



GALE

# THE BUSINESS- ARCHITECT CMO: BUILDING FUTURE-PROOF GROWTH STRATEGIES

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# INTRODUCTION

In a landscape shaped by relentless technological innovation, rapidly evolving consumer expectations, and persistent economic headwinds, marketing is a critical engine of sustainable growth and durable competitive advantage. At its best, it sits at the heart of business success. As a result, the demands on today's Chief Marketing Officer have never been higher or more consequential.

To illuminate the strategies and challenges shaping the CMO agenda in 2025 and beyond, GALE partnered with Forbes Insights to survey 300 CMOs from organizations with annual revenues of \$500 million to over \$10 billion. Across industries and tenure, these leaders face a persistent challenge: effectively developing and delivering a balanced approach that drives immediate business results and lasting brand equity.

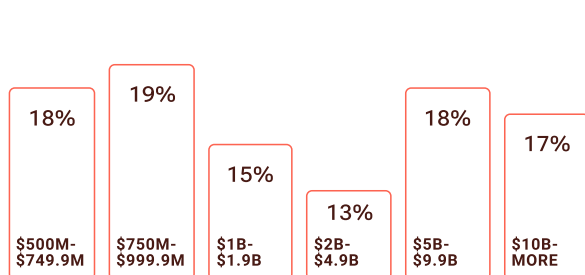
Despite the oft-repeated mandate to “do more with less,” the majority (57%) of CMOs report flat year-over-year budgets, while only 21% report decreases—and 22% even report increases. They have a similar outlook for next year: 62% expect no change in marketing budgets, with 19% expecting a decrease and equally as many expecting an increase. As budgets generally hold steady—considering all the factors that allow for efficiencies—the opportunity to refocus the discipline on its core objective, to drive business growth, is ripe.

The CMO role is evolving accordingly: **67% of respondents say CMOs must now serve as business architects, not just brand stewards.** Yet gaps persist—none report fully breaking down the silos between short- and long-term marketing efforts, and only 19% consider their organizations “extremely effective” at demonstrating marketing’s impact across the entire customer journey.

As CMOs ask, “How should I spend my next dollar—and how do I get to that answer?,” this report examines how leading marketers are navigating complexity, balancing priorities, collaborating across the C-suite, and charting a path forward.

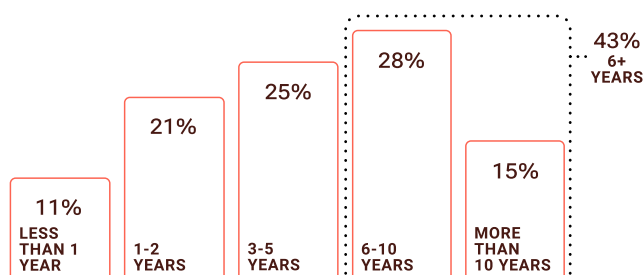
**FIG 1: ANNUAL BRAND REVENUE**

Q: What was your organization's annual revenue in the most recent fiscal year?



**FIG 2: CMO TENURE**

Q: How long have you been in your current role as CMO?



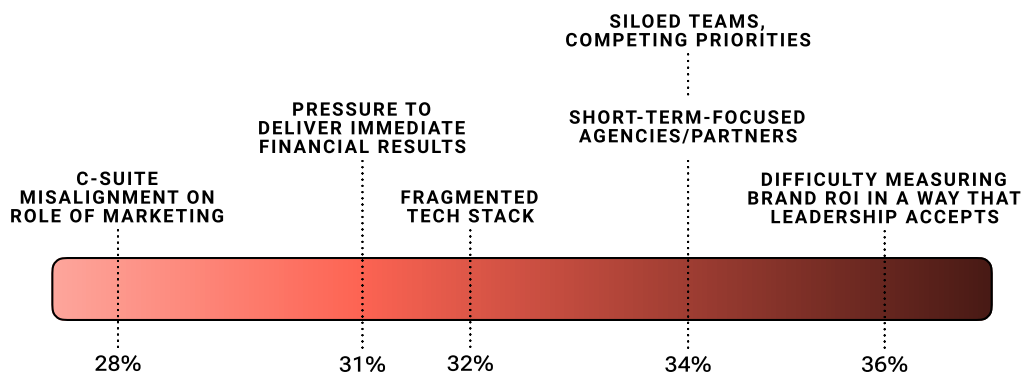
## THE MODERN CMO MANDATE: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY

Among leading marketers, the brand-versus-performance debate is obsolete. They recognize that effectiveness requires both, and the boundaries that determine which activities fall in which buckets have largely blurred. The imperative now is to maximize returns by deliberately balancing short- and long-term priorities. How these are defined vary by organization. Generally, however, short-term marketing (under 12 months) is most often defined as driving quarterly revenue, supporting product launches or promotions, and generating immediate sales or conversions. Long-term marketing (12 months or more) focuses on business growth, sustained brand perception, customer loyalty, and cultural relevance.

