

The State of Performance Marketing

It's Time to Reframe for Strategic Growth

Origami paper flower in bloom

 Generate



Sevoi Resorts

Paradise on the rocks.

 ROI

+ 72%

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A Note from Marissa Dacay

Global VP, Enterprise Marketing

Today's customers expect more. More content. More personalization. More meaningful experiences. Meeting these demands isn't a differentiator, it's the new baseline.

No one is better equipped to meet these demands than marketers. We know our audiences and how to weave data-driven insights and creativity together to deliver the kinds of experiences customers deserve. While the mounting pressure is real — to prove ROI, move faster, protect the brand, and do more with less — the opportunity is just as real, especially as we enter a new era of performance-driven marketing with AI.

In this report, we uncover why performance marketing is the critical link between strategy and business outcomes. Performance-driven marketing activities make up nearly 60% of marketing's budget, proving that it's a reliable lever for driving growth under pressure. Despite this, as we learned from marketing leaders around the world and across industries, few realize its full potential. They're held back by pressure to prove short-term results, limitations with scaling content velocity, and an inability to act on real-time insights. Plus, gaps in talent, training, and AI confidence keep them from leveling up. Sound familiar?

We put this report together to share these insights and, most importantly, the actionable takeaways you need to succeed as you reinvent your teams in the era of AI.

— Marissa

Executive Summary

For the inaugural *The State of Performance Marketing* report, MMA Global surveyed more than 380 senior marketers across North America, EMEA, and JAPAC. The findings bring into sharp focus a longstanding duality at the heart of modern marketing: the need to balance short-term spending with long-term growth outcomes. Performance marketing was once defined by speed and automation. Now, it's a precision-driven growth strategy that ties marketing investment directly to measurable business outcomes. In today's climate of increased accountability and digital acceleration, it offers a unique strategic advantage — one anchored in data, focused on results, and built to deliver impact under pressure. Performance marketing often uses most of the marketing budget, absorbing nearly 60% of total spend. But strikingly, few companies are laying the strategic foundation needed to realize its full potential.

This paradox reveals a deeper tension in how marketing is managed today. Eight in ten marketers claim to aim for a balanced marketing approach across brand, performance, and customer experience rather than being driven solely by performance. Yet in practice, performance spending continues to grow, as short-term pressures from the C-suite and quarterly reviews lead to reactive budget shifts.

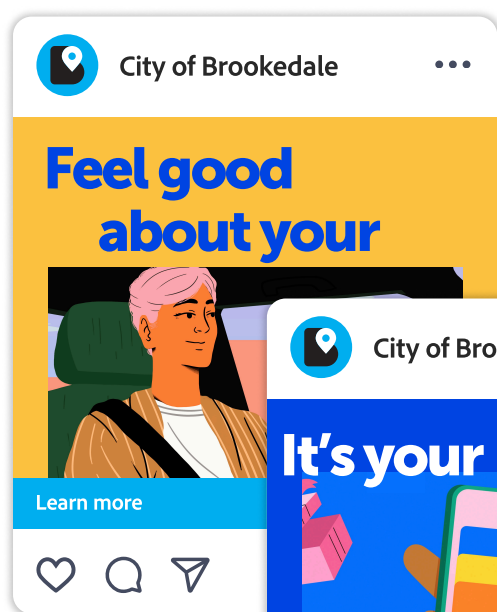
**Over
380** senior marketers surveyed, spanning a host of industries.

While performance marketing is becoming more sophisticated — driven by data-led targeting, agile activation, and a focus on measurable outcomes — it's also becoming far more complex. Marketers now deploy an average of four audience-targeting approaches and manage martech stacks consisting of eight different tools to launch and measure a single campaign, adding operational strain to already stretched teams.

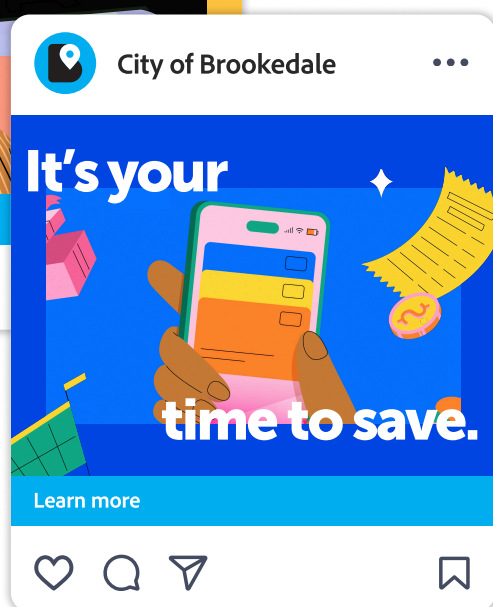
Marketers report low confidence in their ability to evolve their performance.

Measurement remains one of performance marketing's most significant hurdles, as marketers struggle to reconcile the slow pace and rigor of tools like marketing mix modeling (MMM) with the immediacy of real-time engagement data. The latter, while highly accessible, may not be robust enough to support budget allocation decisions. In addition to these broad challenges in measuring performance marketing, companies face their own unique hurdles that vary by marketing approach: brand-led organizations struggle with ROI visibility, performance-led teams cite speed and resource constraints, and customer experience- (CX) led companies grapple with activating insights effectively.

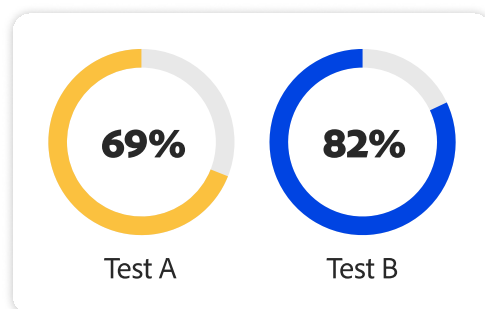
Multiple other capability gaps limit marketers' capacity to solidify their real-time insights and attribution to create personalized content. Specifically, marketers report low confidence in their ability to evolve their performance in terms of data, talent, and martech. Only half of marketers feel prepared when it comes to first- and zero-party data, while martech integration is seen as an important challenge for over 70% of survey respondents. Adding to this, only 25% express strong satisfaction with talent and training investments. While AI adoption is growing — particularly in content versioning, targeting, and planning — concerns about quality and control continue to hold many back from fully participating with the technology fully.



Test A



Test B



Looking ahead, marketers are prioritizing investment in measurement, attribution, and content automation to meet rising demands for accountability, personalization, and speed. To make the most of these investments, senior marketing leaders must champion a shift from tactical execution to strategic orchestration. **This shift will rely on four principles:**



Strategic cross-disciplinary integration will revolutionize performance marketing's potential.

Performance marketing must evolve from a budget-heavy, short-term practice into a strategy-led discipline that drives long-term growth. It must align with brand and customer experience — not compete with them. Intentional integration will close the gap between aspiration and execution.



Measurement capabilities must keep pace with execution.

The ability to move fast means little without meaningful ways to measure impact. Marketers need frameworks that bridge the speed of real-time signals with the rigor of long-term planning tools like media mix modeling (MMM).



Creative agility and content velocity have to be embraced as core performance levers.

As real-time signals and personalized content experiences take hold, marketers must build tighter loops between insight and creative execution while investing in quality content development that scales.



