passionfruit

WHITE PAPER · 2027

The Consumer CMO's Guide to 2027

Consumer marketing trends based on 38 hours of interviews.



What 2027 marketing trends are on the horizon?

As part of our Smarter at Dinner podcast, we regularly interview heavy hitter CMOs about their wins, woes, and the worries that keep them up at night. As the year draws to a close, we decided to aggregate all those interviews, analyse them, and distill them into 6 trends consumer marketers need to keep a close eye on.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

The six marketing trends 2027 strategies should be built on, ranging from AI to customer reviews.

Introduction: What consumer CMOs expect from 2027

2027 planning is under way, and the brief looks familiar. Grow faster. Spend smarter. Do more with the team you have.

But budgets aren't growing to match. Gartner's 2026 CMO Spend Survey puts marketing budgets at 7.8% of company revenue, barely up from 7.7% in 2025, and 56% of CMOs say they lack the budget to deliver their strategy. So the real currency for 2027 is time: hours handed back to your team, spent where they count.

Shoppers are stretched too. They see more ads in a day than anyone could count across search, social, TV and the street. Getting remembered is the prize, and it's gold dust. That makes it harder to stand out, and harder still when your campaign and customer data live in a dozen places.



puts marketing budgets at 7.8% of company revenue

Gartner's 2026 CMO Spend Survey



of CMOs say they lack the budget to deliver their strategy

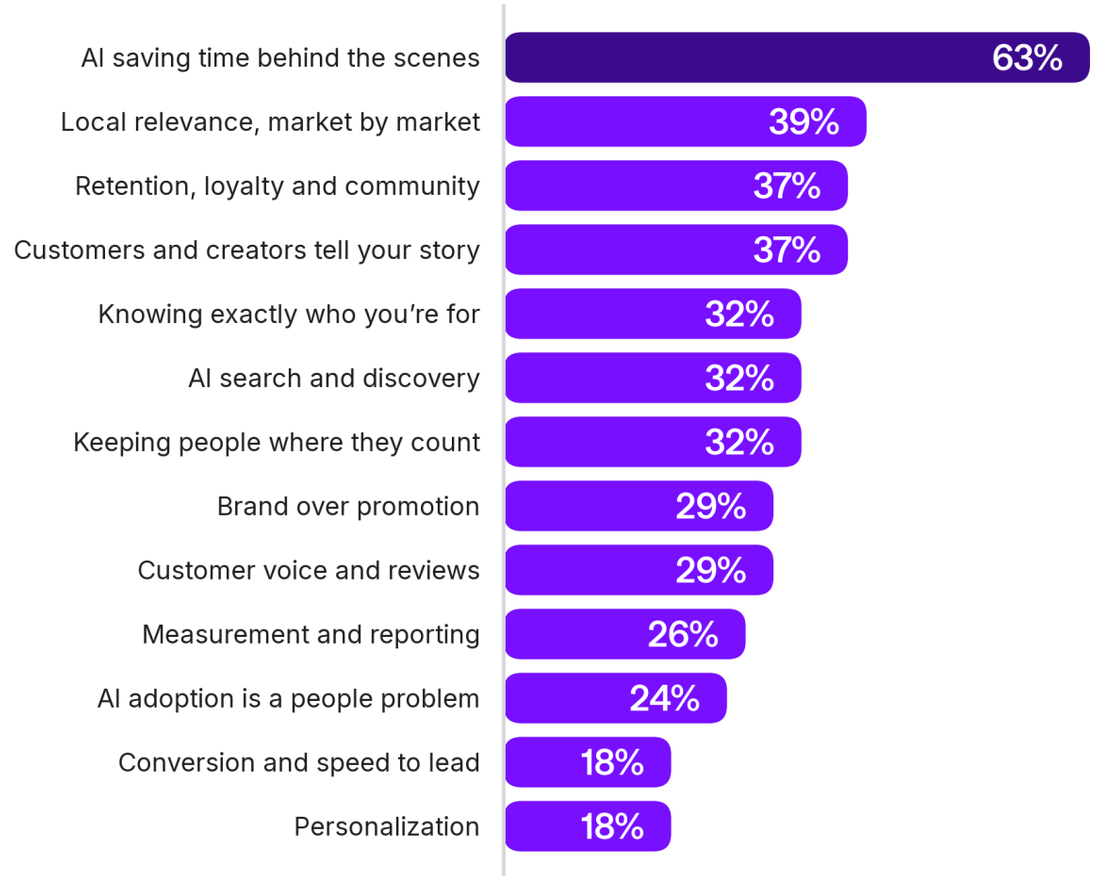
Gartner's 2026 CMO Spend Survey

What we heard: 2027 marketing trends in CMOs' own words

- **AI comes up almost everywhere, mostly behind the scenes.** 24 of the 38 guests described using it to save time on analysis, pricing, reporting or creative versions. ChatGPT and Claude are named most, in roughly equal measure.
