20th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

2027 B2B Marketing Mix Report

The Age of Accountability

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A Letter from Our Founders



Twenty years ago, we launched the B2B Marketing Mix Report to give marketers a clearer view of what was working, what was changing, and where to focus next. A lot has changed since then.

Marketing teams have more channels, more technology, and more data than ever. They're also being asked to do more: build the brand, generate demand, support sales, strengthen customer relationships, and prove marketing's contribution to growth.

That last part is shaping this year's report.

The 2027 findings point to a new era we call *The Age of Accountability*.

Budgets are still growing, but more selectively. Teams are lean. Outside support is becoming part of the operating model. Demand-generation pressure is showing up further down the funnel. Marketers are confident their work contributes to revenue, but proving it remains difficult. And while AI is already part of the day-to-day, many organizations are still figuring out how to use it consistently and responsibly.

In other words, marketers aren't being asked to do less. They're being asked to make every decision count.

As we mark the twentieth edition of this report, we're especially grateful to the marketers who continue to share their perspective with us. Their input has made this report useful year after year, and we hope this edition provides practical guidance for the decisions ahead.

The tools will keep changing, and so will the channels. But clear thinking, trusted expertise, and work that delivers real business value will always matter.

Thanks for being part of the journey,
Mark Schmukler & Suzanne Morris
Co-Founders, Sagefrog Marketing Group

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20 Years of B2B Marketing Evolution



The channels, technologies, and expectations surrounding B2B marketing have evolved considerably over the past two decades. Three broad eras show how marketing's role has expanded.

2007–2012: The Digital Pivot

Websites, search, email, and digital content started playing a bigger role in the marketing mix. B2B marketers gained new ways to reach buyers, stay visible between sales conversations, and track engagement.

2013–2021: The MarTech & Remote Expansion

Marketing technology multiplied. Automation, CRM, analytics, social media, and paid digital became more connected, while remote work accelerated virtual events, digital sales experiences, and new ways to collaborate.

2022–2027: The Accountability & AI Era

Now, the pressure is on marketers to do more with every investment. Teams are leaner, flexible support is more common, AI is changing how work gets done, and proving marketing's contribution to revenue matters more than ever.

The tools have changed. The expectation hasn't. Create value and prove it.

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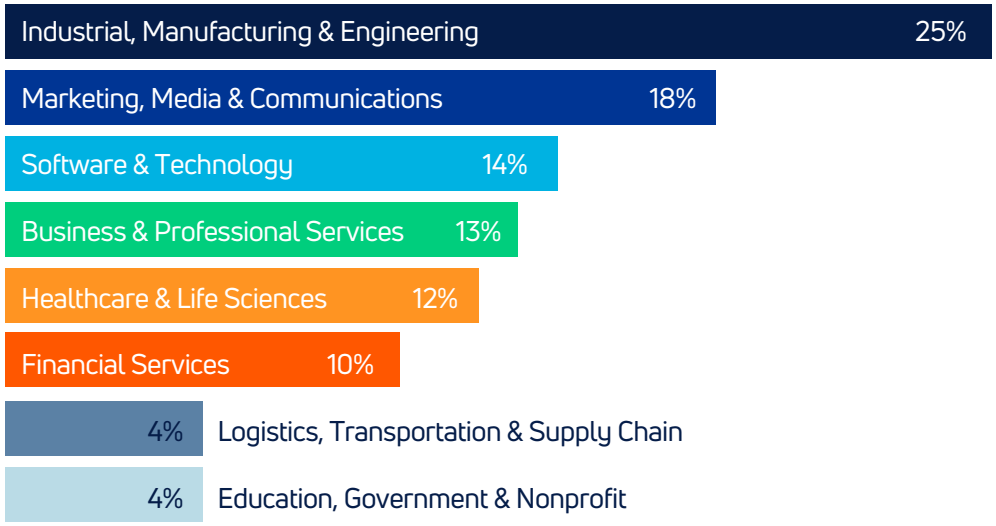
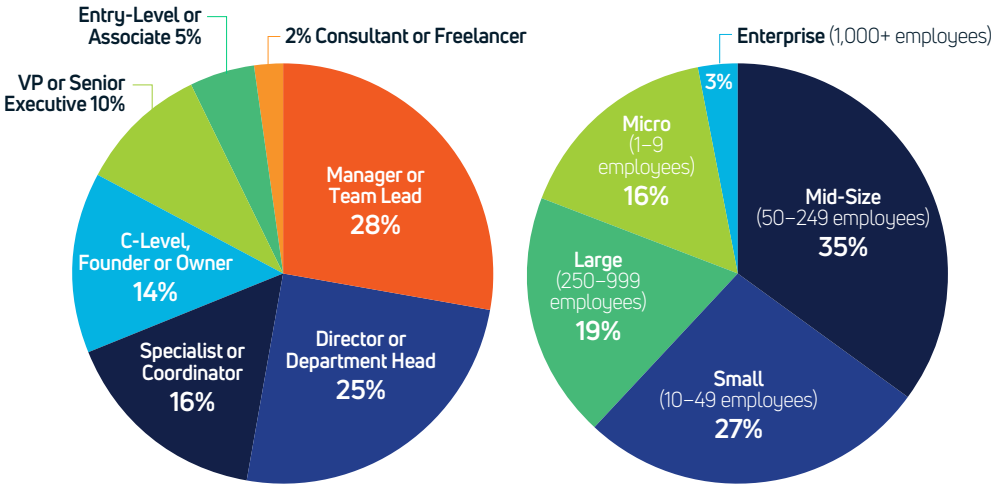
2027 at a Glance





