



AMERICAN MARKETING
ASSOCIATION

The AMA State of Marketing Careers Report

An in-depth look at how
marketing jobs, skills, and
teams are shifting in the
age of AI agents

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A Note from Bennie F. Johnson, AMA's CEO



The World Economic Forum projects net positive job growth globally through 2030, and marketers who adapt will find real opportunity in the disruption.”

The signals are there, and the data in this report makes them hard to ignore.

Marketers are rating adaptability, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking as less important than they did a year ago. These are not soft skills on the margins of the profession. They are the capabilities AI cannot replicate, and the ones our research consistently identifies as most critical for staying ahead. At the same time, influencer marketing sits at the bottom of the list when marketers rank the importance of 37 skills in our survey, yet “influencer marketer” is the fastest-growing role in our profession. The gap between what marketers think matters and what the evidence says is one of the most striking findings in this research. It should concern all of us when it comes to the future of the marketing profession.

While we should be concerned, I also want to be clear that the marketing profession is not collapsing. In fact, this is a critical juncture. The World Economic Forum [projects](#) net positive job growth globally through 2030, and marketers who adapt will find real opportunity in the disruption.

But adaptation requires an accurate read of where things are headed, and right now there is a meaningful mismatch between professionals' perceptions and market reality.

What I do know is that AI is now part of marketing's story, evolving alongside our profession and sometimes forcing uncomfortable changes. Marketing departments look different; the skills marketers need to succeed are changing dramatically and will continue to shift. There is no ignoring AI, and we can't wait for a clear path to emerge. If we do not evolve with the world, the world will move ahead without us.

We also found a significant gap between what AI can automate today and what organizations are actually doing with that capability. Most teams are stuck in experimentation mode, running pilots that never scale, with individuals using tools ad hoc with no shared standard. Closing that gap, deliberately and ethically, is one of the most important things our profession can do right now. The marketers and organizations that close it will not just survive the transition, they will define what marketing looks like on the other side of it.

That is what this report is for. Not to add to the noise about AI, but to give marketers and marketing leaders the specific insights, honest assessments, and practical guidance they need to move forward with clarity. The playbook for this moment does not exist yet. We believe our profession is the one to write it.



The gap between what marketers think matters and what the evidence says is one of the most striking findings in this research. It should concern all of us when it comes to the future of the marketing profession.”

Bennie F. Johnson
CEO, AMA

State of the Job Market

We know this: some jobs will decline, others will disappear, and entirely new jobs and even marketing-adjacent professions will emerge. The World Economic Forum [predicts](#) that the impact on jobs will be a net positive, with a 7% increase of job growth globally between 2025 and 2030. The catch is that 39% of workers' skills are on track to become obsolete in the same period. And marketing is more exposed to AI disruption than most, with one study reporting [50% productivity gains](#) in marketing output from AI. The roles, skills, and specializations that define the profession are shifting, and the map below is a starting point for understanding where things are heading.



A Recent Dip After Years of Stagnation

Today's marketing job market still pales in comparison to its prepandemic strength. Data from [Indeed's Hiring Lab](#) shows that marketing jobs in the United States are down roughly 27% from March 2020. In 2025, total job postings fell over 8% year-over-year, according to the [Taligence U.S. Marketing Jobs Report](#), though the number of employers posting jobs actually increased 5% over the same period. More companies were hiring, even if each was hiring for fewer roles. The first quarter of 2026 showed an additional dip of nearly 7%, likely driven by [significant layoffs](#) at Amazon, UPS, Microsoft, Target, Oracle, and Meta. The "low hire, low fire" stability of 2025 may be giving way to something more turbulent.

Behind every job posting statistic is a person trying to make sense of what it means for them, and workers are worried, particularly in North America. [Gallup's 2026 State of the Global Workforce Report](#) found that 52% of people globally say now is a good time to find a job.

In the U.S. and Canada, that number drops to 47%, the second lowest of any region in the world, behind only the Middle East and North Africa. The 47% favorability in North America represents a 10 percentage point drop from 2024 to 2025, and the lowest seen since the Great Recession.

How AI Is Reshaping Demand

While we have yet to witness a massive decline in open positions, AI has already tweaked the calculus on jobs that remain available. As a bellwether of things to come, job postings are becoming more explicit in emphasizing AI's role. According to [Indeed's Hiring Lab](#), the share of marketing jobs mentioning AI rose from 8% in January 2025 to 15% in December 2025.

Efficiencies unlocked by AI have streamlined the variety of marketing jobs available for hire to downplay rote production and emphasize critical thinking. Positions that remain execution-focused, such as a social media coordinator, copywriter, or search engine optimization (SEO) manager, are fading into the background in favor of roles requiring strategy and interfacing with AI.

The open jobs in marketing are skewing more senior as well. An analysis of 180 million global job postings from January 2023 to October 2025, conducted by [Bloomberly](#), revealed that despite drops in middle management and individual contributor roles, demand for senior leadership remained roughly the same. The study posited that companies are adapting to run lean-and-mean, phasing out bureaucracy and operations in favor of decision-makers and strategic thinkers.

Looking further ahead, the increase in generative AI-driven postings could correspond to workforce cuts down the line. In its [“Predictions 2026: Marketing Agencies”](#) report, Forrester Research forecasted a 15% reduction in marketing agency jobs due to “automation, redundancies, and efficiency,” with one CEO telling Forrester, “By 2028, we’ll double profits and halve the people.” That may be an outlier position, but it signals the direction of travel for some organizations trying to capture AI’s efficiency gains.



For Entry-Level Marketers, a Difficult Start but Still-Desirable Destination

A [2025 Stanford study](#) found that entry-level jobs are shrinking in AI-exposed occupations like marketing, breaking traditional pathways into office work. U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell [admitted](#) that the “job-finding rate is very, very low” for college graduates overall.

The long-term risk of this disruption is significant, notes an [April 2026 analysis by Newmark](#): without sustained early-career hiring, organizations risk depleting the talent pipeline they will depend on for experienced and leadership roles in the years ahead, a challenge compounded by an aging workforce approaching retirement.

That said, marketing remains one of the more attractive white collar jobs for those who can get in. The field offers some of the highest top-end salaries among business disciplines, with the top 10% of marketing managers earning more than \$200K per year, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#). Starting salaries at top programs like the [University of Michigan](#) exceed \$70K.

U.S. News and World Report [ranks](#) marketing manager 18th on its list of the top 100 jobs and 16th among the best-paying jobs, with a median salary of around \$160K, above-average opportunities for advancement, below-average stress, and above-average flexibility. For early-career marketers navigating a more competitive entry point, that’s a destination still worth working toward. The path just requires more deliberate skill-building and more flexibility about how to start.



Jobs Declining

Content Producers

According to [Bloomberg's analysis of job postings](#), content marketer roles fell 11% from 2024 to 2025. AI can produce drafts, variations, and scaled output faster and cheaper than a human team. As Jimi Gibson, VP of Brand Communication at Thrive Internet Marketing Agency, told the AMA: "The typical production roles are compressing because the number of people needed to produce content at volume has changed."

Copywriters

Generating functional copy, product descriptions, ad variations, and email sequences is exactly the kind of repeatable work AI handles well. Average copywriting is no longer a viable standalone career. The writers who remain in demand are the ones whose voice and judgment produce work that AI cannot approximate.

SEO Specialists

SEO saw the steepest job decline of any role tracked by Bloomberg, falling 15% from 2024 to 2025. The cause is structural: traditional search is no longer the main entry point for consumers to discover and purchase new products. It's social media, AI chats and summaries, and, increasingly, agents making decisions on behalf of buyers.

Jobs Growing

Marketing Strategists

As production roles compress, strategy roles are absorbing some of the oversight, direction, and quality control needed to ensure outcomes and impact. Bloomberg's analysis found that while individual contributor roles declined, demand for senior leadership held steady, suggesting that orchestration is increasingly in demand even as roles based on execution are shrinking.

Influencer Marketers

Bloomsbury noted that influencer marketing jobs rose by 10% in 2024 and an additional 18% in 2025—the highest jump for any marketing role. They speculated that this increased popularity is part access to advanced metrics, part users' AI fatigue: "People are developing an immune response to everything [on] the internet. But a skincare video from a TikTok creator their age? That still feels real and genuine."

GEO/AEO Specialists

The SEO role is not disappearing entirely. It's evolving in the AI era. The fields of generative engine optimization (GEO) and answer engine optimization (AEO)—improving searchability for AI large language models (LLMs) and AI-assisted results, respectively—are more in line with how modern users find information. For marketers with SEO foundations, this path would be a natural fit.genuine."

Jobs of the Future

Agentic Commerce Specialist

AI agents can now browse, compare, and transact on behalf of consumers, and purchases are increasingly happening inside AI interfaces rather than on traditional ecommerce sites. Sephora invested heavily in agentic commerce or “acommerce,” launching AI beauty assistants on its site as well as an [app](#) inside ChatGPT that lets customers discover and shop for beauty products through conversational prompts. Marketers will need to understand how to position and sell within these AI-mediated environments.

