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2026 B2B Marketing Outlook:

Reinventing What Works in an AI-First World

A Reset Year for B2B Marketing

A clear shift is underway in 2026.

After several years of volatility across budgets, buyer behavior, and technology, B2B marketing has reached an inflection point. Change is no longer episodic—it is compounding. Buyers are harder to reach, discovery is increasingly mediated by AI, and expectations for measurable business impact continue to rise, even as marketing budgets remain under pressure. The result is a heightened urgency around how marketers drive efficiency, effectiveness, and execution—simultaneously.

In 2025, many marketing teams faced a hard reality: traditional advertising and engagement models were no longer sufficient on their own. Approaches that once performed in isolation now struggle in a fragmented, AI-influenced buying environment where attention is scarce, and buying activity is less visible. As a result, marketers enter 2026 with a recalibrated mindset—one that blends foundational priorities such as customer loyalty, brand building, and reputation with emerging capabilities like AI to drive sustainable growth.

The era of “brand first and measurement later” is over. So is the era of siloed campaigns, static account-based marketing (ABM) programs, and loosely coordinated buyer engagement.

In their place, a new mandate is taking hold: marketing must operate as a performance-driven system—one that prioritizes outcomes over activities, aligns teams around shared revenue goals, and uses data, intelligence, and automation to guide decisions in real time.

The year ahead is not just about reinvention, but rediscovery. New Harris Poll research conducted on behalf of Madison Logic shows that marketing leaders are recalibrating their priorities—returning to proven principles like brand building, customer loyalty, and reputation while simultaneously embracing AI as the most transformative force shaping the future of marketing.

This dual focus between foundational marketing practices and technological innovation signals more than another trend cycle. It marks a reset. In an AI-powered, fragmented discovery environment, marketers increasingly recognize that sustainable growth depends on combining timeless marketing fundamentals with modern, intelligent execution.

Brands that win in 2026 won't abandon the basics—they'll elevate them. The following trends outline how B2B marketing is evolving in this reset year, and what it will take to build a more resilient, accountable, and performance-driven approach in the year ahead.



According to Forrester, [83% of B2B marketing decision-makers expect increased investment over the next 12 months.](#)

Trend #1:

Brand, Loyalty, and Trust Become Competitive Advantages

As B2B buying grows more complex, brand is re-emerging as a decisive commercial advantage. Buying groups continue to expand, decisions involve more stakeholders, and consensus takes longer to reach. At the same time, buyers are conducting more research independently—often long before engaging with sales—consuming content across channels, formats, and moments that sit outside traditional demand paths. In this environment, trust is no longer built in a single interaction; it accumulates through repeated exposure, consistent experience, and credible signals over time.

This shift is forcing marketers to rethink how growth is achieved. Scale alone is no longer sufficient in a crowded marketplace where buyers are overwhelmed with choice and information. When discovery happens independently and asynchronously, brands must earn familiarity and confidence before intent is ever declared.

That reality is reflected in how marketing leaders are reallocating investment. Our Harris Poll survey shows marketers are doubling down on brand building and loyalty in 2026. Nearly half plan to prioritize customer experience and retention (45%), followed closely by brand building and long-term differentiation (43%). These priorities acknowledge a critical truth: when buyers self-educate and compare options early, the brands they recognize and trust are the ones that make the shortlist.

Loyalty and trust become even more valuable as attention fragments across channels and content volumes explode. In environments flooded with similar messages, brands that feel credible, consistent, and familiar are easier to remember—and easier for buying groups to defend internally. Brand confidence reduces perceived risk, accelerates alignment among stakeholders, and shortens decision cycles even as complexity increases.

In 2026, the brands that win won't necessarily be the loudest or the most ubiquitous. They'll be the ones buyers recognize, recall, and return to—because assurance was established before demand ever surfaced.



2026 Implication: Brands that fail to build trust and familiarity alongside scale will struggle to stand out—or stay shortlisted—as buying groups grow and independent research dominates the path to purchase.

Trend #2:

AI Becomes the Operating System—and Accountability Defines the Winners

As AI becomes embedded in everyday commercial applications, competitive advantage shifts from adoption to execution. In 2026, the winners won't be the organizations that deploy AI the fastest, but the ones that operationalize it with clarity, consistency, and control. Accountability can no longer be centralized or ad hoc; it must be distributed, supported by shared frameworks, training, and guardrails.

AI no longer sits alongside marketing strategy—it operates inside it. More than half of marketing decision-makers (55%) surveyed by our Harris Poll believe AI will reshape both the development and execution of marketing strategies in 2026, signaling a fundamental change in how strategy itself functions.

