

# AI, TALENT & TRUST: A NEW BLUEPRINT FOR MARKETING LEADERSHIP



**ADMA**

Association for Data-Driven  
Marketing and Advertising

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# FOREWORD



## Artificial Intelligence is already shaping the way we live, work and connect with each other.

For marketers, this moment is both exciting and daunting. As a naturally inquisitive and innovative group we are typically among the first to adopt these tools at scale, yet practical, trustworthy guidance has been limited.

That is why ADMA has created this report.

With the potential power of AI far outstripping any technology which has come before, it is vital we take the time to stop, think and collaborate to ensure we realise its potential and avoid the major pitfalls which would be all too easy to fall into.

As the trusted voice of Australia's marketing community, we believe it is essential to develop an AI future that is fair, balanced and shaped in the spirit of collaboration, establishing best practice which will set every business up for success. This is not just about technology; it is about people, creativity and trust.

Inside this report you will find world-class insights from some of the leading minds in AI, presented in a way that is easy to digest and immediately actionable. We've conducted the most comprehensive AI in Marketing survey undertaken in Australia – completed by over 1000 marketers – and mined the data from our industry-leading Capability Compass to set out the state of play as it exists in 2025, and create an actionable roadmap for marketers at every level.

We have also included insights from our new partner Reejig, a Work Intelligence Platform powered by a proprietary Work Ontology®, which we will continue to surface over the coming months to give the industry a comprehensive understanding of where we are and what needs to be done.

Whether you are a CMO redefining strategy, a marketing manager exploring AI tools, or an emerging practitioner keen to sharpen your skills, the findings here are designed to meet you where you are and help you move forward with confidence.

This is just the beginning. ADMA will continue to drive this conversation, equipping marketers with the knowledge, skills and standards required to thrive in an AI-powered future. Through our Capability Compass, training programs and regulatory leadership, we are committed to ensuring marketers not only keep pace with change but help define what responsible, human-first AI looks like in practice.

The future of marketing will be shaped by those who are curious, collaborative and courageous enough to explore the possibilities of human-machine partnerships. Together, we can ensure AI strengthens our industry and delivers lasting value for businesses, consumers and society.

**Andrea Martens**  
**CEO, ADMA**

# INTRODUCTION

**Artificial Intelligence, a collection of technologies which demonstrate human-like thinking, has captured the world's attention.**

In many organisations, marketing departments have been among the first to experiment with this new generation of human-machine collaboration, yet bespoke advice and support for marketers remains limited. This report explores the profound impact of AI on the marketing discipline and the critical skills, strategies and workplace practices required to thrive in this new era.

For marketers and marketing leaders, AI presents both opportunities and challenges. AI offers the potential to enhance efficiency, improve decision-making, and drive innovation.

However, capitalising on this work transformation demands a reassessment of skills and organisational structures. It will require cultural transformations too as businesses grapple with the pace of change, new customer expectations, ever-impressive technology and a shifting legislative landscape will demand new responsibilities.

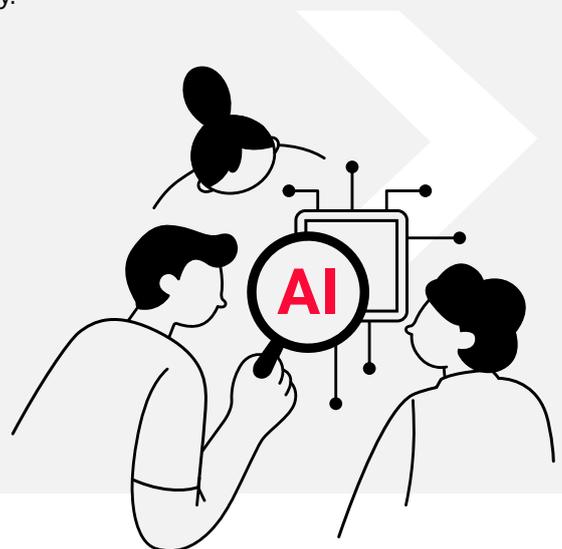
Our research shows that for organisations to thrive, people must be front and center in their technology strategies. With responsibilities traversing customer voice, organisational growth, brand reputation and trust, marketers have a unique and important role to play in joining the dots between people and tech - helping organisations balance opportunities and risks.

To achieve this, marketing leaders will need to become more fluent in tech and data so they can influence the direction of conversation within their organisations. This doesn't mean becoming a data scientist, but it does mean having a strong understanding of:

1. the kinds of problems AI is best suited to solve;
2. the capabilities of AI and automation tools;
3. how to take advantage of tools to drive more effective marketing practices;
4. a robust knowledge of the risks poor AI implementation can have on customer trust and brand reputation.

While there is a lot to do and consider, marketers should not feel they have to do it alone. A huge amount can be achieved through collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Industry bodies like ADMA can play a pivotal role by providing resources, training, and networking opportunities to keep marketers informed of the latest advancements and best practices. They can also foster a collaborative environment where professionals can share insights, create and sustain new industry standards and collectively navigate the challenges and opportunities.

The future of marketing will inevitably feature more technology and data. But, it will belong to those who are curious, collaborative and test the boundaries between human and machine responsibly.

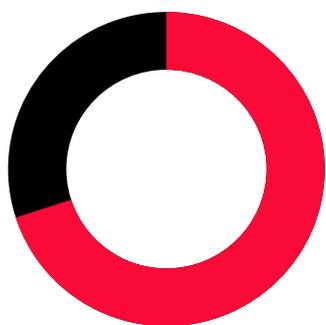


**01**

**THE HUMAN  
ADVANTAGE**



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## Over 70% of marketers are optimistic about AI's long-term impact on effectiveness<sup>1</sup>

With their toolkit spanning analytical, strategic and creative thinking, marketers are well-positioned to seize future opportunities where these core human skills will give them an advantage. Marketing leaders should continue to prioritise and strengthen these skills through ongoing learning and development.

### The skills AI cannot replace

AI has been unboxed on a global stage and we have been transfixed by what seems like magic. Images, conversations, films, music, scripts, coding, summarising, organising, calculating; it seems like there is nothing it cannot do. Creating images for social posts? Tick. A no-code chatbot can answer customer FAQs? Done. Need to mock up a campaign fast? Next please.

Despite appearances, AI is not magic.

Under the hood, its components are largely data sets, algorithms, models, chunky infrastructure and teams of people who build, manage, govern and market it. AI doesn't know what is helpful, what is harmful or hurtful. It doesn't know what is factually accurate. It doesn't understand context, has no taste and therefore doesn't know what is relevant or meaningful. Importantly, AI is also amoral.

But as humans, we do. These are the things machines cannot replace.



While there is no single agreed set of core human **skills** as yet, there are some which repeatedly show up on these lists. The World Economic Forum<sup>2</sup>, the European Commission<sup>3</sup>, the OECD<sup>4</sup> and UNICEF<sup>5</sup> highlight the importance of:

**Creative thinking / Problem-solving / Critical thinking / Collaboration / Communication**



Alongside skills, the EU Commission also emphasises the importance of having the right **attitude** which it defines as five qualities:

**Curious / Adaptable / Empathetic / Responsible / Innovative**

These skills and mindsets need continued nurturing and strengthening through ongoing learning and development. For marketers, there are qualities which underpin the essentials of their craft including analytical and strategic thinking, creativity and empathy for the customer.

These skills are not only needed to ensure the profession continues to be built on a strong foundation, but to buttress the concerns marketers have about AI today.

1 ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

2 World Economic Future of Jobs Report 2025

3 Empowering Learners in the Age of AI, 2025, European Commission and OECD

4 Empowering Learners in the Age of AI, 2025, European Commission and OECD

5 The 12 Transferable Skills, UNICEF, 2022

## The top five issues that most concerned marketers about AI in marketing today include<sup>5</sup>:

1/ Oversaturation of AI-generated content



48%

2/ Diminished creativity and originality



41%

3/ Data privacy and security concerns



36%

4/ Legal or copyright risks



35%

5/ Inaccuracy or low-quality outputs



34%

Ethical bias or fairness in AI-generated outputs was sixth with 31%.

<sup>5</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

# The future is augmentation, not automation

Marketers are both engaged in work with AI tools and enthusiastic about their potential with 75% saying they already use AI tools at least weekly and 74% optimistic about AI's long-term impact on effectiveness<sup>6</sup>.

