



**CMO REPORT:**

# **REMARKETING MARKETING**

How Australia's marketing leaders are reclaiming  
the function's commercial standing



# **FOREWORD**

*A function at an inflection point*

Marketing has never had a greater opportunity to drive growth.

But to realise that opportunity, the profession needs to think more broadly about its role in business.

Marketing is about much more than advertising. It is how organisations understand their customers, build brands, identify opportunities and create value. That means marketing leaders need to be commercially accountable and able to demonstrate their impact in the language of growth and business performance.

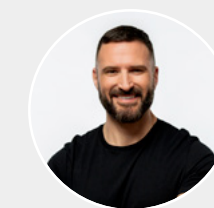
As this report shows, that role is also changing rapidly.

AI and emerging technologies are reshaping how marketers work, how businesses understand and serve their customers, and how people discover and choose brands. The opportunity is significant, but technology alone will not deliver better marketing.

We need to invest just as deliberately in our people. Building commercial capability, strengthening skills and giving marketers the confidence to lead through change will be critical to the future of our profession.

This report provides an important perspective on where marketing is heading and what leaders need to do next.

**The opportunity for marketers is clear:** embrace change, demonstrate value and put marketing where it belongs, at the heart of business growth.



**Josh Faulks**

CEO

*Marketing Association of Australia*

*The Marketing Association of Australia supports this report as a contribution to industry discussion and debate. Its co-branding should not be interpreted as endorsement of every opinion, technology, operating model or methodology expressed within it.*

## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR



**David Phillips,**  
*Deloitte Partner*  
*CCO/CMO advisory lead*

Seven years ago, I wrote a paper about the future of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO). Some predictions aged well. Others aged in the way predictions tend to.

The central argument of that paper was that the function needed to become more commercially accountable, more data-literate, and more genuinely connected to the rest of the business. This has broadly held up, but what I failed to anticipate was the speed at which external events would force the issue. A pandemic compressed five years of digital transformation into eighteen months, AI arrived not as a gentle tailwind but as something considerably less polite, and CFO scrutiny went from periodic inconvenience to structural reality. The function did not get to choose its pace of change. The pace was chosen for it.

So I went back to the source. I sat down with fourteen leading marketing and customer executives in the country – spanning financial services, retail, FMCG, telecommunications, higher education, agency, and industry leadership – to understand what, precisely, is changing.

What came back was more honest, and more energising, than I expected. Yes, there are structural problems – some of them the same ones I described seven years ago, now compounded. But the executives making real progress are genuinely exciting to talk to. They have reframed what the job is for, and they are building functions that are more commercially influential than at any point in the recent past.

Five distinct themes emerged from these conversations.

## FIVE THEMES REDEFINING MARKETING'S ROLE

### 01

#### **The identity crisis**

The function doesn't have a clear answer as to what it is for.

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Measurement frameworks are disconnected from the value drivers of the business.

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#### **Not in the room and not missed**

Marketers slipping off the executive team is a local issue, but one we can address by reclaiming customer strategy.

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#### **The transformation we're all avoiding**

AI is reshaping the function faster than most are acknowledging; Australia's lag is a risk and, used well, an opportunity.

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#### **Our leadership obligation**

None of this changes without personal ownership from senior leaders and incremental investment in talent and the function as a whole.

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# SETTING THE SCENE

Ask a senior marketing or customer executive in Australia what their working environment feels like right now, and the answer has a particular texture. Not simply busy, but complex in ways that feel genuinely new. Pressure is coming from everywhere: the CFO wants investment that defends itself at board level; AI is reshaping the tools, the team structure, and the agency model; and the executive team wants commercial accountability in the language of the business – not the language of marketing.

The global context adds another layer. The 2026 CMO Survey from Deloitte US finds economic optimism among marketers at its lowest point since the pandemic, with more than half reporting they are less optimistic than the previous quarter. Among companies changing investment levels, those signalling cuts outnumber those signalling increases by almost four to one. For Australian marketing leaders already navigating the structural challenges in this paper, the macro headwinds are not background noise. They are shaping priorities, compressing timelines, and raising the stakes on every argument about why marketing deserves its budget.

