

2026 CMO GROWTH PLAYBOOK

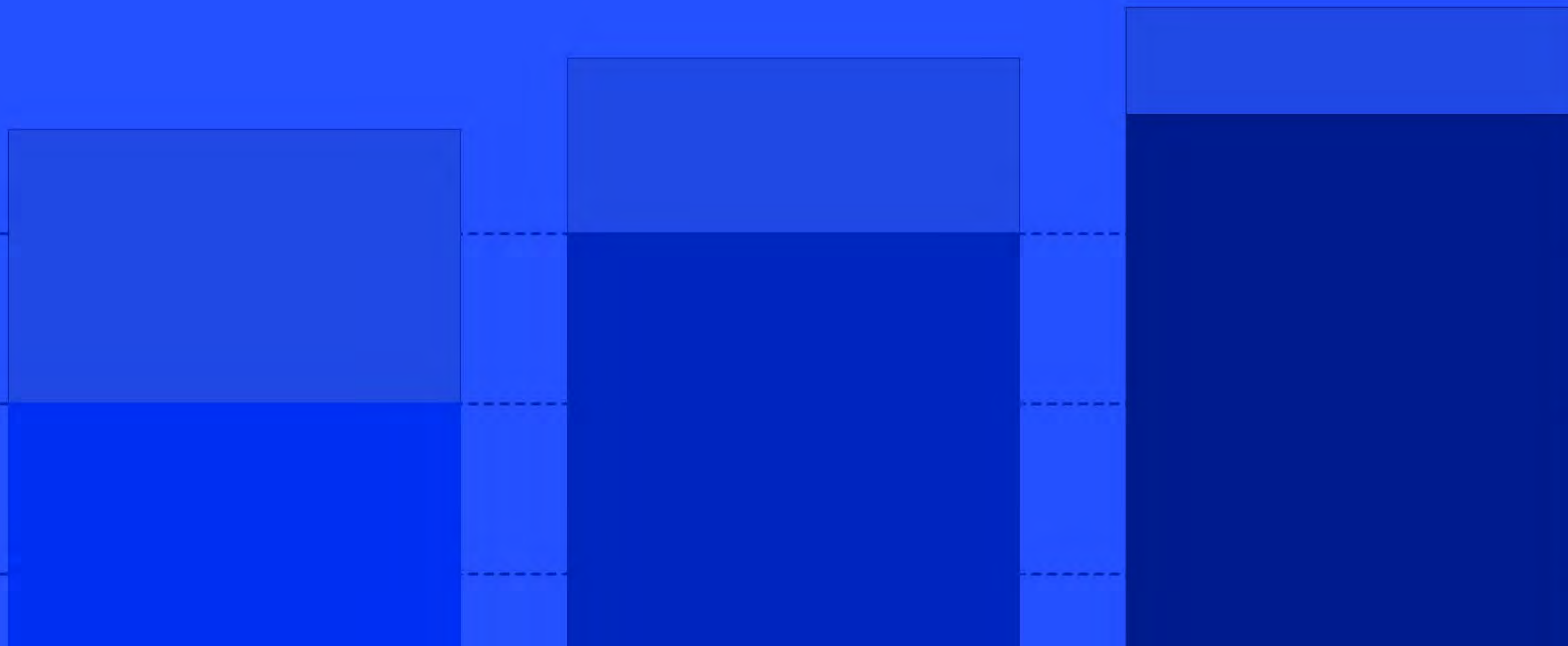


Table of Contents

2026 CMO GROWTH PLAYBOOK

1	THE CMO SITUATION ROOM	(Page 1)
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2	CMO GROWTH PLAYBOOK	(Page 9)
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3	CMO GROWTH USE CASES	(Page 21)
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+ YOUR FREE CMO GROWTH TOOLS

A large, stylized handprint graphic in a lighter shade of blue, centered behind the text. The fingers are spread out, and the palm is visible, creating a subtle background element.

THE CMO SITUATION ROOM

CMO Research that Matters for 2026

THE 2026 CMO THREAT SUMMARY

Marketing has never been more complex. AI is rewriting the rules. And CMOs are being asked to deliver more growth with fewer resources than ever before. **Here are the 3 key issues CMOs need to get real about ahead of 2026:**



AI is driving your digital to zero

- 60% of searches now end without a click.
- CMOs report marketing budgets are flat at 7.7% of revenue.
- AI-driven zero-click search is eroding visibility, leaving CMOs to achieve more impact against flat budgets.



THE SOLVE: Invest in brand moments against tentpole, real-life experiences.



Your audience is a black hole without first-party data

- 81% of the economy is offline, beyond the reach of most brands' current data capture
- CRM black holes and data gaps put brands at a serious disadvantage in an AI-first world.
- Personalization breaks down as well as the ability to convert and retain customers.



THE SOLVE: Capture owned data at the moment of engagement that enables personalization and increases conversion.



Fragmented touchpoints are killing your ROI

- 50%+ of CMOs are listing ROI attribution as a top goal.
- Fewer than 4 in 10 marketers believe they can measure ROI across channels, creating blind spots.
- 73% of brands report no CX improvement year over year, highlighting persistent experience blind spots.



THE SOLVE: Unify customer identity and attribution end-to-end with one ID for every channel, every experience.

 **CMO GROWTH MOVE:** Move 1% of your marketing budget to real-world experiences and enable touch points with solutions like Flowcode.

THE DIGITAL FUNNEL IS COLLAPSING

Market Signals

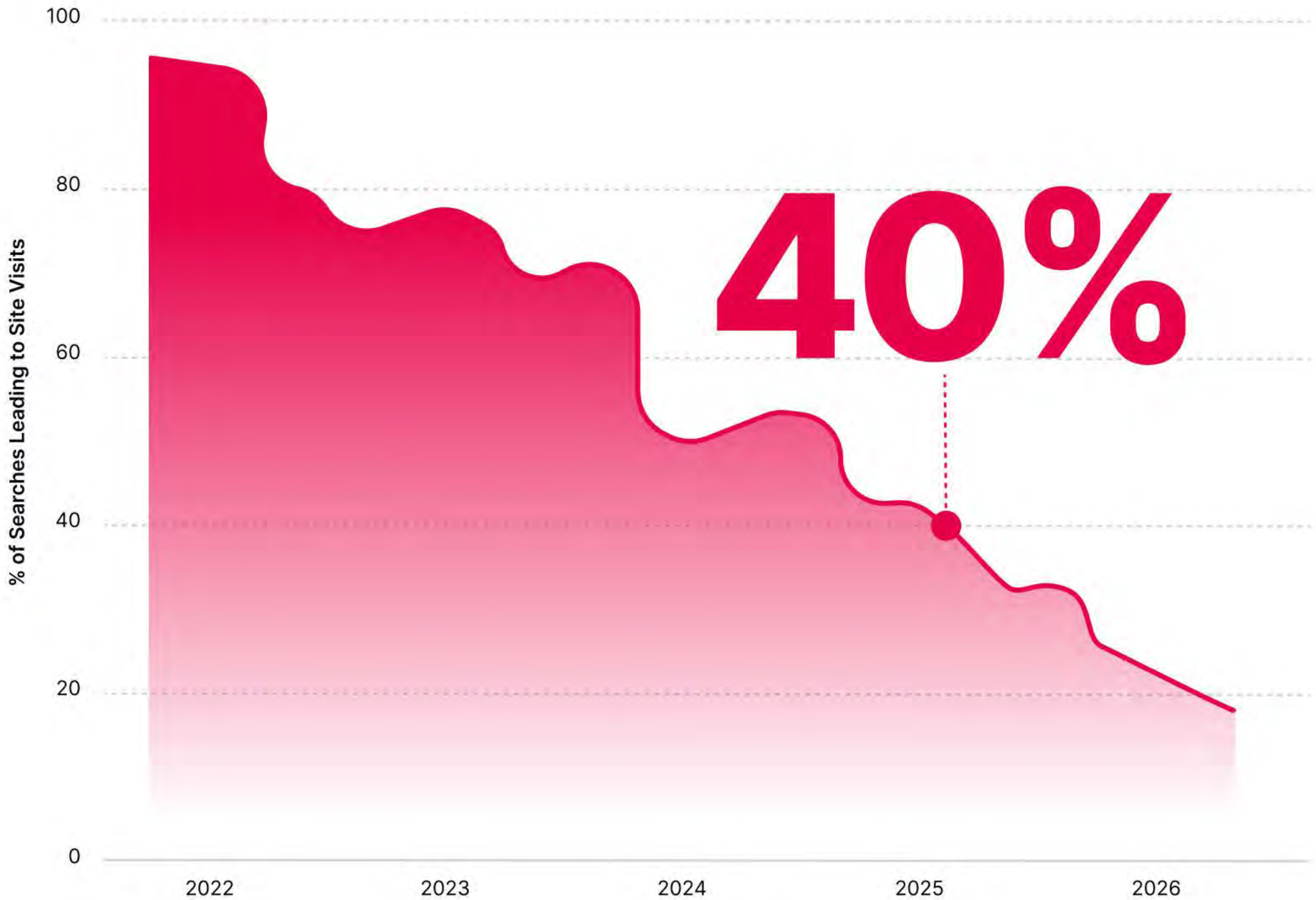
- **60%** of searches now end without a click.¹
- Individuals can be exposed to upward of **1,000** digital ads every day.²
- Presence of an AI Overview in the search results correlated with a **34.5%** lower average clickthrough rate (CTR) for the top-ranking page.³

Digital Impact

- Accelerating zero-click trends are leading to **CPC pressures, fewer click throughs, and increased dependence on owned channels.**
- Ads and platform-controlled content are leading to consumer **distrust in the content they are being served.**

 **CMO INSIGHT:** CMOs must rebuild trust and unlock growth outside of digital ecosystems.

✦ Search Clicks Collapse as AI Grows



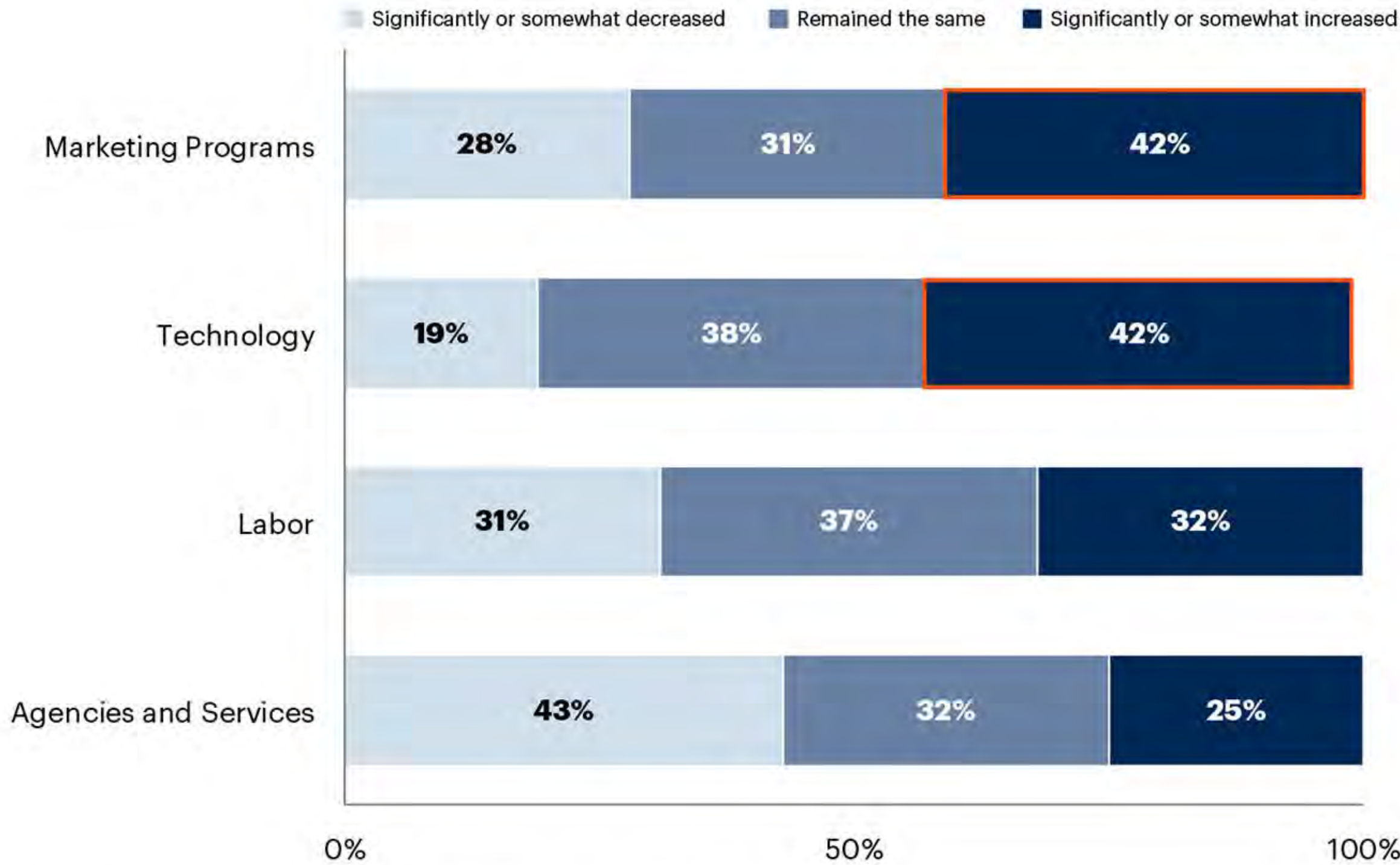
GARTNER® INSIGHTS ON AI AND DEMAND GEN IMPACT

Gartner Strategic Planning Assumptions and Key Findings

- “By 2028, overpersonalization powered by AI/GenAI will erode buyer trust to the extent that 50% of all marketing leads will come from peer channels like community groups, product review sites and professional networks.”¹
- “AI will enable accelerated volumes of personalized communications, while at the same time eroding buyer trust in those communications.”¹
- “Demand generation leaders who face eroding online channel performance and increasing costs for acquiring MQLs/MQAs will need to reimagine their strategies.”¹

 **CMO ACTION:** Shift to peer-driven and signal-based channels for future growth as direct relationships will outperform traditional digital plays.