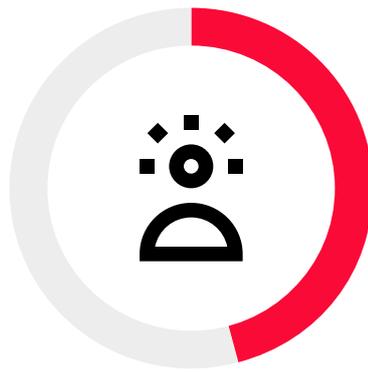
However, marketers are not simply handing their work over to AI for automation, rather they're leaning into augmentation. Marketers' usage of Generative AI demonstrates it can not only assist with the execution of many tasks, but also has the potential to inspire and support the creation of higher quality outputs.

## What marketers are using AI for<sup>7</sup>:



**47%**

To create content for ads, social media, and emails



**46%**

Brainstorming and overcoming creative blocks



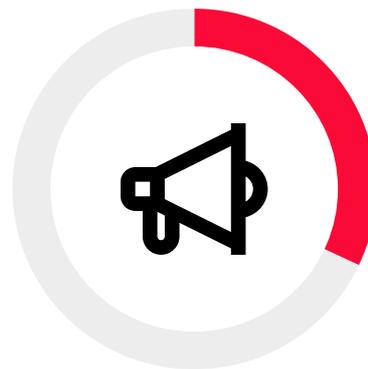
**36%**

Ad copy



**35%**

Campaign ideas



**32%**

To refine or improve brand tone of voice

<sup>6</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

<sup>7</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

David Phillips, Partner at Deloitte Digital, believes this is a positive sign as active engagement with AI tools is not only essential to keeping fundamental skills sharp, but ensures marketers are using them to create distinctive and valuable work.

“

**Generally speaking, Marketers are curious humans - they are naturally going to want to apply the AI assistants they are using in their personal lives to the workplace. However, as the application becomes more systematic, we need to be super clear on the role for humans in the marketing workflow. Placing a human in the loop who can't understand what the automation is for won't help, but removing the human altogether presents even more risk. The fundamentals of marketing are becoming more important than ever, the emerging issue to solve is when and how to intervene.**

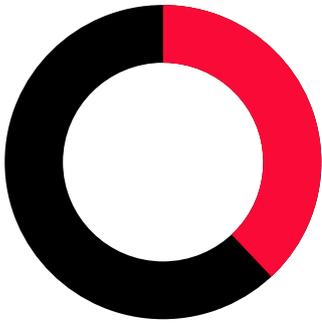
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**02**

**THE GREAT,  
BIG REDESIGN**



**ADMA**



When surveyed, **38%** of marketers believe AI will blur the lines between traditional roles *and* lead to the emergence of AI specialists in marketing roles<sup>8</sup>

AI and automation are not the solution to every problem. It is imperative for marketing leaders to pursue AI initiatives that will add genuine value and solve well-defined and scoped problems. Before redesigning marketing teams and AI-human workflows, marketing leaders must first understand what tasks can be automated and what new tasks will emerge.

## AI regret makes an appearance

A prevalent narrative is AI can solve every problem. So it is easy to understand why so many have misinterpreted the role AI plays in organisations and implemented strategies they have come to later regret.

Research published in April 2025 indicated two in five UK businesses made redundancies because of the imagined gains they would achieve with AI adoption. More than half (55%) came to regret their decision.

The same report found 38% of leaders do not understand AI's impact on business, with 25% unsure which roles are most at risk from AI<sup>9</sup>.

Payments company Klarna is the poster child for AI regret. During 2023 and 2024, and with great fanfare, Klarna partnered with OpenAI to automate marketing and customer service jobs. It was not long before they were reporting<sup>10</sup> they had:

- **Reduced their workforce by 22%;**
- **Cut their marketing agency spend by 25%;**
- **Reduced the image development cycle from 6 weeks to 7 days;**
- **Automated customer service to do the work of “700 full-time agents”;**
- **Saved US\$10m on marketing costs.**

However, in a May 2025 interview with Bloomberg<sup>11</sup> Klarna CEO Sebastian Siemiatkowski admitted it was reversing its AI-first strategy and recruiting humans again.

He explained: *“Cost unfortunately seems to have been too predominant an evaluation factor when organising this, what you end up having is lower quality. From a brand perspective, a company perspective, I just think it’s so critical you are clear to your customer there will always be a human if you want.”*

<sup>8</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

<sup>9</sup> Human-first, machine enhanced: From optimism to pragmatism in AI-driven workforce transformation Report, 2025, Orgvue

<sup>10</sup> AI helps Klarna cut marketing agency spend by 25% and run more campaigns, Klarna, 2024

<sup>11</sup> Klarna Slows AI-Driven Job Cuts With Call for Real People, Bloomberg, 2025

## There is more to AI-readiness than tech

If these case studies teach us anything, it's **tech-centricity is the wrong strategy.**

Organisations have to remember fundamentals like infrastructure and governance frameworks, workforce skills, understanding what problems need solving and good integration design are essential to any successful digital transformation.

But where to start? Siobhan Savage, CEO of Reejig, a leading work intelligence platform, believes successful AI integration requires leaders to have a deep understanding of work.

*“When business leaders think about embracing this transformation, they first need to have full visibility of their work, down to a task level, the requirements to get those tasks done and the AI or automation opportunity for each task”* she says<sup>12</sup>.

As organisations start to shift from AI experimentation to implementation, ADMA's research with marketers shows defining the future of marketing work and teams, is in progress.

## Marketers are still undecided on how AI will impact the future of marketing roles

Currently 38% of Australian marketers believe *AI will blur the lines between traditional roles (strategy, analytics and creative) as well as lead to the emergence of AI specialists in marketing roles*<sup>13</sup>.

However, 32% said *AI will lead to the rise of more specialised roles and functions creating greater fragmentation and niche expertise*<sup>14</sup>.

Reasons for this split are likely driven by the challenges marketers are facing in adopting AI and the struggle to embed tools and people into workflows. Leaders are having to solve this novel challenge while keeping up with the ever-expanding number and capability of tools available and keeping their employees' technical skills updated.

“**People have skills. Jobs have tasks. You don't automate people's skills, you automate tasks.”**

<sup>12</sup> Why companies should redesign their workforces now, 2024, Zero Wasted Potential [via LinkedIn]

<sup>13</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

<sup>14</sup> ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

## Hire and Develop 'X-shaped' individuals

Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management Jim Lecinski recommends "hiring for diverse skill sets and not just diverse resumés.<sup>15</sup>"

These individuals are not only better suited to organisations which need to be more agile in response to a changing world, but also far more adept at maximising the utility from AI tools.

For example generative AI prompting is akin to a brief which clearly communicates direction to a machine, providing it with the necessary context, creative guidelines and constraints. This requires skills stretching the breadth of marketing fundamentals, analytical and strategic thinking, creative nous along with technical and data expertise.

**Hiring and developing X-shaped individuals is key to advancing innovation and supercharging teams. AI tools alone cannot get the work done.**

## AI doesn't respect your silos

Adopting AI into your organisation and assigning it to a team on the third floor isn't going to get results. Rather than having teams working within specialist domains, multidisciplinary individuals work best on multidisciplinary teams. Experts are still needed, but marketing teams should have the necessary skills and data 'on-site' to prototype, experiment and solve problems in creative ways, utilising a diverse mix of human skills and tools.

Steve Brennen, CEO of Archie, explains:

*"The fastest-growing companies are tearing down walls between data, creative and strategy to build X-shaped talent and multidisciplinary teams. The winners won't be the ones replacing humans with machines, but those who get people and AI working side-by-side to move faster and smarter."*

## Your first step in redesigning roles, teams and workflows

Reejig's Siobhan Savage advises that before designing AI-human workflows, start with understanding the relationship between jobs, tasks and skills. *"People have skills. Jobs have tasks. You don't automate people's skills, you automate tasks,"* she says<sup>16</sup>.

She recommends asking three key questions:

1. What tasks are being removed from people as a result of automation?
2. What new tasks will emerge?
3. What will this mean for team capacity, structure, and skills?

The answers will shape not only hiring and reskilling strategies, but provide the scaffolding to new team formations and workflows.

