

Navigating the artificial intelligence frontier: Strategic imperatives for safeguarding brand integrity

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Abstract

This paper delves into the transformative era of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in marketing, underscoring the vast potential of AI to revolutionise marketing strategies through enhanced personalisation and efficiency while highlighting the rapid adoption rate among companies and marketing professionals. Despite the enthusiasm, it navigates through the apprehensions surrounding job displacement, misinformation and brand safety, offering a comprehensive guide to the strategic adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) with a view to harnessing its benefits without compromising brand integrity. It identifies common pitfalls in AI adoption, such as lack of preparation, myopic focus on current use cases, and neglect of strategic planning, emphasising the importance of a thoughtful, multi-disciplinary approach to AI integration. This includes viewing AI as an assistive tool rather than an end goal, understanding its implications for media, fostering internal leadership, and establishing stringent brand protection guardrails. The paper concludes with a call to action for marketers to embrace AI with strategic foresight, leveraging its revolutionary potential to drive innovation while steadfastly upholding ethical standards and brand values.

Keywords

AI, generative AI, AI brand safety, AI in advertising, marketing AI integration, AI ethics, AI marketing strategy

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AI TRANSFORMS BRANDING AND MARKETING

In the mid-15th century, a revolution started in Mainz, Germany. This revolution did not involve weapons or torch-bearing mobs, but innovation. This revolution was the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg.

Hindsight tells us that this invention changed the world for the better. Knowledge was democratised and literacy rates grew, and much of the modern world began to emerge, catalysed by this innovation. At the time, however, it was viewed with fear and suspicion, and even condemned as heretical by many in the

Church who saw it as a direct threat to their authority.

The advent of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is a revolution of similar and far-reaching magnitude. In marketing, it is on par with the introduction of the internet and smartphones, with the potential to go even further. With the global GenAI market projected to grow annually by about 35 per cent through 2030,¹ the potential for AI to enhance personalisation, streamline processes and foster innovation is immense. Beyond the projected growth, what is truly eye-opening is the rate of adoption in these very early days. Accenture's survey of over 1,600 C-suite executives and data-science leaders from some of the world's largest organisations found that 75 per cent of companies had already implemented AI into their business strategies by the end of 2023; meanwhile, 37 per cent of marketing and advertising professionals reported having used AI for work (as of 2023) — the highest percentage of any profession.² Moreover, 75 per cent of digital marketers report using AI for work, with 50 per cent of digital marketers using it multiple times each week.³

A survey of senior marketers across North America and Europe conducted by Forrester Research on behalf of DAC in Q3 of 2023 found that marketers understand that GenAI can be a game changer, with the highest impacts on brand awareness and customer acquisition cost. However, marketers also have legitimate concerns about how it will change their work and world, with the fear of becoming obsolete wrestling with the fear of missing out.⁴ This mix of fear and uncertainty has led major brands, including consumer electronics firms such as Apple and Samsung, as well as financial services such as Wells Fargo, to ban GenAI in the workplace.⁵

This reflects the other side of the coin with GenAI. This new frontier comes with its own set of challenges — job displacement, misinformation, legal and compliance issues, and, critically, brand safety concerns. Our excitement to embrace the evolutionary and revolutionary possibilities afforded by GenAI is tempered — and often defeated — by our fear, because fear of radical change is deeply human. So, how do we overcome that fear and embrace the generational opportunity presented to us? After all, as Kurt Vonnegut wrote, 'You can't fight progress. The best you can do is ignore it, until it finally takes your livelihood and self-respect away'.

STRATEGIC ADOPTION

When it comes to the adoption of GenAI, Forrester suggests that marketers are making five key mistakes⁶:

- *Lack of foresight:* Over 83 per cent of marketers surveyed say that they were not fully prepared for the volume of GenAI use cases, with many now scrambling simply to catch up to their perception of the market.
- *One-dimensional thinking:* When asked of the potential of GenAI to optimise the organisation's marketing execution and strategy in the short term (ie the next six to 12 months) and long term (ie more than 12 months), the results were almost identical, indicating that marketers are not necessarily seeing much development beyond the immediate use cases. This is critically important, as many of the immediate applications are evolutionary in nature, focused on optimising existing tasks and functions through increased efficiency. This stands in contrast to the longer-term applications that are more revolutionary in

nature — opening the possibility to do things we never even imagined before — and that are more in line with the true potential of generative AI.

