

CASE STUDY

Customer Zero Case Study: How Adobe Built A Marketing Learning System For AI-Driven Buying Behavior

How To Respond To AI Disruption With Governance, Measurement, And Operational Speed

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Summary

As buyer discovery increasingly occurs inside AI-mediated answer engines such as ChatGPT, traditional marketing operating models are breaking down. Adobe found that incremental optimization was insufficient and reorganized how it governed marketing work to operate effectively under new market conditions. Tech leaders face something similar as AI moves execution from human workflows into governed autonomous systems. Using Adobe as a customer zero case study, this report shows how a governance-led operating model enables tech leaders to sustain speed, trust, and control by aligning ownership, cadence, measurement, and human oversight as AI becomes pervasive.

Additional resources are available in the [online version](#) of this report.

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Client Profile

Technology leaders don't need more AI pilots; [they need proof](#) that AI can operate at scale. Forrester's "customer zero" case study series examines how high-tech providers apply their own platforms to run agentic workflows in production, revealing the operating model changes, governance structures, and execution disciplines required to deliver sustained value. To better evaluate and extract value from vendors' customer zero initiatives, use the checklists from our first report in [this series](#).

Adobe, a leading digital experience platform provider, helps enterprises create, manage, and optimize digital experiences across web, mobile, and commerce channels, evolving its portfolio into a unified platform for content, personalization, experimentation, and customer journey orchestration. Using Adobe.com as its customer zero environment, Adobe reorganized and reimagined its marketing operations in response to external AI disruption as well as its own agent-driven workflows. This case study shows technology leaders how to work with partners in the business to redesign operating models, establish continuous governance, and operationalize AI-driven execution while maintaining speed, control, and trust.

AI-Driven Disruption Strained Marketing's Existing Operating Model

Adobe's marketing organization [encountered pressures](#) created by two simultaneous shifts: 1) buyer discovery (the process by which customers evaluate and form an understanding of solutions) began occurring more often inside third-party AI answer engines, and 2) internal agent-assisted tools increased execution throughput across website content, experimentation, and localization (see Figure 1). Nathan Etter, senior VP, digital marketing and customer engagement systems, described early AI discovery conditions as "fast-changing and difficult to interpret," with model behavior evolving with frequent releases while measurement practices were still forming: "Every week the models were changing — how they respond, what they cite, and how they behave. You have to find ways to keep pace with that."

The situation resembled a drilling operation that hits a high-yield reservoir: Output capacity rises quickly, external conditions remain unstable, and the limiting factor becomes the organization's ability to monitor conditions, coordinate work, and maintain review discipline at scale. Adobe faced four compounding conditions:

- **A loss of crucial visibility and control into third-party AI systems.** Adobe's brand was increasingly represented inside LLM-driven answer engines where responses

were synthesized and varied dynamically, putting the brand at risk. Visibility became dependent on cross-channel presence (e.g., Reddit, LinkedIn, YouTube, review platforms, Quora, editorial publications) rather than page rankings. Forrester [forecasts](#) that B2B organic traffic will decline by 50% to 75% by late 2027, representing the most significant disruption to digital traffic patterns in over a decade. At Adobe, traditional visibility and control mechanisms provided incomplete insight into how the brand appeared or evolved. Because buyer discovery now occurs inside AI-generated answers, visibility is no longer measured by page rankings alone but by how the brand appears within those answers.

- **Execution capacity scaling faster than existing operating and approval models.**