<sup>15</sup> The CMO's blueprint for building a world-class Marketing Team, 2024, Think with Google

<sup>16</sup> What we need beyond skills: Our conversation with SAP SuccessFactors, 2025, Zero Wasted Potential [via LinkedIn]

**03**

# **THE CAPABILITY CHALLENGE**

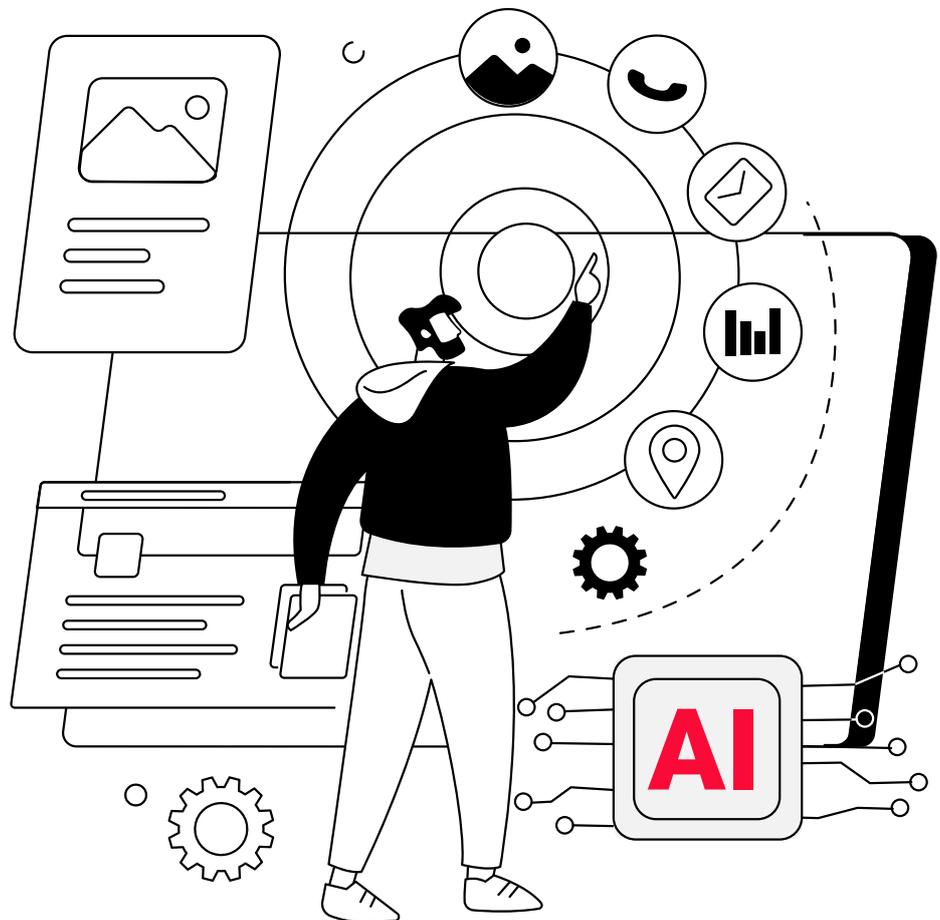


**ADMA**



While **75%** of marketers use AI tools at least weekly, only **29%** of marketers have undertaken AI training<sup>17</sup>

More than a third of CMOs want to link their teams' AI use to business outcomes, yet our research identifies a skills gap as well as a concerning lack of marketing tech skills being prioritised. Leaders should champion continuous learning to close skills gaps and build AI capability through dynamic skilling ecosystems and supporting peer-to-peer learning.



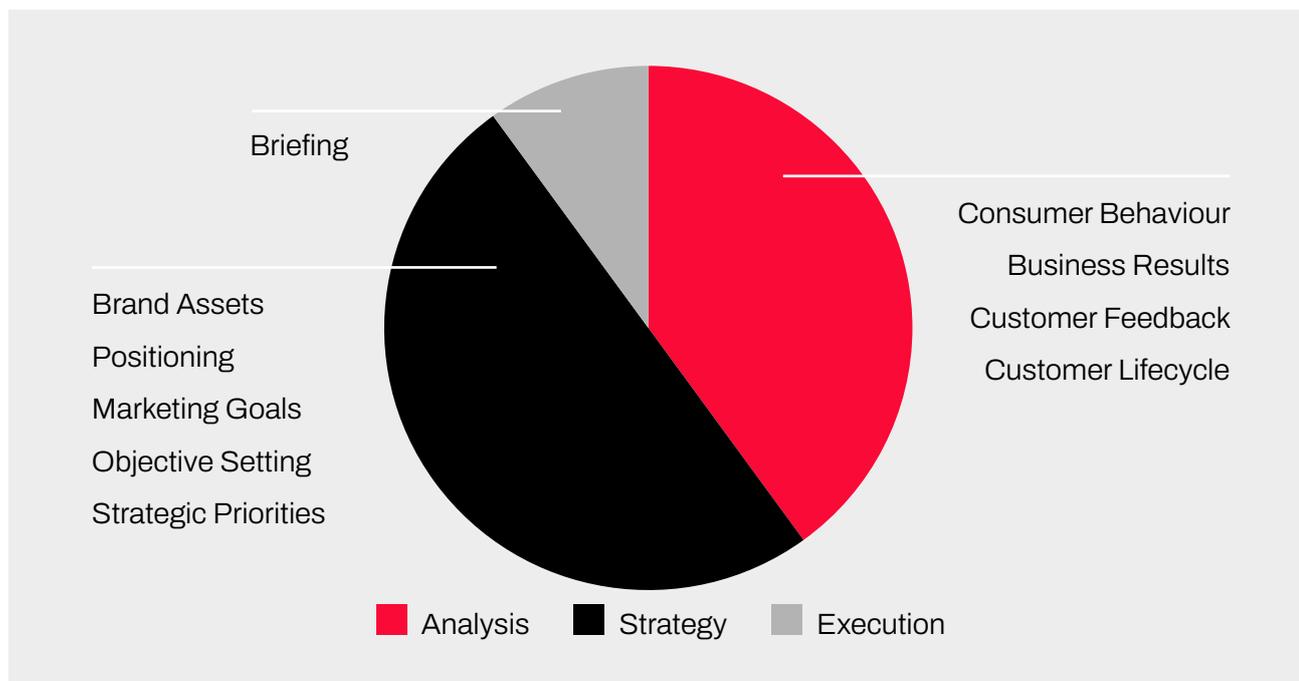
17 ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey, 2025

# Marketing fundamentals are still incredibly important

Fundamental marketing skills remain as important as ever, despite the changes being wrought by the latest technological revolution and our research shows marketing leaders recognise this.

The top skills marketing leaders prioritised were heavily tied to the *Analysis* and *Strategy* phases of marketing according to data from the ADMA Capability Compass<sup>18</sup>.

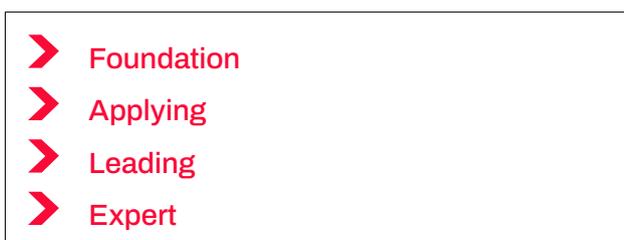
## The 10 Most Prioritised Skills by Marketing Team Leaders



ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

*Consumer Behaviour, Business Results, Brand Assets and Positioning* all feature among the most prioritised skills within the Analysis and Strategy phases. The exception was *Briefing* (a skill within the Execution phase).

ADMA's Capability Compass acknowledges learning is a life long journey, with more junior marketers typically needing to be at a *Foundation* or *Applying* learning levels before moving through to *Leading* or *Expert* learning levels later in their careers. Yet across all team members, the data shows there is still a significant opportunity for growth in each of these fundamental marketing skills.

