



REPORT



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The secret lives of marketers

1,500 marketers reveal the people, priorities and pressures behind their strategy

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Welcome to the secret lives of marketers

Dotdigital first commissioned this survey-based report in 2025. It's designed to help marketers understand the reality of the industry from a people-led perspective, amongst the uncertainty of AI and ever-changing algorithms.

The report analyses the perspective of 1,500 marketers around the globe, to create opportunities for comparison, learnings and reassurance.

In 2025, the report revealed 13% of marketers feared AI would take their job within a year, that finance, HR and IT teams were the least confident in understanding marketing, and that marketing budgets differed greatly by region.

Methodology

The data in this report comes from a survey of 1,500 marketers aged 18+ in the UK, US, and Australia (500 respondents per country). The survey took place between May 20 and June 1, 2026, and was run by Censuswide. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

This year, in 2026, we've gone even further to understand individual marketing perspectives. We've investigated whether those AI fears played out, tracked the changing role of marketing leadership, explored the rise of content marketing and uncovered the biggest challenges marketers are facing.

So, consider this your ultimate guide to industry intel, data, objectives and trends - and what it all means for marketers.

What to expect:

You can read this report cover to cover, or jump straight to the sections that pique your interest the most. Throughout the report you'll find...

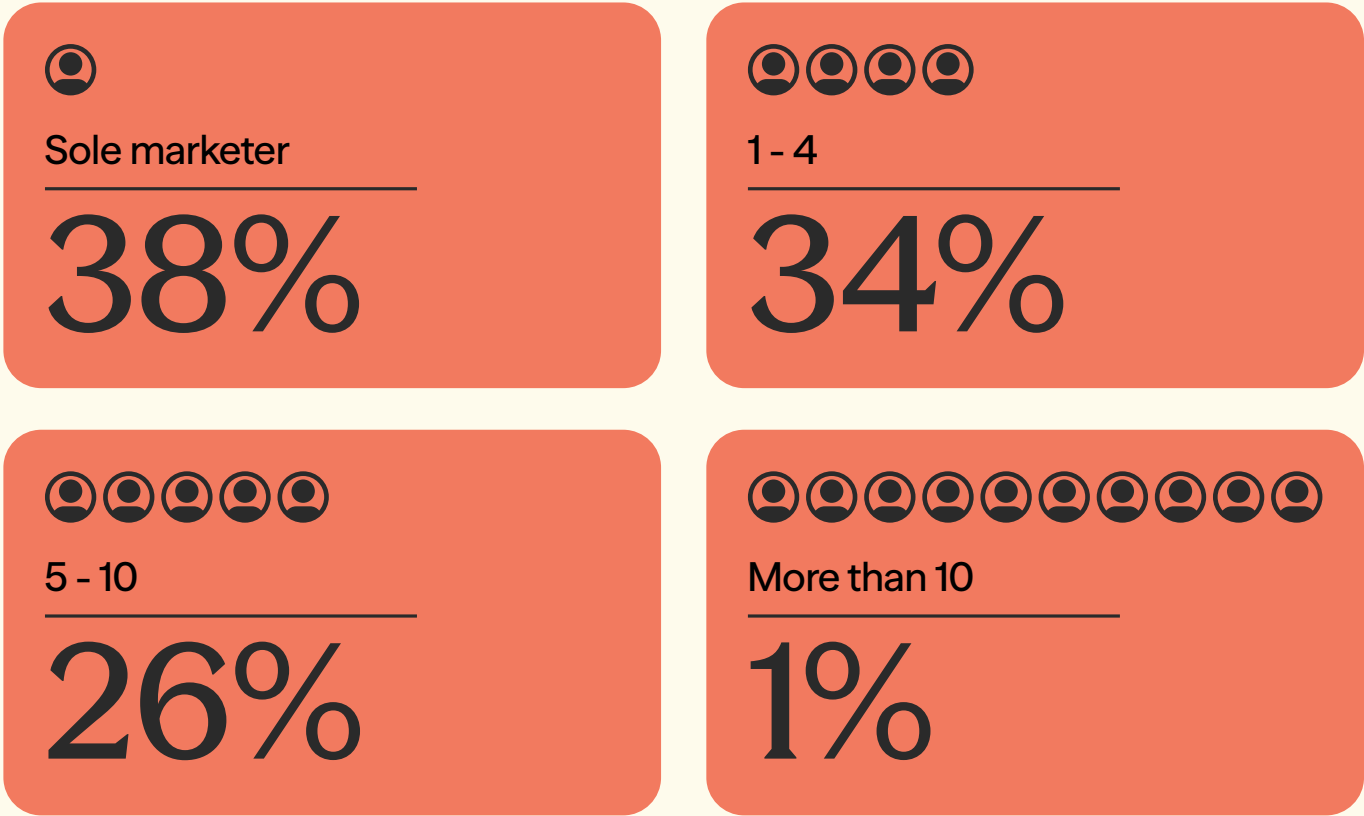
- Skimmable headlines and stats
- Data driven talking points for CMO chats
- Easy ways to share conversation starting data
- Loads of exclusive graphs & charts

Inside the marketing team

A marketing team is only as good as the sum of its parts. Specialists and generalists, doers and strategists, creatives and analysts — we need them all. Here's a lay of the land for marketing teams in 2026.

Team size

Marketing teams can broadly be split into four sizes, here's how that breaks down.



Team structure

A centralized team would have all departments flowing up to one global leader. A de-centralized team is managed on a regional level, reporting into multiple leaders.



Is your team split into sub teams?

Sub teams are categorized by discipline, such as performance marketing, product marketing, content marketing and field marketing.



Team hierachies



Budgets over the last year



Share it on social

Feel free to take a screen shot of the stats you find most insightful and share on LinkedIn to see if your network is surprised, reassured or in total disbelief about the current set-up of global marketing teams. Go on, be a conversation starter. [#MarketingSecrets](#)

Headcounts and hierarchies

The biggest shift in this year's data is the structure of marketing teams. Last year, only 20% of marketing teams had more managers than non-managers. This year, 42% of those surveyed are working in teams with more managers than non-managers.

Teams with an equal split have remained steady at 38%, rising only three percentage points.



Overall, marketing teams are getting smaller. Last year, only 21% of marketers were working as a team of one. This year, that's almost doubled at 38%.

Small teams are also on the rise. In 2025 22% of our survey respondents were working in teams of 1-4 people, in 2026 that number has risen to 34%.

At the other end of the scale, teams with 5-10 marketers have gone from almost half (46%) to just over a quarter at 26%.

Teams of more than ten have massively reduced, dropping from 10% of our survey pool working in a team of ten+ in 2025, to just 1% in 2026.



Marketing team size in 2025



Marketing team size in 2026



The changing team dynamics

In 2025, entry-level marketers were the group most worried about AI replacing their role.

22% of entry-level marketers feared replacement within a year, compared to 10% of mid-level and senior marketers.

In 2026, there are 22% more teams with a higher proportion of managers than non-managers. On paper, it would be easy to look at that and think those fears were justified, but, when we look at the overall survey findings, it seems unlikely that is the case.

The wider market shift

LinkedIn's 2026 [Labor Market](#) report identifies marketing as one of the top five functions exposed to AI. It also shares that hiring in the marketing industry is down 32% compared to pre-pandemic levels.

However, this level of decline isn't unique to marketing, and is instead simply part of a wider labor market shift. For context, some industries that weren't identified as being especially exposed to AI, but are still seeing hiring declines are: Human Resources (-31%), Engineering (-32%), and Product Management (-36%).