Marketing strategy is moving away from static, calendar-based plans toward adaptive systems that learn continuously. AI enables teams to interpret behavioral and intent signals as they emerge, dynamically adjust messaging, and optimize activation in near real time. Audience understanding becomes fluid rather than fixed. Content evolves as performance data flows in. Budgets and channels shift proactively instead of waiting for end-of-quarter reviews. Strategy increasingly behaves less like a document and more like an operating system.

But as AI scales across go-to-market teams, risk scales with it. While adoption is already delivering value—three-quarters of sales reps (75%)

report using AI-powered tools at work and 43% of generative AI decision-makers report improvements in customer experience—it is outpacing governance. The consequences are becoming harder to ignore.

Industry data points to rising legal exposure, reputational damage, and operational risk tied to AI-driven decisions. More than four in 10 marketing and sales leaders say their AI efforts have increased legal investigations or litigation in the past year, while a quarter cite reputational harm tied to AI-driven decisions. Forrester estimates that ungoverned generative AI in commercial applications could cost B2B companies more than \$10 billion in enterprise value, driven by legal exposure, fines, and reputational damage. The issue isn't whether AI works; it's whether organizations are prepared to manage its impact responsibly.

The next phase of AI maturity will be defined by operational discipline. Winning organizations will treat AI as a core infrastructure, embedding it across strategy, execution, and measurement while ensuring humans remain accountable for outcomes. That requires raising AI literacy across teams, setting clear guardrails, and empowering teams to question outputs, catch errors, and intervene when results don't align with brand standards, regulatory requirements, or customer expectations.

2026 Implication: The strongest marketing teams won't just scale intelligence; they'll scale accountability.

Trend #3:

Zero-Click Discovery Elevates Influence Over Visibility

In 2026, discovery will matter more than ever, but visibility is no longer enough. As AI-powered search, assistants, and recommendation engines increasingly shape how buyers gather information, brands are now competing in environments where clicks are optional and first impressions are formed instantly. An estimated 60% of Google searches now end without a click, and Gartner predicts that 50% of brands' organic search traffic will decrease by 2028 as generative AI reshapes discovery.

Buying groups now rely on AI Overviews, chat interfaces, analyst summaries, social feeds, and other zero-click surfaces to inform decisions. In these moments, influence outweighs exposure. Being present is table stakes; being trusted, cited, and reinforced by credible third parties is what determines whether a brand advances or disappears from consideration.

This shift in buyers' research behavior helps explain why marketers are rethinking how authority is built and measured. As traditional impression-based tactics lose effectiveness, performance-minded teams are investing in the signals that shape perception upstream: earned media, analyst relations, influencer credibility, and content designed to be surfaced, summarized, and validated by AI systems. Forrester predicts that 75% of B2B enterprises will increase budgets for influencer relations, elevating it from a tactical PR function to a strategic growth lever. Their Buyers' Journey Survey also shows that



68% of generative AI users use it to research, gather or summarize information.

analyst reports, social media, and proof of success now rival—or surpass—brand reputation as drivers of purchase decisions.

At the same time, genAI is accelerating content creation and distribution, placing more brand voice into more hands across the organization. While this democratization increases speed and scale, it also raises the stakes. Without coordination, governance, and shared narrative control, brands risk fragmenting their narrative precisely when consistency matters most.

The brands that win in zero-click discovery will treat influence as a system, not a campaign. They will align PR, analyst engagement, influencer strategy, content, and ABM activation around a shared story that AI systems can recognize, reinforce, and reward with visibility. They'll also expand their "signal universe" beyond engagement metrics to include external validation cues like third-party mentions, expert endorsement, and external credibility cues that increasingly shape AI-driven discovery.

2026 Implication: Brands that fail to intentionally build third-party credibility and narrative consistency risk becoming invisible—even when their content is everywhere.