Percentages have been rounded and adjusted to total 100%.

Six Trends Shaping B2B Marketing in 2027

B2B marketers are investing with more scrutiny, stretching lean teams, and facing more pressure to connect marketing activity to revenue. Six trends define the year ahead (and this report).

1. Budget Growth Gets More Selective
58% expect budgets to grow, while 35% expect them to stay flat. More budget doesn't mean more spending everywhere.

2. Lean Teams Add Flexible Capacity
More than half work on teams of one to five, and 67% use a hybrid model. Small teams are extending capacity with outside support.

3. Resource Pressure Hits Demand Generation
31% cite limited budgets and resources as their top demand-generation challenge. Doing more with less is getting harder.

4. Most Funnel Friction Happens After Lead Capture
51% point to the middle of the funnel as their biggest bottleneck, and 20% cite the bottom. The challenge is shifting from generating leads to moving them toward revenue.

5. Revenue Confidence Outpaces Measurement
91% believe marketing contributes to revenue, but 62% struggle with ROI tracking or cross-channel attribution. Marketers see the value. Proving it is the harder part.

6. AI Adoption Outruns Readiness
86% are using or testing AI, but just 35% say their organizations are fully prepared and actively using it. Adoption is moving faster than governance and readiness.

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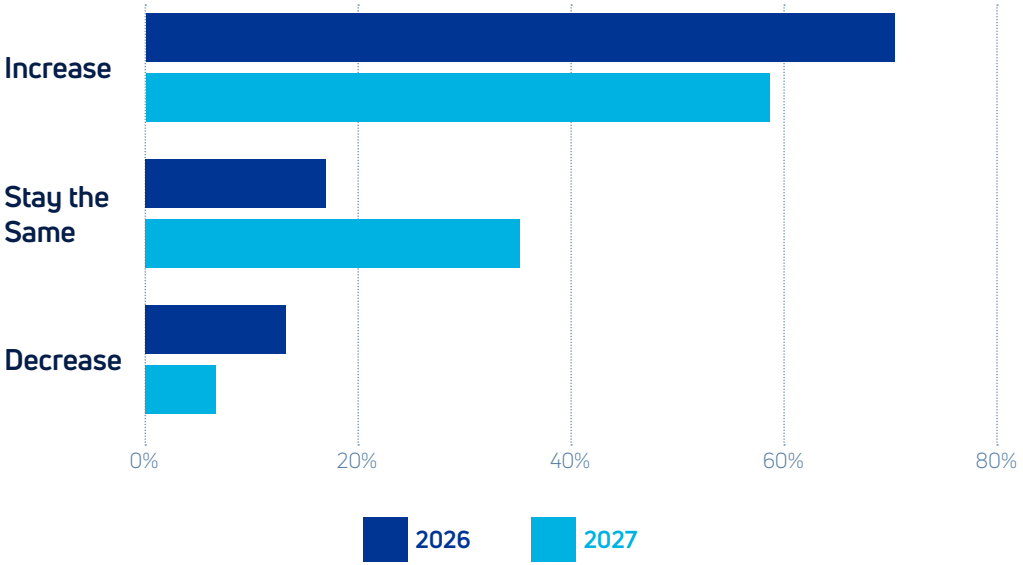
Trend #1