Unlocking the full potential of martech and AI requires talent and trust.

Automation alone isn't enough. Success depends on building internal capabilities, addressing talent gaps, and establishing governance that ensures AI and martech are used confidently, effectively, and responsibly.

Methodology

This report is based on a global online survey conducted between April 1st and May 11th 2025, among 389 senior marketing professionals. Respondents represented companies across North America (48%), EMEA (33%), and JAPAC (19%), spanning industries such as retail and e-commerce, consumer packaged goods, manufacturing, financial services, and healthcare.

Most companies reported annual revenues between \$100 million and \$10 billion, with 57% operating in both B2B and B2C models. Participants held senior roles — primarily senior director, VP, or above — and worked across a range of marketing functions including strategy, brand, operations, advertising, media, and other digital marketing disciplines.



The Performance Paradox

Budget Dominance
without Strategic
Direction

Performance Marketing's Rising Influence

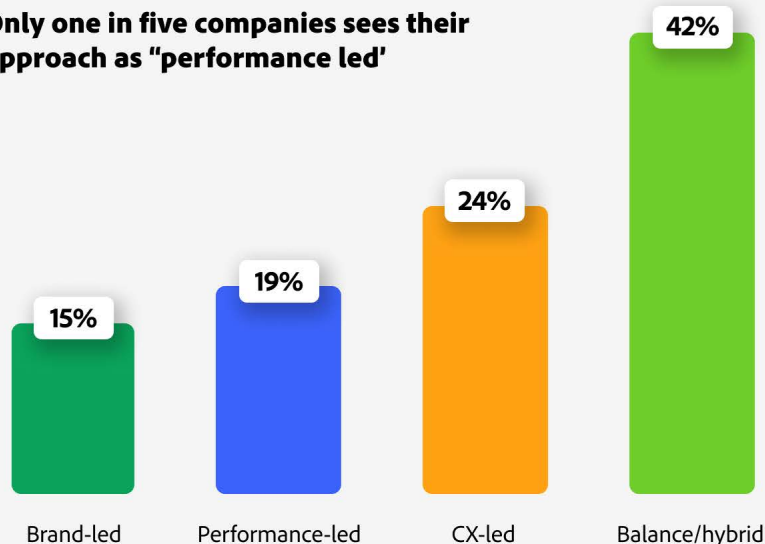
As marketing budgets evolve to reflect an era of heightened accountability and digital acceleration, performance marketing now commands more than half of the total spend among global senior marketers' budgets. Its promise of measurable returns and precision targeting has made it the go-to lever for growth under pressure, leading to further budget increases. Over the last 12 months, 23% of marketers increased their allocation towards performance, 70% remained stable, and only 7% reported a decrease.

Despite this dominance, a striking contradiction persists: Only one in five organizations describes themselves as "performance-led." This suggests that while companies pour budget into performance marketing activities, few are building the strategic foundations needed to maximize its impact.

57%
of marketing
budget goes to
performance
marketing.

Figure 1

Only one in five companies sees their approach as "performance led"



Q. How would you describe your organization's overall marketing approach? (Select one)
Q. What percentage of your total marketing budget is allocated to performance marketing?
N = 389 Global Senior Marketers

This paradox is not trivial. It reveals a structural imbalance in how marketing is planned, resourced, and executed. Performance marketing is being treated as a financial lever rather than a strategic pillar — deployed aggressively but integrated poorly into business strategy.

The Strategic Shortfall

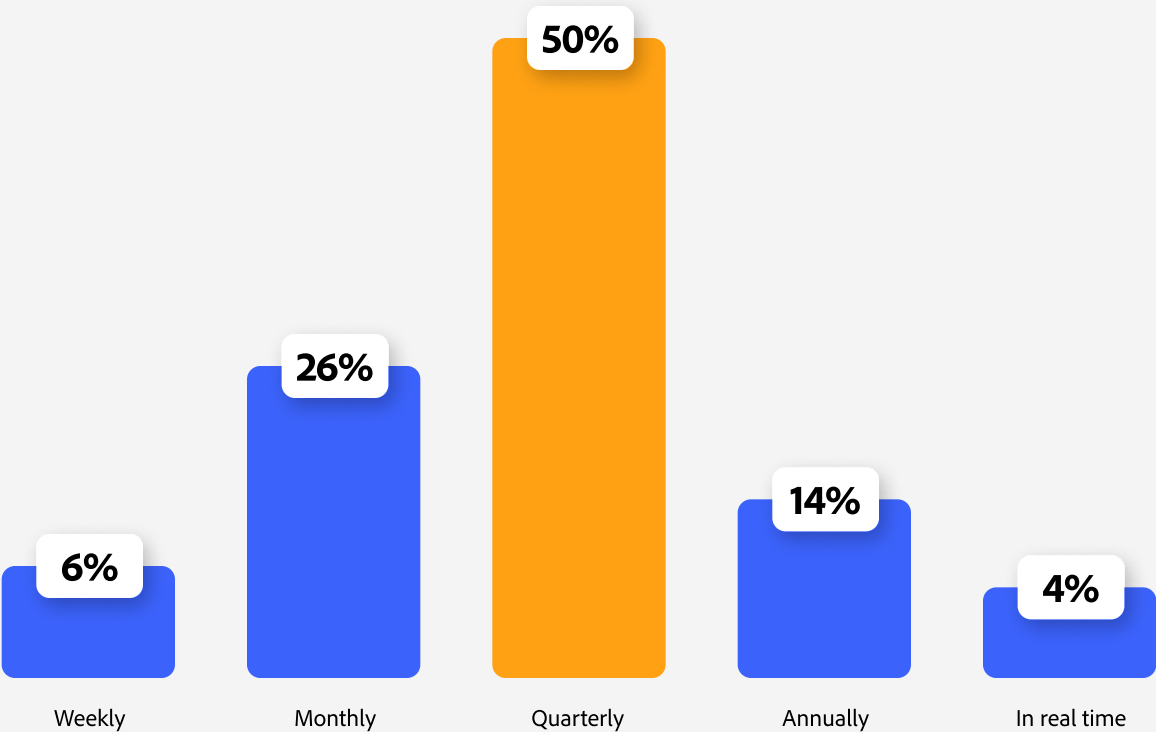
Why does this disconnect exist? The research points to two key forces at play.

01 Strategic aspiration versus operational execution.

An overwhelming 80% of marketers intend to balance their strategic planning between long-term brand equity and short-term performance. However, organizational processes incentivize optimizing for immediate impact, often at the expense of long-term value. Frequent budget reviews play a key role, with 50% of marketers conducting them quarterly, and 36% doing so monthly or more often. These behaviors risk causing overcorrections based on limited information given the measurement and attribution challenges.

Figure 2

Budget reviews and performance.



