B2B MARKETING

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER?

How B2B Marketers Can Take More Control of Growth

B2BMARKETING.NET



Contents

INTRODUCTION
Becoming The MVP In B2B marketing

SECTION ONE
THE CHALLENGE:
Why Marketing Is Working Harder
But Winning Less

SECTION TWO
THE MVP PLAYBOOK:
What Best-in-Class Marketers Are Doing

SECTION THREE
COMMERCIAL CREDIBILITY BUYS THE RIGHT TO BE BRAVE

SECTION FOUR
AI IS NOT THE PLAYER:
It Is The Enabler.

CONCLUSION
Becoming the Most Valuable Player
in B2B Marketing

Becoming the MVP in B2B marketing



Kavita Singh,
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B2B Marketing

When we think about the MVP, we think about sports. The player who changes the outcome. The one who carries the pressure, delivers when it matters, and ultimately determines whether the team wins or loses.

B2B marketing has entered its own MVP era, and they're no longer playing on the sidelines. For years, marketers were measured by activity. Campaigns launched. Leads generated. Content produced. But across boardrooms and leadership teams, the scoreboard has changed.

According to our B2B CEO Blindspot research, **which surveyed over 150 business leaders, 75%** said marketing is important but it's not currently driving growth.

Marketing is no longer judged by how much activity it creates, but by the impact it has on growth. And the marketers pulling ahead are the ones who understand the new scoreboard, focus on the opportunities that matter most, and consistently deliver match-winning results.

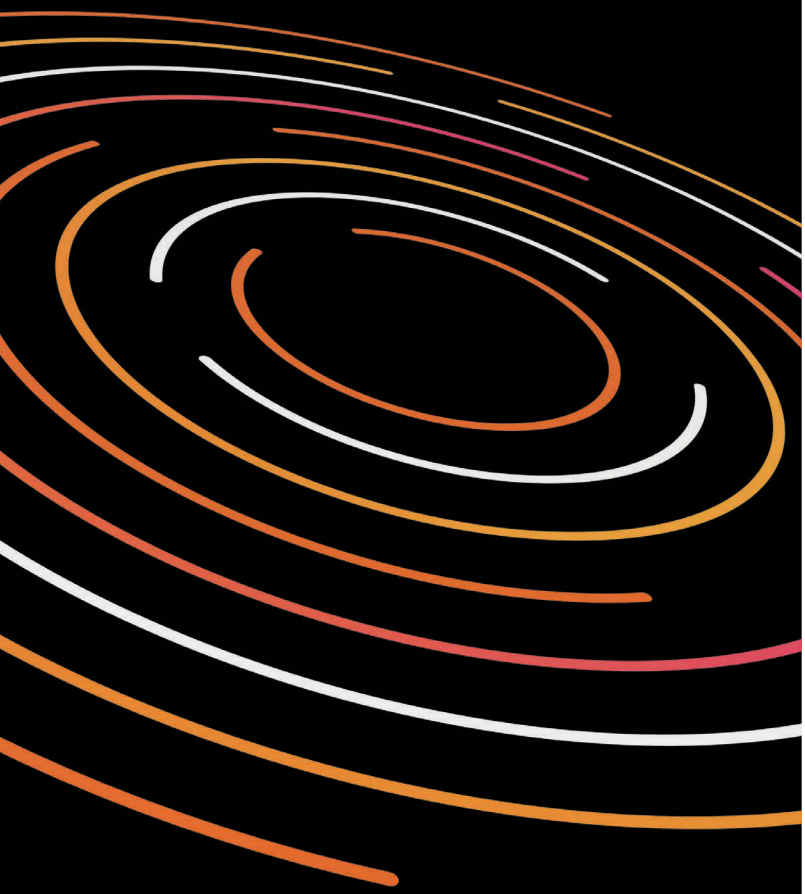
Drawing on a collection of B2B Marketing insights available, this report combines data from the 2026 Elevation Awards, findings from the Propolis Index, bespoke research conducted by B2B Marketing in 2026, and thousands of hours of customer conversations we've had across the B2B marketing community.