Level of Changes in Marketing Budget Allocation to Resource Categories Compared to 2023



n = 154; technology marketers with \$100 million USD or more in annual revenue
Q: Please indicate if your organization's 2024 marketing budget allocation has increased, decreased, or remained the same compared to 2023.
Source: 2024 Gartner Tech Marketing Benchmarks Survey
821847_C



Gartner, Predicts 2025: Rebalance Demand Gen Investments for Impact, January 2025.

GARTNER® INSIGHTS ON AI CHALLENGES

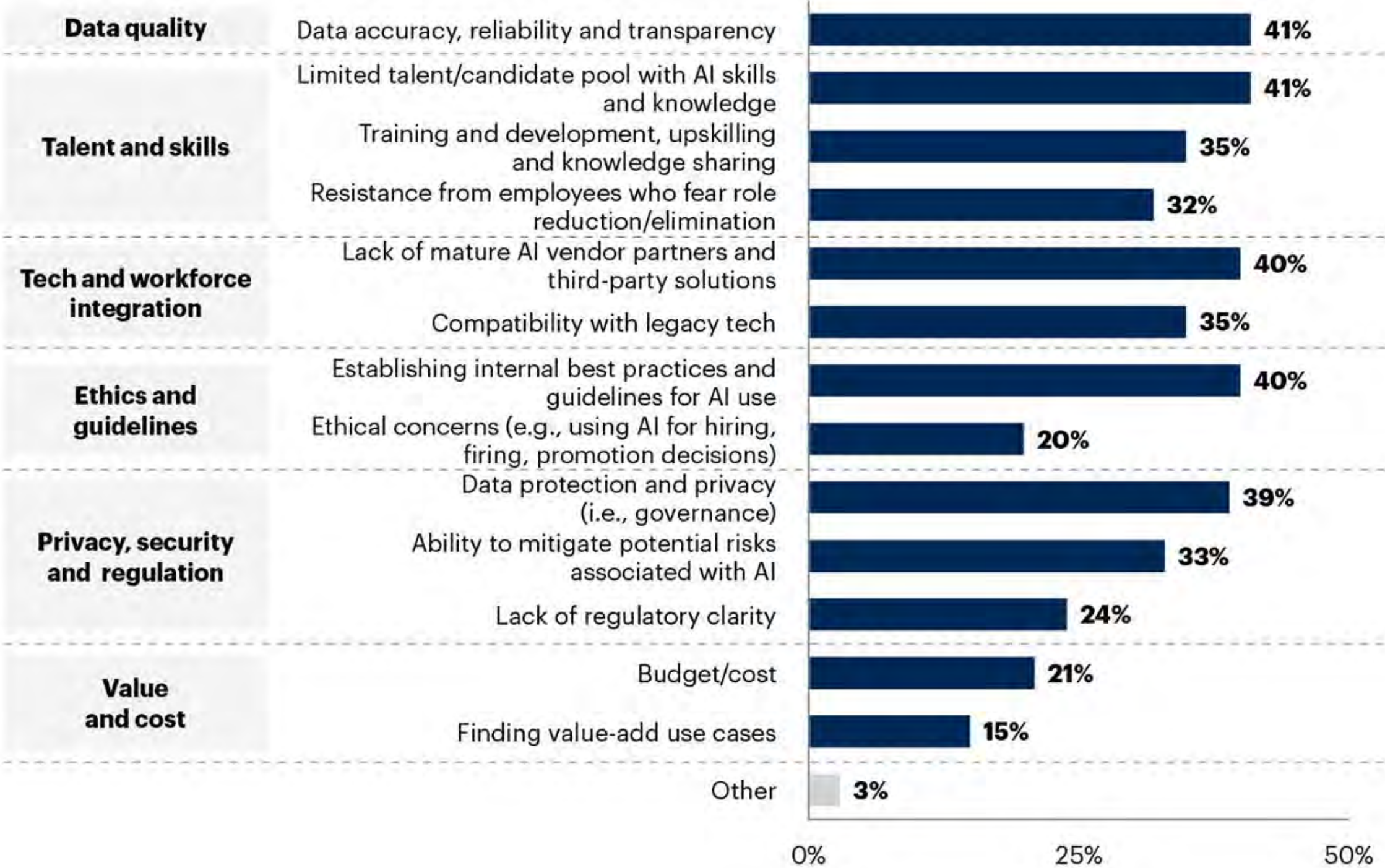
Strategic Planning Assumptions and Key Findings

- “Despite being the “first movers” of GenAI adoption, CMOs struggle to identify business value beyond the easy-to-evaluate use cases, such as operational efficiency.”¹
- “Now is the time to prioritize the establishment of data privacy protocols, clear process guardrails - including legal and ethical guidelines around autonomy - liability and robust security measures that will shape your AI-enabled future.”¹
- “Data quality and governance are critical components to success of AI applications now and will become more vital in the midterm planning horizon as AI agents begin to engage with eachother to make decisions.”¹

 **CMO ACTION:** Owning and governing your first-party data is the single most important lever for unlocking secure, differentiated, and future-proof AI impact.

Top Challenges in the Implementation of GenAI

Multiple responses



n = 100 marketing leaders

Q. In your understanding, what are some potential challenges with the implementation of Generative AI in your organization?

Source: Gartner Generative AI 2024 Planning Survey

811822_C

Gartner

Gartner, Develop an AI Strategic Roadmap for Marketing, January 2025.

WHAT YOU LOSE WITHOUT FIRST-PARTY DATA: PERSONALIZATION, ATTRIBUTION, AND CONVERSION



Current Marketing Landscape

- **Decreasing preparedness** with 60% of brands feel “mostly” or “very” prepared for the deprecation of third-party cookies (down from 78% in 2022).¹
- **Persistent fragmentation** with 67% of B2B marketers prioritize data compliance and accuracy, global reliance on 1PD stands at 84% but is hampered by silos.²
- **Growing emphasis on owned data** with warnings since 2022 that “The loss of third-party data will leave marketers — especially those with little first-party data — in the dark.”³

 **CMO INSIGHT:** It is mission critical for CMOs to truly know your customer to unlock growth.

Sources: 1. Adobe, Brands make progress weaning off third-party cookies, yet feel less prepared than ever for a world without them (July 2024); 2. eMarketer / Pipeline360, B2B firms laser-focused on first-party data (2024); 3. McKinsey & Company, The demise of third-party cookies and identifiers (2022).

FLAT BUDGETS, RISING PRESSURE: WHY MAXIMIZING ROI IS HARDER THAN EVER

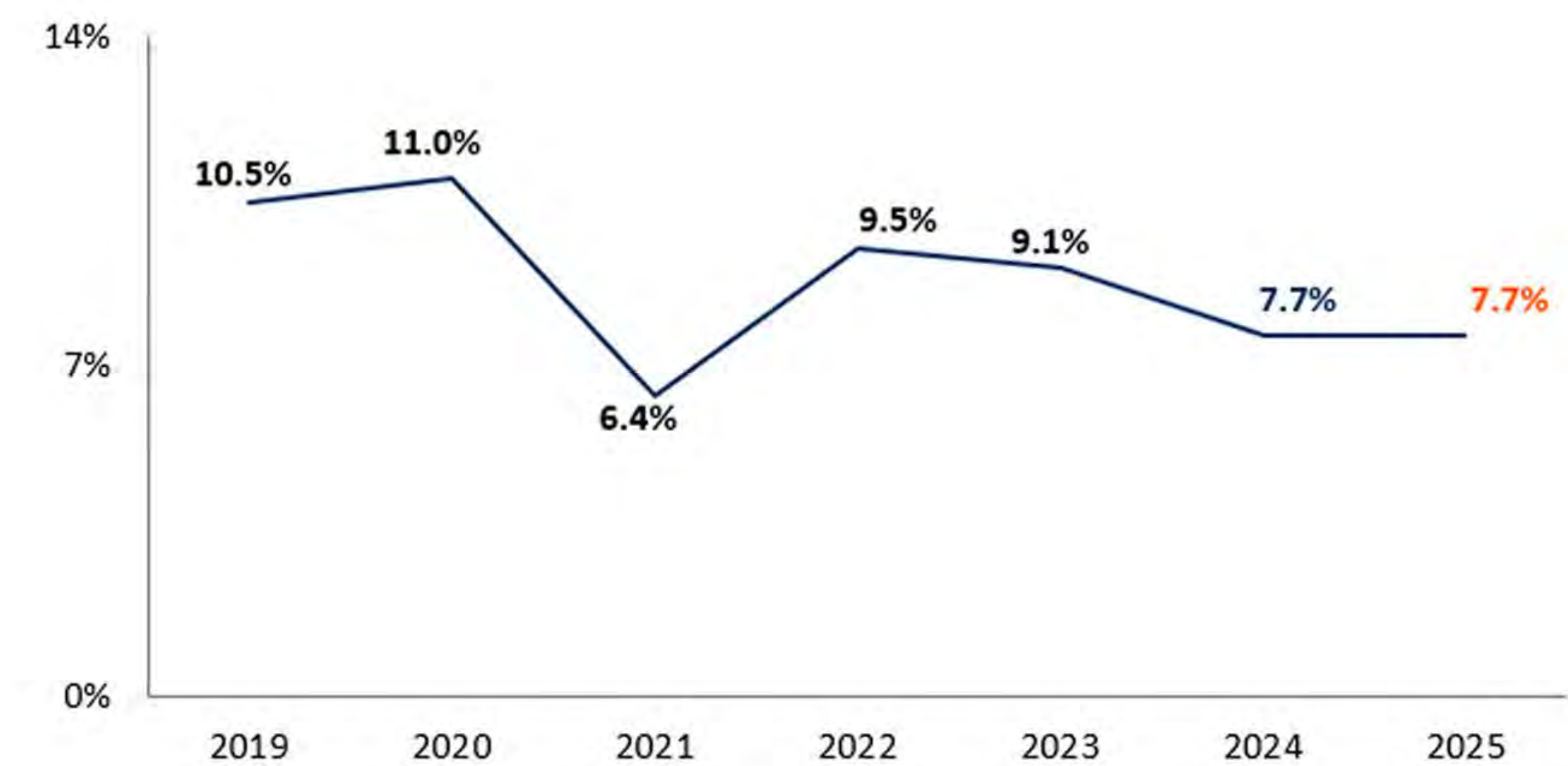
Flat Budgets Mean Flat Outcomes

- “CMOs report that their marketing budgets for 2025 remain flat at 7.7% of overall company revenue, according to a Survey by Gartner Inc.”¹
- Forrester’s CX Index 2025 shows **satisfaction plateauing**. Wasted spend hurts more than ever.

Rising Expectations, Falling Trust

- Ipsos Global CX 2025 finds **consumer trust continues to decline even as expectations rise**.
- NielsenIQ’s 2025 Outlook shows **ROI remains one of the hardest challenges for CMOs**.

Average Marketing Budget As A Percent of Total Revenue (2019-2025)
Mean percentage of company revenue shown



n = 402 CMOs

Q: What percentage of your revenue is being allocated to your total marketing expense budget in 2025?
Source: Annual Gartner CMO Spend Survey (2019-2025)

Gartner

Gartner, Insights From the 2025 CMO Spend Survey May 2025

 **CMO INSIGHT:** Optimizing your channel mix and touchpoints is more important than ever going into 2026.

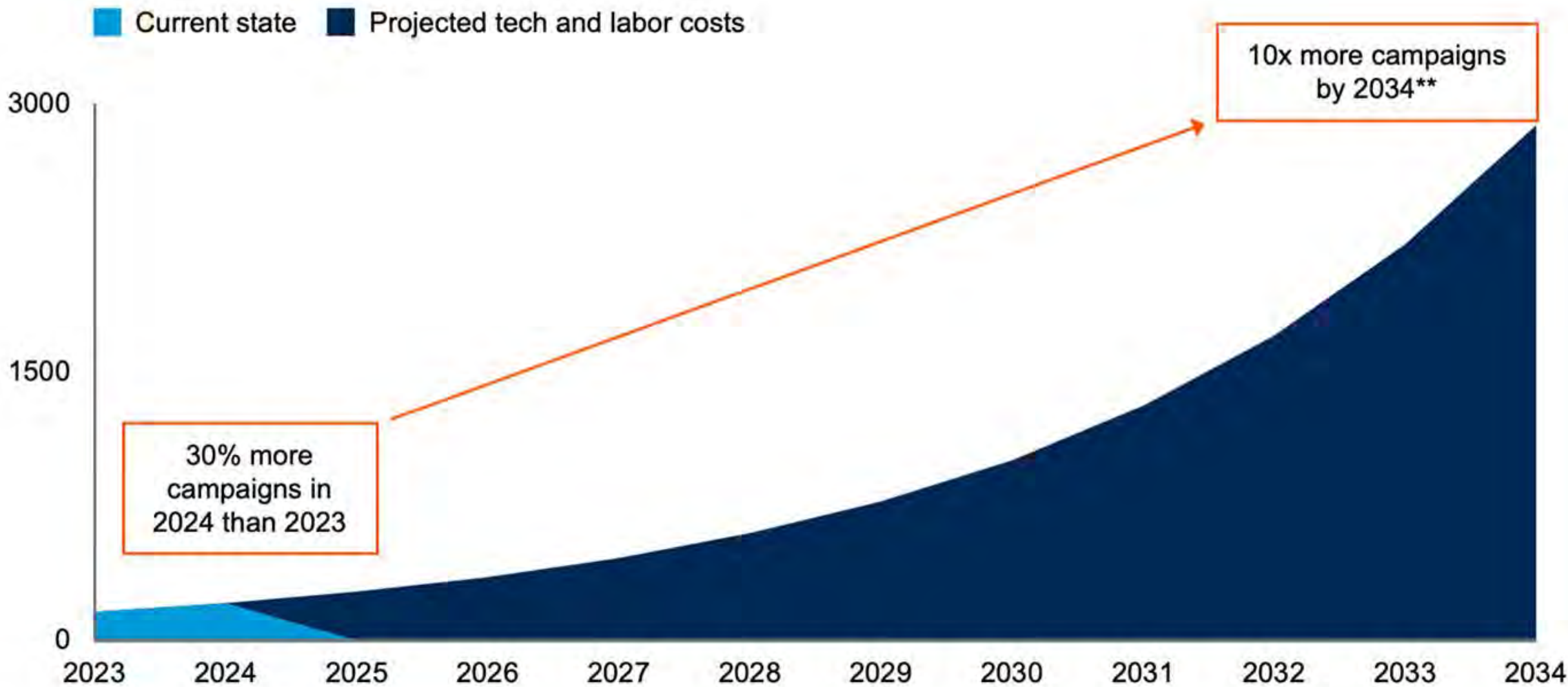
Sources: 1. Gartner, “2025 CMO Spend Survey: Marketing Budgets Flatline at 7.7% of Company Revenue”. GARTNER is a registered trademark and service mark of Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the U.S. and internationally and is used herein with permission. All rights reserved. Forrester, CX Index 2025; Ipsos, CX Global Insights 2025; NielsenIQ, CMO Outlook 2025.