- **AI agents are early.** They came up in 10 conversations, but only a couple of guests described one doing real work in their business today.
- **Lifecycle gets less airtime than it deserves.** Plenty of guests talked about loyalty, but only a handful went into how they use their own customer data to decide what to send, and when.

What consumer brand leaders talked about

Share of the 38 Smarter at Dinner consumer brand episodes that raised each theme

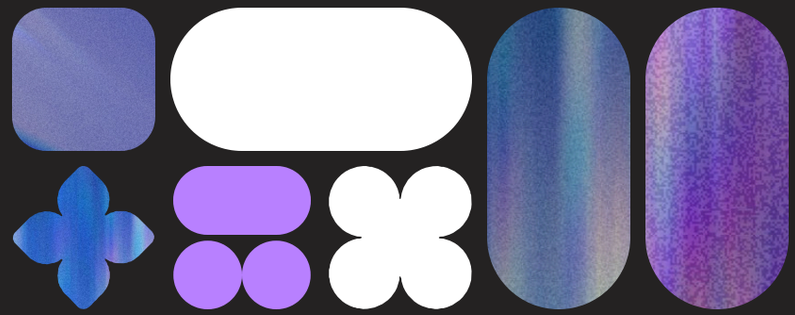


How often each theme came up across the 38 consumer brand episodes. Source: our analysis of Smarter at Dinner episode transcripts published to November 1, 2026.

01

AI in marketing: Earning its keep on the work nobody loves

For the last two years, most brands have used AI for content. Captions, blogs, deck summaries. Useful, but small bits of work handed to the AI equivalent of an intern. What our guests describe now goes deeper, and customers mostly never see it.



Days of work, done in minutes

John Maasch, VP of Sales and Marketing at Veridian Homes, uses Claude to price new homes. Work that "was taking me days to weeks" now takes "maybe four or five minutes". At PurposeBuilt Brands, CMO Jon Bellante's team now turns mascot animation around in "essentially hours versus what was taking weeks prior", so Green Gobbler can join cultural moments instead of waiting on one big asset.

Brandon Rhoten, CMO of Dave's Hot Chicken, is clear about where the value sits:

> **"The useful stuff for me is the stuff behind the scenes today. It lets me ... better plan media. It lets me do analysis a lot faster than I ever could before."**

Brandon Rhoten, CMO, Dave's Hot Chicken, Smarter at Dinner: *Why Most Brands Get Ignored*

He keeps AI away from consumer-facing creative. Andrew Ladd, VP of Marketing at Noble House Hotels and Resorts, says AI copy gets you "about 80% there". The pattern is consistent: hand AI the majority of the legwork, but keep people on the work that customers see.