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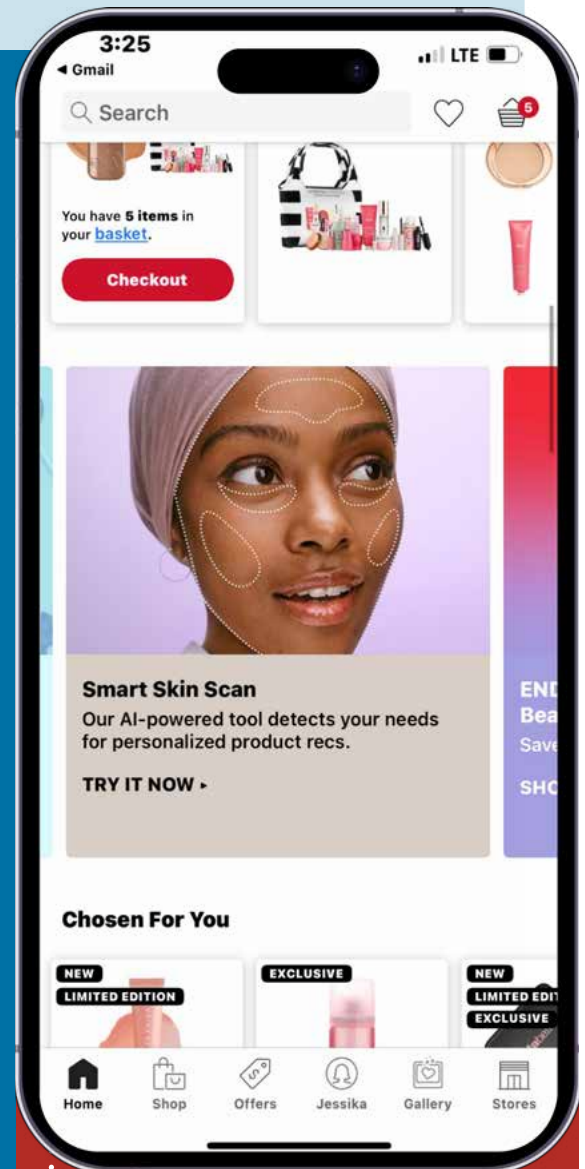
AI Workflow Designer

As AI agents handle multi-step tasks, the challenge shifts from managing people to designing the workflows those agents run on. In April 2026, OpenAI posted a job for an [AI Workflow Engineer](#) embedded inside its own marketing organization, tasked with designing systems that “combine agents and human operators.” The title may vary, but the function is already appearing inside forward-leaning organizations, and demand will only grow as more teams move from ad-hoc AI use to intentional workflow design.

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Agencies of One

In 2025, Katie Parrott [described](#) producing, in roughly two weeks with AI assistance, a volume of work that would have previously kept three or four writers at a small content marketing shop busy for two to three months. The agency of one describes a skilled operator directing AI across research, strategy, writing, and distribution simultaneously. High risk, high reward, and increasingly viable as the tools mature.



Sephora's Smart Skin scan uses AI to give customers a personalized skin analysis and recommended skincare routine.

Seismic Shifts

Marketing has always been a field in motion, but the pace and nature of what is changing is now different. As Tiffany Wilburn, Global Market Strategy Practice Lead at [Overline](#), puts it:

“

Marketing is, in my opinion, one of the most dynamic—if not the most dynamic—job function that people can choose. When you sign up to be a marketer, you are signing up to live in a tornado. The ground is never going to be steady underneath you.”

.....
Tiffany Wilburn

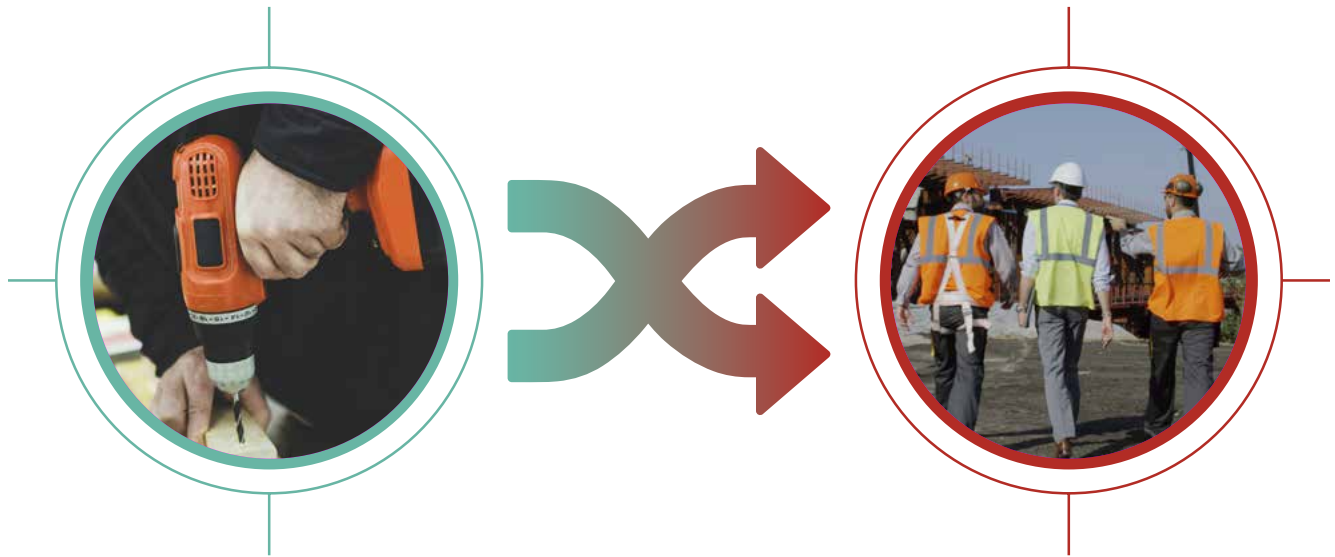
Global Market Strategy
Practice Lead, Overline



What follows are five shifts already underway that will reshape the profession from the ground up over the next few years: from the scope of marketing roles, to the structure of teams, the tools practitioners use daily, the means by which they upskill, and the career pathways available to them.

Shift 01

From Content Generation to Agentic Operations



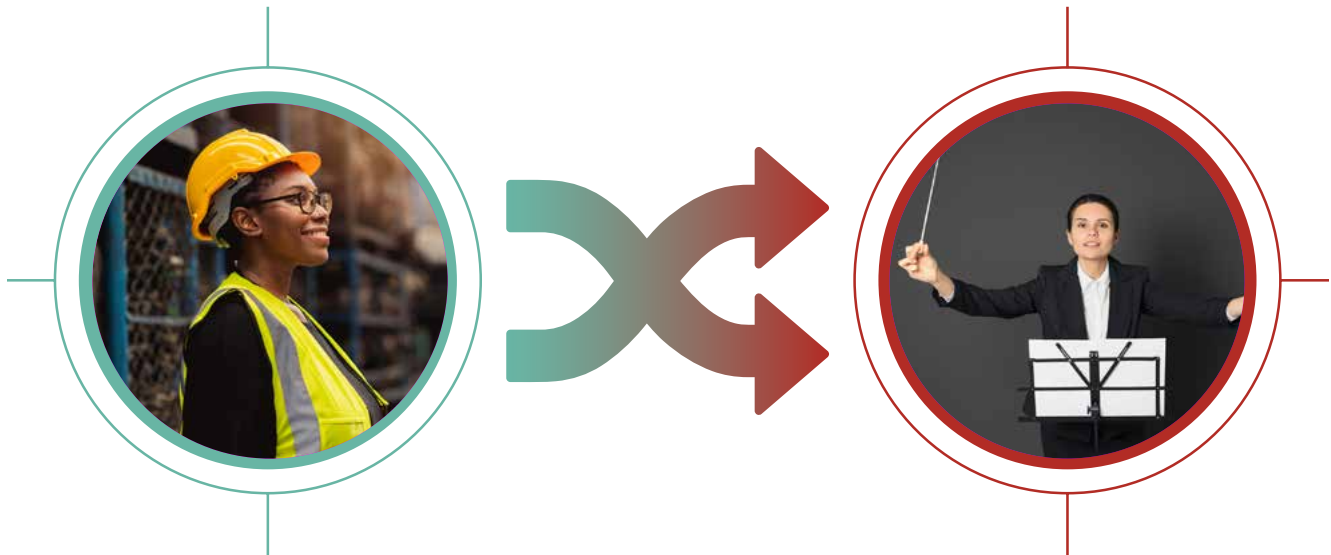
AI's role in marketing has evolved in distinct phases, a framework Jimi Gibson outlined in his interview with the AMA. In 2023, the focus was content production and prompt engineering, a period he characterizes as producing a tidal wave of low-quality output as everyone experimented at once. By 2024, the more sophisticated use cases emerged: workflow integration, client reporting, call recording, and summarization. Now, the frontier is agentic operations: AI that monitors campaign performance, flags anomalies, and executes adjustments, with humans serving as approvers rather than operators.

The shift from AI-as-tool to AI-as-agent changes the nature of marketing work fundamentally. Using an AI agent is less like picking up a drill to accomplish a specific task and more like managing a multiple-person construction crew. The human role is no longer doing the task. It is scoping the job, setting the standards, reviewing the work, and making calls the crew cannot.

The gap between this capability and current practice, however, is significant. A [2025 McKinsey report](#) found that only one third of organizations have begun to scale AI across teams, and those are primarily larger firms with more than \$5 billion in revenue. Sixty-two percent of organizations remain stuck in experimentation or pilot mode. For the profession as a whole, closing that gap is both the central challenge and the central opportunity of the next few years. Our take at the AMA: marketers must move deliberately to close the adoption gap, while remaining mindful not to over-automate and to keep ethical use at the center of every decision.

Shift 02

Executors Become Orchestrators



The move to agentic operations makes the next shift inevitable. As AI takes on more of the execution, the marketer's job is no longer primarily to produce (writing content, composing emails, designing collateral, posting on social media). AI shouldn't be given free reign to publish without oversight, but it doesn't require one-to-one micromanagement. A single marketer is capable of monitoring a few AI agents at once and adjusting output accordingly.

The result is a new kind of marketing role: the orchestrator. Rather than doing the work, orchestrators direct the systems that do the work, setting parameters, maintaining quality standards, and making judgment calls that AI cannot. [Gartner](#) predicts that within the next year, CMOs will steer towards "fully composable, AI-dependent marketing organizations." This could shrink the size of marketing departments and increase the level of cross-functional collaboration as individuals begin overseeing additional facets of the business. The marketer who can orchestrate across functions will be far more valuable than the one who excels at any single execution task.