What's interesting is that while team structures have shifted dramatically in the last year, marketers themselves feel more secure than they did a year ago.

This shift in seniority levels could actually be a return to the historical norm, rather than a disruption. According to [LinkedIn data](#), between 2016 and 2022, companies increased hiring at junior levels. From 2022 to 2025, the entry-level share has gradually moved back towards its previous average.

Entry-level hiring in marketing declined by just 0.3% between 2022 and 2025, placing marketing squarely in the middle of industry specific hiring declines.

In 2025, 13% of marketers feared they'd be replaced by AI within 12 months.

Were their fears founded, or are teams just evolving?

93%

of marketers feel secure in their role

AI has changed how work is done, but the data suggests we're moving out of the panic phase and into something more settled: a clearer sense of where it actually fits.

Reassuringly, this shift in structure isn't being matched by a pullback in investment. Budgets are still rising.

The reality of marketing budgets

Between 2025 and 2026, 82% of marketing teams reported budget increases, with just 3% reporting a decrease. Proving investment in marketing resource is still strong.

Budgetry change	% of marketing teams affected
Increased by 25% or more	<1%
Increased by 10-24%	48%
Increased by less than 10%	34%
Stayed the same	15%
Decreased by less than 10%	2%
Decreased by 10-24%	1%
Decreased by 25% or more	0%

A Regional view

% of teams that have seen budgets increase for 2026



UK budgets are the most conservative, but they still show three quarters of marketing teams are working with more budget than they had a year ago.

Budget predictions

Looking ahead the mood gets even more optimistic.

86% of marketers expect budgets to increase over the next 12 months, which is 4% more than those who benefitted from a budget increase in 2025/2026.

A message for the CMO

If you're faced with a flat budget this year, or trying to make a business case for new tech or tools that your current allocation won't stretch to, these are the numbers that will help you have a data-driven conversation about that. They'll also help you communicate the global trends in marketing budget increases with C-suite colleagues.

EXPERT OPINION ALERT



Tom Mullan, CFO, Dotdigital Group

“CFOs never want to say no to investing in any department or decline specific requests for budget, but we have to constantly think about the bigger financial picture. For us to make a decision or approve a request that this impacts we need to understand four clear things, ideally with data to back them up:

- 1 What results and ROI will this ask bring in, and over what timeframe will we see the returns
- 2 What's the business impact of NOT doing this. What will miss out on, what will we lose
- 3 Why now. What is that makes this request time sensitive and necessary now, rather than waiting until more funds can be freed up in the next financial year
- 4 Is there any existing planned spend that could be reduced or deferred to fund this?”

Marketing priorities by category

We asked our 1,500 survey respondents which marketing channels and tactics are their primary areas of focus.

Prioritization of marketing goals

Respondents could select up to five.

Marketing goals	% of marketers prioritizing each goal
Increasing revenue from marketing	29%
Improving customer retention and loyalty	27%
Improving brand awareness	27%
Better use of data and analytics	27%
Marketing database growth	27%
Creating more engaging content	25%
Enhancing social media presence	25%
Improving internal stakeholder relations	24%
Increasing organic website traffic	24%
Running more effective paid media campaigns	22%
Upskilling the marketing team	21%
Using more AI tools	21%
Adding more marketing channels to the mix	19%

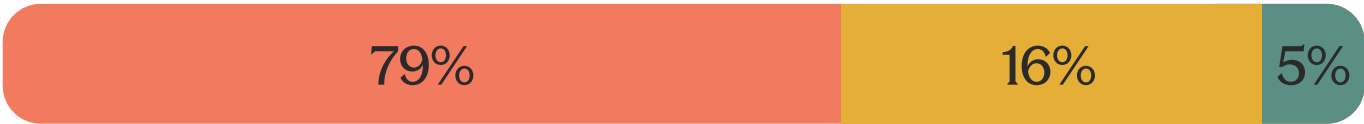
Unsurprisingly, increasing revenue stays firmly at the top of the list, but we can decipher from the fairly even split of the other categories that a cross-channel strategy has become the standard approach. When we consider this alongside the fact that marketing teams are shrinking in size, it becomes apparent that marketers are expected to do more with less - making the right tech stack key to success.

Brand marketing as a priority

In our 2025 survey results, we learned that brand marketing was the number one focus for marketers, with 35% of survey respondents selecting it as their top priority. This year, 79% of marketers say they are focusing even more on brand than last year, proving brand marketing is back and here to stay.

The importance of brand marketing

For the purpose of the survey, we've classified brand marketing as anything that falls into the following categories: brand awareness, storytelling, organic content and longer-term brand building initiatives including events.



- 79% of marketers are focusing more on brand marketing in 2026 than in 2025
- 16% of marketers are giving brand marketing the same amount of focus in 2026
- 5% of marketers are focusing less on brand marketing in 2026

Keen to dive deeper into brand marketing?



Dotdigital recently chatted with Brand Consultant, Eugene Healey, who's consulted for Google, Spotify, and Red Bull.

Eugene reminded us that brand marketing isn't something companies fully control anymore. It's something that gets built by marketers, but interpreted and rebuilt in all the places you can't control: social feeds, creator discussions, comments sections, reviews and even group chats.

As a result, 'brand' is evolving into something every member of the marketing team has a role in shaping and protecting.

"We are key influencers of our brand, but we are not its owner. We are not its keeper, and we cannot architect the destiny of our brand."

Eugene Healey, Brand Strategist and Consultant

Watch the webinar

Channel preferences & ROI

We also asked our 1,500 marketers what channels they're prioritizing, and just as we saw with the goals marketers are focusing on, the results are mixed.

How marketers are prioritizing individual channels

Respondents could select all that apply.

Marketing channel	% of marketers prioritizing each channel
Website personalization	33%
Content marketing (blogs, videos, guides)	31%
Organic search	26%
Mobile (SMS, MMS, WhatsApp)	26%
Events and webinars	26%
Retail media networks	23%
Push notifications (web and app)	23%
Affiliate/partner marketing	23%
Email	22%
Organic social	21%
Paid search	21%

So, how do channel priorities align with ROI?

We asked marketers which channel gives them the best ROI to see if people are prioritizing the areas that deliver the best returns, or focusing on improving returns in weaker areas.

Which marketing channels show the best return on investment?

Marketing channel	% ranking the channel No1 for ROI
Email & CRM marketing (email, automation, lifecycle journeys)	20%
Organic content marketing (SEO, blogs, video content, organic social etc.)	16%
Mobile marketing (SMS, MMS, WhatsApp)	16%
Paid social (Meta, LinkedIn, TikTok ads etc.)	15%
App push notifications (mobile app messaging)	12%
Affiliate, referral, and partner marketing	11%
Paid search (Google, Bing placements)	9%
We don't have the right tools to track ROI	1%

It's worth noting that just under 1% of survey respondents told us they were unaware of ROI by channel. If you fall into this category, or don't have the right tools in place for tracking - reach out to [Dotdigital](#), we can help!

A message for the CMO

Note the position of email on the channel prioritization chart. Despite how low down the list it sits as a priority channel, email is the top-scoring channel for ROI. Make sure you're having the right conversations about tech and resources in this area to avoid taking it for granted, and ensure all your emails stand out in busy inboxes. Download Dotdigital's [Hitting the Mark](#) report for an in-depth overview of what visuals and copy make emails stand out.

The email marketing paradox

If email is driving the most ROI of all channels, why is it so far down the list of marketing priorities? Let's do some email myth busting!