Together, these sources provide a unique view of how marketing leaders are responding to today's biggest challenges, from proving impact and earning commercial credibility to adopting AI and driving growth. More importantly, they reveal what the highest-performing teams are doing differently, highlighting the strategies, behaviors and award-winning initiatives that are changing the score.

This report explores what separates those marketers from the rest.

Section 1:
THE CHALLENGE:
Why Marketing Is Working Harder But Winning Less

In a recent Propolis Community Sprint, we brought together a group of B2B marketers to discuss a topic leaders resonated with deeply: saying no.
B2B leaders recognized patterns that felt familiar: planning cycles getting squeezed to make room for in-quarter delivery; campaigns being launched quickly to meet demand, but without a clear link to pipeline; reporting becoming more frequent, but less useful in driving decisions. And by the way, none of these decisions are made with bad intent, but, over time, they can add up.



This is how "random acts of marketing" creep in – not because teams lack capability, but because prioritization isn't being enforced in a visible way. And when everything is treated as urgent, very little ends up being important.

The fact is, the more time marketing spends responding to tactical requests, the less time it has to take a step back, think strategically, and map out the big plays across functions that will drive real business growth.

And that's exactly what business leaders now demand from marketing. To contrast this reality, across leadership teams, expectations have shifted. Marketing is no longer viewed primarily as a communications or lead generation function; it is increasingly expected to contribute directly to commercial impact. Boards want clearer attribution. CFOs want stronger efficiency. CEOs want measurable impact on pipeline, revenue, and customer expansion.

In fact, our CEO research revealed that 88% of CEOs think marketers would be more credible if they spoke the "language of the business" and 83% of them would trust marketers more if they showed stronger commercial understanding.

Want to speak the language of the C-Suite and drive measurable business outcomes? Leverage the power of Propolis AI to sharpen your commercial marketing skills.

Propolis provides expert-led intelligence and proven B2B frameworks, blending human insight with AI to drive measurable growth and commercial success for B2B marketers.
To find out more and get a free trial, ***click here.***

And according to our customer conversations, marketers do realize the need for a commercial mindset in marketing to tie activities to business outcomes. One marketing leader commented: "Our skills gap is less about knowledge and more about commercial acumen, measurement, and operational rigor."

For many organizations, existing structures, metrics, and operating models were not built for this level of accountability. The result is growing tension between pressure, proof, and performance. So let's delve into the two key challenges marketers are struggling to tackle.

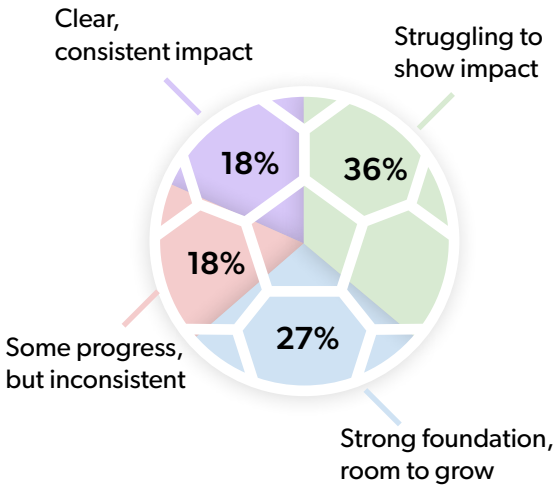
The Stat Sheet Trap: The Measurement Problem

In most businesses today, the old B2B sales-led model does not work. With buyers increasingly conducting research online and only speaking with sales when they've already made a decision, it falls to marketing to influence and reach those audiences and drive those decisions. The problem? Proving the impact of that work is hard.

In fact, in our recent 2026 B2B Marketing Impact Report: From Cost Center to Growth Engine, we found that over a third of marketers cannot yet show impact consistently, leaving a credibility gap at the leadership table. So why is that?

Marketing teams often operate with metrics that fail to translate effectively at board level. That includes click-through rates, engagement metrics, MQLs and isolated performance metrics, and while they are useful for your marketing team and for reporting purposes, they do not demonstrate commercial impact.

How confident are you in your marketing team's ability to demonstrate real business impact to the C-suite?