GARTNER® INSIGHTS ON THE CURRENT AND FUTURE MARKETING LANDSCAPE

Strategic Assumptions and Key Findings

- “Marketers ran, on average, 30% more campaigns in 2024 compared to 2023, which implies an increase factor of 10 by 2034.”¹
- “70% of channel marketing teams struggle to prove ROI of their marketing campaign efforts, undermining the growth story of the CMO.”¹
- “Fifty-nine percent of CMOs report they have insufficient budget to execute their strategy in 2025, down by five percentage point since 2024.”²

By 2034, Marketers Will Deploy 10 Times the Campaigns They Did in 2024 Illustrative



Source: 2024 Gartner Channel & Campaign Management Survey
Note: **Projected based on 30% CAGR
825698

Gartner

Gartner, Capture The Unit Cost of Multichannel Marketing, September 2025.

 **CMO INSIGHT:** Velocity of campaign execution is increasing disproportionately to the resources being allocated.



CMO GROWTH PLAYBOOK

Growth Powered by the Experience Economy



GROWTH OPPORTUNITY IN THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Market Opportunity

\$8 Trillion

expected to be spent in the experience economy by 2030.

- Shift from selling goods and services to **staging memorable, differentiated experiences**.¹
- Experiences have emerged as the **next step in the progression of economic value**.¹
- Brands that design intentional, personalized moments win **loyalty and outpace commoditized competitors**.¹



CMO INSIGHT: Move 1% of your digital budget to real world experiences

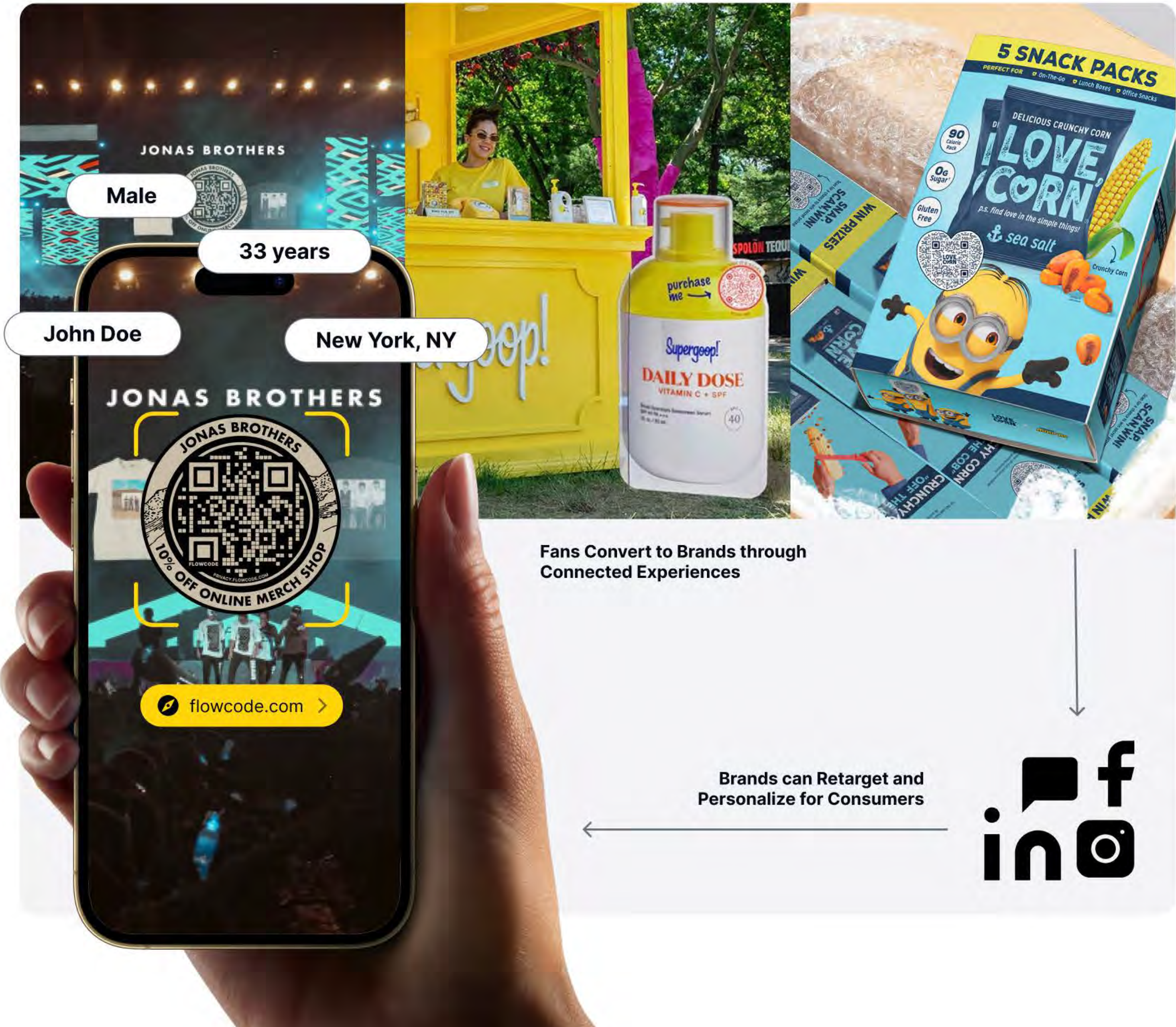
INSTANTLY CONNECT FANS TO BRANDS WITH CONNECTED EXPERIENCES

Connected Experiences are moments where physical engagement and digital identity come together to create measurable growth.

Key Imperatives

- Offline moments become **digital entry points** into your brand ecosystem.
- **First-party data is captured at the source** in a secure and compliant way.
- Customer journeys are **measurable from end-to-end**.

 **CMO INSIGHT:** Connected Experiences close the gap between IRL and digital in a way that eliminates the black hole of customer relationships.



OWN YOUR DATA, OWN YOUR GROWTH

CMOs admit they're under-prioritizing the very thing that could solve the black hole: first-party data ownership.

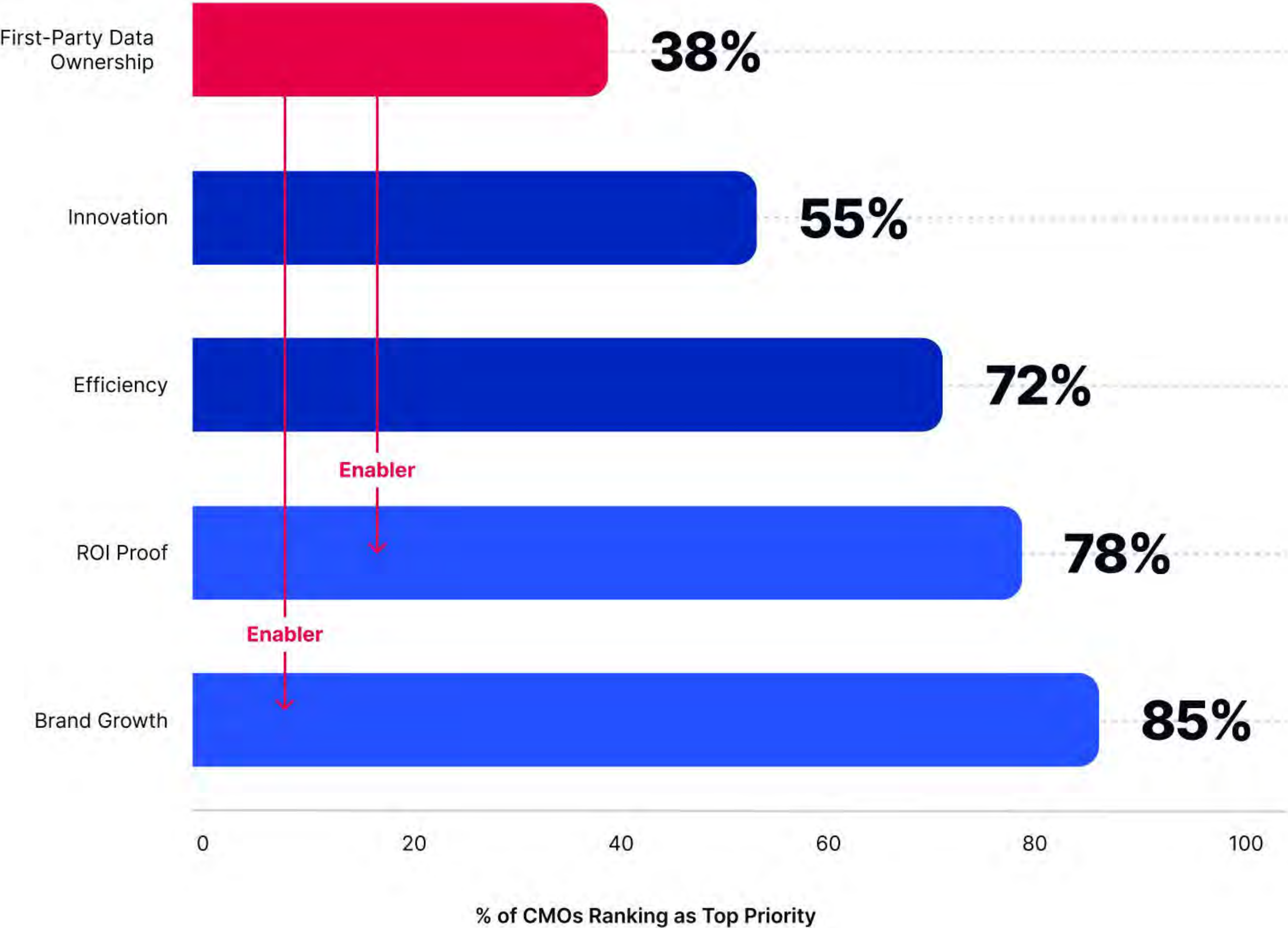
Business Impact

- “Businesses using first-party data for personalization have seen a **1.5× increase in customer retention rates.**”¹
- Companies that grow faster **drive 40% more of their revenue from personalization** than their slower-growing counterparts.²

Strategic Takeaway

- Experiences should not just entertain, but capture identity and be activated across your entire marketing ecosystem.

First-Party Data Unlocks CMO Priorities



 **CMO INSIGHT:** Personalization is universalization.

WHY EXPERIENCES ARE BECOMING THE BIGGEST GROWTH CHANNEL

91%

of consumers think participating in experiential marketing would make them more inclined to buy from the brand.

77%

of Gen Z / Millennials have planned a trip around visiting a retail store or brand, making IRL cultural currency a driver of travel and behavior.

82%

of Gen Z / Millennials want brands to bring people together in various spontaneous ways.



CMO INSIGHT: The modern consumer doesn't just want to watch, they want to be there. Digital fatigue and cultural FOMO are colliding, driving consumers toward shared, in-person moments.

EXPERIENCES WIN AT A HUMAN LEVEL: TRUST, HAPPINESS, AND LOYALTY

Experiences drive consumer trust

“People are less likely to rely on consumer reviews for experiential purchases than for material purchases.”



Experiences create durable happiness

“On average, experiences produced ~5 points more in-the-moment happiness than material purchases on a 0–100 scale.”



Experiences breed fandom

“People are more likely to talk about them, less likely to compare them, and they retain their value longer.”



» **Keep reading for the 2026 CMO Growth Playbook.** 3 key problems, how you can solve them, and the Big A## Growth Engine behind it all: the Experience Economy.

iHeartMedia DEFINES A NEW ERA: THE HUMAN CONSUMER

A national survey of 2,007 U.S. adults conducted online by Critical Mass Media between August 8 and 13, 2025, reveals the rise of **The “Human” Consumer**, defined by a deep yearning for authenticity and emotional connection in an increasingly artificial world.

7 in 10 say social media makes them feel more disconnected.

Consumers now define “connection” as being part of something real, not being served relevant content.

The Human Consumer doesn’t want content for them; they want experiences with others that feel live, local, and human.

 **CMO INSIGHT:** Going into 2026, human connection is currency. The “Human” Consumer rewards brands that show live and created shared moments, not just targeted messages.

THE HUMAN CONSUMER IS CHOOSING REALITY OVER ALGORITHMS:

A STUDY BY  **iHeartMedia**

90%

of consumers say it's
important to know media is
created by a real person

92%

feel more alive when
with people

9 in 10

say human trust cannot be
replicated by AI



CMO INSIGHT: Invest in human-driven channels like real-world interactions as they are the most accurate source of intent and trusted data. Connected experiences allow brands to capture human emotion at scale, transforming how people feel into how growth happens.