Myth	Reality*
Email reliably performs without needing much attention so we can leave it to its own devices	Deliverability, consent and competition are constantly changing. Your email strategy should be regularly reviewed on an ongoing basis to make sure you stand out, and stay within the rules
Email marketing tools are so easy to use that email marketing no longer requires a strategic focus	With the right tools and data, great email marketing can drive real impact. But, it's creativity and care that get your emails read in a crowded inbox. AI subject line generators do the job, but nothing replaces human ideas and empathy. However, smart segmentation and automation can ensure those great ideas get to the right people at the right time
It's better to focus on newer, faster-moving areas like AI search and new styles of ads so we don't get left behind	In marketing we have to embrace the new, while protecting the tried and tested. None of us can afford to let the most reliable channels drop, while focusing on the unknown

*The right email provider will be able to help you take care of all of these

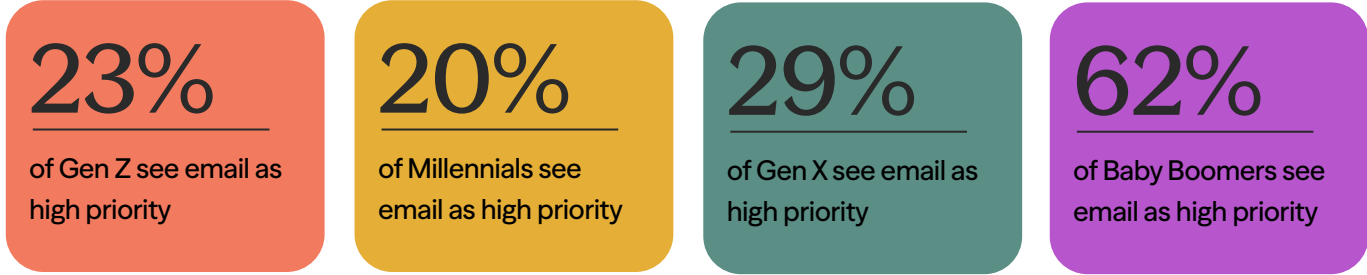
Share it on social

Email ranks number one for ROI, but ninth for prioritization according to Dotdigital's *The secret lives of marketers report*. Ask your network if email is their top ROI channel - and how they're prioritizing the channel as a result. See who is surprised by these results and share your own thoughts too. [#MarketingSecrets](#)

Email marketing through a generational lens

We were super intrigued to discover that marketers of different generations place varying importance on email.

Generational breakdown of marketers who prioritize email



Does this mean email is being deprioritized by younger generations of marketers, despite its consistently strong performance? Not necessarily, it's more likely that marketers in the early - mid stages of their career are just more comfortable using the wider variety of marketing channels they are native to.

If we use TikTok as an example, the search and discovery platform reaches 47% of US females and 41% of US males aged between 16-24 (Gen Z) but only 16.4% of US females and 16.3% of US males aged 65+ (Baby Boomers).

EXPERT OPINION ALERT

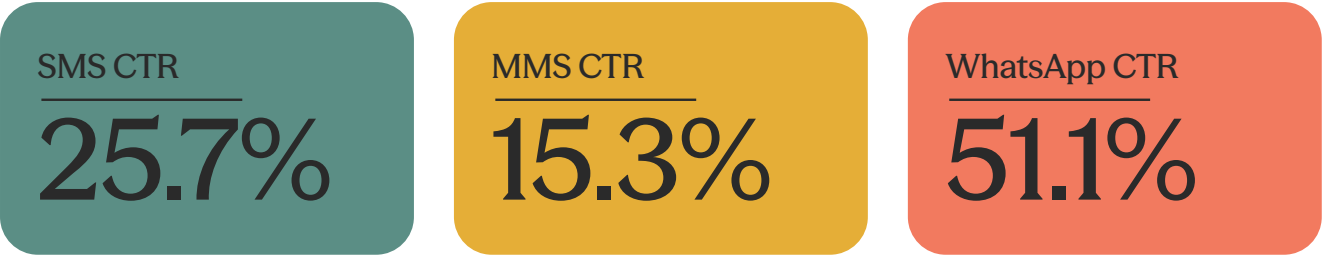


Katie O'Leary,
Global Head of Content Marketing,
Dotdigital

"As a Head of Content Marketing, working for an awesome marketing automation and personalization platform, I am not at all surprised to see email, content and mobile marketing in the top three channels that deliver the strongest ROI. These are owned areas that a business has the capability to strengthen and control, without the interference of third party price hikes or diminished returns. And when marketing teams get those three areas working in sync, things start to get really exciting".

Following audiences from email to mobile

Mobile marketing performance benchmarks

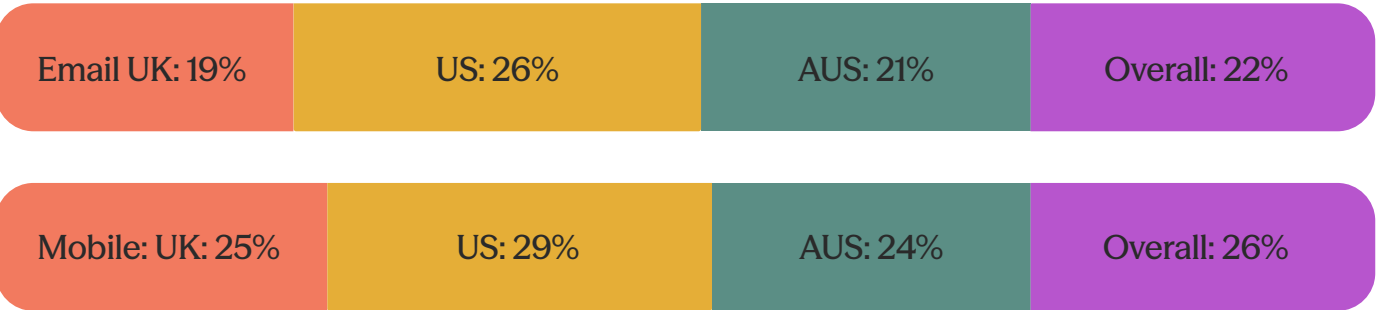


CTR = Click-through rate. (Number of clicks ÷ number of messages delivered) × 100.
Read more benchmarks for all marketing channels in Dotdigital's [Global benchmark report](#).

Mobile marketing fast facts

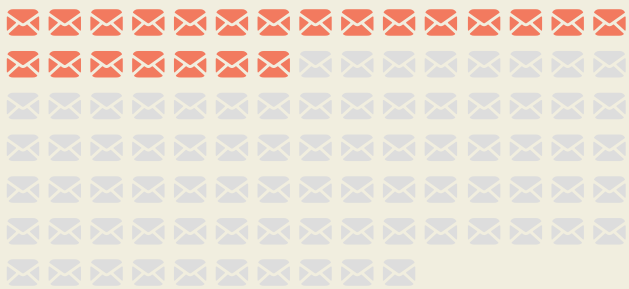
- Mobile messaging channels (SMS, MMS, WhatsApp) are seeing higher levels of prioritization than email (26% vs 22%)
- Mobile marketing is not replacing email, it's extending engagement across the customer lifecycle
- Mobile works best in moments where speed, immediacy, and two-way interaction is needed
- Smart phones capture the biggest share of screen time and the strongest engagement rates

