Q3 2026 REPORT

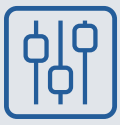
CMO SIGNALS & SHIFTS

6 Surprising AI Truths From Marketing Leaders

BY ARKETI GROUP AND JM SEARCH

Marketing leaders agree that profitable growth remains the mission, AI is now unavoidable, and visibility in AI-driven search is becoming a strategic imperative. Yet underneath that consensus lies a series of surprising contradictions. Leaders are embracing AI while questioning its impact, prioritizing new technologies while struggling to measure ROI, and reporting concerns over loss of brand value.

According to inputs from over 100 marketing leaders, these are the AI truths they're facing.



52%

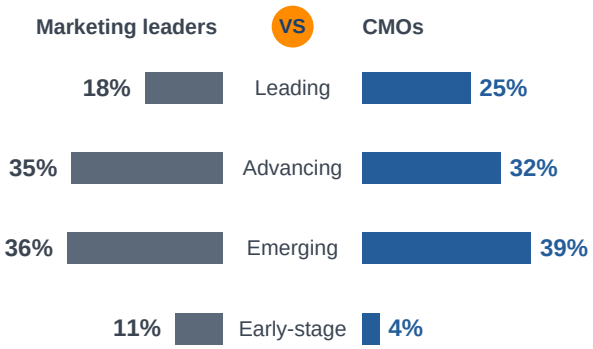
OF MARKETING LEADERS BELIEVE THEY ARE UNDERUTILIZING AI

TRUTH #1

AI IS EVERYWHERE. IMPACT IS NOT.

While all marketing leaders report AI adoption, the deeper numbers show a novice approach to utilization and execution.

HOW WOULD YOU CLASSIFY YOUR ORGANIZATION'S CURRENT AI MATURITY IN MARKETING?



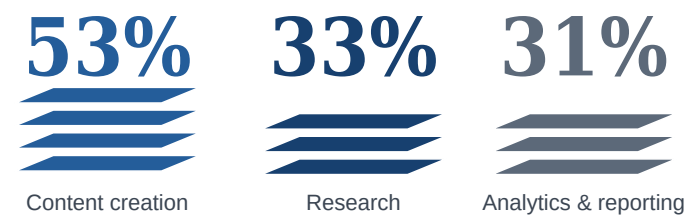
46% of marketing leaders have yet to move beyond pilots.

TRUTH #2

AI'S BIGGEST WIN IS PRODUCTIVITY, NOT REVENUE.

Cost savings and revenue generation have often been described as the main goals for AI usage, but marketing leaders are showing that value is less on the revenue side, and more on the operational.

THE MOST VALUABLE AI APPLICATIONS TODAY ARE:



THE MOST MEASURABLE IMPACTS ARE:

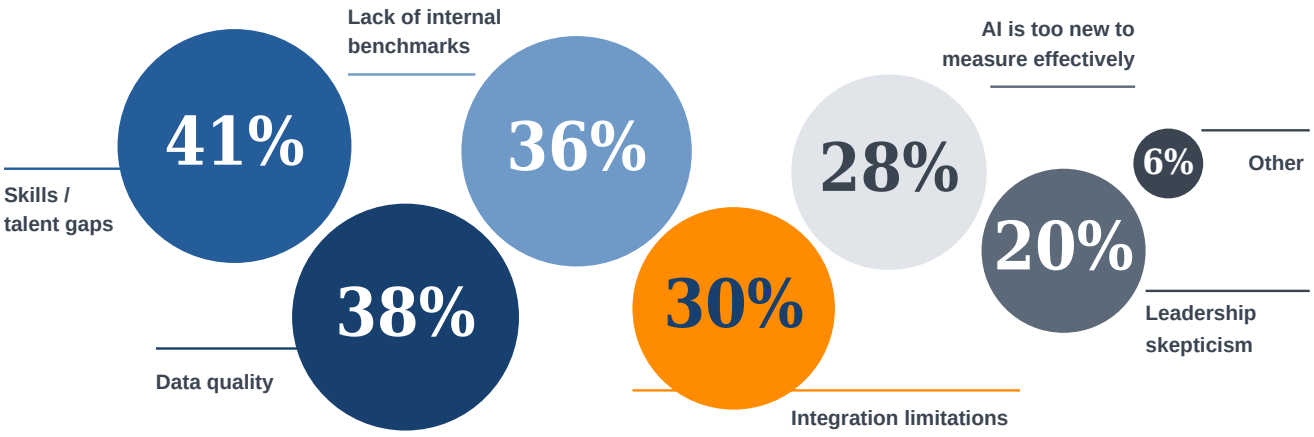


TRUTH #3

THE AI ADOPTION BATTLE IS NEARLY OVER, BUT THE ROI BATTLE HAS BEGUN.

As all marketing leaders report AI usage, the focus has now turned to getting value out of the technology. The problem is that many still struggle to fully understand the ROI of AI. Marketing leaders must identify ways to overcome these challenges to effectively move forward.

THE BIGGEST BARRIERS INCLUDE:

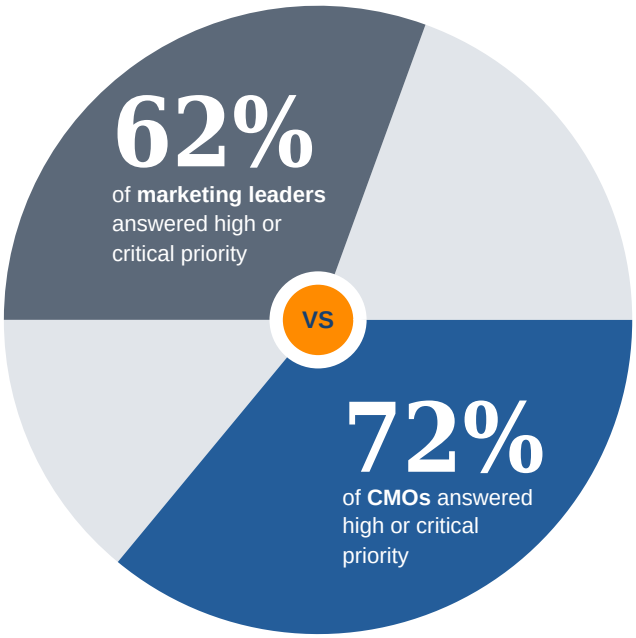


TRUTH #4

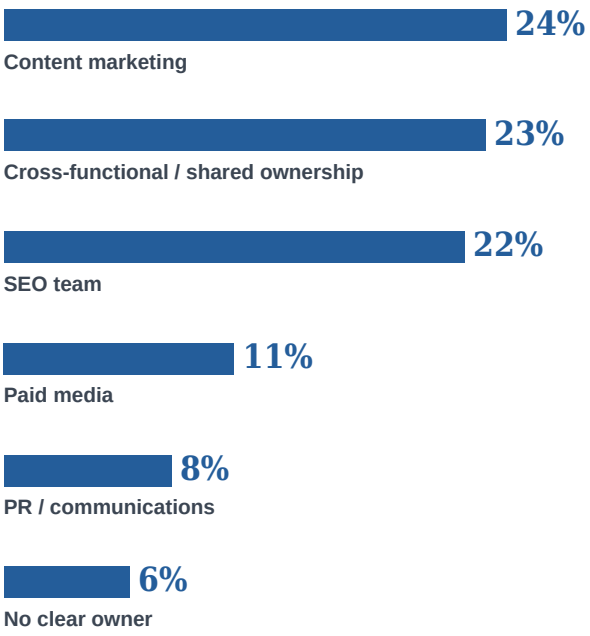
THE SEARCH REVOLUTION HAS STARTED BEFORE ANYONE AGREED WHO OWNS IT.