Shift 03

Rise of the AI-Powered Generalist



As marketing teams shrink, the specialist model is under pressure. Hiring a dedicated SEO manager, a separate email marketer, and a distinct social media coordinator made sense when teams were large enough to support them. It makes less sense when AI can handle much of the execution across all three areas. [Reed Group](#), a global recruitment firm, sees 2026 as the year when demand for “all-rounder” marketers will reach a fever pitch because they enable companies, with the help of an AI co-pilot, to achieve more despite reduced head counts.

Wilburn sees this as a pendulum swing: “With the rise of digital marketing, we saw a lot more subject matter experts coming up. What we’re experiencing right now is the pendulum moving back towards generalists.”

Specialization is not completely dead, however. As Gibson notes: “If you are somebody who likes very narrow lanes, there’s still an opportunity to specialize in one particular area of expertise at a larger agency or an in-house role.” Areas like video production, AI workflow design, and GEO/AEO also reward deep expertise. The shift toward generalism is most pronounced in mid-sized teams and organizations running lean. Larger agencies and enterprise marketing departments will still need specialists. The difference is they will need fewer of them.

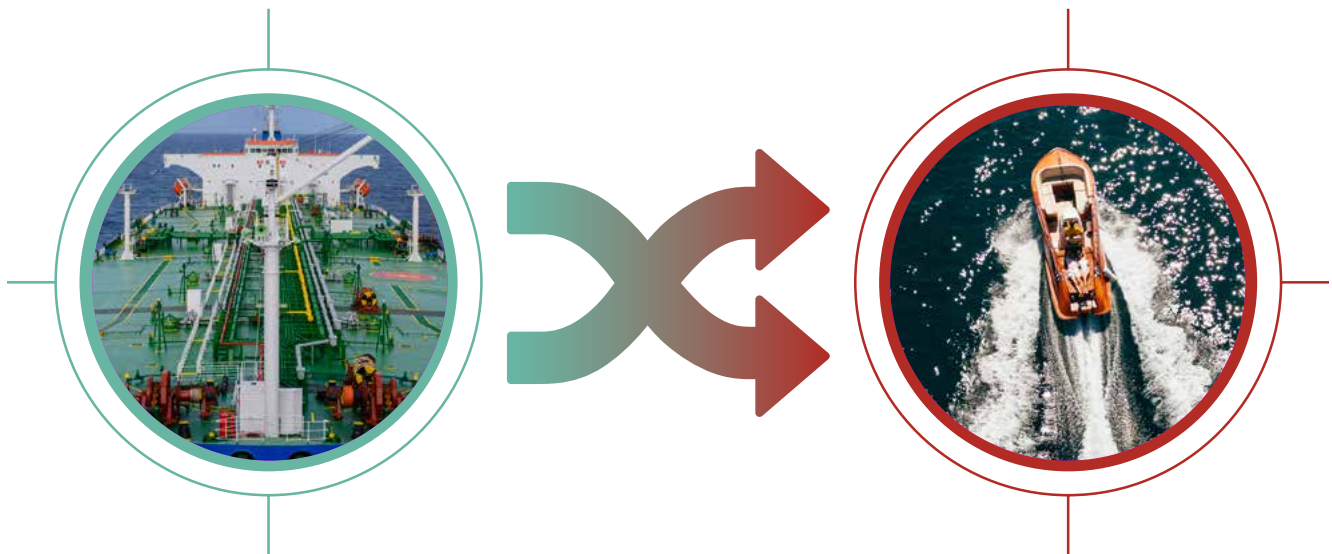


Beware of Brainfry

Marketers have to be wary of overloading these generalists with too much AI oversight. A new study by Boston Consulting Group, published in [Harvard Business Review](#), identifies a worrying phenomenon they call “AI brain fry,” a phenomenon afflicting employees tasked with monitoring an array of AI agents that runs counter to the promise of AI. Rather than freeing up time for these employees to focus on higher-level concerns, this situation causes much more stress, worsens burnout, and saps mental energy, particularly if employees are operating within a less familiar domain. The study finds that working with up to three AI agents improves productivity, after which declines are pronounced.

Shift 04

Leaner, Meaner Pods



The move toward orchestration and generalism leads naturally to a third shift: the restructuring of how marketing teams are organized. The large, hyper-specialized team built around handoffs and approval chains is giving way to something smaller, faster, and more empowered.

David Edelman, co-author of [Personalized: Customer Strategy in the Age of AI](#), describes watching this play out firsthand with the companies he advises. The problem with the old model, as he frames it, was fragmentation: too many

specialists, too many handoffs, too many people whose calendars had to align before anything could ship. “Marketing had become too specialized,” he says. “It took 13 people over 13 weeks to get something out the door.” The new model he is seeing is borrowed from software development: small, cross-functional pods of five or six people, each with enough range to own strategy, analytics, creative, media, and operations without constant escalation. “Instead of 13 people taking 13 weeks, you can have two or three teams of five people who each can do more, have more swing, because the tools enable them to do that now.”

Dan Slagen’s work is concrete proof of what a small, AI-first team can accomplish when the tools are used well and the people are empowered to move fast. Currently head of Marketing at Zapier, Slagen ran a four-person marketing team with a \$1 million budget at the weather intelligence company Tomorrow.io. The team’s accomplishments won Slagen a spot on the [Forbes 2024 Entrepreneurial CMO 50](#) alongside CMOs at giants like Amazon, GE, and Cola-Cola.

For leaders building or rebuilding teams, Slagen shared practical advice in his interview with the AMA:

Early and enthusiastic AI adoption gives small teams the tools to push the limits of what they can accomplish. Lead by example and build alongside your team. Celebrate wins publicly. Give people dedicated time to learn the tools. And make clear that everyone on the team can advance if only you can find the unlock that will convert them from a skeptic to a builder.

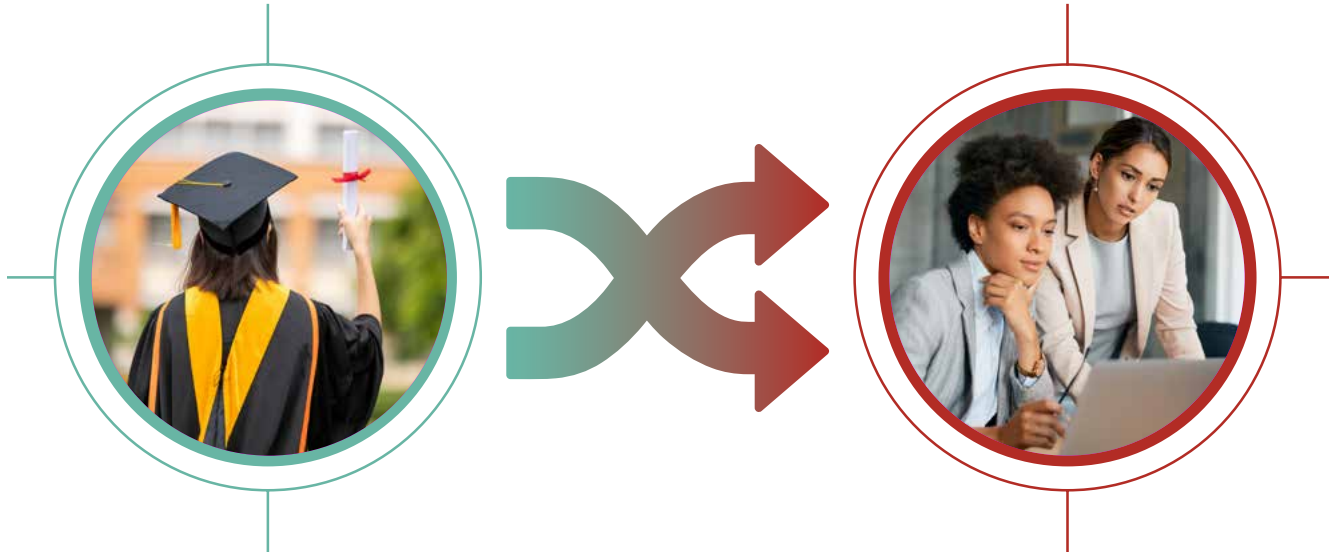
Dan Slagen

Head of Marketing, Zapier



Shift 05

From Degrees to Skills



The traditional path into marketing, a four-year degree followed by an entry-level job, is under real pressure from both ends. Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has [stated publicly](#) that he expects AI to eliminate half of all entry-level jobs as agentic capabilities mature. At the same time, organizational flattening means fewer junior roles and even [fewer internships](#) exist to absorb new graduates even at companies that are hiring.

What is replacing the traditional path is less linear and more self-directed. Hiring managers are increasingly expecting candidates to arrive with demonstrated skills rather than credentials: data literacy, AI fluency, and a portfolio of work that shows what they can actually do. A degree still matters, but it is no longer sufficient on its own.

The credential that will carry the most weight going forward is not a diploma. It is a track record of continuous learning and applied experimentation. That means internships that run longer and go deeper than the traditional summer program. It means freelance work that builds a real portfolio before the first full-time job. It means treating every project, whether inside or outside a classroom, as evidence of capability.

Universities are beginning to respond, some partnering with major AI vendors like [OpenAI](#) and redesigning curricula to reflect the skills employers are actually looking

for. At the [2026 Stanford AI+Education Summit](#), professor Mehran Sahami pointed to a foundational problem: AI has broken education's core assumption that strong work products indicate strong learning. Students can now generate impressive outputs without engaging in meaningful learning at all, which forces educators to shift focus from evaluating end products to assessing the actual thinking process behind them.