Marketing priority by region

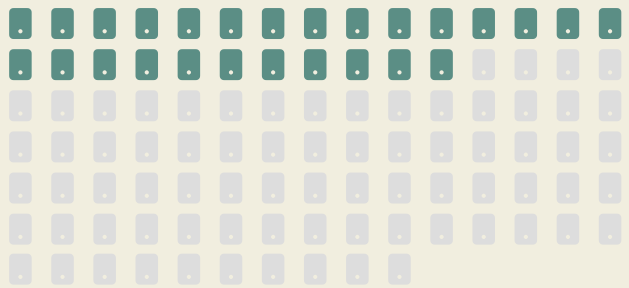


Global marketing focus

Email 22%



Mobile 26%



Screen time domination

The average adult's screen time is **6 hours 40 minutes**

Mobile phone

3 hours 50 minutes/day

Desktop/laptop

2 hours 10 minutes/day

Tablet

40 minutes/day

A reality check on AI

AI usage and attitudes

The headlines

99%

of marketers
use AI

94%

trust AI

36%

say it makes
their job easier

The caveats

21%

of marketers are
concerned about
AI's impact on
human jobs

19%

of marketers are
concerned about
AI's impact on the
environment

14%

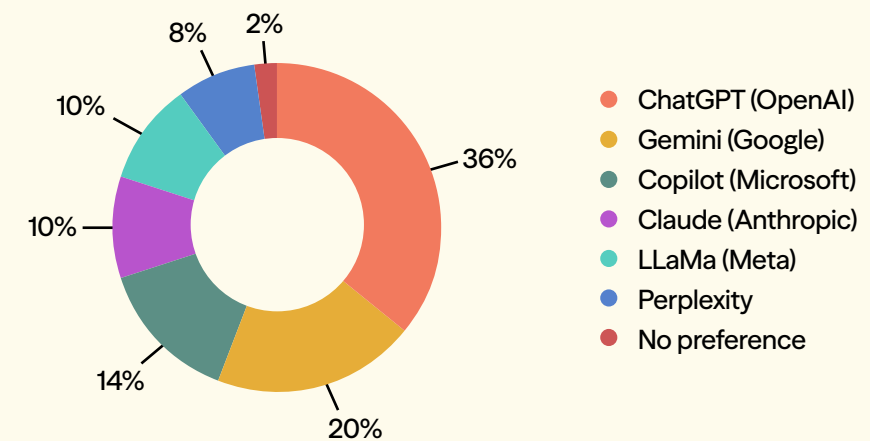
of marketers are
concerned that using
AI is 'cheating'

Share it on social



14% of marketers admit that using AI 'feels like cheating'. This increases to 40% amongst the Baby Boomer generation, and women are 6% more likely to feel this way than men. Does your network agree? Source: Dotdigital's *The secret lives of marketers report*. #MarketingSecrets

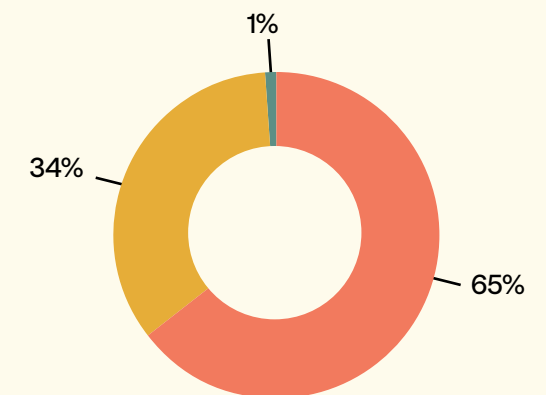
The AI engines marketers prefer



How does AI impact productivity?

Most marketers say AI positively impacts productivity

- 65% of marketers say AI speeds up productivity
- 34% of marketers have mixed views on AI productivity
- 1% of marketers say AI slows down productivity



Do marketers enjoy using AI?

Just 36% of marketers enjoy using AI - and it varies by generation

39% of Gen Z marketers enjoy using AI

35% of Millennial marketers enjoy using AI

41% of Gen X marketers enjoy using AI

40% Baby Boomers enjoy using AI

AI for content creation

How marketers use AI

Marketing tactic	% of marketers using AI for support
Content creation (e.g. blogs, emails, social posts)	45%
Research and insight gathering	44%
Ideation and brainstorming	41%
Reporting and analytics	41%
Workflow automation	41%
Personal productivity (e.g. summarising, note-taking)	40%

AI and content: high usage, mixed confidence

Nearly half of marketers (45%) use AI for content creation, making it the most common form of AI usage. But, they don't necessarily have confidence that it's doing a great job.

Almost a quarter of marketers (24%) say AI-generated content is too generic, 30% say editing it slows them down, and 12% don't fully trust the outputs.

Last year's fears aren't this year's reality

In last year's survey, copywriters were the marketers most concerned about AI replacing their role. More than a third (34%) feared replacement, twice the level of most other specialisms.

And the past few years have brought no shortage of predictions about the end of human-created content. But the data tells a more nuanced story.

Rather than making content less important, AI seems to have made marketers pay closer attention to it.

The value of content marketing

- Content ranks as the second-highest channel for ROI, with 16% of marketers identifying it as their top revenue-driving channel
- Content marketing is the second most important channel focus (31%), and its close teammate, organic search, is in third place (26%)
- A quarter of marketers (25%) say creating more engaging content is a priority for the year ahead

Content hasn't become less important in the age of AI. In fact the opposite is true. As content becomes easier to produce, quality, originality, and strategic thinking become more valuable.

EXPERT OPINION ALERT



Ann Handley, World's first Chief Content Officer, Author and Entrepreneur

Ann Handley's advice for keeping content human:

- 1 **Look for an opportunity to make yourself laugh:**
If you don't enjoy your own work, you can't expect your audience to
- 2 **Take joy in the creative process:**
Accept that parts of the process are difficult. That's where the magic happens
- 3 **Don't strive for perfection:**
Shrink the starting point, make success accessible to yourself
- 4 **Embrace the lo-fi:**
High-fi is so 10 years ago, so share true stories, warts and all!

Watch Dotdigital's full webinar with Ann Handley here

The duality of AI

Has AI simultaneously become a solution and a scapegoat?

As with most things in marketing, the reality of AI is highly complex, where multiple things are true at once.

While most marketers (65%) agree that AI speeds up productivity, 34% of marketers consider AI productivity to be a mixed bag.

Why marketers feel AI slows productivity

Reason for AI slowing productivity	% of marketers affected
Time spent on learning how to use tools effectively	41%
Time spent writing and iterating prompts	38%
Dealing with inaccurate or unreliable outputs	36%
The need to fact-check and verify results	35%
Meeting compliance and approval processes for AI use	33%
Time spent editing and refining outputs	30%

Do marketers trust AI?

The early days of AI came with a lot of hype. A few years in, marketers have enough hands-on experience to form more balanced opinions.

Our survey found that 94% of marketers trust AI outputs to some degree, but that trust is rarely unconditional.

