

The rise of marketing intelligence

How data, measurement and
agentic AI are redefining
modern marketing

Funnel

Executive summary

Marketing has always had the same job: understand what drives demand, allocate budget accordingly and improve performance over time. What has changed is the environment in which that work is done.

Customer journeys span more channels, data lives in more systems and privacy and platform changes have reduced what can be observed directly. At the same time, a growing share of marketing investment flows toward upper-funnel channels that influence demand but don't generate clicks. This makes attribution inherently more difficult, since the channels with the most strategic value are the least directly measurable. As automation and AI increasingly execute marketing decisions, weaknesses in data, measurement and reporting become harder to ignore. The consequence is a measurement gap: teams can scale execution but struggle to prove what's driving outcomes with evidence.

The data backs this up. Our research shows that 86% of marketers still lack clear insights to make confident decisions. Organizations are flooded with data, yet 72% of in-house teams struggle to turn it into actionable insights.¹ As signal loss increases and platforms rely more on machine learning for optimization, performance narratives become harder to reconcile across stakeholders. Only 32% of CEOs say they have clarity on how marketing drives growth.²

This is why a new category is emerging: marketing intelligence. Marketing intelligence is not a single report or tool but a workflow that involves gathering, analyzing and interpreting data on marketing activities and consumer behavior to make informed decisions. It does this through three linked functions:

Data integration: Marketing intelligence connects to marketing platforms and systems to collect data, standardizes definitions (conversion, channel, market), normalizes data and preserves history so performance remains comparable over time.

Measurement: It takes a holistic approach to measurement, combining attribution, marketing mix modeling (MMM) and incrementality testing to produce decision-grade estimates of incremental ROI.

Reporting: It anchors results to agreed targets and definitions so performance can be reviewed, explained and audited across both day-to-day execution teams and senior stakeholders such as CMOs and finance leaders.

The objective is to make marketing performance easier to manage: budgets can be justified with credible evidence, execution can be optimized against higher-quality signals and decisions can be repeated and scaled with the confidence and backing of leadership.

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
The new complexity of marketing	4
Why traditional measurement just isn't working	6
Marketing has a data problem	10
What is marketing intelligence?	12
The pillars of marketing intelligence	13
The business impact of marketing intelligence	15
Operational efficiency and AI readiness	17
References	18

The new complexity of marketing

Marketing is operating in a fundamentally different environment than it did even a few years ago. Regulatory changes, widespread signal loss, fragmented customer behavior and the rapid expansion of automated media buying have altered how performance can be observed, measured and explained.

The expectations placed on marketing leaders, however, have not eased. Growth targets and budget accountability remain. CMOs are still expected to explain what worked, what did not and where the next investment should go. The difference is that the evidence needed to support those decisions has become harder to assemble and easier to challenge.

The problem is not a lack of data; it's that the data is scattered. The number of digital marketing tools has grown by 7,258% since 2012,³ and the average enterprise marketing team now works across dozens of platforms, each with its own definitions, formats and update cycles. Spend lives in one system, conversions in another and revenue in a third. When data is siloed like this, the story it tells becomes unreliable. What looks like a solid lead on a dashboard is often just a fragmented signal, disconnected from the broader picture of what is actually creating demand.

Privacy and signal loss

The first hurdle is that marketers are flying blind because privacy rules have changed data collection. Consent banners block tracking, browsers like Firefox limit third-party cookies and mobile operating systems restrict how data is shared between apps. When Apple rolled out iOS 14 and made cross-app tracking opt-in, a large amount of user-level conversion data evaporated almost overnight.⁴ The shift has not been gradual — it has unfolded in waves.

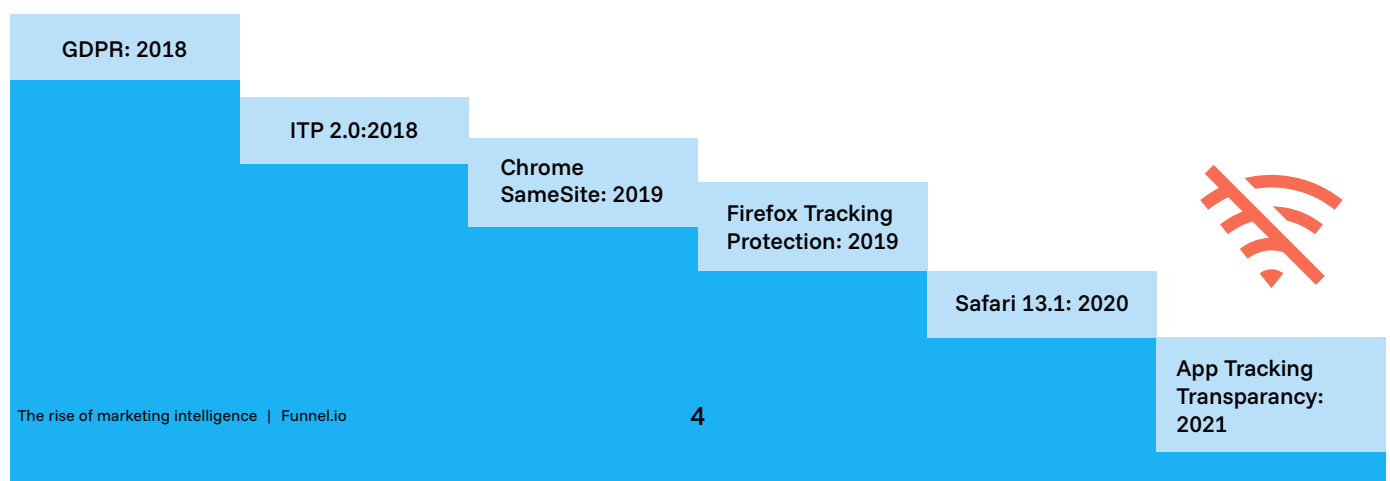
A few years ago, teams could follow a fairly continuous path from ad exposure to click to purchase. Today, those paths are broken. A marketer might see the start of a journey, or the end of it, but not the middle. Attribution models try to bridge those gaps by estimating what likely happened in between.