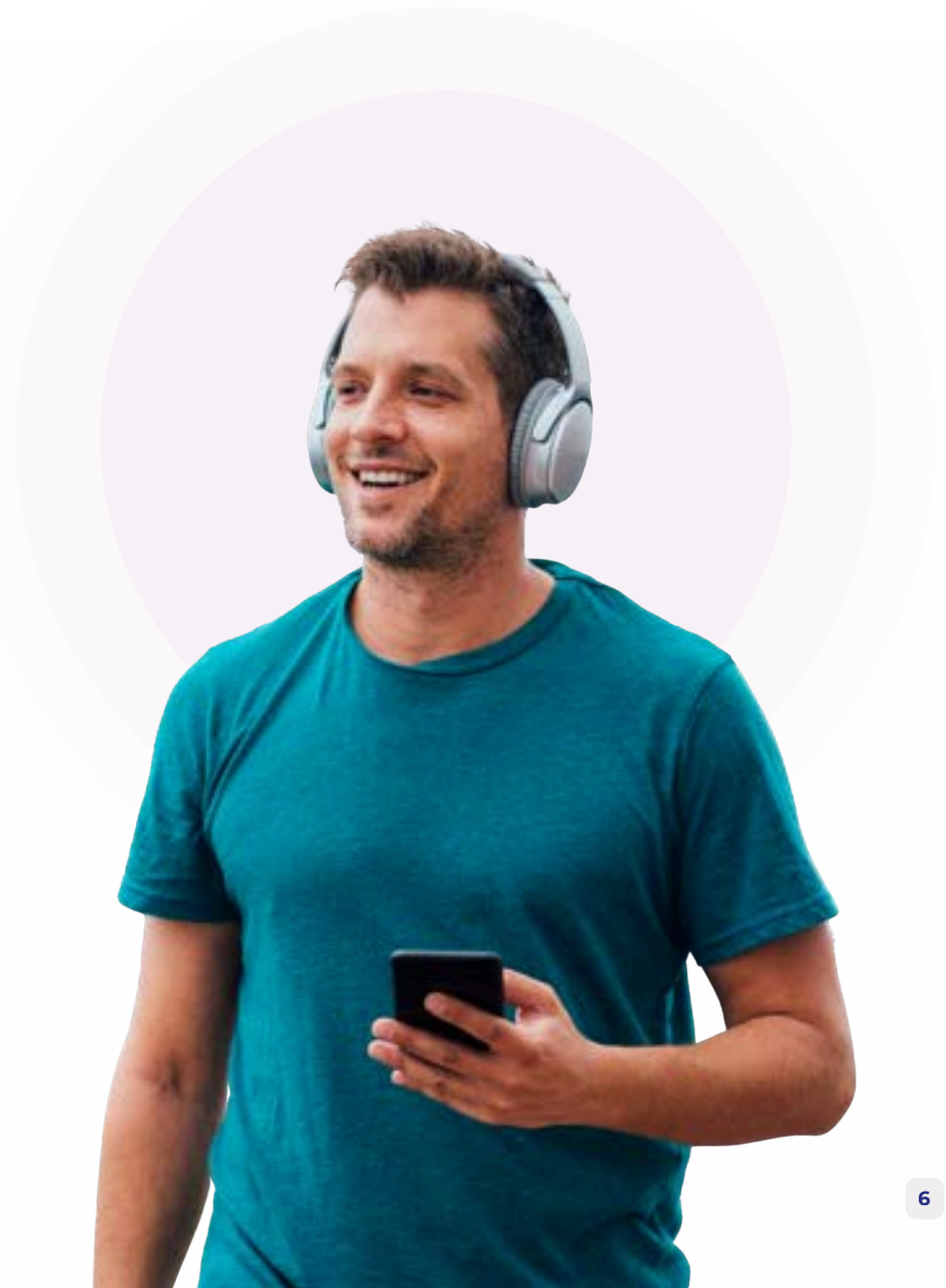
Trend #4:

Audio and CTV Turn Brand Building into a Performance Lever

For years, emerging channels like audio and connected TV (CTV) have been treated as experimental or “nice to have” in B2B marketing—useful for awareness, but difficult to tie to impact. In 2026, that perception changes. As buyers increasingly fragment across platforms and discovery happens outside traditional clicks, audio and CTV are becoming essential channels for shaping perception, building brand presence, and influencing demand earlier in the journey.

As B2B marketing moves beyond a 9-to-5, screen-bound model, brands are rethinking where and how they show up. Buyers now encounter B2B brands throughout the day—during commutes, workouts, travel, and moments of passive discovery—not just during working hours in front of a computer screen. This shift is driving renewed interest in channels that extend reach and engagement beyond traditional digital media.

The focus on emerging channels aligns with a broader rebalancing of B2B priorities. Our Harris Poll finds that 43% of B2B marketing decision-makers say they plan to prioritize brand building and long-term differentiation in 2026, recognizing that sustainable growth requires more than short-term performance tactics. Audio is particularly effective in this context, offering high-attention environments where brands can tell cohesive stories, reinforce credibility, and build familiarity at scale. Nearly half of B2B decision-makers already report that thought leadership content—including formats like podcasts—directly influence their purchasing decisions, underscoring the role audio plays in shaping trust long before a buyer ever clicks.





