

When AI is everywhere, brands in the loop will rise to the top

AI isn't a zero-sum competition between humans and the machine — it's a positive-sum collaboration

AI immediately changed how companies did marketing. With time, it even began to transform how and where buyers make decisions, disrupting decades-old best practices.

Instead of relying only on Google, buyers now explore social media feeds, creator networks, communities, review sites, and AI answers before making a purchase. Companies tried to keep up and leaned into AI to produce content for all of these channels. But their copy sounded bland and boring, as marketers haphazardly adopted AI without protecting their distinct voice. Suddenly, brands flooded the internet with generic "we're made for everyone" messages — but buyers want brands that feel like they were made just for them.

While everyone has access to powerful AI tools, the companies that will be most successful are the ones that have:

- A strong brand and point of view
- A unified data foundation
- Good taste

We surveyed over 1,500 marketers to understand their priorities, goals, and challenges in the age of AI. 61% agree that your taste and brand POV are more important than ever when [humans and AI work together](#). 58% say that while search traffic is down, AI referral traffic has much higher intent — so visitors who do arrive on your site are much further along in their buying journeys than they used to be. And to convert high-intent visitors once they arrive, 60% say that you need seamless purchasing experiences fueled with tools like chatbots.

In this report, we'll of course break down the data. But we'll also teach you how you can take action. Plus, you'll find AI prompts and a customizable plan you can tailor to your brand.

Happy marketing!



Kipp Bodnar

CMO, HubSpot

Introduction + Key Findings

AI has disrupted marketing to be more human

As AI gets smarter, it allows marketers to be more human

61% of marketers believe that marketing is experiencing its biggest disruption in 20 years due to AI, which fundamentally changed how businesses engage with customers.

67% of marketing teams say AI saves them 10 or more hours per week, and another 68% say it's meaningfully increased their productivity, freeing up precious time for strategic thinking on how to connect with customers.

Whether it's increasing brand awareness or deepening customer relationships, the tactics that move the needle are still "soft" skills that AI can't do alone, like creative problem solving or building trust via emotional intelligence. And marketers agree: 63% say they need more unique, human-centered content to stand out.

Understanding how your buyers feel, how to connect with them, and how to build trust with them will always be a human's job. Savvy marketers use AI to clarify and elevate their thinking, not replace it.

Key findings

Omnichannel marketing amplifies content

75%

of marketers use 5+ distinct marketing channels.

Brand drives demand

85%

of marketers revisit their brand identity quarterly or annually.

Personalization gets audiences to act

93%

of marketers report that personalization improves leads or purchases.

Optimization is a growth engine

59%

of marketers review performance on a daily or weekly basis.

AI is a core part of marketing workflows

80%

of marketers use AI for content creation, and 75% use it for media production.

As search changes, so does content strategy

41%

of marketers say the top trend they're exploring is updating SEO strategy for changes in search.

What's new in 2026

2025

2026

Marketing goals

- 01 Increasing revenue/sales
- 02 Driving traffic to your website
- 03 Increasing engagement
- 04 Improving the customer experience
- 05 Closing more deals

Marketing challenges

- 01 Generating traffic
- 02 Generating leads
- 03 Hiring top talent
- 04 Driving purchases
- 05 Securing the budget you need

Strategy + Brand Trends

Expressing your brand's POV is a competitive advantage

Marketing results are strong, but there's room for growth

Despite a difficult economic climate, the marketers we surveyed had a good year.

65% met or exceeded their goals in 2025, and 72% report that current economic conditions have positively impacted their organization.

Year-over-year lead performance on marketing teams

93%

higher-quality leads

74%

more leads

Even with these results, 40% of teams haven't clearly defined or documented their brand's unique value proposition (UVP). That means there's still a significant opportunity to create content that resonates more strongly with audiences. Sure, AI makes it easier than ever to generate content. But without a clear brand POV, content can feel bland and boring. It's no surprise that 61% of marketers agree that expressing your taste and brand POV is a necessary component of a successful AI strategy.

The most successful strategies combine an omnichannel presence, strong brand identity, and personalization.