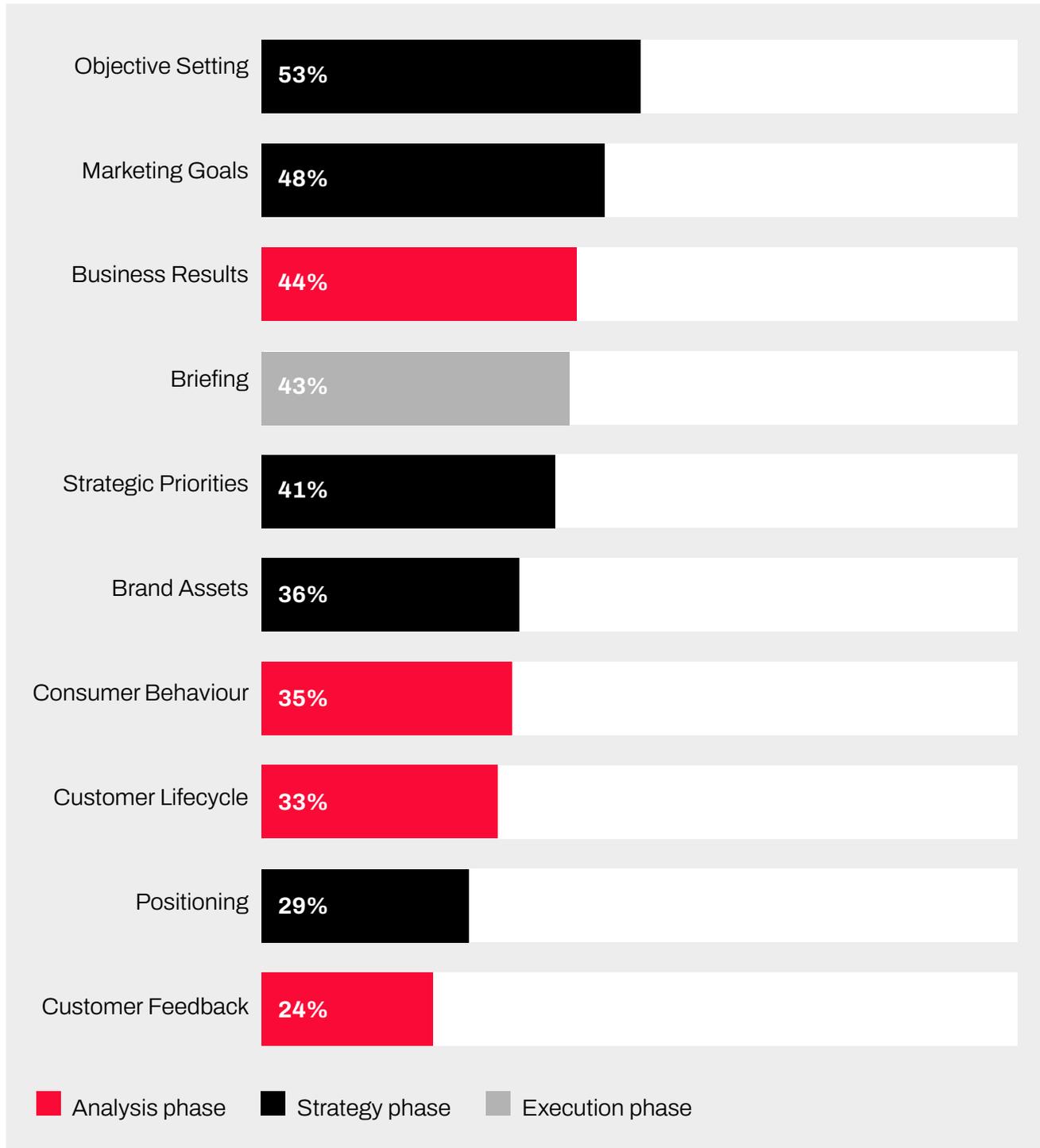


18 ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

Just over half of marketing team members (53%) were at the desired skill level for *Objective Setting*, whilst under a quarter (24%) were at the desired level for *Customer Feedback* (the ability to collect and interpret customer input to adapt marketing strategies)<sup>19</sup>.

## Percentage of Team Members at Desired Learning Level<sup>20</sup>

(Top 10 Prioritised skills)



<sup>19</sup> ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

<sup>20</sup> ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

## The future requires more than brilliant basics

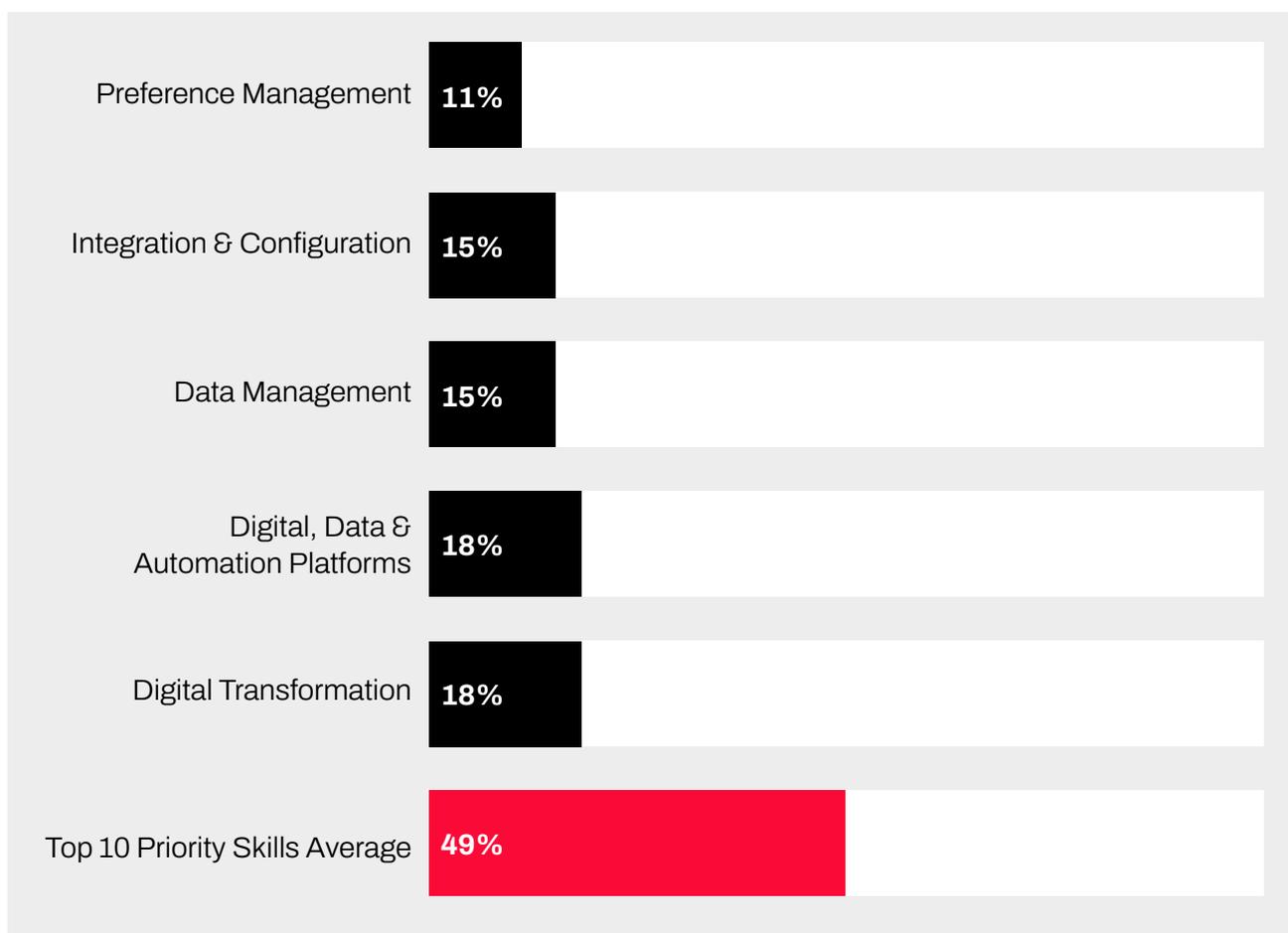
According to the World Economic Forum “workers can expect two-fifths of their existing skill sets will be transformed or become outdated over the 2025 - 2030 period.”<sup>21</sup>

Whilst skills in the Analysis and Strategy phases of marketing are top priorities for marketing leaders<sup>22</sup>, several skills associated with the *Marketing Technology* capability featured in the bottom quartile of prioritised skills.

