



tmI Partners CMO Roundtable Series

# The Impact of AI on B2B Marketing

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## Introduction

There was great excitement in the room regarding the topic of AI, with many asking questions from the offset, intrigued to know how their peers are investing in new technology, how they can get ahead of the curve and the journey to becoming market leaders with the support of AI. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly impacted businesses' operations and will continue to do so in the future, but we are merely scratching the surface in terms of its capabilities.

We sat down with some of the world's leading B2B marketers who are now incorporating AI to improve their marketing strategies, enhance productivity, and create a better client experience.

This report will explore various themes relating to AI, including:

- How AI is used and perceived by Global CMOs
- The effect it will have on productivity
- Changes to the structure of the marketing function moving forward
- How AI will affect staff acquisition and specialist roles

We were joined by:

- *Chris Blaik, GVP EMEA Marketing, previously at Oracle*
- *Javier Diez-Aguirre, Chief Marketing Officer - Coadjute*
- *Neil Dowling, Chief Marketing Officer - Rightpoint*
- *Margaret Franco, Chief Marketing Officer - Finastra*
- *Mehul Kapadia, Chief Revenue Officer - Locus*
- *David Keene - Chief Marketing Officer, Europe - Wipro*
- *Mark Lewis, Chief Marketing Officer - Pulsant*
- *Ayla Lyon, Marketing Director - Broadbean Technology*
- *Tamasin Manwaring, Marketing Director, Global Disputes - Hogan Lovells*
- *Susan McKay, Chief Marketing Officer - Dun & Bradstreet*
- *Barney O'Kelly, Marketing Director - AlixPartners*
- *Bonnie Pelosi, Chief Marketing Officer, UK - Microsoft*
- *Dan Roche, VP Marketing - Scoro*
- *Tal Valler, Chief Marketing Officer - HockeyStick*
- *Craig Welch, SVP, Head of Research Marketing - Elsevier*
- *David Zaranka, Manager - tml Partners*
- *David Price, Director - tml Partners*



## Productivity

One of the most significant benefits of AI is improving productivity, and Tal Valler, CMO, emphasized this point by displaying an example that showcases how it can streamline tasks: [A video that was produced and edited entirely by AI](#), including the visuals, the voiceover, the transitions, and the transcribing. This is a project that would previously take days for a production company, but instead has taken merely hours with the right instructions.

But how is AI being utilized by our panel of marketing leaders in day-to-day operations? Is AI being used to curate entire campaigns, or is this premature? Neil Dowling, CMO at Rightpoint, believes that we are just scratching the surface in terms of how AI can streamline our work processes, and this is especially true in relation to creative roles and specialties. ***“At its best, AI could be a replacement for certain in-house skills.”***

Craig Welch, SVP at Elsevier, has found AI to be of high value in creating detailed personas of potential

customers. ***“AI can tell us who this person is and how they are most likely to interact with our brand and services.”*** This has been incredibly useful in the collaboration between marketing and sales, as the sales team has more information available on their target audiences than ever.

There can be a tendency to focus on the risk AI will bring, but ***“it’s worth considering how AI can take the risk out of certain practices,”*** continued Craig Welch. For example, AI can support the influence and responsiveness of your campaigns, as opposed to monitoring an endless list of variations and filtering down to the best tactic, which still won’t work for everyone. AI could mitigate the risk of wasted resources in this regard and put the right message in front of the right person at the right time. But while AI offers many further benefits to B2B marketing leaders, such as data analysis, content creation, and personalization, it’s important to harness these abilities alongside human skills.

The importance of integrating human skills with these technologies shouldn't be underestimated and will lead to us getting the best out of AI, including the most creative tasks. While AI could support lead generation, for example, identifying leads and analyzing data from various sources at a speed humans couldn't, the marketing team can provide important context and insights that may be overlooked by algorithms. There's an assumption that AI can do 100% of a task, but human balance is needed to monitor and evolve alongside the technology.



## Humanizing AI and Mitigating Risks

Perhaps humanizing AI as much as possible is a way to mitigate some of the perceived risks and general fears over the adoption of such advanced technology. **“Think of it like an employee, rather than as technology,”** said Barney O’Kelly, Marketing Director at AlixPartners. This human approach makes it easier to structure and format AI into the marketing function, seeing it as a welcome addition rather than a replacement, and this could have a dramatic impact on productivity and morale.