GARTNER® INSIGHTS ON PERSONALIZATION

Gartner Observations

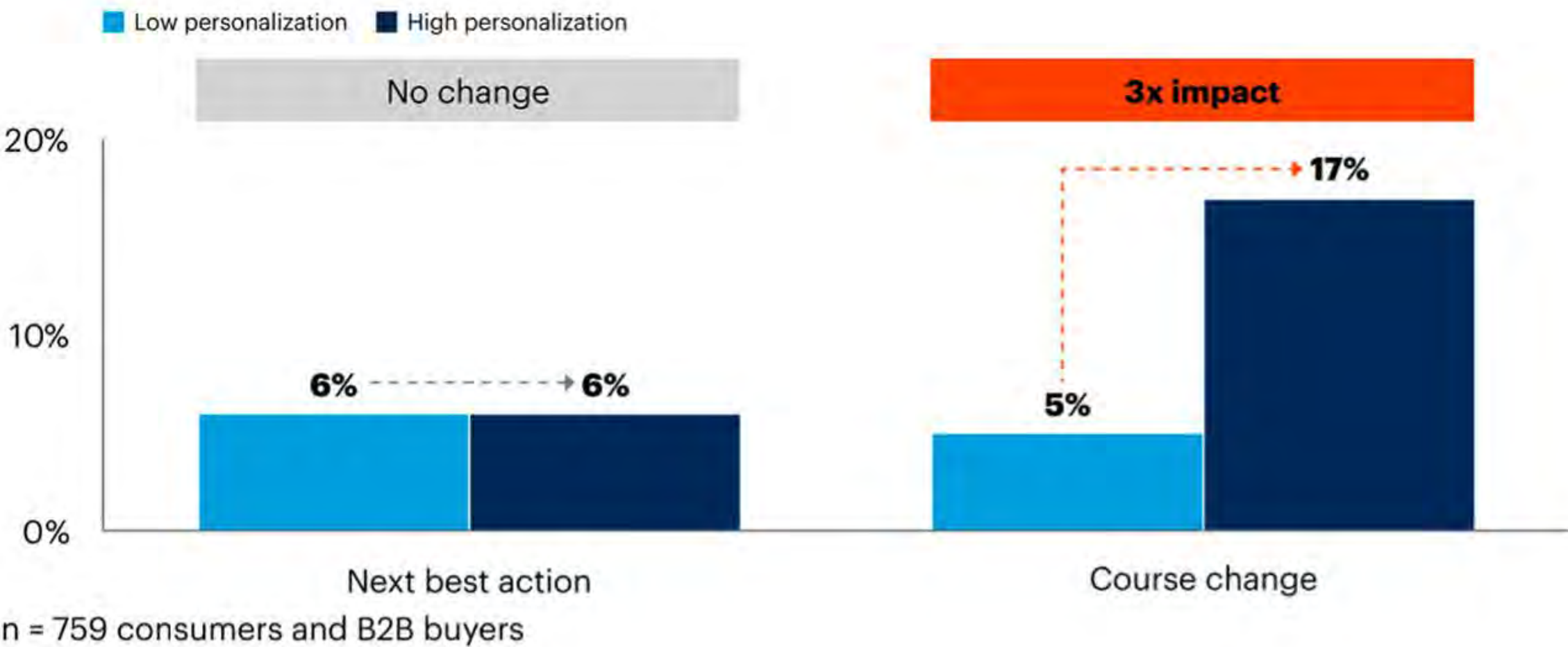
- “CMOs reported that they plan to increase budget allocations to personalization from an average of 19% in 2024 to 26% in 2025, according to Gartner’s 2025 CMO Spend Survey.”¹
- “Following a personalized digital experience, consumers and B2B buyers were more likely to pay a premium and purchase more than intended, compared to those who didn’t have a personalized experience. However, personalization also increases the likelihood of customers delaying and regretting their purchase.”¹
- “Customers who experienced personalization were 1.8 times more likely to pay a premium and 3.7 times more likely to purchase more than intended. However, they were also more likely to delay or put off important decisions, regret their purchase and feel overwhelmed by the volume of information received.”¹



CMO INSIGHT: Prepare for a future where peer-driven communities and direct relationships will outperform traditional digital plays.

Personalized Course Changes Maximize Impact on Commercial Outcomes

Percent change in commercial outcomes by level of personalization



Source: 2025 Gartner Marketing Personalization Survey
Note: Results based on regression model. Outcome based on 7-item index of commercial benefits (e.g., purchase decision, future purchase intent). Percent impact calculated as the percent increase from -1SD to +1SD from the mean on each respective driver (x-axis variables). Model controls for respondent type (B2B vs. consumer), country, age, gender, education, employment type, number of brands/suppliers considered, buying group size, product/service cost, whether discount/exclusive terms offered, product/service category, repurchase of past product/service vs. new, new vs. existing supplier/brand, amount of information consumed across brand interactions, perceived consistency of interactions across channels, amount of content perceived as AI-based.
830422_C



Gartner, Revitalize Your Personalization Strategy to Drive Future Growth, August 2025.

Source: 1. Gartner, “Revitalize Your Personalization Strategy to Drive Future Growth,” Janine Kanters, Sharon Cantor Ceurvorst, Audrey Brosnan, Michael Ro, Nicholas Mortensen, 29 August 2025. GARTNER is a registered trademark and service mark of Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the U.S. and internationally and is used herein with permission. All rights reserved.

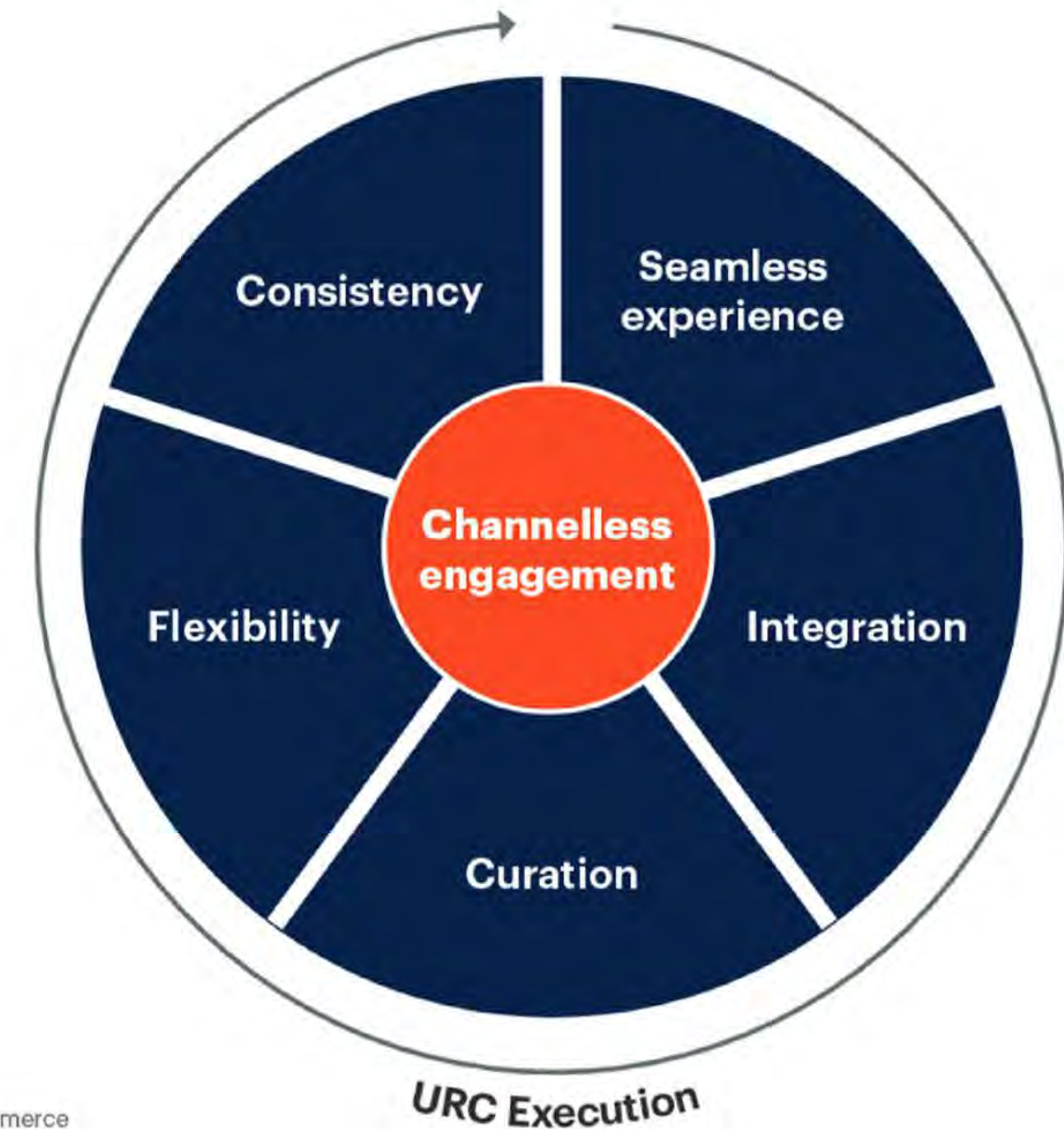
GARTNER® INSIGHTS ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT CHANNELS

Key Highlights

- “Consumer technology, including social media, retail apps, smartphones and connected devices, has ignited a shift in consumer interaction by creating unprecedented access to information for both consumers and companies. This evolution has resulted in a highly aggressive competitive environment where channel-based strategies are increasingly functioning in direct opposition to how customers wish to engage.”¹
- “Enabling channelless engagement requires a unified commerce (UC) strategy and is an enterprisewide initiative.”¹
- “UC moves beyond simply being omnichannel; it provides flexible, composable pathways that seamlessly interact with consumers, underpinned by technology that can anticipate engagement.”¹

 **CMO INSIGHT:** Orchestrate seamless, cross-platform journeys that drive ROI, retention, and loyalty.

Channelless Engagement Supported by URC



URC = unified retail commerce

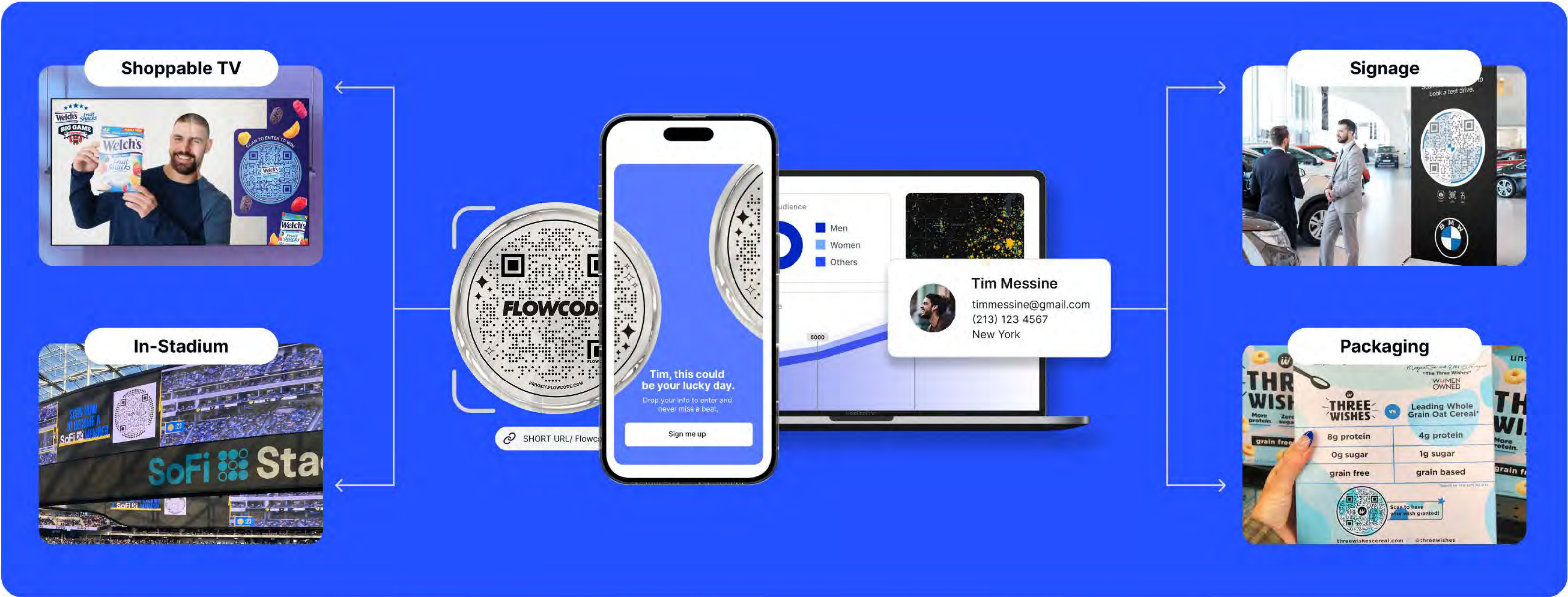
Source: Gartner

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Gartner

Gartner, Generational Change Demands Channelless Consumer Engagement for Competitive Advantage, July 2025

OMNICHANNEL GROWTH WITH ENABLED TOUCHPOINTS



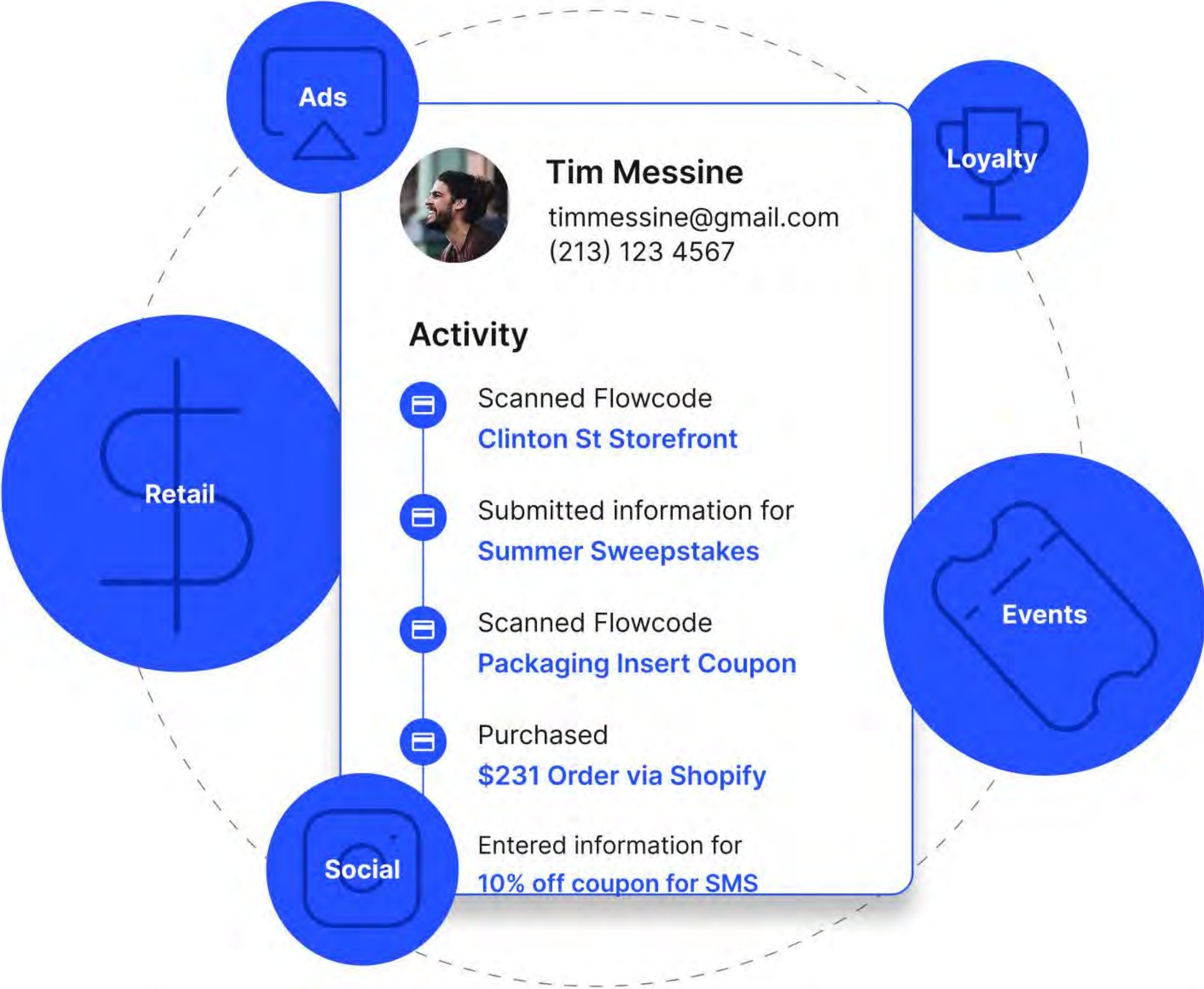
» 72% of marketers who used cross-channel attribution see a substantial improvement in ROI.¹

Sources: 1. "Navigating the Complex World of Cross-Channel Attribution in Ecommerce," Lifesight, last updated July 10, 2025.

