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2026 B2B Marketing Forecast: What Tech Leaders Need to Know Now

Executive Summary

Tech marketing leaders face a pivotal moment. According to the Propolis Community Index, marketing budgets as a percentage of revenue have declined for three consecutive years, yet teams are being asked to deliver more with enhanced ROI expectations. The data reveals a fundamental shift: successful tech marketing in 2026 will require precision allocation, data-driven decision-making, and strategic agility.

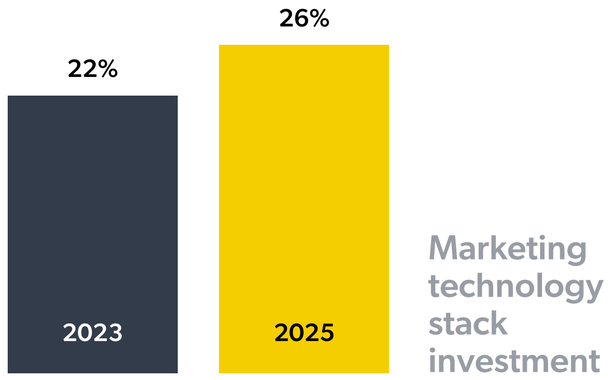
Our analysis of real-time data from marketing leaders across the US and UK reveals three critical insights for 2026: marketing technology investment is accelerating while third-party spend contracts, ROI expectations have doubled across most activities, and team structures are becoming increasingly distributed despite growing headcount. Leaders who act on these insights now will position their organizations for success in an increasingly complex market.



The Current State: Data-Driven Reality Check

Budget Evolution and Strategic Allocation

Marketing budgets dropped from **9%** of revenue target in 2024/25 to **6%** in 2025/26



Marketing's share of revenue continues its gradual decline. The Propolis Community Index shows marketing budgets dropped from 9% of revenue target in 2024/25 to 6% in 2025/26. This represents a three-year downward trend that demands strategic response rather than tactical adjustment.

Yet within these constraints, a clear pattern emerges. **Marketing technology stack investment has grown from 22% of budget in 2023/24 to 26% in 2025/26**, while third-party spend decreased from 19% to 17% over the same period. This shift signals a fundamental transformation: organizations are building internal capabilities rather than outsourcing expertise.

The allocation within marketing activity budgets reveals strategic priorities. **Social media marketing now commands 16% of activity spend, up from 14% in 2024/25**, while events and conferences dropped from 13% to 10%. Digital and web activities, along with content creation, each maintain 15% of activity spend, suggesting these remain foundational rather than differentiating investments.

ROI Revolution: The Performance Imperative

Perhaps no shift is more dramatic than ROI expectations. The Propolis Community Index reveals that social media marketing ROI increased from 4:1 in 2024/25 to 6:1 in 2025/26. Content creation and digital/web activities now deliver 5:1 returns, up from 3:1 the previous year. Email marketing has seen similar improvement, rising from 2:1 to 5:1.

This performance improvement coincides with increased agency usage for specific activities. **Digital advertising agency support jumped from 54% to 70% of organizations**, while market research and analysis outsourcing grew from 46% to 65%. The data suggests a strategic paradox: while overall third-party spend decreases, selective outsourcing for specialized capabilities increases.

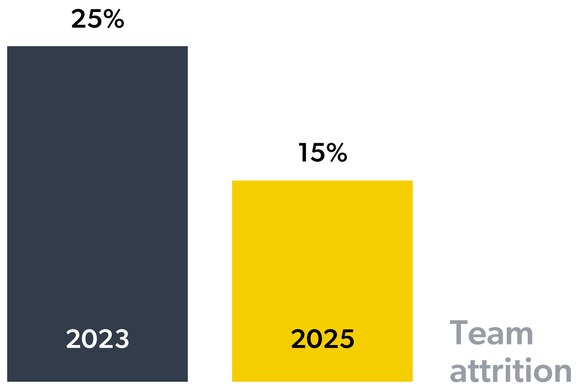


Content creation and digital/web activities now deliver 5:1 returns, up from 3:1 the previous year.