These include:

- Digital Transformation
- Digital, Data and Automation Platforms
- Data Management
- Integration and Configuration
- Preference Management

### Marketing Technology Skill Prioritisation



The number of marketers in teams who are at a *Leading or Expert* skill level across the *Marketing Technology* capability was an average of 13% - a full 5% lower than the average across all of ADMA's 65 measured skills. Considering the rise of AI in workflows and the many tools marketers use, there is a growing importance to prioritise developing this expertise.

This expertise gap highlights a critical need for technical focus to build competency and confidence in AI-driven innovation.

<sup>21</sup> World Economic Future of Jobs Report 2025

<sup>22</sup> ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

## Marketers are seeking education and support when it comes to AI

Just 29% of marketers report having undertaken AI training, with 42% planning to do so, according to ADMA's AI research<sup>23</sup>.

The fact seven out of 10 marketers have yet to have any AI training stands out given 75% report using AI tools on an at least weekly basis<sup>24</sup>.

### Top 5 areas teams need support with to confidently adopt and use AI in marketing

|   |     |   |
|---|-----|---|
| Collaborating effectively with AI tools and workflows       | 43% | ↑ |
| Upskilling the broader team in AI capabilities              | 39% | ↑ |
| Writing effective prompts or creative briefs                | 35% | ↑ |
| Applying AI to strategic marketing goals                    | 32% | ↑ |
| Linking AI efforts to business growth or financial outcomes | 27% |   |
| Understanding legal, ethical, or privacy risks              | 27% |   |

Key areas teams report needing the most support with AI adoption are *Collaborating effectively with AI tools and workflows*, *Upskilling the broader team*, *Writing effective prompts or Creative briefs* and *Applying AI to Strategic Marketing Goals*.

*Linking AI Efforts to business growth or financial outcomes* ranked fourth among the top priorities for CMOs and Heads of Marketing, listed by 34% of those surveyed. Marketing leaders have also expressed a desire for actionable blueprints to implement AI workflows and strategies across their teams and organisations.<sup>25</sup>

Plugging the gap between AI usage and education seems an obvious place for leaders to start if they want to be able to better link their teams' AI use to business outcomes.

23 ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

24 ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

25 ADMA Heatseeker Data, 2025

## Tackling skills gaps and future-proofing marketing teams

A true focus on learning and development is not just about giving current team members the confidence and ability to perform better - it's about attracting and retaining the best talent. With 90% of organisations concerned about employee retention, providing learning opportunities is the number one retention strategy<sup>26</sup>.

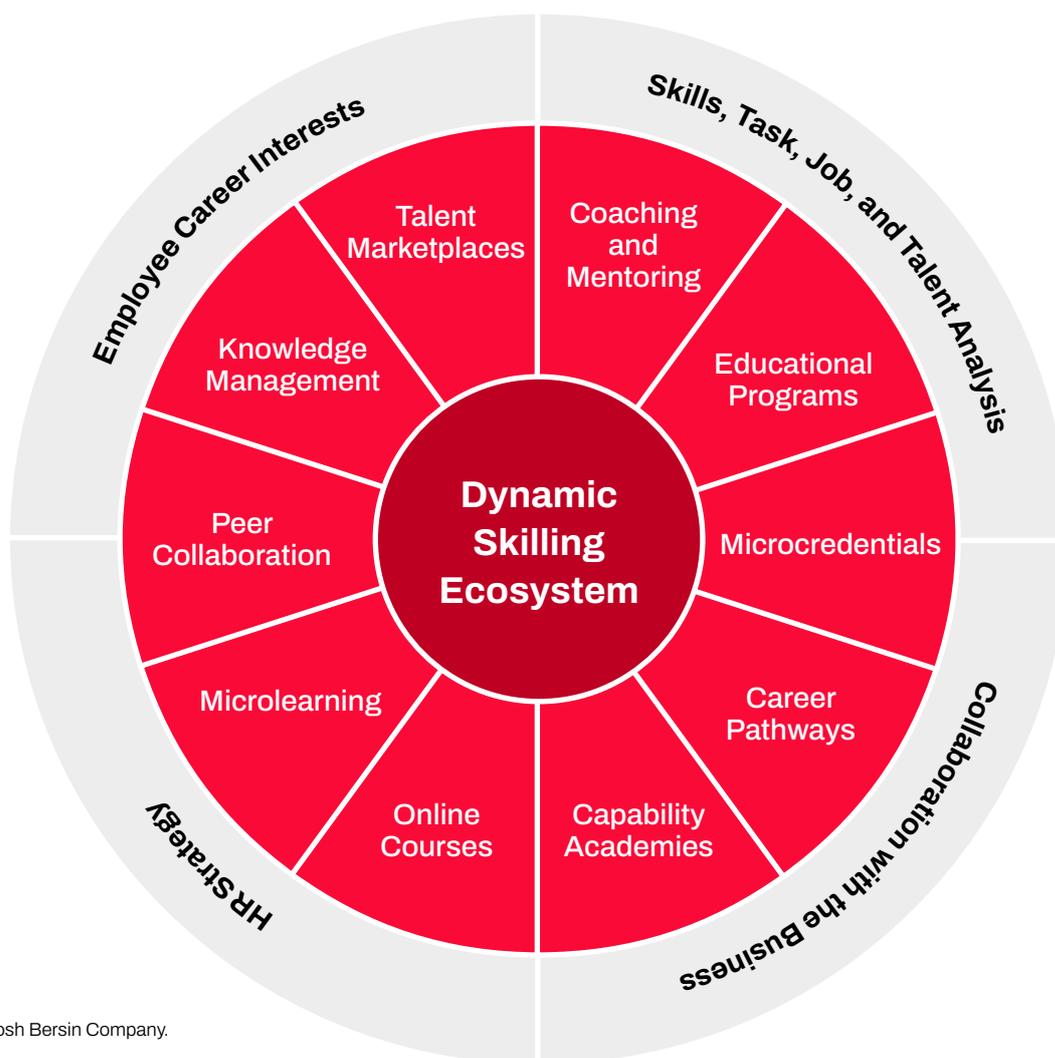
Continuous learning will continue to be a key feature of successful companies into the future. At the heart of this is understanding the skills which need to be developed and then strategically building them using a number of different methods.

Futurist, author and business transformation expert, Tom Goodwin advises organisations think

as much about which skills need to be developed as the ones which don't. "A lot of AI solutions are context specific. For instance, the kind of workflows and frameworks you might design if you work in government will be unbelievably different to a direct-to-consumer organisation, because governments have far stronger security protocols that need to be met.

*"Marketers should be aware of this and extend this thinking to skills training. Given how overwhelming AI as a subject matter can be, marketing leaders should question what their teams don't need to know. Do people need to know how to code with AI? Do people need to know how to make videos? Thinking about what people don't need to know is just as helpful as knowing what they do."*

### Take action: Build and harness dynamic skilling ecosystems to tackle skills gaps

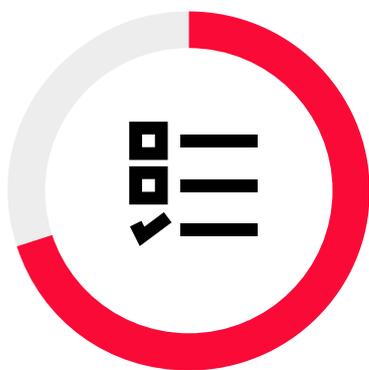


Adapted from the Josh Bersin Company.

26 Workplace Learning Report, LinkedIn, 2024

High performing organisations create Dynamic Skilling Ecosystems<sup>27</sup>. These harness a variety of educational methods spanning microlearning, online courses, coaching, mentoring, talent marketplaces, formal education programs, career pathways (showing steps/skill requirements), microcertifications, knowledge management (repositories) peer collaborations and capability academies.

Dynamic Skilling aligns with the 70/20/10 Learning Model<sup>28</sup> which posits the most effective learning is broken up across three higher level buckets in:



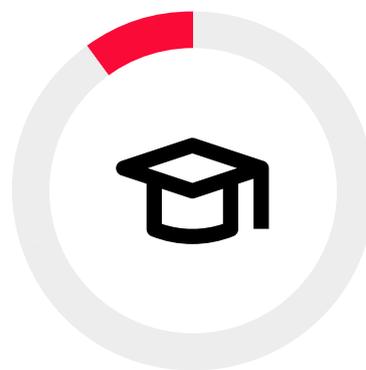
**70%**

Experience on the job, experimentation, and reflection



**20%**

Mentoring and social learning through interactions with others



**10%**

Formal education and training

Marketing leaders need to be aware of the different levers they can pull to drive continuous learning, creating a psychologically safe environment which encourages experimentation.

