

An aerial photograph of a city skyline, likely New York City, during the golden hour of sunset. The image shows a dense cluster of skyscrapers and buildings, with a prominent street filled with traffic running vertically through the center. A semi-transparent blue rectangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the main title text. A white grid pattern is visible across the entire image.

# The future of marketing effectiveness in 2026

**Funnel**

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# Effectiveness, rewritten for 2026

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Marketing effectiveness is entering a new era. AI is giving marketers new ways to forecast, optimize and act in near real time. Privacy laws are pushing teams to find cleaner, more resilient approaches. And the industry is moving past oversimplified models like last-click attribution.

Budgets are also leaner, while journeys are more complex and old signals are harder to find. Gartner's CMO Spend Survey notes that budgets have dropped to 7.7% of revenue even as boards raise expectations.<sup>1</sup> This shift creates an opening for CMOs who can adapt. For leaders ready to embrace smarter measurement to demonstrate effectiveness, this is the moment to stand out.

**“Marketing effectiveness is no longer about explaining what happened. It’s about deciding what to do next.”**

**What defines effectiveness in 2026 is agility. CMOs who succeed will prove impact with sharper tools, act on opportunities faster and scale measurement to fit their stage of growth.**

Funnel makes that possible by giving teams a measurement foundation that adapts as they grow, from fast clarity on digital performance to more advanced, brand-level decision support at scale.

Measuring marketing effectiveness today isn't about looking backward to justify spend. It's about leading forward: showing marketing's true value, guiding smarter investments and unlocking growth in a world full of new possibilities.



# 1. Why is marketing effectiveness changing?

In today's boardroom, CMOs aren't measured by how many people they reach but by how much growth they create. Impressions and clicks might look good on a slide, but they don't tell the full story. The goal of marketing measurement is to link efforts to business impact. It's about proving how marketing fuels revenue, margin and momentum.

## From vanity metrics to business value

When leaders shift from vanity metrics to value metrics, they don't just earn trust; they elevate marketing as a driver of growth. The IPA's Making Effectiveness Work 2024 report revealed that organizations with strong effectiveness cultures are more consistent in aligning marketing strategies with long-term objectives, and they outperform peers who treat measurement as a reporting exercise.<sup>2</sup>

That shift is visible in every boardroom. CEOs and CFOs are asking tougher questions, and CMOs are expected to answer in financial terms. The CMO Survey reports that 61% of CMOs face rising pressure from CEOs to prove impact.<sup>3</sup>

For CMOs, the challenge is clear: measurement must keep pace with sharper expectations and faster decisions. That involves knowing when to look beyond attribution and building a reliable marketing intelligence foundation to power better measurement.



Want to see what it takes  
to succeed as a CMO in 2026?

**Download our ebook,  
How to become a CMO.**



# Why attribution alone falls short

Using attribution as the baseline measure is often treated as the definitive answer to effectiveness, but on its own, it tells only part of the story. Attribution can oversimplify by assigning value to clicks or touchpoints without capturing the longer-term drivers of actual growth.

Single-touch models mislead. Whether last-click or first-click, they distort the customer journey by elevating one point of interaction over the full path.

Even multi-touch attribution becomes limiting when marketing teams adopt a brand-heavy approach or rely heavily on offline channels. Data-driven and rules-based models add more context, but they still focus on short-term outcomes rather than the combined effects of marketing campaigns, channels and brand activity.

A more holistic approach to measurement — one that unifies methods — clarifies how marketing efforts influence business outcomes. But it's important to keep in mind that unified marketing measurement isn't about chasing a perfect model; it's about using the right models for the moment.

The IPA's Making Effectiveness Work report shows that strong effectiveness cultures balance short-term accountability with long-term growth.<sup>2</sup> That means knowing when attribution delivers speed, when MMM provides scale and when incrementality testing proves causality.

With open-source marketing mix models like [Google's Meridian](#) and [Meta's Robyn](#), MMM is automated, privacy-safe and calibrated with experiments. But new tools don't negate existing methods.