Dave Finnegan, who helped grow Build-A-Bear from two stores to more than 400, shared a line one retail CEO sent his team this year:

> **“The AI technology is ready, the humans are not.”**

Dave Finnegan, Build-A-Bear founding team, quoting a retail CEO, Smarter at Dinner: *The guy who helped start Build-A-Bear on why the tech is ready and the humans aren’t*

The technology is ready. But the team needs time.

Nine guests made the same point in their own words: adoption is a people problem. Julie Wade, VP of Brand and Digital Marketing at ModWash, uses Claude daily but says tutorials don’t cut it: “I need somebody hands-on to show me. Let’s work on a real problem”.

The surveys agree. In the Marketing AI Institute’s 2025 State of Marketing AI Report, 62% of marketers named a lack of education and training as a top barrier to adoption, for the fifth year running. And Gartner found CMOs now put 15.3% of their budgets into AI while only 30% report mature AI readiness. The money is ahead of the skills - which is hardly surprising considering AI’s nascency beyond ah-hoc prompts.

When you skip the training, teams start lobbing what Shopify’s CEO calls ‘AI slop grenades’: walls of unedited, AI-generated text that someone else is expected to read.



of marketers named a lack of education and training as a top barrier to adoption

Marketing AI Institute’s 2025 State of Marketing AI Report



CMOs now put 15.3% of their budgets into AI

Gartner



only 30% report mature AI readiness

Gartner

AI agents: They're real, but it's early

Agents came up more often as experiments than as working tools. When asked how Long Home's AI voice agent compares with a human at booking appointments, CMO Jill Josephson answered: "It's equal". Lombardo Homes added an AI shopping assistant to its website, and VP of Marketing Melissa Cervin says it reveals the questions buyers won't ask a salesperson. Others are more skeptical: Andrew Ladd thinks assumptions about agents booking leisure trips are "a bit exaggerated".

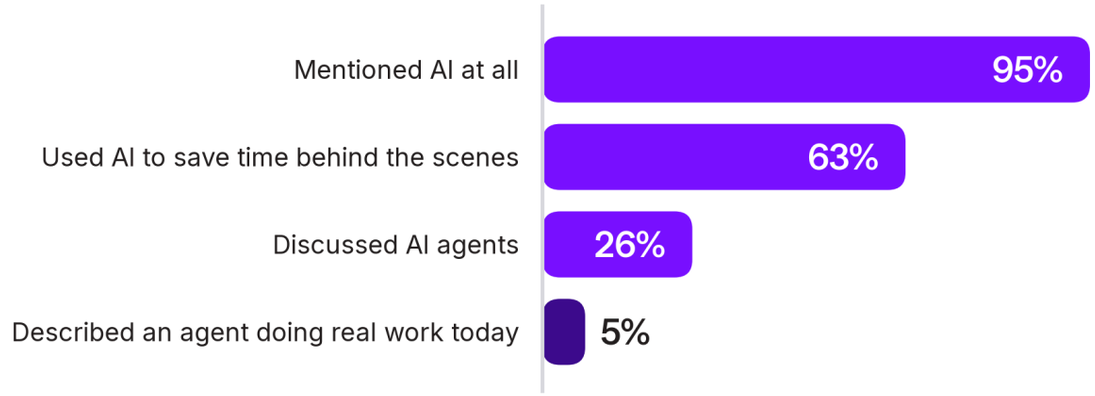
That honest picture is why the most useful marketing agents in 2027 will take on clear, checkable jobs first: reporting, budget pacing, segment building, and review round-ups, with people keeping the judgment calls.

Speaking at our AI in marketing summit in London, Passionfruit's CEO Raffi Salama described AI as a multiplier, allowing marketers to act like a set of Russian dolls, each opening to reveal another body or pair of hands: "How many of you can I hire? How many versions of you can be doing good work?"

Speaking at the same summit, Cinzia Amadio, SVP and CMO of HX Expeditions, echoes a similar sentiment: "The fact that the access to data and insight is democratised allows for people to step up."

AI is everywhere. Agents are early.