This includes assigning team members to challenging projects and initiatives (which provide on-the-job skills development) through to more formalised training and certifications. It can also extend to creating 'walled gardens' or 'sandboxes', allowing marketers to experiment with ideas, test tool efficacy and fail in a safe environment.

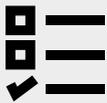
Finally, at the formal education and training level, you may look to learn from subject matter experts with things like Jim Lecinski's book *The AI Marketing Canvas*.

<sup>27</sup> Dynamic Skilling: Anticipating and Mitigating Current and Future Skill Gaps, 2025, The Josh Bersin Company,

<sup>28</sup> Career Architect Development Planner, 1996, Michael Lombardo and Robert Eichinger

# Building AI Fluency with the 70/20/10 Model

Here is an example of how Sonny Sethi, Senior Director of Marketing Research at Zip Co puts the 70/20/10 model into action with his team.



## 70 – Learn by doing

Practical actions to put insights into motion:

- Run a “*So what / Now what*” workshop with your team after a research project to translate insights into actions;
- Use AI-powered text analytics on NPS, CSAT, CES, Trustpilot or App Store reviews to uncover hidden themes;
- Ask AI tools to summarise research reports and apply the learnings directly to your business context;
- Conduct in-person customer immersions or shopalongs to capture what data alone cannot reveal;
- Use AI to synthesise competitive intelligence (e.g. Trustpilot reviews, social feeds) and compare against your internal analysis;
- Analyse a recent campaign performance dataset with AI to uncover improvement areas for the next campaign;
- Stress-test your own insights by asking AI to generate alternative “*So What / Now What*” framings;
- Document AI’s false positives or “hallucinations” and share learnings across the team;
- Simulate different consumer personas with AI to test how varied audiences might interpret the same dataset.



## 20 – Learn from others

Social learning to embed best practice:

- Shadow a product manager using AI to inform roadmap decisions and see how they validate signals;
- Sit in on a creative debrief to observe how insights are translated into campaign ideas;
- Interview an insights manager experienced in AI to learn how they validate outputs;
- Speak with a marketer who has tested AI for social listening to understand what value it delivered;
- Meet with a CX lead to see how contact centre insights are integrated into marketing decisions;
- Join or establish an internal Slack group or community that shares AI use cases and lessons learned.



## 10 – Learn through formal education

Courses and resources to sharpen skills:

- **ADMA IQ:** Behavioural Economics Masterclass;
- **ADMA IQ:** Storytelling with Data module;
- **ADMA IQ:** Customer Journey Mapping
- Subscribe to *There’s an AI for That* – a curated newsletter showcasing learnings from 30,000+ AI platforms.

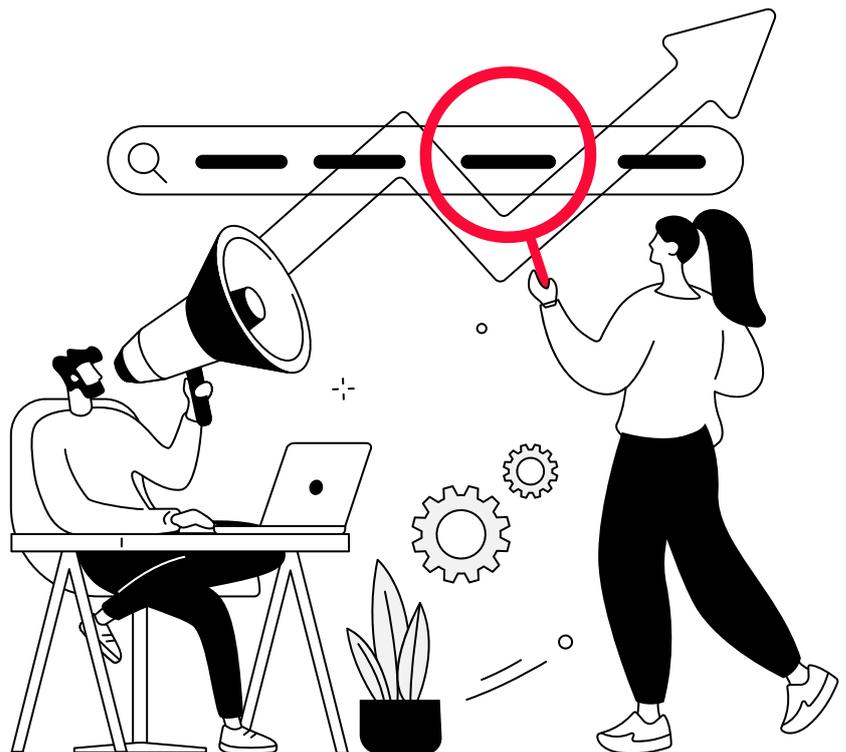
**Takeaway:** Embedding AI into your marketing practice isn’t about one-off training – it’s about building habits of experimentation, collaboration and continuous learning. The 70/20/10 model provides a clear blueprint to make that shift real.

## Take action: Build AI Champions to advance AI capability

For AI-centric education marketers prefer a variety of formats to help them upskill with the most cited preferences:

|                                       |            |
|---------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Hands-on workshops</b>             | <b>57%</b> |
| <b>Microlearning</b>                  | <b>43%</b> |
| <b>Formal Certification</b>           | <b>39%</b> |
| <b>Show-and-tell from AI adopters</b> | <b>36%</b> |

The Show-and-tell from AI adopters links to the idea of making team members 'AI Champions' forwarded by Marketing Professor Jim Lecinski. He speaks of the importance of providing training and certification opportunities, but also creating space for all team members to share learnings on their success in adopting AI across various tasks, along with having them help to train others. This helps foster a culture of curiosity, collaboration and enthusiasm around AI adoption.



**04**

**THE BUSINESS  
CASE FOR  
RESPONSIBLE  
AI**

**ADMA**





## Only **36%** of Australians report trusting AI, but just **30%** believe the risks outweigh the benefits<sup>29</sup>

Responsible AI practices drive public adoption, trust and trustworthiness. As custodians of an organisation's brand, reputation and the engine room for growth, marketers are ideally positioned amongst the C-suite to become champions of responsible AI practice.

### Responsible AI practices: An untapped possibility of enormous influence for marketers

Imagine this: You're the CMO of an organisation creating HR management AI tools to help sort, rank, and filter job applicants. One morning you learn a class action lawsuit has been filed asserting your tool has been unfairly discriminating against job applicants based on their race, age and disability. This story is all over the media, your favourite podcasters pick up on it and it is even discussed at the conference you go to that week. It impacts hundreds of millions of lives.

Or try this: Your chatbot gave a customer totally wrong information resulting in them being financially worse off. The customer is taking legal action and the media worldwide have jumped on the story. The judge later rules in the customer's favour, resulting in not just a headline, but a case study on the level of oversight companies need to have over their chatbots.

These are not hypotheticals, but scenarios which have happened in the last 18 months.

These are good examples of why marketing leaders should be picking up the baton and leading the charge on responsible AI practices. If it all goes wrong, whose inbox is most likely to light up like a Christmas Tree and who is faced with rebuilding the lost reputation?

### Not just a compliance exercise

If you think you are immune from these problems because Australia's AI legislation is under development - think again; both of these examples took place in countries where national AI legislation does not exist.

AI has not emerged in a legislative and regulatory vacuum. Many countries, including Australia, have consumer regulation and employment, product safety and privacy laws which all govern the use of AI.

Using AI responsibly is the practice of applying legal frameworks and applying human values to the creation, implementation and maintenance of AI systems. In many countries the values prioritised most often include fairness, security, accountability and governance, and transparency.

By applying these values and the law throughout the AI lifecycle, what will emerge is AI many would consider to be responsible and ethical.

Beside the letter of the law sits the spirit of the law, which plays out in the court of public opinion. As Dr Sage Kelly, ADMA's Regulatory and Policy Manager, notes, responsible AI practices drive public adoption, trust and trustworthiness. For marketers this translates to impacts on brand reputation and equity, customer loyalty and future earnings.