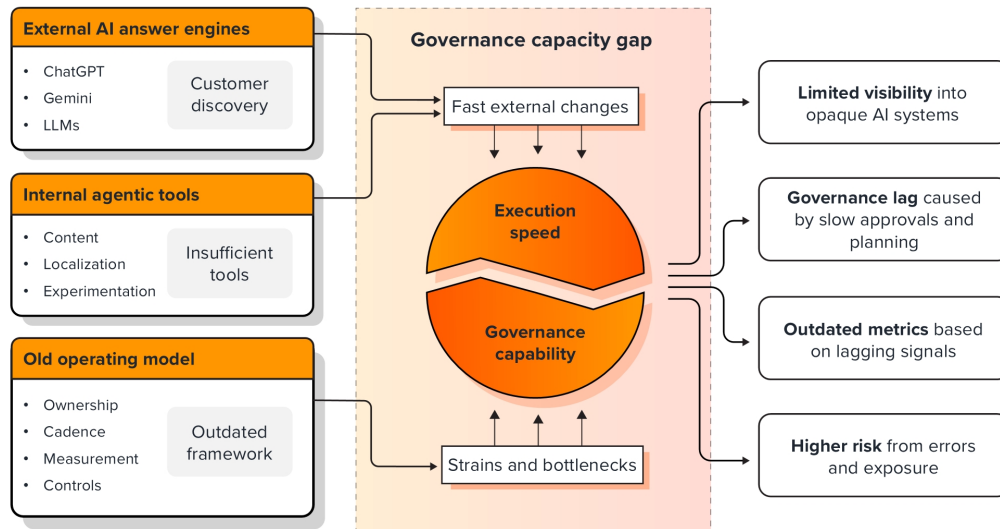
Agent-assisted workflows increased the volume and velocity of content creation, experimentation, and localization at Adobe, enabling teams to double content production throughput across dozens of pages. We see this across the industry: In [Forrester's State Of B2B Content Survey, 2025](#), 91% of B2B business decision-makers who contribute to the content lifecycle reported that their organization uses generative and/or agentic AI for localizing or translating content. This increase in throughput introduced new quality and consistency risks as more decisions moved into day-to-day execution, while existing content production and approval workflows were designed for slower, lower-variance work.

- **Change velocity outpacing traditional planning and measurement cycles.** Model behavior shifted on a weekly basis — from static training data to real-time retrieval — while citation patterns and channel influence moved just as quickly (for example, shifts in which sources were most frequently cited). These changes repeatedly invalidated prior optimization strategies and redistributed accountability across teams in real time. Quarterly planning cycles and lagging performance metrics could not capture these shifts as they unfolded, making it difficult for the organization to interpret signals, coordinate responses, and adapt strategy at the pace required.

- **Risk management requirements increasing with scale and automation.** As more variants, markets, and experiences were activated concurrently, errors or inconsistencies could propagate more broadly. Experience quality is of [wide concern](#): 61% of US advertising executives noted that the quality of generative AI output would be among the challenges to adopting genAI for their agency. Existing controls at Adobe were designed to review individual assets rather than manage continuous, high-volume execution.

Figure 1

Marketing's Operating Model Fell Out Of Alignment As AI-Mediated Discovery Accelerated



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Adobe Reorganized Marketing Leadership And Operations To Learn Faster

Faced with expanding execution capacity, faster external change, and increased risk exposure, Adobe reorganized how marketing work was governed to operate at a higher rate of execution. The change focused on establishing continuous monitoring and review practices that could operate at the same tempo as agent-assisted workflows, [embedding governance](#) directly into workflows and decision processes (see Figure 2). Adobe then translated this shift into coordinated changes across governance, mindset, measurement, operations, resourcing, and co-innovation to align execution, oversight, and learning under a unified operating model (see Figure 3). According to Etter: “We didn’t add headcount; we shifted capacity. The efficiencies we gained in foundational work let us invest in entirely new areas, like experimentation and learning, that we weren’t focused on before. That’s really what enabled us to adapt to how fast things are changing.”

Adobe developed five core practices:

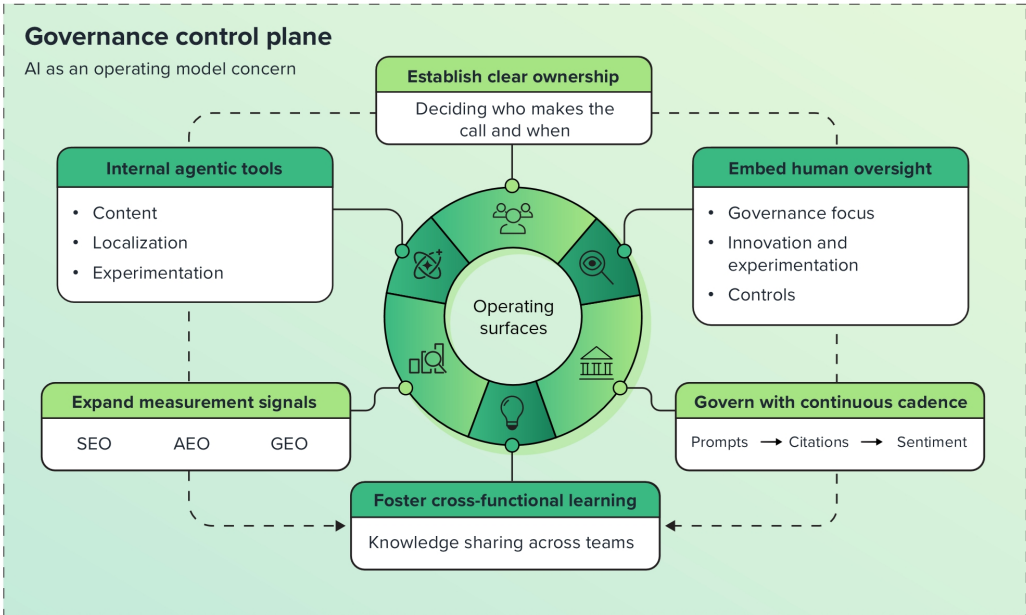
- **Establish clear ownership for AI-mediated brand visibility.** Adobe stood up a cross-functional team that monitored how its brand appeared in ChatGPT and

Gemini on a daily basis and owned interpreting changes in visibility, citations, and sentiment. This team served as the focal point for interpreting signals and driving coordinated action. In practice, the team tracked how Adobe appeared in ChatGPT and Gemini throughout the week, then brought those observations into a shared forum to interpret what changed and coordinate updates across content, SEO, and experimentation efforts.

- **Install a continuous operating cadence.** The brand visibility team tracked changes in LLM outputs throughout the week and met weekly to review what shifted, analyze experiment results, and decide what to adjust or scale next. Changes were reviewed together, allowing decisions to be made as changes unfolded. The team reviews what changed, examines experiment results and visibility trends in dashboards, and decides what to adjust or scale next based on those signals.
- **Expand measurement to include leading indicators.** Adobe instrumented dashboards that track how it appeared for specific prompts, including which sources were cited and what sentiment was expressed in responses. These early signals inform decisions and experiments alongside traditional performance metrics. Teams decide where to adjust content or run new experiments.
- **Redesign workflows to embed human governance inside agent-assisted execution.** Adobe redesigned agent-assisted workflows so systems generate page outlines and draft copy, pause for review, and only proceed to publishing after a copywriter or editor approves the output. Systems generate outlines, copy, and pages; human copywriters and brand reviewers retain editorial and quality accountability. Automation increased throughput while preserving control over accuracy and consistency.
- **Create mechanisms for learning to compound across the organization.** Adobe distributes every experiment with its hypothesis and results across the organization and uses formal forums such as AI councils and communities of practice to review and reuse successful approaches. Experiment hypotheses and results are broadly distributed, communities of practice share techniques across roles, and formal forums such as AI councils and companywide learning events enabled successful patterns to spread beyond individual teams.

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Figure 2
Install Governance As The System Of Systems



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Figure 3
What Adobe Did And Why It Works

Layer one — Governance: build the learning apparatus	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Established a cross-functional brand visibility team to monitor how LLMs represent the brand	Treat AI-mediated discovery as an always-on sensing problem, not a periodic SEO task
Focused monitoring on high-impact answer engines (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) while tracking the broader model landscape	Prioritize signal where customer discovery actually happens
Created an AI council and cross-disciplinary communities of practice	Make learning shared, governed, and repeatable — not ad hoc
Socialized learning through “AI Days” and internal forums	Normalize learning as part of the operating system, not side work
Layer two — Mindset: normalize continuous adaptation	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Shifted teams away from static playbooks toward continuous sensing and experimentation	Assume change is constant; design marketing to adapt continuously
Reframed automation as a way to free capacity, not eliminate effort	Use AI to elevate human judgment, not replace it
Moved roles up the stack, from production to governance and leverage	Recognize that humans should govern quality, trust, and direction — not do repetitive work
Layer three — Measurement: redefine what success looks like	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Added answer engine native visibility metrics (prompts, citations, sentiment) alongside SEO	Measure how customers actually encounter the brand in AI answers
Shifted attention from traffic volume to intent quality and conversion	Optimize for demand capture, not clicks
Used leading indicators to shape decisions before outcomes lag	Sense change early to act sooner

