



From creative heads to growth architects: The agentic AI playbook for modern CMOs

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Foreword



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The technology transformation we are witnessing today is unprecedented. As AI continues to reshape our world, we at PwC have been working extensively with clients to realise value across functions as diverse as finance, HR, IT, and supply chain. The marketing function, in particular, has been reinventing itself through emerging AI systems and solutions.

So far, marketing was looked upon as the communicator of a brand, creating content and executing creative campaigns. But with shifting priorities caused by economic, global, political, and other factors, CMOs have woken up to a new reality—and it boils down to just one outcome—impact. The good thing is, marketing leaders have realised this early on in the process and are trying to leverage technology to strike a conscious balance between ambition and reality, brand health and market share, and engagement and margins. By getting it right, CMOs can unlock new sources of innovation and growth.

What is interesting is that during the course of my interaction with various clients, I have come to realise that in essence CEOs, CFOs, and CMOs want the same thing—sustainable growth. On the flip side, however, they aren't often aligned about 'how' they would achieve that growth.

The CEO mandate is clear—revenue, efficiency, and speed. For CFOs, it is about measuring the commercial impact of marketing. CMOs are hemmed in by the two, with the goal of building long-term value while their performance is measured on immediate wins. Thus, it is not always easy to align on what is 'measurable marketing performance'.

This is where agentic AI comes in. It is enabling CMOs to reimagine how marketing works at its core, and to move beyond execution and productivity to a realm where agentic systems can predict trends, prioritise channel investments, and balance ROI with longer-term impact.

This leads to the question: How does agentic AI support the CMO's mandate? I believe, with agentic AI, CMOs have a real opportunity to design a new operating model that can reposition them from being custodians of the brand to architecting it—designing the intent, outcomes, and guardrails within which intelligent systems operate. It is a completely different matter how CMOs actually leverage these newer systems. That will determine whether they bring short-term productivity gains or use agentic AI to fuel enterprise growth.

In this report, we have explored how CMOs can empower themselves to leverage the power of agentic AI to plan with purpose, execute with precision, and measure the impact. One thing is for sure: If AI is approached simply to trim expenses, its impact will be limited. But when it is embraced as a driver of growth, it can significantly expand marketing's contribution and unlock far greater business results.