Marketing trends teams are currently exploring:

01

Using AI to create personalized content

02

Leveraging automation to make marketing processes more efficient

03

Creating content that reflects your brand's values (e.g. social responsibility)

04

Updating your SEO strategy in line with search algorithm changes

05

Repurposing content across various channels



"Channels have multiplied while attention shrinks. Today's buyers trust people, communities, and AI results more than ads. Feedback loops — not one-and-one campaigns — create compounding advantages. The types of metrics people cared about a couple years ago are far less relevant today than they've ever been. AI is crucial to today's marketers, but more important than AI is good taste."

KIPP BODNAR

CMO, HubSpot

Marketing performance pulse check

How marketing activities performed against goals in the last 12 months

Overall

Small to Medium Business

Mid-Market

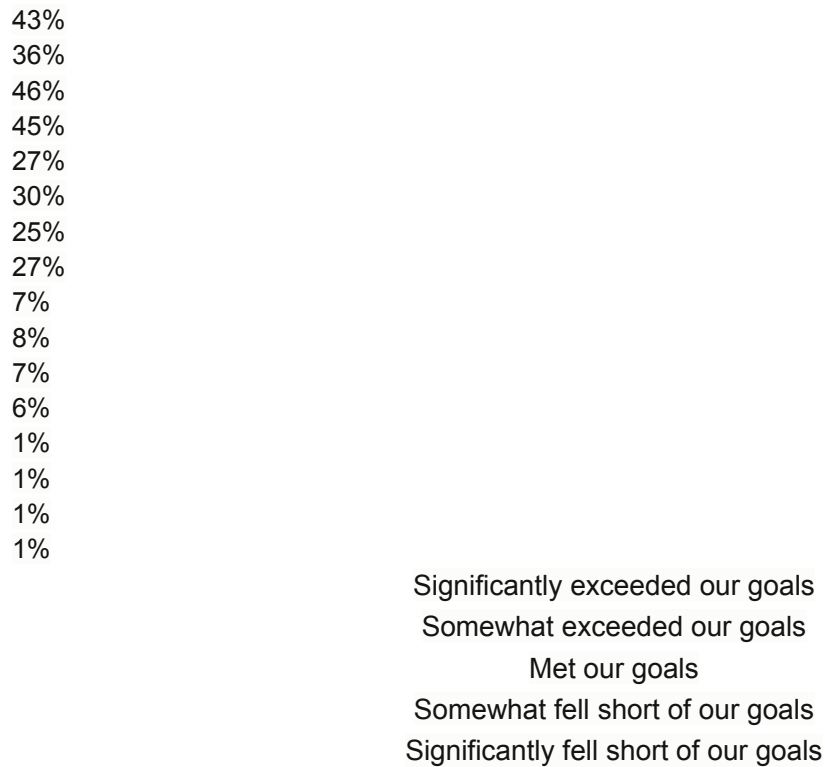
Enterprise

22%

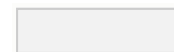
25%

22%

20%



Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



Omnichannel marketing

Today's marketing landscape requires a presence across multiple channels and platforms — only 6% of marketers rely on just one or two.

How many channels marketing teams are using

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

25%

use 3-4 channels

52%

use 5-8 channels

17%

use 8+ channels

Most-leveraged marketing channels

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Website/blog/SEO

45%

1

Organic social media content

40%

2

Email marketing

40%

3

Paid social media content

39%

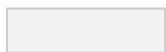
4

Brand awareness

36%

5

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



73% of marketers say their budgets are more heavily scrutinized than they used to be. Still, 93% expect their budgets to stay the same or increase in 2026.

Unsurprisingly, AI chatbots (38%) top the list of channels companies plan to increase investment in, followed by video marketing (37%) and paid social media content (37%).

To stay competitive, marketers are experimenting: 45% of teams allocate between 10–20% of their budget to testing new channels.

94% of teams diversified channels last year, and 4 in 10 said the most effective change was moving from broad platforms to niche communities, demonstrating the value of casting a smaller net to make higher-quality connections. Another 29% said expanding from digital-only to traditional media was their most effective change. At the same time, traditional channels are where most organizations plan to reduce their investment next year — 23% plan to cut their budget for physical ads, 22% for direct mail, and 21% for print advertising, showing that digital channels are only growing more effective.