Tony Riley, *CEO,* **MX**

In the report, Tony Riley, *CEO,* **MX** discussed this exact point. Rather than treating marketing as isolated campaigns, we need to treat marketing as narrative arcs woven across brand, demand generation, sales, product and customer success. He said: *"Marketing's future isn't measured in vanity metrics, but in how deeply and authentically it engages the buyer and in how confidently it claims its strategic seat at the growth table."*

And Tony is right. Our CEO research indicates that **76%** of CEOs cannot justify marketing investment unless it generates leads while **73%** of CEOs believe sales is a bigger growth driver than marketing.

"The teams who are getting buy-in for new budgets are the ones who connect everything they do to business outcomes."

- Insight generated from customer conversations

Taken together, these report findings and community conversations reveal a widening credibility gap. Marketing is under increasing pressure to contribute to growth, yet many teams are still being evaluated through metrics that fail to demonstrate commercial impact.

The Creativity Credibility Gap

At the same time, differentiation has become harder than ever. For more than a decade, B2B marketers have been under pressure to produce more. More campaigns, more channels, more content, and more touchpoints.

The rapid digitalization of marketing during and after the pandemic accelerated this trend, concentrating competition into the same digital spaces and making it harder for brands to stand out. AI hasn't created this challenge. It has simply amplified it.

The result is a marketplace where buyers are exposed to more marketing than ever before, but remember less of it. It's perhaps no surprise that **53% of marketers** say they struggle to differentiate their content in increasingly crowded digital environments.

Yet, standing out has never mattered more. Findings from the **2025 WARC Health of Creativity report** show that highly creative campaigns are approximately twice as likely to deliver strong commercial outcomes than average work.

This creates a growing tension for B2B marketers. They are expected to deliver measurable business impact while also creating work that earns attention, builds distinction and resonates with buyers.

For many teams, these objectives can feel at odds with one another. The pressure to prove commercial value can push marketers towards safer, more measurable activity, while creativity is often perceived as harder to justify. But this is where many organizations get it wrong.

The choice between creativity and commercial impact is a **false choice.**

The most effective marketers don't choose between the two. They use creativity to drive commercial outcomes and commercial discipline to unlock greater creative ambition.





Section 2: THE MVP PLAYBOOK:

What Best-in-Class Marketers Are Doing

In every big game, a handful of players rise above the rest. Not because they touch the ball the most. Not because they run the furthest.

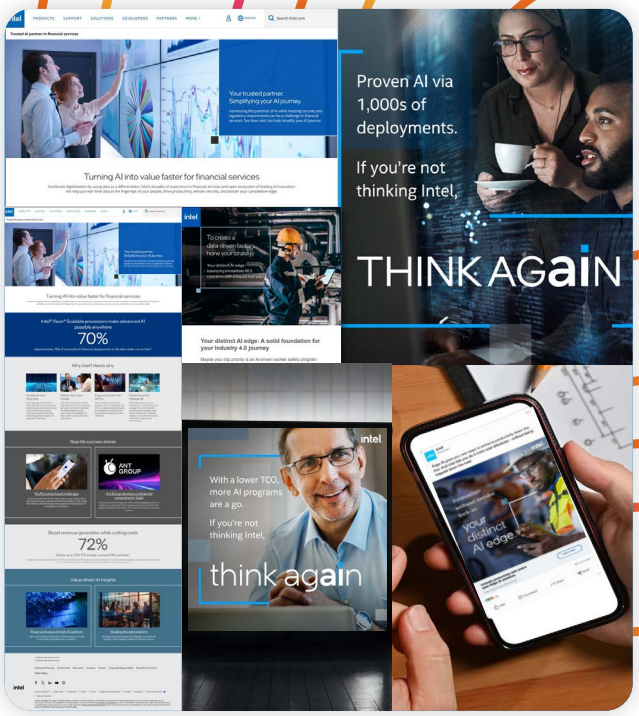
Because they consistently influence the outcome of the match.

The same is true in B2B marketing.

The highest-performing marketers aren't simply overcoming today's challenges. They are playing differently with three key shifts in mind. Pulling data from our 2026 Elevation Awards Winners data, we have outlined three unique case studies which were able to prove commercial credibility while creating big moments.