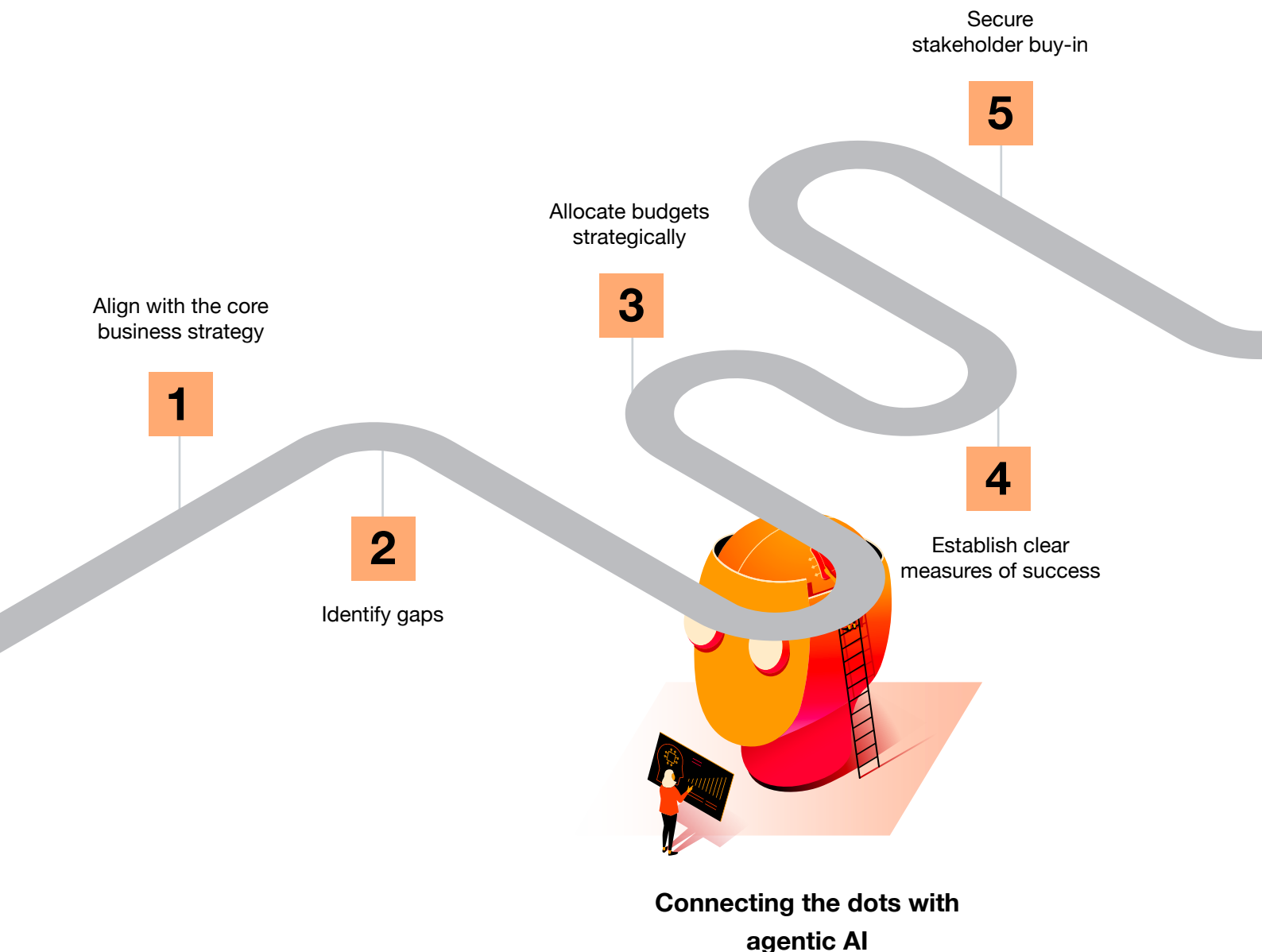
Looking into the future, I am certain that marketing will move beyond the traditional realm to incorporate intelligent and adaptive systems that provide scale and speed.

01 Plan with purpose

If 2025 has taught us anything, it's this: In a world of relentless disruption, the difference between survival and excellence is impeccable execution and innovation. For marketing to become a growth partner, CMOs need to plan decisively, turning efficiency into effective gains, data into decisions, and campaigns into measurable value.

Strategic planning therefore does not have to be arduous; it just needs to be calculated. Here are five principles that can help CMOs drive impact while creating a marketing plan:

Plan with purpose





Let's look at how agentic AI can connect the dots and help CMOs plan their strategy.

Align with the core business strategy

To craft a winning marketing strategy, the first step for CMOs is to understand the core business goals. This includes clarity on how the enterprise plans to compete and succeed in the near term and long term and how the function can contribute to larger success.

Once aligned with the broader organisational vision, marketing leaders can create their roadmap using the three key levers of people, process, and technology, and its likely impact. Effectively, this means that marketing teams

must adopt a well-rounded and deliberate approach to integrate technology within each stage of the marketing journey. This will enable them to work alongside their existing teams to maximise process efficiency. This goes beyond just introducing new and standalone tools within their existing ecosystem. Whether the goal is to increase brand awareness, reach newer markets, improve revenue, or increase product or service adoption, agentic AI can help leaders achieve tailored outcomes with thoughtful planning and iterative deployment.

