



65% OF CEOS DON'T
TRUST THEIR CMOS.
**IT'S TIME TO SHAKE
THINGS UP.**





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Introduction

Once-in-a-lifetime moments used to happen once in a lifetime. Now they happen daily, simultaneously, relentlessly. This chaos is changing everything: rewiring our brains, shifting customer behavior, and reshaping the business landscape.

The economy is volatile. Customers are overwhelmed. Technology is accelerating faster than teams can keep up. Yet marketing still operates like it's 2015: too slow, too complex, too disconnected from business results. Teams are stuck in the past: outdated KPIs, bloated tech stacks, and static planning. And if AI is the future, it's making things worse today, churning out creepy, forgettable content that erodes trust and widens the skills gap.

This isn't your average economic downturn. It's a reckoning—a generational shift in how value is created and how marketing must prove it.



In an age of chaos, simplify your marketing.



According to a recent Gartner report, CMOs report that their marketing budgets remain flat year-over-year, and 59% report they have insufficient budget to execute their strategy in 2025.¹ That doesn't mean doing less, it means doing better.

Simplify your customer interactions, your tech stack, your measurement, and, above all, your purpose delivering value.

Measure impact, not activity. Prioritize clarity over noise. Authenticity over automation. Accountability over applause. If you're still talking click-through rates, you're missing the point. And your CEO knows it.

A staggering 65% of CEOs admit they lack confidence in their CMOs,² a crisis that puts the future of countless companies at risk. In today's unforgiving climate, marketing can no longer hide behind buzzwords or surface-level metrics. The C-suite must demand radical accountability and true authenticity from their marketing leaders—anything less threatens the company's survival. Now, more than ever, it's not just about asking better questions, it's about challenging marketing to rise to a new standard, or risk getting left behind.

This paper sets a dual challenge:

- + What leaders should expect of marketing
- + What CMOs must do to deliver

Because marketing has two paths: Simplify and profit. Or overcomplicate and perish.

¹ "Gartner 2025 CMO Spend Survey Reveals Marketing Budgets Have Flatlined at 7.7% of Overall Company Revenue," Gartner, May 12, 2025, <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>

² Mike Ruff, "Data literacy: The key to correcting the C-suite trust deficit," MarTech, May 3, 2024, <https://martech.org/data-literacy-the-key-to-correcting-the-c-suite-trust-deficit/>



1. Market conditions are rewriting the rules

Today's market isn't just turbulent. It's hostile to old ways of working.

Tariffs, inflation, and geopolitical instability are slamming margins. Supply chains are unstable. Borrowing is expensive. Trust is fragile. AI is creating as many problems as it solves. Your average marketing team wasn't built for this environment.



**The question isn't whether conditions have changed.
It's whether your marketing can keep up with the times.**



Let's break it down:



TARIFFS AND TRADE

Trade tensions—especially between the US, China, and Europe—are raising costs. Tariffs have driven prices up across industries—for shoes and apparel, by nearly 40%.³ Marketers now face the challenge of justifying these price increases without offering additional value. That requires clarity and authenticity, not clever positioning or ambiguity.



SUPPLY CHAIN STRAIN

Bottlenecks are driving up costs, delaying production, and triggering shortages. With global shipping costs up 12%, some companies are losing 8% of annual revenue to disruption.⁴ From the war in Ukraine to raw materials, the crunch is hitting core industries, like automotive and electronics, harder than ever. Marketing spend is under the microscope, and ROI isn't optional—it's survival.

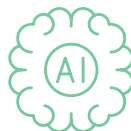
³ "State of U.S. Tariffs: July 10, 2025," The Budget Lab, July 10, 2025, <https://budgetlab.yale.edu/research/state-us-tariffs-july-10-2025>

⁴ Ibid.; "Supply Chain Disruptions: How They Happen, Industries Affected, and How to Manage," Inbound Logistics, April 2025, https://www.inboundlogistics.com/articles/supply_chain_disruptions_how_they_happen_industries_affected_and_how_to_manage/



CONFIDENCE COLLAPSE

Economic anxiety and price hikes are delaying purchases. Seventy percent of consumers expect a recession.⁵ Business leaders can't forecast confidently. With the world so overwhelming and tensions so high, the smallest friction point can cause drop-off. Simplifying the customer experience isn't a nice-to-have—it's your lifeline.



THE AI ARMS RACE

Most marketing organizations are dangerously unprepared for AI. Meanwhile, AI is flooding marketing channels with shallow, tone-deaf content that customers are tuning out. The average tech stack is overflowing, yet only 58% of platform features ever get used.⁶ Advertising agencies, once valued for creative originality and strategic insight, are now grappling with AI-generated work that threatens to devalue human creativity and commoditize ideas. Adding more tools without a clear purpose or skilled people only amplifies confusion and noise. With technology and AI, more is not better. Without discipline and expertise, it simply makes chaos louder.

Today's conditions have shattered the status quo. Last year's strategy won't survive this year's market.