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Layer four — Operations: rearchitect work to scale learning	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Implemented agent-assisted content production with human review	Treat content as a throughput system, not a bespoke craft
Standardized briefs, templates, and workflows	Lower the marginal cost of experimentation
Scaled experimentation using high-variant testing and automated convergence	Make learning the default mode of operation
Embedded automated transcreation into publishing workflows	Prevent global scale from slowing learning
Introduced conversational interfaces (Brand Concierge)	Capture intent directly instead of forcing navigation
Layer five — Resourcing: reallocate capacity to fund the change	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Redirected freed capacity toward learning, training, and new capabilities	Reinvest efficiency gains instead of banking them
Stood up new capabilities (e.g., LLM optimization) without adding headcount	Fund the future by doing today's work more efficiently
Layer six — Co-innovation: turn marketing learning into product learning	
Action Adobe took	Operating principle
Used marketing as "customer zero" for new tools and capabilities	Discover product requirements through real operational pressure
Fed day-to-day marketing learning directly into product teams	Shorten the loop between use, validation, and roadmap
Co-developed and pressure-tested features before commercialization	Build what customers actually need, not what sounds good on paper

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Adobe Now Operates With An Adaptive Digital Marketing Capability

By aligning governance, measurement, and execution around a continuous operating rhythm, Adobe changed how work was performed and governed under AI-mediated and agent-assisted conditions. These changes reflected ongoing shifts in day-to-day operating practices and extended beyond marketing performance into new operating capabilities and commercialization. “As sensing, interpretation, and execution started operating at the same pace, learning became continuous instead of something that happened in cycles,” Etter said. “Operating as customer zero gives us that continuous feedback loop — we’re learning from real workloads and using that to shape what becomes product.”

Adobe gained benefits in four areas:

- **A governable system for continuous, AI-mediated execution.** Adobe developed the ability to consistently observe, interpret, and influence how its brand and offerings appeared across AI-driven environments. Brand visibility inside LLM-generated answers became an explicitly owned domain with defined signals, review cadence, and clear routing for action. AI-mediated discovery became a

regularly monitored and managed input into routine decision-making.

- **Sustained gains in learning speed and execution leverage.** Agent-assisted workflows increased content production, localization, and experimentation throughput while preserving human editorial oversight. Expanded throughput reduced constraints on experimentation coverage, allowing strategy adjustments to occur more frequently while maintaining control and quality. As sensing, interpretation, and execution operated at the same tempo, learning became continuous rather than episodic.
- **Redeployed organizational capacity toward higher-value work.** Efficiency gains in production and localization enabled teams to reallocate effort toward governance, experimentation, and capability development without proportional increases in headcount. New operating motions, including LLM optimization and conversational experiences, became standing operating practices supported by clear ownership, shared practices, and organizational learning mechanisms.
- **New commercial products shaped through customer zero operations.** Operating Adobe.com as customer zero created direct, ongoing interaction between teams running production workloads and teams building product capabilities (see Figure 4). For example, as Adobe's marketing team worked to continuously monitor how its brand appeared in LLM-generated answers — tracking prompts, citations, and sentiment on a weekly cadence — it directly informed the design and evolution of LLM Optimizer, which was first built and used internally before being productized. Similarly, content production and experimentation constraints encountered at scale led Adobe to seed and co-develop agent-assisted content production and experimentation capabilities, such as Journey Optimizer Experimentation Accelerator, which originated from internal use and were later commercialized for customers.