Share of the 38 consumer brand episodes



AI came up in almost every conversation, but working agents in only two. Source: our analysis of Smarter at Dinner episode transcripts.

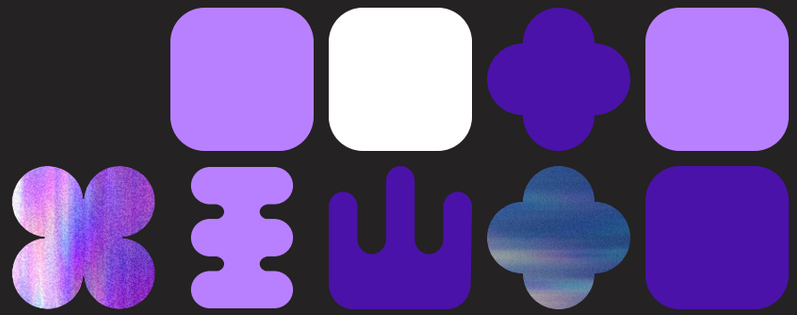
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

AI is already saving consumer marketers days of work, mostly out of sight. The bottleneck is people, not technology, so start with checkable jobs and train your team on real problems.

02

Customer retention: Keep the customers you've already won

Your next customer is probably already on your email list. Ask consumer CMOs where growth is hiding and many point at the customers they already have: 14 of the 38 guests talked about retention, loyalty, membership or community, and the strongest examples had little to do with points.



> **"Acquisition gets so much attention, doesn't it? Because it's immediate. It's very measurable. Retention is often quieter."**

Vicky Ellison, CMO, The Private Clinic Group (ex-Equinox, Hawksmoor), Smarter at Dinner: *How Hawksmoor & Equinox Keep Customers Coming Back*

At Retro Fitness, VP of Marketing Jason Langford found the average membership is "pushing 5 years", and he credits community for that. At Bravissimo, personal bra fittings build unusually strong loyalty, and CMO Cathy Berman encourages that contact because time with the customer "has [a] direct impact on lifetime value".

Watch what your promotions teach

Though they can be incredibly tempting and win the quarter, discounts can cost you the customer file. Garth Weber, Chief Brand and Marketing Officer at Duluth Trading Company, says that when the brand promoted harder than ever, it "trained our current customer, our very loyal customer, what to expect from us". Sales and seasonal price cuts sometimes run the risk of teaching customers to delay their purchases.

Relevance is the retention engine

Relevance is what keeps people opening, clicking and coming back. Send the wrong thing too often and your audience switches off. Twilio's 2025 State of Customer Engagement Report found 71% of consumers will walk away from a purchase if the experience doesn't feel relevant, while 75% of brands using personalization report customers spending more.

Shuchi Sarkar is moving AAA from segments toward one-to-one messages. Dave Finnegan's version of the brief: "people don't want to be tracked, they want to be seen". Doing that by hand is labor intensive, which is why personalization at scale is where agentic marketing earns its keep: small, repeatable moves that make customers feel they've bagged a white-glove service.



of consumers will walk away from a purchase if the experience doesn't feel relevant

Twilio's 2025 State of Customer Engagement Report



of brands using personalization report customers spending more

Twilio's 2025 State of Customer Engagement Report

The next best product, at the right moment

When marketers talk about retention, it's so difficult to leverage historic own purchase data to decide what to send, and when. This is largely because our CRMs are a mess. We're yet to meet a marketing team that has their CRM in order - especially in industries like retail, hospitality, and travel, where customer data sits in various data puddles. But that's a huge gap, because mining your own data is one of the strongest agentic use cases on the table right now.

In the world of ecomm, oftentimes, the default cross-sell is "something cheaper that goes with it". Someone buys a couch, so out go the cushion emails. Purchase history may show that a new couch is usually followed by a mattress, then a bed frame: bigger, more valuable purchases. Timing matters too. Suggest the mattress the day after the couch arrives and it feels pushy. Suggest it when similar customers usually make that move and it feels helpful. So when a customer buys, work out the best next product for them, predict when they're likely to need it, then personalize and schedule the message in the CRM you already use.