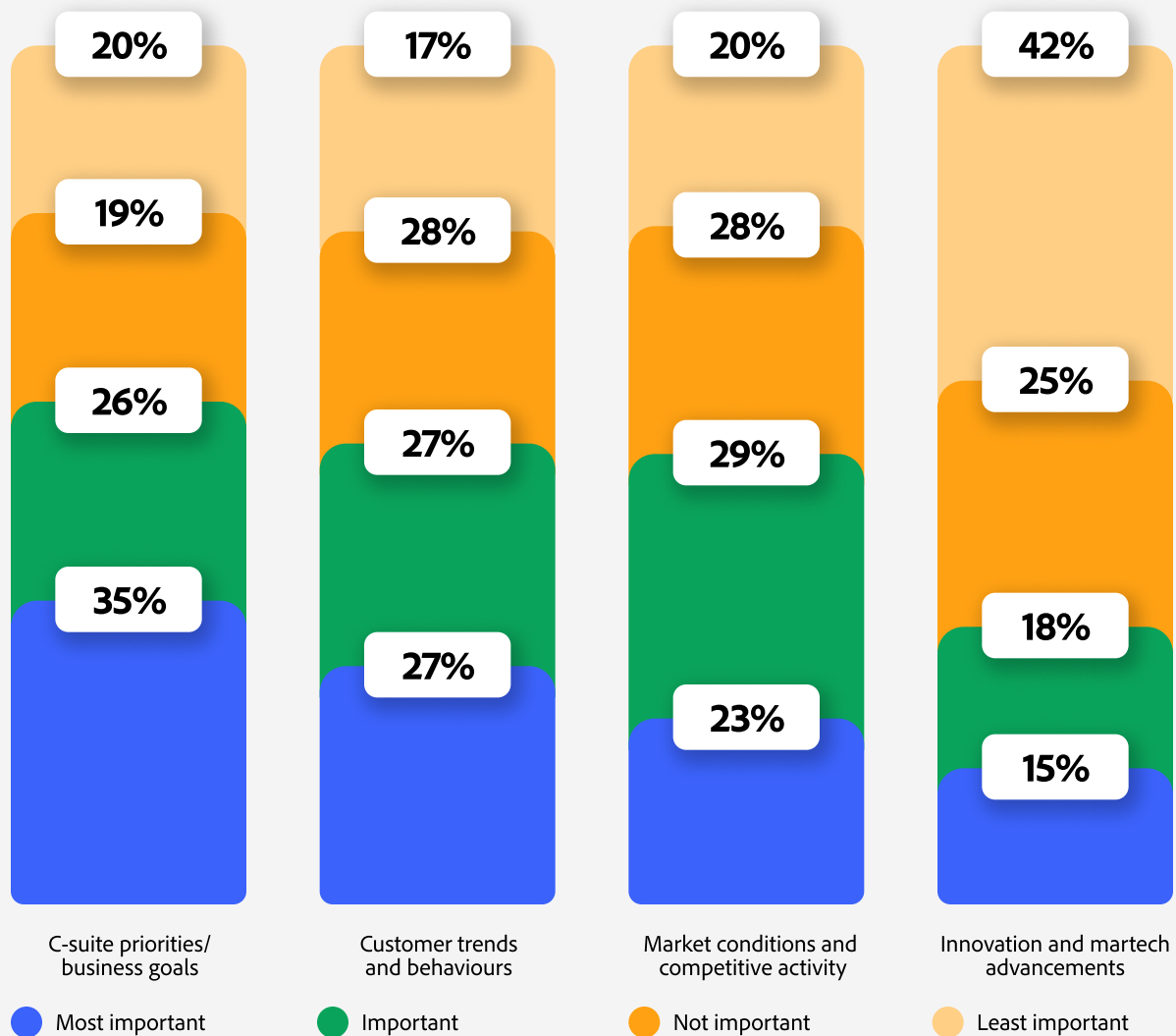
Q. Over the past 12 months, has your investment in performance marketing increased, decreased, or remained the same? (Select one)
Q. How frequently do you shift budget allocations based on performance data? (Select one) |
N=389 Global Senior

02 Executive pressure.

More than customer trends, market conditions, bigger innovation, and technology trends, C-suite mandates are the primary driver of budgetary decisions. These mandates are often motivated by quarterly results and KPIs, both of which encourage short-term results and are most influential among performance-led companies (43% of which say that C-Suite priorities are the most important factor vs. 35% on average).

Figure 3

Key factors impacting budget allocation.



Q. What factors most influence your marketing budget decisions and allocation? (Rank in order of importance) (Each row needs a response)
N=389 Global Senior

Performance
marketing is being
treated as a financial
lever **rather than a
strategic pillar.**



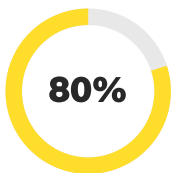
In Search of Internal Alignment

While most firms aim to balance their planning between short-term and long-term objectives, and claim to be aligned across disciplines — brand, CX, and performance — the data reveals discrepancies in the depth of that alignment:

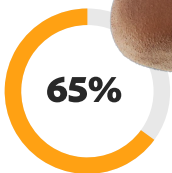
- In performance-led firms, internal alignment is the weakest: **44% are “somewhat aligned.”**
- CX- and brand-led firms report better alignment: **20%-24% say “somewhat aligned.”**

Performance marketing-led firms report the weakest internal alignment, likely due to their emphasis on short-term metrics and rapid execution cycles that can isolate them from brand and CX counterparts. This misalignment signals an untapped opportunity for long-term growth that, when strategically integrated, performance marketing can help realize.

📌 Objectives

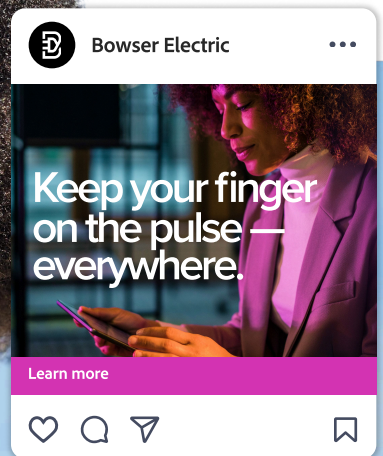


Short-term



Long-term

● Site visits
+34%



📌 Post

Where Performance is Heading

Balancing
Complexity with
Speed to Deliver
Better Outcomes



An Evolving Definition

What marketers mean by “performance marketing” is no longer consistent — and this matters. Performance marketing today is driven less by speed and automation alone, and more by a deliberate, data-driven mindset focused on outcomes. Measurable outcomes supported by data-led audience strategies are explicitly prioritized by 75% of marketers, as the primary drivers of their performance approach.

This goes to show that performance marketing is maturing and beginning to live up to its full promise as marketers seek to better understand measurable ROI and sophisticated capabilities to increase personalization.

This evolving definition is also reflected in how marketers measure impact. While cost per acquisition (CPA) and return on ad spend (ROAS) remain common metrics, many are shifting towards broader ones like customer lifetime value (CLV) and even brand lift metrics, which signals a more holistic view of performance success.

Figure 4

How marketers define and track performance.