Photos credit: [Stanford.edu](#)

The MBA, long the gold standard for marketing leadership development, is also under pressure to evolve toward something more experiential: a mix of real-world internships, freelance engagements, and entrepreneurial projects rather than traditional lectures, exams, and grades. The marketers who will thrive in this environment are the ones who treat their own development as an ongoing work-in-progress, not a credential they finished at 22.

AI Disruption Map

Marketers who understand AI's ability to do common marketing tasks are better positioned to make deliberate choices about when to lean on AI (and when not to), where to focus their time, and what skills to invest in.

How We Created This Map

To map where marketing skills and activities fall on the AI automation spectrum, we used the Human Agency Scale (HAS), developed by researchers at Stanford. The scale runs from H1, where an AI agent handles a task entirely on its own, to H5, where the task cannot function without continuous human involvement.

We enlisted the help of marketing and AI experts to score each skill from our annual skills survey and every activity under the AMA Marketing Competency Model. Scores from ChatGPT and Claude were included as additional data points. For each competency domain, we averaged the score of each job activity.

H1

AI agent handles the task entirely on its own.

H2

AI agent needs minimal human input for optimal performance.

H3

AI agent and human form equal partnership, outperforming either alone.

H4

AI agent requires human input to successfully complete the task.

H5

AI agent cannot function without continuous human involvement.

Skills

H1 | Fully Automatable Email Marketing

H2 | Some Human Input

- Search Engine Optimization
- Social Media Marketing
- Channel Management & Optimization
- Budgeting & Financial Acumen
- Copywriting
- Graphic Design
- Lead Generation
- Market Research
- Marketing Technology
- Paid Media
- Performance Analytics
- Website Management

H3 | Equal Partnership

- Content Marketing
- Data Literacy & Storytelling
- Proving ROI
- Customer Experience (CX)
- Business-to-Business (B-to-B) Marketing
- Consumer Behavior
- Data Privacy, Compliance, & Security
- Influencer Marketing
- Project Management

H4 | Human-led

- Brand Management
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility
- Sustainable Marketing
- Innovation
- Marketing Strategy

H5 | Fully Human

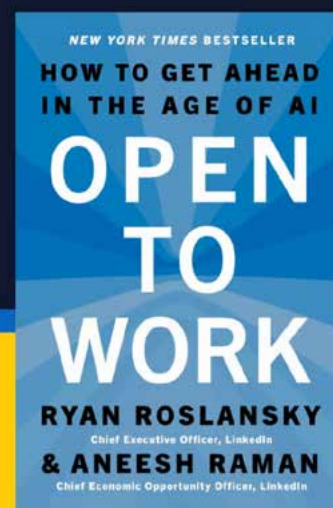
- Adaptability
- Emotional Intelligence
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Critical Thinking
- Ethical Decision-Making
- Leadership

The most disrupted skills—email marketing, paid media, SEO, lead generation, and performance analytics—share a common trait: they are rules-based, measurable, and repetitive.

The middle of the spectrum, the H3 skills, are content marketing, market research, consumer behavior, and data storytelling. These are skills where human-AI collaboration genuinely outperforms either party working alone. Marketers who learn to work fluidly in this zone, contributing judgment and direction while letting AI handle synthesis and execution, will have a real edge.

The least disrupted skills tell a different story. Leadership, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, creativity, and curiosity require accumulated experience, cultural knowledge, and relationship trust that take years to build. These are the skills that will command premium value as automation takes over execution-based tasks.

In their new book **Open to Work: How to Get Ahead in the Age of AI**, authors Aneesh Raman and Ryan Roslansky call these skills that will carry a competitive advantage for jobseekers the five C's: Curiosity, Creativity, Courage, Compassion, and Communication.



AMA Competency Model Domains



Marketing Ethics **avg. H4.2**

Marketing ethics sits at the human end of the spectrum, and the data reflects why: the tasks in this domain are rooted in values, judgment, and accountability. AI can help monitor regulatory shifts or flag potential risks, but deciding what the right thing to do is, and modeling that conduct for a team, requires human presence. This is one domain where automation support can be useful, but human ownership is non-negotiable.

Essential Capabilities **avg. H3.9**

The interpersonal and cognitive skills that make marketers effective with other people are, unsurprisingly, among the hardest for AI to touch. Emotional intelligence, adaptability, collaboration, and mentorship all scored at the high end of the scale. AI can handle scheduling and administrative support, but the capabilities that determine whether a marketer can build trust, navigate conflict, and grow a team remain firmly human.

Strategy and Planning **avg. H3.1**

Strategy sits squarely in partnership territory. AI can accelerate research, model audience segments, and synthesize competitive intelligence, but translating that into a plan that reflects organizational priorities, stakeholder realities, and market timing still requires human judgment. The risk here is outsourcing the synthesis without owning the direction. AI can be a strong thinking partner in this domain, but marketers should be wary of offloading this strategy work entirely to AI.

Content and Branding **avg. H3.0**

Content is where AI disruption is most visible and most misunderstood. AI can generate content at scale, but brand voice, creative direction, and the judgment to know when something is off are not automatable. The tactical work of content production has shifted significantly; the strategic work of building and protecting a brand identity has not.

Channels and Technology **avg. H2.4**

Scheduling, social monitoring, SEO, paid media optimization, and performance reporting are all tasks where AI needs minimal human input to perform well. That does not make channel expertise irrelevant, but it does change what expertise means. The value has shifted from execution to orchestration: knowing which channels to prioritize, how to integrate them, and how to interpret what the data is actually saying.

Data and Analytics **avg. H2.3**

Data and analytics is the domain most transformed by AI, with several early-career tasks, including routine reporting, data collection, and campaign monitoring, scoring at H1. AI handles the mechanical work of gathering and processing data faster and more consistently than any human team. What it cannot do—yet—is connect data to the business narrative, communicate findings to skeptical stakeholders, or make the judgment call about which metric actually matters. The analytical marketer of the future is less technician and more interpreter.

What This Map Cannot Tell You

1. The scores reflect what AI can do today, not what it will do even a year from now. For example, skills currently sitting at H3 may shift toward H2 as models improve.
2. The scores above reflect what AI is capable of today under the right conditions, not what most marketing teams are actually doing. AI adoption is much lower than the current theoretical capability, [according to research by Anthropic](#).

Marketers Weigh In

Marketers have opinions about where the profession is headed, and the data in this section captures them. The findings draw on an AMA survey of 1,412 marketing practitioners conducted in December 2025 and January 2026. For full details on how the survey was conducted, see the [Report Methodology](#).

Read alongside the job market signals, the AI Disruption Map, and the hiring trends elsewhere in this report, a concerning pattern emerges: what marketers believe will matter and what the evidence says will matter are not always the same thing.

- Human skills, strategy, and brand management top the list of skills marketers say are important for their jobs today

% who said the skill was “extremely” or “very” important for their current role

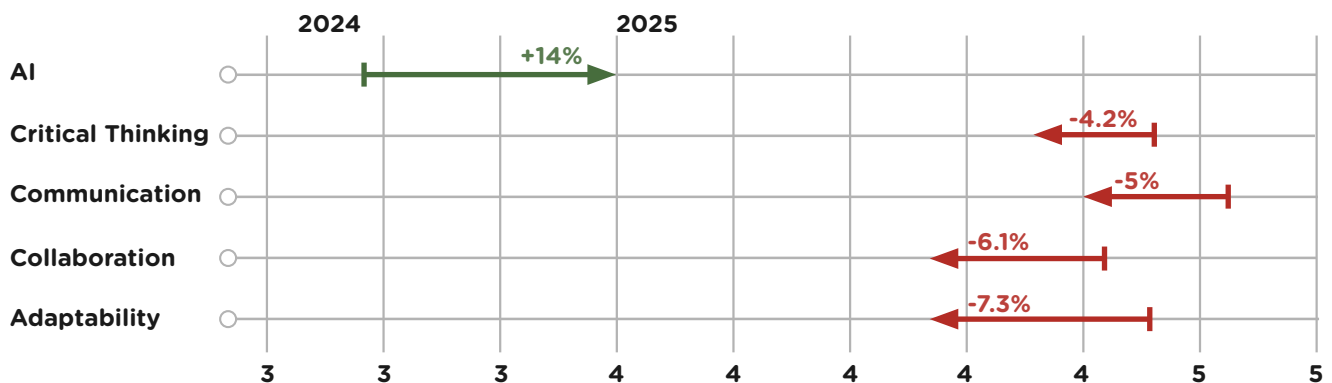


For the second year in a row, the top skills that marketers say they need today skew toward human skills, sometimes referred to as “soft” skills. **Communication, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and collaboration** occupied top slots.

- Companies are not hiring less judgment.
- They are hiring less execution.

But here is where perception and evidence diverge. Those same human capabilities, the ones most resistant to AI automation, were all rated as less important in 2026 than they were in 2025. This runs counter to nearly every signal in this report. The AI Disruption Map scores adaptability, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration at H4 or H5, meaning AI cannot function in these areas without continuous human involvement. The job market is moving in the same direction: job postings show that demand for senior leadership and strategic thinking are holding steady even as individual contributor roles decline. Companies are not hiring less judgment. They are hiring less execution. The marketers who underinvest in these capabilities now are making a bet that runs directly against the evidence.

Change in Importance for Current Role



A related concern is that marketers are feeling significantly more confident in their skills overall in 2026 than they were in 2025. Last year, marketers reported competency exceeding importance for only 10% of skills. This year that figure has jumped to 46%. That kind of confidence shift in a single year, during one of the fastest-moving periods in the profession's history, raises a flag. Some of it may reflect genuine growth. But it may also reflect overconfidence, particularly in human skills that are harder to self-assess than technical ones.

- Marketers reported competency exceeding importance for 46% of skills.