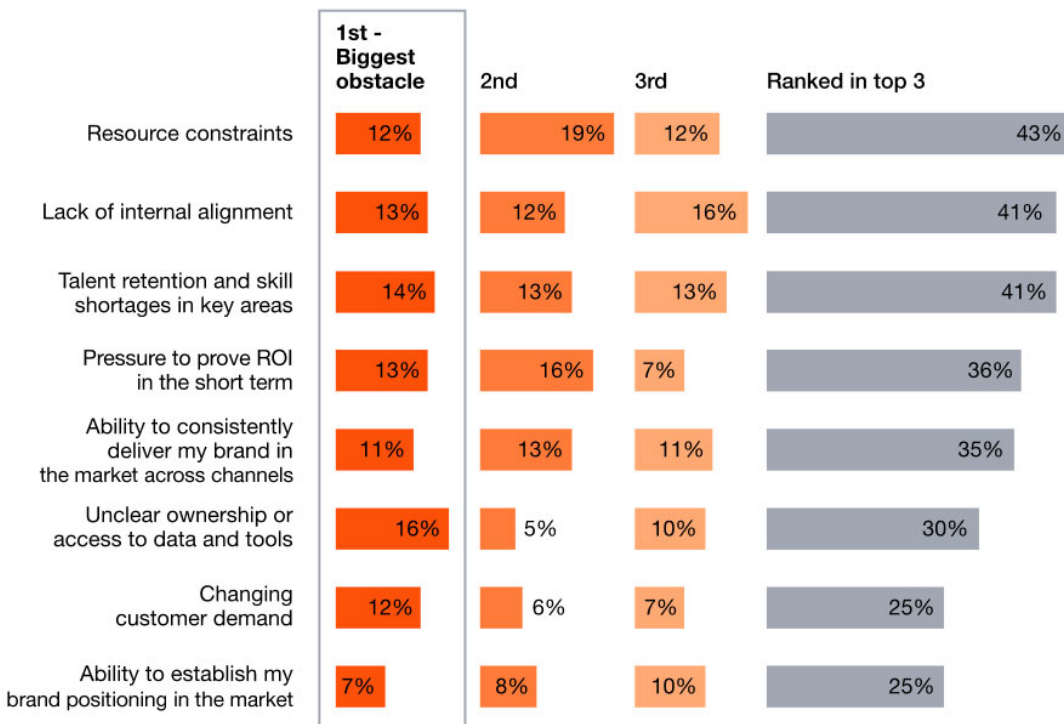


Identify gaps

With the strategic roadmap determined, the next step for CMOs is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their teams to deliver business

goals. It is important to identify any white spaces that are keeping the teams from reaching those goals.

CMOs point to talent, resource, and internal alignment gaps to achieving strategy



Q. Aside from the current uncertain business environment, what are the biggest barriers to delivering on your marketing strategy right now? (Rank in top 3.)

Source: PwC’s Pulse Survey 2025 (base = 678, CMO base = 83)

This report shows that most CMOs are struggling with three core challenges: talent, internal alignment, and skill shortages. So, while CMOs are trying to push forward, the surrounding ecosystem is pulling them back, leading to a persistent gap between ambition and execution.

Allocate budgets strategically

Having outlined the marketing goals and team’s capabilities, the next priority faced by CMOs is the allocation of funds. With increasing marketing complexity, speed of requirements and cost pressures, CMOs are under pressure to do more with less. This requires not just tweaking of existing processes but adopting a new operating model altogether—where agentic systems and humans thrive together. The skills and experience of marketers can ensure faster AI

success, while agentic AI replaces manual work with autonomous systems that can compound learning, reduce marginal costs over time, and improve revenue. Hence, CMOs need to be prudent while allocating their budgets between low-, medium-, and high-potential investments, reinvest saved costs to fund growth activities, and leverage unallocated budgets to fuel other investments.



Marketing has changed almost beyond recognition. Leading the function in today’s disruptive era means balancing creativity with commercial impact. We are no longer just selling the brand story, we are driving business performance through every customer interaction. This is more than a technological step forward. It is a leadership transformation.”

- Marketing leader, leading retail enterprise (India)





Establish clear measures of success

This forms an important link between strategy and execution. Today, success metrics go beyond clicks, impressions, and open rates. With agentic systems in place, performance metrics can have a direct impact on business outcomes and customer satisfaction. Therefore, CMOs need to arrive at what these ‘hard’ metrics are, whether it’s lower customer acquisition cost (CAC), improved customer lifetime value (CLV) lower agency costs, or reusability of assets, etc.

These metrics ensure that CMOs can effectively quantify the commercial impact of marketing on the overall business, and here is where creative execution meets the eye of the CFO. PwC’s report ‘Marketing in the AI era: To matter more or cost less?’ lays out ‘the “value equation” pyramid: golden metrics’, which is a tool to bridge marketing metrics with executive key performance indicators (KPIs).¹



Source: PwC, Marketing in the AI era

1. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/front-office/marketing-in-the-ai-era/to-matter-more-or-cost-less.html>

Here is what these metrics mean:

Business metrics	These are the traditionally established metrics of revenue growth, market share, and margins expansions. Here, the value created by marketing can be calculated by dividing the gross profit by the marketing spend.
Marketing ‘golden metrics’	These are the strategic KPIs owned by marketing and reported to senior leadership.
Marketing diagnostics metrics	These metrics are like the report card of the ‘golden metrics’ and track the outcomes vs planned KPIs. They also highlight any course correction that may be required.