ROI focus and outcome-orientation



Data-driven audience targeting and personalization



Measurability and direct attributions



Buying approach and real time automation



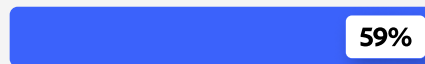
Speed results



Culture of continuous experimentation



CPA (Cost Per Acquisition)



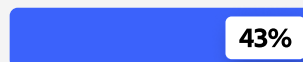
ROAS (Return on Ad Spend)



Customer retention rate



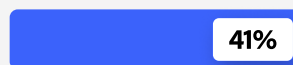
Incremental revenue



Brand lift metrics



CLV (Customer Lifetime Value)



Account engagement



Channel specific efficiency outcomes



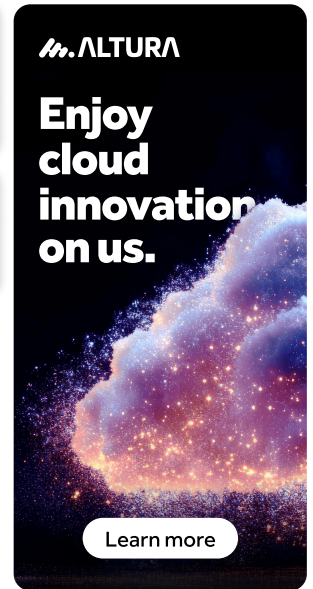
Q. Which of the following elements are more important in the way that your company defines performance marketing? (Select all that apply)
Q. What primary KPIs drive your performance marketing strategy? (Select all that apply)
N = 389 Global Senior Marketers

Top buying groups by engagement



Analytics: SecurFinancial

● Engagement Score 97 ● Completion Score 100%



The Role of Demographics in Audience Approaches

Marketers use an average of at least four distinct audience targeting approaches, approximately half of which employ data-driven methods like behavioral, first-party data, geotargeting, and retargeting. Contextual and cohort-based approaches are also used by four in ten marketers, highlighting their need to address privacy changes and meet their audiences in more environments. This is particularly evident in EMEA, while JAPAC marketers show a bigger focus on first-party, behavioral, demographic, and contextual data approaches.

75% of marketers prioritize measurable outcomes supported by data-led audience strategies.

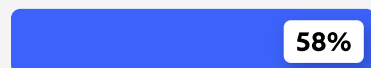
Overall, while most marketers experiment with a variety of approaches, at least half continue to struggle with data and admit to being dissatisfied with their first- and zero-party data initiatives. In the end, despite the desire for more sophistication, demographic targeting remains a key pillar for almost 50% of companies, most of which see their marketing approach as being more brand-led.

Figure 5

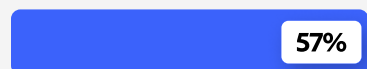
Audience approaches by region.

NOAM (n=189)

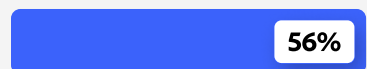
Retargeting



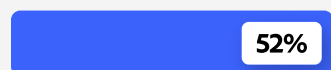
Geotargeting



First-party data targeting



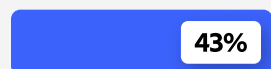
Behavioral targeting



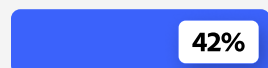
Lookalike modeling



Demographic targeting



Third-party audience segments



Cohort-based targeting



Propensity targeting



Contextual targeting



EMEA (n=128)



JAPAC (n=72)



Q. Which audience targeting approaches do you currently use for your performance marketing initiatives? (Select all that apply)
N=389 Global Senior Marketers

The Balance Between Complexity and Speed

Increasingly, marketers expect their performance campaigns to leverage increasingly sophisticated audience targeting methods. This comes at a cost.

The martech stack required to execute performance marketing effectively is sprawling, averaging eight tools, which adds complexity and fragmentation. Despite this, marketers report surprising agility, with most claiming they can launch a new campaign in under a month.



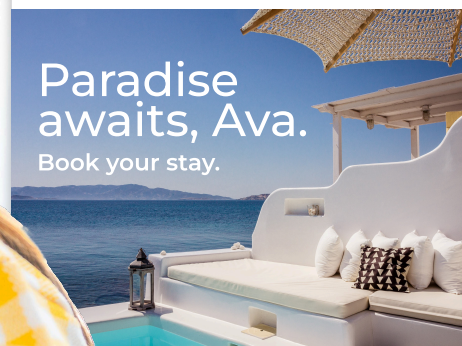
 Personalize content



Sevoi Resorts



Paradise
awaits, Ava.
Book your stay.



The Measurement Gap



Fast Execution,
Slow Insights

A Critical Disconnect

Measurement is the cornerstone of performance marketing's promise, but for many organizations, it remains its most persistent point of failure.

The study found that despite their ability to launch campaigns quickly, most marketers struggle to measure performance with the precision and depth needed to inform strategic decisions. They're increasingly caught between "slow and rigorous" tools like MMM and "fast but directional" data signals that lack incremental impact or long-term validity.

The dissonance is stark: Marketers can act fast but can't always prove their actions worked, or determine why. This disconnect affects planning, execution, and optimization — making it harder to scale what works and course-correct what doesn't.

Challenges by Orientation

According to the research, each type of organization experiences the measurement gap slightly differently.

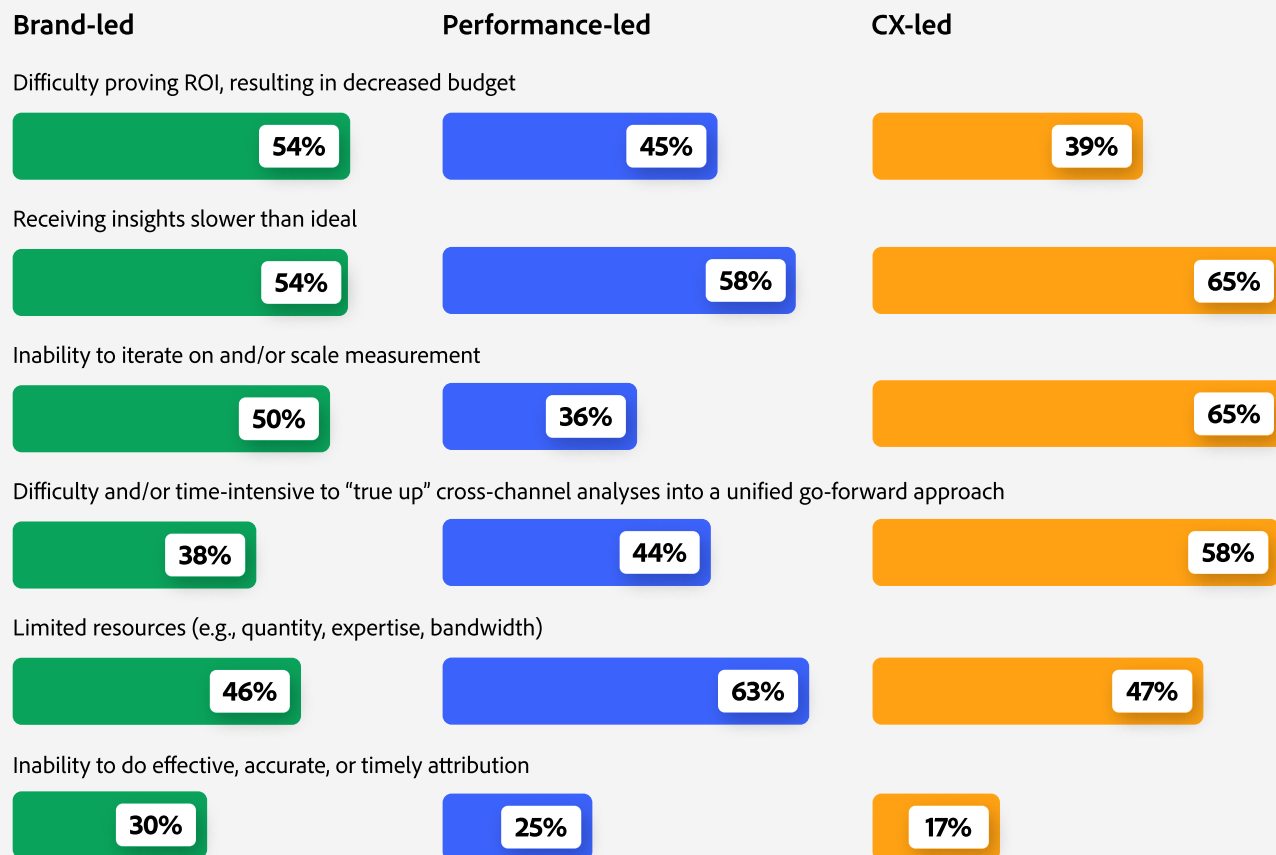
- **Brand-led organizations:** struggle to prove ROI and scale measurement.
- **Performance-led organizations:** report a lack of speed and resources despite having the most to gain from fast, accurate insights.
- **CX-led organizations:** face difficulties activating insights across touchpoints in time to meaningfully influence the customer journey.