TARGET THE RIGHT PLAYERS

A shift to account-led growth



Account-based marketing (ABM) was never meant to become a campaign tactic but many marketers started to use ABM as exactly that. However, it's now being used as a strategic growth engine more often than not.

Our **Propolis** *ABM & Demand Generation Expert* Robert Norum commented: "*With so much of the enterprise buying cycle becoming 'self-service,' it's become increasingly important to think about a 'shift left' to make sure you're building brand awareness, engagement and trust right across the buying group as early as possible - both to shape demand and ensure you're on the shortlist. You can't do this effectively to the whole market without a massive spend, but you can take a micro-targeted approach to your most important accounts and prospects.*"

The strongest marketers know that growth isn't about reaching everyone. It's about identifying the accounts with the greatest potential and focusing resources where they can have the biggest commercial impact. As B2B buying becomes more complex, leading teams are moving beyond broad audience strategies to build more precise, coordinated approaches around high-value accounts.

MVP marketers are using data, intent and customer insight to understand which accounts matter, where they are in the buying journey and what will move them forward. This requires closer alignment between marketing and sales, with activity designed around shared commercial priorities rather than disconnected campaigns.

A good example of this? Intel faced a rapidly changing enterprise AI market, with increasing competition for attention and a complex group of decision-makers influencing technology investment. Its existing demand generation approach was fragmented and product-centric, making it difficult to create the relevance and coordination needed to engage high-value enterprise accounts.

Enter **Dentsu**. The agency stepped in to develop a precision-led ABM program focused on more than **200 priority accounts** across financial services, manufacturing, public sector and global systems integrators. Rather than treating these accounts as a single audience, the program combined research, intent data and sales intelligence to understand individual account needs.

At the heart of the program was a new creative platform, "All in on AI," designed to reposition Intel from a technology supplier to a trusted partner helping enterprises operationalize AI at scale.

Personalized engagement was then coordinated across **22 channels**, with more than 223 custom assets supporting 1:1, 1:few and 1:many ABM motions. The approach connected marketing and sales through an integrated martech ecosystem, allowing the team to respond to engagement and optimize activity around the accounts most likely to convert.

The result was a **54% increase in pipeline, a 27% increase in marketing-influenced revenue within four months** and a **doubling of deal velocity.** Plus, it earned Dentsu the Gold for 'Best ABM or BGM Program' at our Elevation Awards.

MATCH SUMMARY:

Commercially: Connected account-level insight and marketing activity directly to pipeline, revenue and deal velocity.

Creatively: Repositioned Intel as a trusted AI partner through the "All in on AI" platform, using a more human brand voice, distinctive visual identity and tailored messaging across industries, accounts and personas.

FEWER TOUCHES, BIGGER MOMENTS

From Volume to Impact

But focusing on the right opportunities is only half the challenge. Once you've identified the accounts that matter most, the next question becomes: how do you earn their attention?

The answer isn't more activity.

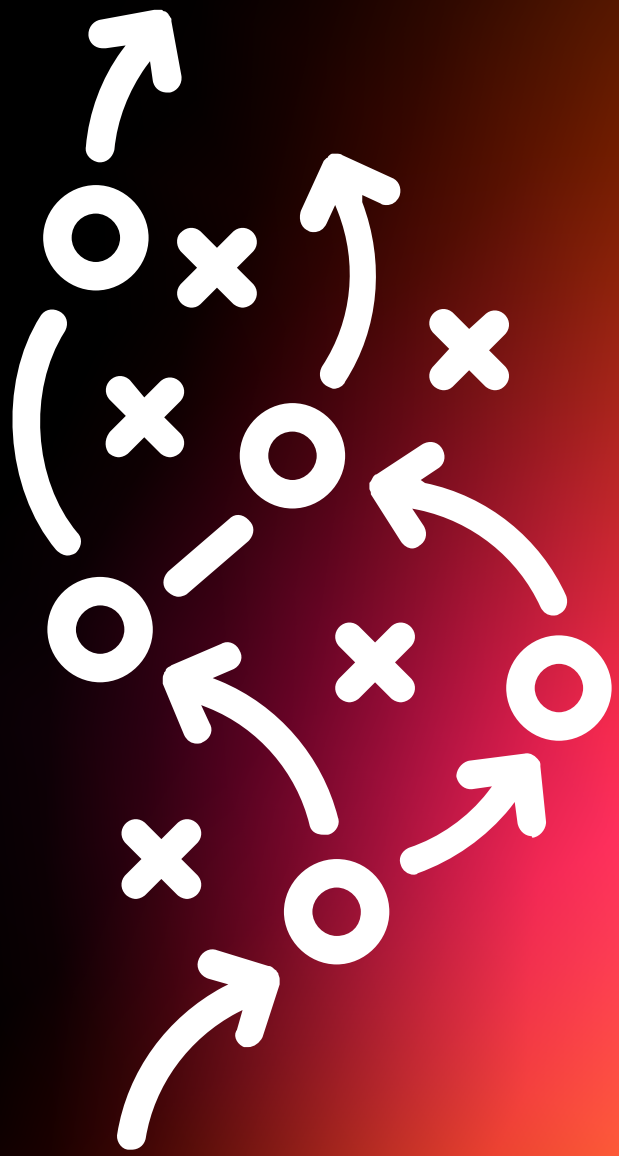
It's creating moments people will remember.