- *Taking action without clear goals or processes:* The best way to describe the approach that most marketers are taking to generative AI is that they are casting a wide, *ad hoc* tinkering net. Everything from text-prompted image, copy, video and even idea generation, through to social and measurement data summarisation, language translation, research analysis summarisation and classification and search engine optimisation workflow automation is being worked on concurrently, and to almost equal extents. What is missing is the strategic direction and oversight.
- *Trying to outperform competitors instead of focusing on what is best for business:* Inadequate preparation for the emergence of generative AI is being compounded by fear of missing out — 96 per cent of marketers surveyed feel they are being encouraged to use some form of generative AI for its own sake, often to outperform competitors rather than focusing on what is optimal for the company. This is particularly challenging for brand safety when you consider that 68 per cent of surveyed marketers reported having directly experienced marketing executions with biased information, tone or inferences, while 74 per cent indicated having trouble harnessing the power of AI specific to their brand.
- *Losing track of fundamentals such as data security and privacy:* Finally, over 45 per cent of marketers surveyed reported needing the most support with generative AI in the areas of brand safety and compliance, and in data security, suggesting that these factors are particularly challenging.

All this illustrates that the allure of generative AI's potential can overshadow the strategic planning necessary for its integration and adoption. A successful AI adoption strategy begins not with the technology itself but with a clear vision of how it can enhance and align with the marketing ecosystem — and for that to happen, an AI strategy needs to be developed and implemented.

OPERATIONALISING AI WITH BRAND INTEGRITY AT THE CORE

Over half of enterprise marketers (52 per cent) report that their organisations lack AI guidelines, while 12 per cent are uncertain about their existence.⁷ These are not mere technical checkpoints but comprehensive processes ensuring AI's alignment with brand values and ethical standards. In the Forrester survey commissioned by DAC, brand safety was the second-most cited issue (48 per cent) when using generative AI that marketing organisations need the most help with.⁸

This requires a strategic approach to operationalise AI within the organisation, incorporating the following elements:

- *AI is an ingredient, not the entrée ...* AI is a means to an end, not the outcome. Marketers that are under pressure to 'do something with AI' risk turning these efforts into a box-checking exercise to relieve internal pressure. Understanding that AI is an ingredient that contributes to a business outcome is critical to utilising it strategically.
- *... and you're already using it:* AI is already deeply woven into the digital media landscape. A specific example of this is PMAX, which is Google's shot across the bow in the use of AI for full funnel discovery. Interestingly, many marketers are not enamoured with this specific

offering, mainly due to the relative lack of control it affords them compared with regular search advertising, and its seemingly 'black box' nature. That said, it is a clear statement of intent from Google in terms of the direction in which it is moving, and marketers need to get used to this new reality.

- *Understand the broader adoption of AI in media:* While PMAX is a great example of how AI is shaping media, it is only one. This is a rapidly developing space where the available ad units, formats and capabilities are evolving rapidly and significantly by the day. That said, three major themes are emerging that marketers should be aware of:
- *More automation, less control:* AI is being integrated to allow for greater automation within advertising. The implication is that there will be less control in the hands of marketers, meaning greater need for publishers and platforms to work to ensure not just performance, but also brand safety.
- *Diversity and integration of assets:* The ability to silo capabilities and assets is eroding. Historically, it was possible to manage organic and paid search as well as listings separately. With AI adoption, these are becoming far more integrated. In addition, the lines between text, image, video and shopping are becoming increasingly blurred, with all assets displayed together. Finally, the distinction between what is a social platform and what is a search platform is becoming less clear. The implication is that while there is less granular control in these platforms, it will require more work and capability to plan and execute multi-formats, which will require new skill sets.
- *New measurement frameworks:* In an environment where marketers are already working to overcome signal

loss with the deprecation of third-party cookies, combined with the increasing prominence of zero-click assets in search such as the knowledge graph, there will be even greater pressure as AI assistants emerge to answer questions without allowing for clicks to websites. This will lead to even greater erosion of the ability to measure the effectiveness of marketing investment, particularly in the organic or earned space. This in turn will require an acceleration away from traditional measurement frameworks to more progressive ones to understand marketing effectiveness and brand growth.