The findings point to a gradual shift away from an overwhelming emphasis on short-term results toward more balanced or long-term investment strategies. Progress is incremental, but reflects a growing recognition that short-term returns and long-term brand value must be integrated for sustained success. Achieving this, however, is not without its challenges.

Silos and measurement continue to be significant obstacles to effective, integrated marketing. More than a third of CMOs identified both as a top barrier to building long-term brand value, underscoring just how pervasive and disruptive these issues remain.

**FIG 3: BARRIERS TO LONG-TERM BRAND BUILDING**

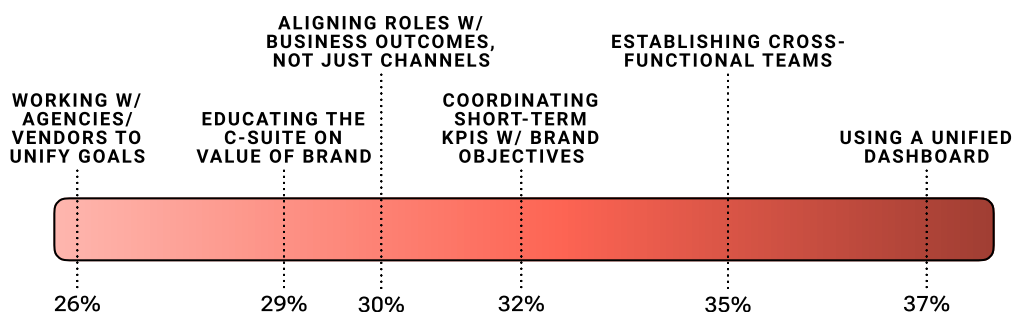


Q: What are the top barriers to long-term brand building?

CMOs are responding with a set of organization-wide solutions: implementing a unified marketing dashboard; establishing cross-functional teams that bridge brand, performance, and product; and coordinating short-term KPIs with long-term brand objectives. They are also deepening collaboration across the C-suite, educating peers on the economics of brand building, and aligning with agencies and vendors around shared goals. Together, these moves reflect a necessary skill for today's CMOs: championing alignment and a holistic, results-driven approach.

This holistic mindset is essential to balancing both short-term results and long-term growth. CMOs are optimizing for both immediate profitability and future competitiveness, while also meeting business needs, building customer trust, increasing efficiency, and reducing reliance on promotions. The result is a marketing discipline that is more nuanced, strategically integrated, and future-focused.

**FIG 4: HOW CMOs ARE BREAKING DOWN SILOS BETWEEN SHORT- & LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES**



Q: How is your organization working to break down silos between short-term performance and long-term brand objectives?

## THE BALANCING ACT: BARRIERS & ENABLERS

While CMOs recognize the imperative, **only 39% of CMOs report that their budgets are fully aligned with and supportive of their strategic vision.**

Two barriers dominate: the challenge of demonstrating ROI for long-term brand initiatives (52%) and limited control over budget allocation (48%). The industry is not uniform in how these tensions manifest. When asked what hinders their ability to balance short- and long-term priorities, for example, **42% cited an organizational tilt toward performance marketing over brand, while 38% cited the reverse.** This split indicates that CMOs are grappling with divergent internal pressures, not a single, universal constraint. With competing priorities and biases at play, achieving integration requires tailored solutions.

Even so, many CMOs are taking decisive action to stay ahead of a volatile market. Nearly half (44%) are investing in advanced marketing technology to scale their efforts, and 40% are building owned customer communities and loyalty programs to drive sustainable growth. Others are focused on leaning into customer loyalty and long-term brand value (38%), adopting more flexible or real-time budgeting to stay agile (37%), and investing in delivery models that boost both output and quality, such as modular content systems or in-house studios (37%).

## FUTURE-PROOFING MARKETING: MEASUREMENT, AI, & INNOVATION

Future-proofing remains a top priority for CMOs, focused on ensuring their brands not only withstand disruption but outperform amid constant change. Their perspective on the most important factors for a future-ready strategy includes: adopting an audience-first approach that keeps the customer's voice at the forefront; aligning teams around shared business goals; and leveraging AI to scale content, creative, and targeting.

Alignment thrives on KPI clarity, and CMOs are prioritizing a direct line from activity to financial impact. When asked about how they're measuring success for short- and long-term priorities, sales emerged as the top metric for both. Additional short-term indicators include lead volume (55%) and social engagement (55%), while long-term progress is being tracked through brand awareness (58%) and brand sentiment (61%).

AI is becoming a core enabler, especially for advancing measurement approaches and addressing persistent ROI challenges. More than half (55%) of CMOs are using AI for predictive analytics and forecasting to better anticipate outcomes, and nearly as many are using it for automating reporting (49%) and mapping the customer journey (47%). The greatest AI-driven efficiency and effectiveness gains to date, however, stem from internal process improvements, including customer service automation (49%), workflow tools (46%), and productivity aids (44%).