Modeling is necessary because it allows measurement to function in a privacy-restricted world. But the more of the journey that takes place behind privacy walls, the further apart action and outcome grow. And the more that gap widens, the harder it is to say with confidence which marketing activities actually create growth.

Automation inside ad platforms

At the same time, execution has taken a hard left toward automation. Major advertising platforms, such as Google, Meta and TikTok, now automate large parts of campaign execution by default. Bidding, targeting and pacing optimization are increasingly handled by machine-learning systems rather than manual rules.

While these automated systems have made campaign delivery more efficient, the platforms themselves are also navigating signal loss. Privacy changes, cookie deprecation and app tracking restrictions mean that platforms know less than they used to about what actually happens after a user clicks an ad.



The answer is conversion APIs, direct, server-to-server connections that send first-party conversion data back to the platforms so their algorithms can learn from real outcomes. But conversion APIs are only as good as the signals they carry. The caveat is that the system will optimize even with messy signals, and not necessarily toward desired business outcomes. When those signals are stable, aligned with real business value and consistently delivered, automation works well.

More channels that don't produce clicks

A growing share of spend is allocated to channels that influence people without asking them to click straight away, such as streaming TV, short-form video, influencers and retail media. These channels tend to work earlier or later in the journey, not at the point of purchase. Someone sees an ad, recognizes the brand and maybe does nothing at all in that moment. Days later, they search. Or, they come back directly.

None of that is strange from a buying perspective. It's how people naturally behave. This shift is especially pronounced as spend moves into upper-funnel and mid-funnel digital channels such as YouTube, TikTok, connected TV and creator-led media. These channels rarely produce direct, attributable clicks, yet they play a significant role in shaping demand, influencing consideration and driving downstream conversions.

What remains is the last thing that can be measured cleanly; usually search, retargeting or direct traffic. That creates bias in budget allocation because channels that help create demand often look ineffective, and the channels at the end of the journey look like they did all the work.

“Trust-us marketing”

No doubt, platform dashboards are useful, but they only show what the platform can observe and model inside its own ecosystem. That makes it hard for marketing teams to verify results end-to-end across channels and match them back to business outcomes. As such, teams become slower to reallocate budget because they can't prove the trade-offs.

Therefore, forecasts are less reliable because small changes in tracking or attribution rules can swing the numbers. As a result, because performance reporting doesn't hold up when it's questioned or reconciled against revenue and margin, wider business confidence in marketing suffers. Gartner research reveals that only 32% of CEOs and CFOs have received significant clarity from their CMOs about what marketing is capable of doing, and only 34% agree with their CMO on how marketing can support growth.² The gap between aspiration and achievement has never been more visible or more urgent to close.

The capability gap

Marketing leaders cite gaps in data and analytics capability as a barrier to better measurement. Skilled analysts are hard to hire and harder to keep. But even teams with strong talent struggle to keep up because it's the stack itself that works against them. This is why the problem persists even in well-resourced organizations.

Marketing data lives across platforms with different schemas, definitions and update cycles. A large share of the team's time goes into reconciling numbers, rebuilding reports and restoring confidence, rather than learning what worked and improving.

The environment marketing operates in has changed faster than the systems used to understand it. The result is a widening gap between the decisions marketing leaders are expected to make and the evidence they can confidently stand behind.

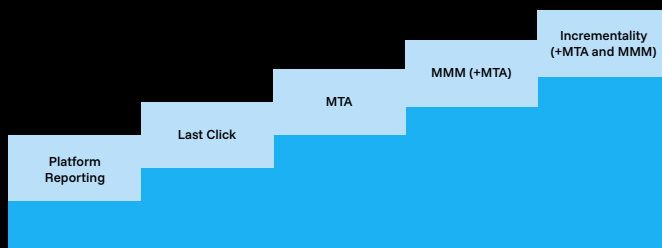
Why traditional measurement just isn't working

Most organizations are not short on data, tools or talent. What they are short on is certainty.

The playbook we use to measure performance hasn't kept pace with the complex world marketing teams operate in. When tracking gets harder, teams naturally climb a measurement ladder: platform dashboards for channel-level detail, last-click for clarity, MTA for cross-platform journey insights, marketing mix modeling for a wider view and incrementality tests for truth. Each rung exists for a reason. But none of them can carry the full weight of complex modern marketing on its own.