⁵ Terry Lane, "Consumer Confidence Falls Again in June," Investopedia, June 24, 2025, <https://www.investopedia.com/consumer-confidence-falls-in-june-11760104>

⁶ Dom Nocastro, "Martech Stacks Are Being Underutilized By Marketers, How Much Does It Matter?," CMSWire, December 3, 2020, <https://www.cmswire.com/digital-marketing/martech-stacks-are-being-underutilized-by-marketers-how-much-does-it-matter/>



2. Customer priorities are changing

We're living through a constant cascade of crisis: wars, inflation, layoffs, tech disruption. And it's not just reshaping markets. It's reshaping people.

Buyers are overwhelmed, emotionally maxed out, and quick to drop anything that feels complicated, dishonest, or annoying. Their expectations have evolved and so have their behaviors.



If your marketing still assumes a rational buyer on a calm day, you're already off course.



In 2025, customers demand more and tolerate less. Four priorities matter most:



VALUE-FIRST, NOT JUST PRICE-CONSCIOUS

People are delaying discretionary purchases, comparing everything, and asking tougher questions: "What *exactly* am I paying for?" They don't have time for inflated promises or vague value. If it's not clear, they're gone.



SIMPLE, SEAMLESS EXPERIENCES

Buyers expect every brand to act like Amazon. Whether they're on mobile, in a meeting, or chatting with support, the tone and experience must match. Any mismatch triggers skepticism. If you make it hard to buy, they won't.



TECH THAT HELPS, NOT CREEPS

Customers know AI is everywhere. They hate when it shows: bot-written LinkedIn posts, generic emails (or overpersonalized ones), and infuriating chat tools. When automation misses the mark, it feels manipulative, annoying, or forgettable. Authenticity is the new intelligence. Relevance wins. Creepiness loses.

Customers crave clarity, connection, and ease. Marketing must lead by making things more human. The way forward isn't more complexity. It's simplicity with purpose.



CLEAR, TRUSTWORTHY COMMUNICATION

People are tired of bait-and-switch pricing, greenwashing, and empty buzzwords. They want honest pricing, transparent sourcing, and real accountability. Ambiguity is a red flag. If you waffle, they walk.

3. What the C-suite must demand and what CMOs must deliver

The world is chaotic. Customers are harder to reach and retain. The C-suite is under pressure to do more with less, and many don't believe marketing is delivering.

Leaders expect results, but they're done with vanity metrics. If you're still reporting on engagement and not EBITDA impact, you're off base. They need to see proof that marketing is lifting revenue, protecting margin, and driving measurable growth.

For every dollar invested, what's the return?

It's time for marketing to lead. Not with complexity, but with authenticity, accountability, and business impact. **This is the new mandate. And it works both ways:** The C-suite must ask better questions, and CMOs must give better answers.



MARKETING, HOW ARE YOU FUELING REVENUE, MARGIN, AND GROWTH? HOW IS YOUR STRATEGY TANGIBLY SAFEGUARDING OUR BOTTOM LINE AND PROPELLING US AHEAD OF THE COMPETITION?

A Gartner survey revealed only 34% of CEOs and CFOs see eye-to-eye with CMOs on marketing's role in supporting growth.⁷ We need to change this. Marketing must reflect enterprise priorities and collaborate across functions to achieve them. Campaigns should tie directly to goals like margin, customer lifetime value, and market share, not just brand awareness. Companies that align marketing strategy with business outcomes see 32% higher revenue.⁸ If we can't trace campaigns to commercial outcomes, we're not creating value. We're creating noise.



**Stop reporting on clicks.
Start proving impact.**



GIVEN THAT MARKETING TECHNOLOGY IS 20% OF THE MARKETING BUDGET AND INVESTMENT ASK GROWS EVERY YEAR, WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MAKE EVERY TECH DOLLAR COUNT?

Spending on marketing technology, including AI, makes up 19% of marketing budgets and is expected to reach 31.7% in five years. Yet martech tools often underperform: only half are used, and just 24% of companies have fully integrated their digital investments.⁹ We must strip out what's unused, build flexible systems we can swap and scale quickly through test-and-learn approaches, and train our teams to use them properly. More tech doesn't mean better marketing. Simpler, integrated tools used well drive results.



**Stop chasing features.
Start simplifying to increase agility.**



⁷ "Gartner Survey Reveals Only 45% of CMOs Surpass Senior Executive Expectations Despite Achieving Objectives," Gartner, February 25, 2025, <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-02-24-gartner-survey-reveals-only-45-percent-of-cmos-surpass-senior-executive-expectations-despite-achieving-objectives>

⁸ Kaitlyn Wilcoxon, "The Business Impact of Marketing Strategy," Paradigm, n.d., accessed August 13, 2025, <https://www.paradigmmarketinganddesign.com/the-business-impact-of-marketing-strategy/>

⁹ "The CMO Survey: Despite Uncertainty, Marketing Budgets Rebound," Duke, Fuqua School of Business, November 12, 2024, <https://www.fuqua.duke.edu/duke-fuqua-insights/CMO-survey-despite-uncertainty-marketing-budgets-rebound>



HOW ARE YOU LEVERAGING AI TO DELIVER MEASURABLE RESULTS? WHAT'S YOUR PLAN TO PREVENT AI FROM BECOMING JUST MORE DIGITAL NOISE?