Top 10 Self-reported Skills Gaps for Marketers

Proving ROI

0.41

Customer Experience (CX)

0.23

Performing Analytics

0.39

Communication

0.14

Marketing Strategy

0.37

Content Marketing

0.14

Marketing Technology

0.26

Consumer Behavior

0.13

Search Engine Optimization

0.26

Data Privacy, Compliance, & Security

0.12

The competency gap data points in the same direction. The largest gaps, where marketers feel least equipped relative to the demands of their roles, cluster around **proving ROI**, **performance analytics**, **marketing strategy**, **marketing technology**, and **SEO**.

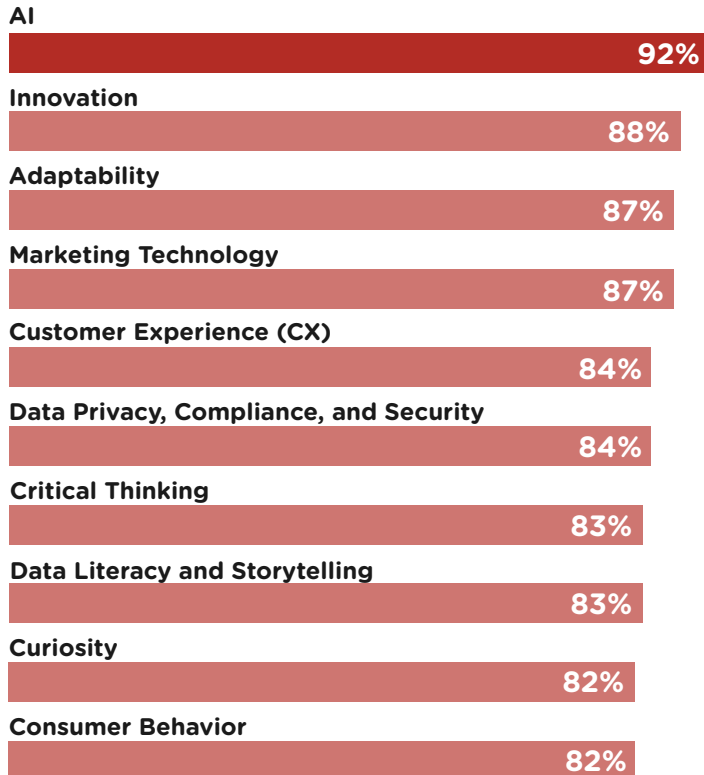
Meanwhile, AI, which market signals consistently flag as one of the most critical areas for development, ranked only 12th on the competency gap list, up from 23rd in 2024. The **AI** competency gap actually shrank from 0.39 in 2024 to 0.11 in 2025, which sounds like progress. But the gap did not close because marketers caught up. It closed because overall confidence in skills rose so sharply across the board.

Where marketers' perceptions do align with the evidence: **marketing strategy** rose from sixth in 2025 to second in 2026 in marketers' ranking of top skills today, reflecting how central high-level orchestration and decision-making have become as execution shifts to AI. Likewise, **brand management** jumped from 12th to 6th, a logical response to a landscape flooded with AI-generated content where distinctive, consistent brand identity has become harder to maintain and more valuable to protect. And **email marketing**, one of the most easily automated tasks according to this year's AI Disruption Map, fell in importance relative to other skills. These shifts show that marketers are reading the room. The areas where the evidence is most visible and concrete—strategy, brand, and channel automation—are exactly where perceptions are moving in the right direction.

Intelligence, Artificially

Top 10 Future Skills, According to Marketers

% who said the skill would become more important in 5 years



Looking ahead, marketers were unambiguous on our survey when asked which skills would be most important in five years. **AI** once again claimed the number-one spot on the list by a healthy margin, demonstrating that its prevalence is no longer a possibility, but an inevitability.

Still, there is a significant knowledge gap. AI ranked 23rd on our list of largest competency gaps in 2024. Today it sits at 12th, meaning the gap has widened even as awareness has grown. The pressure to close it is real and intensifying. AI fluency is moving from a differentiator to a baseline expectation, and the window for getting ahead of that shift is narrowing. Marketers who treat AI as something to explore eventually are increasingly finding that employers are not willing to wait.

Skills that support AI also topped the list of skills marketers thought would become more important in five years. AI agents require a wealth of data on which to train themselves, so it's not surprising to see **marketing technology** ranked fourth, **data privacy, compliance, and security** ranked sixth, and **data literacy** and **storytelling** ranked eighth. These skills are essential to understanding how data is collected, processed by AI, and synthesized into actionable insights; and a lack of knowledge in these domains could lead to data breaches and related hazards, severing customer trust.

Experimental Mindset

Data from [Kantar](#) found that disruptive brands have generated \$6.6 trillion of value over the last 20 years. With generative AI accelerating the rate of disruption, avoiding change has become even more of a liability.

When looking five years ahead, **innovation** and **adaptability**, two skills essential for embracing the unknown, were ranked second and third—a big jump for adaptability, ranked tenth last year. These results suggest that marketers need to be open to taking calculated risks and collecting feedback, guiding decisions by lessons learned in experimentation.

The proliferation of AI aids these efforts. Once it's been deployed, data analysis, which includes supporting charts and recommended next steps, can occur nearly instantaneously. Marketers that leverage the technology to maintain agility are going to thrive in a professional landscape becoming increasingly volatile.

Customer Focus

AI is likely going to take over operational tasks, but marketers expressed certainty that in five years, customers will continue to serve as their strategic north star.

Customer experience (CX) ranked fifth on the list of skills marketers said they'll need in five years, followed by **curiosity** (ranked ninth) and **consumer behavior** (ranked tenth).

Technological advances over the next five years will aid personalization efforts. AI can utilize customer data to offer targeted suggestions, such as online shopping recommendations, or power real-time dynamic content that adjusts messaging, imagery, and offers based on individual behavior as it happens. These AI agents can achieve a high level of specificity, unlocking the ability to tailor experiences to individuals themselves.

Whether the future of marketing is fully AI-powered or merely AI-enhanced, marketers maintain optimism that human-to-human connections with customers will never fall out of style.

• According to research from [SurveyMonkey](#), 52% of
• marketers felt they are better at understanding their
• target audience than AI, and 79% of consumers agreed.

Strategic Processing

- Both critical thinking and leadership
- fall near the middle of our list
- of biggest competency gaps.

Aided by AI, marketers will soon have a wealth of data at their disposal, not all of it relevant or immediately actionable. This requires diligent data interpretation and discernment about the stories data is trying to tell, synthesized into workflows rooted in tangible strategy.

Critical thinking, an essential strategic ingredient, ranked seventh on the list of skills marketers need in five years. Not far behind, **leadership** was ranked 13th, as any adjustments to workflows, processes, or best practices are going to require guidance.

The pieces for this change are already falling into place. Both critical thinking and leadership fall near the middle of our list of biggest competency gaps, meaning that marketers agree on their importance and feel they hold an appropriate amount of knowledge to accomplish them effectively.

These nine skills represent the AMA's synthesis of expert interviews, market signals, and AI disruption data to identify what will separate thriving marketers from struggling ones over the next five years.

They share a common thread: none can be fully automated, at least not yet, and all become more valuable as AI absorbs the execution work beneath them.





Leveling Up in AI



This section offers three tools to help:

Knowing which skills matter is only half the equation. The other half is understanding where you actually stand and how to move forward.



1

A **personality assessment** to identify your current relationship with AI,

2

A **practical fluency rubric** developed by Zapier to benchmark your team, and

3

An honest look at the **cognitive risks** of AI dependence and how to avoid them.

What's Your AI Personality at Work?

As AI becomes embedded in office jobs, we're seeing distinct patterns emerge in how people adapt and where they stumble. Some professionals are using AI to reimagine their roles entirely. Others are optimizing incrementally. Some are resisting adoption, while others are over-relying on the tools in ways that backfire. And many are finding that AI-enabled "productivity" has become a fast track to burnout.

These aren't just individual quirks. They're archetypes that reveal broader truths about how organizations are navigating this transition. Often without clear guardrails, training, or honest conversation about what's actually working.

We've identified five core AI personalities that capture the most common patterns we're seeing in workplaces today. Understanding which archetype you lean toward (and when) can help you make more intentional choices about how you use AI, avoid common pitfalls, and advocate for the support structures you actually need.

The five archetypes are:

1

The Architect

Reimagining work from the ground up, using AI as a catalyst for transformation

2

The Engineer

Integrating AI pragmatically to optimize existing workflows

3

The Resister

Sticking with proven methods, skeptical of AI hype

4

The Over-Optimizer

Delegating too much to AI, creating quality problems for others

5

The Juggler

Taking on unsustainable workloads enabled by AI-driven speed

Most people don't fit neatly into one category. You might be an Engineer on routine tasks, an Architect when starting new projects, and a Juggler when deadlines pile up. The goal isn't to label yourself permanently, but rather to recognize your patterns so you can course-correct before small habits become big problems.

Ready to find out which archetype describes you? [Take the quiz online](#). Answer honestly about how you're actually using AI at work, not how you think you should be. Five minutes of reflection now could save you from months of unproductive patterns later.

Self-Audit Your AI Habits

Take the quiz, then block 15 minutes on your calendar for honest reflection. Look at your results and ask yourself:

- ?** When do I shift between archetypes? (Monday mornings vs. Friday afternoons? High-stakes projects vs. routine tasks?)
- ?** Which pattern is serving me well, and which is creating problems I haven't acknowledged?
- ?** What's one concrete change I could make this week to use AI more intentionally?

Then have a conversation with a trusted colleague or mentor about what you discovered. Sometimes the patterns we can't see in ourselves are obvious to the people who work with us. Ask them: "Do you see me falling into any of these traps?" Their answer might surprise you.

.....