ID YOUR OMNICHANNEL CONSUMERS

The fix for fragmentation is a single source of truth for the customer journey. Solutions like Audience Insights, Flowcode's identity solution, give you the ability to:

- **See the whole customer.** One complete view across every channel and experience.
- **Prove ROI with confidence.** Attribute journeys end-to-end and show clear impact.
- **Retarget intelligently.** Use AI to deliver the next best action and drive higher LTV.
- **Tie measurement back to the experience economy.** Real-life activation into the starting point for a connected, measurable customer journey.



→ YOUR NEXT STEP:

Implement a multi-channel attribution tool and connect your media, CRM, and onsite data with a single persistent ID. Measure how touchpoints work together, cut what doesn't convert, and double down on what drives revenue.

Source: Flowcode, "Audience Insights"

2026 CMO GROWTH USE CASES

The Experience Economy

Sports

Pages 22-24

Entertainment

Pages 25-26

Media

Pages 27-28

CPG

Pages 29-30

Retail

Pages 31-32

Financial Services

Pages 33-34

Automotive

Pages 35-36

Travel & Hospitality

Pages 37-38

Out-of-Home Activation Across Industries

Page 39

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN SPORTS

Offline Touchpoints

- Stadium & Arenas (seat backs, jumbotrons)
- Physical Merch & Packaging (jersey tags, tickets)
- Fan Event Venues (bars, local pop-ups)

The Big A## CMO Calendar

- See the full playing field with streamlined view of every major cultural, seasonal, and industry moment in 2026.
- Time activations for maximum impact using key details tagged (date, location, audience reach).

Key Moments for Sports

- 2026 Winter Olympics | Feb 6-22
- The Big Game | Feb 8
- FIFA World Cup | June 11 - July 19



“It’s incredible to be able to see our fans engagement across a plethora of activations directly piped into my phone while I’m on site at the NBA All star game. This type of data is incredibly valuable for optimizing our initiatives nationwide.”
Adam Silver, NBA Commissioner



HOW SPORTS ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

Top leagues aren't waiting on digital's rebound. Here's how three powerhouses activated the fan experience this past year.



NBA

Turned NBA All-Star 2025 into a citywide festival with dunk courts, fan voting, cultural events, and legends meetups. NBA Experiences also offers locker room tours and premium hospitality at major games.

Extended the value of a single game into a multi-day cultural event, driving ticket sales and engagement.



TKO

Launched TKO Takeover in Kansas City - a multi-day block party combining PBR, UFC, and WWE. Secured multi-event deals in Perth and Salt Lake City, plus a Meta partnership adding AR/VR and AI experiences.

Combining multiple IPs in single activations cross-pollinated fan bases and maximized spend.



NFL

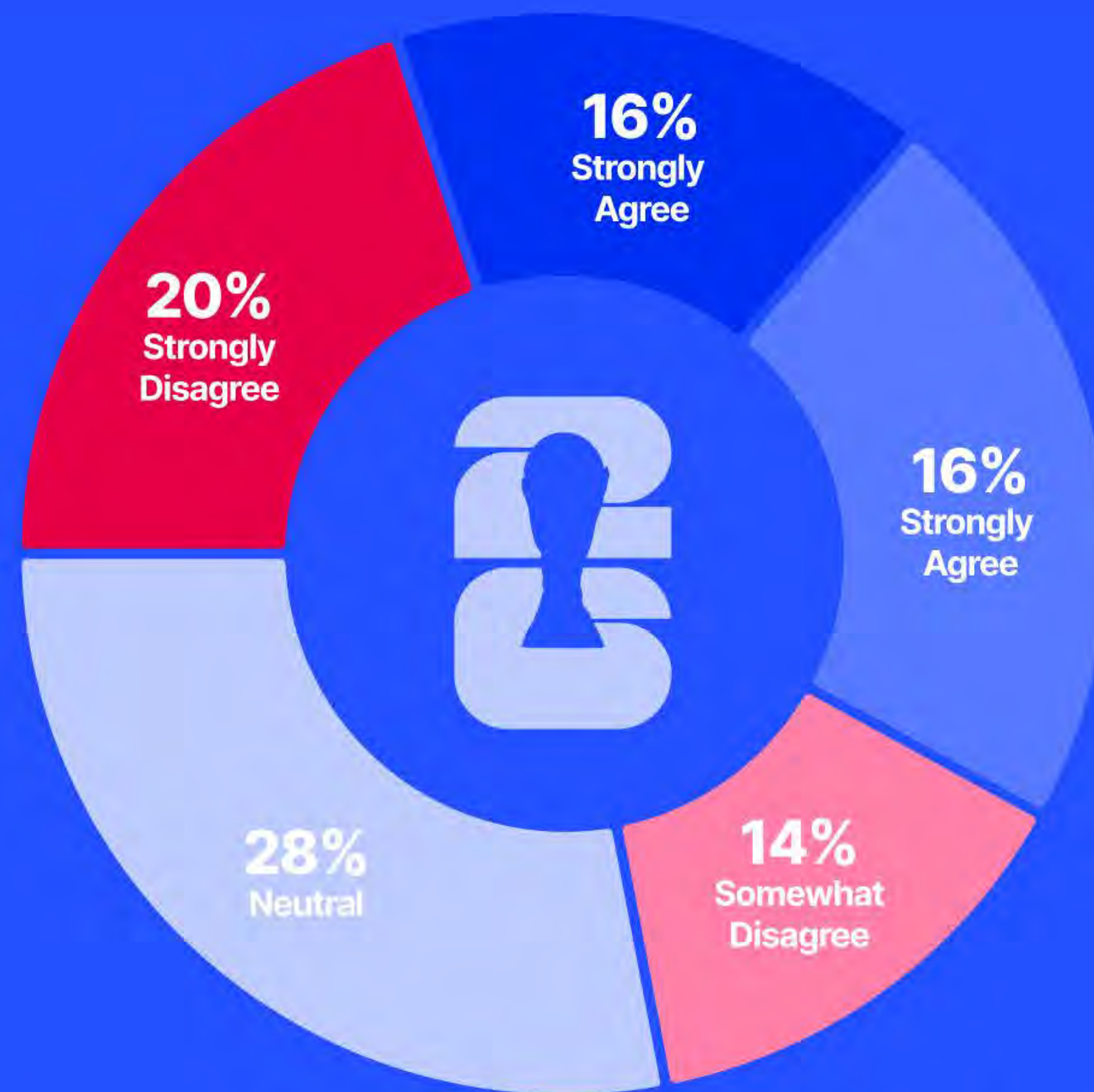
Activated NFL Experience events in 7 global cities with combine-style drills, live music, and player appearances. Expanded experience with fan races, catch drills, and immersive hall-of-fame exhibits.

Brought league moments closer to fans everywhere, fueling participation and global reach.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

Use the Big A## CMO Calendar to plan your real life brand activations for 2026. Layer in audience preferences, demographics, and location, then build IRL activations that meet your consumers where they are.

Sources: [NBA Experiences – “NBA All-Star 2025: Recap”](#); [TKO Group / BusinessWire – “TKO Announces ‘Takeover’ in Kansas City as UFC, WWE, and PBR Come to T-Mobile Center”](#); [JetNation – “NFL Announces Global NFL Experience Events in 7 Cities for 2025 Season Kickoff.”](#)
Image sources: Jojo Korsh/BFA; Bull Stock Media; Matt Ludtke/AP Photo.



“My interest in the 2026 World Cup is driven primarily by the fact it will be played in the U.S.”

Data Source: [The Harris Poll, America's Surge in Soccer Fandom, 2025](#)

KEY MOMENT TO ACTIVATE: FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

For all brands, the 2026 FIFA World Cup is an unmatched opportunity to connect with audiences.

Audience Signals

- **46%** of U.S. adults already knew a year out the tournament will be hosted here.¹
- **70%** of soccer fans are more excited about this tournament because it's in North America.¹
- **62%** of U.S. adults say they want to see OOH ads connected to the tournament.²

Strategic Takeaway

- Fandom thrives where people can see, feel, and participate IRL.
- Physical proximity to tentpole events amplifies interest.



CMO INSIGHT: Use as a backdrop to create measurable brand moments that give consumers a way to participate.

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN ENTERTAINMENT

Offline Touchpoints

- Venue & Stage Environments
- Physical Merch & Collectibles
- Ticketing & Access Points

The Big A## CMO Calendar

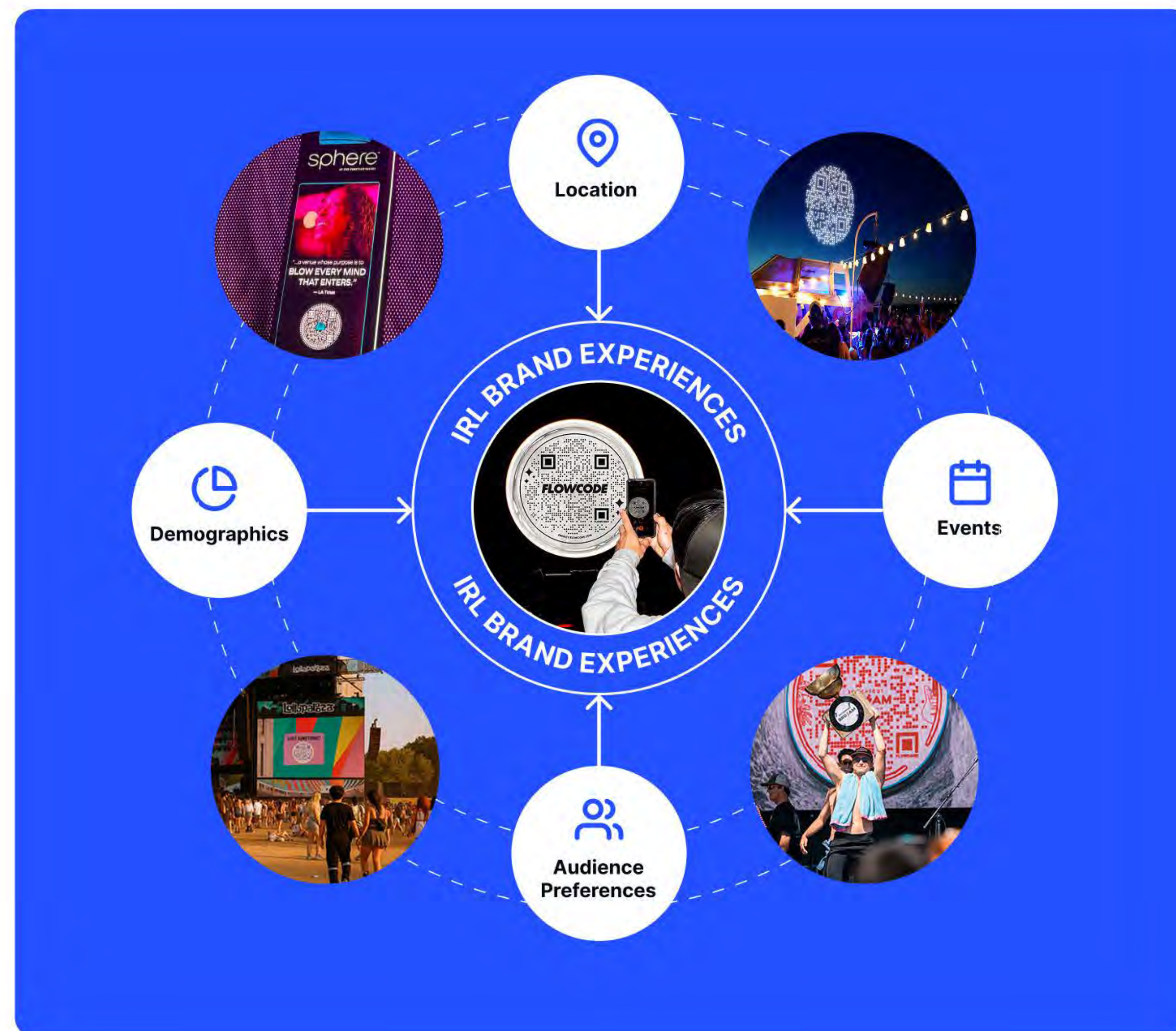
- Set your brand stage around the world's biggest cultural moments.
- Spotlighting the festivals, live events, and fan gatherings where audience energy is already high, so your brand can step into the spotlight.

Key Moments for Entertainment

- SXSW | March 12-18
- Coachella | April 10-12, 17-19
- FIFA World Cup | June 11-19

» **74% of F1000 marketers expected to increase experiential marketing spend in 2025.**

Source: Business Insider, "74% of Fortune 1000 marketers to increase experiential spending in 2025"



HOW ENTERTAINMENT ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

The entertainment world isn't pausing for digital to bounce back. See how festivals, arena tours, and venues activated fans in the experience economy this year.