Unsurprisingly, when asked where they would invest if they had unlimited resources over the next few years, deploying AI to further enhance efficiency and scalability would be a priority (39%).

**Their top priority, however, would be investing in research and development to create new and differentiated customer experiences (47%),** reinforcing a commitment to innovation and audience-centric approaches. This enables deeper personalization as a catalyst for growth. Additional priorities include strengthening first-party data infrastructure (36%) and elevating ESG or sustainability-focused brand positioning (36%).

**FIG 5: TOP AREAS CMOS WOULD INVEST INCREMENTAL BUDGET**



INVESTING IN RESEARCH AND  
DEVELOPMENT AROUND NEW  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES



DEPLOYING AI TO SUPPORT  
EFFICIENCY AND SCALABILITY



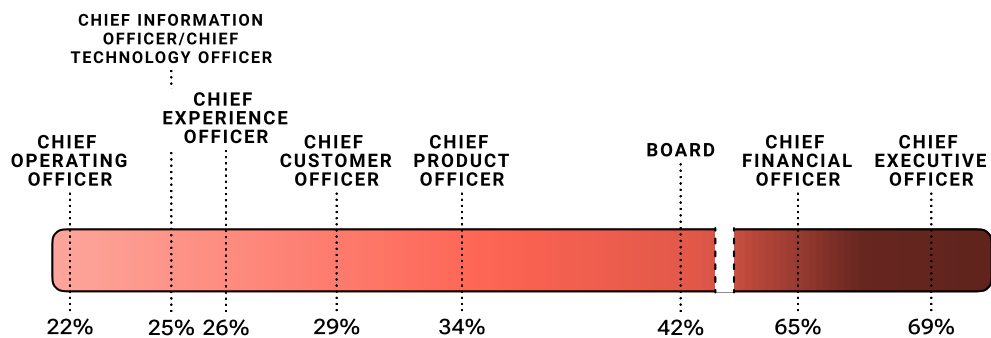
STRENGTHENING FIRST-PARTY  
DATA INFRASTRUCTURE



# THE CMO AS BUSINESS ARCHITECT: LEADERSHIP, INFLUENCE, & ALIGNMENT

Reframing their own role from brand steward to business architect requires CMOs to influence a broad spectrum of C-suite stakeholders. A quarter of CMOs identified the C-suite’s confidence in marketing as a top factor shaping how they build strategy. While the CEO and CFO remain the most influential, with 69% and 65% of CMOs citing them as the key decision-maker in marketing spend, respectively, buy-in from the board, Chief Product Officer, and Chief Information/Technology Officer is increasingly important—particularly as AI investments make technology leadership central to marketing’s future.

FIG 6: WHO INFLUENCES MARKETING SPEND



Q: Aside from yourself, who are the top stakeholders that influence marketing spend decisions within your organization?

The biggest barriers to telling a complete story around the impact of marketing are siloed data across internal departments (48%), procurement-driven investments that may not align with marketing goals (48%), and IT-driven investments that similarly diverge from marketing priorities (46%). Conversely, the most effective enablers of impact communication include unified marketing data across platforms (45%), C-suite support for investing for the long term (41%), and close collaboration with agency partners who understand business outcomes (41%). CMOs doubled down on the third point, with **70% agreeing that agency partners increasingly need to understand their business more holistically to be effective.**

With these strategies and more, when making the case to the C-suite for long-term brand investment during tight budget cycles, CMOs report that the most persuasive approaches are positioning marketing as a driver of enterprise value, directly linking brand health to the sales pipeline, and using industry benchmarks or market share to reinforce their argument.

As CMOs look to step into the role of business architect, they should consider the following questions to guide their approach:

- 1 How am I aligning marketing strategies with broader business objectives to drive measurable enterprise value?
- 2 What steps am I taking to build trust and influence among key C-suite stakeholders to ensure marketing is seen as a strategic growth driver?
- 3 Am I effectively breaking down data silos and fostering collaboration across departments to create a unified, business-focused view of marketing's impact?
- 4 How am I leveraging technology, data, and agency partnerships to connect marketing results directly to sales, revenue, and long-term business outcomes, and do I have the right partners to do this effectively?
- 5 What evidence and benchmarks am I using to make a compelling case for sustained brand investment, even during periods of budget pressure or organizational change?

Future-proof marketing isn't accidental—it's designed. With deliberate examination of the questions above, CMOs can drive clarity around strategy, investments, and collaboration, and ultimately generate enterprise value.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This GALE x Forbes Insights survey was conducted between June and July 2025. Respondents included 300 CMOs from companies with a minimum annual revenue of \$500 million evenly distributed across a broad range of industries, including Automotive, Consumer Goods, Financial Services, Healthcare and Pharma, Media and Entertainment, Retail, Technology, Telecom, and Travel and Hospitality.