To understand why measurement feels fragmented, it helps to visualize how teams typically evolve their approach.

Figure 1. The marketing measurement ladder



As the ladder illustrates, each method solves a different problem, but none provides a complete, unified view of impact. Two structural weaknesses within traditional attribution models make this fragmentation inevitable.

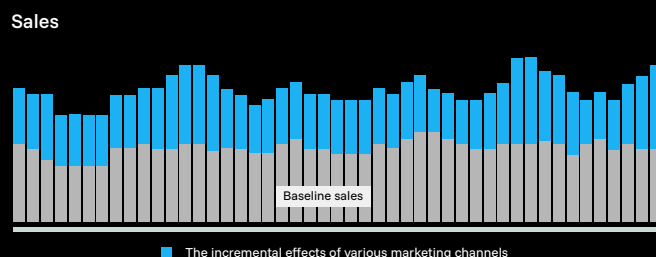
Last-click rewards the wrong thing

Last-click attribution is popular because it produces a clear answer: someone clicked, then they bought, so the click gets the credit. But that “clarity” is artificial. Last-click does not measure what caused a purchase. It assigns 100% of the value to the final observable touchpoint, which creates problems; two common examples are baseline demand and delayed impact.

Problem 1: It attributes baseline demand to marketing.

The first structural flaw is failing to separate baseline demand from incremental impact.

Figure 2. Baseline demand vs. incremental lift



This distinction is critical. If baseline sales are not modeled explicitly, marketing performance will be systematically overstated.

For businesses that have been around for a while, if you turn off all marketing, you'll still have sales. That's because of brand and market awareness built up over a long period, so returning customers and referrals continue to make purchases even without being exposed to marketing. This is called the baseline, and these sales should not be attributed to current marketing campaigns. Marketing campaigns should be measured only by how much sales they drive beyond this baseline. To do this, you have to include the baseline in your model and estimate it.

Problem 2: It assumes marketing impact is immediate and disappears instantly.

The second flaw is temporal: marketing impact does not occur instantly, nor does it disappear instantly (see figure 3 below).

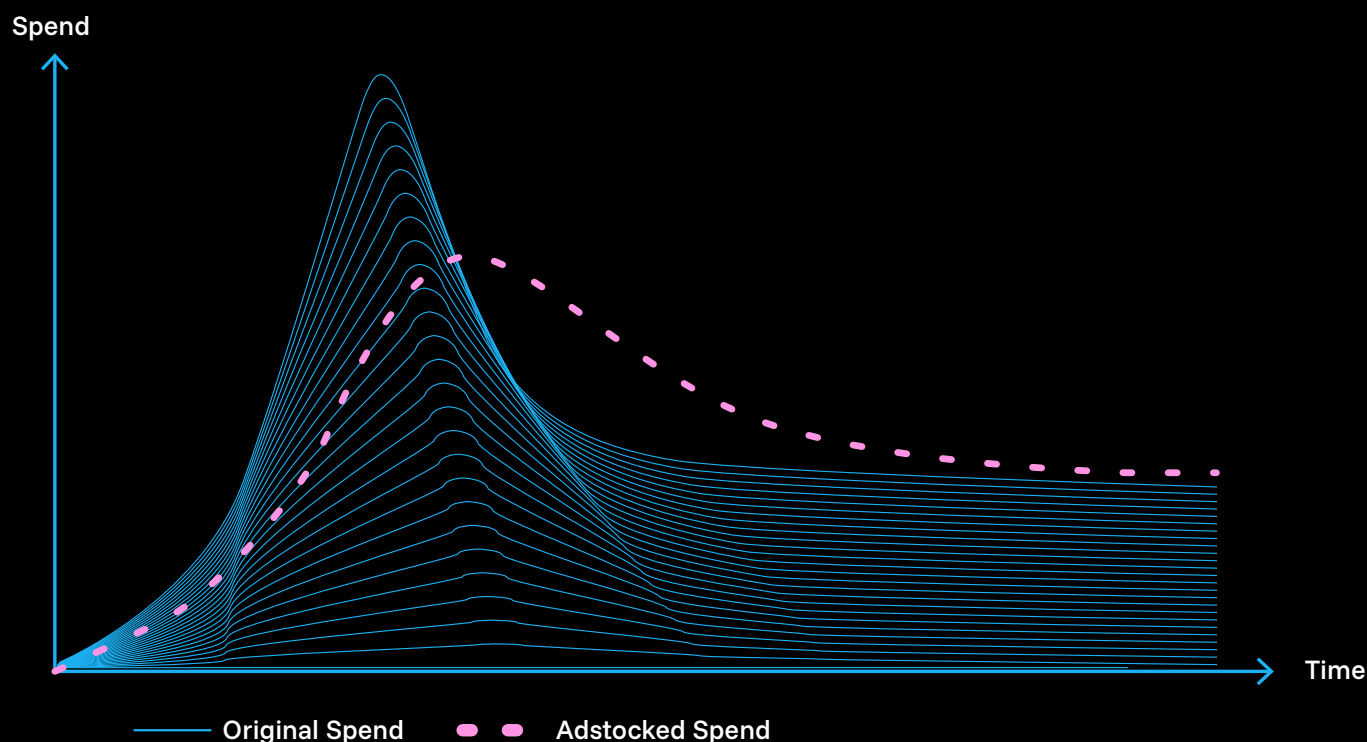
Last-click attribution assumes that all sales occur immediately. You buy a click, and the user visits the website and makes a purchase. In reality, marketing campaigns affect sales over an extended period. If you run a big marketing campaign in one day, it will lead to sales that occur over several weeks. The model of this type of time delay is called adstock. You need to model adstock to accurately determine the effect of your marketing.