Top marketing channels by ROI

Website/blog/SEO (search engine optimization)

27%

1

Paid social media content

26%

2

Organic social media content

24%

3

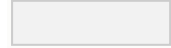
Social media shopping tools (e.g. Instagram Shops)

23%

4

Email marketing

22%



Brand is becoming more of a competitive advantage

Just over half (52%) of organizations have a clear, well-defined value proposition that differentiates them from competitors.

Marketers turn to data to define their brand, conducting competitor analyses (57%) or customer research (49%). Validating positioning is a data-backed exercise as well, with the majority of teams running brand perception surveys (61%) or monitoring changes in engagement after a positioning update (56%). Most teams refresh their brand on a quarterly (40%) or annual (45%) basis, taking an iterative approach that's becoming the norm as organizations deal with rapidly changing market conditions.

The branding investments that deliver the highest ROI

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Brand awareness campaigns

29%

Customer experience alignment with brand promises

23%

Brand messaging framework development

20%

Visual identity system

11%

Brand partnership or sponsorship opportunities

7%

Internal brand culture initiatives

6%

We don't measure ROI on brand investments

4%

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



"AI is not a critical 'marketing skill.' Positioning is a critical skill. Storytelling is a critical skill. Customer insights, creating something of value that prospects want, understanding how to educate buyers with the right content at the right time, creating a community among your audience, are critical skills. AI helps marketers with all of the above. But it will never replace marketers."

KIERAN FLANAGAN

SVP of Marketing, AI & GTM, HubSpot



Get in the loop

01.

Express who you are

Strategy

[Define your brand POV](#) and taste as a competitive differentiator — 61% agree it's essential for effective AI collaboration.

AI prompts/agents

Define my company's brand POV: The unique beliefs and strategic perspective that set it apart from competitors. Provide a structured framework that is ready for adaptation across any platform or channel.

Fill in: Company name and URL, target audience description, primary competitor URLs, and industry/category

02.

Tailor your approach

Strategy

Use [behavioral data](#) and CRM data to identify which of your channels and [brand touchpoints](#) resonate most with specific audience segments and customer types.

AI prompts/agents

Use [Breeze ICP Assistant](#), which adopts the perspective of your ideal customer, to provide feedback on personalized content strategies.

03.

Amplify your reach

Strategy

Strategically [repurpose content](#) across 5–8 active channels to maximize brand consistency.

AI prompts/agents

Analyze this content at the provided URL and give clear direction on how to adapt it to [platforms] while preserving brand voice.

Fill in: Content URL, brand messaging guidelines, goal of content

04.

Evolve in real-time

Strategy

Track [brand awareness](#) campaigns and optimize messaging based on performance.

AI prompts/agents

Analyze this campaign data and provide insights to guide creative refinement, message optimization, and cross-platform strategy, while maintaining consistency with brand positioning.

Include platform-specific recommendations.

Fill in: Campaign name and objective, platforms used, campaign duration, target audience description, brand messaging framework, key performance metrics by platform (URL or file upload)

Content Trends

Content by humans, for humans converts

Differentiation is tough in a saturated content market

Content has always been a pillar of marketing. 83% of marketers say that with the advent of AI, they're expected to produce more than ever before, and 80% of teams plan to maintain or increase their content budgets in 2026.

But content fatigue may be setting in.

Marketers' feelings about AI content

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

52%

of marketers believe AI makes content so easy to create that it's less effective overall

53%

of marketers struggle to differentiate their content in an AI-saturated market

Top content marketing challenges

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Creating content that receives high levels of online engagement (clicks, shares, comments, etc.)

35%

1

Finding ideas for new content

28%

2

Creating content on a consistent schedule

27%

3

Measuring ROI

25%

4

Choosing the right channels for content distribution

23%

5

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report

71% say AI helps them create significantly more content. But marketers are struggling to create content that *performs*. This paradox demands that marketers balance AI-powered efficiency with authentic differentiation. Whether you produce

human stories, behind-the-scenes peeks at your company, community-generated content, or compelling partnerships, get creative to break through the noise.