Coachella

At Coachella 2025, brand activations went hyper-immersive: Absolut's "House of Cosmo" lounge offered cocktails and photo ops, while Method's sensory pop-up solved the "no showers" problem with photogenic design.

Solved real attendee pain points while creating shareable, Instagram-ready content that amplified cultural relevance.



Live Nation

Live Nation's experiential team produced 250+ activations in 2025. At Gov Ball, highlights included the first-ever drone show by Electrolit and "Slurpee Street" from 7-Eleven woven into the festival grounds.

Turned concerts into branded ecosystems, giving fans and sponsors immersive ways to engage before, during, and after shows.



Cosm

Cosm partnered with WWE to bring Premium Live Events into "shared reality" venues in LA and Dallas, immersing fans in wraparound LED domes that synced visuals, audio, and crowd energy.

Extended broadcast content into communal, visceral moments, turning passive viewing into collective experience.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE: Use the Big A## CMO Calendar to plan your real life brand activations for 2026. Layer in audience preferences, demographics, and location, then build IRL activations that meet your consumers where they are.

Sources: PR Newswire / Absolut – "Introducing...Absolut House of Cosmo at Coachella, with Paris Hilton"; EventMarketer – "Gov Ball 2025: Activations from Slurpee Street to Flavor Fair"; Atlas Media – "Gov Ball x Electrolit: Drone Show"; WWE / Cosm – "WWE and Cosm Announce Multi-Year Partnership to Deliver Premium Live Events in Shared Reality." Image sources: Ashley Osborn, Marissa Joy; Live Nation; Richard Rodriguez/WWE via Getty Images

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN MEDIA

Offline Touchpoints

- Premium Broadcast & Display
- National Print & OOH Networks
- Flagship Event Environments (award shows, industry summits)

The Big A## CMO Calendar

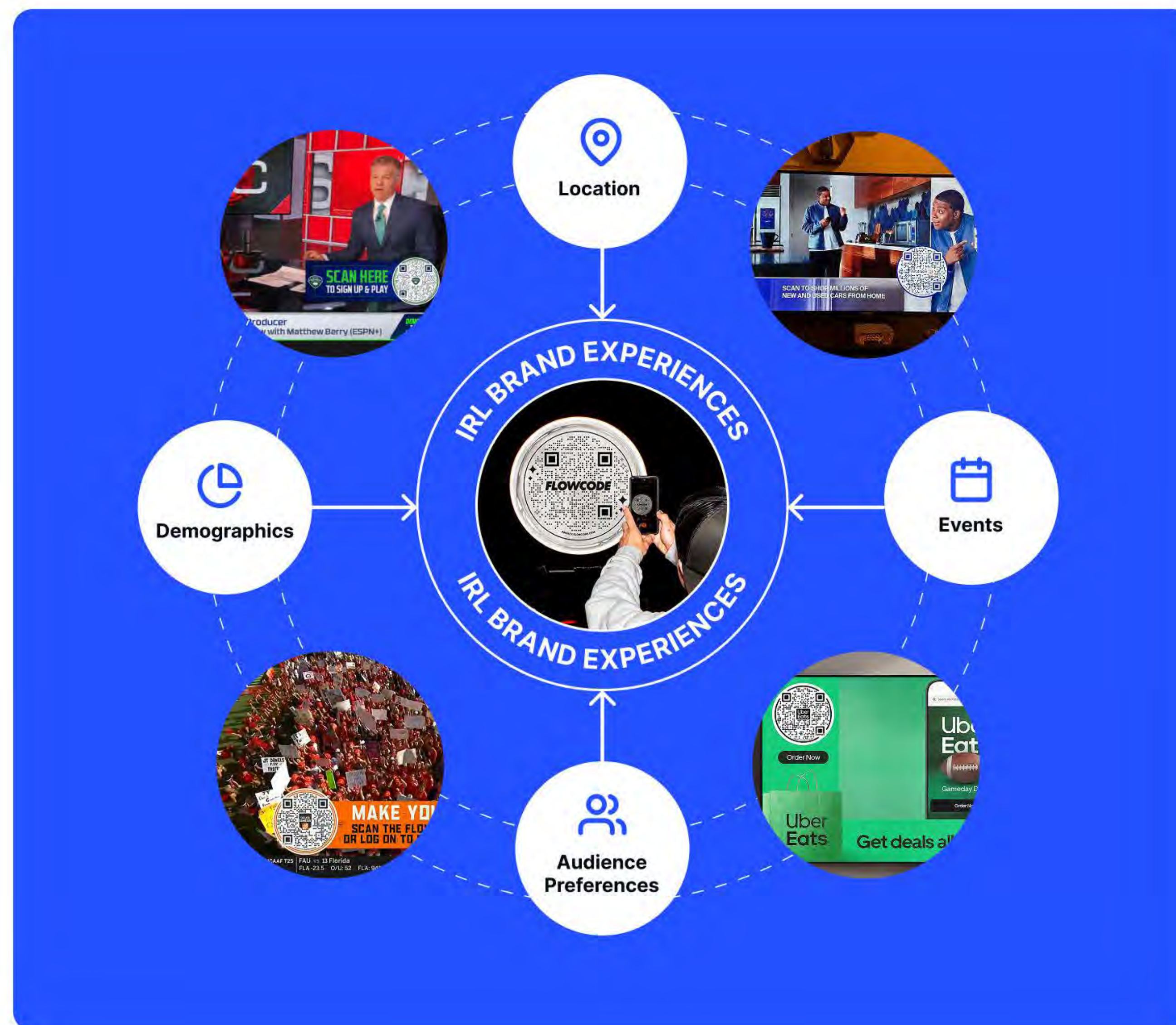
- Anchor your real-life campaigns to the cultural pulse of 2026.
- This calendar maps out the marquee moments across sports, entertainment, and culture so you can sync brand moments where attention is already at its peak.

Key Moments for Media

- SXSW | March 12-18
- ANA Media Conference | March 25-27
- Cannes Lions | June 22-26

» **74% of F1000 marketers expected to increase experiential marketing spend in 2025.**

Source: Business Insider, "74% of Fortune 1000 marketers to increase experiential spending in 2025"



HOW MEDIA ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

From broadcast to streaming to IRL, media power players aren’t waiting on digital. Here’s how three reshaped the audience experience this year.



iHeart Media

Revived House of Music with immersive, artist-inspired rooms and a scannable “House Pass” unlocking digital activations, points, prizes, and meet-ups. Fan villages at iHeartCountry Festival and Z100 Summer Bash delivered sponsor activations, giveaways, and interactive booths.

Turned broadcast reach into live moments that built loyalty, gave fans content, and made the brand tangible.



Disney

Walt Disney World rolled out Disney Starlight: Dream the Night Away Parade, a summer nighttime spectacle, alongside a fully reimagined Test Track 3.0 and new themed lounges at EPCOT.

Blended nostalgia with innovation to turn parks into all-day, all-night destinations that boosted guest spend and social buzz.



NBCU

NBCU turned Rockefeller Plaza into Olivia Benson Plaza, letting fans step onto the “Weekend Update” desk and relive iconic sketches. It also brought the Love Island USA villa to select cities. Fans posed in villa photo-ops, recorded casting tapes, and got beauty tips in activation pop-ups.

Brought beloved IP into physical spaces where fans could interact, capture content, and share online.

➔ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

Use the Big A## CMO Calendar to plan your real life brand activations for 2026. Layer in audience preferences, demographics, and location, then build IRL activations that meet your consumers where they are.

Sources: [iHeartMedia – House of Music](#), [Barrett Media – iHeartRadio Music Festival Brings Back House of Music](#); [Disney World – Starlight: Dream the Night Away Parade](#); [WDWNT – Parade Times & Route Revealed](#); [People – Test Track 3.0 Reopens](#); [WDW Magic – First Look Inside EPCOT’s GEO-82 Lounge](#); [NBC Insider – Olivia Benson Plaza](#); [Rockefeller Center – SNL50 Fan Experience](#); [Elite Daily – Love Island USA Pop-Up Villa Casting Tour](#). Image sources: Brenton Ho; Walt Disney World; Jeff Schear/Peacock

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN CPG

Offline Touchpoints

- Product Packaging
- Retail Shelf & Floor Environments
- Promotional Print & Sampling

The Big A## CMO Calendar 2026

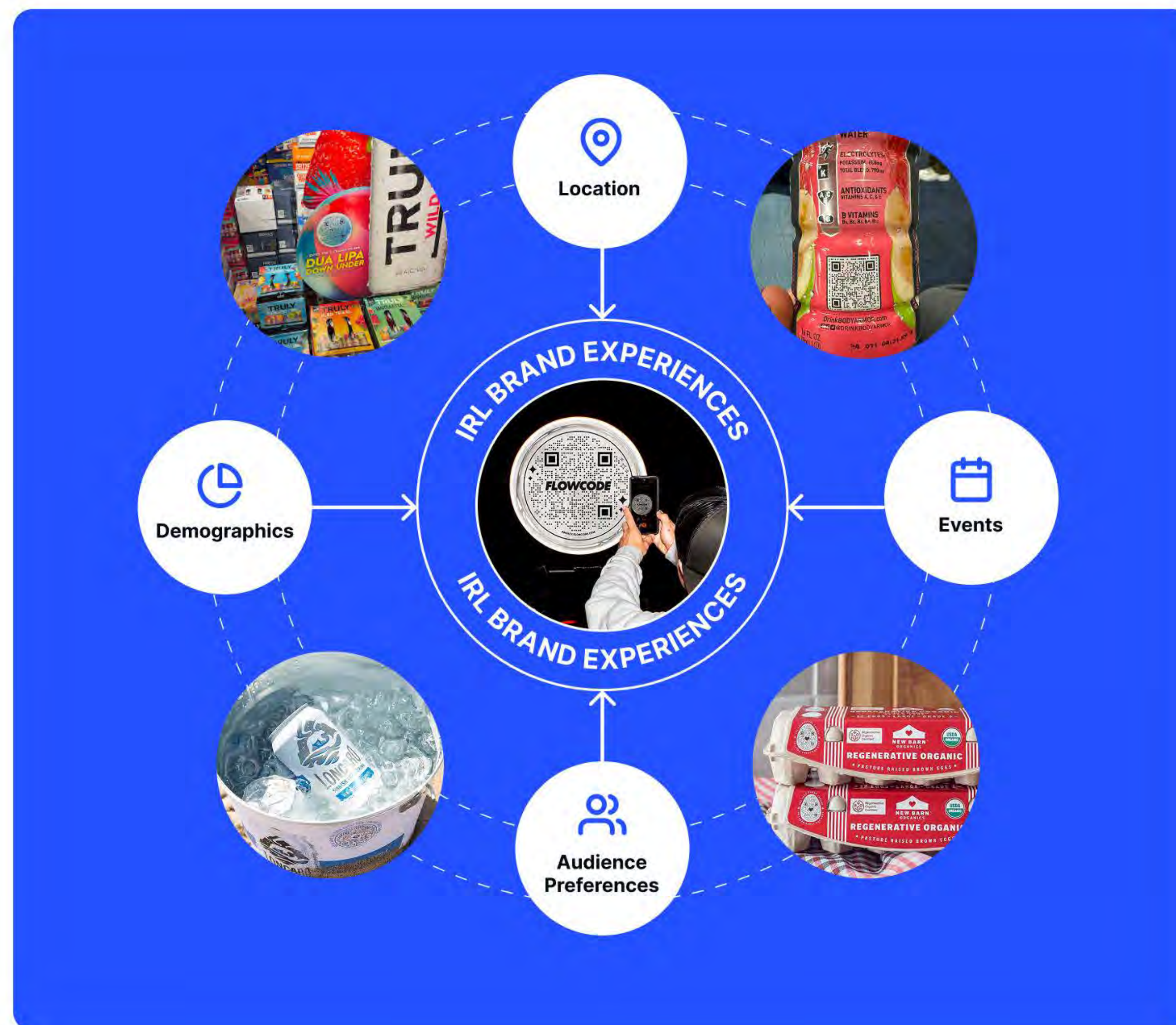
- Time your launches to ride the cultural wave.
- From seasonal spikes to major cultural events, make sure your brand meets shoppers when demand and excitement are highest.

Key Moments for Retail

- NRF: Retail's Big Show | Jan 11-13
- Groceryshop | Sep-Oct

» **74% of F1000 marketers expected to increase experiential marketing spend in 2025.**

Source: Business Insider, "74% of Fortune 1000 marketers to increase experiential spending in 2025"



HOW CPG ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

The best CPG brands aren't pausing for digital to bounce back. Here's how packaging, retail media, and brand experiences powered the shopper journey this past year.



AB InBev

At the FIFA Club World Cup, Budweiser rolled out stadium anthems and giveaways, while Michelob ULTRA built beer garden pop-ups at all 12 host stadiums and hosted a VIP Pitchside Club in NYC for finals viewing.

Merged beer with unforgettable sports moments, cementing products as the go-to for celebrations and deepening fan connection.



Glossier

In 2025, Glossier's NYC flagship hid a secret mirrored room for selfies and try-ons, while outdoor pop-ups in LA and London offered pastel décor, ice cream, and limited-edition merch.

Turned shopping into a social hangout and cultural event, building loyalty and organic buzz in an e-commerce age.



Poppi

Poppi launched "Poppi World," a vibrant pop-up experience, and toured college campuses with influencer Alix Earle, offering playful sampling stations and limited-edition merch.

Brought a functional beverage to life through immersive, youth-driven events, building cultural cachet and brand love.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

Use the Big A## CMO Calendar to plan your real life brand activations for 2026. Layer in audience preferences, demographics, and location, then build IRL activations that meet your consumers where they are.

Sources: [AB InBev - Budweiser & Michelob ULTRA at FIFA Club World Cup](#); [EventMarketer - Michelob ULTRA's Pitchside Club NYC Pop-Up](#); [Secret NYC - Glossier NYC Flagship Hidden Room](#); [Vellooy - Glossier London Pop-Up](#); [Secret NYC - Poppi World Pop-Up](#); [Spoon University - Poppi World Campus Tour](#). Image sources: Momentum Worldwide; Glossy; Vivien Killilea/Getty Images for Poppi.