This effectively means that it would be incorrect for marketing leaders to track outcomes using any single measure. Instead, they should focus on how the metrics are contributing to specific business outcomes. However, it is also important to remember that not all metrics can

be ‘quantified’, especially by small and medium-sized businesses with less mature systems. Absence of a roadmap, limited budgets, and sporadic investments further make it difficult to identify success measures.



Secure stakeholder buy-in

This can be crucial for CMOs to be valued as growth drivers of the business. Now with agentic AI, CMOs have a chance to move faster than ever before, unlock newer markets, deliver unparalleled customer experience, and even re-invent business models. The good news is that a

majority of CMOs feel supported and confident. According to PwC’s Pulse Survey insights, **nearly 92% of CMOs said their colleagues supported them in making bold bets and over 78% said they were confident of handling the strategic aspects of their role.**²

2. <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/executive-leadership-hub/library/business-outlook-100-days-cmo.html>

02 Execute with precision

Though AI has been around for some time, not many organisations have been able to harness its full potential. The truth is that the results have been proportional to the investments. Companies that were after short-term goals such as productivity gains, capacity improvement, or minor efficiency improvements have seen limited results with no impact on the top line.

However, this reality is gradually shifting as CMOs have come to realise that the technology will continue to evolve. Hence, they need to match its speed of evolution with smart planning and fool-proof execution to realise tangible success.

Marketing leaders now have the complete arsenal to define KPIs, leverage tools and technology,

create value, and measure performance. The actual difference arises when leaders take a disciplined approach to prioritising execution that leads to sustained value in the short, medium and long terms.

Having worked with various clients on their transformation journey, combined with our decades of experience, we've discovered that strategy does not fail as a result of being too ambitious. Instead, it fails due to lack of discipline in execution. CMOs who want to deliver real impact need to take a practical approach on how marketing should run. We have narrowed down this approach to four foundational levers:

01 Evaluate your current assets—skills and tools

Before adding headcount, platforms, or agencies, step back and audit what you already have. Most marketing teams are capability-rich but alignment-poor. The question is not 'What are we missing?' but 'Are we fully utilising what we already own?'

Start with a skills inventory. Map your team's capabilities against your strategic priorities—brand building, performance marketing, lifecycle, analytics, content, and MarTech operations. Where are the gaps? Where are the redundancies? With one of our clients, for example, marketing transformation accelerated only after leadership aligned specialist talent

(creative, data science, automation) into integrated pods aligned to customer journeys instead of channel silos. The shift unlocked speed and measurable revenue contribution.

Next, rationalise your technology stack. Historically, we have seen most CMOs utilise only a fraction of their MarTech stack's capabilities. We have seen organisations pay for enterprise platforms while running them like basic email tools.

Execution excellence begins with clarity: who owns what, what tools power what outcomes, and how success is measured.

02 Optimise and leverage data

Data is not an asset unless it informs decisions at speed. High-performing marketing organisations treat data as an operating layer, not a reporting layer.

This means integrating first-party, behavioural, and transactional data into a unified customer view. A global F&B company has successfully demonstrated how this works in practice. The company's loyalty ecosystem is not just a rewards

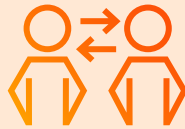
engine—it is a behavioural data engine that informs personalisation, offer timing, store-level inventory planning, and product innovation. The result is a measurable lift in frequency and average ticket size.

Similarly, a retail ecommerce leader's recommendation engine is not merely a UX feature; it is a revenue multiplier powered by real-time data feedback loops. The principle for CMOs is clear: Move from dashboards to decision engines.

Operationally, this requires



Clear data ownership
and stewardship



Strong collaboration
between marketing and IT/
data teams



Defined KPIs tied to
business outcomes, not
vanity metrics

The real unlock happens when campaign planning, budgeting, and forecasting are informed by predictive insights rather than historical averages.