With this in mind, it’s important to consider how AI needs to be nurtured when tackling new audiences or the nuances of international markets. **“You can teach people how to use tools, but you can’t teach emotion and how to interact,”** said Ayla Lyon, Marketing Director at Broadbean Technology. Different markets relate and empathize differently, and this could be lost using AI, leading to ineffective messaging that is interpreted unexpectedly.

**“AI could train itself into a corner,”** said Margaret Franco, Chief Marketing Officer at Finastra, hence the need to have experts who are able to look at the outcomes and **“understand the relevance AI output has to the consumer”**. There is also the issue of algorithm bias, where the algorithms AI uses aren’t diverse enough to reflect the goals of a business. Here lies additional responsibility for the human owner to ensure adequate data and context are provided to prevent this from happening and damaging company reputation.

The people-focus should be shielded and maintained despite the desire to do more with AI. **“People still buy people,”** added Tamasin Manwaring, Marketing Director at Hogan Lovells. There is also a risk of **“diminishing your expertise and credibility”** if all your content is written by AI, said Barney O’Kelly, AlixPartners. By taking a nuanced approach, leveraging expert local expertise, and using human skills to test and iterate AI messaging, a healthy middle ground can be found where AI’s full value is discovered.

The ideal combination and balance of human skills and AI technology is completely relative to each business and their sector. Bonnie Pelosi from Microsoft raised the potential issue of AI turning your team into **“one of everything, but losing a certain area of specialization,”** which could affect your point of difference and how people relate to your brand.

It’s also important to remember that the marketing industry has been leveraging AI for some time. Chris Blaik, GVP EMEA Marketing, added, **“we’ve been harnessing AI for years, from customization to real-time targeting, so this is just a continuation.”** From Amazon, Siri, Gmail, Spotify, Facebook, just to name a few that will be well-known to the end-user, AI is already cemented in a lot of our daily lives. **“AI products are called ‘AI’ in their early days, but as soon as they become useful, they’re no longer referred to as ‘AI,’”** added David Keene, Chief Marketing Officer at Wipro.

The emergence of conversational AI, such as ChatGPT, has brought the term ‘AI’ to the forefront, especially due to its accessibility to consumers and businesses alike. The ease of use, along with AI’s rising popularity, has seen senior company executives more keen than ever to utilize these new technologies. Whereas in the past, it was perhaps for the preservation of the enthusiasts and technologists. Leaders of marketing functions may need to educate senior executives on best practices for implementing AI, ensuring that they don’t lose sight of long-term strategies and visions just to say they are using the latest MarTech.



## Consumer Upskilling

The use of AI is also evolving in the lives of consumers, and their rising expectations of AI performance may be tricky to keep abreast of. Neil Dowling, Rightpoint, built on this, explaining that we are all very excited about AI, but it's important to note that customers are as well, and they are upskilling every day. Younger consumers are going to be comfortable and willing to have relationships with AI. They see the value in this relationship, so it's a race to see who can find the right combination and approach. Tamasin Manwaring, Hogan Lovells, agreed with this point. ***"We are seeing this in the coaching space. Conversational AI can be used to build rapport"*** rather than just giving answers.

As companies introduce AI to add more value to their customers' lives, there will no doubt be more competition in AI-powered services, as well as the need for more sophisticated AI to cater to the individual needs of customers. Customer expectations will increase, and poor use of AI will become a major risk factor for B2B marketing leaders.

Whatever 'good' is, it needs to link back to how it benefits the customer, rather than just how it streamlines processes and frees up time. 'Good' looks like advocating for the client, not just churning out irrelevant content for the sake of using the latest MarTech.

AI is not just going to affect the marketing function; it will undoubtedly affect sales, customer service, and the entire organization, so it has to be leveraged to stay on top. Bonnie Pelosi, Microsoft, believes ***"this isn't a threat. I see it as a great opportunity to evolve the marketing function"***. Now is the time to capitalize on it by upskilling, integrating, and collaborating. This will enable teams to evolve alongside AI. ***"Marketing is progressive, and we are in a position where we need to consider and take exciting risks,"*** added Susan McKay, Chief Marketing Officer at Dun & Bradstreet.

Knowing when and how to invest in AI training is complex as we aren't yet sure of the full potential it has within marketing teams. It's going to be a journey for each organization. Margaret Franco, Finastra, believes that we need to be prepared as it will be ***"harder in the short term, but then it will just be 'different'."*** She added that there will need to be as much focus as possible on what *good* really looks like once the standard has been set, but right now we don't know what the standard is.