"Today, more content is generated by AI than by humans. But it's mostly average. Consumers seek human-created content, and will tune out brand and AI-generated content. Content will move to gated spaces that AI hasn't overrun, like newsletters, podcasts, and YouTube. Learning to craft content is a timeless skill. Don't follow the masses and outsource that to AI."

KIERAN FLANAGAN

SVP of Marketing, AI, & GTM, HubSpot

Short-form videos see the most returns — by a long shot

In a sea of AI-generated blog posts, marketers find the most value in the personal touch of video. This is especially clear for short-form videos. Not only was it the most-leveraged content format of 2025, it also generated the highest ROI: 104% more marketers named it their most valuable channel compared to 2024 (and it's where teams plan to invest the most for 2026).

Media formats companies use in their content strategy

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Short-form video

60%

Long-form video

38%

Blog posts

38%

Live streaming video

37%

Images

36%

User-generated Content

35%

Infographics

28%

Case studies

27%

eBooks

24%

Interviews

24%

Interactive content (polls, games, etc.)

23%

White papers

22%

Checklists/templates

18%

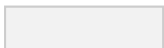
NFTs

3%

Podcasts or Other audio content

1%

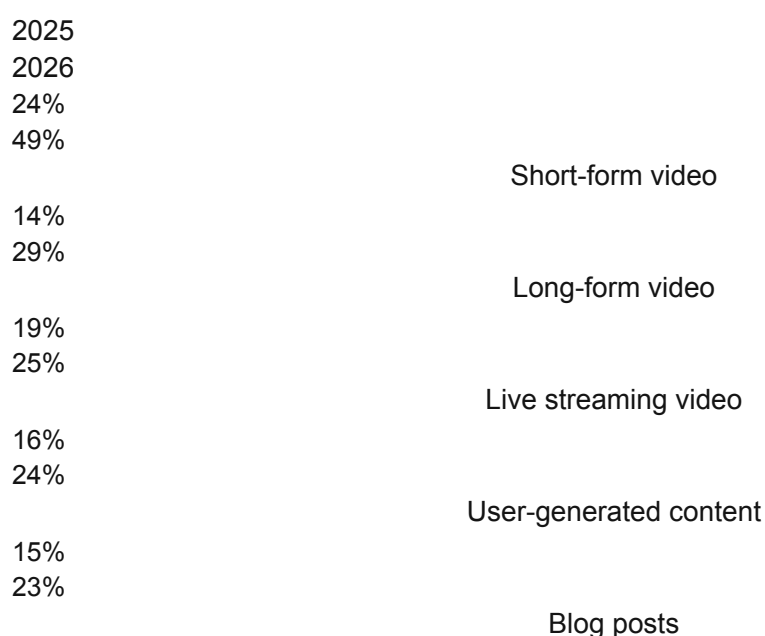
Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



Between TikTok's estimated [1.6 billion global users](#), YouTube Shorts' [200 billion daily views](#), and Instagram's [3 billion monthly active users](#) spending [50% of their in-app time](#) watching Reels, short-form video dominates consumer attention. Even LinkedIn, which has prioritized text-based posting and is yet to introduce native video recording capabilities, reported a [36% increase in video views](#). As brands invest more in organic and paid social media content and social media shopping, videos are here to stay.

[Read the guide to short-form video](#)

Highest-ROI content formats



Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report

But the written word isn't dead. Small businesses are 23% more likely than average to see ROI from blog posts. And they're 35% less likely to see ROI from ebooks, while enterprises are 24% more likely to. While these findings are useful benchmarks, the content formats you should invest in depend entirely on who your customers are.

Where content teams plan to invest in 2026

Overall

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30%

short-form video

13%

live streaming video

12%

long-form video

Social media growth is centered around short-form video

Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube dominate social channels, but in keeping with short-form video's growing dominance, more marketers are flocking to TikTok. The platform's usage grew the most of any social media marketing channel — 62% more teams use TikTok this year compared to last. Other fast-growing channels are LinkedIn (53%) and Twitter/X (43%), both of which support short-form video.