Budget Growth Gets More Selective

B2B marketing investment remains positive, but budget growth is moderating from the higher levels seen in prior years. While 58% of respondents expect marketing budgets to increase in 2027, compared with 70% in 2026, the year-over-year change points to more moderate growth expectations. Meanwhile, the share expecting flat budgets nearly doubled, rising from 17% in 2026 to 35% in 2027. Only 7% anticipate budget reductions.

Budget Expectations

Comparison of 2026 and 2027 budget expectations



Taken together, the findings point to moderation rather than contraction. Most marketers still expect budgets to grow or remain steady, but fewer anticipate increases than they did a year ago. As budget growth slows, making deliberate investment decisions and connecting spending to business outcomes becomes increasingly important.

For marketing leaders, the question is shifting from how much they can spend to where investment can work hardest.

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Trend #1

Budget Growth Gets More Selective

Primary Marketing Objectives for 2027

Marketing leaders are prioritizing brand awareness, lead generation, and customer retention.

1. Brand Awareness: **56%**
2. Lead Generation: **54%**
3. Customer Retention & Account Expansion: **42%**
4. Revenue Growth & Attribution Proof: **38%**
5. Digital Transformation & Marketing Automation: **31%**

Brand Awareness and Lead Generation remain the top two priorities for 2027, reinforcing the importance of balancing market recognition with pipeline creation.

Customer Retention & Account Expansion also ranks among the top three. Its position alongside **Brand Awareness** and **Lead Generation** shows that marketers' priorities extend beyond acquisition to existing customer relationships. **Revenue Growth & Attribution Proof** and **Digital Transformation & Marketing Automation** round out the top five.

Together, these objectives span the customer journey, from building awareness and generating demand to retaining customers and proving revenue contribution.

Where Marketers Plan to Invest

Marketing leaders are concentrating investment in a mix of established channels and emerging capabilities:

Content Marketing & SEO: 66%
Events & Partnerships: 55%
Paid Media: 51%
AI Tools & Experimentation: 45%

The mix shows continued investment in visibility and demand generation, alongside growing interest in AI-enabled execution.
For lean marketing teams, that broader mix also raises a capacity question: How can internal teams support more priorities without adding equivalent resources?

More priorities are competing for the same marketing resources.

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Trend #2

Lean Teams Add Flexible Capacity

B2B marketing teams remain lean. More than half of respondents (52%) operate with teams of one to five people, while marketing responsibilities continue to span brand, demand generation, events, digital media, analytics, sales enablement, and technology.

Against that backdrop, flexible delivery models are becoming more common.

Hybrid Delivery Becomes the Operating Standard

For 2027, 67% of organizations report using a hybrid model that combines internal marketing staff with external agency partners or specialized resources, an increase from 56% in 2026. Another 80% are planning or considering additional external support during the year.

52%
have internal teams of **one to five people**

67%
operate using a **hybrid delivery model**

44%
cite **limited internal bandwidth** as the main driver for external support

80%
are planning or considering **additional external support**

Together, these findings show how external resources are becoming an increasingly established part of the way B2B marketing teams build capacity.