## All Roads Must Lead to Customer-Centricity

AI's value will ultimately be defined by *“how it improves the quality of the pipeline,”* said Chris Blaik, previously of Oracle. It needs to enhance our understanding of the customer, the right time to convert, and how to improve our relationships with long-term and new customers, rather than simply increasing content frequency.

The marketing department is one of the few that deeply focuses on human emotion, and for the integration of AI to be considered successful, it needs to complement this need. Tal Valler made the point that *“as marketing leaders, we are the people who should know the brand, the product, and the customer more than anyone. So the power of AI needs to influence and add to this knowledge.”*

Mehul Kapadia, Chief Revenue Officer at Locus, emphasizes that having a thorough understanding of AI is crucial before upskilling teams. This includes not only being aware of AI's capabilities but also *“knowing*

*the right questions to ask to ensure that AI outputs are highly relevant to the organization.”* Without a clear comprehension of AI's abilities and limitations, it becomes challenging to effectively train and upskill teams in utilizing AI technologies to their full potential.





## AI Learning & Development

How will AI affect talent attrition and the promise of learning and development programs? *“Employees now place a lot of value on how employers upskill their staff, and AI is going to be a topic many want to be well-equipped to handle”* commented David Price, tmi Partners. Additionally, what opportunities will this create in the workforce? As alluded to earlier, the next generation of marketers will possess a better general understanding of AI’s capabilities compared to the previous generation. David Keene, Wipro, added, *“We live in a hybrid world where these technologies blend into our personal lives,”* meaning that the focus will be on how to utilize AI in the context of specific business goals, rather than general usage and familiarity with selected tools.

Despite the prevalence of AI, many attendees of this roundtable held the belief that traditional marketing skill sets will remain a priority while we upskill the use of new technologies. Enthusiasm for new technology is easy to find, but this enthusiasm must contribute to being commercially-minded, building robust strategies, and effectively communicating goals and visions to board members. *“It also comes down to how marketing team members can bring these data points and findings from technology to life as storytellers,”* added David Zaranka, tmi Partners.

Mark Lewis, Chief Marketing Officer at Pulsant, added to this point, saying there’s a risk of adopting too many new AI tools and drifting away from the desired commercial outcome. Building a massive tool stack is useless unless *“as leaders, we take a view of how it’s really improving the pipeline and driving the business forward.”* *“We need people who are tool-aware but still know how to be traditional marketers,”* added Dan Roche, VP Marketing at Scoro.

However, there will still be a place for experts, especially considering the rate of new technology adoption and the need to gain a competitive advantage. Javier Diez-Aguirre, CMO at Coadjute, added, *“I think perhaps we will see specialists, especially the younger professionals, who will work across various teams showing them how to get the best out of AI.”* This coincided with Tal Valler’s belief that mastering AI prompts will become an important part of the marketing function. He has seen full-time junior roles come to market in North America with a sole focus on building a framework of AI tools at a company’s disposal, with tips on how to get the best out of them.





## Conclusion

The rise of AI has had a significant impact on B2B marketing strategies, and there is great excitement among marketing leaders about its potential. The integration of AI into the industry offers numerous opportunities to enhance productivity and improve customer experiences, but generic use of AI will provide marketing teams with generic answers. However, implementing an AI model that works and learns alongside the team will elevate the function and the business as a whole. By leveraging AI's capabilities, marketing teams can gain a deeper understanding of their target audiences and further optimize their campaigns.

This is an exciting period for marketers, but perhaps initial fears over AI replacing elements of the function are not well-founded. It is crucial for marketing leaders to view AI as an addition to human talent, as human expertise and creativity will play a big role in shaping AI's use, developing a detailed and rounded view of customer behaviour, brand affinity, and integrated strategies. Whilst AI has the potential to enhance productivity and improve customer experiences, it must also be implemented strategically, keeping customer-centricity at the forefront.

Teams are scratching the surface in the realization of AI's full potential, but there must be a willingness to upskill, invest, take risks, consider specialist talent solutions, and adapt to gain a competitive advantage.

## Who are tml Partners?

tml Partners source marketing leaders for the world's most ambitious companies, harnessing a unique and dynamic approach to recruitment.

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