



INSIGHTS PAPER

Impact on your brand & business

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, smiling and looking slightly to her right. She is wearing a light blue ribbed sweater and a necklace with a small heart pendant. The background is blurred, showing other people in a social setting.

How to make your marketing strategy a growth accelerator for your business

Edition - Marketing programmes & campaigns



Quick marketing wins are tempting, but real business growth? That requires more.

Many businesses focus their marketing efforts on short-term results. However, true business growth demands a marketing approach that looks beyond the next sale. To achieve this, you need to shift towards marketing that truly resonates with your target audience and builds long-lasting customer relationships.

How do you make your marketing stand out AND grow your business?

In this Insight Paper, we examine the power of marketing in driving business growth. We also discuss why - and how - you can leverage AI, data, and creativity for a marketing strategy that truly makes an impact.

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1. The business value of marketing

The role of marketing

In recent years, we've seen many businesses shift their marketing focus towards **campaigns that generate immediate returns**. Their attention and budgets have moved from brand investment to performance marketing from measuring brand equity to bottom-funnel metrics, from long-term strategies to short-term tactics.

While these choices may seem pragmatic and effective in the short run, they carry a significant risk: if you do not invest in brand building, your brand will lose its place in people's minds and hearts – clearing the way for your competitors.

While conversions are important, they should not be the sole focus of your marketing efforts if you want to drive sustainable growth.



The pitfalls of conversion-centric marketing

Campaigns with a strong transactional focus push for a sale or action quickly, instead of investing in personal relevance for the customer. This approach often results in generic, untargeted messaging, **which might reach a large audience, but fails to resonate with anyone**.

If you 'bombard' people with purely transaction-focused messages, they have no reason to become or remain loyal to your brand. Why should they, if you're only engaging them when you want something in return? This can lead to a higher **customer churn rate** and a decrease in the customer lifetime value of your customers.

Brand experience: the key for business success

In a world where products and services are increasingly similar, differentiation often comes down to how you make people feel at every step of their journey. In this ‘era of experience’, simply promoting products or services through advertising and campaigns is not enough to truly engage and resonate with consumers in the long run.

Creating **positive experiences**—even if they don’t lead to immediate sales—can significantly contribute to the long-term **value** and **reputation** of your brand. Even when a customer isn’t buying something immediately, they remember – for example – the convenience and positive interaction, making them more likely to return in the future.

The marketing team has a **significant responsibility** in shaping these experiences. From consistent ad messaging to a recognisable tone of voice in emails, and from seamless app interactions to an exceptional in-store experience. Every touchpoint and interaction with your brand should contribute to building a positive and lasting impression with the customer.

In practice, we see many marketing teams hop from campaign to campaign with a laser focus on immediate conversions. However, to drive **real business value**, marketing efforts must go beyond day-to-day tactics. It is the combination of consistent, long-term strategies and a comprehensive approach to brand experience that drives sustainable growth.

“Marketing plays a key role in shaping and delivering the total brand experience”

The true business value of marketing lies in its ability to create lasting connections with customers.



Every experience matters:
unravel customer experiences
with the Experience Model

[Download the whitepaper](#)

2. From short-term actions to a sustainable marketing strategy

4 reasons why marketing is often seen as a tactical activity in an organisation:

1

Strategic marketing offers benefits that are often **less tangible**. This can make it challenging to explain the value of investments to a management team that is primarily focused on quick, direct results.

2

There is frequently a **mismatch** between broader business objectives and the marketing metrics being used. Statistics such as website visits or conversions are simply easier to measure than more complex indicators like brand value or customer lifetime value.

3

Many marketing teams struggle to translate the **wider business strategy** into concrete marketing objectives.

4

The marketing department **often operates in isolation** from other business units such as sales or customer service, despite these teams being able to offer valuable insights.

“Do you find yourself reporting on operational metrics, rather than discussing how your marketing efforts contribute to overall business goals? And when budget discussions arise, is your marketing department regarded as a cost centre, or an investment?”