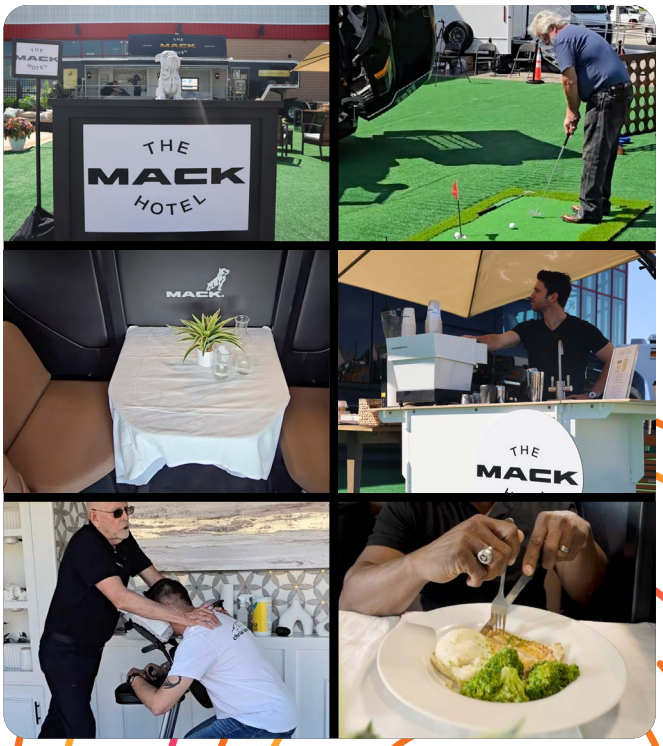
However, with an explosion of content volume, it can become extremely difficult to create standout work. Despite this, our data indicates that the best teams are now prioritizing making their work truly; emotionally, creatively, and experientially, focusing on fewer, higher-impact initiatives.

That is why the best B2B marketers are shifting from volume to impact, where success is measured not by output but by the depth of commercial influence and initiatives that hit all the sweet spots: creatively, emotionally and experientially. Another brilliant example of this was demonstrated by our 'B2B Marketing Agency of the Year (North America)' **Stein**, and its campaign with Mack Trucks.

Mack Trucks needed to change perceptions around driver comfort. While competitors had established strong associations with the category, Mack had an opportunity to make comfort a unique part of its positioning around the launch of the Mack Pioneer.

Rather than relying on conventional product advertising, Stein looked for a way to make the benefit tangible. The answer was **Mack Hotel**: a luxury hotel experience built inside a Mack Pioneer truck and brought to Kenly 95, one of North America's largest truck stops.





Drivers were invited to experience the truck for themselves, from premium bedding to a salon and gourmet food. The idea gave Mack an opportunity to demonstrate its proposition rather than simply communicate it, while creator content and social amplification extended the experience beyond those who attended.

The result was a distinctive brand moment that cut through category convention and helped drive a **28% year-on-year increase in Mack's market share**, its highest gain in more than two decades.