Social media platforms companies are using for marketing

Overall

Small to Medium Business

Mid-Market

Enterprise

70%

78%

66%

71%

Instagram

70%

77%

67%

66%

Facebook

69%

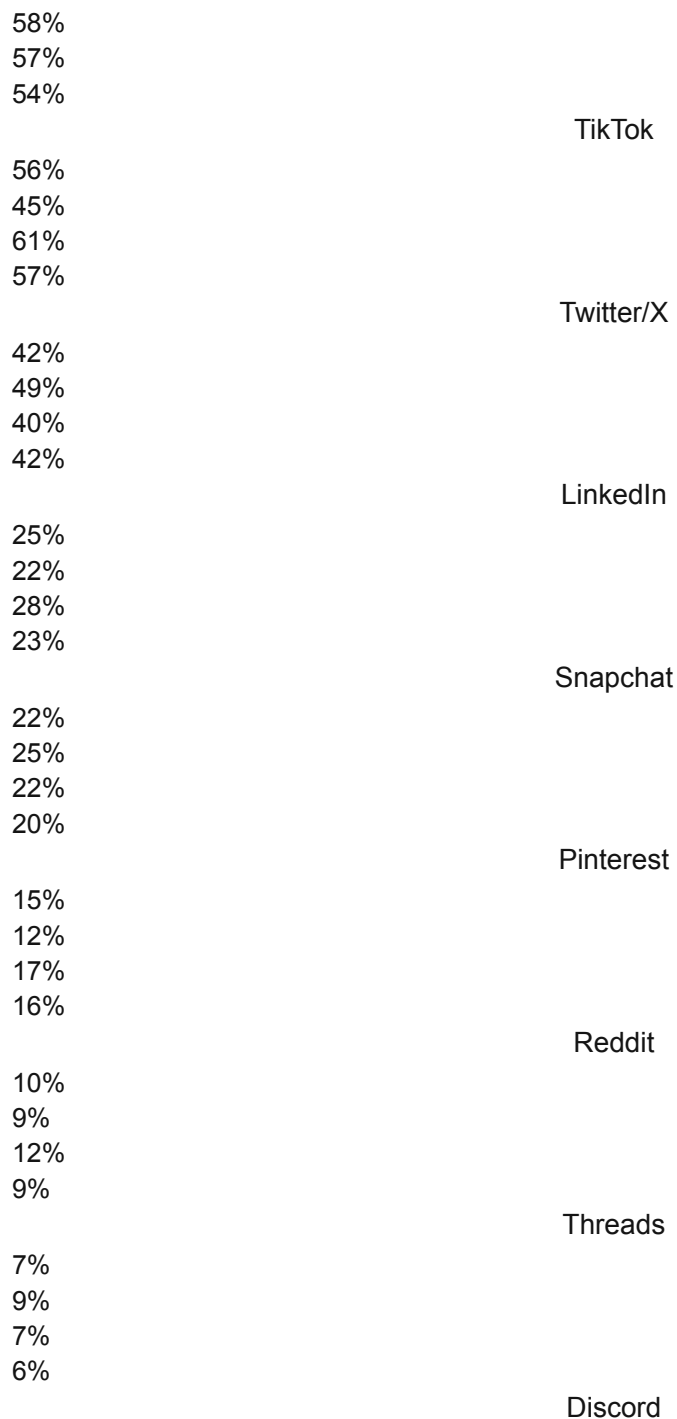
62%

71%

71%

YouTube

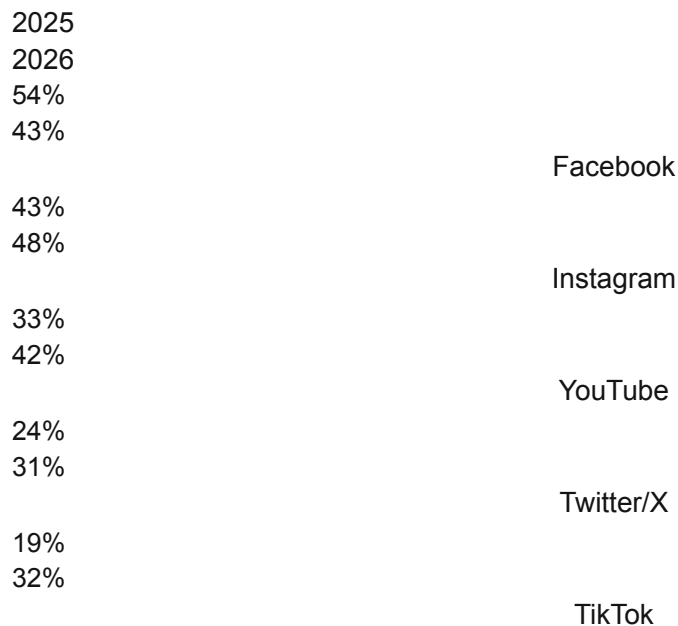
57%



Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report

Looking ahead to 2026, the top 5 social platforms marketers plan to invest in most support short-form video: 1) TikTok (19%), 2) Instagram (19%), 3) Facebook (18%), 4) YouTube (18%), and 5) Twitter/X (11%). Small businesses are more likely to increase their Instagram and TikTok budgets compared to the average, while enterprises plan to invest more in YouTube.

The highest-ROI social platforms



Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report

TikTok's value as a marketing channel also leads the pack, with 62% more teams naming it a high-ROI channel compared to 2025. YouTube and Twitter/X saw notable gains as well (32% and 29%, respectively), while the proportion of teams seeing ROI from Facebook dropped 21%. Small businesses are 40% less likely to name Twitter/X and 35% less likely to name YouTube as top ROI segments, compared to the average.

Keeping up with social media is the biggest challenge

Speed matters on every channel, but especially so on social, where trends are short-lived and algorithms get tweaked on what seems like a weekly basis. As audience attention splinters between more social platforms than ever before, "keeping up" is the biggest social media marketing challenge across all segments.

Social media marketing challenges

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Keeping up with new trends

32%

1

Keeping up with changing features and algorithm updates

30%

2

Reaching your target audience

27%

3

Gaining and keeping followers

24%

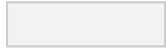
4

Determining which platform to market your brand on

23%

5

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



Influencer marketing is a community game

In a crowd of impersonal content, brands stand out by building deeper connections with customers by tapping into influencers' followings. 89% of companies worked with a content creator or influencer in 2025, up from 50% in 2024.