The global research confirms this velocity. AI use in US marketing has nearly doubled in two years, now at 24% of marketing activity and projected to reach 55% within three years.<sup>1</sup> These are structural shifts arriving at speed. What's striking about the executives in this study is not the weight of the pressures they describe, but the purposefulness with which the best of them are responding. The executives making choices actively, rather than reactively, are building functions that are more influential and commercially connected than at any point in the recent past.



We are faced with delivering growth and optimising performance today and innovating for tomorrow based on working out what marketing will look like in 2030 – all at the same time.

**Natalie Lockwood**, *Chief Marketing Officer, NAB*



## ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

This paper draws on two bodies of evidence. The first is qualitative interviews with fourteen senior marketing and customer executives in Australia, conducted by David Phillips in 2026, spanning financial services (NAB, ANZ, Allianz), retail (Coles, Woolworths, Kmart), FMCG (Kraft Heinz, Bega Group), telecommunications (Optus), higher education (University of Melbourne, RMIT University), agency (Omnicom), and industry body leadership (Formerly ADMA).

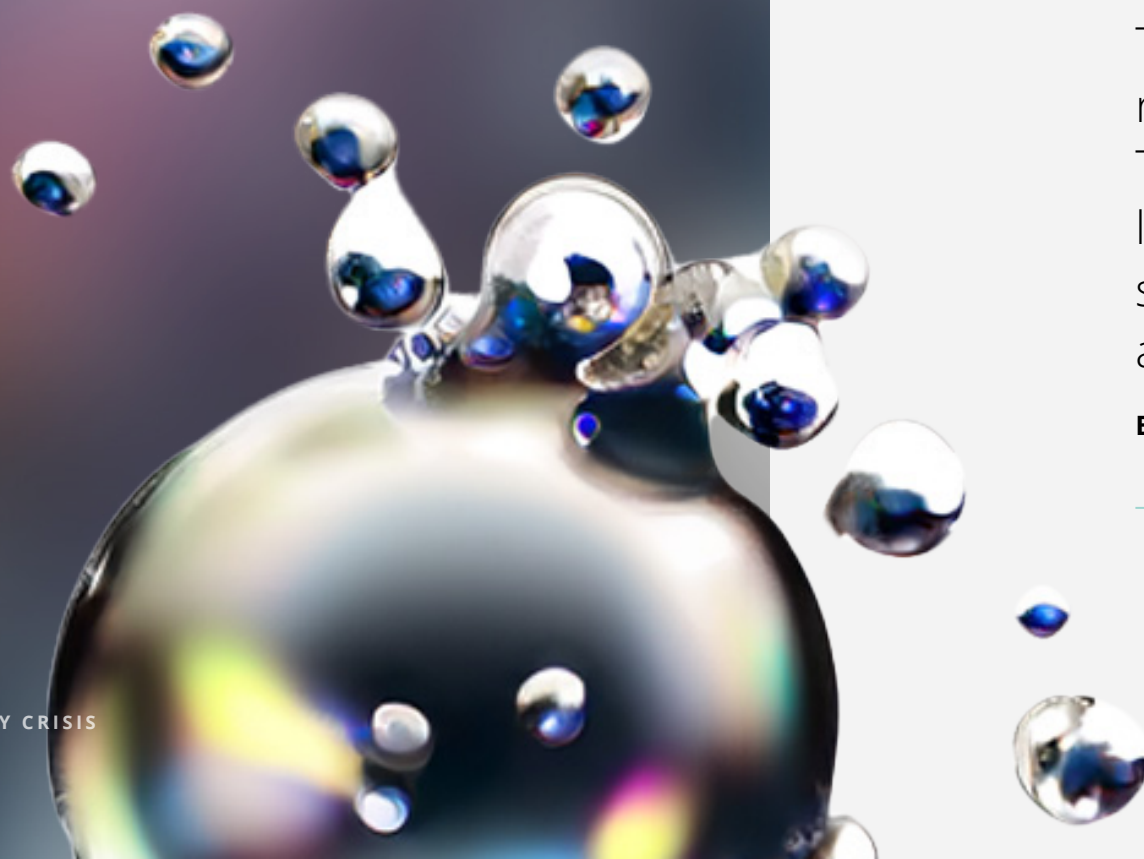
The second is two consecutive waves of global research – the CMO Survey 2025 and CMO Survey 2026 (Duke University, Deloitte US, and the AMA), Deloitte CMO Perspectives Spring 2025, Deloitte's CMO Tenure Analysis, and Deloitte Digital Marketing Investment Trends 2025.