For Team Leaders

Turn This into a Team Development Conversation

Have your team take the quiz individually, then dedicate some team meeting time to discussing the results together. This isn't about judging anyone's approach. It's about building shared awareness of how your team is adapting to AI and where you might need guardrails, training, or new norms.

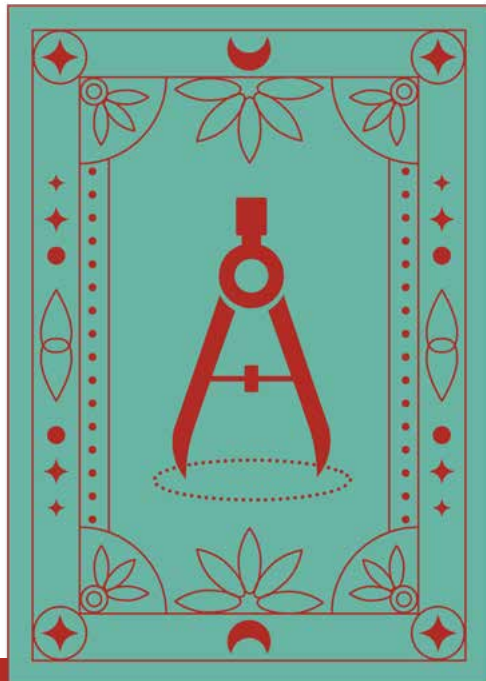
Discussion Prompts

- ? "Who got results that surprised them? What did you learn about your own patterns?"
- ? "Are we creating an environment where Jugglers feel pressure to say yes to everything? How do we change that?"
- ? "Do our Over-Optimizers know it's happening, or do they think their AI outputs are landing well?"
- ? "Are our Resisters being left behind, or do they have legitimate concerns we should listen to?"

End the conversation by co-creating team agreements:

- ? What does "good" AI use look like for your specific work?
- ? When should output be reviewed by a human?
- ? When is speed more important than perfection?
Make it explicit instead of assumed.

The Types



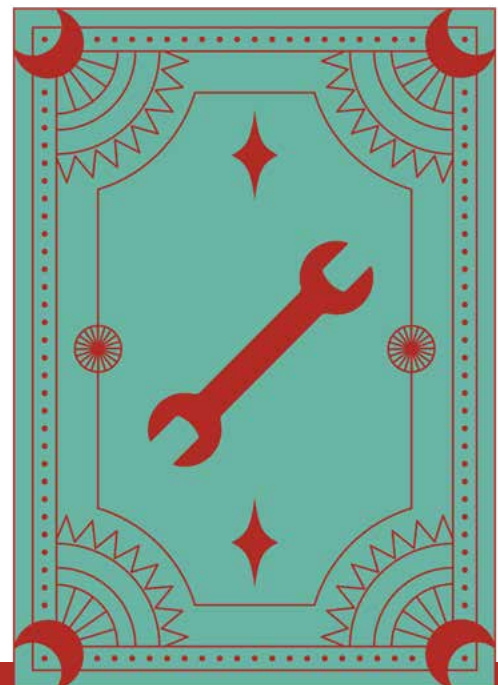
The Architect

You see AI as a fundamental shift in how work gets done—not just a tool, but a catalyst for reimagining processes, roles, and possibilities. You're energized by designing new workflows from scratch, identifying opportunities that didn't exist before, and thinking strategically about how AI can unlock entirely new business models or ways of solving problems. You're comfortable with ambiguity and experimentation, often serving as a bridge between technical capabilities and organizational vision. Your strength is seeing the forest, not just the trees.

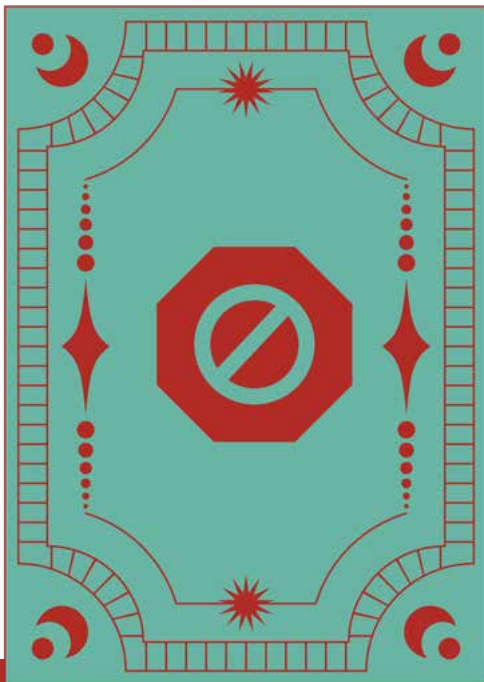
Watch out for: Getting so focused on the future that you lose sight of immediate, practical needs. Your ambitious redesigns may outpace your organization's readiness to change.

You're pragmatic and methodical. AI is a powerful tool in your toolkit, and you excel at identifying specific pain points where it can drive measurable improvements. You integrate AI thoughtfully into existing workflows, focusing on optimization, efficiency, and reliability. You ask questions like "What's the ROI?" and "How do we measure success?" You're building on what works rather than tearing everything down and starting over.

Watch out for: Missing transformational opportunities by staying too close to current processes. Incremental gains are valuable, but sometimes the biggest wins require reimagining the game entirely.



The Engineer

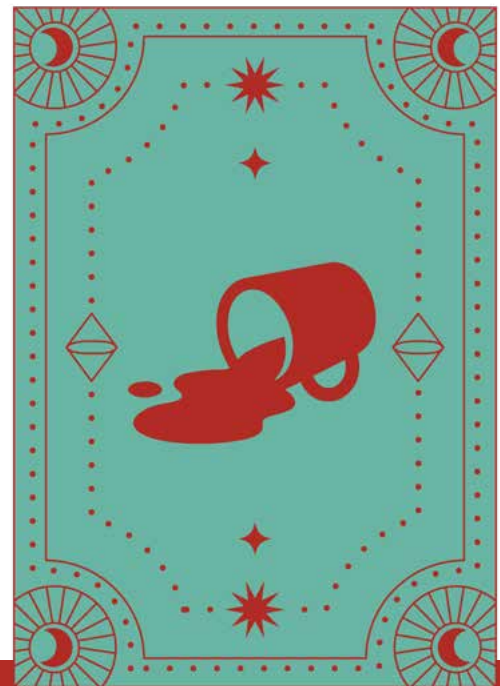
**The Resister**

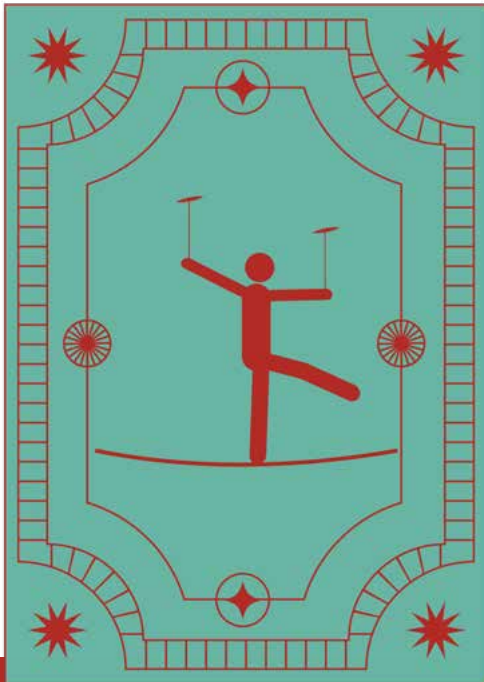
You're skeptical, and perhaps for good reason. Maybe you've seen too many tech fads come and go, or you're concerned about quality, accuracy, environmental, or ethical implications. You prefer proven methods and are wary of the hype around AI. While others rush to adopt, you're holding steady with approaches you know work. You value craftsmanship, expertise, and the human element.

Watch out for: The gap is widening. What feels like principled caution today may become competitive disadvantage tomorrow. Your expertise is valuable. Consider how AI might amplify rather than replace it.

You've embraced AI enthusiastically...perhaps too enthusiastically. You delegate extensively to AI tools, sometimes without sufficient review or context. First drafts become final drafts. AI-generated analyses go unchecked. Your output volume has increased, but quality and nuance have suffered. Your [workslop](#) is creating headaches for others: colleagues spend time deciphering unclear AI-generated emails, fixing errors in AI-drafted documents, or re-doing analyses that missed critical context.

Watch out for: Becoming a bottleneck rather than a force multiplier. Speed without judgment creates friction. The time you save may be costing your team—and your reputation.