Customer service needs people

Twelve guests stressed the moments where a person matters most. Josh Churnick, CMO of Vertex Service Partners, is blunt: "I would never replace my call center with AI at this point". Vicky Ellison warns against trimming front-desk staff, because that's where "the power of the hello" lives. Automating the legwork should give your people more time for these moments, not fewer of them.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

Retention is quieter than acquisition, but it's where consumer brands can build lasting value. Win it with relevance, well-timed next purchases and people in the moments that matter, not with ever-deeper discounts.

03

Local marketing and AI search: Show up in the right spaces

A blanket national strategy isn't enough anymore, especially if you're a multi-location brand or a franchise. Of the 38 guests, 15 talked about local relevance, more than any other marketing theme.



PurposeBuilt Brands plans its 30 Seconds outdoor cleaner market by market because the season starts at different times in different places. As Jon Bellante puts it, the team will "drill down to zip codes and DMAs". Feldco localizes creative because Cedar Rapids is not South Side Chicago.

Search is moving into the answer

Paid search is getting more crowded and more expensive, and when so much research now happens off the page, in a zero-click world, pulling traffic gets harder. Twelve guests described that shift. Brad Thorberg, VP of Marketing at GOLFTEC, watched a Google local search update hit overnight:

> **"We saw about a 32% drop overnight in leads."**
>
> **Brad Thorberg, VP of Marketing, GOLFTEC Enterprises,** Smarter at Dinner: *A Google update cut their leads 32% overnight*

GOLFTEC's response was unique local content and imagery for its 240+ location pages, plus pages built for AI answers. At Noble House, Andrew Ladd is "seeing direct revenue from AI models starting to surface literally within 18 months".

The scale is real. Adobe saw traffic from generative AI sources to US retail sites rise 4,700% year on year in July 2025, and 73% of shoppers who use AI for shopping call it their main source of product research.



traffic from generative AI sources to US retail sites rise 4,700% year on year in July 2025

Adobe

What gets you into the answer

AI tools weigh what other people are saying about you, recently. Jason Langford puts it simply: AI cares about "what's being said about this brand, what's happening in the last 90 days". Josh Churnick builds visibility through reviews, social proof and outside sites. Reviews are community-sourced, authentic tips to any search engine that qualify (or debunk) the claims you make on your own website.

Here's a simple test for your 2027 plan. Ask two or three AI assistants for the best option in your category in a city you serve. If a competitor shows up and you don't, look at what's being said about them, where and how recently. That's your gap list. Repeat the test monthly, market by market, and track who gets mentioned instead of you.

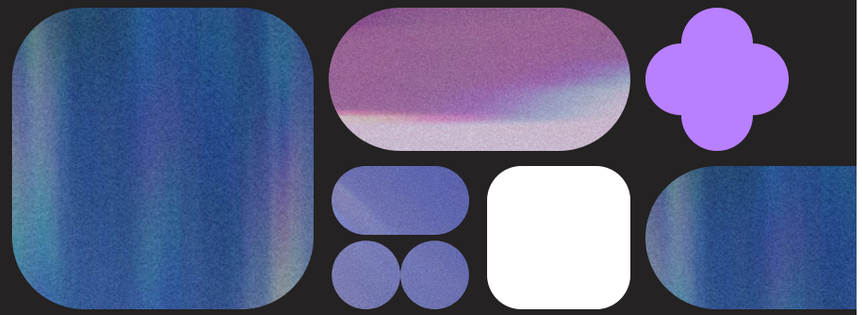
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

Consumers now find brands through local searches and AI answers, and both reward specific, recent, local proof. Treat every location page, review and FAQ as something an AI might quote.