Bandwidth Becomes the Top Driver for External Support

Limited internal bandwidth or capacity constraints are the leading reason respondents cite for seeking external support at 44%.

- Limited internal bandwidth or capacity constraints: 44%
- Lack of in-house expertise or specialized skills: 17%
- Speed to market or accelerated execution: 15%

Reliance on freelancers and independent contractors also increased from 13% in 2026 to 23% in 2027, providing further evidence that marketers are using a broader mix of external resources.

The findings point to a more flexible operating model, with internal teams retaining strategic oversight while outside partners add capacity or specialized support.

Flexible capacity is becoming part of the B2B marketing operating model.

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Trend #3

Resource Pressure Hits Demand Generation

B2B demand generation challenges are shifting, with resource pressure becoming a more prominent concern for marketers.

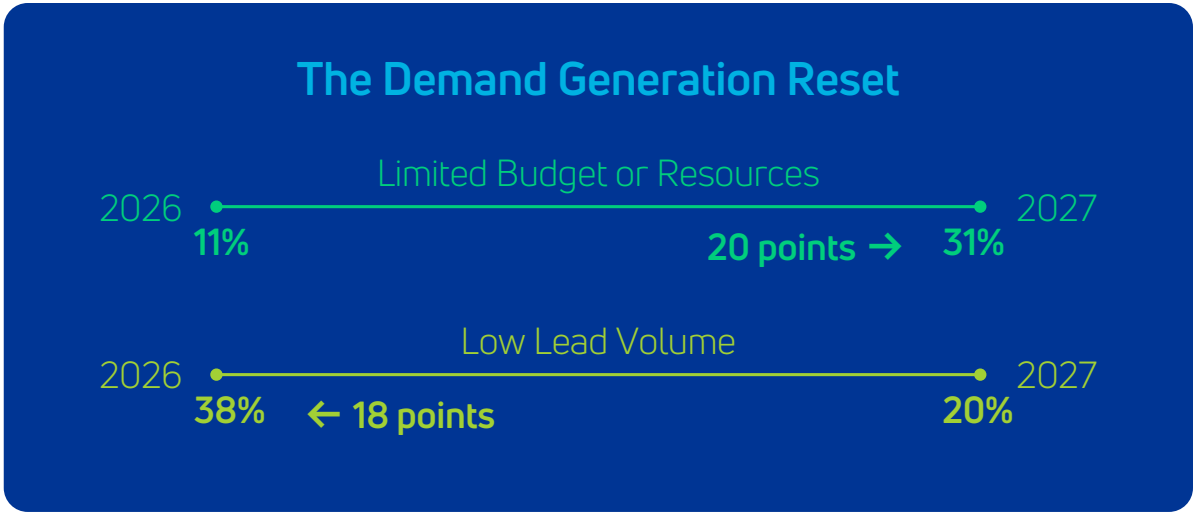
In 2026, low lead volume was the most commonly cited B2B demand generation challenge. For 2027, limited budget and resources moved into the top position.

Limited Budget or Resources: 31%

Low Lead Volume: 20%

Poor Lead Quality: 16%

The year-over-year shift is notable: limited budget and resources rose from 11% to 31%, while low lead volume fell from 38% to 20%.



That changes the demand generation equation. While conversion rates and lead quality moved only modestly year-over-year, resource constraints rose sharply as low lead volume declined. Generating enough leads remains important, but marketers are increasingly balancing that goal against the budget, bandwidth, and capacity available to support demand as opportunities move forward.

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Trend #4

Most Funnel Friction Happens After Lead Capture

While resource pressure is reshaping demand generation priorities, the middle of the funnel accounts for the largest share of reported bottlenecks at 51%. Bottom-of-funnel challenges also increased from 8% in 2026 to 20% in 2027.