48%

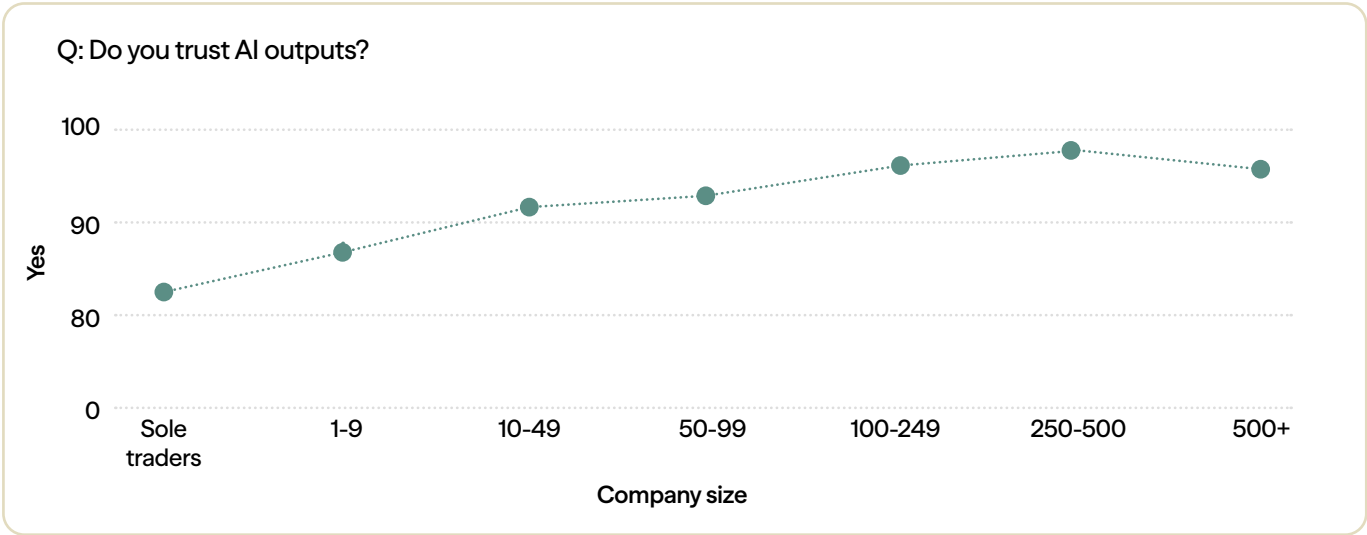
Nearly half of marketers surveyed only trust AI outputs after fact-checking and 36% say AI outputs can be inaccurate.

How much do marketers trust AI outputs?

Fully trust them	47%
Trust them, but always fact-check	48%
Rarely trust them without heavy checking	5%
Do not trust them at all	1%

Considering that even LLMs themselves caveat their outputs with a note to say AI can make mistakes and you should check all outputs, it is interesting to see that this isn't baked into the usage process for most marketers.

Trust in AI outputs grows with company size



A message for the CMO

Create clear guidance on where AI can accelerate work and where human judgment is still essential. Having a document to refer to helps build confidence and consistency within the team. You could even use AI to create one (as long as you fact-check it).

Where AI fact-checking happens

We asked marketers which, if any, AI output they spend the most time fact-checking or editing:

AI usage	% of marketers that fact check the response
Statistics and research	25%
Reporting based on owned data	20%
Internal communications (e.g. email drafting, interpretation, responding)	18%
Image creation	18%
Generative copy	16%
Marketers who do not fact-check or edit AI outputs at all	4%

Women are 6x more likely not to use AI at all (3% vs 0.5%)*

Women are 2.5x more likely to distrust AI outputs (10% vs 4%)*

*Compared to men.

Share it on social 

Women are 2.5x more likely to lack trust in AI outputs and 6x more likely not to use AI at all (3% vs 0.5%) compared to men. Men are 8% more likely to say they ‘enjoy’ using AI and 5% more likely to say it helps with creativity. Does your network agree? Source: Dotdigital’s *The secret lives of marketers report*. #MarketingSecrets

The real impact of AI for marketers

Much of the conversation around AI’s ethics centers on two things: what it might do to jobs, and what it might do to the planet.

At the same time, adoption isn’t really optional for many marketers. You’d be hard-pressed to find a marketing job description today that doesn’t explicitly call for AI skills.

So, how do marketers actually feel about using AI?

Environmental concerns don’t dominate marketer conversations in the same way productivity does, but they are there. 19% of marketers told us they are concerned about the environmental impact of AI.

21% of marketers say they are concerned about the impact of AI on human jobs.

These concerns don’t mean people are necessarily rejecting AI, but the wider conversation around AI adoption and integration should include these considerations.

A guide to using AI in marketing

Learn how to make AI work for your marketing, without losing the judgment, creativity, and personality that make it yours.

It covers:

- What AI does well in marketing
- Where human creativity still matters most
- How to decide when to use AI and when not to



[READ BLOG HERE](#)

The marketing mood

Let's start with the big question: how do marketers feel about marketing itself?

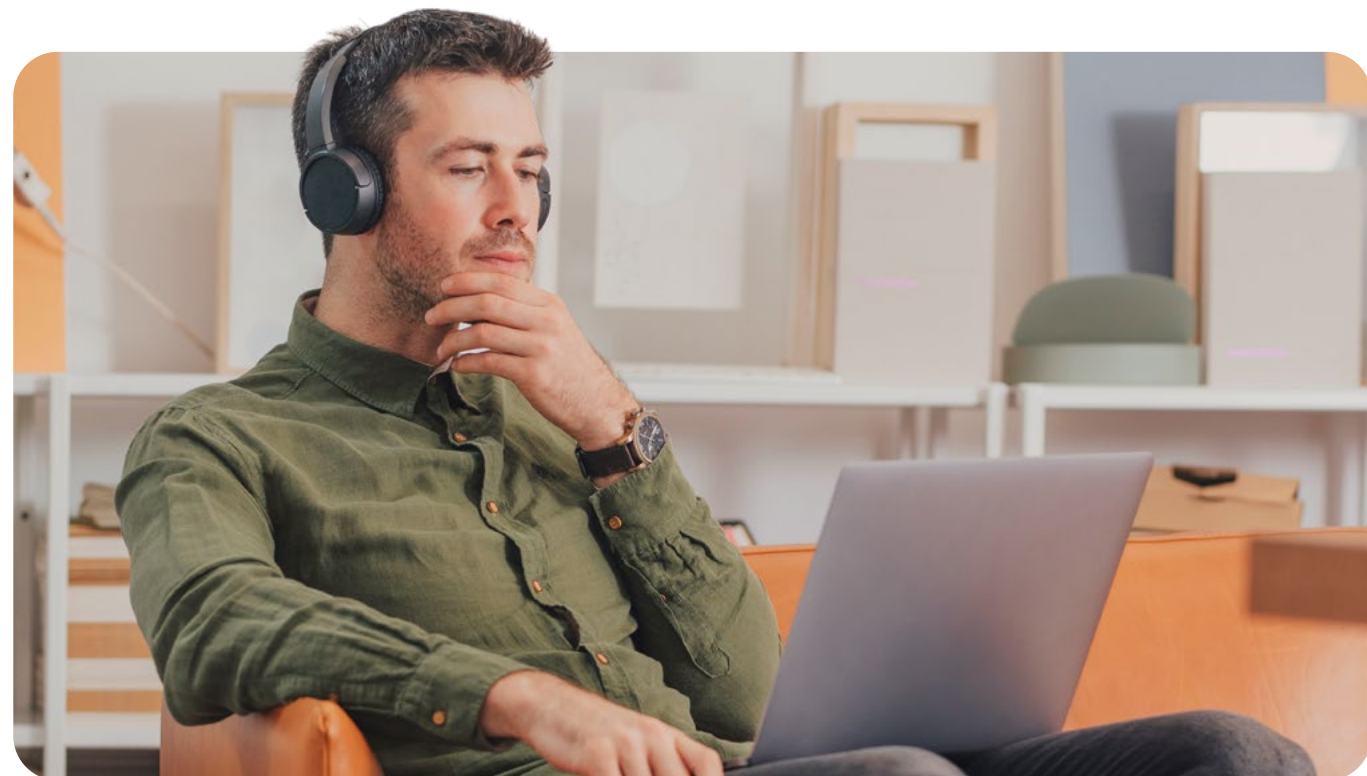
Over the last few years, the profession has seen a lot of change. New tools, new expectations and entirely new ways of working, so let's see how that translates in terms of job confidence.