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Figure 4
Proof Points: Customer Zero To Product Outcomes

Product	Customer zero operating need	What it enabled for Adobe
LLM Optimizer	Continuous visibility into how Adobe is represented in LLM-driven answer engines, including accuracy, citations, and sentiment as models change	Enabled Adobe.com teams to monitor prompt-level visibility, track citations and sentiment, and adjust strategy on a weekly cadence as answer behavior evolved
Adobe Experience Manager (AEM) content production agents	Generate and maintain enough high-quality page variants to support continuous experimentation across billions of visits	Removed content production as the binding constraint on learning by increasing throughput and enabling more variants to be tested concurrently
GenStudio for Performance Marketing	Scale creative variation across paid and owned channels without increasing manual production effort	Allowed performance teams to test, iterate, and optimize creative variants at a pace that traditional workflows could not sustain
Journey Optimizer Experimentation Accelerator	Move beyond episodic A/B testing to continuous, high-variant learning embedded in day-to-day operations	Enabled automated experimentation and convergence on winning variants, making large-scale testing a default operating capability rather than a special initiative

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Redesign Your Operations And Governance For Durable Excellence

AI agents compress execution cycles and expand the scope of [what can be done](#). Sustainable value depends on installing governance that scales with that expansion. Adobe’s experience shows that when ownership, cadence, and controls evolve alongside execution, organizations can move faster while maintaining trust, quality, and control. Adobe’s customer zero experience highlights how technology leaders must adapt governance when AI agents become part of everyday execution. Etter notes: “The core metrics of marketing haven’t really changed — what’s changed is how we get there. It’s about building the ability to continuously sense what’s happening, interpret it, and adapt as conditions evolve.”

The following best practices generalize Adobe’s approach into reusable guidance for enterprise platform and application leaders who are responsible for balancing speed, [safety](#), and scale. To apply the lessons from Adobe’s customer zero experience to your business:

- **Treat agentic workflows as an operating model concern.** When AI agents shape how work is performed, governance can no longer be handled as a downstream approval activity. Adobe treated AI-mediated discovery and agent-assisted

execution as persistent operating conditions that required changes to ownership, cadence, and decision-making. Technology leaders should frame AI adoption as an operating model redesign rather than a tooling initiative.

- **Establish clear ownership for new execution surfaces.** Adobe explicitly assigned ownership for how the brand appeared inside LLM-generated answers. Clear accountability prevented AI-mediated visibility from becoming a shared but unmanaged risk. Technology leaders should identify who owns observation, interpretation, and response for each new autonomous system and ensure that decision rights are unambiguous.
- **Govern at the pace of execution with continuous cadence.** As execution accelerated, Adobe installed a recurring operating rhythm that matched the speed of change. Weekly review cycles allowed teams to interpret emerging signals and adjust direction while changes were still unfolding. Tech leaders should design governance cadence to align with execution tempo rather than relying on quarterly planning or retrospective review.
- **Expand measurement to include leading indicators.** Adobe retained traditional performance metrics while adding leading indicators specific to AI-mediated environments. Prompt-level visibility, citation behavior, and response framing provided earlier insight into changing conditions. Tech leaders should complement outcome metrics with leading indicators that inform proactive decision-making.
- **Embed human accountability inside agentic workflows.** Adobe increased execution throughput by using agents within content and experimentation workflows while retaining explicit human review points. Editorial and brand oversight remained accountable for quality and accuracy. Leaders should [design workflows](#) where automation increases scale and humans retain responsibility for judgment, escalation, and control.
- **Design learning to compound across the organization.** Adobe reinforced governance through transparency and shared learning mechanisms, including broad experiment visibility, communities of practice, and formal forums. This allowed successful patterns to scale beyond individual teams. Tech leaders should create structures that allow learning to propagate horizontally and vertically rather than remaining siloed.
- **Redeploy capacity toward governance and innovation.** Efficiency gains from agent-assisted execution allowed Adobe to redirect effort toward higher-value work, including experimentation, oversight, and new capability development. Leaders should plan explicitly for how efficiency will be reinvested rather than assuming that benefits will materialize automatically.

Supplemental Material

Companies We Interviewed For This Report

We would like to thank the individuals from the following companies who generously gave their time during the research for this report.

Adobe



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