To get the most out of measurement, marketing teams should be flexible enough to apply each method (or a combination of them) where and when it creates the most value. Funnel lets you do just that. Funnel Measurement includes MMM, attribution models and incrementality testing. The suite is integrated with our Data Hub, so clean, normalized data updated daily feeds into your measurement models for ongoing insights you can build strategies on, forecast with and use to optimize for marketing success.

Still matters  
Still matters  
Still matters  
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Still matters

## Attribution still matters:

especially for dynamic and fast budget allocation and campaign optimization in platforms like Meta Ads or Google Ads.

## MMM still matters:

especially for long-term strategic planning, brand-heavy marketing campaigns, channel mix decisions and quarterly budgeting.

## Incrementality still matters:

especially for proving true lift, validating experiments and justifying marketing spend to finance.









# How CMOs can turn risk into opportunity

Executives no longer just want proof after the fact. They want marketing to guide investments, shape customer experience and drive growth. CMOs who deliver trusted, business-linked measurement can turn budget pressure into real, measurable influence.

Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform is built to drive that influence. It gives midmarket brands rules-based, data-driven and programmatic attribution they can act on quickly, while also supporting enterprises with advanced methods like MMM, incrementality testing and triangulation when scale demands them.

## The results speak for themselves.

Deuba rebuilt its marketing measurement foundation with Funnel's AI-powered multi-touch attribution and marketing mix modeling. The company had relied on last-click attribution, which obscured the impact of top and mid-funnel channels, such as social and display. After integrating data through Funnel, Deuba discovered that some social campaigns were driving up to 80% more conversions than reported previously.

By feeding these refined insights into Google Ads bidding, Deuba improved cost per acquisition and increased return on investment. Funnel's unified data and advanced modeling gave the team confidence to allocate spend based on true channel performance rather than incomplete tracking. The result was a shift from reactive reporting to proactive, data-led optimization across every marketing channel.



Explore Deuba's journey from last-click reporting to data-led growth.



## Key takeaway:

**Attribution alone flattens marketing's impact into a narrow view. The marketers that layer it with MMM, incrementality testing and experiments grow their influence and shape strategy.**





## 2. What will effectiveness mean in 2026?

Marketing effectiveness is becoming the playbook for growth, and the opportunity lies in how measurement guides the next move, not in how it records the last one.

### Moving from outputs to decisions

Impressions and clicks once were enough to call a campaign a win, but they no longer hold weight in the boardroom. Executives want sharper answers. Did this help us make a better decision? How do we know this will increase sales?

Effectiveness is about the quality of choices marketing enables. Why does this matter? Organizations with a formal effectiveness roadmap are 37% more likely on the brand side and 38% more likely on the agency side to build cultures that adapt and improve.<sup>2</sup>

### Activity is no longer enough

Clicks, views and reach still have surface value, but they don't answer the questions that matter. Did those users convert? Were they the right customers? Activity shows movement, not momentum. Boards want to know which levers to pull, which campaigns to cut and where the next dollar will work hardest. That requires measurement that sharpens decisions in real time.

## Effectiveness as a spectrum

No single model provides all the answers.

Effectiveness follows a spectrum because different businesses need different tools:

- **Attribution as a starting point:** Midmarket brands need swift clarity inside digital platforms. Rules-based models (including last-click) and platform-reported conversions provide the fast entry point many teams need. Funnel is making this easier by integrating Digital Attribution directly into its app.
- **Data-driven multi-touch attribution (DD MTA) for depth:** When brands need to see how touchpoints combine, data-driven MTA provides richer short-term context.
- **MMM and incrementality testing for scale:** Enterprises with complex budgets often turn to MMM for long-term patterns and incrementality testing for causal proof.
- **Triangulation for the most advanced:** Some organizations combine all three, validating results from multiple angles.

The point isn't chasing every model. It's matching the method to the stage of business and scaling as needs grow.

Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform supports this spectrum. Midmarket teams can act on attribution today while enterprise teams add MMM, incrementality testing and triangulation on top. Clean standardized data feeds all of it, turning measurement into a living decision engine.