The full potential of marketing

Make the shift from standalone, ad hoc **marketing campaigns** towards a well-structured, goal-oriented **marketing programme**.

A marketing programme takes a comprehensive approach, integrating marketing efforts with long-term business objectives. It includes ongoing initiatives that allow customers and prospects to participate at any time, rather than relying on the urgency often associated with a campaign.

Of course, in a marketing programme, individual marketing campaigns may come and go, but they are all tied back to an overarching core message or theme to ensure consistency and to reinforce the brand message.

The real business value of a marketing programme is its ability to create compound growth: its effects accumulate over time, often in ways that aren't immediately apparent.

This way, you'll find a balance between driving transactions and creating positive customer experiences. Between effectively addressing short-term needs and ensuring long-term brand health.

*“With a marketing campaign
you reach the potential of people
who are in-market today.
With a marketing programme
you work on the demand
of today AND tomorrow.”*

	Marketing campaign	Marketing programme
1. Duration	Short term	Continuously - even for decades
2. Scope	Focused and targeted, often addressing a specific product/service/objective	Broader and more comprehensive, encompassing multiple initiatives and campaigns
3. Goals	Specific marketing goals like lead generation or sales increase	Aligned with overall business objectives
4. Measurements	Immediate, campaign-specific metrics	Long-term, cumulative metrics that are often harder to quantify

3. Building blocks of a robust marketing approach

Successful marketing goes beyond marketing

Previously, we stated that marketing plays a key role in shaping and delivering the intended brand experience.

However, we see many marketing teams blindly follow industry trends. This leads to a lack of individuality and creativity in their communication and marketing strategies: the same minimalist design approach, comparable visuals in ads, similar sponsored content by the same social media influencers, or the same kind of automated conversations in chatbots.

“Ok. But how to be distinctive with my marketing?”

Amidst all the rapid advancements in the marketing world, three key factors play a crucial role in distinguishing successful marketing strategies from unsuccessful ones: **the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the utilisation of data, and the unique human touch of creativity.**

In the next few chapters, we will take you through each of these ingredients and show you how to harness their potential for optimal marketing success.



3.1 AI as your marketing ally

AI levels the playing field for marketing teams

Think technology in the context of marketing and you cannot ignore the new and upcoming possibilities of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