As Bill Gates put it, “Automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. Automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency.” AI is no exception. Most teams are stuck in pilot mode, adding to the 15,000+ martech tools already crowding the stack,¹⁰ without governance. But AI is only a tool, not a strategy. Used well, with test-and-learn approaches, AI can accelerate segmentation, personalization, and forecasting. Used poorly, it floods channels with low-value content and alienates customers. On LinkedIn, AI-generated posts get 45% less engagement,¹¹ noticeably degrading platform quality. People don't like it when we trade authenticity for automation. We must test faster, govern better, and keep marketing rooted in human creativity.



**Stop chasing novelty.
Start scaling smart.**



WHEN DEMAND SHIFTS OR ANOTHER CRISIS HITS, ARE WE READY TO PIVOT INSTANTLY? IS OUR TEAM BUILT FOR RESILIENCE?

It's not about being “agile.” It's about being ready. Tariff spike? Product flop? Our marketing plan must flex in real time. Budget rigidity is a risk. Waiting for next quarter is a liability. Flexible strategy adoption cuts marketing spend waste by 30% by shifting resources away from low-performing channels toward measurable results.¹² That flexibility is no longer optional. Fixed planning cycles won't survive today's demand shocks and cost swings. Resilient teams adjust messaging, budgets, and priorities in real time because responsiveness is not just a competitive edge—it's a bottom-line necessity.



**Stop waiting for next quarter.
Start preparing to pivot now.**



¹⁰ Scott Brinker, “2025 Marketing Technology Landscape Supergraphic: 100X growth since 2011, but now with AI...,” Chief Martech, n.d., accessed August 13, 2025, <https://chiefmartec.com/2025/05/2025-marketing-technology-landscape-supergraphic-100x-growth-since-2011-but-now-with-ai>

¹¹ Jonathan Gillham, “Over ½ of Long Posts on LinkedIn Are Likely AI-Generated Since ChatGPT Launched,” Originality.ai, December 16, 2024, <https://originality.ai/blog/ai-content-published-linkedin>

¹² Sarah Lee, “10 Surprising Stats on Audience Research in Market Research,” Number Analytics, March 21, 2025, <https://www.numberanalytics.com/blog/10-surprising-stats-audience-research-market-research>

¹³ Niamh Carroll, “Over half of brands facing marketing effectiveness skills gap,” April 23, 2025, <https://www.marketingweek.com/marketing-effectiveness-skills-gap>



ARE OUR MARKETING TEAMS AND PARTNERS DRIVING REAL REVENUE, OR JUST BUSYWORK? HOW WILL YOU ENSURE EVERY ACTION DELIVERS MEASURABLE BUSINESS IMPACT?

Over 65% of marketing leaders say their organization has an effectiveness skills gap.¹³ That's why we need marketers with strategic fluency, creative judgment, and commercial acumen. We need to train our teams in data, AI, and strategy. The same applies to agency partners: They are an extension of our team, and we need to demand more from them to align metrics with our business goals. Great marketing teams don't just extend reach; they drive results and tie their work directly to revenue, not just activity. That's how we simplify marketing: by anchoring every person, partner, and plan to business value.



**Stop outsourcing your brain.
Start investing in your people.**



The C-suite is right to expect more from marketing, but only if they're asking the questions that matter. CMOs must be ready to respond with impact: by streamlining tools, simplifying metrics, and choosing talent that deliver value. Above all, they must lead with accountability and keep authenticity, not automation, as the north star. Marketing's job is to drive value. Nothing is more important.

In an AI-saturated, attention-fractured market, clarity cuts through. Here's what matters now:

- + Clear, business-aligned metrics
- + A lean, value-driven tech stack
- + Responsiveness to change
- + Bold, relevant creative
- + Great people with the right skills



**It's time to cut through the chaos
and simplify your marketing.**



Conclusion

Amid chaos, there's no room for ambiguity. No time for vanity metrics. No patience for campaigns that don't deliver. Marketing must operate with clarity, precision, and purpose.

The margin for error is razor thin. The upside for reinvention is massive.



TO THE C-SUITE:

Demand more from marketing and invest in its evolution. Ask sharper questions. Reallocate budget based on results. Done right, marketing is a growth engine. Done wrong, it's a drain.



TO CMOS:

Stop defending. Start leading. Prove marketing's value in business terms. Tie every decision and every dollar to revenue and EBITDA, not reach and engagement.

Chaos isn't going away. AI isn't a silver bullet. And customer trust is harder than ever to earn. So, stop outsourcing your thinking. Rethink how you work with agencies. Simplify what you measure. Train your teams to use today's tools and know when to ignore the hype.

Rebuild what's not working. Deliver results that stand up to scrutiny.

Because in this economy, marketing has two choices: **Profit or perish.**



Discover ways you can simplify your marketing by using our AI-powered rapid marketing diagnostic by clicking on the following link: a-mplify.com



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