Organizational Transformation

Marketing teams are growing and evolving. The Propolis Community Index shows 64% of marketing teams increased headcount in 2025/26, with average growth of 10%. Yet this growth comes with complexity: 46% of teams are organized by function, 44% by sector/industry, and 36% by geography, with significant overlap indicating matrix structures.

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Team attrition has decreased from 25% in 2023/24 to 15% in 2025/26, suggesting improved retention despite market volatility. The centralization versus decentralization debate continues, with 43% of marketing headcount centralized and 40% distributed across regional, product, or sector teams.

Customer Dynamics

Customer acquisition ambitions remain aggressive. According to the Propolis Community Index, 83% of marketing leaders plan to acquire “more” or “significantly more” customers in 2025/26 compared to last year. Retention targets hover at 67%, down from 92% in 2024/25, suggesting a shift toward growth over retention.

Customer tenure has declined slightly to 6 years from 7 years in previous periods, while **fee increases accelerated to 50% in 2025/26 from 27% in 2024/25**. This combination of aggressive acquisition, moderate retention, and significant price increases defines the current growth playbook.



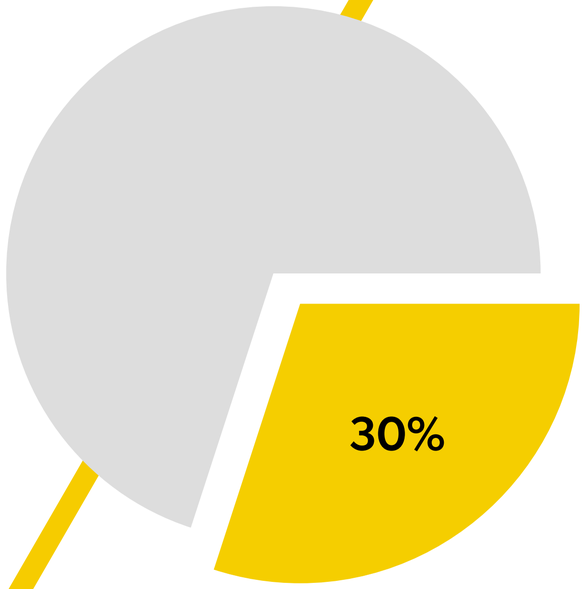
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2026 Predictions:
Strategic Imperatives

The Technology-First Marketing Organization

By 2026, marketing technology will consume 30% of marketing budgets

By 2026, marketing technology will consume 30% of marketing budgets as organizations complete their transformation to technology-enabled operations. The current 26% allocation represents a transitional state. Leaders should prepare for increased investment in automation, analytics, and AI-enabled tools that deliver the ROI improvements already evident in early adopters.



Marketing technology budget

Integration complexity will become the primary challenge. As tech stacks expand, the organizations that excel will be those that create seamless data flows and unified customer views across platforms. Investment in integration capabilities and data architecture will separate leaders from laggards.

Hybrid Resourcing Models

The selective outsourcing trend will intensify. By 2026, we predict 80% of organizations will use agencies for digital advertising and market research, while maintaining internal capabilities for strategy and creative development. This hybrid model optimizes both expertise access and cost efficiency.

Account-based marketing presents an interesting counter-trend, with agency usage declining from 35% to 31%. This suggests ABM is becoming a core internal competency. Organizations should invest in building ABM expertise now to avoid capability gaps in 2026.



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Performance Accountability Culture

ROI expectations will continue climbing. Based on current trajectories, marketing leaders should plan for average ROI targets of 7:1 by 2026. This will require sophisticated attribution modeling, real-time performance monitoring, and rapid resource reallocation capabilities.



Marketing leaders should plan for average ROI targets of 7:1 by 2026

Four One

Activities unable to demonstrate clear ROI will face elimination. Non-digital advertising already shows the lowest returns at 2:1. **By 2026, any activity delivering less than 4:1 ROI will likely disappear from marketing portfolios.**

Distributed Team Excellence

The trend toward geographic and functional distribution will accelerate. By 2026, we predict only 35% of marketing headcount will be centralized, with the majority embedded in regional and product teams. This requires new operating models that balance autonomy with alignment.