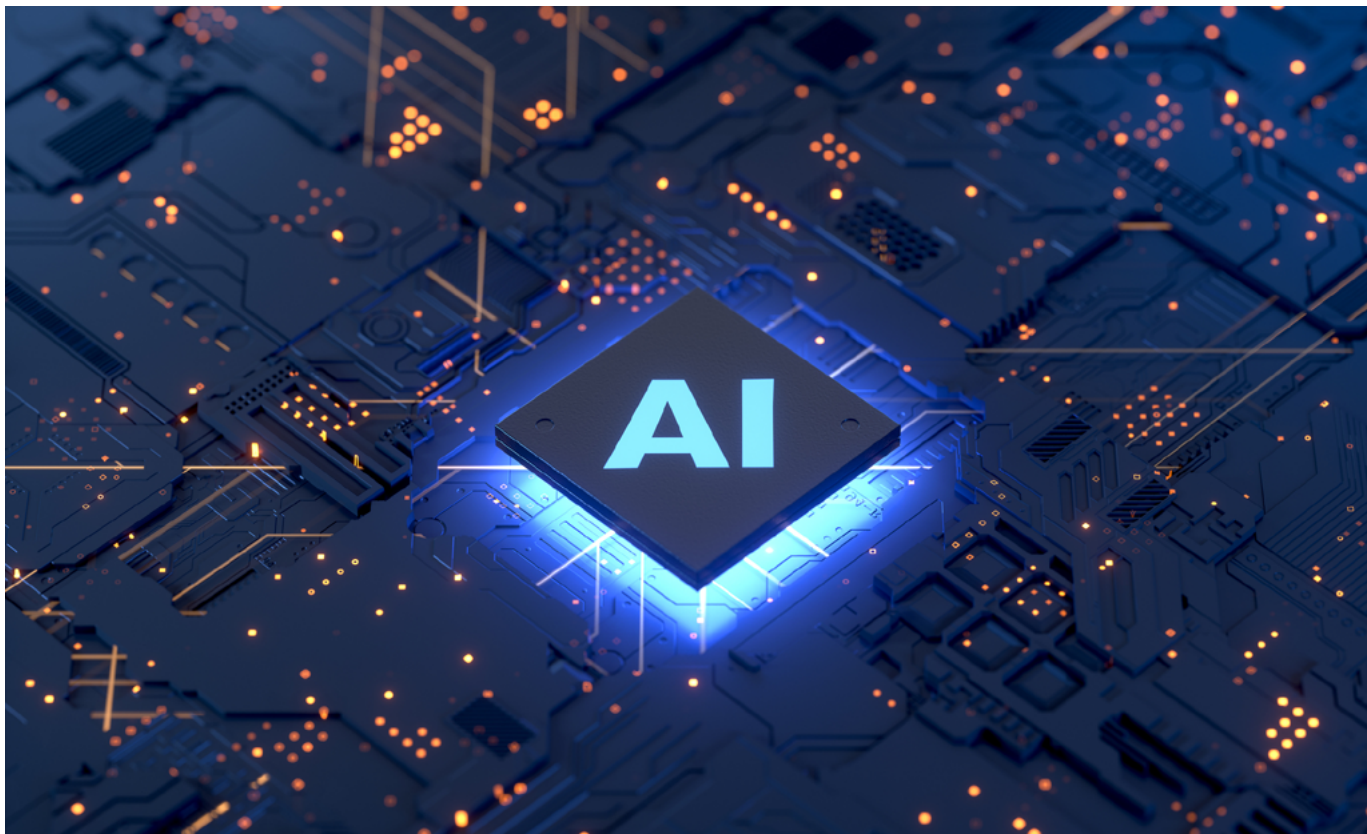
Previously, marketing teams with enough resources to hire skilled designers, copywriters, video experts, etc., had a clear advantage over smaller teams. With the emergence of AI, this has changed.

By now, everyone has become familiar with tools like ChatGPT for text, Dall-E 2 for illustrations, Adobe Photoshop's Generative Fill, and so on.

Thanks to these AI tools, anyone can now get create content: whether it's blogs, scripts, illustrations, product photos, presentations, speech, music or videos.

However, AI is more than GenAI

Apart from content creation (GenerativeAI), AI is particularly good at processing large amounts of data, finding trends and making predictions (machine learning). It has the potential to revolutionise different aspects of marketing.



We'll highlight four different applications of AI that might elevate your marketing approach:

1

Hyper-personalisation

Customised promotions, personalised email campaigns, tailored advertising: people have talked about hyper-personalisation for a long time, but it hasn't really happened. Making custom content at scale often costed more than it was worth.

But thanks to AI, data like browsing history, purchases or demographics can be used to understand the specific needs and preferences of customers. **Brands now have the ability to personalise all digital touchpoints** such as their website, newsletters and advertisements based on a Customer Data Platform and/or Data Marketing Platform.



Read more about hyper-personalisation for better customer experiences in our interactive webpaper 'AI beyond technology'



2

Predictive personalisation

By analysing historical data, interactions and behaviours, AI can predict what customers might be interested in. This way, brands can **proactively personalise marketing tactics**. The marketing team could send out personalised email campaigns with content and recommendations that are highly relevant to every subscriber. Or they could launch a loyalty program with personalised incentives.

3

Predictive analytics

Based on historical data, AI algorithms can forecast future trends and outcomes. This is called predictive analytics. AI's predictive capabilities enable marketers to anticipate search trends and consumer behaviours, allowing for **proactive strategy adjustments**. This can be applicable to various scenarios, such as [predictive lead scoring](#) or [predictive SEO](#), and can also be incorporated into a broader strategy.

Extra communication efforts to reduce no-shows

At iO, we are currently helping an automotive company with targeted communication to customers who are more likely to miss their showroom appointments. We use AI algorithms and predictive analytics to identify customers at a higher risk of no-shows. Then, we focus additional communication efforts on those specific individuals, such as extra reminders, special offers, flexible rescheduling options or a personalised outreach.