04

Reviews and word of mouth: Let other people tell your story

Customers, creators, staff and fans often sell a brand better than the brand does. 14 of the 38 guests talked about it, and the lesson was surprisingly consistent: real beats polished.



At Yoto, Jon Kell saw word of mouth drive "in excess of 60%" of new customer acquisition at points. Celebrity posts barely moved sales; a post from a mom influencer with a few thousand followers did. Jessica Bryce, VP of Marketing at Edge Homes, made "the most beautiful color graded video and nobody cared", then watched a funny clip filmed on a phone outperform it.

Reviews are your biggest organic asset

11 guests talked about listening to customers through reviews, complaints and conversations. SharkNinja's CMO sets an internal bar of 200 to 300 reviews before a launch.

> **"Nobody thinks of ratings as organic, but it's the single biggest organic asset that you have."**
>
> **Lana Sanleandro, CMO, SharkNinja,** Smarter at Dinner: *How SharkNinja Creates Global Demand*

Shoppers agree. In a June 2025 PowerReviews survey of 21,279 consumers, 95% said they regularly read reviews while shopping, and only 43% would buy a product with no ratings or reviews at all.

Listen harder than you broadcast

The best listeners turn feedback into plans. Epcon records sales conversations to find the objections buyers raise most, and those objections become the content calendar.

Make it a habit, not a project. Pull reviews from across the web into one weekly briefing on volume, ratings and themes by product and location, share the top three with the people who can fix them, and close the loop in public when you do. That last step reassures the next shopper, and it gives AI search fresh, specific proof to work with.

Shoppers lean on reviews

Share of 21,279 consumers surveyed, June 2025



Reviews are part of almost every shopping trip. Source: PowerReviews consumer survey, June 2025.

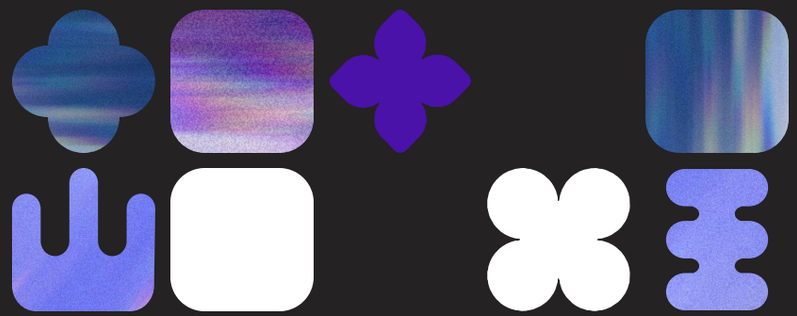
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

Word of mouth, creators and reviews do work that ads can't, and AI search rewards them too. Give real voices room, and build reviews into every launch and every plan.

05

Brand vs performance: Know who you're for, then build the brand

The fastest way to be ignored is to talk to everyone. 12 of the 38 guests talked about narrowing their audience, and 11 about brand building paying off where promotions stall.



> **"The huge flaw with that, in my opinion, is you make wallpaper when you do that. You make things that are beige and ignorable."**

Brandon Rhoten, CMO, Dave's Hot Chicken, on targeting "everyone with a wallet", Smarter at Dinner: *Why Most Brands Get Ignored*

And it's not just a restaurant problem. Cathal Conlon, VP of Marketing at the New England Revolution, says MLS spent years chasing the loudest fans, the soccer purists. League research found nine types of fan, and the purists were a small group. Two other groups, about 30% of the soccer-watching audience, drive almost 60% of engagement. The lesson: the audience that talks the most isn't always the audience that matters most.

Paid alone hits a ceiling

Marketers are wary of moving away from paid because it can carry a brand a long way. The problem is, it hits a ceiling. Jon Kell once asked a fast-growing startup who its target audience was and they replied: "We're not sure. Meta knows". When sales plateaued, nothing else was doing the work.