Taking a regional lens adds more granularity to the above picture. Resource issues are more evident in NOAM, while EMEA struggles with scaling and cross-channel measurement.

The result in all cases is a fragmented performance landscape. Execution often outpaces understanding and optimization remains reactive, since performance results come too late to inform action for the next campaign. This inhibits marketers' ability to optimally allocate their budget and proactively optimize campaigns based on real-time insights.

Figure 6

Top measurement barriers by organization type.



Q. What are the biggest challenges your organization experiences in its ability to measure performance marketing and its impact on the business? (Select all that apply)
 Brand-Led = 58 Global Senior Marketers | Performance-Led = 75 Global Senior Marketers | CX-Driven = 93 Global Senior Marketers | Hybrid = 163 Global Senior Marketers

Measurement is the cornerstone of performance marketing's promise

... and its most persistent point of failure.



Building the Capability

Content, Tech,
and Talent as
Performance
Enablers

The Next Frontier

Capability-driven Performance

For performance marketing to scale effectively and deliver more than just tactical short-term wins, organizations must invest in the foundational capabilities that enable speed, personalization, and accountability. The survey reveals marketers are increasingly aware of these needed capabilities yet still fall short in execution. Four areas emerge from marketers as critical capability contributors:

01 **Real-time insights**

02 **Agility in creative development and testing**

03 **Integrated martech and talent strategy**

04 **Measurement**

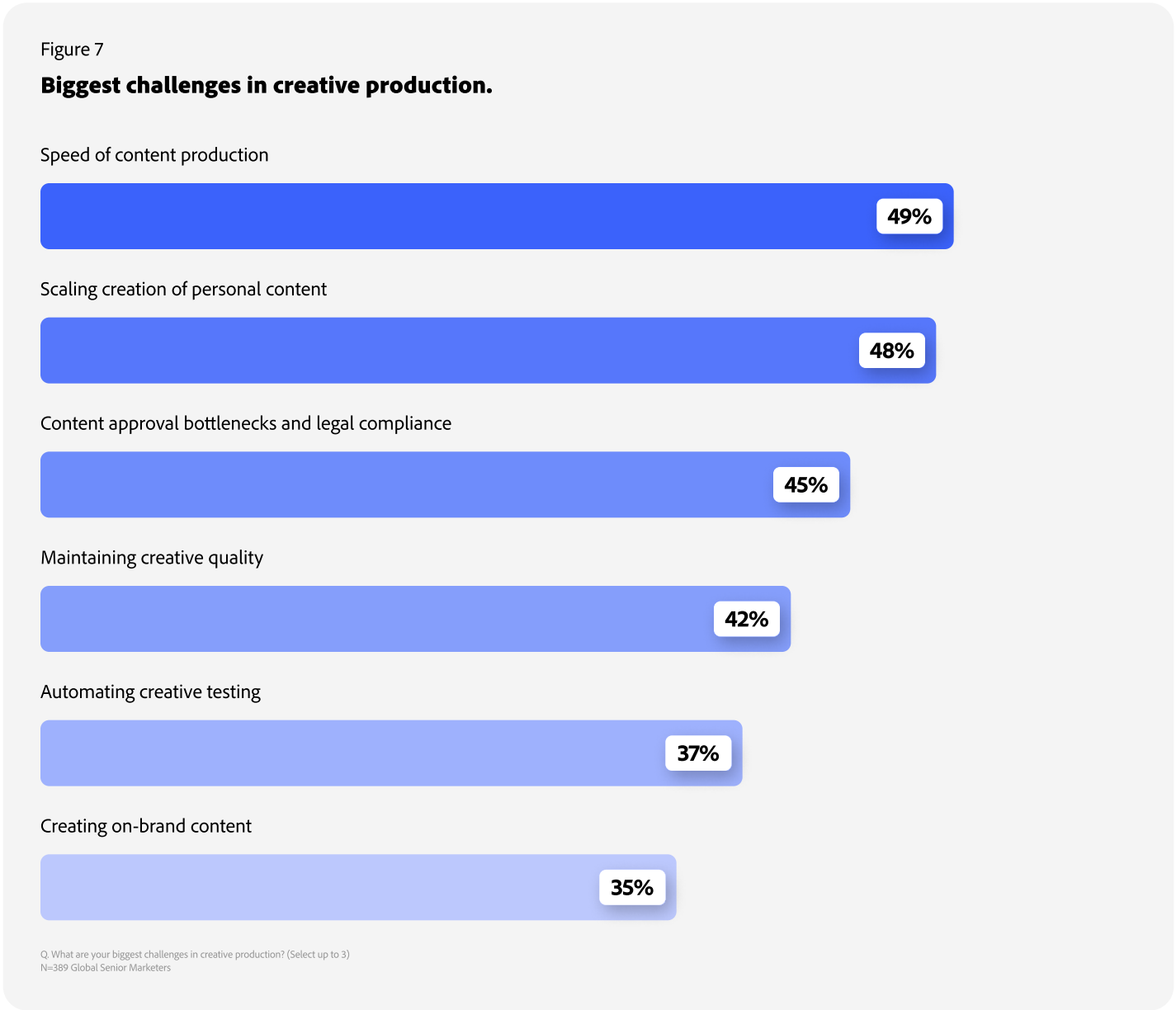
**Marketers can't
truly evolve** without
significantly streamlining
the entire creation
and approval process.



The New Differentiators

Real-time Insights and Content Velocity

The ability to generate and act on real-time insights is now considered one of the top enablers of performance success, yet these demands are pushing content production workflows to their limits. Marketers cite several content production challenges, the most pressing of which are speed, personalization at scale, and approvals and compliance.



Ultimately, even with the power of real-time insights, marketers can't truly evolve without significantly scaling content production and streamlining the entire creation and approval process.