CTV's momentum is accelerating for similar reasons. In 2025, streaming surpassed cable and broadcast television viewership for the first time, according to Nielsen, with a growing share occurring in ad-supported environments. As attention shifts toward lean-back, high attention viewing moments, CTV enables B2B marketers to drive stronger brand recall and recognition across devices and contexts.

That impact on memory and familiarity matters more in an AI-driven discovery environment. As genAI reshapes performance channels like search and social—flooding feeds with low-quality, easily bypassed content—audio and CTV ads deliver sustained exposure in moments where attention is less fragmented. These repeated, high-attention impressions reinforce memory and familiarity, ensuring brands are remembered and stay top of mind even when clicks never occur.

We're already seeing the sustained attention that these programmatic ad channels garner being reflected in marketing budgets. According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau, 36% of advertisers planning to increase CTV spend say they will redirect dollars from social, while 32% plan to reallocate budget from paid search. As pressure on traditional performance channels continues, that migration is likely to accelerate in 2026.

What's changing isn't just channel mix—it's expectation. Audio and CTV are no longer upper-funnel add-ons. When integrated with intent data, ABM activation, and performance measurement, these channels become powerful levers for building trust, reinforcing authority, and fueling downstream demand in a zero-click world.

2026 Implication: B2B brands that fail to elevate audio and CTV beyond experimental awareness plays will lose ground to those using high-attention channels to build trust, protect brand equity, and drive measurable growth in an AI-disrupted media landscape.

Trend #5:

Precision Replaces Scale in Experience and Engagement

In 2026, B2B marketing will continue its shift away from indiscriminate reach toward precision-driven engagement. As buying groups grow more complex and journeys become less linear, success will no longer be defined by how many impressions a brand generates, but by how accurately it reaches the right accounts, roles, and moments with relevance and intent.

This evolution from “spray and pray” messaging to truly personalized marketing experiences has been underway for years but accelerates as AI and data infrastructure mature. Marketers now have access to richer, more continuous signals across the buying journey, including intent data from research behavior, engagement patterns across channels, and account-level insights from CRM, media, and content interactions.

This data depth fundamentally changes what personalization means. Experiences are no longer designed around static personas or assumed stages, but around observable buying activity in real time. Precision means identifying which accounts are actively researching solutions, which stakeholders are shaping consensus within the buying group, and which behaviors signal readiness to engage—then responding with experiences that reflect that reality.

Precision doesn't stop at targeting; it requires a new approach to measurement. Metrics optimized for scale, such as impressions, clicks, and even MQL volume, were built for linear journeys and visible interactions. They fall short in an environment where buying decisions unfold across multiple stakeholders, channels, and moments—often without a click at all.