- Middle of the Funnel (Nurturing & Consideration): 51%
- Bottom of the Funnel (Conversion & Closing): 20%
- Top of the Funnel (Awareness & Lead Capture): 19%

With 71% of reported bottlenecks occurring in the middle or bottom of the funnel, the challenge extends well beyond generating initial awareness and leads.

Lead Quality Comes from a Mix of Channels

When asked which channels generate the highest-quality leads, marketers pointed to a close mix of referral, organic, and paid sources.

- Referrals & Word of Mouth: 63%
- Content Marketing & SEO: 62%
- Paid Media: 61%

No single channel dominates. The findings reinforce the importance of understanding which sources bring in stronger leads and how those leads progress through the funnel.

The demand challenge is no longer lead volume. Resources, nurturing, and conversion are putting pressure further down the funnel.

Evidence Supports the Later Stages of the Funnel

The most requested forms of sales enablement are:

- Sales collateral, including one-sheeters and presentations: 53%
- Case studies and client stories: 53%
- Product demos and interactive tools: 39%

Sales collateral and client stories tied for the top position, giving buyers information they can use to evaluate options and support internal decision-making. Product demos and interactive tools can make fit and functionality more tangible.

These findings reinforce the role sales enablement can play once buyers move beyond initial awareness.

As buyers move closer to a decision, evidence has more work to do.

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Trend #5

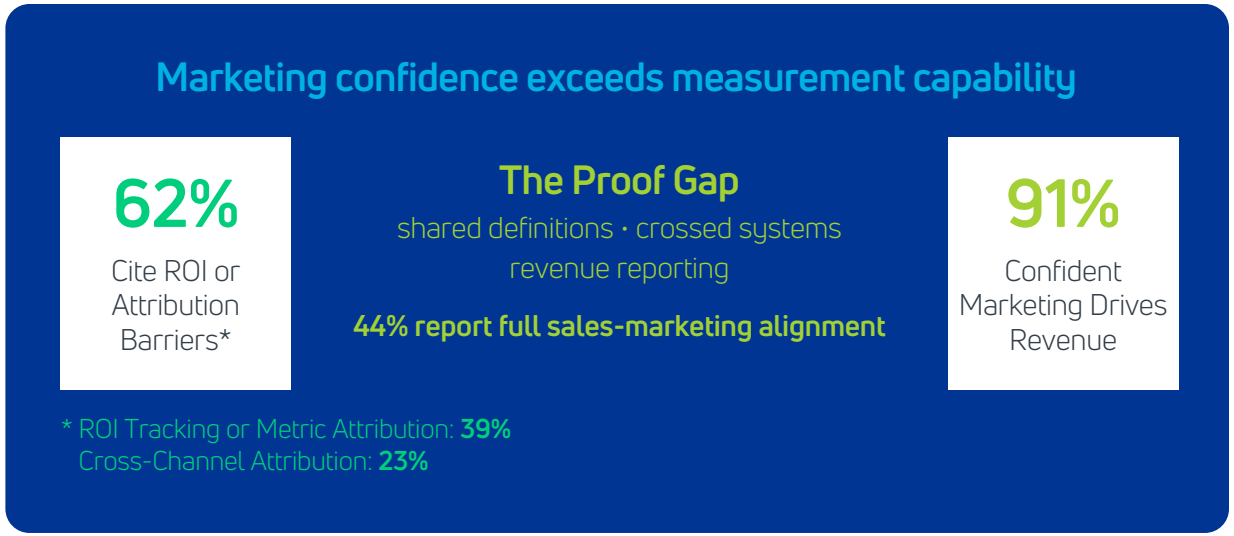
Revenue Confidence Outpaces Measurement

B2B marketers overwhelmingly believe their work contributes to revenue. Proving that contribution remains much harder.

91% are confident that marketing activities drive company revenue. Yet 62% cite ROI or attribution as their primary barrier to proving marketing's value.

That gap between confidence and proof is one of the clearest signs of growing accountability pressure.