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN RETAIL

Offline Touchpoints

- In-Store (end-caps, shelving, floor decals, in-aisle displays)
- Product Packaging & Labels
- Receipts & Take-Home Collateral

The Big A## CMO Calendar 2026

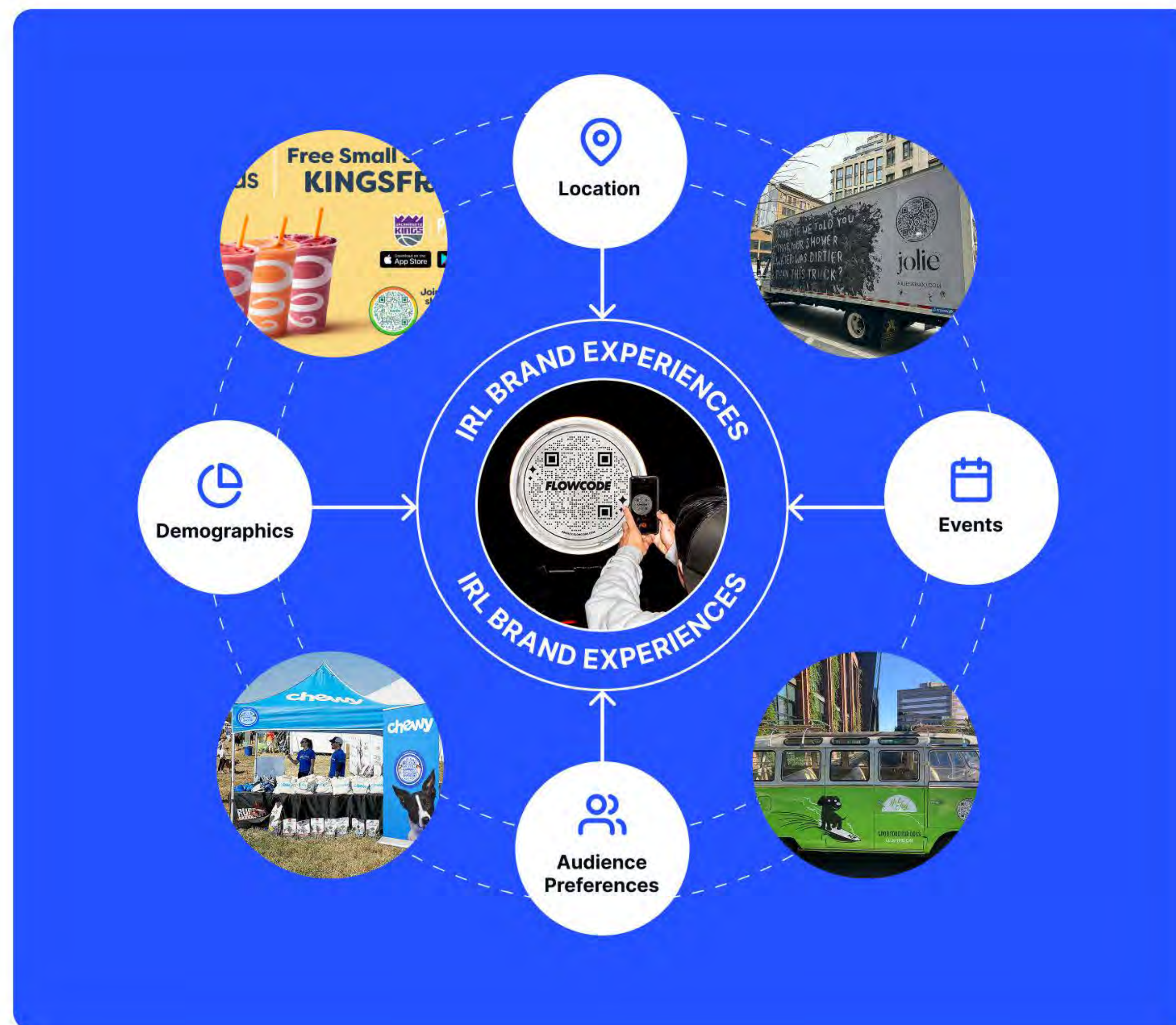
- Align your retail activations with the world's biggest moments.
- Lays out the cultural, seasonal, and industry tentpoles that drive foot traffic and sales, helping you place your brand where shoppers are already primed to buy.

Key Moments for Retail

- NRF: Retail's Big Show | Jan 11-13
- Shoptalk Spring | March 24-26
- FIFA World Cup | June 11-19

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HOW RETAIL ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

Fashion to mass, retailers aren't hitting pause. Here's how live experiences and omnichannel playbooks activated shoppers across channels this year.



Revolve

Staged its annual Revolve Festival during Coachella 2025, turning a fashion brand into a desert destination. The pop-up featured celebrity performances, influencer-only lounges, exclusive merch drops, and immersive brand activations designed for social sharing.

Tapped into Coachella's cultural stage, transforming retail into an experience that influencers wanted to share.



Walmart

Walmart blended retail and culture with its immersive Walmart Realm online storefronts and a touring "Walmart Delivers" truck featuring K-Pop concerts and fan photo ops.

Made a mundane errand fun and culturally relevant, boosting Gen Z engagement, traffic, and loyalty.



Sephora

In 2025, Sephora expanded SEPHORiA globally with massive fan events featuring 50+ brand activations, masterclasses, and celeb meet-and-greets. Its concept stores also added AI skin analyzers and AR try-on mirrors.

Built a passionate beauty community by turning stores and events into immersive "worlds" that drive spend and loyalty.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

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Sources: [REVOLVE – REVOLVE Presents the 8th Annual REVOLVE Festival](#); [Vogue – Julia Fox, Lisa, Lil Wayne, and More Descended on Revolve Festival 2025](#); [Retail Dive – Walmart Realm adds new digital storefronts in support of Walmart Delivers](#); [RetailTouchpoints – Walmart Debuts Immersive, Influencer-Led Walmart Realm Experiences](#); [LVMH / Sephora – SEPHORiA 2025 Tour Announcement](#); [Retail Dive – Sephora accelerates AR, AI sales tactics](#). Image sources: NVE Experience Agency; Walmart; WWD.

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN FINANCIAL SERVICES

Offline Touchpoints

- Branch & On-Site Environments
- Direct Mail Networks
- Event & Sponsorship Environments

The Big A## CMO Calendar 2026

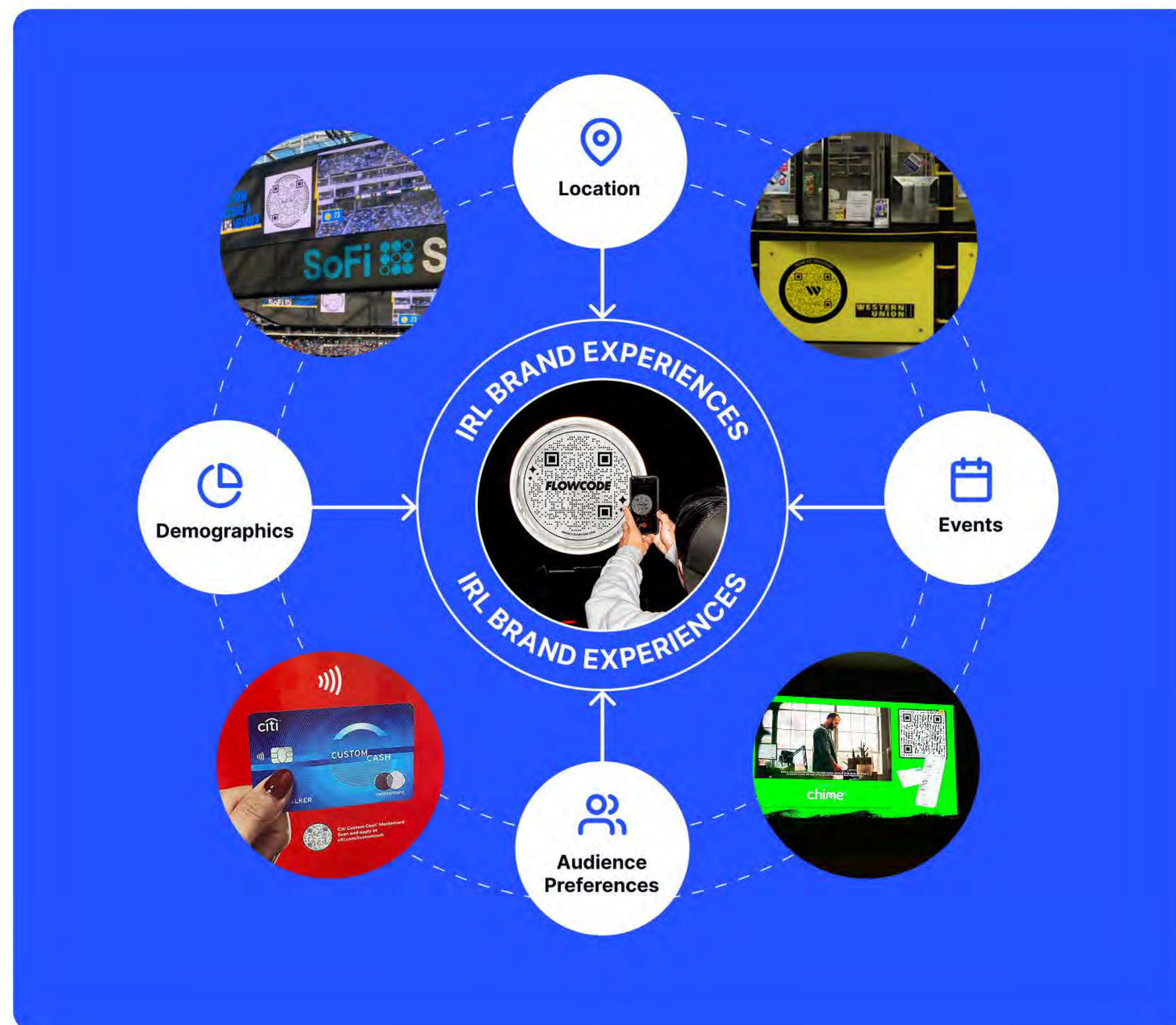
- Build your campaigns around the trusted moments that shape consumer decisions.
- Cultural and industry milestones mapped so you know where attention is already concentrated.

Key Moments for Financial Services

- Fintech Meetup | March 30-April 1
- The Big Game | Feb 8
- FIFA World Cup | June 11-19

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HOW FINANCIAL SERVICES ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

From branches to BNPL to wallets, finance's power players aren't waiting on digital. Here's how three built high-trust, high-conversion experiences this year.



Mastercard

Mastercard debuted The Mastercard Collection with presale access and curated experiences at concerts, sporting events, and film premieres, and deepened its F1 partnership with race weekend activations.

Tied rewards to culture-defining experiences, making loyalty feel exclusive and aspirational.



State Farm

At NBA All-Star 2025, State Farm created "Jake's Station," a pop-up arcade where fans met Jake from State Farm. Its Good Neighbor Club continued with surprise upgrades and swag at Hawks games.

Turned insurance into moments of joy, building positive associations at fans' favorite events.



SoFi

SoFi became the presenting sponsor of CMA Fest, giving members cashback perks, VIP lounge access, and exclusive contests for premium tickets.

Positioned membership as cultural currency, turning financial services into lifestyle experiences.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

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Sources: Mastercard – “Elevating Cardholder Experiences with The Mastercard Collection”; Mastercard – “Betting on Experience: Which Rewards Win Over High-Earning Consumers”; SoFi – “SoFi Named Presenting Partner of the Country Music Association’s CMA Fest”; Pollstar – “CMA Fest Announces Fan Alley & SoFi Premium Perks”. Image sources: Mastercard; Event Marketer; Donna Vissman/Williamson Source.

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN AUTOMOTIVE

Offline Touchpoints

- Vehicle Placements
- Dealership & Service Environments
- Major Event Collateral (auto shows, sponsorships, experiential test drive programs)

The Big A## CMO Calendar

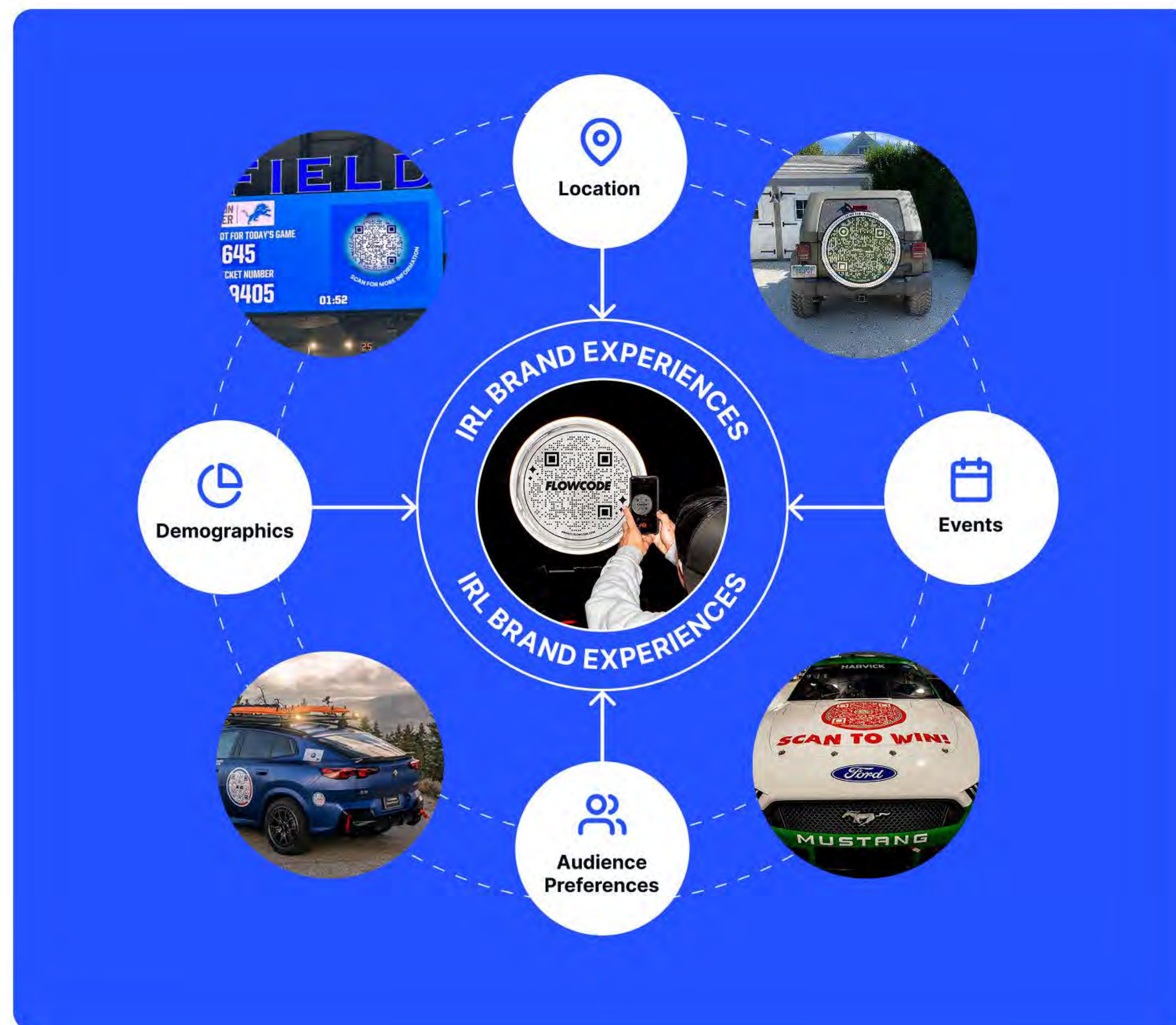
- Navigate the year ahead with a full view of major moments in 2026.
- This calendar gives you the mileage markers to plan test drives, launches, and activations that convert.