Teams saw the most success with micro influencers with 10K to 100K followers, while nano influencers with 1K to 10K followers dropped to the least effective influencer type. Niche audiences are valuable, but this drop suggests that brands will prioritize working with influencers who have better-established, larger followings in 2026.

77%

plan to invest more in influencer marketing in 2026

Which size influencer or content creator did you see the most success with?

2026 (In 2025)

2025 (In 2024)

8.6%

20%

36%

45%

34%

26%

15%

9%

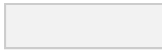
Nano (1K to 10K)

Micro (10K to 100K)

Macro (100K to 1M)

Mega (1M+)

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



Helsinki Partners measures influencer marketing with HubSpot

[Helsinki Partners](#) promotes the City of Helsinki's economic growth by attracting business and tourists. The company collaborates with influencers on social media, articles, and blog posts, and uses HubSpot to measure ROI. "We can calculate the value of the post or article depending on its reach," says Sirpa Salmi, senior manager of digital business.

[View post](#)

[View post](#)

[View post](#)

[Read the full story](#)



"At HubSpot, creator partnerships are about relationships, not just reach and impressions. As audiences turn away from obviously transactional marketing tactics, brands that build real relationships with their creators will retain them longer and achieve far better results."

ALANAH JOSEPH

[Learn to build an influencer marketing strategy](#)

Personalization works, but it's hard to operationalize

An overwhelming 93% of marketers report that personalization improves leads or purchases. Despite these results, advanced personalization techniques remain underutilized — only 13% of teams hyper-personalize their marketing based on data or lookalike audiences. Current approaches show a wide spectrum of personalization, with basic personalization (such as including a name in an email) used by 53% of marketers and audience segmentation implemented by 47%.