Marketing confidence is high. The ability to prove revenue contribution still has room to catch up



Marketers may be confident that their work contributes to revenue, but many still lack the measurement capabilities needed to substantiate that contribution across channels and touchpoints.

Sales and marketing alignment provides a more encouraging signal: 44% report full alignment, up from 35% in 2026. But stronger alignment doesn't eliminate the need for clearer attribution.

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Trend #6

AI Adoption Outruns Readiness

AI has moved from an emerging experiment to an increasingly common operational capability. Baseline adoption is high, yet we still see a gap between basic usage and organizational maturity. Questions around output quality, reliability, and governance remain.

Adoption Grows While a Maturity Gap Persists

In 2027, 86% of respondents report using or experimenting with AI tools in their marketing workflows, led by Generative AI as the primary technology choice.

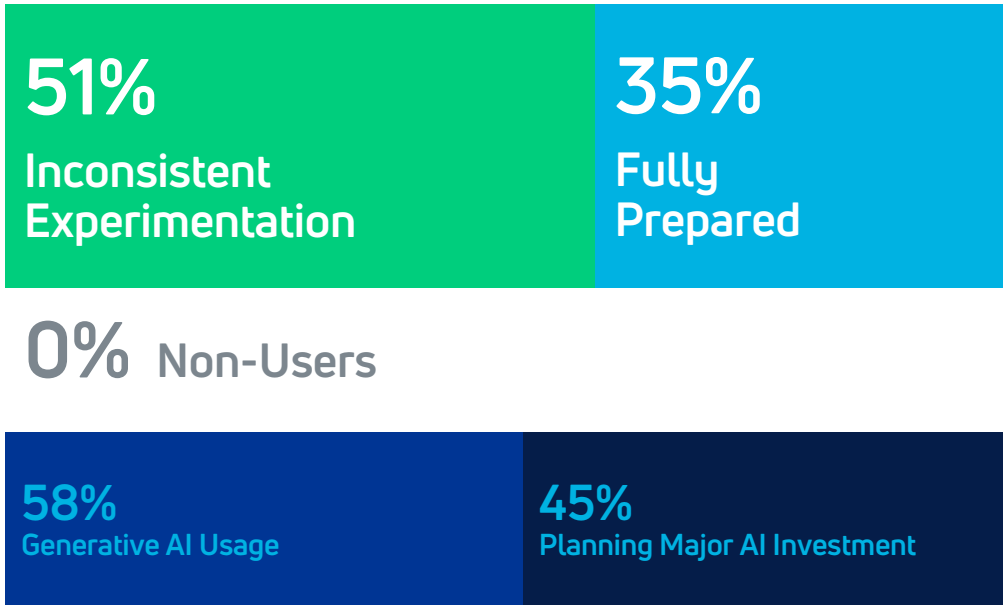
- **Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Claude): 58%**
- **Planned Major AI Tool Investment: 45%**

Despite widespread adoption, organizational readiness varies across three distinct stages:

- **Experimenting Inconsistently: 51%**
- **Fully Prepared & Active: 35%**
- **Not Currently Using: 0%**

While AI use is widespread, only about one-third of respondents describe their organizations as fully prepared and active, highlighting a gap between experimentation and organizational readiness.