Leadership structures will evolve accordingly. The current multi-dimensional organization (by function, geography, and sector simultaneously) will give way to clearer accountability models. **Leaders must design structures that enable both local responsiveness and global efficiency.**



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Customer Value Optimization

The aggressive growth and pricing strategy evident in current data will reach natural limits. By 2026, customer acquisition costs will force a rebalancing toward retention and expansion. Leaders should prepare for this shift by building customer success capabilities and value realization programs now.

Average customer tenure will stabilize around 5 years, requiring new approaches to lifetime value optimization. Subscription models, outcome-based pricing, and strategic account programs will become standard rather than exceptional.



By 2026, customer acquisition costs will force a rebalancing toward retention and expansion

Strategic Recommendations: Actions for 2026 Success

Immediate Priorities (Next 3 Months)



Technology Stack Audit and Roadmap

Assess current marketing technology capabilities against 2026 requirements. The Propolis Community Index data shows technology investment growing consistently. Identify integration gaps and create a phased investment plan that prioritizes platforms delivering measurable ROI improvement.



ROI Measurement Framework

Establish comprehensive ROI tracking across all marketing activities. With returns ranging from 2:1 to 6:1 across different activities, understanding true performance requires consistent measurement methodology. Implement attribution modeling that captures both direct and influenced revenue.



Team Structure Assessment

Evaluate current organizational design against the distributed model emerging from the data. With 46% organized by function and 44% by sector, most organizations operate hybrid structures. Define clear accountability models that enable both specialization and collaboration.

Medium-term Initiatives (3-9 Months)

Selective Outsourcing Strategy

Develop criteria for build-versus-buy decisions. The Propolis Community Index shows dramatic variations in agency usage, from 31% for ABM to 70% for digital advertising. Create a capability map that identifies core competencies to retain and specialized skills to access through partners.

Performance Culture Program

Build organizational capability to deliver enhanced ROI expectations. This includes training on data analysis, performance management processes, and incentive alignment. The doubling of ROI in many activities suggests leading organizations have cracked this code.

Customer Value Framework

Design programs that balance aggressive acquisition with value realization. With 83% of leaders targeting growth and fee increases of 50%, sustainable growth requires demonstrable value delivery. Implement customer success metrics and expansion playbooks.

Long-term Transformation (9+ Months)



Marketing Operations Excellence

Build the operational backbone required for 2026 performance levels. This includes workflow automation, resource optimization, and continuous improvement processes. The efficiency gains evident in ROI improvements require operational discipline.



Integrated Data Platform

Create unified customer data and analytics capabilities that enable real-time decision-making. As marketing becomes increasingly technology-enabled, data integration becomes critical for performance optimization and customer experience delivery.



Strategic Workforce Planning

Develop talent strategies for the distributed, technology-enabled marketing organization of 2026. With attrition at 15% and growing headcount, attracting and retaining talent with the right skills mix becomes strategic imperative.

Conclusion
The Propolis Community Index Advantage

The path to 2026 marketing excellence requires navigation through complexity. Budget constraints, ROI pressure, technological transformation, and organizational evolution converge to create unprecedented challenges. Yet within these challenges lie opportunities for leaders willing to embrace data-driven transformation.

The Propolis Community Index provides the continuous intelligence required for this journey. Unlike static reports, our real-time data from marketing leaders across the US, UK and global evolves with market conditions. Members gain access to granular insights, trend analysis, and benchmarking capabilities that enable confident decision-making.

The data presented here represents a snapshot from November 2025. Market dynamics continue evolving, strategies continue adapting, and performance continues improving. Leaders who maintain visibility into these changes through continuous data access position themselves to anticipate rather than react.

Success in 2026 belongs to those who act on insight rather than instinct. The Propolis Community Index transforms data into competitive advantage, enabling marketing leaders to benchmark performance, identify opportunities, and validate strategies against real market evidence.



Learn more about the Propolis Community Index

As Propolis members you and your team get access to the right strategies, frameworks, and skills to confidently drive growth, build teams, and prove a clear business impact

Contact our team to learn more:



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