**The Over-Optimizer**

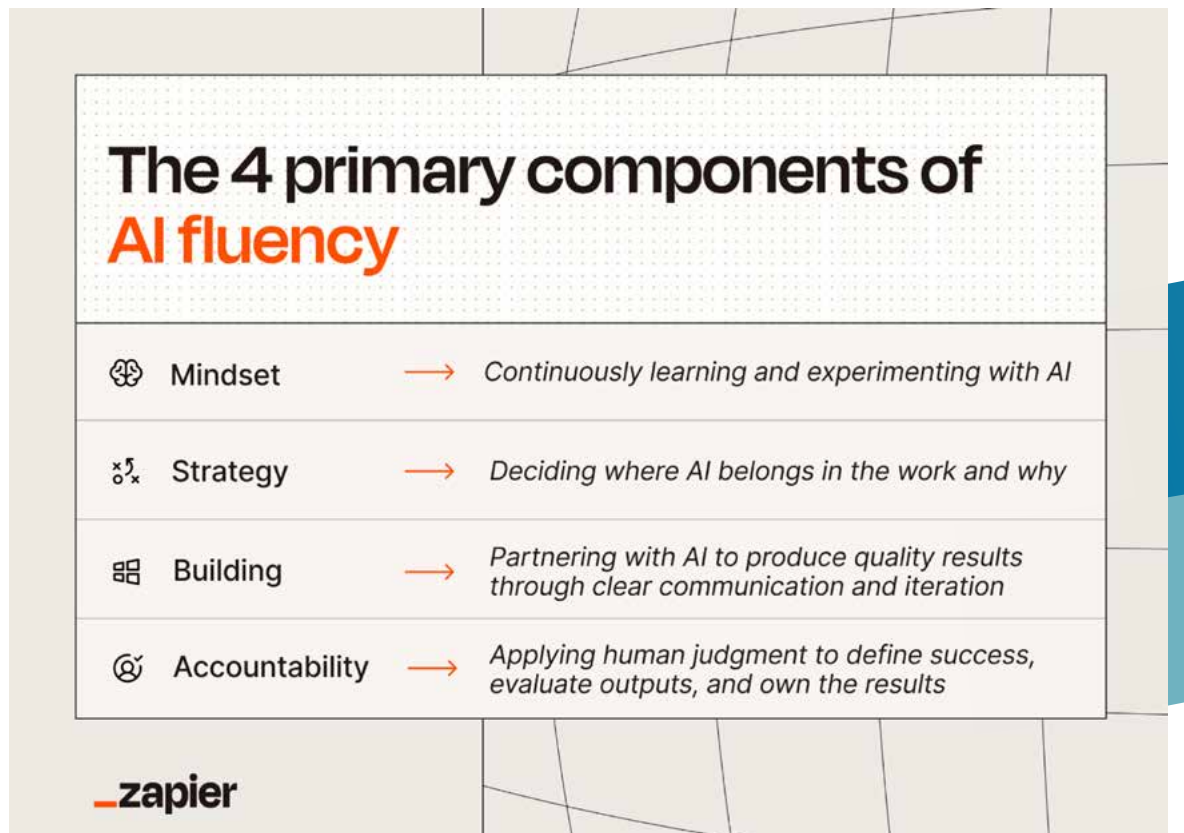


The Juggler

AI has made you faster, so you've taken on more. And more. And more. You're saying yes to projects you'd have declined before, handling a volume of work that once required a team. You're productive in the moment but stretched thin across an ever-expanding role. The promise of AI-powered efficiency has become a treadmill of escalating expectations from yourself, your manager, or your clients. Boundaries have blurred, and burnout is creeping in.

Watch out for: Sustainable productivity requires boundaries, not just better tools. AI should create capacity for strategic thinking and rest, not just an excuse to pack your calendar tighter.

Case Study: Zapier's AI Fluency Rubric



Many individual marketers are unsure how to get started with AI, or where to level up from where they are today. At the same time, marketing leaders lack clear frameworks to guide their teams beyond siloed, ad-hoc experimentation into sustained, widespread, and impactful adoption. The result is scattered usage, inconsistent results, and little transformation in how work actually gets done.

Zapier addressed this challenge by introducing and evolving an AI Fluency Rubric that is used to evaluate every job candidate. The rubric includes four levels of fluency, from unacceptable to transformative, and assesses four components: AI mindset, strategy, building, and accountability. [Zapier reports](#) that the rubric has contributed to an “explosion” in AI usage at the company within a year, with “100% adoption as teams across every function have moved from personal experimentation to redesigning teams and workflows with an AI-first lens.”

One key differentiator that Zapier hires for is “fluency slope” over static skill. They are looking for individuals who are showing forward momentum and an evolving approach; not someone who has already plateaued on their use of the tools.

For marketers, the rubric clarifies what progression looks like and provides a path forward for growing your AI skills. For leaders, having a clear rubric like Zapier's helps define what "good" looks like, and can be used for hiring, coaching, and developing your team.

Zapier's AI Fluency Rubric for Marketing

Unacceptable (if this is the extent of what they do)

- **Uses AI for first drafts only.** Output reads like unedited AI; hasn't developed a process for improving quality or adapting tone.
- **Uses AI for campaign ideas but has no real workflow.** Cannot explain how AI has changed their process, speed, or output quality. Before AI and after AI looks the same.

Capable "I use AI to operate at a meaningfully higher level."

- **Uses AI regularly across content, SEO analysis, and performance review.** Output volume and quality are both up, and they can point to specific examples.
- **Built a reusable prompt library for top content formats that the team now pulls from.** Can explain how they've iterated on it over time and why certain approaches work better than others.

Adoptive "I orchestrate AI and build systems that elevate how I work."

- **Has run AI-driven experiments with measurable results** (e.g., A/B testing copy that increased CTR by 18%) and now defaults to this approach across campaigns.
- **Built a content system** that drafts, formats, and schedules posts across channels. The team stopped doing that manually.
- **Has built always-on agentic workflows** that run without human involvement: content pipelines, monitoring, or campaign ops that operate 24/7.

Transformative "I re-engineer how work happens."

- **Built a personalization engine** that serves AI-generated campaign variants at scale, tied directly to pipeline.
- **Restructured how the marketing team works:** what gets automated, what gets owned, how success gets measured.
- **Has automated entire job categories and is driving measurable impact on pipeline and revenue.** The team's output is qualitatively different from what was possible before AI.

Will AI Make Us Dumb?



The way human beings tend to have original ideas is to immerse in a problem for a long period of time, which is something that flat out doesn't happen when LLMs do the thinking. You get shallow, surface-level ideas instead."

Writing copy, creating content assets, conducting market research, and doing data analysis can, to varying degrees, be entirely replaced by AI. Should they? And will an overreliance on artificial intelligence weaken the marketing professional by minimalizing human intelligence?

Consider the recent [prepublished study](#), titled "Your Brain on ChatGPT," which determined implications of using large language models (LLMs) to write essays. Researchers divided participants into three groups: LLM users, folks granted access only to search engines, and those afforded nothing but their brains.

The results demonstrated that the shortcuts granted by LLMs were detrimental to cognitive function, learning, and recall. LLM users were less engaged with the exercise than their counterparts, took less ownership of their work when it was complete, and even had trouble quoting their own work mere minutes after the exercise was complete.

The participants themselves didn't seem to notice, and, in fact, deluded themselves about the final product. When asked if they were satisfied with their outputs, 94% of LLM users said they were fully satisfied, as compared to 83% of those using their brains.

Writing done by an LLM is also diminished by a very low creative ceiling. A 2026 study by the [University of Montreal](#) had more than 100,000 participants and AI agents take a test called the Divergent Association Task, then produce poetry, movie summaries, short stories, and other creative works.

The researchers encountered mixed results. When comparing averages, AI received higher creativity scores than humans. However, AI paled when compared to the top creative half of human participants, and the gap widened substantially for the top 10% of creative humans.

Middling AI output is being vaunted as exceptional—and the prolificness of the technology means the market is being saturated by mediocre content. In an article for [Harvard Business Review](#), Dr. David Rock, a doctor of the neuroscience of leadership, noted AI's limitations as a partner, as well. He wrote that the increased prevalence of using AI agents to summarize meetings, in lieu of attending in-person or virtually, was robbing users of the intangible neurological value that comes with collaboration.

“Neuroscience has shown that when we focus on ideas in the company of others we encode the information in our brain more deeply and with greater understanding,” Rock wrote. “This is because we evolved to pay close attention to social signals—who's speaking, how others respond, and what that might mean for our own group standing. So just being in the presence of others will more strongly activate the brain.”

“The convenience that the technology provides strips away the very conditions—exposure, friction, and interaction—through which empathy, judgment, and relational capability are formed.”

On his website [Marginalia](#), software engineer Viktor Löfgren argues that doing the work itself, which runs counter to the core promise of AI, is paramount to learning.

“Having humans in the loop doesn’t make the AI think more like people, it makes the human thought more like AI output,” Löfgren writes. “The way human beings tend to have original ideas is to immerse in a problem for a long period of time, which is something that flat out doesn’t happen when LLMs do the thinking. You get shallow, surface-level ideas instead. Ideas are then further refined when you try to articulate them. This is why we make students write essays. It’s also why we make professors teach undergraduates. Prompting an AI model is not articulating an idea. You get the output, but in terms of ideation the output is discardable. It’s the work that matters.”

The loss of human-to-human connection and neural activity carries emotional dangers, as well. Another writer for Harvard Business Review, [Lynda Gratton](#), a professor of management practice at London Business School, lamented how AI has made empathy harder to develop. “When AI intermediates human interaction, it reduces exposure to the experiences that cultivate empathy,” she wrote. “The convenience that the technology provides strips away the very conditions—exposure, friction, and interaction—through which empathy, judgment, and relational capability are formed.”

Protecting Your Human Capabilities



DO

- Use AI to eliminate repetitive tasks, redesign workflows, and unlock new ways of working
- Employ AI as a thinking partner, not a thinking replacement
- Treat deep thinking as a muscle that needs to be protected and exercised regularly to stay sharp
- Generate your own ideas before brainstorming with AI
- For managers: Set clear expectations around AI and workload



DON'T

- Blindly trust AI outputs, even if they appear polished
- Outsource human interactions to AI, especially in emotionally complex or high-stakes situations
- Offload discernment or original thinking wholesale to AI
- Confuse speed or quantity with quality
- Don't ignore signs of [“brain fry”](#): mental fatigue, slower decision making, and difficulty focusing

Take Aways by Job Level

No matter where you sit in the marketing org,
three things are true right now:

1

AI fluency is no longer a differentiator.

It is a baseline expectation of marketers. The competitive advantage has shifted from whether you use AI to how well you use it: applying it to real workflows and using it to solve business problems rather than treating it as a separate tool you occasionally pick up. If you haven't gotten started using AI at this level yet—or at all—get started now, knowing even those who are experts will always feel behind.

2

Be open to reinventing yourself.