4

Overall marketing efficiency

We anticipate AI's influence on marketing efficiency to grow massively. Tasks like social media posting, email marketing, and ad placements do no longer have to be manual and labour-intensive. With AI it is possible to **automate** a lot of those marketing activities and remove repetitive tasks. This gives marketers the opportunity to shift their focus towards the more strategic and creative aspects of their campaigns.

AI frees up time for strategy

At iO, we leverage AI to generate client FAQ questions from texts as part of a SEO strategy. A dedicated section for frequently asked questions on a website contributes to improving its Google score. Thanks to AI we efficiently streamline this process. This allows us to focus our time and efforts on other vital aspects of a SEO strategy.

How to leverage the strength of AI in your marketing team

1. Learn to understand its potential

At first glance, the application of AI may seem broad and vague, but it's reminiscent of how computers and the internet were initially perceived as technologies:

"Interesting, but what can you do with it?"

AI is a technological tool that allows you to create a lot of value. You just need to understand the potential. And that is about more than just more efficient content and asset creation.

Therefore, first learn to understand how AI works and what it can do, and then consider how this can add value within your marketing team. [Our AI dossier is a great place to start.](#)

2. Good quality data serves as the backbone of AI

Every new era requires new fuel, and the AI era is no exception. Simply collecting raw data is not enough to effectively utilise AI. The data that AI relies on should be of good quality: complete, accurate, up-to-date, understandable, and consistent. The famous principle applies here too: garbage in, garbage out.

3. Your marketing stack will need a Customer Data Platform

Is all your customer data spread across a multitude of tools? By using a Customer Data Platform (CDP) with AI, marketing teams can really make data-driven decisions. A CDP combines customer data from different platforms and hands it back to you in a 360° package. Are you interested in understanding the role of a CDP within your organisation, its benefits, and the conditions for using a CDP? [Lees dan ons Customer Data Platform whitepaper.](#)

4. Not only invest in tools, invest in people

Have you found the perfect AI tools? Invest in workshops and training sessions for your marketing colleagues so they can learn to make the most of them. Not every ChatGPT user is an instant prompt engineer who knows which prompts yield optimal results. [Speaking of prompts, you can always check our advanced prompting cheat sheet.](#)

5. Merge the strengths of AI with human intuition

The key to AI-success does not lie in complete automation and surrendering to technological capabilities. The ability to give meaning to specific words, understand cultural context, and make moral considerations is inherently human. Ultimately, the human touch is what makes or breaks your AI success.



3.2 Data as your source for customer understanding

There's no good marketing without good data

In the past, brands could rely on data from other parties. For example, it was easy and affordable to buy target audiences (data) from platforms like Facebook or Google for campaigns.

However, we've often seen companies pouring money into advertisements, while their own database was a complete mess: incomplete, outdated or inconsistent data, with integrity issues.

First-party data is an ongoing learning process

Today, owned data (a.k.a. first-party data) plays a crucial role in guiding marketing decisions. Measuring performance, predictive analysis or building campaigns all happens based on the data of customers and visitors that brands collect themselves.

However, that is easier said than done.

For many companies this is a learning process. They are still in the innovation phase, overcoming the challenges and experimenting with the possibilities that their own data presents.

A shift in mindset

There is no obvious, simple, or pre-defined solution that you can use to run marketing operations without third-party data. You can't cover it with a single project and/or the implementation of a single tracking solution. It requires a shift in mindset: brands that focus on privacy, make an effort to truly understand their customers and have faith in their own strengths will be the ones who make the transition to a new marketing and advertising ecosystem successfully.

What data?

Most brands have a lot of data collected through all kinds of touchpoints. From **demographic information** (location, gender) to **customer feedback** (reviews, support tickets), and from **user behaviour data** (bounce rates, conversions) to **performance data** (server response times).