- *Craft internal leadership roles across disciplines for AI usage:* Emerging and disruptive technologies will always be adopted first by those that have the greatest aptitude, affinity or enthusiasm towards them. These people often come from or hold technical roles within the organisation. While they are critical in driving the adoption of these technologies within the organisation, this adoption will be severely stunted if peers in other functions are not enrolled early. Ninety-eight per cent of employees surveyed by IBM's Institute for Business Value think they need additional AI training; this could equate to anything from 1.4 billion to 3.4 billion people.⁹

One of the most striking areas that generative AI can impact is the ability to empower the rapid creation of content and creative brand assets. If it is left in the hands of technical people to drive that mandate, at best it will meet with deep resistance from those that are tasked with creative and brand functions, and at worst it will impact brand perception, as those with technical skills are not necessarily the best creative brand marketers.

When AI is regarded as an ingredient that can support every function across the organisation, it changes the nature of the internal conversation and democratises its use and adoption. The formation of an AI adoption committee with senior representation across all disciplines is a critical step in the rapid and responsible adoption of the technology.

- *Stay in your lane:* The seemingly magical nature of GenAI has led to huge adoption and a lot of tinkering. A common mistake many organisations make is to allow people to use GenAI to experiment with work outside their area of responsibility.¹⁰ For example, analysts and technicians using it to develop creative assets, and creatives using it to summarise and analyse data. The attraction is obvious; GenAI seemingly provides the ability to do things that have historically been outside your skill set and abilities, and this is an exciting and empowering thing. However, allowing this is a significant mistake if the goal is organisational adoption. The reason is twofold:
 - *What does good look like?* Simply put, if you have not been working in a particular discipline, you do not know what good looks like in the same way that a professional does. An analyst can use ChatGPT to create content that might look great to them, but a brand marketer or creative would need only a glance to know it is mediocre.
 - *They're coming for my job.* One of the greatest anxieties people have around AI (and one of the greatest barriers to adoption) is that it is going to replace them at their work. Research from Oliver Wyman indicates that although employees prioritise training in AI and Big Data, employers place a greater emphasis on analytical thinking,¹¹ suggesting that while AI is not going to necessarily replace functions, it will

change the nature of responsibilities. More importantly in this context, AI is not going to take your job; someone with your skill set who uses AI is going to take your job. AI is excellent at empowering people to do their jobs better rather than allowing people to do the jobs of others in addition to their own. For these reasons, it is critically important to instruct those tasked with AI adoption to focus their efforts on applying it to their roles and areas of responsibility.

- *The AI ambassador:* A challenge with establishing a multi-disciplinary team to spearhead the adoption of AI within the organisation is the widely varying levels of ability to use the technology. This can lead to significant resistance and hesitation in its use, simply because of ignorance. An excellent way to overcome this is the appointment of an AI ambassador. This would be an individual (or team) that has displayed a deep affinity with and ability to utilise the technology. This person would work directly with the various disciplines to teach them how the technology works, its capabilities and limitations, as well as the best way to use it, including helping to guide the building of a library of prompts for individual functions. This role helps significantly accelerate comfort with the technology, rapidly accelerating its use and adoption.

Boston Consulting Group analysts forecast that as organisations evolve, the majority of AI professionals will collaborate within a unified data and analytics centre, where roles will become more uniform. AI specialists will be integrated into business operations, necessitating that businesses acquire a practical understanding of data and analytics. Over time, AI will be reintegrated into

the company, managed by a compact, central AI team responsible for overseeing data management, enhancing capabilities and establishing best practices.¹²

- *Evolutionary versus revolutionary:* Most conversation on how GenAI can impact brands is focused on evolutionary outcomes, that is, existing functions done faster and better, with greater impact on the business; for example, greater speed to market, doing more with less, etc. These outcomes are all matters of *efficiency* and cover areas such as amplifying outcomes or industrial scaling of outputs.

However, the true potential of GenAI lies in what we would consider revolutionary outcomes. These are about accelerating optimisation and embedding differentiation. Effectively, this is about using the technology to do things we have never considered possible before. This is where true *innovation* happens, where we build brand differentiation, create new industry benchmarks, elevate customer expectation, and ultimately deliver long-term brand growth. These revolutionary outcomes can be hard to envision, but to truly realise the potential of the technology and seize the moment, they must be part of the plan.