> **“They went to all bottom of funnel, which makes you look like a genius for about two years until you start eroding the brand.”**

Bruce Millard, Fractional CMO (ex-Safelite, Big Lots, Empire Today), Smarter at Dinner: *A $1M streaming-TV test changed how they measure ads*

The payoff shows up in the funnel. At Long Home, about 60% of marketing spend goes on third-party unbranded leads, yet branded leads “double when they get to issue”, and CMO Jill Josephson wants to flip the mix.

Pay for what’s already proven

Paid works hardest as an amplifier. SharkNinja’s rule is to “let the organic be the source of paid, not the other way around”, and to move budget the same day a post takes off. That means watching pacing, ROAS and CPA closely enough to spot a slipping campaign or a post starting to fly. POLYWOOD’s SVP of Brand Marketing, James Gregson, keeps 10% of his budget for new things to test.

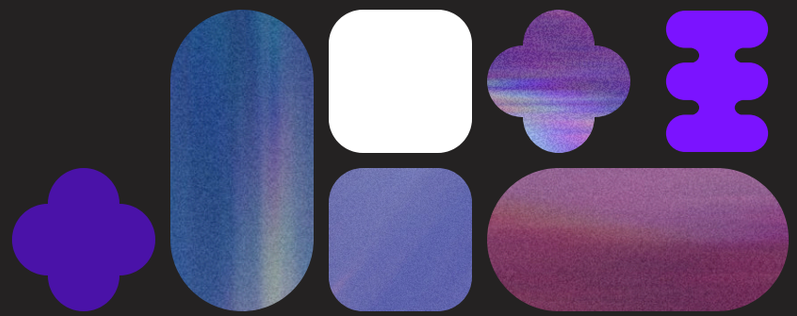
WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

Brands that pick a specific audience and invest in brand get more from every paid dollar. Use paid to scale what’s already proven, not to stand in for a reason to choose you.

06

Marketing reporting: Prove what's working, in one view

As marketers, we can easily flit between 20 tabs in an hour. Sometimes so many that the browser crashes. We've spoken to plenty of CMOs who have spent their Sundays reconciling instead of relaxing: paid results in one window, SEO in another, email and social somewhere else. Exporting reviews, uploading them into Claude to spot anything important. Nothing speaks to anything either, so there's no single source of truth.



10 of the 38 guests talked about measurement, and most were wrestling with exactly this.

> **"Pulling teeth to be able to get the data that I know it's in there ... And now to see it and be able to make decisions based off of it ... has been just a game changer."**

Julie Wade, VP, Brand & Digital Marketing, ModWash, Smarter at Dinner: *135 car washes. First marketing hire.*

Attribution guesswork can feel like red string on a detective's evidence board. At Safelite, Bruce Millard's $1M streaming TV test gave no clear answer until device-level tracking made it as accountable as paid search. And Caitlin Choate, who leads marketing at Boatsetter and Getmyboat, reminds teams that "often times we can measure more than we think we can".

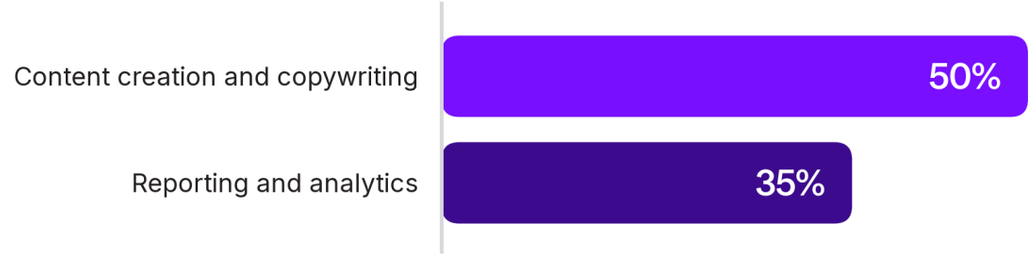
Hand the reporting to AI first

In Supermetrics' 2026 Marketing Data Report, 40% of marketers said proving ROI across channels is their biggest challenge, yet only 35% use AI for reporting and analytics, compared with 50% for content. That's the gap: the work that eats the most hours is the work least often handed over.