How secure are marketers feeling?

In our 2025 secret lives of marketers survey, 13% of marketers feared they would be replaced by AI within one year, and 80% believed their organization would replace human employees with AI if they could.

In 2026, those fears appear to have softened considerably. When asked how they feel about the next 12 months, 91% of marketers said they feel confident about their future, 8% feel neutral, and 1% are unconfident.

In terms of role security right now, 93% of marketers feel secure, with 38% of those feeling 'very secure,' and just 1% of marketers said they feel at risk in their current role.



So, why are 44% of marketers considering leaving the industry?

Despite feeling secure in their current roles, almost half of marketers (44%) are either considering leaving the profession (17%), are open to doing so (13%), or are actively planning to leave the industry in the next 12 months (14%).

Of those planning to stay (56%), less than a third (32%) plan to stay in their current specialism long-term, with 24% wanting to change their specialism (e.g., moving from performance marketing to generalist).

Share it on social 

More than one in ten marketers are actively planning to leave the industry and a further 30% are open to, or considering leaving marketing, according to Dotdigital's *The secret lives of marketers report*. Ask your network if they're brave enough to admit being that 1 in 10 - and if so, why? [#MarketingSecrets](#)

EXPERT OPINION ALERT



David Aldrich
Chief People Officer, Dotdigital

"While job security and career doubt sound like opposites, the fact that marketers are telling us both at once makes sense. The role feels solid and secure, but the long-term picture is less clear. We see that theme repeated when it comes to how AI will shape our days and our careers. It unsettles us as we navigate the changes, and at the same time it offers huge opportunity for development and growth. The employers who keep their best people will be the ones who help them answer 'what do I become next?' rather than leaving them to work it out alone."

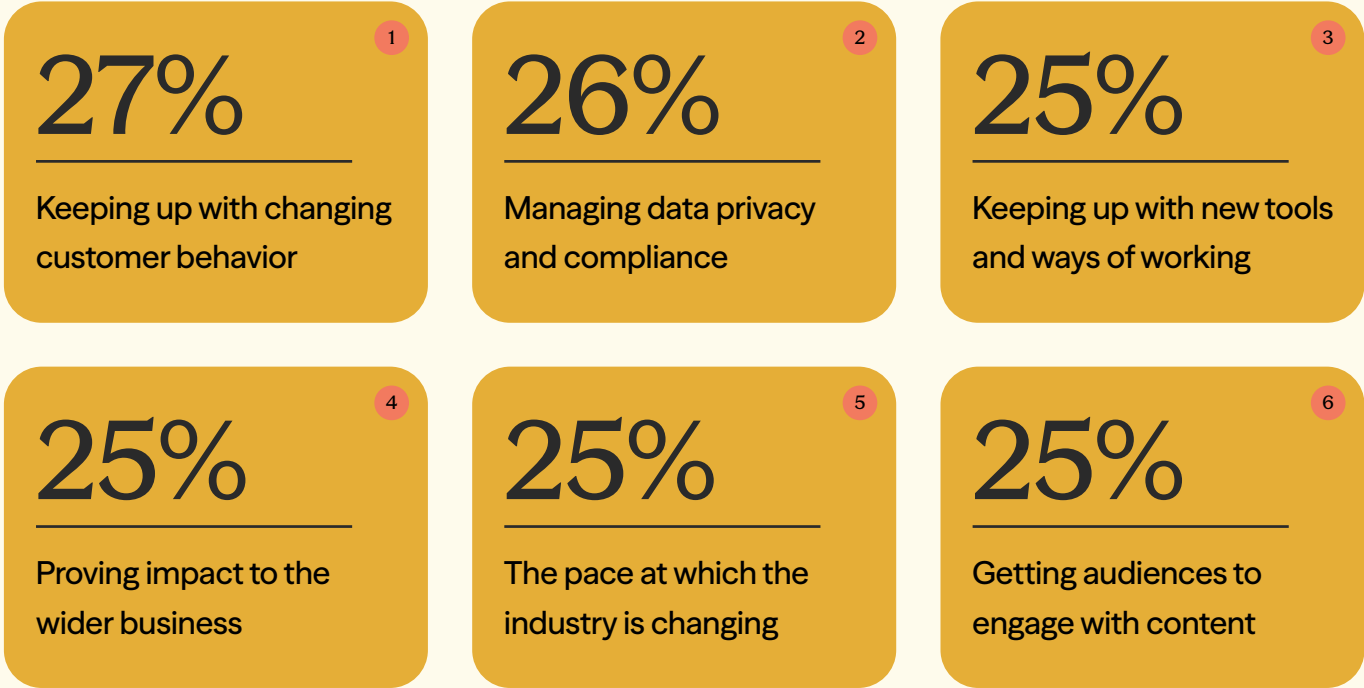
Intentions and challenges

We asked marketers about their career intentions, the biggest challenges they're facing, and the reasons that might make them consider leaving the profession. For challenges and reasons for leaving, marketers could select up to three answers.