However, where we start with operationalising AI within the organisation will be more mundane...

- *What do you hate most?* The best way to accelerate adoption of AI within an organisation is by asking the multi-disciplinary team what tasks within their job they hate the most. These are often the tasks that are misaligned with their skill set but that they need to work through to get to the most rewarding parts of their job. For example, this

could be the collection and joining of data for an analyst, or the assembly of individual ad units with very minor edits for a creative. Identifying these tasks and prioritising them for automation utilising AI, in partnership with and under the guidance of the AI ambassador will lead to an instant recognition of the benefits of AI in their roles, with significant time freed from mundane work, and the ability to focus on higher-order and more stimulating and rewarding work.

- *Understand and choose the technology:* The safe utilisation of AI within brands requires an enterprise platform with built-in capabilities and responsibilities around data security, brand security and intellectual property ownership.¹³ In addition, given that so much of what is being done on behalf of the brand is delivered at arm's length from the marketers, who have little knowledge of the material on which the technology is being trained, the chosen platform must also take on responsibility for legal and ethical compliance on behalf of the brand.

Further, the limitations of the technology need to be properly understood. This is something that is rapidly evolving, but at the time of writing, these limitations include the ability to work with extensive data sets and to deliver consistent answers.

- *Establish your brand protection guardrails:* All the steps leading up to this point are designed to build teams, technology and responsibility for the safe and rapid adoption of GenAI technology within an organisation. Now we come to the final critical point, and that is establishing brand protection guardrails for the use of AI. These are:
 - *Use of brand guidelines.* As part of the knowledge base to train your AI

instance, ensure you are uploading all brand guidelines in addition to documentation on compliance and legal restrictions. You must train the AI on what you can and cannot say, how you say it, and when you say it. The exact way this is uploaded, stored and trained will vary by platform, but is an excellent way to use your AI ambassador, working with an external group if necessary.

- *AI is your first draft.* The use of GenAI as an automated production pipeline from keyboard to external communications is not a viable option today, or for the foreseeable future. Using it as a first draft, or an assistant to accelerate ideation, analysis and production, with human oversight, review and editing by key stakeholders, is the most important consideration to ensure brand safety. The brand will reap the benefits of far greater efficiency, and the ability to move from zero to first draft far faster because of the adoption of AI. Approval processes from external stakeholders (such as legal and compliance) will need to be overhauled to keep up with the significantly expanded output in volume and quality, ensuring they do not become a bottleneck or a factor that diminishes the accelerated time to market. If the overhaul of these approval processes is not addressed, it will affect the competitiveness of the brand as other more agile organisations realise the true benefit and potential of the technology.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we navigate the complexities and opportunities of the AI revolution in marketing, it is clear that the journey ahead is both exhilarating and daunting.

The comparison with Gutenberg's printing press is apt, reminding us that while technological advancements can initially provoke fear and resistance, their transformative potential is undeniable. Just as the printing press democratised knowledge and spurred centuries of progress, AI promises to reshape the landscape of marketing in ways we are only beginning to comprehend.

The strategic imperatives outlined in this exploration serve not just as a roadmap for adopting AI but as a manifesto for doing so responsibly, ethically and effectively. By learning from the past and anticipating the future, we can ensure that AI becomes a force for innovation that respects brand integrity, enhances human creativity and drives meaningful engagement.

The challenges relating to job displacement, misinformation and brand safety are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With careful planning, strategic adoption and a commitment to ethical considerations, we can harness the power of AI to unlock new horizons of marketing excellence. The fear of becoming obsolete or missing out, while natural, must be balanced with a clear-eyed vision of AI's potential to augment human effort, not replace it.

As we stand on the brink of this new frontier, the call to action for marketers is clear: embrace AI with both enthusiasm and caution, with an eye towards the revolutionary and evolutionary outcomes it promises. By doing so, we can ensure that AI serves as a catalyst for growth, innovation and brand differentiation in the digital age.

In conclusion, the journey through the AI frontier is one of discovery, innovation and strategic foresight. As marketers, our task is to navigate this terrain with wisdom, creativity and a steadfast

commitment to our brands' core values. The future of marketing in the AI era is not just about leveraging new technology; it is about shaping that technology to enrich human connections, deepen brand loyalty, and carve out new paths of excellence in an ever-evolving landscape.

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