Marketers say the most valuable types of audience data to use in personalization are:

1. Shopping habits (42%)
2. Interests and hobbies (36%)

3. Basic demographic information (33%)

Many marketers don't have access to basic audience information to develop more personalization strategies. But even simple improvements to data collection can drive notable improvements. Investing in more advanced techniques like persona-level targeting and behavioral data creates a massive competitive advantage. In a market where only 14% of teams segment or personalize at least half of their content, personalization can push companies to the top of their audience's minds.

Less than half of marketers have access to key personal datapoints

44%

of marketers know their customers' shopping habits

39%

of marketers have access to basic demographic information like name, gender, and location

31%

of marketers have access to customer purchase history with their company

27%

of marketers know what products customers are interested in buying

17%

of marketers know their customers' experience preferences and expectations

16%

of marketers know their customers' pain points and challenges

Perhaps this year's biggest finding? When we rank channels by ROI, we see almost the same ranking for how effective they are for personalization. This suggests that the more personalization a channel supports, the more effective it will be.

Top channels by ROI and personalization success

Biggest ROI this year

Segmentation/personalization is most effective

Website/blog/SEO (search engine optimization)

27%

Paid social media content

26%

Organic social media content

24%

Social media shopping tools (e.g. Instagram Shops)

23%

Email marketing

22%

Brand awareness

19%

Content marketing

17%

Physical events and tradeshows

16%

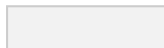
Search/Display ads

12%

Mobile messaging (SMS, WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.)

11%

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report





Get in the loop

Here's how to apply these insights to your marketing strategy using the Loop Marketing framework.

01.

Express who you are

Strategy

Define clear [content quality standards](#) that differentiate your brand from generic AI-generated material, and establish editorial guidelines that maintain brand voice consistency across AI-assisted content creation.

AI prompts/agents

Use the [Breeze Brand Assistant Agent](#) to check whether your content aligns with your brand guidelines.

02.

Tailor your approach

Strategy

Incorporate shopping habits, interests/hobbies, and demographic data (identified as most valuable) for targeted content.

AI prompts/agents

Use the [Breeze Data Agent](#) to automatically fill in gaps in your customer data and inject researched insights into your automations.

03.

Amplify your reach

Strategy

Diversify content formats strategically: combine [video](#), user-generated content, and blogs to meet audiences across channels, and [work with micro-influencers](#) for authentic amplification.

AI prompts/agents

Use the [Breeze Social Post Agent](#) to generate post suggestions optimized for Instagram, Facebook, and more.

04.

Evolve in real-time

Strategy

Stay agile with platform changes, and build processes for quick adaptation. Then, monitor [content performance](#) across channels and shift investment toward highest-performing formats.

AI prompts/agents

Research and summarize recent algorithm and platform updates for [platforms]. Include both technical algorithm changes and shifts in platform behavior, policies, or engagement mechanisms that could affect visibility or performance. Provide actionable recommendations for SEO, content, and social media teams, and include verified source links for each finding.

Fill in: Date range or trigger (i.e. weekly, daily), platforms to monitor, region or market focus

Growth Trends

High-intent buyers from AI search are changing the web game

LLM traffic has lower volume, but higher intent

Nearly half of marketers (49%) agree that web traffic from search has decreased because of AI answers. But 58% note that AI referral traffic has much higher intent than traditional search. This means that visitors who come from LLMs such as ChatGPT are much further along in their buyer's journey. (We've seen the same phenomenon at HubSpot — while our blog traffic is down, leads from LLMs are up 1850%, and convert 3 times better than XYZ.) And when visitors do arrive on your website, 60% say you need to meet them with seamless purchasing experiences, like chatbots, that are as easy to use as the LLMs that referred them to you.

This has accelerated the marketing optimization cycle. Ten years ago, campaigns and content only existed on a handful of platforms and distribution channels. Today, potential visitors may encounter them in AI-powered results or LLM answers. Your content may be cited as is, or it may be summarized. (Or, it may not be included in an official answer at all.) As a result, marketers need to optimize campaign content

to be helpful across multiple potential scenarios and AI platforms. 62% of marketers say campaigns now operate in interactive cycles, meaning they're continuously updating content to be found online.