Martech

More Tools, Less Satisfaction

While the average organization uses eight martech tools, many marketers struggle to make those tools work together effectively. In performance marketing workflows, 54% are automated, but much of this automation remains basic and fails to properly utilize the advanced personalization and decisioning capabilities of journey orchestration tools (used by only 10% of marketers).

Within this context, martech stacks are reassessed approximately every 18 months, but improvements are hard to execute, primarily due to budgetary constraints and technical resourcing issues. Marketers also report challenges in technical integration. Although most companies expect integration to help increase effectiveness, performance-led companies are less optimistic about integration impact and more critical about the overall effectiveness of martech.

Figure 8

Martech stack effectiveness and the impact of integration.

Martech effectiveness on performance marketing goals.

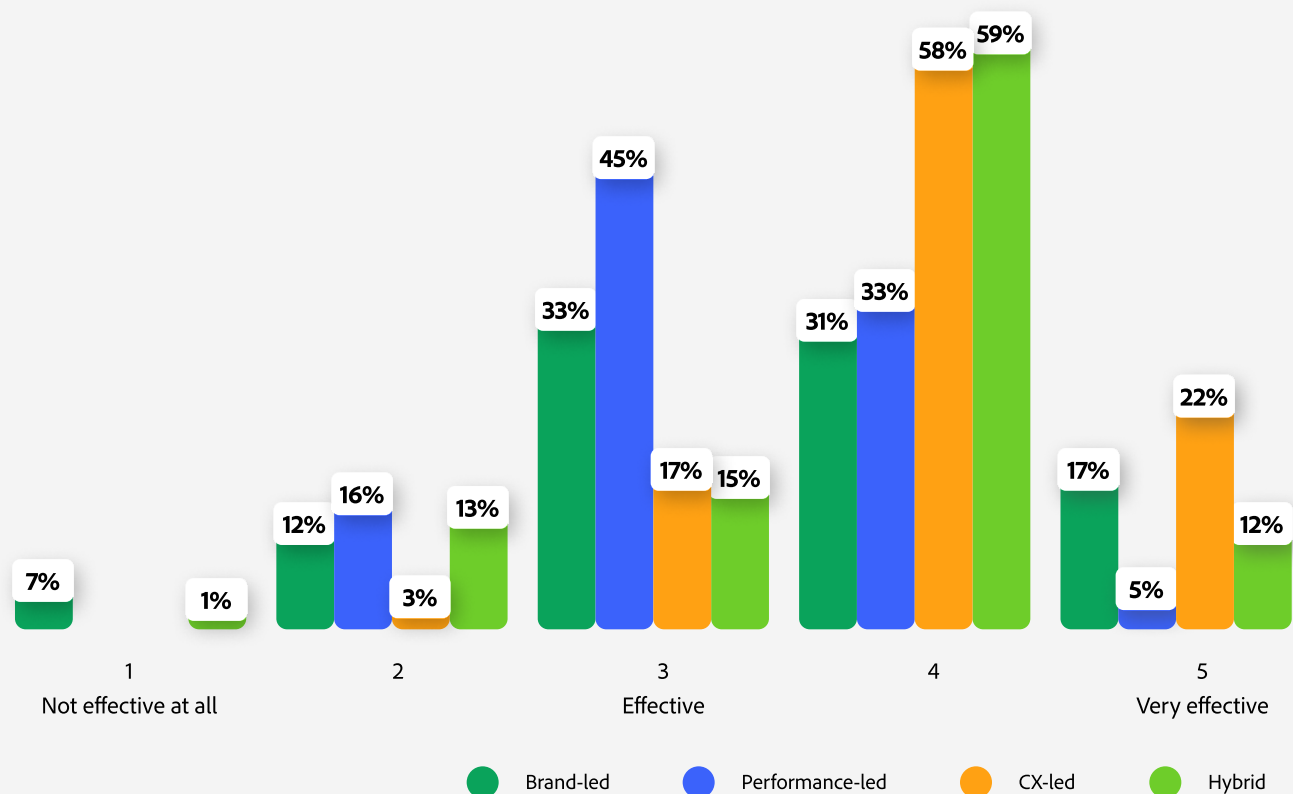
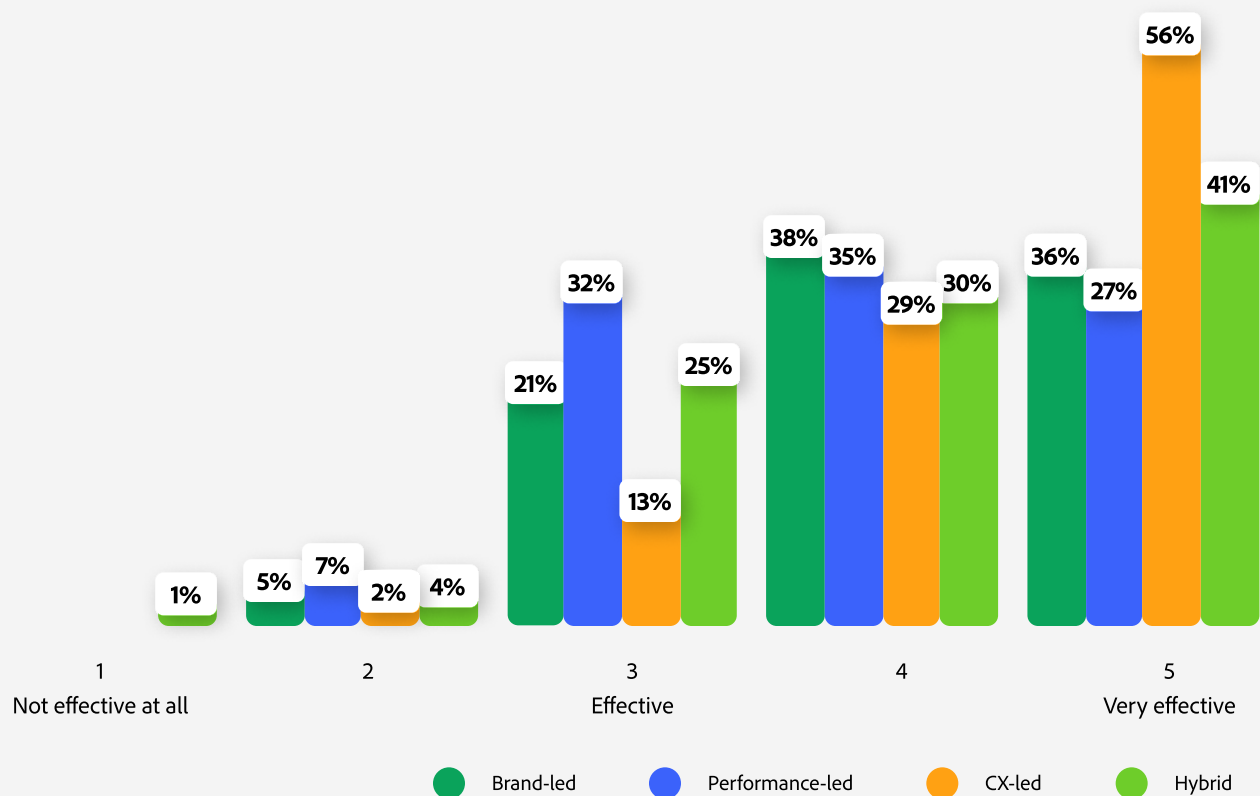


Figure 8

Martech stack effectiveness and the impact of integration.