How to use data in your marketing in a smart way

1. Don't buy data, own it

Long before you can even start thinking about selling, you have to **patiently build an audience**. You do that with hundreds, even thousands, of small valuable moments and interactions. And preferably on your own channels, so that all exchanges and the data you capture is yours.

Building an audience is hard work and getting the most out of it requires a large investment in people and resources. The big advantage is that your investment is not lost. If you buy data, and therefore reach, from Facebook, your money only works once, and you can only hope that your target group will connect with your content. 'First party data' - owned data - is yours forever. A crucial argument to convince your CMO to invest in a first-party data strategy.

2. Bring your marketing affairs in order

How do you manage your marketing data - and can it be done more efficiently?

Conduct a data audit:

- What data are you actually collecting?
- Where is it stored?
- Which systems handle this data flow?
- Which partners and advertising platforms do you work with?
- Do you always have access to that data, and can you use it?
- How do you handle privacy and personal data?
- Do you need to review your measurement plan?

3. Make your campaign strategy a data strategy

In the past, with the traditional use of third-party cookies, the data aspect of a strategy would typically come at the end: marketers would develop campaign X for target audience Y, and then the data specialists would apply their (purchased) data accordingly. Now data is taking a prominent role right from the start of campaign creation.

Start by determining the specific data you require, what information you need to gather from your users, and the privacy guidelines you need to adhere to.

By addressing these questions at the outset of your strategy, you can ensure a more effective and privacy-conscious approach.

4. Use data ethically

A lot has changed in terms of data regulation over the past five years. There has been a shift towards stricter compliance measures and increased transparency. Now marketers face a crucial challenge: balancing privacy and insights.

Invest in advanced tracking and analytics solutions that comply with strict privacy regulations.

As such, you'll have to delve into the latest technologies and methods that respect user privacy while still providing valuable data. Learn more about ethical and responsible data management in this article: ["The next step for analytics and tracking in a 'privacy first' world"](#).

5. Allocate your marketing budget more effectively with Marketing Mix Modelling

What is the impact of all your marketing activities over the past three years? Which initiative or effort contributes the most to your objectives? To answer these kind of questions, traditional attribution models are becoming less and less relevant. **Changes in technology and legislation mean that you have to look for alternative attribution models.**

Marketing Mix Modelling quantifies the effectiveness of advertisements through statistical analysis and predicts the future impact of various marketing tactics. This provides a better understanding of how to best allocate the available marketing budget. It offers unique insights into channels that are increasingly difficult to predict in a cookieless world.

Contrary to popular beliefs, Marketing Mix Modelling is not just for multinationals spending millions of euros on marketing every year. Smaller organisations can also benefit. If you already have a reasonable amount of usable ad data, you can get going with [Marketing Mix Modelling](#).



3.3 Creativity as your unique selling point

Attention, please!

People scroll for hours through social media feeds, but skim past boring advertisements. They binge-watch series on streaming platforms like Netflix but effortlessly skip over YouTube commercials. How can brands get our attention?

The ability **to attract and maintain the audience's attention** is becoming more valuable than ever. This challenge is made even more complex by the rise of Generative AI. GenAI enables every marketing team to produce images, text and videos more quickly and easily. If every competitor has access to the same tools and strategies, standing out becomes an even bigger challenge. However, there is still one distinct advantage that can set you apart: **creativity**.

Being able to think outside the box, to come up with unique solutions, or to approach things in a new way: the capability to be creative is one of the **most important distinguishing factors** in the coming years and should therefore be an indispensable part of the mindset and skillset of your marketing organisation.

“Creativity, humanity and emotion are often missing in marketing, when it’s actually those factors that help you to claim your place in the hearts and minds of your target group.”



The Future of Jobs Report predicts the skills that will make a difference in the future, and it ranked ‘creative thinking’ low in the top ten in 2015. However, in 2025, it ranks fourth among the most important skills.