"I see three major shifts in SEO vs. Answer Engine Optimization (AEO): AEO requires volume, so to influence tools like ChatGPT, claim as much mind share as possible. AEO also flips the funnel, prioritizing bottom-funnel and middle-funnel content. Third, AEO requires content bifurcation: One version of content optimized for machines (tables, semantic triples, JSON-LD); another for humans (story, POV, brand voice). The future of search is here, and in a world that moves at AI speed, experimentation wins above all else."

AJA FROST

Senior Director of Global Growth, HubSpot



AEO Grader

Use HubSpot's free AEO Grader to learn how leading AI engines interpret your brand.

[Grade your brand](#)

Optimization benchmarks

Speed has always mattered in marketing. But in a world where three in five (59%) marketing teams analyze campaign data at least weekly and 73% implement changes to active campaigns within days or hours, agility is a necessity.

How frequently marketing teams analyze campaign performance data

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Weekly

44%

Monthly

27%

Daily

15%

Quarterly

8%

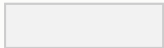
After campaign completion

3%

We don't consistently analyze performance

2%

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



The most-used optimization techniques are:

1. Audience segmentation refinement (51%)
2. Conversion rate optimization (50%)
3. Message timing optimization (40%)

When deciding where to optimize, marketing teams prioritize the areas with the largest performance gaps (32%), stages with the highest drop-off rates (24%), and potential impact analysis (18%).

The KPIs that matter to marketers

Overall

Small BusinessMid-MarketEnterprise

Lead quality and MQLs

39%

1

Lead-to-customer conversion rates

34%

2

Return on marketing investment

31%

3

Customer acquisition cost

30%

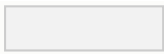
4

Lead generation volume

29%

5

Source: HubSpot 2026 State of Marketing Report



"The balance between execution excellence and execution agility is hitting a tipping point — and in the AI era, agility wins. With buyers evaluating AI tools and arriving on your site more educated than ever and turning to content from platforms like YouTube and Reddit to inform their decision making, brands must influence before they land, and your site must deliver an experience that converts them when they do."

Emmy Jonassen

VP Demand Generation, HubSpot



Get in the loop

01.

Express who you are

Strategy

Create authoritative, expert-informed content that earns visibility in AI-powered search results, and express clear value propositions that convert high-intent AI referral traffic.

AI prompts/agents

Use [Breeze Blog Research Agent](#) to generate smart topic recommendations based on AI-powered research and analysis of existing blog posts.

02.

Tailor your approach

Strategy

Implement seamless purchase experiences like [chatbots](#) for high-intent visitors.

AI prompts/agents

Use [Breeze Customer Agent](#) to answer visitor questions and guide them to the right content.

03.

Amplify your reach

Strategy

Optimize content for [AI Engine Optimization \(AEO\)](#) to maintain visibility as search evolves.

AI prompts/agents

Analyze this content and deliver actionable recommendations that improve its visibility, accuracy, and perceived trustworthiness across AI-driven search and summary tools. Do not rewrite the content. Provide a structured checklist and guidance framework aligned with both content quality and technical readiness for AI indexing.

Fill in: Content source (URL or file upload), target AI platforms

04.

Evolve in real-time

Strategy

Adopt daily or weekly performance analyses to quickly understand and benchmark your progress using [AI-powered analytics](#).

AI prompts/agents

Analyze campaign performance data, evaluate it against the defined goals and KPIs, and provide clear, actionable short-term recommendations per platform. Do not invent data; base all insights strictly on the inputs provided and verifiable contextual sources.

Fill in: Date range, campaign name, performance data (file upload), campaign KPIs, platforms included in the campaign, preference for text-based or visual indicators for report

Future

Where marketing is headed (at the speed of AI)

This year, marketing is all about blending the efficiency and speed of AI with creativity and good taste. With humans and AI in the loop, marketing has become an iterative process that gets smarter with every new campaign and launch.