Want to go deeper into unified measurement?

[Read Triangulation Tango — our guide to combining attribution, MMM, and incrementality testing for a complete view of marketing effectiveness.](#)



And the spectrum is only part of the story. Even the best models depend on the intelligence behind them. That's where AI is reshaping what's possible, changing not just what can be measured but how quickly insights surface and how decisions themselves are made.

### Takeaway:

**Marketing effectiveness in 2026 won't be defined by a single model. It will be defined by using the right method for the moment.**







### 3. How is AI changing how we measure and market?

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AI is moving measurement from hindsight to foresight. What used to take weeks of manual work can now be modeled, tested and adjusted in near real time. The winners are the teams that treat AI not as a shortcut but as the new backbone of decision-making.

#### The unseen transformation

AI is at the core of how marketing decisions get made. Teams use it to forecast outcomes, allocate budgets and catch weak campaigns before they sink results. Predictive models now score user intent, budget elasticity and purchase probability. The payoff is a sharper focus on where to invest and when to pull back.

McKinsey's State of AI report shows that 78% of organizations now use AI in at least one business function, and 71% report regular use of generative AI in areas like marketing.<sup>4</sup> Companies are redesigning workflows and adding governance roles to scale responsibly. The Wall Street Journal reports that Yum, parent of Taco Bell and KFC, is already running AI-driven campaigns that outperform traditional ones, boosting purchases and reducing churn.<sup>5</sup>

The headlines focus on creative AI, but the bigger disruption is happening behind the scenes. AI is rewiring measurement itself.

**“AI isn’t changing what we measure.  
It’s changing how fast decisions  
can be made.”**



## Where AI is reshaping measurement

The impact is showing up across every stage of the measurement process. What once slowed teams down is now automated, accelerated and made more reliable:

- **Simplifying and automating complex modeling processes:** AI infrastructure, such as Ray, can be used to calculate and compare thousands of different models. AI is also being used to automate parts of the modeling process, for example, suggesting causal relationships between input variables.
- **Automatically generate insights:** Generative AI allows you to consolidate and synthesize separate data insights from an advanced measurement system into specific and valuable recommendations and action items.
- **Simulating budget shifts:** AI tests how reallocating spend across channels affects reach and conversions, letting teams pressure-test strategies without burning cash.
- **Instantaneous anomaly detection:** Algorithms flag unexplained spikes or drops instantly, so teams can act before waste builds.
- **Next-generation MMM:** Biggie outlines how Google researchers are building transformer-based models, such as NNN, that capture cross-channel effects, seasonal swings and creative impact with more precision than traditional methods,<sup>6</sup> advancing the field. However, it's not yet an established replacement for traditional MMM frameworks.

The common thread is speed. AI shortens the cycle from messy data to confident action.

But like any measurement step in the data stack, AI tools are only as good as the data they get. Feed them siloed, inconsistent inputs, and the outputs will be skewed. That's why Funnel's transformation process matters. It standardizes marketing data across all sources, ensuring clean inputs for MMM, attribution and incrementality testing.

With that foundation, AI and Funnel together become a helpful decision engine. Teams can build accurate forecasts, spot issues earlier and run simulations with confidence that the inputs reflect reality. Funnel connects the dots across models, teams and platforms, turning AI's potential into intelligence marketing leaders can act on now.

### Takeaway:

**AI isn't just speeding up creative work.**

**It's reshaping the backbone of marketing effectiveness by making measurement faster, smarter and predictive. Funnel makes sure those systems run on clean, trusted data so teams can move with clarity and confidence.**

## 4. The new measurement stack

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Marketing is too complex for one lens to capture it all. Budgets span channels, customer journeys stretch across platforms and the stakes in the boardroom demand more than a single source of truth. That's why the smartest teams are building a measurement stack that adapts to their needs and grows with their maturity.

### Why one method isn't enough

No single model can carry the weight of modern marketing. Attribution on its own misses long-term brand impact. MMM on its own can't capture user-level signals or the fast-moving shifts of digital. Incrementality testing can prove lift, but it won't tell you how results scale.