Agentic AI can create a transformational shift for marketing as a function that can accelerate innovation, increase agility, and deliver unparalleled customer experiences in today's digital-first world. However, it requires thoughtful adoption. With clear goals, robust data foundations, cross-functional collaboration, and ethical rigour, marketing leaders can unlock new growth frontiers and solidify their roles as catalysts of business transformation.

- **Digital transformation leader, Indian consumer packaged goods enterprise**



03 Build an AI-first workforce

AI is not a good-to-have feature; it is a capability shift. An AI-first workforce does not simply use AI tools—it redesigns workflows around them so humans can make decisions with AI at the core.

Rather than replacing creative teams, AI can accelerate ideation cycles and enable rapid testing and variant generation across markets.

For CMOs, this means three practical actions:



Upskill teams on prompt engineering, AI-assisted analytics, and automation.



Redesign processes so repetitive tasks (reporting, segmentation, asset resizing) are automated.



Hire hybrid talent—marketers who understand both storytelling and systems.

The competitive advantage will not come from having AI tools, as everyone will have them. It will come from embedding AI into campaign planning, media optimisation, content production, and forecasting workflows.

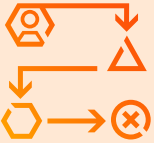




04 Make governance a priority

Speed without governance creates risk.
 Governance without speed creates stagnation.
 The winning model balances both.

As marketing becomes more data-driven and AI-enabled, issues of brand safety, regulatory

compliance, privacy, and ethical AI use rise to the forefront. Organisations that treat governance reactively could be jeopardising their organisation, resulting in both reputational and financial losses.

Effective governance includes:

 <p>Clear decision rights (RACI models)</p>	 <p>Defined data privacy protocols</p>	 <p>AI usage guidelines and review boards</p>	 <p>Brand and messaging guardrails</p>	 <p>Transparent performance reporting structures</p>
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Governance should be designed into the operating model—not layered on after a crisis.

Bringing it all together

Marketing is no longer just a creative engine—it is a growth system. And like any system, its performance is determined not just by ambition, but also by architecture.

Successful CMOs understand that execution is structural. Evaluating assets ensures focus. Leveraging data ensures precision. An AI-first workforce ensures scale. Governance ensures sustainability.



03

Measure the impact

If execution discipline builds the engine, measurement determines whether it is compounding or stalling.

Agentic AI—systems that can autonomously plan, execute, optimise, and learn across marketing workflows—fundamentally change not only how

value is created but also how it is measured. Traditional campaign ROI models are too narrow. CMOs need a multidimensional measurement framework that captures revenue impact, operational leverage, speed, and strategic advantage.

Here is how marketing leaders can approach impact:



Tie agentic AI directly to revenue contribution

The first rule: Measure AI against business outcomes, not experimentation metrics.

Agentic AI influences revenue in three primary ways:

Incremental demand generation

Conversion lift

CLV expansion

For example, an e-commerce seller's AI-driven recommendation systems can contribute to a substantial portion of total sales. The lesson isn't the algorithm—it's the attribution model. Recommendations are tied directly to basket size and purchase frequency. AI isn't evaluated on 'engagement'; it's evaluated on revenue.

For CMOs, this means:

Designing controlled experiments (A/B or geo tests) isolating AI-driven interventions

Measuring incremental lift vs. baseline human-driven campaigns

Quantifying revenue per campaign hour or revenue per dollar spent

If the AI can autonomously re-allocate media budget, personalise offers, or optimise bidding, then its output must be benchmarked against prior performance.



Measure operational leverage, not just marketing output

Agentic AI compresses time. That time compression has monetary value.

For example, accelerated creative production enables companies to speed up their market testing and iteration ability. The measurable ROI is not just campaign performance in that case—it is reduced production cycles and increased experimentation velocity.

CMOs should track:

Time-to-launch reduction

Cost per asset produced

Campaign iteration velocity

Cost savings from automation

Ratio of strategic vs executional hours in the team

If agents hypothetically reduce reporting time by 40% and campaign build time by 30%, what is that freed capacity worth? Often, ROI emerges not from headcount reduction but from redeployment into higher-value strategic work.