So what does this do in practice? It biases budget decisions. If you steer by last-click, you tend to fund demand-capture channels and cut demand-creation channels, even when the latter is what sustains long-term growth.

But last-click is rarely where measurement starts. Most teams begin with platform reporting: the dashboards inside Google, Meta and other ad platforms. As they grow and need to compare performance across channels, they move to cross-channel reporting, which is significantly harder because it requires mapping data across different systems.

Last-click often becomes the default attribution model at that stage simply because it's the easiest to apply. And once it stops aligning with what teams see in the business, the instinct is to go back to the platform dashboards they started with.

Figure 3. Adstock and delayed marketing effects.



Without modeling adstock, measurement systems systematically underestimate long-term impact — and overvalue short-term demand capture.

Platform dashboards aren't neutral measurements

When attribution breaks down, teams lean harder on platform dashboards because they're detailed and always available. The issue is that each platform can only see what happens within its own world, and it reports results using its own definitions, attribution logic and modeling assumptions.

Here's a clear indication of this problem that many marketing teams run into: when you add up all the conversions reported by each platform, the total far exceeds what your back-end system actually records. Meta, Google, TikTok and others can each produce a convincing story in isolation, but those stories don't add up to a consistent explanation of business outcomes.

To be clear, platforms do provide valuable data for evaluating the relative performance of campaigns within their own channel. The problem is using that data to compare performance across platforms; it is essentially each platform grading its own homework, with no universal standard and no third-party auditing.

As signal loss increases, more of what you see is inferred rather than observed, which makes these cross-channel comparisons even less reliable. When every platform can plausibly claim credit, the question shifts from "what performed in this channel?" to "how should we allocate budget across the mix?"

Siloed attribution struggles when marketing gets more complex

An ad platform may offer "data-driven attribution," but it still operates inside a single platform's view of the world. It can help optimize performance within that channel, but it breaks down when you need to make decisions across channels, especially once you add upper-funnel activity, offline media, retail or multiple markets.

At that point, the limitation is structural: you can't allocate budget across the mix using reporting systems that each see only a slice of the journey. Decision makers need a view that treats marketing as one system, not a set of disconnected dashboards.

That's why teams step back from individual touchpoints and move toward measurement approaches that work at the business-outcome level.

Marketing mix modeling can widen the lens, but it cannot run the engine

Marketing mix modeling (MMM) helps teams move beyond clicks and view performance at the business level. It brings upper-funnel and offline channels into view, models baseline demand and shows contribution at the business level rather than within a single platform. The change in perspective is essential because it's often the first time a leadership team can see how different parts of the mix work together over time.

But MMM is not designed to answer operational questions.

Because it works on aggregated, time-series data, MMM can tell you that video, paid social or TV contributes to growth, but not how that contribution is created. It does not show which creatives are resonating, which audiences are responding or how performance varies at a campaign or creative level.

Reliable models require clean data, sufficient history and enough variation in spend and outcomes to separate signal from noise. For most organizations, that means monthly or quarterly updates, which take time. When leaders want proof, rather than estimates, they turn to experiments that can isolate causality.

Incrementality testing eventually hits a wall

When done right, incrementality tests cut through attribution noise to show exactly which investments are moving the needle; it's the most dependable way to pressure-test a channel or validate a high-stakes bet.

But it's hard to scale as controlled tests require planning, clean execution and time for results to emerge. As such, they work best when applied selectively, to critical channels, markets or decisions, rather than as a continuous measurement layer across every campaign and every week. Test results also reflect a specific set of conditions, which limits how far they can be generalized as the environment or other parts of your media mix change.

There is no doubt that climbing the measurement ladder helps you see the full landscape, but it doesn't remove the underlying constraint: every method depends on the quality and structure of the data underlying it. As customer journeys fragment, measurement becomes more inference than observation, which is why results stop reconciling and confidence in marketing drops.

The real problem to solve isn't how fancy your measurement model is, but whether the data foundation can support any model at all.

Marketing has a data problem

Poor data quality is expensive. It's estimated to cost organizations \$12.9 million per year on average, driven by wasted spend and time lost reconciling discrepancies.⁵ Over time, the damage isn't just financial; it erodes trust in reporting and slows decision-making.

That's the situation many marketing teams are in today: measurement has gotten more sophisticated, but the data foundation hasn't. The data feeding these models is fragmented, unstable and defined differently from one system to the next.

Unstructured signals are the next frontier

Beyond impressions and clicks, valuable signals now sit in creative assets, product images, reviews, social posts and support conversations. These sources are rich but difficult to standardize and often live in different teams and systems. As AI is increasingly used to analyze and generate creative and audiences, organizations need a governed way to connect unstructured signals back to structured performance data — a role marketing intelligence is designed to play.