AEO/GEO remains a “must-have” among marketing leaders and CMOs. As teams continue to identify ways to optimize their rankings, most are approaching the task through joint ownership.

HOW IMPORTANT IS AEO/GEO VISIBILITY TO YOUR MARKETING STRATEGY OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?



LEADERS ARE DIVIDED ON AEO/GEO OWNERSHIP, WITH RESPONSIBILITY DIVIDED AMONG:



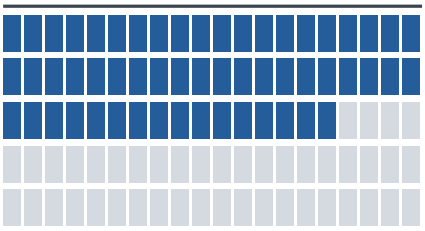
TRUTH #5

MARKETING LEADERS FEAR DEGRADATION MORE THAN DISRUPTION.

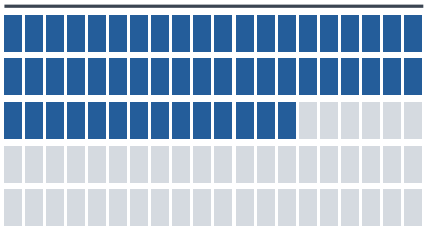
Among marketing leaders, top concerns around AI have less to do about workplace disruption and have more to do with brand degradation.

SPECIFICALLY, LEADERS EXPRESS THE GREATEST CONCERN ABOUT:

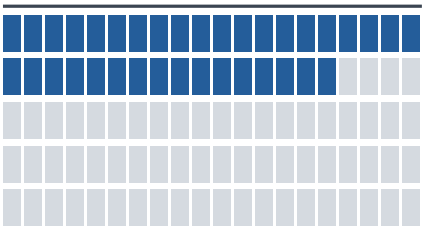
56%
Loss of brand voice



54%
Content quality decline



36%
Over-reliance on AI outputs



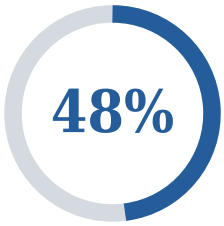
Additionally, nearly two-thirds of marketing leaders believe AI-generated “slop” is already hurting content quality or creating growing risk.

TRUTH #6

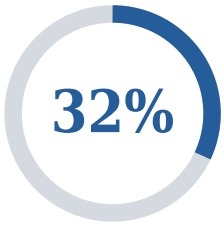
HUMAN INTERACTION IS AN AI NECESSITY.

Due to fear around brand degradation, efforts to maintain brand trust remain high. Most are turning to the human element. The result? The AI era is increasing the value of human judgment, not reducing it.

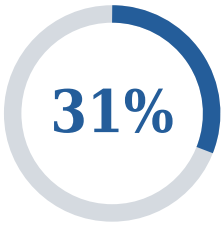
MOST IMPORTANT PRACTICES FOR BUILDING TRUST:



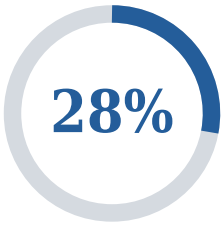
Human review of AI-generated content



Authenticity



Preserving human creativity



Transparency about how AI is used

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The CMO Signals and Shifts Survey was conducted by Arketi Group and JM Search in August 2026. The survey sampled more than 100 marketing, communications, and public relations leaders (including 35 CMOs) at companies ranging from $10 million to $1 billion and up, and in industries including technology and software, financial services, and professional services.

100+
MARKETING, COMMS & PR LEADERS SURVEYED

35
CMOs REPRESENTED IN THE SAMPLE

$10M - 1B
AND UP, IN COMPANY REVENUE RANGE

ABOUT ARKETI GROUP

Arketi Group is a next-generation agency platform that helps B2B technology organizations generate revenue and accelerate growth through both marketplace and workplace communications.

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ABOUT JM SEARCH

JM Search is the leading retained executive search firm for private equity and other growth-oriented private and public organizations.

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