The campaign demonstrates what happens when marketers resist the pressure to simply create more activity. One focused idea, built around a clear audience insight, can create a much bigger commercial impact than a higher volume of disconnected touchpoints.



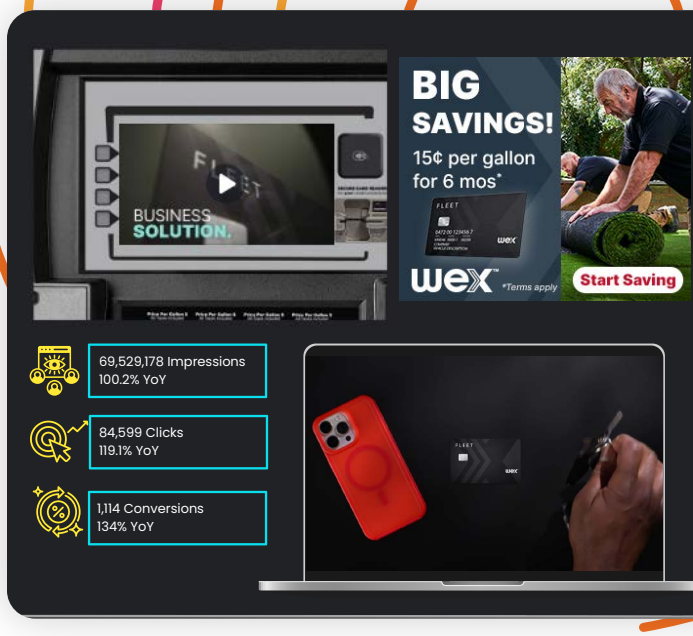
MATCH SUMMARY:

Commercially: Delivered a **28% YoY increase in market share**, demonstrating the business impact of a focused marketing intervention.

Creatively: Turned a functional product benefit into an unexpected experience that audiences could see, feel and remember.

KNOW WHEN TO PLAY THE LONG GAME (BUT KEEP AN EYE ON THE SCORE)

The shift to long-term growth



Not every marketing challenge can be solved with a campaign.

While MVP marketers know when to create decisive moments, they also understand when sustained brand investment is required to build awareness and future demand.

In a world increasingly focused on short-term metrics, the strongest marketers resist the temptation to optimize only for immediate results. They recognize that growth is created through a balance of short-term performance and long-term brand building.

The key is knowing when to choose.

MVP marketers play the long game but they never stop watching the score.

In our final case study, we turn to WEX. WEX had historically relied heavily on partner-led acquisition, which could generate efficient short-term volume but produced lower lifetime value than WEX-branded accounts. The company recognized that building greater brand awareness and preference could create a stronger foundation for sustainable growth.

Causal developed a multichannel strategy designed to balance immediate performance with longer-term brand investment. Rather than treating brand and demand as separate activities, the program connected media, creative and measurement across the customer journey, creating a model that could build brand equity while continuing to drive near-term commercial outcomes.

The strategy ran across a multi-year period, allowing WEX to build and optimize its approach rather than judging brand investment on the results of an individual campaign. Measurement was also expanded to understand longer-term marketing effects and the contribution of marketing to incremental sales.

As the campaign evolved, the creative moved towards more branded messaging designed to strengthen WEX's identity and build broader recognition. This helped shift perceptions of WEX from a supporting platform behind partner fuel brands to a more credible and trusted solution in its own right.

The results demonstrate the commercial value of taking the long view. **Marketing contributed 50% of incremental sales**, while long-term marketing effects reached **61.6%**. WEX also exceeded its 2025 revenue target and surpassed earnings expectations by **12%**.

The lesson for MVP marketers is not to choose brand over performance or performance over brand. It's to understand what the business needs at different stages of growth and make the right investment accordingly.

MATCH SUMMARY:

Commercially: Connected sustained marketing investment to measurable growth, with marketing contributing 50% of incremental sales.

Creatively: Evolved WEX's creative and media approach from short-term performance messaging towards a full-funnel brand story.

Section 3: COMMERCIAL CREDIBILITY BUYS THE RIGHT TO BE BRAVE

Across every example in this report, one theme keeps appearing. The marketers generating the greatest impact aren't choosing between creativity and commercial discipline. They're using one to strengthen the other.