How to be more creative in your marketing

1. Dare to experiment

For emerging brands, creativity is often the catalyst. But as brands expand and the impact of the decisions they make grows, willingness to take risks for the sake of creativity can decrease, replaced by a safety-first approach. That's why **courage plays such a crucial role**, both for the creative and for the manager who must dare to choose an outside-the-lines idea. One way to balance creativity and risk is by applying the 80/20 rule, allocating 20% of your advertising budget to experiments. If you don't dare to take a risk, even in a controlled manner, you'll be stuck in the familiar and safe zone – and before too long you'll be overtaken by a brand that dares to be original.

2. Break free from marketing asset constraints

A big challenge lies in ensuring that the rules of marketing tools never impose limitations on creativity. Take, for example, a video on Facebook: best practices dictate that it should grab attention, showcase the product within the first three seconds, and prominently display the logo multiple times. However, strictly adhering to these guidelines may result in a video that resembles a typical commercial and fails to stand out in a crowded landscape.

3. Channel selection is a creative opportunity too

Many brands feel the pressure to be present on social as a channel used for direct contact, but it often scores poorly as a traffic source. However, with the right approach, there are plenty of opportunities for your brand just as well. There are no sets of laws that consumers follow: they are constantly trying out all kinds of things. As a brand, do the same. As a marketer, connect using new channels and research whether you want to be visible there as a brand. For instance, every country handles social differently. Snapchat is more popular in Scandinavian countries because it is more private, and livestreaming in China generates instant revenue, even for cabbages.

4. Test your creativity

While a creative approach to crafting a marketing message is valuable, it must ultimately translate into an effective campaign. Embrace your creativity but also embrace the importance of continuous testing. Initiate a dialogue with your target audience right from the beginning.

- Does your concept resonate with them?
- Does the pilot or prototype strike a chord?
- Does your message truly resonate with your intended audience?
- Is your campaign achieving its desired goals?

Approach each step with a fresh perspective and allow your creativity to evolve. By doing so, you gradually infuse your campaigns with emotional relevance and achieve optimal results.



4. iO Case - LAIKA

Why settle for a traditional campaign when you can harness AI's creative potential?

Meet LAIKA, an AI-teenager raised by social media

A prominent retail bank and insurance provider in Sweden, Länsförsäkringar, wanted to address the impact of high screen time on young people's mental health. Our creative team wanted to create something more original than a traditional awareness campaign to really capture the attention of schools, teachers, journalists, and teenagers.

We asked ourselves:

"What happens to a child's self-image and world view when they get 100% screen time?"

That's when we came up with Laika. Laika is an AI teenager whose personality, ideals and opinions are entirely influenced by the content and climate of social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat using an AI language model.

By chatting with Laika, we can investigate how extensive use of social media risks affecting a young person. To gain deeper insights, we sought the expertise of a neuroscientist and psychologist who evaluated her condition. Laika is diagnosed with various psychological illnesses such as depression, anxiety, self-harming behaviour, and identity confusion. Additionally, her perception of the world is distorted, and she has many harmful ideas and destructive beliefs.

Campaign resultats

The campaign results don't lie. Laika gained widespread coverage in national media and is now featured in international outlets. More than 100 school groups have signed up for an educational session about Laika and the risks of social media.

[Learn more about the case](#)

Checklist

Does your marketing strategy focus on long-term business growth?

1. Our marketing department works closely with sales and customer support
2. Our marketing objectives are linked to broader company goals
3. Our campaigns support a consistent core message
4. We frequently experiment with new formats and channels
5. We maintain marketing presence beyond campaign periods
6. We track both operational and strategic metrics
7. We've adopted AI tools for personalisation and efficiency
8. We give priority to building our first-party data
9. We maintain human supervision and creativity in AI-driven processes
10. We regularly audit and update our data collection methods

The more boxes you've checked, the stronger your marketing foundation.



About iO

iO is a *blended agency*. We blend marketing, technology and creativity because we believe that creating the ultimate customer experience requires a blend of these different skills to make an impact on our clients' brand and business.

With our solutions, we aim for experiences that matter:

Digital platforms →

Brand, business & experience design →

Marketing programmes & campaigns →

Creation & content production →

Cloud, data & integration →

Transformation & consulting →

Experience is
everything

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