That's why the best teams build a stack that blends methods: MMM for long-term patterns, attribution for speed and incrementality tests to validate cause and effect.

### Where triangulation can fall short

Triangulation isn't a neat 30-30-30 split. In practice, MMM often anchors the view, with attribution and incrementality testing adding short-term and causal context. The right balance depends on business model, channel mix and data availability.

### It still fails when:

- **Data is disconnected:** Without shared inputs, MMM, attribution and lift tests can't be cross-checked.
- **One method dominates without context:** Last-click creates short-term bias, while MMM alone misses short-term digital signals.
- **Teams aren't aligned:** Without shared definitions of success, even strong models fail to drive action.
- **Models don't evolve:** Outdated or unrecalibrated models quickly lose relevance.<sup>7</sup>

Triangulation is powerful, but it's not the only way forward. For example, brand-heavy advertisers in industries such as automotive and consumer packaged goods often lean on MMM as their core model because it captures upper-funnel spend. Growth-stage brands usually start with attribution for quick clarity on digital ROI.

Sophistication isn't about using every method. It's about knowing which models fit your context, when to add depth and how to shift from deterministic attribution toward more probabilistic, privacy-safe approaches.

## Funnel's role in the new stack

Funnel makes this flexibility real by supporting different ways of measuring marketing effectiveness within one connected system, all powered by clean, standardized data.

For mid-market teams, Funnel focuses on making digital performance clearer and more actionable, helping marketers understand how channels and campaigns contribute to results without the overhead of heavy modeling.

As organizations grow in complexity, more advanced approaches (such as marketing mix modeling, experimentation and triangulation) become increasingly important. Funnel supports these methods at enterprise scale, ensuring teams can evolve their measurement as their business matures.

### With Funnel, teams get:

- **Multiple methods in one place:** Attribution and experimentation today, with advanced approaches like MMM layered on as teams scale — all built on the same trusted inputs.
- **Continuous loops:** Always-on measurement that updates quarter after quarter, not static studies that fade.
- **Decisions, not just reports:** Models that guide where to invest next, not just explain what happened last quarter.

Power Digital reduced manual work by as much as 75% by building a proprietary analytics platform on Funnel, replacing manual, one-off reporting with a scalable, always-on system for fast insights.

This capability sets Funnel apart. Agencies and consultancies often deliver measurement as one-off projects. Funnel turns it into an always-on capability that scales with your business.

## The stack that builds momentum

The goal is to build a stack that grows with your business so your technology never holds your team back. For some brands, attribution alone provides enough clarity. For others, MMM offers the bigger picture. For the most advanced, triangulation blends MMM with supporting layers of attribution and incrementality testing to cover short-term signals and causal effects.

**The upside is clear:** Teams can move beyond backward-looking reports to a forward-looking system for growth. Funnel connects the dots across models, teams and platforms, giving leaders the confidence to act rapidly.





# 5. Why infrastructure is more than operations: it's a moat

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Data infrastructure is often treated as plumbing for IT to quietly manage. In reality, it's the strategic edge. Clean, scalable and unified data is what separates fast movers from laggards. It's the difference between spotting opportunities first and chasing after competitors.

When data flows seamlessly across teams, you cut decision delays, remove rework and accelerate experimentation. Over time, that speed compounds into a durable advantage. Infrastructure becomes a moat: the barrier that protects your ability to move faster, operate smarter and build lasting performance.

We see this every day here at Funnel. With data structured for scale, teams can stack advanced measurement like MMM, attribution and incrementality testing, simulate future outcomes and align insights across finance, media and strategy without manual exports or engineering bottlenecks.

The stakes rise further in an AI-first world. Machine learning models for attribution, forecasting or budget allocation are only as strong as the data they consume. Feed them fragmented inputs, and AI multiplies the noise. Feed them clean, unified data, and AI drives clarity, accuracy and faster decisions. That's why the best teams treat infrastructure as a growth driver, not a backend chore.