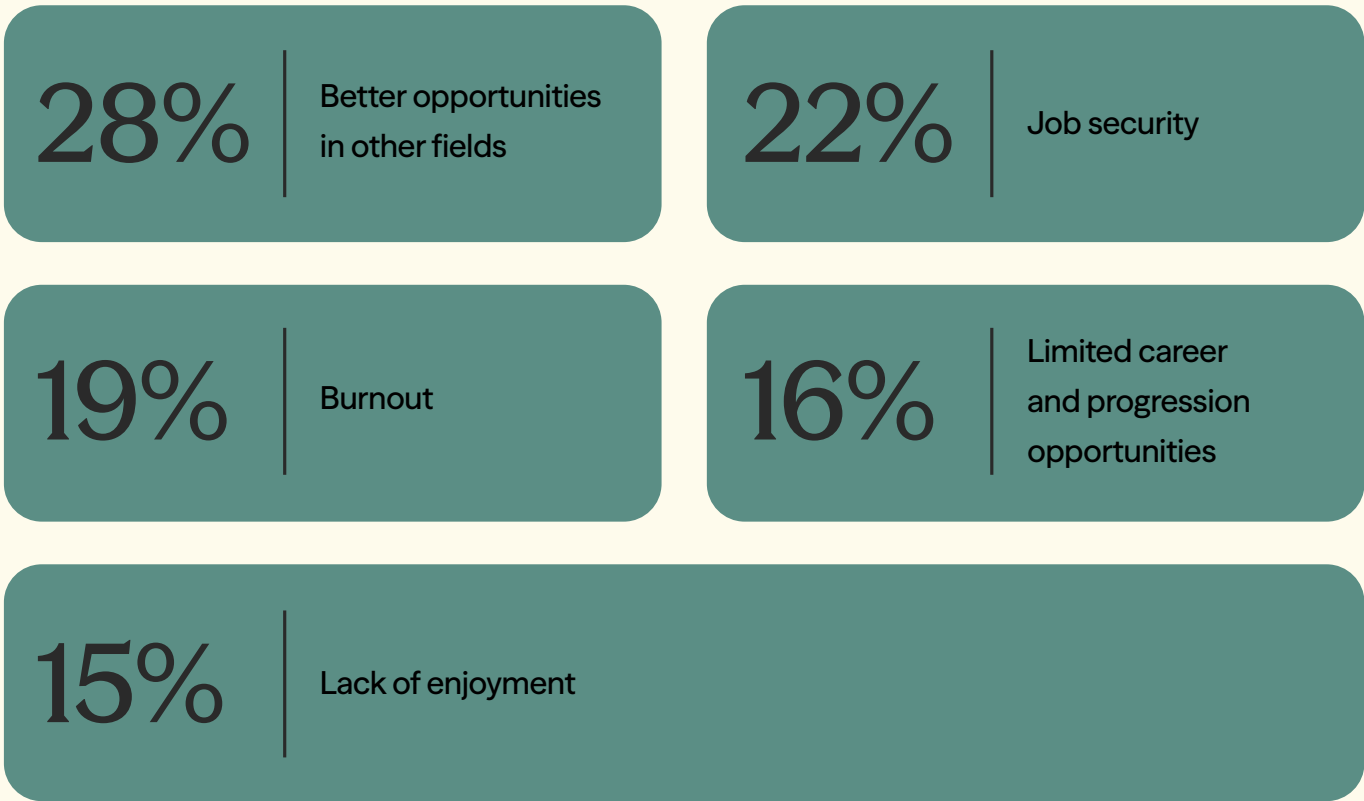
Career intentions



The six biggest challenges for marketers



Top five reasons marketers might leave the industry



The gender divide - career intentions and the rising pay gap

The secret lives of marketers survey data reveals a clear gender split. Only a quarter of women (26%) plan to stay in marketing long-term, compared to a third (34%) of men.

Marketing Week's [salary survey](#) found that 72.2% of the 2,350 survey respondents identify as female, yet the mean gender pay gap for full-time workers stands at 21.7%, up from 17.8% in 2025, and the pay gap in marketing is at its highest since 2021.

There is a [viral](#) social media theory that suggests changes in industry language within job specs could be contributing to more marketing roles appealing

to men. Specifically titles being expanded to include more traditionally technical wording "Content Engineer" and "UGC Engineer." This would align with a [Harvard study](#) that found that masculine-coded wording in job adverts reduces women's sense of belonging, but is very much just a theory and not evidence.

However, this is not the first time that we have seen the gender balance change within in marketing - and will almost certainly not be the last.



A marketing history lesson

50s and 60s

The 'Mad Men' era; men dominate the industry and marketing is positioned more like behavioral science; analytical, structured, and closer to economics than creativity

70s and 80s

Marketing recognizes that women influence a large proportion of household spending. A "female lens" approach is desired as women are closer to consumer behavior

90s and 00s

Pop culture portrayals like Sex and the City, Bridget Jones, and 13 Going on 30 mean the industry feels distinctly female

10s and 20s

A new label has emerged, women in SPAM (Social, PR, and Marketing). Whether this is a genuine shift or a social media moment remains to be seen

Now

65 - 70% of the marketing industry remains female, but only 26% of female marketers see themselves staying in the industry long term

A message for the CMO

Start the conversation around the positive impact of an equality policy. This helps to ensure neutral language in job ads, diverse gender representation during interview processes and diversity for speaker panels and content contributions. It also helps keep campaigns and activations more interesting and successful with broader appeal.

Marketers' sentiment, success and secrets in summary

So, what did we learn from the secret lives of marketers survey in 2026? It's mostly good news: marketing and marketers are in a strong position.

Despite extensive changes across the industry, marketers remain positive about what they can achieve.

79%

of marketers are optimistic they'll hit their goals this year and a huge 93% of marketers feel secure in their role.

This marketing confidence is shared at a businesses level with 82% of marketing teams experiencing a budget increase in 2026.

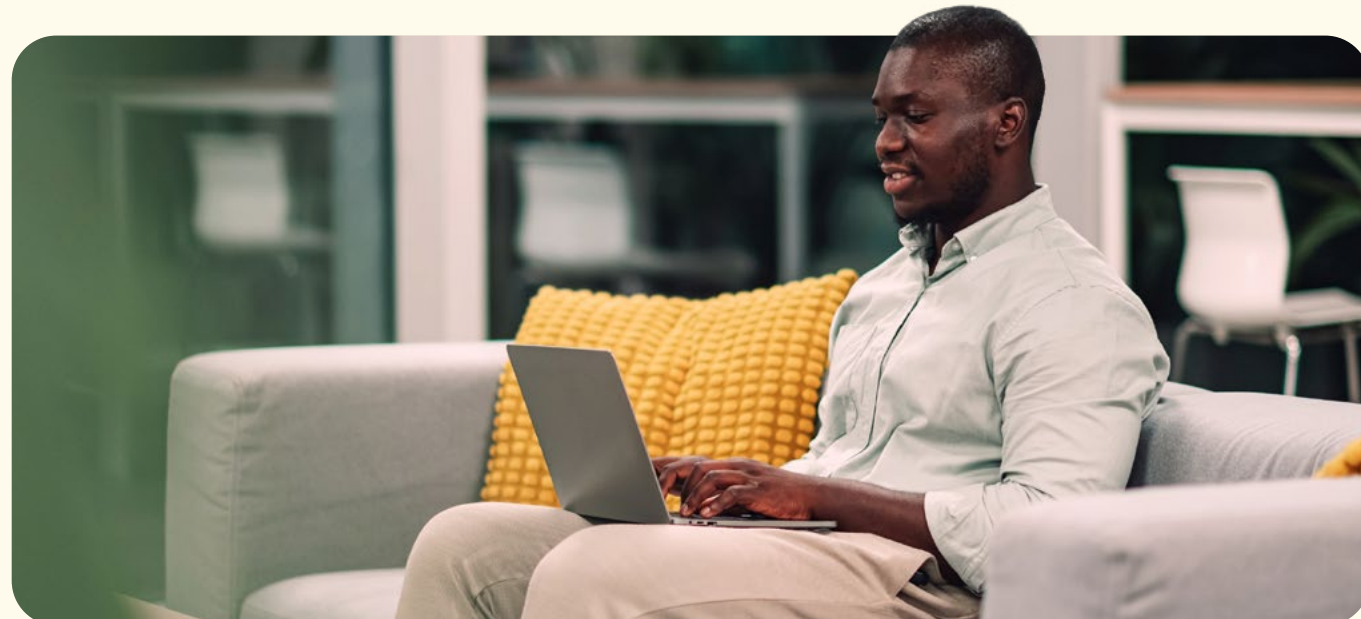
Marketers also understand that differentiation will be a big part of hitting those goals.

79%

of marketers are focusing more on brand marketing in 2026 than they did in 2025.

In a world of infinite content, increasingly accessible technology and customers with abundant levels of choice, brands need to stand out to be recognizable, relevant and remembered.

That makes the combination of brand, data and connected cross-channel experiences the trinity of marketing success.



Confidence v contradictions

One of the most interesting contradictions in this year's research came from the learning that **44% of marketers have considered leaving the profession**, despite role security being exceptionally high.

That suggests marketers aren't worrying about whether they'll have a job tomorrow, but are thinking about whether marketing is a job they want to keep doing in the future.

And when we asked marketers about their biggest challenges, it wasn't difficult to see why.

The combination of adapting to new technology, keeping up with changing customer behaviors, increased pressure to better understand and make smarter use of data, the addition of more marketing channels, and the weighty task of creating content that actually earns attention in the AI era, is a huge workload by anyone's standards. And all of this sits on top of a marketer's existing day job.