Operational ROI is frequently the fastest and most defensible win in AI transformation.



Quantify decision intelligence gains

Agentic systems improve decision quality over time by learning from performance data. The question that then arises is, are decisions getting smarter?

If a company leverages predictive analytics to tailor offers through its loyalty platform, the value can be measured in frequency and spend per member. The underlying AI continually improves offer timing and relevance.

CMOs can measure:

Forecast accuracy improvement

Media allocation cost and efficiency

CAC reduction

Increase in personalisation-driven revenue

Decline in wasted impressions

A practical framework is to track 'AI-optimised vs non-optimised' campaign deltas over multiple cycles. If optimisation compounds, the ROI is exponential, not linear.



Capture customer experience and retention impact

Agentic AI can orchestrate omnichannel journeys autonomously—adjusting messaging across email, paid media, web, and app interactions.

AI-powered personalisation across in-app and other digital ecosystems can drive stronger loyalty engagement and higher purchase frequency. These gains can then be measured in repeat purchase rate and lifetime value.

CMOs should measure:

Retention rate changes

Churn reduction

Net revenue retention (NRR)

CLV

Engagement-to-purchase conversion rates

The long-term ROI of AI often lives in retention economics, not just acquisition.



Track risk mitigation and governance ROI

One aspect that is often overlooked is the contribution of AI governance towards protecting enterprise value.

Agentic AI operating without guardrails can create compliance risk, brand inconsistencies, or biased targeting. Conversely, well-governed AI can reduce human error in media spend, ensure regulatory adherence, and protect brand equity.

The ROI here is defensive:

Reduction in compliance violations

Reduction in media waste or fraud

Brand safety improvements

Fewer crisis-response costs

Avoided loss is still measurable ROI



Create a composite AI ROI scorecard

The most effective CMOs do not rely on a single metric. Here is what a comprehensive AI impact dashboard can look like:

Financial impact: Incremental revenue, CAC, CLV, marketing contribution to pipeline

Operational efficiency: Cost savings, time reduction, asset throughput

Decision quality: Forecast accuracy, optimisation lift

Customer outcomes: Retention, personalisation impact, net promoter score (NPS)

Risk and compliance: Governance metrics and incident reduction

This balanced view prevents short-term performance bias and captures strategic value creation.

The strategic perspective

Agentic AI should not be justified as a cost centre efficiency play alone. It is a force multiplier for growth.

The true ROI question for CMOs is not 'Did AI reduce my costs?'

It is 'Did AI increase my organisation's capacity to generate, capture, and retain demand at scale?'

When AI becomes embedded in planning, execution, optimisation, and learning loops, marketing evolves from campaign-based execution to autonomous growth orchestration.

That is where ROI moves from incremental to transformational.



04

Looking ahead

It is clearly time for CMOs to position themselves as ‘growth partners’ rather than ‘**creative communicators**’.

Agentic AI marks a turning point for the marketing function—not as another layer of automation, but as an intelligent partner to CMOs embedded across the value chain. When leaders plan with purpose, AI sharpens strategic choices, revealing where to play and how to win. When they execute with precision, it leads to expansion of markets, sharpening of differentiation, and strengthening of customer demand. Finally, when measuring impact, AI connects marketing activity to enterprise outcomes with greater clarity, speed, and accountability.

However, this requires a rigorous, evidence-based case to be made across the executive

team, so that the strategic role of marketing is fully understood.

The opportunity before organisations is not simply how marketing can be done more efficiently, but to redesign how marketing creates value at its very core. Technology can intensify each link in the value chain, accelerating results when applied strategically. Organisations that recognise this will transform marketing from a support function into a compounding growth engine—one that shapes demand, strengthens competitive advantage, and delivers durable shareholder returns.



05

How PwC can help

Agentic AI is reshaping how businesses operate, compete, and sustain themselves for the future. At PwC, we help businesses unlock this potential responsibly with our expertise and tailored solutions. Our technology solutions are designed to speed up your transformation, delivering value at scale. We will help you redefine the future,

reimagine your current business model, and build agentic automation solutions at scale. Our team of specialists can help you innovate faster, reduce your time to market, and deliver enhanced customer experiences. Finally, we do all this responsibly while helping you manage possible risks.



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