## Bad data breaks everything

Outdated, duplicated or missing data wrecks measurement. Metrics drift across platforms, trust erodes and analysts spend more time cleaning than learning. According to research shared by McKinsey, companies that use analytics effectively are 1.5x more likely to achieve above-average growth than their peers.<sup>8</sup>

## Manual reporting slows you down

Teams still trapped in CSVs and stitched dashboards waste hours chasing errors. Siloed data can't be trusted or compared. Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform flips the script: centralizing campaigns, spend and performance data into always-on dashboards that refresh automatically, giving leaders instant clarity.

## Unified data unlocks advanced measurement

Marketing mix modeling, attribution and incrementality testing all depend on consistent inputs. If foundations don't line up, outputs clash and insights go unused. Scalable infrastructure ensures every method pulls from the same trusted source, so results align and planning moves forward. Instead of debating whose report is right, teams can ask the only question that matters: what should we do next?

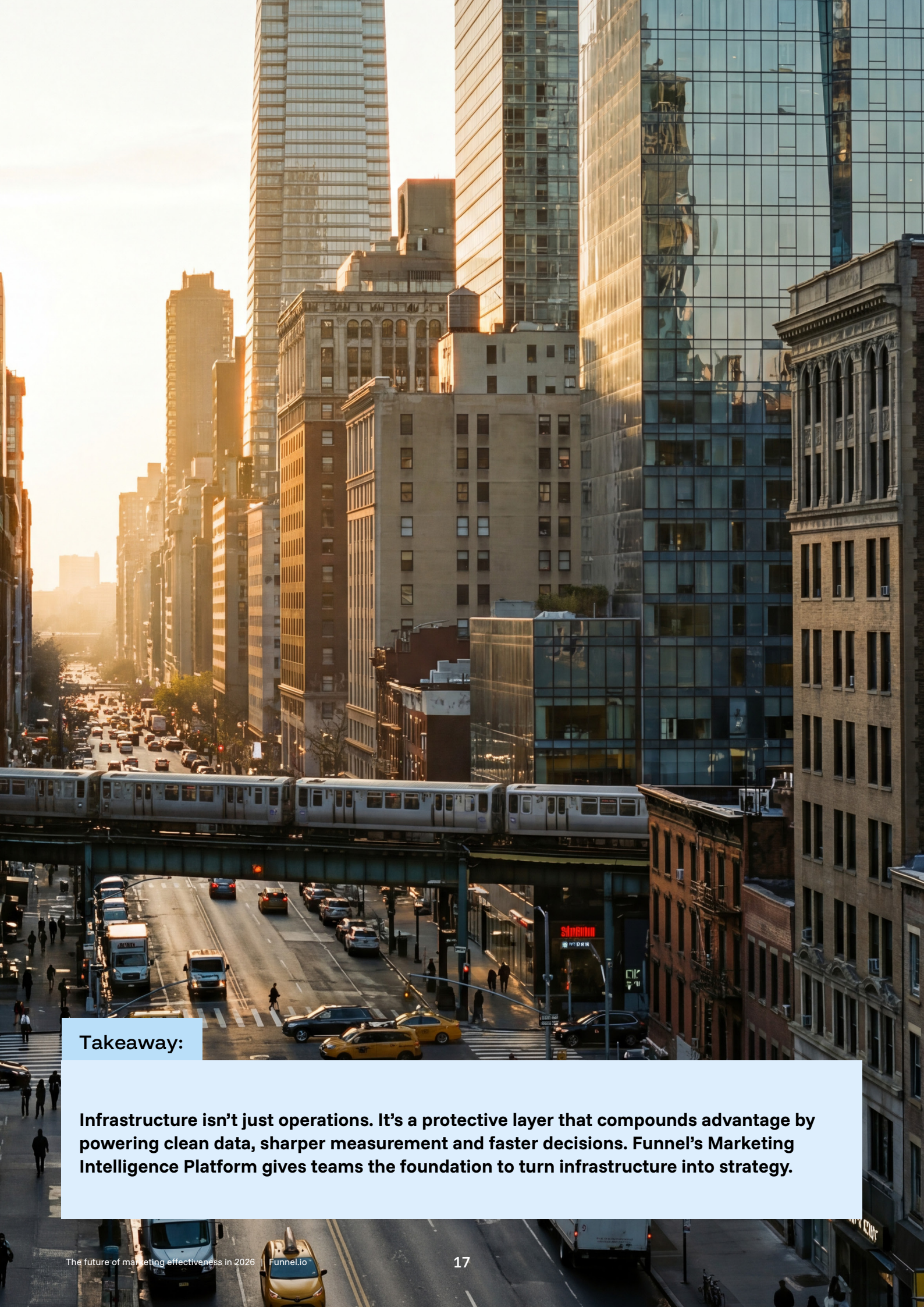
Van De Velde reduced data processing costs by 19% in the first year, and forecasted a 49% reduction the next year by using Funnel.