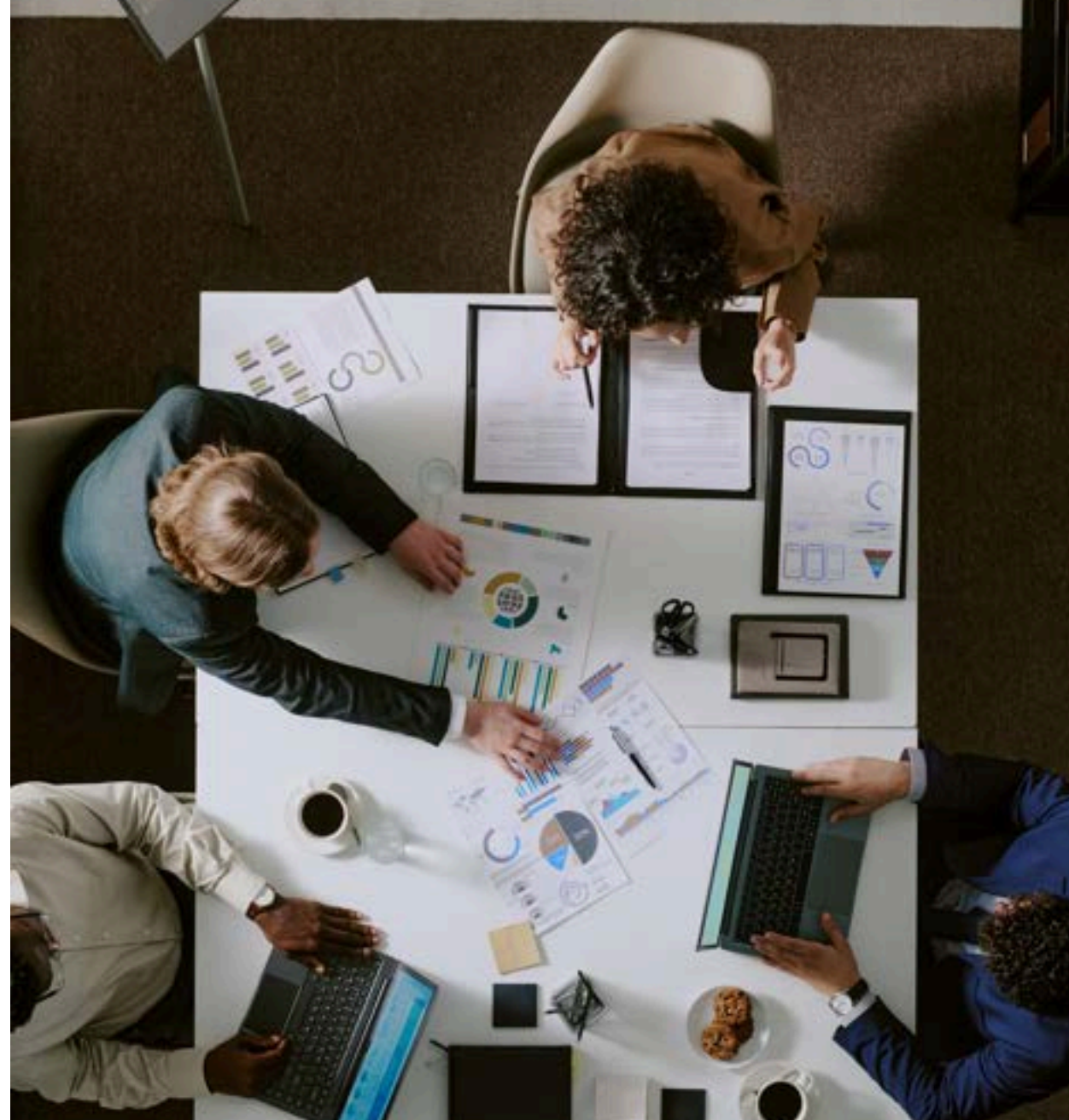


In 2026, performance is measured by influence and progression rather than volume. Marketers evaluate whether accounts are advancing, whether engagement is deepening across the buying group, whether messages are resonating over time, and how marketing activity contributes to pipeline and revenue outcomes.

Data-led optimization becomes the engine that makes this level of precision sustainable at scale. It allows marketers to continuously assess which experiences are working, where engagement is stalling, and how buyer behavior is evolving, then adjust strategies in near real time. Budgets shift dynamically, channels are prioritized based on demonstrated impact, and experiences are refined as signals accumulate.

The result is marketing that behaves less like a broadcast engine and more like a learning system—one that improves with every interaction and every signal. Scale doesn't disappear, but it becomes intentional, applied only where data shows it will drive meaningful outcomes.

25% of marketing leaders report spending budget on campaigns that look productive based on campaign metrics but do not drive revenue.



2026 Implication: Brands that execute engagement without rigorous measurement and optimization risk generating activity without impact. The strongest marketers will scale precision with the same accountability and operational discipline that drives strategic AI adoption.

Navigating the New Normal

2026 will be a defining year for B2B marketing. The landscape is more fragmented, discovery is increasingly AI-driven, and buyers are harder to reach with traditional approaches. At the same time, technology, data, and emerging channels like AI search, audio, and CTV offer unprecedented opportunities for marketers who can combine timeless principles with modern execution.

The trends outlined in this report show a clear mandate: marketers must balance trust, accountability, and precision while operationalizing AI across strategy, activation, and measurement. Brand, loyalty, and influence matter more than ever, but so does data-led optimization. Audio and CTV are no longer optional experimental channels—they are high-impact levers that reinforce brand authority and drive measurable engagement. And precision-driven, continuously optimized strategies will define who wins and who falls behind in a zero-click world.

Success in 2026 will belong to organizations that treat marketing as a living system: one that learns, adapts, and evolves with buyer behavior, while maintaining accountability, governance, and consistency across every touchpoint. Those who fail to integrate these principles risk generating activity without impact, losing trust faster than they can build awareness, or being outmaneuvered by more disciplined, insight-driven competitors.

From Trends to Transformation

Madison Logic can help. Our platform and expertise empower B2B marketers to unify strategy, data, and execution, ensuring that AI, emerging channels, and precision-driven engagement translate into measurable results. To turn these 2026 trends into actionable advantage, contact us today and start building the foundation for growth, trust, and impact in the year ahead.

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Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Madison Logic from December 1-8, 2025, among 307 U.S. adults aged 21+ who are employed full-time, as marketing, advertising, communications, public relations, or social media decision-makers (director level or higher) at their current company (referred to as “marketing decision-makers”). The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the full sample data is accurate to within +/- 5.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.