Marketers in 2026 aren't struggling with a lack of opportunity, the challenge is keeping up with the sheer amount of opportunity available.

And then there's AI

Of course there is. If there was any doubt that AI has entered mainstream marketing, our research puts it to rest: **99% of marketers are using AI**. But adoption isn't being met with enthusiasm.

While **94% of marketers trust AI to some degree** and **65% say it improves productivity**, only **36% say it makes their job easier** and the same proportion say they actually enjoy using it.

48%

Almost half of marketers only trust AI outputs after fact-checking them, and 36% are concerned about inaccurate outputs.

45%

Perhaps most tellingly, is that **45% of marketers are using AI for content creation**, but **24% say AI-generated content is too generic**.

The next stage of AI in marketing isn't going to be about using more AI. It's about making AI more useful. AI should reduce the repetitive work surrounding marketing without removing the judgment, creativity and human understanding that makes marketing effective in the first place.

That's exactly why we're building tools such as Dotdigital's Content Agent around marketers — helping teams create faster while keeping their brand voice at the heart of their work.

One last secret: marketers don't always prioritize what works

One of the most surprising findings in the entire report comes back to something all marketers prioritize: ROI.

20%

Email was named the number-one channel for delivering marketing ROI, cited by 20% of marketers surveyed.

But when marketers told us which channels they plan to prioritize, email ranked ninth.

The smartest marketing strategies aren't built around choosing between established and emerging channels, instead they connect them. Email, SMS, social, web, personalization, loyalty, AI and customer data become significantly more powerful when they're working together around one customer - rather than competing for attention.

2026/2027 is an exciting time for marketers, filled with optimism, ambition, investment and adaption.

The opportunity for marketing leaders isn't to just keep adding more channels, more tools and more tech, but to make everything work better together.

Better connected data, more relevant customer experiences, AI that amplifies marketers rather than replacing them and building strong brands that people recognize - with cross-channel strategies - is what will turn customer attention into lasting relationships.

The future of marketing won't belong to the team using the most technology, it belongs to the teams that use technology to make marketing more human.



Now, over to you!

These findings represent 1,500 marketers, but the conversation doesn't end with them. Share the stat that surprised you most on LinkedIn. Send this report to someone who could really learn something from the data inside. Take the findings into your next team meeting, and, most importantly, use the data to start conversations about what marketers need to succeed.



About Dotdigital

Dotdigital helps brands create marketing that feels connected, personal, and effortless. Our platform gives marketers the tools they need to design smarter cross-channel campaigns and stronger customer relationships.

Unified customer view

Dotdigital's single customer view connects data from all of your marketing channels in one place. That means every message is based on real behavior and preferences, not guesswork.

Create with ease

Our drag-and-drop email builder lets you move quickly from idea to polished campaign. Plus, with our AI template builder you can create beautifully branded emails without needing extra design or dev support.

Automate smarter

Craft journeys that respond to your customers in real time across all your marketing channels. Whether it's welcoming new subscribers over email, recovering abandoned carts with an SMS, or celebrating milestones with a perfectly timed website pop-up, everything you need to create a seamless experience is at your fingertips.

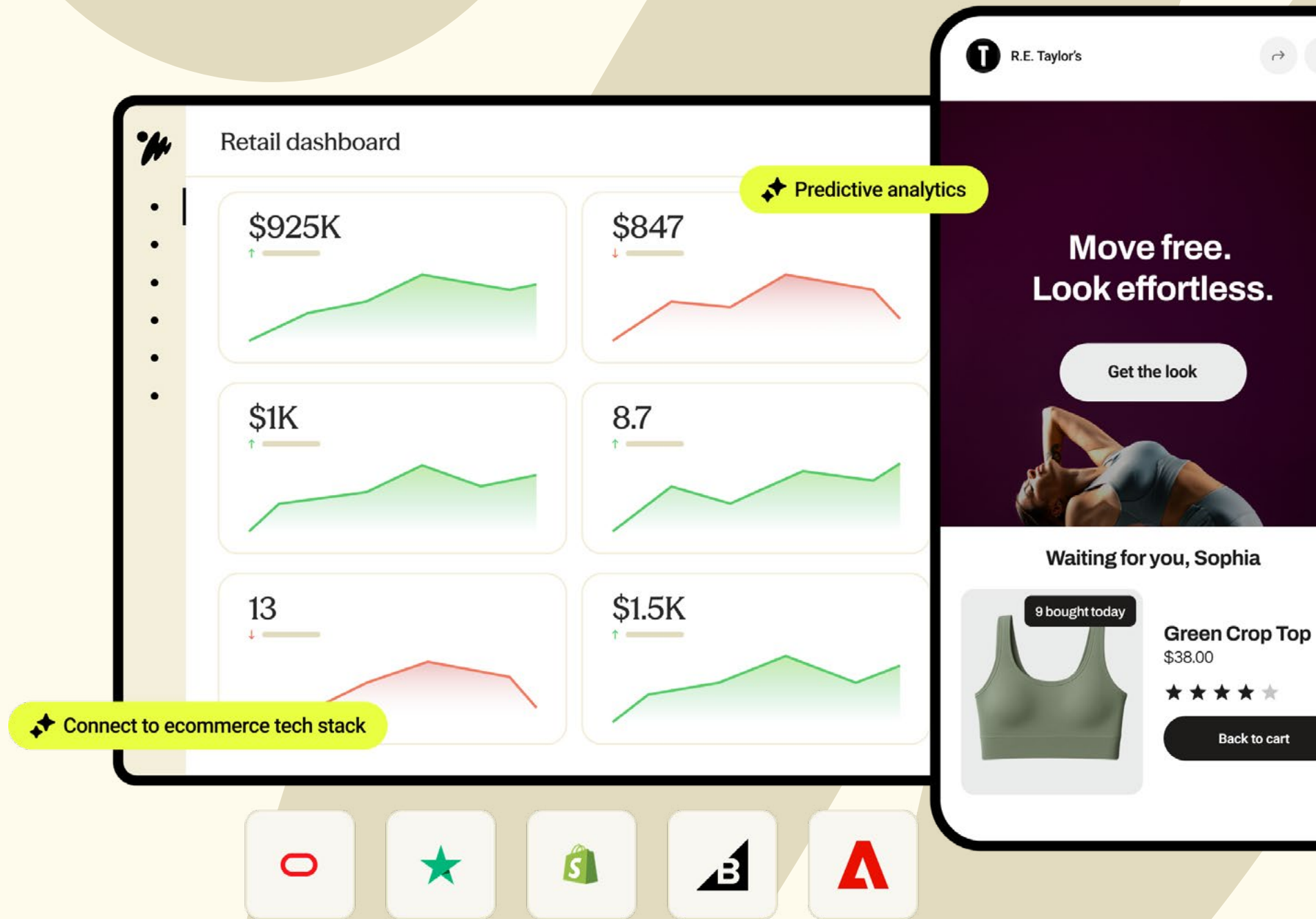
Personalize with confidence

With advanced personalization features and our marketing intelligence engine, you can deliver timely, relevant messages at scale. And because Dotdigital syncs seamlessly with your entire marketing stack, you'll always have the right data in one place to power personalized journeys.

Curious to see how it all works?

Explore how Dotdigital can help you bring your best campaigns to life.

DISCOVER WHAT'S POSSIBLE





Discover more at dotdigital.com