The marketers who thrive in the next five years will not be the ones whose roles survived intact. They will be the ones who actively shaped what their roles became. That requires an entrepreneurial mindset, whether you work inside an organization or for yourself.

3

The pace of change today makes inaction feel safe.

It is not. The marketers pulling ahead are not waiting for clarity before they move. They are making deliberate choices about their skills, their tools, and their careers now, and adjusting as they go. Agency is not something the moment gives you. It is something you exercise.

Independent Operators (Freelancers, Agency Owners, Creators)

Entirely new specializations like AEO/GEO are developing, and the independent operator who plants a flag early can own that territory. The same pace that creates that opening also means new competitors emerge constantly, often armed with the same tools and lower overhead.

Mindshift

Emotional labor is now a core part of the work for outside experts, explained Jimi Gibson, VP of Brand Communication at Thrive Internet Agency, in an interview with the AMA. Clients are anxious; the headlines around AI have been apocalyptic and contradictory. Being a trusted partner now means providing reassurance and helping clients determine what's worth their attention.

Watchout

Sounding authoritative has never been easier or cheaper, which means it's worth less than it used to be. Be a [thought doer](#), not a thought leader. The independent operators who will thrive are the ones with scar tissue: real experiments, documented failures, and firsthand experience they can bring to a client's specific problem.

Opportunity

The marketing functions most disrupted by AI, including AEO/GEO, agentic commerce, and AI workflow design, are exactly the areas where organizations need outside expertise the most. These are emerging enough that in-house teams lack confidence, but established enough that clients are willing to pay for guidance. Getting ahead of the curve here is high risk, high reward, but the window is open right now.

How to Get Ahead

- **Build a visible point of view and portfolio of successful client projects** where you helped move the needle with measurable outcomes.
- **Develop deep expertise in two or three of the highest-demand emerging specializations** rather than spread yourself thin across generalist services.
- **Your structural advantage** is likely the absence of overhead, approval chains, and competing priorities. Use it to move faster than large agencies can.
- **Position yourself as a strategic advisor**, not a service provider. AI and offshore competition are driving down the cost of output, which means competing on deliverables alone is a shrinking margin business. Judgment and outcomes are the differentiator.

Early Career

You are entering a market that does not yet know exactly what it wants from you. That is both a liability and, if you approach it right, an opening.

Mindshift

A degree and a job title will not define your career the way they defined the generation before you. What will define it is a portfolio of demonstrable skills, a track record of impact, and the ability to show exactly what you contributed and how. Start building that evidence now.

Watchout

The ability to use AI tools well is quickly becoming table stakes. Employers will eventually assume it. What they will hire and promote for is evidence that you have used AI to solve real business problems, and used it in a responsible way. Proactively seek out opportunities and document your impact.

Opportunity

The internship-to-full-time pipeline is restructuring. Entry-level roles are shrinking, but the demand for skilled, flexible contributors is not going away. Freelancing early, even on small projects, builds a portfolio and a professional network faster than waiting for a traditional job. It also builds the entrepreneurial instincts that will serve you regardless of whether you go independent, agency, or in-house.

How to Get Ahead

- **Commit to building expertise across multiple areas** rather than betting on a single specialization. The generalist with depth in two or three domains is the profile organizations are hiring.
- **Be prepared to demonstrate how you have used AI to solve real business problems**, and to show how your use of AI is evolving to become more sophisticated over time. Show both the process and the results.
- **Max out whatever AI tools are available to you.** Take them to their limits. If you don't have access to any AI tools at work, use free tools in your personal life to follow how the technology is changing.
- **Cultivate adaptability as a deliberate practice.** Seek out unfamiliar problems, take on stretch projects, and get comfortable operating without a clear playbook.

Team Leaders

The path upward used to be visibility through execution. Now it is visibility through influence. The skills that got you here are not the same ones that will move you to the next level.

Mindshift

Your value is no longer primarily in your ability to produce or manage production. It is in your ability to set direction, coach judgment, motivate teams to operate under ambiguity, and translate organizational strategy into team action. If you are still spending most of your time in the weeds, AI is not your threat. Your habits are.

Watchout

Do not let “coaching your team on AI” become a checkbox. Sending a Slack message about a new tool or hosting a single lunch-and-learn is not leadership. Mandating to use AI without redesigning how the work gets done is a setup for failure.

Opportunity

In most organizations, executives are anxious about AI adoption but uncertain how to lead it. The team leader who becomes a credible internal AI champion—someone who runs real experiments, documents what works, and translates findings upward—gains visibility fast. This role does not exist yet in most companies. You can create it.

How to Get Ahead

- **To move up, invest specifically in the skills that differentiate leaders from contributors:** strategic thinking, discernment and decision-making, big-picture business acumen, and the ability to influence and tell a compelling story with data.
- **Hire for skills and adaptability, not roles.** The job description built around a static function is becoming obsolete faster than the hiring cycle can keep up. Design roles with flexibility built in from the start, so you can absorb change without costly layoffs and rehires. Prioritize adaptability, quality control, taste, and AI fluency as the through-lines in every hire, regardless of function.

How to Get Ahead (continued)

- **To coach your team effectively on AI, draw on insights from [Zapier's research](#):**
 - Create psychological safety for teams to experiment with AI
 - Set clear expectations and make space for AI upskilling
 - Model change management through real implementation
 - Redesign workflows so AI meaningfully changes how team work gets done
- **Beyond Zapier's framework, four additions worth building in:**
 - Provide prompt, specific, and constructive feedback when AI outputs fall short of quality standards
 - Push toward innovation, not just efficiency
 - Advocate for your team to get access to the agentic AI tools they will need to stay relevant
 - Make it clear that everyone can advance, no matter where they are starting from

CMOs and Executives

The tools to reimagine your team's work already exist, but most organizations are stuck in scattered, ad-hoc AI use with no shared standard in sight. Closing that gap and moving beyond adoption to scaling are the defining leadership challenges of this moment.

Mindshift

Start by asking a genuinely difficult question. As futurist Amy Webb [puts it](#): “What are we willing to let die on purpose so that something more valuable can live?” Too many leaders are letting their teams stay fixated on optimizing for efficiency and the next quarter, without a vision for the future. The leaders who will matter most in this era are the ones willing to make deliberate, strategic bets about what to build, what to wind down, and what to reinvent.

Watchout

In most organizations, AI adoption is scattered and low. Employees are bringing their own tools, with no shared standard or direction. That is adoption by accident. Left unaddressed, your people and company will fall behind as competitors figure out a better way. The instinct is often to enact change from the top down. But as the new book [Open to Work](#) argues, it's better to lead by design and not command, letting innovation come from the bottom and sides.

Opportunity

AI makes it viable to blur functional lines that have historically been rigid, including between marketing and sales, marketing and technology, and marketing and customer success. Leaders who rethink these boundaries now, and redesign teams and workflows around outcomes rather than functions, will have a structural advantage over those who optimize within existing silos.

How to Get Ahead

- **Set the AI capability vision explicitly.** As the evidence from AI-first organizations like Zapier makes clear, people will not just figure it out on their own. They need tools, guidance, and clear guardrails.
- **Build AI into hiring, onboarding, and performance expectations** from day one.

How to Get Ahead (continued)

- **Invest in agentic AI tools** like Claude Code and Cursor, as well as upskilling your team to use them. These are the tools of the future of the profession, and you are curtailing your team's potential and future career prospects if you opt out.
- **Create recurring structures that incentivize AI innovation** and surface what is actually working at the team level: internal demos, experimentation labs, hackathons, and peer showcases. The best ideas in your organization are probably already happening. Find them and celebrate them.
- **Rethink not just efficiency but possibility.** The organizations that win will not be the ones that automated their existing playbook. They will be the ones that use AI to unlock entirely new business models.

Methodology

The American Marketing Association (AMA) conducted this mixed-methods study drawing on survey responses, interviews with thought leaders in the field, and secondary market data.

The survey was sent via email to 180,581 AMA subscribers and garnered 1,766 responses, resulting in a 1% response rate. Responses were collected from December 2025 to January 2026. Only professional marketers, as opposed to marketing academics or marketing students, were asked questions relevant to this skills study. Five \$100 Amazon gift cards were awarded randomly to those who completed the survey as an incentive.

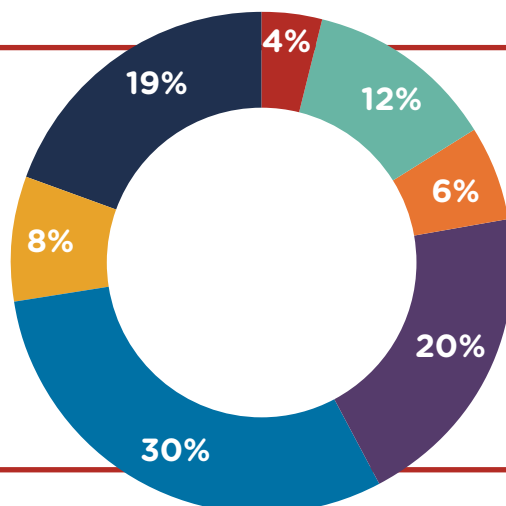
Beyond AMA subscribers, the survey was sent out to professional marketers through an external panel service, which resulted in 440 additional responses. This external panel helped ground the study's findings beyond AMA's current network.

A combined total of 1,412 marketing practitioners responded to the skills portion of the survey, with an estimated margin of error of 3% at a 95% confidence level.

Nevertheless, sampling bias was a limitation of the survey, with a majority of the respondents residing in North America and almost half being AMA members. Mid-level managers, those working at small companies, and certain industries, such as Higher Education, were over-represented in the respondents relative to the overall makeup of the marketing profession.

Survey Respondents by Job Level

- C-Level
- Owner, Partner, or President
- VP
- Director
- Manager
- Senior, Non-Supervisor
- Specialist or Coordinator



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