"Partnering up with Funnel has enabled our team to efficiently connect advertising platform data with web analytics data, which allows our clients to easily derive channel performance insights directly from Google Analytics and make informed decisions about their future digital channel mix."

— Daniel Ferreira, Manager Digital & Data Consulting, Artefact, Funnel Solution Partner

This illustrates how unified data creates clarity, whereas siloed pipelines create confusion.





## Takeaway:

**Infrastructure isn't just operations. It's a protective layer that compounds advantage by powering clean data, sharper measurement and faster decisions. Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform gives teams the foundation to turn infrastructure into strategy.**



## 6. Building a culture of measurement

Even the best tools collapse without a shared definition of success. When marketing chases engagement while finance focuses on profit, numbers collide and trust disappears.

The upside is much bigger than avoiding tension. A true culture of measurement aligns the business and puts CMOs at the center of growth. Harvard Business Review calls on marketing leaders to link goals to financial outcomes from the start.<sup>9</sup> That means acting like owners of profit-and-loss, not just campaign managers, and delivering results that move the business forward.

**Alignment isn't luck. It's built into the way teams measure and act:**

- **Agree on definitions upfront:** Metrics like MER, CAC and LTV only matter when they're defined together. Shared terms prevent messy reconciliations later.
- **One clean pipeline for all:** Consistent data cuts debate. Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform ensures every team sees the same trusted numbers.
- **Tie measurement to action:** Data should guide choices, not just decorate dashboards. Companies should design workflows that utilize insights to fuel test-and-learn cycles that shape spend.
- **Bridge silos with shared goals:** Accountability scales faster when marketing, finance and ops own results together.

### From accountability to advantage

A culture of measurement isn't just about alignment, it's about speed and opportunity. When teams agree on the same metrics, tests scale faster, experiments run cleaner and budget shifts occur with less risk.

Marketing experimentation is where this culture comes alive. The best teams don't wait for perfect certainty. They run controlled tests, launch imperfect ideas and use evidence to evolve swiftly. That mindset turns measurement from a reporting function into an engine of innovation.