Crucially, unstructured signals don't replace existing data challenges; they intensify them by introducing even more formats, ownership models and definitions into an already fragmented data landscape.

Fragmentation isn't just "lots of sources"

Marketing data is spread across ad platforms, analytics tools, CRM systems, ecommerce platforms, retail media and, increasingly, offline channels and repositories of unstructured content such as creative libraries or product reviews. The real problem is not the number of sources, but the fact that they store data in fundamentally different ways.

Some systems report aggregated time-series data. Others capture individual events. Others are built around objects such as customers, accounts or campaigns. Unstructured data — such as images, text, video and audio — doesn't conform neatly to any of these models, making it harder to standardize, join and analyze alongside performance data. Each model works within its own context.

Trouble starts when teams try to combine them as if they were the same, which creates issues like double-counting, mismatched numbers across systems and reports that look accurate but aren't.

Instability is an ongoing operational tax

Another problem is that marketing data is always changing. Platform-level shifts (API deprecations, attribution window changes and schema updates) regularly alter what data is available and how it's defined. Internally, teams also change the rules: KPIs evolve, business logic gets revised and naming conventions or reporting structures get updated.

These changes create an ongoing operational tax. Teams spend time fixing pipelines, revalidating numbers and rebuilding reports, which pulls skilled analysts away from analysis and decision support.

Over time, this constant change makes it difficult to maintain shared, consistent definitions across systems, turning instability from an operational burden into a strategic risk.

Inconsistent definitions make even advanced AI fall short

AI is already embedded in marketing workflows, from lead scoring to personalization.⁶ But AI doesn't resolve ambiguity in business logic. It learns from whatever structure you give it.

If "lead," "conversion," "pipeline stage" or "revenue" mean different things across systems, AI won't correct that. It will automate it. Models infer patterns from observed inputs, not organizational intent. When you apply automation closer to budget allocation, the risk increases: you can move faster, but in the wrong direction because you've scaled inconsistent definitions.

This is why semantic consistency becomes critical. For AI systems and agents to operate reliably, marketing data needs a shared semantic layer. The system must know exactly what concepts like "upper funnel" or "LTV" mean for the organization, so that when a marketer asks, "How are my upper-funnel channels performing?" the answer reflects the correct platforms, markets and definitions. Without this semantic layer and decision-ready data, AI systems are left to guess and teams cannot produce consistent, defensible decisions at scale.

What marketing leaders increasingly need is not another isolated tool, but a way to unify data, measurement and performance management. They need a system where definitions hold across channels and insights can be acted on with confidence. That need starts getting answered with marketing intelligence.

What is marketing intelligence?

Marketing intelligence is the foundation that turns fragmented marketing data into a single, reliable view of what marketing is doing and delivering. Instead of treating reporting, measurement and activation as separate workstreams, marketing intelligence unifies them.

Data is collected once, standardized once and governed once, then reused across planning, budgeting, optimization and reporting. The same definitions and structures run through every step, so the numbers used by day-to-day teams are the same ones trusted by the CMO, CFO and CEO.

Crucially, marketing intelligence is not only an operational capability. At a strategic level, it gives marketing leaders and executives a credible, shared understanding of how marketing investment contributes to business outcomes, enabling better budget decisions, clearer accountability and more confident conversations with finance and leadership.

In practice, marketing intelligence addresses a small set of core needs that most organizations struggle with today: getting marketing data in order across platforms and markets, measuring what works across channels and campaigns, reporting performance in a way that can be trusted by all stakeholders and turning those insights into decisions that can be acted on consistently.

When these needs are tackled in isolation, teams end up with disconnected tools, inconsistent definitions and insights that fail to translate into action.

Rather than addressing data integration, measurement and reporting in isolation, marketing intelligence as a category is meant to support the full workflow. The goal is to create a stable system of record for how marketing performance is understood, optimized and explained.

Why is marketing intelligence emerging now?

The way we do marketing has outgrown the infrastructure it depended on for the last decade. Yet expectations for speed, accountability and financial discipline have only increased.

Marketing intelligence addresses this gap by re-establishing coherence across planning, execution and measurement when the underlying signals are fragmented and constantly changing.

Marketing needs an authoritative system of record

Marketing is typically one of the largest discretionary spend owners in the business. Yet, unlike sales or finance, marketing lacks a single, authoritative view of its own performance. Sales CRM provides a shared source of truth for pipeline, customers and revenue that leadership trusts. Decisions scale because leadership can trust the numbers.

Marketing performance, by contrast, is usually spread across platforms, tools and spreadsheets, each with its own logic and incentives. As budgets grow and AI is implemented more, the fragmentation becomes a greater risk.

Marketing intelligence fills this gap by providing a single, trusted foundation for understanding marketing spend, contribution and outcomes. Planning, execution and reporting align to the same view, giving marketing the operational credibility required to confidently manage large budgets.

The pillars of marketing intelligence

Marketing intelligence helps you improve your marketing performance at every step in your marketing data workflow: bringing data together, measuring impact, turning insights into actions and reporting against targets.