Reporting is frequent, structured and easy to check, the safest place for AI to take the first pass. Aim for one always-on view across ad platforms, ecommerce, analytics and CRM that works out blended ROAS and flags the moment a metric moves. Run the AI version of your weekly roll-up alongside the manual one for a month, then hand it over and spend the hours on decisions.

AI goes to content before reporting

Share of marketers using AI for each task



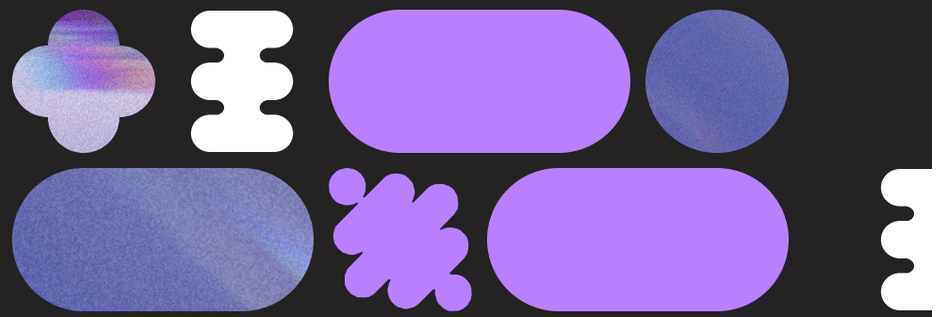
Marketers hand AI their content well before their reporting. Source: Supermetrics 2026 Marketing Data Report.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR 2027 PLANNING

Most teams can measure more than they think, once the data sits in one place. Automate the weekly scramble so your people spend Monday on decisions, not spreadsheets.

Your 2027 marketing plan: Where to start

If there's one thread through the marketing trends 2027 will bring, it's this: the CMOs in this guide aren't chasing every new tool. They're protecting their customers, getting specific about who they serve and using AI to win back time. Here's how that turns into a plan.



01 **Start with the unglamorous work.** Frequent, checkable jobs like reporting come first.

02 **Earn trust on small things.** Get the weekly report right before handing over more.

03 **Agents do the work, people keep the judgment.** Your team sets the audience and guardrails, reviews work before it ships and decides what a number means.

04 **Be AI-willing, not AI-expert.** Build the skill of a clear brief and a careful review.

05 **Leaders go first.** Use the tools weekly, and judge teams on what they do with AI.

06 **Own it daily.** Lifecycle programs stall when nobody tends them. A small daily commitment, backed by a system that builds and sends, keeps them earning.

07 **Remember brand is the long game.** Identity, patience and insight build what lasts.

Quotes come from Smarter at Dinner episode transcripts and are lightly tidied for reading: repeated words and filler are removed, and "..." marks a skipped passage. Titles are as given at the time of recording.

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A closing note: Where Pip fits

The CMOs in this guide aren't short of ideas. They're short of hours. That's why we built Pip, Passionfruit's team of specialist AI marketing agents. Each takes on a clear, checkable job in the tools you already use, so your people keep the judgment calls.

- **AI that saves time:** Pip's agents take on the repetitive, measurable work that eats your team's week.
- **Retention:** CRM Manager picks each customer's best next product and the right time to suggest it.
- **Local and AI search:** SEO and GEO Lead tracks how you show up in Google and AI answers.
- **Reviews:** Review Pulse turns reviews from across the web into a weekly briefing.
- **Brand and paid:** Paid Media Strategist watches pacing, ROAS and CPA and flags budget moves.
- **Reporting:** Reporting Sidekick puts your ads, Shopify, GA4 and CRM data in one view.

If any of that sounds like your Monday morning, you can learn more about Pip.