On the contrary, creativity, when disciplined and strategically applied, enhances memorability and helps campaigns stand out in crowded markets. And ultimately, the results of our CEO Blindspot Research speaks to the C-Suite's view as well. **81%** of CEOs would give marketers who prove commercial value more freedom to take creative risks. And **78%** would give "commercially credible" marketers more freedom to experiment.

In other words, commercial credibility earns you the right to be brave and take a risk. The scoreboard doesn't restrict creativity. It gives marketers the confidence to take bigger shots.

And once you champion those, you will then have the confidence to galvanize the team. MVPs don't wait on someone else to take charge. They take the lead to align the team around strategy and business goals. **And MVPs aren't afraid to become the captain.**

And the secret weapon to it all?

AI can be used to make these power plays come to life.



Darryl Merkli
Head of AI Studio & Services,
Hut 3

In a B2B Marketing and Hut 3 report: **The State of AI: Today, Tomorrow and 2030**, Darryl Merkli, Head of AI Studio & Services, Hut 3 said: *"The most effective AI strategies we've delivered are the ones where technology amplifies creativity, sharpens decision-making and frees up people to focus on what they do best: building relationships, crafting stories, and driving growth."*

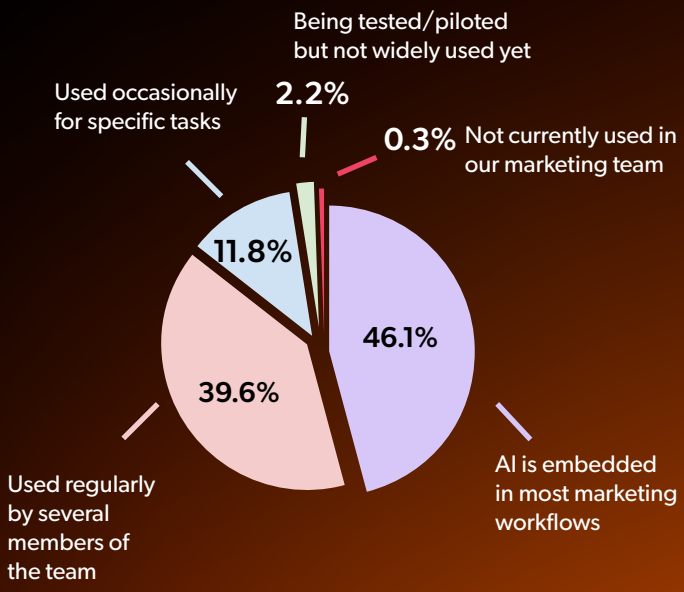
Section 4: AI IS NOT THE PLAYER: It Is The Enabler.

If the first half of this report has been about changing the way marketing plays, this section is about accelerating performance. AI is not the player though. It is the enabler.

The most effective marketers aren't using AI simply to do more work. They're using it to amplify the same behaviors that already separate MVP marketers from the rest. The question is no longer whether AI can improve productivity. The more important question is how it can strengthen commercial focus, enhance creativity, and accelerate growth.

As suspected, AI is no longer an experimental add-on in B2B marketing; it is becoming the operating system that underpins how teams function. According to our **Propolis Index** which reveals real-time insights collected from B2B marketing leaders across the US and UK in businesses of £20 million plus in annual revenue, 46.1% of marketing leaders have embedded AI into most of their marketing workflows. That means that more than half of B2B marketers still have room to grow in that space.