The starting point is data integration to ensure the data is consistent, comparable and usable across everything that comes next.

Data integration

Data integration is the foundation on which the other capabilities depend, as it holds your marketing data. It is tempting to jump straight into gathering data and moving it into visualization tools, but without a clear framework for how that data should be structured, measured and used, the resulting insights will be flawed. Planning and governance ensure that the data collected is consistent, accurate and aligned with overall business objectives from the outset.

A key challenge is that marketing data doesn't behave like a single clean time series. Most paid media metrics follow a daily timeline, but other sources do not. CRM systems and organic social platforms produce event-based or object-based data that doesn't align neatly to daily reporting and can change retroactively. Add multiple currencies, metrics like reach that can't be summed day to day, and constant API changes, quotas and endpoints that don't merge cleanly, and the process of "getting the data in" becomes an operational problem rather than a one-time setup.

That's why mature teams look beyond connectors and require reliable data delivery as sources change. In practice, that means handling API and schema changes quickly, managing quota constraints, detecting gaps and performing retroactive updates and surfacing issues before they appear as broken reports.

But collecting data in one place still doesn't make it usable. Raw, siloed data in a lake can be almost as unusable as leaving it in source platforms. Teams need data that is cleaned, normalized and joined into an

analytics-ready, measurement-ready format. That requires a marketing data model that unifies definitions — for example, "campaign," "channel," "conversion" and "revenue" — across sources.

Storage strategy matters in this instance because marketing teams need years of history to analyze and train measurement models, while taxonomy, naming conventions and business logic change regularly. If you store only transformed outputs, updates require re-pulling history, and many sources have limited lookback windows. A robust approach preserves raw history, supports backfilling and keeps reporting comparable over time.

Integration also flows in the other direction. Once data is integrated and normalized, it can be activated — sent back to ad platforms through conversion APIs to improve how their algorithms optimize.

Automated bidding systems make decisions based on the signals they receive, and noisy inputs lead to weak outcomes. The platforms need better signals. For example, not all conversions are equal, but treating them as equal trains bidding algorithms on the wrong objective. Identifying high-value actions, such as qualified conversions, and delivering them reliably — without missing events, processing delays or inconsistent formatting — gives platforms a stronger foundation to optimize on. Industry testing suggests that improving signal quality can improve marketing performance by more than 15%.⁷

All of this work has a purpose: measurement relies on analysis-ready data from data integration.

Measurement

It's a dead end to chase perfect tracking, so the purpose of measurement is to generate evidence strong enough to support budget decisions when journeys can't be fully observed. Most organizations develop measurement capability in stages as their questions get bigger and their channel mix gets broader.

Attribution offers detail. Incrementality adds proof. Marketing mix modeling provides scale connecting spend to outcomes across the full mix, including non-digital factors and carryover effects like adstock.

Triangulation represents the pinnacle of modern marketing measurement because it combines these approaches to cross-check results. By reconciling the granular journey view, the top-down contribution view and causal evidence from experiments, teams can produce more defensible estimates of incremental ROI and make allocation decisions with higher confidence.

Once you know which outcomes you trust, the next step is to send the right inputs back to the platforms doing the delivery.

Reporting

Traditional marketing reports focus on what happened but fall short when explaining whether an outcome was expected or why it differed from the original plan. When results are presented without context, everything is open to interpretation. Stakeholders compare dashboards, notice inconsistencies and lose confidence. Reporting becomes something to defend, rather than something to use.

Many BI tools struggle with the added context marketing needs to explain; they are built for structured metrics, not evolving definitions or mixed inputs. As a result, teams build more dashboards. Each one answers a narrow question and requires ongoing maintenance.

A marketing intelligence approach changes what reporting is for by grounding it in governance established during data integration. Budgets, targets and definitions are agreed earlier with stakeholders, so performance is reviewed against those shared expectations and results become easier to explain in context. If a creative swap leads to a deviation in performance, the report can reflect that, rather than it appearing suspicious to stakeholders.

Reporting, in turn, gets simpler because teams are working from the same definitions and measurement foundation and fewer bespoke dashboards are needed. Marketing intelligence provides a trusted place to explore performance and a clearer way to share contextual results with stakeholders.

The business impact of marketing intelligence

For much of the past decade, marketing has functioned under a growing trust deficit. While the marketing technology landscape expanded by more than 7,000% after 2012,⁸ the ability to prove incremental impact declined.

Marketing intelligence helps close that gap by creating a stable foundation of governed data and decision-grade measurement. With that foundation in place, marketing investment can be managed more like growth capital that's allocated with intent, evaluated consistently and refined over time. The business impact is most visible in four areas: allocation decisions, learning velocity, marketing-finance alignment and operational efficiency.

