple projects is crucial, which involves working with multiple business partners, managing project plans, timelines, and budgets, strong time management skills, and operational rigor.



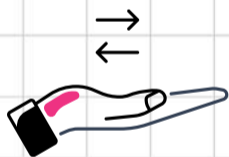
Problem-solving

Strategic thinking is a skill that will never go away. This means strong problem-solving skills, ability to structure problems into an analytics plan, strategic thinking, ability to translate large amounts of data and sales objectives into marketing objectives and tactics, and intellectual curiosity.



Collaboration and Teamwork

A marketer's ability to work well with others is imperative. This involves the ability to influence others, to work closely with cross-functional teams, and to be an excellent team player.



Adaptability

Specifically, the ability to work in a fast-paced environment. Marketers should have flexibility, the ability to thrive in a matrixed environment, be a fast learner, and have a proactive and self-starter attitude.



Final Thoughts

Some marketers fear that AI is going to eradicate humanity from the marketing world—and can you blame them? The media, C-suite, other marketers, and maybe even our own minds sometimes lead us to believe that the deep focus on accountability and efficiency will suck all the creativity (and yes, humanity!) out of marketing.

But this report suggests that the influx of new technologies is actually deepening the need for human connections. And that puts marketers in a beautiful position.

All technologies should be used to complement the authenticity and creativity that humans bring to the table. If we can keep brand voices genuine and set clear guidelines, AI can be a powerful tool without sacrificing what makes marketing human. It's that human touch—through relationships, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence—that will keep brands strong.

THANK YOU!

ABOUT  emmarketing

EM Marketing provides expert marketing talent on-demand, offering fractional CMO services and specialized support to drive results across all channels.

Visit E-M-Marketing.com for more information.

ABOUT  magnolia

Magnolia is the world's leading composable Digital Experience Platform, with over 450 enterprise customers and more than 200 certified Magnolia Partners around the world.

Visit Magnolia-CMS.com for more information.