Importance of consolidating performance marketing tools.



Q. How would you rate your Martech stack's effectiveness in delivering on performance marketing goals?

Q. How important is it for your organization to consolidate the tools used for performance marketing?

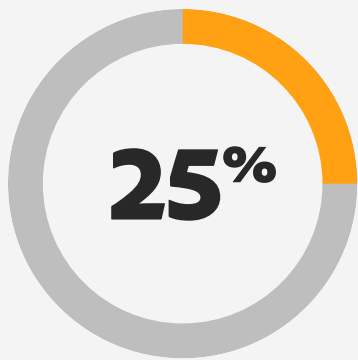
Brand-Led = 58 Global Senior Marketers | Performance-Led = 75 Global Senior Marketers | CX=Driven = 93 Global Senior Marketers | Hybrid = 163 Global Senior Marketers

Ultimately, despite the high number of tools and frequent re-evaluations, marketers struggle to:

- Effectively integrate their martech stacks.
- Achieve advanced automation.
- Drive tangible performance improvements amidst budgetary and technical constraints.

Integrated Talent and AI Strategy

Performance outcomes are increasingly tied to an organization's ability to train teams, build cross-functional fluency, and embed AI responsibly and effectively. Put differently, as complexity grows, organizations must evolve from solely buying tools to building capability across these tools.



Currently, only 25% of marketers express strong satisfaction with their investments in training and talent, with performance-led organizations reporting the lowest numbers.

Also, while marketers are turning to AI — particularly for content versioning, audience targeting, and planning — adoption is uneven as concerns about quality and control remain widespread.

AI's anticipated benefits vary too, because AI strategies are shaped by distinct organizational priorities.

- Performance-led firms prioritize AI for speed to market and volume.
- CX and hybrid teams focus on AI for personalization and decisioning.
- Brand-led organizations are more focused on using AI for insights and content versioning.

The path to stronger performance relies on a mix of team upskilling, cross-functional collaboration, and responsible AI integration. Still, most organizations struggle with training satisfaction, face uneven AI adoption due to quality and control concerns, and pursue varied AI strategies based on their distinct priorities.

Figure 9

AI adoption by function and use case.



Q. In which of the following areas of performance marketing have you successfully applied AI to improve the process? (Select all that apply)
 Brand-Led = 58 Global Senior Marketers | Performance-Led = 75 Global Senior Marketers | CX-Driven = 93 Global Senior Marketers | Hybrid = 163 Global Senior Marketers

**Organizations must
invest in the
foundational capabilities
that enable **speed**,
personalization,
and **accountability**.**



Future Investment Priorities

Looking ahead, marketers' top investment priorities include:

51%

Measurement and attribution modernization

49%

AI applications

48%

Content automation and creative scaling

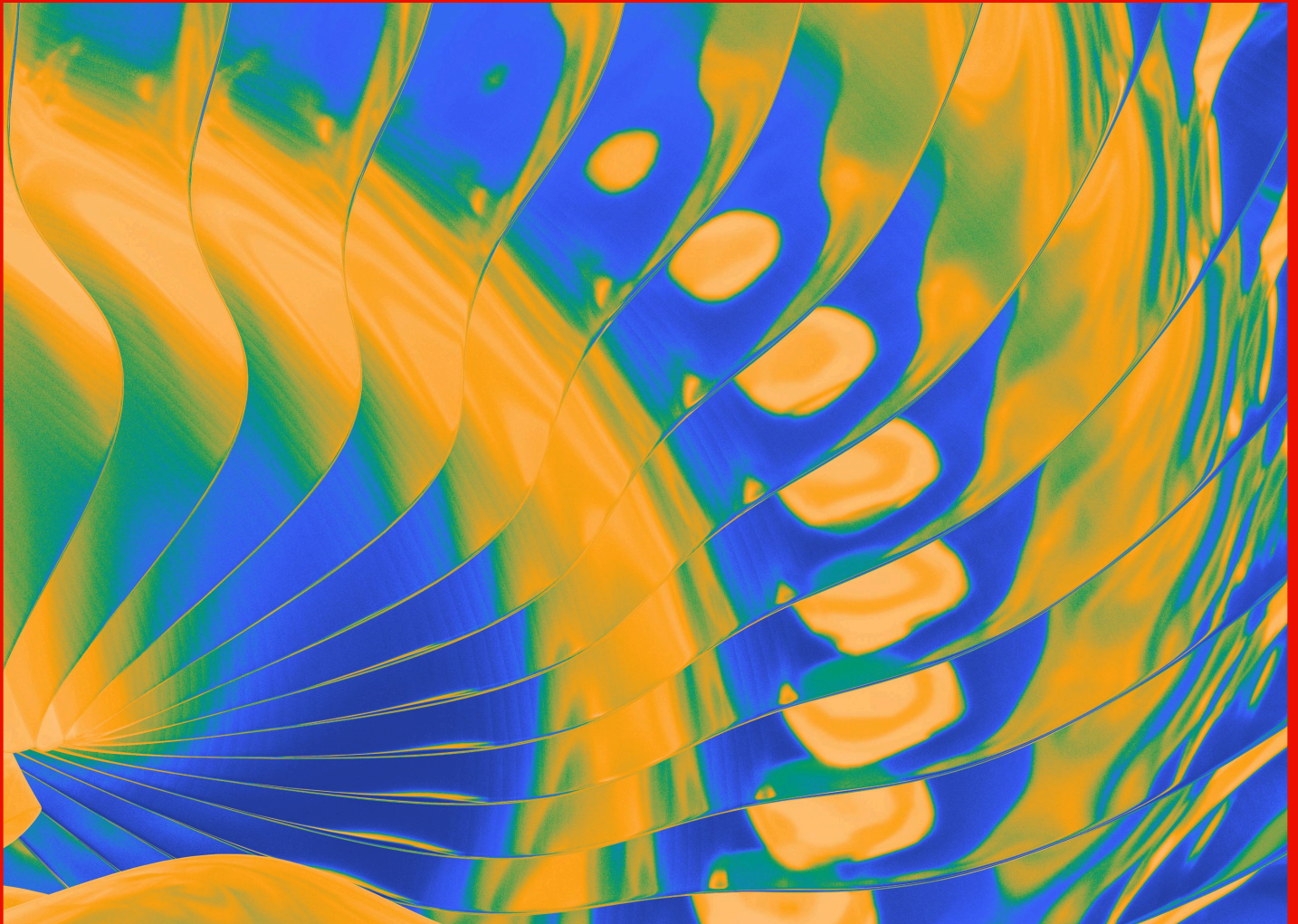
43%

Extracting more value from martech

Senior marketers' focus on modernizing measurement and attribution tools, implementing deeper AI integration, and scaling content signals a strategic pivot toward intelligence-driven growth, operational efficiency, and greater customer personalization. These priorities emphasize a shift toward building a sustainable, scalable performance ecosystem that runs smarter, not just faster.