Better allocation decisions

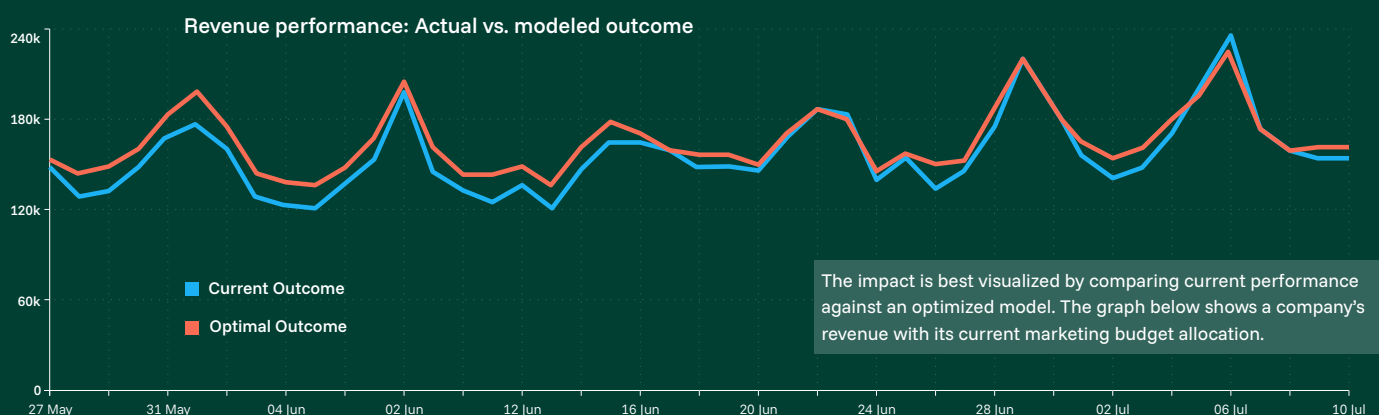
When marketing intelligence is deployed end-to-end and teams act on the insights, companies can typically achieve up to 25% improvement in marketing performance, with some achieving even more. In practical terms, that means either spending less to achieve the same results or growing faster with the same budget. For businesses, that can be transformative. For the individuals who lead the change, it can be career-defining.

Traditional attribution fails because it relies on averages. Average return on ad spend (ROAS) has become a vanity metric that masks significant waste, yet many marketing leaders continue to use it as a

North Star. Marketing intelligence shifts this focus toward marginal incremental return, enabling a more clinical assessment of where the next dollar should be spent and what it will yield.

Marketing budgets have flatlined at approximately 7.7% of overall company revenue. Despite these stagnant budgets, CMOs still allocate a larger share to paid media, now 31% of the total budget, up from 28% last year, while spending on martech and labor declines.⁹ The result is a diminishing return for every media dollar spent. Marketing intelligence empowers marketing and data teams to validate direction and experimentation by quantifying marginal returns. This helps leaders move beyond theoretical performance and answer the specific financial question: "If provided another \$1 million, exactly where will it go, and what will it return?"

But that level of precision is not just a nice-to-have, as measurement uncertainty now creates significant financial instability. According to TransUnion, 60% of marketers face internal skepticism regarding their metrics. When roughly 20% of a marketing budget is considered "at risk" due to these doubts,¹⁰ marketing intelligence functions as a financial insurance policy, providing the auditable evidence required to secure and protect the budget.



Faster learning loops

Our research shows that only 32% of in-house marketers report having a clear view of campaign performance across all channels.¹ The lack of transparency results in operational latency when performance fluctuates. The absence of a unified, governed data history forces teams into speculative debates. While these “circular arguments” persist, media budgets continue to be deployed against underperforming assets.

Marketing intelligence transitions an organization to almost instant diagnosis and isolates the ‘why’ something happened. For example, if it’s a technical glitch, the data foundation flags the broken connector or the taxonomy change before it ruins the report. If it’s a platform change, marketers can sanity-check the “black box” results against their own measurement models to see if the algorithm has simply hit a wall.

Ultimately, the value of marketing intelligence is measured in the learning loop. By reducing the time required to identify waste, organizations can reallocate capital with a speed that traditional reporting cannot support.

Bridging the finance-marketing divide

Another problem that blocks marketing teams is that the CMO-CFO relationship is often broken. Nearly 80% of these partnerships are fundamentally misaligned, leaving CFOs to view marketing as a discretionary cost to be trimmed rather than a revenue engine to fuel.¹¹ When finance doesn’t understand the “how,” they default to cutting the “what.”

The margin for error has disappeared. Fiscal pressure is now a constant: 59% of CMOs report they lack the budget to execute their 2025 strategies, while 39% are already planning to cut labor and agency spend just to protect their productivity.¹¹ In this climate, marketing teams cannot afford to speak a different language than the rest of the business.

Marketing intelligence forces alignment from day one because it requires both departments to agree on conventions and KPIs before the first dollar is spent, which gets teams to work with a shared definition of success. When marketing data follows the same mathematical framework as the company ledger, the friction of surprise audits and the skepticism that causes them vanishes.

Operational efficiency and AI readiness

With more time spent reconciling broken spreadsheets, debating mismatched figures and re-running reports because of small but compounding errors, most marketers are forced into the role of “data janitors.” That’s a high-cost use of strategic talent.

This is the operational gap marketing intelligence is meant to close: standardize definitions, monitor data quality and reduce the manual work required to keep reporting and measurement usable. Our research shows the scale of the problem. Only 12% of in-house marketers have extensively automated data-related tasks such as integration and performance monitoring.¹ Seventy-two percent say they struggle to turn the data they already have into actionable insights.