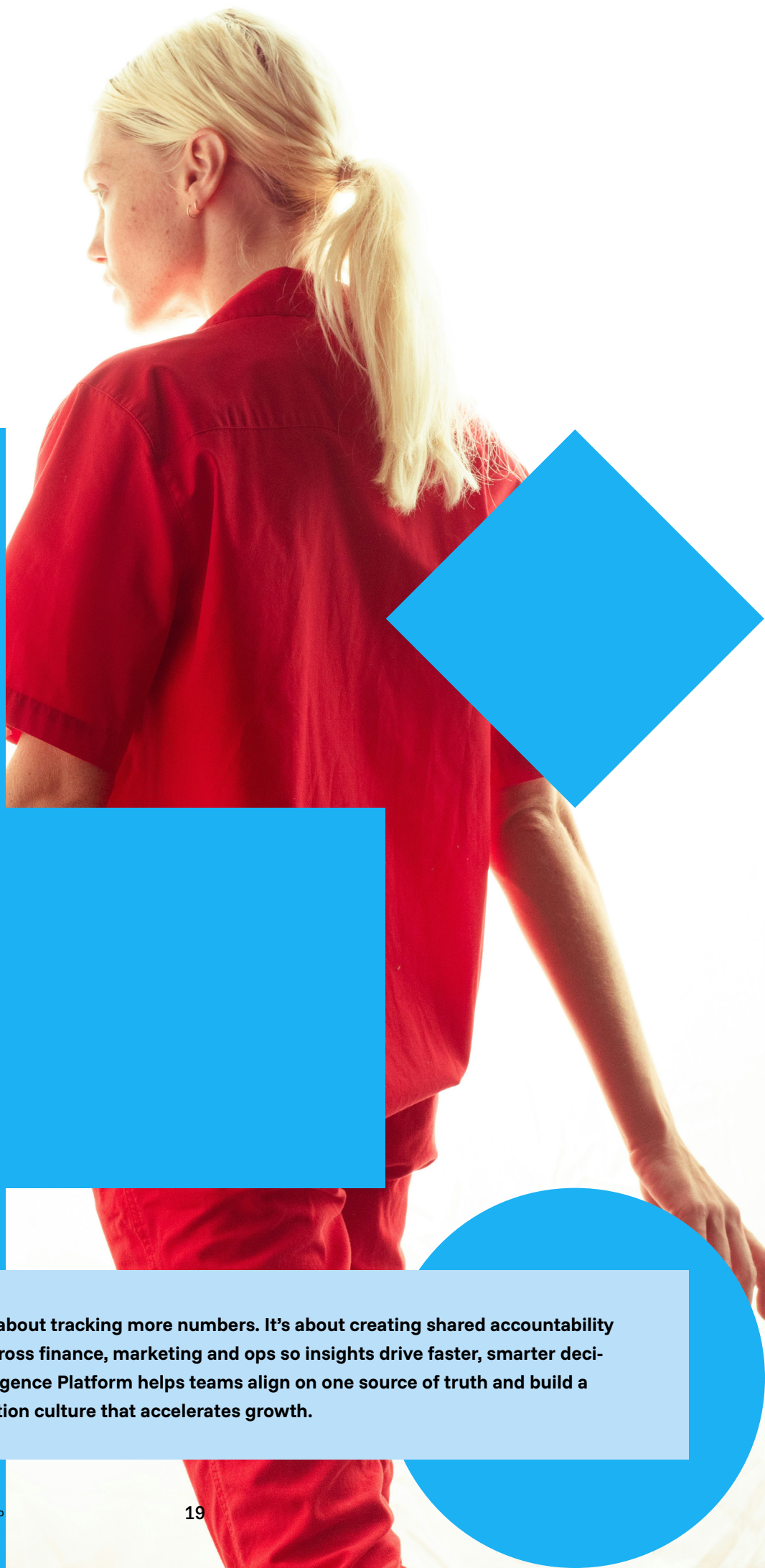
It also strengthens the role of the CMO. Leaders who embrace accountability and experimentation earn credibility in the boardroom. They can show not only how marketing is performing but how it's accelerating growth across the business. That credibility compounds: once finance and ops trust the numbers, they move faster on investment decisions.

A measurement culture also prepares organizations for what's next. As AI and automation become core to marketing, models will only be as reliable as the data and definitions that feed them. Companies with unified pipelines, shared goals and experimentation built into their DNA will see AI amplify clarity.

### The upside

A strong measurement culture creates a competitive engine: faster decision cycles, cleaner feedback loops and stronger financial alignment. For CMOs, it's a chance to move from defending spend to driving growth.





### Takeaway:

**A culture of measurement isn't about tracking more numbers. It's about creating shared accountability and a test-and-learn mindset across finance, marketing and ops so insights drive faster, smarter decisions. Funnel's Marketing Intelligence Platform helps teams align on one source of truth and build a measurement and experimentation culture that accelerates growth.**

# 7. How high-performing teams operationalize effectiveness

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The best teams don't treat effectiveness as a quarterly box-tick. They hardwire it into how they plan, execute and learn. Here's how leaders turn measurement into a growth engine.