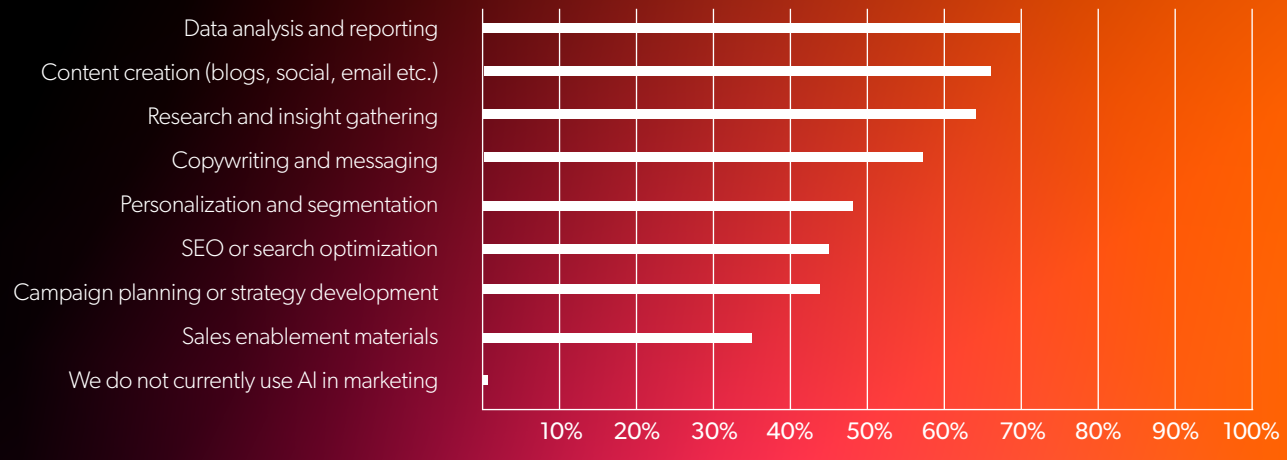
How widely is AI currently used across your marketing team?



Having been at the heart of industry conversations all year, it's clear to us at B2B Marketing that AI is central to everything. It's not just a tool we can use for content; it's the fundamental technology that underpins the transformation of everything we do in marketing and business overall.

And when we dug deeper, we found that marketers are using AI in various ways, with 70.4% using it for data analysis and reporting, 66.7% using it for content creation and 64.2% using it for research and insight gathering.

Which marketing activities does your team currently use AI for most?



While it's great to see the widespread usage of AI, we wanted to pinpoint the best opportunities possible. When we mapped AI opportunities against the behaviors explored throughout this report, a clear pattern emerged. The most valuable applications weren't replacing marketers. They were helping teams execute the MVP playbook more effectively.

We also realized that the real opportunity is no longer simply efficiency. **Efficiency** is great for cost-effectiveness and saving time. **Effectiveness** leads to impact, value and results. According to **Asana's Anatomy of Work Index**, only 46% of employees clearly see how their work connects to organizational goals, showing that effectiveness - doing the right things - often matters more than efficiency alone.

Here's how AI can be used to make a real **effective** power play:

1. **Scaled personalization and ABM-lite:** As B2B marketing becomes more account-focused, AI is enabling more scalable forms of personalization through one-to-few targeting, verticalized messaging, contextual content, and smarter account prioritization - allowing marketers to deliver more relevant experiences without significantly increasing manual effort. In many organizations, this is creating a more practical and scalable evolution of account-based marketing.
2. **Internal enablement through AI**: Internal AI bots, shared prompt libraries, persona frameworks, knowledge hubs, and best-practice systems are improving consistency, collaboration, and decision-making across teams. Rather than knowledge sitting in isolated departments or individuals, AI is helping organizations scale expertise more effectively across the business.

Together, these applications show how AI is accelerating the same strategic shifts already transforming B2B marketing.

Conclusion: Becoming the Most Valuable Player in B2B Marketing

The highest-performing marketers aren't following a checklist. They're adopting a different way of thinking about growth. Across our research, award-winning campaigns and community insights, six behaviors consistently appeared among the marketers creating the greatest impact.

The 6 MVP Moves:

- **Organize Around Accounts →** Prioritize high-value relationships
- **Focus on Impact →** Fewer, higher-quality initiatives with measurable outcomes
- **Align to Revenue →** Connect every activity to commercial performance
- **Create Memorable Moments →** Use creativity to break through and drive action
- **Own the Growth Agenda →** Move from campaigns to connected ecosystems
- **Scale Effectiveness with AI →** Use AI to enhance impact, not just speed

The marketers who win aren't the busiest. They're the ones who understand the scoreboard, focus on the opportunities that matter, create moments that buyers remember, and consistently connect marketing to growth.

In a world where expectations are rising and competition is intensifying, the challenge isn't simply to participate in the game.

It's to influence the outcome. That's what MVP marketers do. And that's how marketing takes greater control of growth.

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