The stakes for efficiency extend far beyond saving time; it is the prerequisite for AI readiness. While the potential value of generative AI is in the trillions¹², automation applied to fragmented, low-quality inputs exacerbates inconsistencies rather than eliminates them.

The “productivity promise” of AI agents requires a reliable data foundation to prevent hallucinations (where the model provides confident yet nonsensical information). Currently, our research shows that only 33% of in-house marketers invest in the structured data and metadata that AI systems require to understand and surface content.¹

Marketing intelligence provides the “clean fuel” necessary to make these agents functional. Without a unified data layer, an organization may as well install a Ferrari engine into a vehicle with no wheels and still expect to get ahead in the race.

Final words

The marketing data paradox is the defining challenge for the modern CMO. Most teams possess more data than ever before, yet they have never felt less certain about how their budgets drive growth.

At Funnel, our mission is simple: to give marketing teams the clarity and control they need to drive better results. The core challenge hasn’t changed over the past decade. Marketers always need to understand what works and how to improve. What has changed is the environment. With AI reshaping how teams make decisions and allocate budgets, organizations need a reliable foundation of data and insight to guide the AI’s actions. That is what Funnel provides.

If an organization is evaluating a marketing intelligence platform, the priority must be an end-to-end solution that addresses structural problems rather than one that just moves data from A to B. Funnel stands alone by combining a governed data foundation with a built-in advanced measurement layer, providing the “how” behind the numbers. We built this platform to fix the fragmentation that prevents teams from turning data into decisions.

As AI continues to automate execution, the need for a trusted intelligence layer will only grow. In future work, we’ll explore how AI can operate responsibly on top of a governed marketing intelligence foundation.

References

1. Funnel. The 2026 Marketing Intelligence Report. Funnel. https://funnel.io/hubfs/Gated%20content/2026-Marketing-Intelligence-Report_Digital.pdf. Published 2026. Accessed January 15, 2026.
2. Gartner. Beyond 2025: With Purpose, Precision and Personalization. Gartner CMO Journal. <https://emt.gartnerweb.com/ngw/globalassets/en/marketing/documents/cmo-journal-q4-2025.pdf>. Published Fourth Quarter 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
3. Gartner. Gartner Says 63% of Digital Marketing Leaders Still Struggle with Personalization, Yet Only 17% Use AI and Machine Learning Across the Function [Press Release]. Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/gartner-says-63--of-digital-marketing-leaders-still-struggle-wi>. Published June 10, 2021. Accessed February 16, 2026.
4. Aridor G, Che YK, Hollenbeck B, McCarthy D, Kaiser M. Evaluating the Impact of Privacy Regulation on E-Commerce Firms: Evidence From Apple's App Tracking Transparency. SSRN. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4698374>. Posted February 6, 2024. Last revised November 17, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
5. Gartner. Data Quality: Why It Matters and How to Achieve It. Gartner. <https://www.gartner.com/en/data-analytics/topics/data-quality>. Published August 29, 2024. Updated November 11, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
6. Harvard Division of Continuing Education. AI Will Shape the Future of Marketing. Harvard DCE Professional & Executive Development. <https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/ai-will-shape-the-future-of-marketing/>. Published April 18, 2024. Accessed January 15, 2026.
7. AdExchanger Content Studio. Signal Versus Noise: Rethinking Frequency Management Without Ad IDs. AdExchanger. <https://www.adexchanger.com/content-studio/signal-versus-noise-rethinking-frequency-management-without-ad-ids/>. Published January 10, 2024. Accessed January 15, 2026.
8. Brinker S. 2025 Marketing Technology Landscape Supergraphic: 100X Growth Since 2011, but Now With AI.... chiefmartec. <https://chiefmartec.com/2025/05/2025-marketing-technology-landscape-supergraphic-100x-growth-since-2011-but-now-with-ai/>. Published May 6, 2025. Updated May 7, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
9. Gartner. Gartner 2025 CMO Spend Survey Reveals Marketing Budgets Have Flatlined at 7.7% of Overall Company Revenue. Gartner Newsroom. <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-05-12-gartner-2025-cmo-spend-survey-reveals-marketing-budgets-have-flatlined-at-seven-percent-of-overall-company-revenue>. Published May 12, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
10. TransUnion. New TransUnion Research Reveals Marketers' Confidence in Measurement Has Stalled. <https://newsroom.transunion.com/new-transunion-research-reveals-marketers-confidence-in-measurement-has-stalled/>. Published October 21, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
11. CMO Council. Marketing and Finance: Fueling Innovation or Falling Behind. CMO Council. <https://www.cmocouncil.org/thought-leadership/reports/marketing-and-finance-fueling-innovation-or-falling-behind>. Published July 7, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.
12. McKinsey & Company. The Economic Potential of Generative AI: The Next Productivity Frontier. McKinsey & Company. <http://mckinsey.com/capabilities/tech-and-ai/our-insights/the-economic-potential-of-generative-ai-the-next-productivity-frontier>. Published June 14, 2023. Updated May 12, 2025. Accessed January 15, 2026.

Want to be a smarter marketer?

Follow us on LinkedIn, YouTube and our blog
for insights to boost your impact