Strategic Implications

A CMO Playbook
for Performance
Reinvention

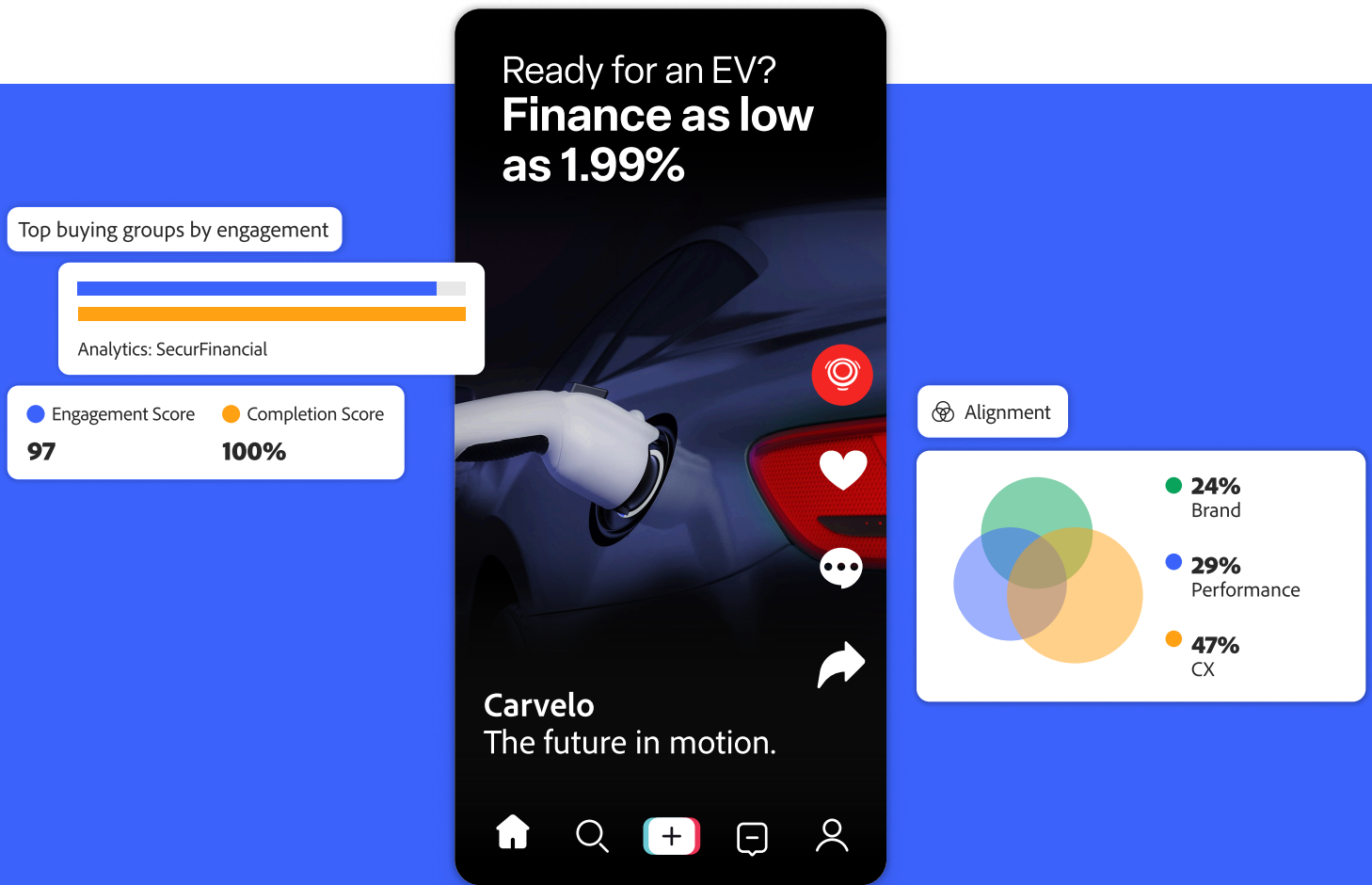


From Tactics to Strategic Orchestration

The State of Performance Marketing report reveals a clear imperative for marketing leaders: evolve performance marketing from a collection of tactical efficiencies into a cohesive, insight-led growth strategy.

This transition requires more than budget reallocation. It demands the rearchitecting of how marketing functions plan, measure, and execute across brand, CX, and performance. CMOs and other marketing leaders must lead this evolution, not by increasing spend but by increasing strategic coherence.

Performance marketing must be reframed as a **strategic growth system** — one that unifies near-term outcomes with long-term value creation.



4 Imperatives for Performance Marketing Leadership

Strategic integration is the next frontier.

Performance must evolve from a budget-heavy practice into a strategy-led discipline — one that aligns with brand and CX rather than competes with them. Intentional integration will close the gap between aspiration and execution.

- Break down silos to establish shared goals, KPIs, and data foundations.
 - Coordinate planning cycles and success metrics across functions.
 - Ensure that performance objectives reflect brand and customer impact as well as efficiency.
-

Measurement must catch up to execution.

The ability to act fast means little without meaningful measurement. Marketers need to modernize measurement to support both speed and rigor.

- Evolve beyond either/or measurement models and combine real-time agility with the depth of long-term tools like MMM.
 - Use real-time signals as leading indicators, not final decision-makers.
 - Design measurement systems that enhance both decision quality and speed.
-

Creative capacity needs to scale with agility without sacrificing quality.

With real-time insights and personalized execution on the rise, marketers must invest in content development and production capabilities to sustain performance at scale.

- Create a tighter link and feedback loop between insights and creative that prioritizes quality.
 - Invest in content systems that support versioning, personalization, and in-flight optimization, treating content velocity as a performance lever, not a production challenge.
 - Use AI to augment rather than replace creative development — and ensure that it remains anchored in governance and subject to quality standards.
-

Unlocking martech and AI requires talent and trust.

Automation alone won't drive success. Marketers must address talent gaps, build internal skills, and create governance structures that enable confident, quality-focused AI adoption and smarter use of martech systems.

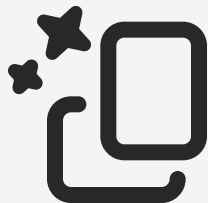
- Address the capability gap by embedding training and experimentation into performance operations.
- Enable cross-functional fluency covering marketing, data science, and tech.
- Invest in governance frameworks that allow AI and automation to scale responsibly.

Elevating Performance to Drive Holistic Growth

Performance marketing's dominance in budget share underscores its operational value, but its full strategic potential remains unrealized. The research shows that while organizations have made great strides in executional agility, gaps across measurement, talent, and alignment will continue to limit performance's impact on enterprise growth.

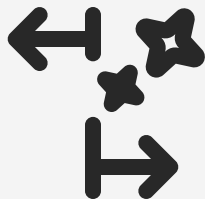
For CMOs, this is a moment of opportunity. By transforming performance from a short-term tactic to a strategically integrated growth engine, marketing can achieve greater resilience, personalization, and impact.

The next era of performance will not be defined by speed alone but by strategic orchestration, creative scalability, and measurable contribution to business outcomes.



Discover how Adobe's generative AI is helping marketers design and deliver personalized experiences at scale.

[Learn more](#)



Consider leveraging the power of AI to strengthen and streamline content supply chains.

[Learn more](#)



Explore the benefits of combining real-time insights and personalized content to better engage with customers.

[Learn more](#)