## They build shared definitions early

High-performers don't wait to debate numbers after launch. They define what marketing ROI, CAC and contribution mean upfront. Marketing, finance and product sign off together so there's one definition of success across the organization. With shared documentation, teams avoid the postmortem battles that waste time and stall momentum.

## They measure to learn, not just report

Dashboards aren't scorecards. They're feedback loops. Winning teams use measurement to fuel creative tests and shift spend fast. Attribution isn't just for proving past impact. It's a planning tool for the next move.

## They make modeling part of planning

Modeling isn't just about explaining what happened. It's about shaping what comes next. Teams use MMM to simulate scenarios before they spend a dollar. They bring past results into planning to test assumptions about channels, seasonality and budget.

## They close the loop with finance

Leaders don't silo budget ownership. Marketing and finance share it, using reports that connect cost, margin and revenue so no one translates KPIs after the fact. Finance sits in planning and debriefs, aligning success metrics before budgets are set.

## They embed effectiveness into culture

For high-performers, measurement isn't an analyst's job. It's everyone's. Teams review results in weekly standups, so insights spread fast. New hires learn effectiveness basics from day one. Goals tie to outcomes, not outputs. Companies with strong measurement cultures don't just report better. They perform better.





## 8. Are you measurement-ready? A checklist for future-focused teams

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Being measurement-ready is about building foundations that make every model sharper and every decision faster. The best teams scope campaigns with clear business outcomes, not vague KPIs like “awareness.” They pull data from every channel into one reliable source, put marketing and finance in the same dashboards and simulate investment mixes before launch instead of waiting for post-hoc attribution.

Readiness can be seen through three lenses: data, measurement and alignment.

### Lens 1: Data readiness

Clean and centralized data is the starting point. Without it, everything else breaks. High-performing teams can answer confidently:

- Is our marketing data audit-ready or scattered across spreadsheets?
- Do naming conventions and pipelines keep data consistent across all channels?
- Can we trust that spend, performance and pipeline data align in one source of truth?

Teams that use platforms like Funnel to automate pipelines and standardize inputs spend less time cleaning data and more time making decisions.

### Lens 2: Measurement maturity

Readiness is not about picking one model. It is about knowing which to use and when. Mature teams ask:

- Do we know when attribution provides fast clarity, when MMM reveals long-term patterns and when incrementality testing proves lift?
- Can we forecast outcomes with confidence, not just explain what already happened?
- Do we recalibrate frameworks as new channels and campaigns emerge?

With clean data flowing into a unified system, attribution, MMM and experiments can run off the same trusted inputs. Funnel is building toward this by integrating rules-based and data-driven attribution directly into the app while also supporting advanced models for enterprises.



### Lens 3: Organizational alignment

Measurement only matters when teams act on it together. Alignment turns numbers into momentum. Ready teams ask:

- What does “effective” mean for us, and do all leaders agree?
- Are marketing and finance aligned on KPIs that drive growth, not vanity metrics?
- Do we hold shared reviews and planning cycles that keep everyone on the same page?
- Are we willing to take action on the insights provided, and do we promote a learning culture driven by experiments?

When all teams work from one version of the truth, decisions happen faster and with more confidence. Funnel makes that possible by unifying reporting across functions.

Measurement readiness is not about dashboards or acronyms. It is about building trustworthy data, using the right method for the right question and aligning the business on what success means. Teams that achieve this shift stop debating the past and start steering the future.



## Final checklist:

### Is your team measurement-ready?

- ☐ **Data readiness:** Our marketing data is centralized, standardized and audit-ready in one source of truth.
- ☐ **Data trust:** Spend, performance and pipeline data align across all channels without manual reconciliation.
- ☐ **Method maturity:** We know when to use attribution for speed, MMM for scale and experiments for lift, and when to combine these methodologies for triangulation.
- ☐ **Future-proofing:** We recalibrate models as new channels, campaigns and signals emerge.
- ☐ **Cross-functional alignment:** Marketing, finance and ops share the same KPIs and review results together.
- ☐ **Culture of experimentation:** Teams treat measurement as a feedback loop that guides decisions, not a report card.

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