<sup>29</sup> ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

Dr Kelly explains : *“In Australia, adoption and trust of these systems is so, so low. You will not see increased use if AI systems are not trustworthy, if they’re not making sense, if they’re not using your data correctly. Trust determines user acceptance which predicts actual use and adoption of AI tools. It’s the marketer’s job to not only be the voice of the company, but the voice of the consumer.”*

A study conducted by KPMG and the University of Melbourne reports **Australians rank among the lowest globally on acceptance of AI systems**, with only 30% believing the risks outweigh the benefits.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, only 36% of Australians reported trusting AI.

The report further states Australians have some of the lowest levels of **AI literacy** among the global population. Dr. Kelly notes literacy, having an understanding of AI systems and their impact, is a positive predictive factor of user willingness to adopt AI systems.<sup>31</sup>

Peter Leonard – Principal at Data Synergies, Adjunct Professor at UNSW Faculty of Law and Justice, and Chair of ADMA’s Regulatory and Advocacy Working Group – agrees CMOs have a crucial role to play in building positive relations with the public and their customers.

He says: *“Trust and trustworthiness are two different words and a good CMO really understands the difference between the two. It’s the difference between saying ‘I take your data privacy very seriously’, which every organisation says they do, and being fully transparent about what you are actually doing. It also means being ready to show that you have effective controls that stop mission creep and uncontrolled uses. In the low trust world that we’re moving into, demonstrable trustworthiness is a valuable brand differentiator. The key person within the organisation who should understand that and know how to build brand equity through data trustworthiness is the CMO.”*

## Training needed to close gaps and build confidence

ADMA’s AI research shows marketers are aware of customer concerns, but currently lack the necessary skills to mitigate the risks.

Data privacy and security concerns were the third most concerning AI issue marketers cited. More than a third said they are concerned about legal or copyright risks (35%) and 31% named ethical bias or fairness in *AI-generated outputs* as a worry<sup>32</sup>.

Capability Compass data shows just 41% of marketers have the desired level of data privacy knowledge required by their team leads, with a third of marketing team members still in the early learning stages.

*Emerging Issues*, a skill requiring marketers to stay informed and proactive in addressing new and evolving legal and ethical challenges, could arguably be one of the most important in the future of marketing given the ever moving feast of ethical and legal challenges attached to AI.

It is currently the sixth lowest prioritised skill by marketing leaders. Of those listing it as a priority, only 18% of their team members have the desired level of knowledge.

“It’s the marketer’s job to not only be the voice of the company, but the voice of the consumer.”

30 The Trust, attitudes and use of Artificial Intelligence: A global study 2025, University of Melbourne and KPMG

31 Comprehension, apprehension, and acceptance: Understanding the influence of literacy and anxiety on acceptance of artificial Intelligence, 2024

32 ADMA Capability Compass Data 2025

# Moving from theory to practice

Whatever stage you are currently at you may consider the following actions to either start, evolve or strengthen responsible AI in your organisation.

- 1. Build the FATE framework into workflows:** Fairness, Accountability, Transparency and Ethics (FATE), this framework is a good starting point to build responsible and ethical practices. Ask yourself:
  - **Fairness:** Have we ensured our AI-driven campaigns and tools do not perpetuate bias or discrimination?
  - **Accountability:** Does our team have clear protocols for reviewing and addressing complaints about AI-generated content?
  - **Transparency:** Can we clearly explain what AI tools we use, how they are used in marketing practices and the kinds of decisions they help to make?
  - **Ethics:** Do we have strict guidelines to avoid using sensitive personal information for targeting and to ensure we don't reinforce stereotypes or exploit vulnerable groups?
- 2. Get audited:** Prioritise independent data and algorithm audits to ensure data sets are diverse and all demographic groups receive equal access to high-value product offers. Actively correct any skewed distribution or model drift.
- 3. Create support structures:** Peter Leonard recommends CMOs embed responsible AI practitioners into marketing teams. This subject-matter expert works to embed best practice, alert teams to possible legal and ethical challenges arising and work with teams to mitigate possible unintended consequences. In addition, offer marketing teams skills training in AI literacy and responsible AI practices so they can do their best work.
- 4. Principle up:** Organisations including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation<sup>33</sup> have created AI Ethics Principles which they have published. These provide guardrails for employees, and support in building trust with customers. Alternatively, consider adopting Australia's AI Ethics Principles which promote safe, secure and reliable development and deployment of AI.<sup>34</sup>
- 5. Be accountable and take responsibility:** Ensure information on how customers can raise concerns is easily found and processes to raise concerns or complaints are not arduous. If it goes wrong, take responsibility by issuing corrections and apologies when errors or biases are found. Don't blame the tools.

<sup>33</sup> AI Principles, 2024, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

<sup>34</sup> Australia's Artificial Intelligence Ethics Principles, 2024, Australian Government Department of Industry, Science and Resources

**05**

**ADVANCING A MORE  
COLLABORATIVE  
AI-HUMAN  
FUTURE**



**ADMA**



Only **65%** of managers agreed with the statement **Employees will crave more human connection as AI usage grows, compared to **82%** of employees<sup>35</sup>**

Our research shows the organisations which will thrive in an increasingly AI-dominated world are those which bring people front and center into their technology strategies. With responsibilities traversing customer voice, organisational growth, brand reputation and trust, marketers have a unique and important role to play in joining the dots between people and tech - helping organisations balance the scales between opportunities and risks.

## Getting your AI strategy moving

Against the backdrop of this ever-evolving AI driven landscape, it can be easy for leaders to forget people remain key to achieving organisational success, as well as building their own technical and data skills, and striking the balance between risk and enablement.

Tom Goodwin sees this as a great opportunity to catalyse what he terms “possibility thinking”.

*“AI is an extraordinary combination of technologies. Marketers are able to do things they’ve never been able to dream of doing before. We’re able to accomplish far, far more because technology becomes a lever to our imagination and to our productivity.*

*“So in addition to thinking about what problems AI can solve, we should also be thinking ‘Wait a minute, wouldn’t it be amazing if we could do this!’ Possibility thinking allows our imaginations to be broad and expansive.”*

Building the right organisational culture and having strong leadership is imperative, and senior marketers need to focus on several areas amidst the flux of today.

## Recommendation 1: Create and support industry standards, and empower industry bodies

We cannot wait for legislation to start defining the future or create accountability. Being accountable to industry peers and collaborating on shared resources are essential qualities of good corporate citizenship. It is therefore critical leaders come together to participate in the creation of industry standards and education. Doing so will encourage the responsible development of new marketing practices.

Industry bodies like ADMA play a unique role in helping to convene diverse voices, shape standards and responsible AI practices, as well as boost literacy around emerging topics.

<sup>35</sup> Elevating Human Potential: The AI Skills Revolution Global Study, 2025, Workday

## Recommendation 2: Protect the fundamentals, but keep an eye to the future

ADMA's Capability Compass shows many marketing teams have plenty of upskilling to do across marketing fundamentals. Skills linked to the *Analysis* and *Strategy* phases of marketing in particular should continue to be prioritised and developed because they cannot be automated.

Just as it is vital to track the effectiveness of a campaign, it is imperative marketing leaders become more engaged in understanding and tracking the skills of their team members along with the kinds of tasks they perform in their roles.

This will empower leaders to identify and address priority skills deficits in the present, but also provide visibility on skill sets which are becoming more important in an AI-powered future.

## Recommendation 3: Foster a culture of experimentation and collaboration

Leaders need to adopt an *innovator's mindset* focused on experimentation and deepening their understanding around what AI can offer their organisations<sup>36</sup>. It is vital to imbue teams with this same spirit, as collectively, every team member has a role to play when it comes to contributing their own insights, experiences and creativity to inform how this technology can be harnessed to spur innovation.

Additionally, as noted by Marketing Professor Jim Lecinski, teams composed of individuals with multiple skillsets - X-shaped employees - will help break down silos and unlock desired efficiencies<sup>37</sup>.

Weaving diverse skillsets throughout marketing teams, for example content creation with brand strategy and data analytics, will cultivate a broader understanding of business objectives and targets and better position teams to identify opportunities where AI can add value.

## Recommendation 4: Adopt a problem-centric orientation

Remember VR, Blockchain and the Metaverse? New technologies are always accompanied by waves of hype positioning them as the solution to an organisation's problems. AI and automation are no different - they are not the solution to every problem.

When it comes to effectively delivering AI solutions, marketing leadership needs to come to the fore with a problem-centric orientation, not a tech-centric one.