AI Maturity & Adoption Gap



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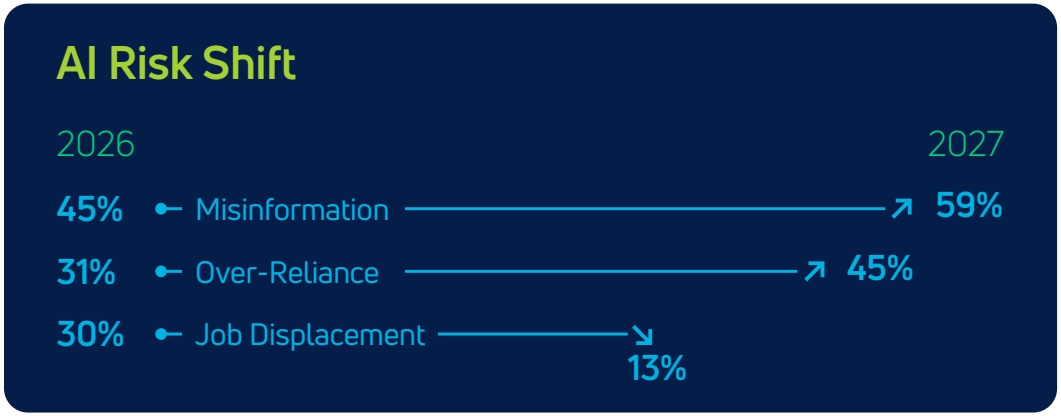
Risk Perception Moves from Displacement to Quality

Marketers are far less concerned about AI replacing their roles and far more focused on whether AI-generated work can be fully trusted. That heightens the need for human oversight—defining strategy, verifying accuracy, and shaping a differentiated point of view.

- Misinformation & Inaccuracy: 59% (up from 45% in 2026)
- Data Privacy & Security: 49% (down from 57% in 2026)
- Over-Reliance on AI Tools: 45% (up from 31% in 2026)
- Job Security & Displacement: 13% (down from 30% in 2026)



AI is a great way to extend team capacity, but it raises the standard for governance and human oversight.

Five Priorities for Responsible AI Use

Approve Tools & Use Cases: Define authorized platforms and specific business problems AI should solve

Protect Company & Client Data: Establish strict guardrails around confidential, proprietary, or client information

Require Human Review: Ensure expert oversight for all AI-generated strategy, copy, and analysis

Verify Facts & Sources: Audit claims, statistics, and citations before publication or deployment

Preserve Distinct Brand Voice: Maintain brand-specific language and perspective to prevent AI from flattening messaging into generic language

Structured governance turns AI speed into dependable value. A lack of guardrails turns it into operational risk.

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What B2B Marketers Are Watching Next

Taken together, the 2027 findings point to three areas B2B marketers should keep watching as search, content, and AI continue to evolve.

AEO & GEO Join the Search Strategy

Search is expanding beyond traditional Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) and Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) are becoming part of the conversation as buyers increasingly encounter AI-generated summaries and conversational search experiences.

For B2B marketers, that raises the importance of creating expertise that is clear, credible, well-structured, and easy to surface across both traditional and AI-driven search.

Authenticity as the Counterweight to AI Automation

As AI makes content production faster and easier, speed alone may become less of a differentiator. That puts more weight on the elements that AI can't easily replicate: a distinct brand voice, original research, credible subject-matter expertise, and a clear point of view.

Verified Thought Leadership Carries More Weight

As more commodity content enters the market, evidence-backed expertise may become more valuable. Proprietary data, executive perspective, case studies, and real-world experience can help B2B organizations establish credibility and give buyers more reason to trust the content they consume.



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The New Standard Is Accountable Growth

The B2B marketing landscape looks very different from how it did when this report began twenty years ago. New channels, technologies, and ways of working have reshaped how marketing operates and how success is measured. The 2027 findings point to growing expectations for marketers to connect creativity, execution, and innovation to business outcomes.

That's accountable growth: balancing experimentation with disciplined execution and making marketing decisions that can be connected to meaningful business outcomes.

NOW WHAT? Your To-Do List from This Year's Report

1. Prioritize investments that deliver meaningful results
2. Add specialized support where internal capacity falls short
3. Strengthen buyer progression beyond lead generation
4. Connect marketing metrics to business outcomes
5. Set clear standards for responsible AI use
6. Build expertise that differentiates your brand

About Sagefrog

Sagefrog is a top B2B branding and marketing agency specializing in healthcare, technology, industrial, and services. We accelerate client success through deeper B2B expertise, full-service capabilities, and proven, integrated systems that deliver measurable results and ROI.

Put the insights from this report into action. Scan to connect.

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