Key Moments for Automotive

- Detroit Auto Show | Jan 14-25
- SXSW | March 12-18
- FIFA World Cup | June 11-19

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HOW AUTOMOTIVE ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

In automotive, momentum beats the digital cycle. Here’s how model drops, ride-and-drive tours, and partner media turned attention into orders this year.



BMW

BMW stole CES 2025 with a theatrical “shrinking” experience that let audiences explore its new Panoramic iDrive inside an immersive show hosted by Tim Meadows, with surprise cameos and special effects.

Turned a tech demo into entertainment, creating emotional connections and buzz in a crowded luxury auto market.



General Motors

GM re-opened EPCOT’s Test Track with a new EV design experience that let guests build virtual cars, ride through futuristic landscapes, and exit through a Chevy showroom.

Delivered a living brand showcase inside the world’s busiest theme park, shaping perceptions of GM as future-focused.



Ford

Ford expanded its Bronco Off-Road program to four U.S. training parks, giving SUV owners immersive off-roading experiences and “BYOB” weekends to build community among enthusiasts.

Transformed ownership into adventure, creating loyal fans who see themselves as part of the Bronco family.

→ YOUR NEXT MOVE:

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Sources: EventMarketer – “BMW ‘Shrinks’ Product Experts ... CES 2025 Experience”; GM – “Reimagined Test Track presented by General Motors now open at EPCOT”; From the Road / Ford – “BYOB: Bring Your Own Bronco is Now an Option at Bronco Off-Road.”
Image sources: Futurride; Chloe Ferreira/WDW Info; Heather Storm.

CREATING EXPERIENCES IN TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY

Offline Touchpoints

- In-Room Media & Signage
- Lobby & Check-In Environments
- Destination Guides & Concierge

The Big A## CMO Calendar

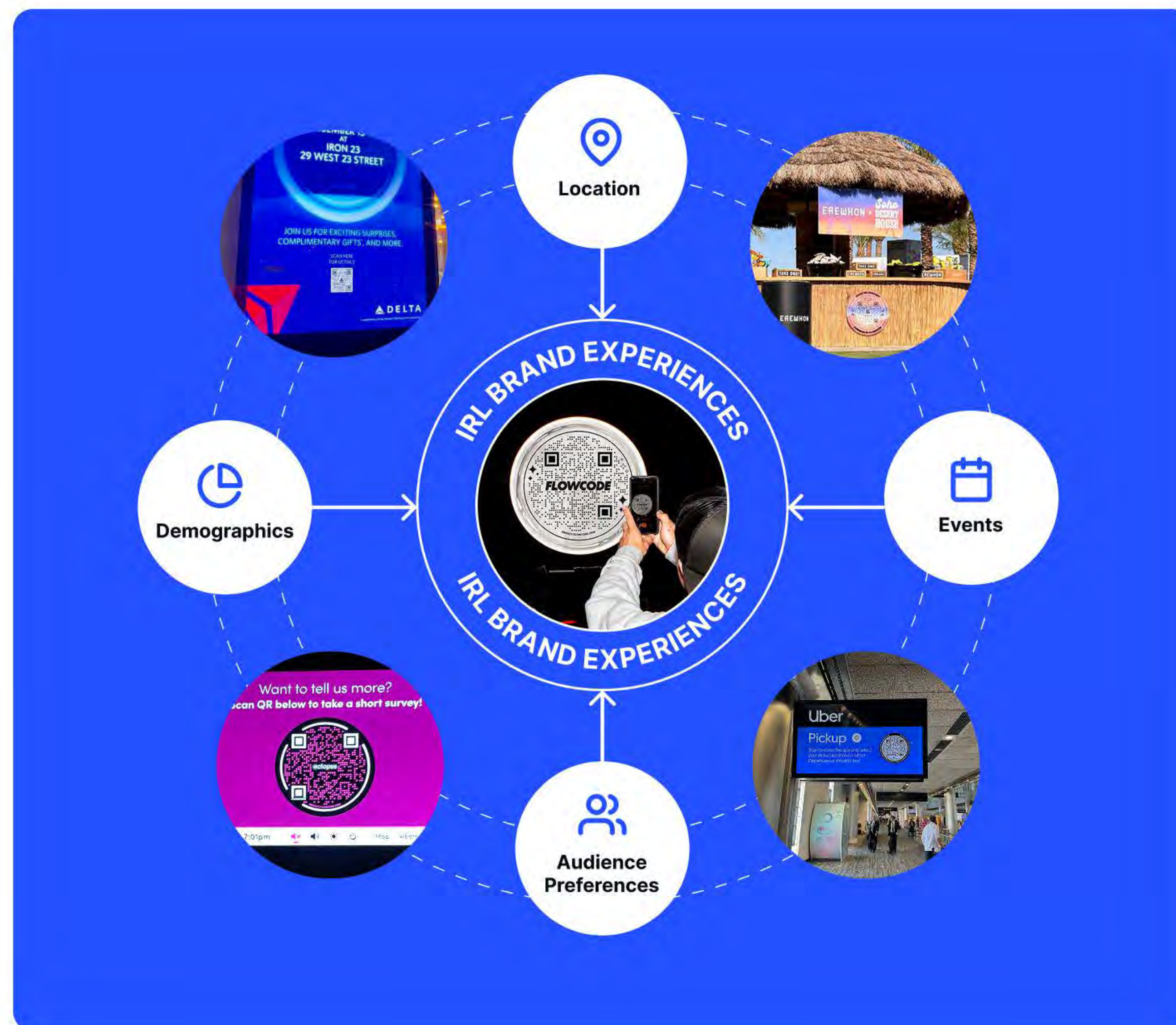
- Chart your marketing journey around the global events driving travel demand.
- Highlights when and where travelers are already on the move, helping you create unforgettable on-site touchpoints right where excitement peaks.

Key Moments for Travel & Hospitality

- 2026 Winter Olympics | Feb 6-22
- Coachella | Apr 10-12 & 17-19
- FIFA World Cup | June 11-19

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HOW TRAVEL & HOSPITALITY ACTIVATED IRL IN 2025

From concourse to cabin to cabana, here’s how airlines, hotels, and cruise lines turned experiences into bookings this past year.



CLEAR

CLEAR expanded its biometric express lanes to arenas and stadiums for events like Lady Gaga’s MAYHEM Ball Tour, letting fans enter with a face scan and even buy drinks without showing ID, cutting wait times dramatically.

Turned culture-defining moments into premium experiences by making utility feel like a benefit, not a chore.



Delta

Delta introduced flexible Travel Experiences ahead of the busy fall travel season and enhanced Delta Sync entertainment across 300+ aircraft. It also partnered with the PGA TOUR to launch golf-themed premium travel packages.

Connected flight upgrades with seasonal peaks and lifestyle passions, keeping Delta top-of-mind.



Marriott

Marriott expanded Bonvoy Moments in 2025 with once-in-a-lifetime rewards, from rooftop concerts to exclusive festival access with perks to experiences like the Cowboy Carter Tour. Created

Made loyalty feel like access to unforgettable experiences, driving preference and deeper emotional engagement.

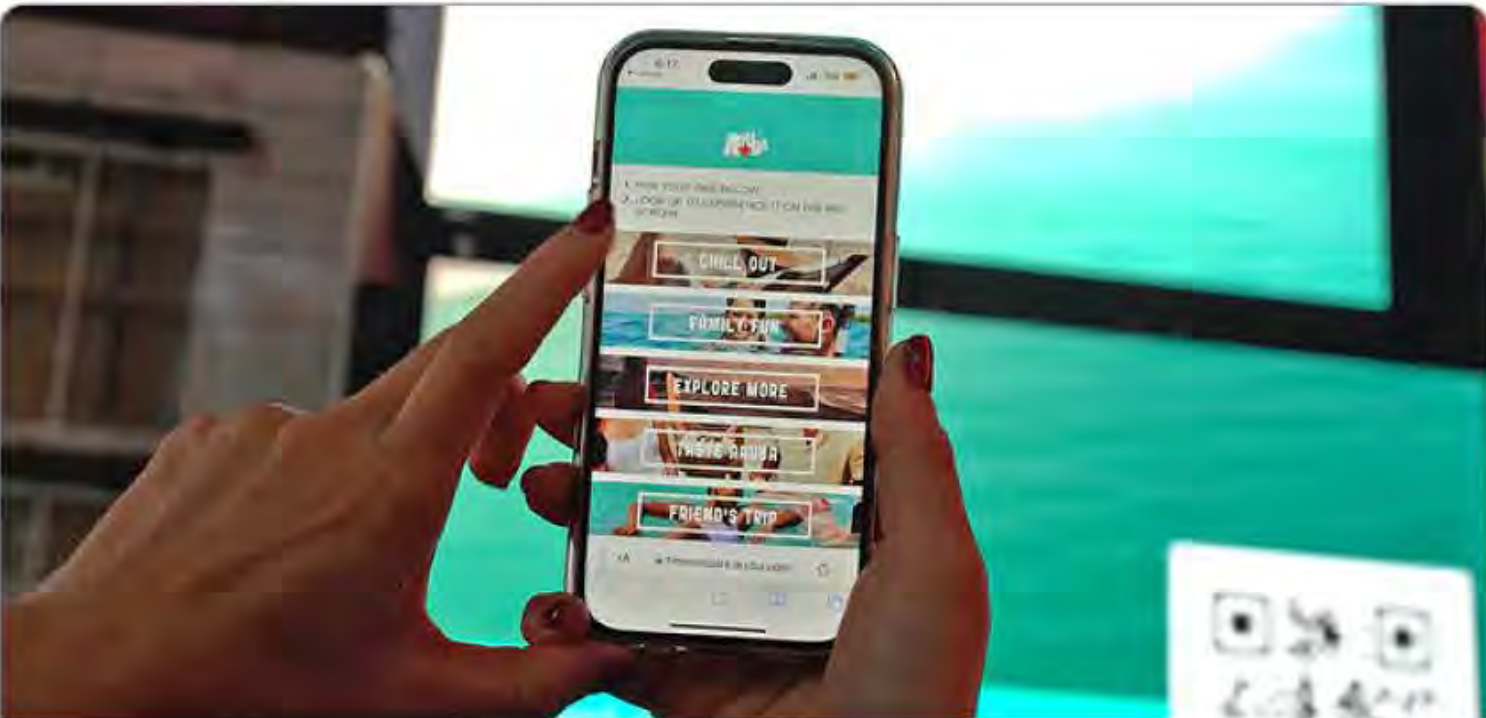
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Sources: CLEAR – “CLEAR Expands to Stadiums and Arenas Nationwide”; Delta News Hub – “Delta introduces Flexible Travel Experiences ahead of busy fall travel season”; PGA TOUR – “Delta Air Lines partners with PGA TOUR to offer premium golf travel packages”; Marriott Bonvoy Moments – “Unlock Once-in-a-Lifetime Experiences in 2025”, Time Out London – “Marriott launches Stranger Things suite in London.” Image sources: Luk Kordas; Getty Images; Marriott.

OUT-OF-HOME ACTIVATION ACROSS INDUSTRIES

Across different industries, leaders are tapping into OOH to create a shareable customer journey, co-creation moments and occasion-based activations to delight customers IRL. Here are three examples of how to win with OOH from OUTFRONT Media.



Aruba Tourism

Consumers controlled Aruba Tourism’s two-screen Times Square ad by scanning a QR code and then selecting the type of “Aruba Experience” they wanted to see displayed on the larger-than-life digital out of home screen.

Made the screen participatory, turning connections into live creative and intent signals.



Barilla

The brand celebrated World Pasta Day with an activation at Hudson Yards where they handed out “Tickets to Togetherness” – boxes of spaghetti that they could use to tap in to the subway and pay their fare!

Made the medium the benefit. When OOH delivers real-world value, participation soars.



Zyrtec

New York City subway riders were surprised by the scent of flowers in the subway this spring as allergy medication brand Zyrtec staged a one-day “Floral Flash” pop-up with Instagram-famous florist Lewis Miller, handing out blooms to commuters to emphasize the brand’s mission.

Injected multi-sensory delight into transit, creating emotional recall and outsized earned reach.

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FREE CMO GROWTH TOOLS

*Bonus: Big A## CMO Calendar

REAL WORLD TOUCHPOINTS UNLOCK REAL WORLD GROWTH

CMOs who lead will show up in real-world moments that audiences trust, remember, and return to and measure the impact.

1. The Big A## CMO Calendar

A roadmap to where real-world attention is already concentrated, so your brand shows up in the right moments. [Request to have one shipped to you, on us →](#)

2. Connected Experiences

Technology like Flowcode links high-impact, real-world interaction to your digital funnels, transforming fragmented offline engagement into direct-to-consumer journeys.

3. Single Customer ID

Tools like Audience Insights capture, unify, and attribute data across touchpoints, proving ROI in a world where traditional signals are disappearing.



CMO INSIGHT: Flowcode is the infrastructure that turns real-world touchpoints into scalable, measurable growth.

Book your custom Flowcode demo