Two of the five key factors derailing AI initiatives and prohibiting organisations achieving a positive ROI were "*miscommunication or misunderstanding of the problem*" and "*not solving a problem for users*." <sup>38</sup>.

With so many AI systems on the market as well as AI embedded into many of the tools marketers are already using, it is imperative leaders utilise critical thinking skills to assess, prioritise and pursue AI initiatives which will add genuine value across their teams and the wider business.

This is an opportunity for marketing leadership to inject their strategic competencies into designing a future where people thrive. Transferable marketing skills like setting objectives and marketing goals and defining strategic priorities are crucial to pressure testing organisational AI initiatives, and act as a bulwark against tech-centrism.

The old adage "just because you can, doesn't mean you should" is more relevant than ever given organisations are naturally constrained by resources and need to prioritise based on delivering the best business outcomes.

<sup>36</sup> Generative AI and Future of Work, 2023, Deloitte AI Institute

<sup>37</sup> The CMO's blueprint for building a world-class Marketing Team, 2024, Think with Google

<sup>38</sup> The Root Causes of Failure for Artificial Intelligence Projects and How They Can Succeed, 2024, RAND

## Recommendation 5: Celebrate continuous learning

Continuous learning is powerful - and is a key driver to attracting and retaining the best talent. Seven in 10 people said *learning improves their sense of connection to an organisation* with 80% saying *learning adds purpose to their work*<sup>39</sup>.

With current technology leapfrogging previous development lifecycles, organisations need to adopt new learning strategies and tactics to help employees feel in control and valued, rather than overwhelmed and fearful of losing their jobs.

### Strategy - Harness dynamic skilling

**ecosystems:** Marketers would struggle to deploy effective campaigns if they did not understand the promotional mix and how to synergistically pull on different levers to achieve their communications objectives.

Dynamic skilling ecosystems are not dissimilar. Marketers should have a clear picture of the different levers they can pull to educate and upskill their team members around areas of focus. This could be through formal certifications, mentoring, coaching, setting and tracking career pathways as well as peer-based collaboration and project assignments. Having a clear picture of your L&D toolkit, the skills individuals need to develop and team member learning preferences is essential to effectively address skills gaps and strengthen expertise over time.

### Tactic - Create and celebrate AI champions:

When it comes to retaining and building AI capability within your organisation, Professor Lincski notes the importance of finding ways for marketers to become AI champions by providing learning and credentialing opportunities.

But as team members continue to develop their skill sets, celebrating progress is important. Marketing leaders should create space for AI champions to share their learnings on how they've succeeded with adopting AI across various tasks and help to train others. This provides team members with a true sense of proficiency, along with ownership, confidence and pride in their own advancement.

Be they early on in their career or seasoned veterans, keeping talent positively engaged and inspired will help shape a positive culture around AI will translate into growing and retaining the very best talent.

## Recommendation 6: AI literacy is at the heart of trusted AI

AI literacy is not just about understanding AI tools, it means considering the potential negative outcomes it can create for a business; from damaging trust, losing customers and financial repercussions through fines and legal fees.

Dr. Sage Kelly, Regulatory and Policy Manager at ADMA, explains: *"AI literacy is the cornerstone to trust. There's a danger in conflating AI responsibility with a legal team because that's when it becomes about compliance rather than overall consumer trust or responsible practices.*

*"Knowing the basic principles of what AI is and how it uses data are AI 101. From there, marketers need to know what tools they can be using to drive their practices and where they can ethically automate mundane tasks which take up a lot of their time."*

AI Literacy is not a destination, it is a continuous journey. Given the almost exponential evolution in the AI landscape, there is a need to ensure team members are continuously updating and improving responsible AI practices to ensure their knowledge remains contemporary and relevant.

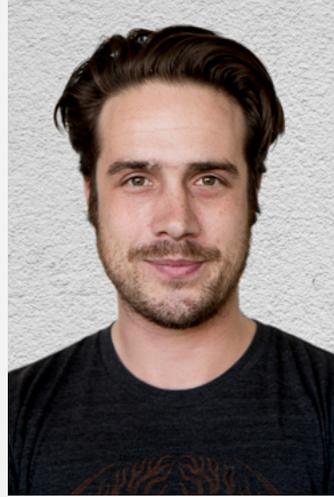
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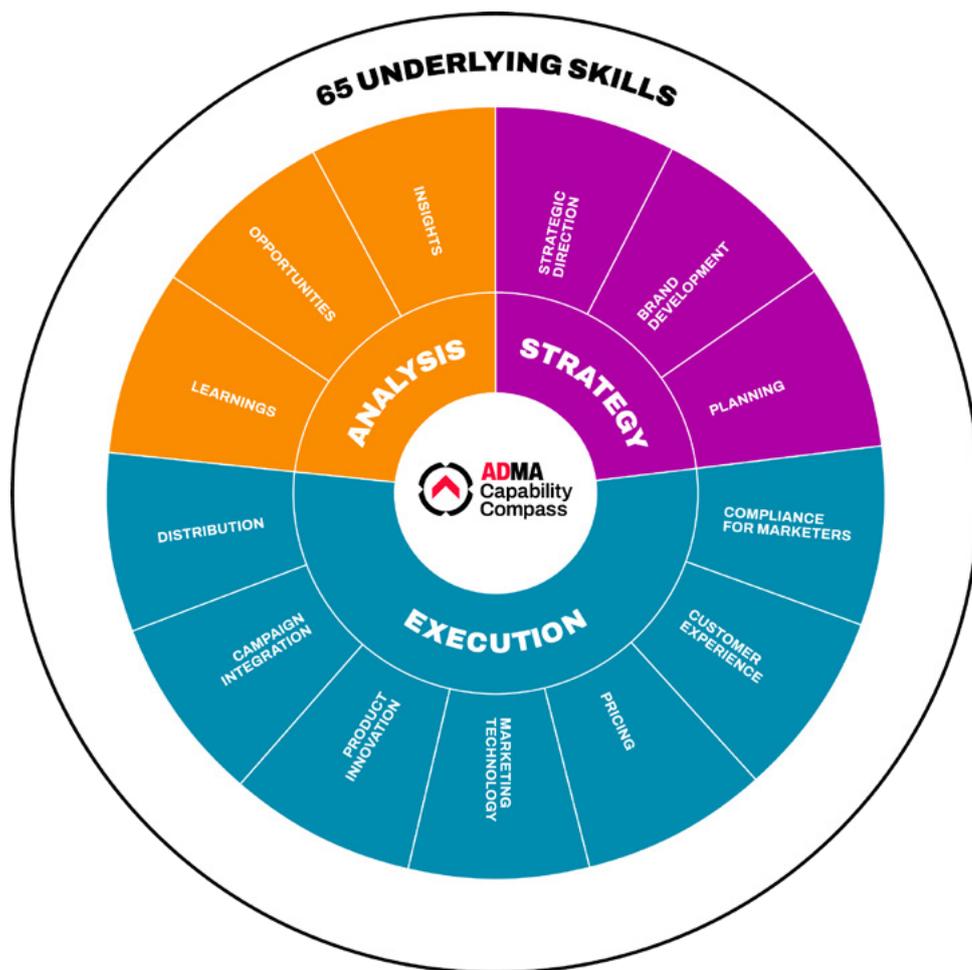
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## B) Capability Compass Visualisation



## C) Capability Compass Description

The ADMA Capability Compass data is derived from completions by Australian marketing leaders assessing their teams' skill levels across ADMA's 65 skills. The skills marketers are measured on are based upon what their marketing leaders consider to be relevant to their role.

There are four Learning Levels: Fundamental, Applying, Leading and Expert.

Data analysed for this report was collected over a 12-month period spanning the beginning of August 2024 to the end of July 2025.

## D) ADMA State of AI in Marketing Survey 2025

ADMA's State of AI in Marketing Survey was completed by 1092 marketers across Australia with fieldwork being completed in August 2025. 359 (33%) of the respondents were sourced via ADMA's database with the remaining 733 (67%) being sourced through an independent, third party data provider.

Within the sample, 24% were CMOs/Heads of Marketing. The remainder of the sample was composed of roles including Brand/Marketing Manager (27%), Content/Creative Specialist (14%), Digital/Performance Marketer (14%), Marketing Analyst / Data Role (8%) and Other (8%).



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