Where both survey waves are relevant, we cite both; where the 2026 data supersedes the 2025 finding, we use the more recent figure. Fourteen conversations are not a statistically representative sample. What they are is a candid, cross-section of thinking from some of the most significant marketing functions in the country. A full list of contributors appears at the end of this paper.



# 01

## THE IDENTITY CRISIS



There's a question many marketing leaders haven't answered clearly enough, and it's doing more damage than they realise. It's not about what the function does – most can produce a list. But rather, 'What are we fundamentally for?' 'What is the version of this function the organisation genuinely cannot run without?'

The function is currently defined, in most large Australian organisations, by its outputs rather than its purpose. Campaigns, content, communications – the 'colouring-in department' is a phrase that surfaced across multiple interviews with a weariness that suggested it had been heard one too many times, and not only from outside the function.



The function has become too identified with content and advertising – it's just part of the mix. Marketing is here for business results first and foremost. The way you might execute changes. But you have to adapt to that quickly.

**Michael Magee**, *Chief Marketing and Category Officer, Kraft Heinz Australia & New Zealand*

The function is becoming more marginalised – reinforcing that 'colouring-in department' stereotype. The span of influence has narrowed as we have had less control over the core elements of technology that shape a business. It is becoming more about comms and efficiency of spend versus growth.

**Emma Jensen**, *Executive General Manager, Small Business, Optus*





Carolyn Bendall, Non-Executive Director and former CMO of ANZ Banking Group, Swinburne, and Medibank, was the most direct voice on this point. Her argument is not that the function needs a title change, but that the term 'marketing' carries the accumulated baggage of an era defined by persuasion. In a world where consumers are better informed and more sceptical, that association is working against the strategic influence as a growth driver that the function needs to build.



Marketing has always been about growth – but it has been misinterpreted as the advertising department. The word itself has a brand problem. And we are the ones who need to fix it.

**Carolyn Bendall**, *Non-Executive Director; fmr. CMO, ANZ Banking Group & Medibank*



In the US, 69% of CMOs believe their title will not change in the next five years.<sup>1</sup> Within this interview group, title change was described as an active issue, with several participants observing moves away from traditional CMO titles. This contrasts with the US survey finding, although the two evidence bases are not directly comparable.

The legitimate counter-argument is that changing the word without changing the work solves nothing. Nick Garrett, Chief Executive Officer of Omnicom Australia & New Zealand, was direct: some organisations have adopted the CCO title, without the expanded scope or genuine cross-functional accountability that would justify it.

The organisations making real progress have changed what the function actually does and let the title follow. Medibank's 'Experience Hub' model is the most cited example: a deliberate dissolution of the traditional marketing department into a broader customer experience function encompassing insights, design, martech, UX, and go-to-market. Brand becomes one asset within a larger customer strategy, not the sun around which everything else orbits.

Scope also varies dramatically by industry, and calibrating ambition against reality is a precondition for progress. Chaminda Ranasinghe, Chief Customer and Student Officer at RMIT University, described the evolution as a staged expansion: the traditional CMO role grows first to encompass channel and CX, then product, then – for those who earn it – sales and revenue. Each step requires demonstrated commercial credibility at the level before.



If a CMO comes and talks about their input to the commercials, they become far more important. Show the CEO what the customer data means for the business strategy. Connect everything back to what the board cares about. Bide your time – the organisation will get ready for you to take on more.

**Chaminda Ranasinghe**, *Chief Customer and Student Officer, RMIT University*





CMOs are often accountable for the customer experience, but rarely in control of it – and nor should they be. The role is one of enterprise-wide orchestration, across functions at very different stages of maturity. That shift – from operator to orchestrator – is where the real complexity of modern marketing sits.

**Laura Halbert**, *General Manager Customer Strategy and Marketing, Allianz Australia*

Retail is a game of dials, not switches. What we choose to dial up and dial down based on where the customer is – that is a customer strategy. Not a marketing one. Not a technology one. A customer one.

**Michael Laxton**, *Chief Customer Officer, Woolworths Group*



There's no denying the gap between what marketers did at the outset of the profession and what they do today. But the meaning most take from the term hasn't kept up, leading to damaging fragmentation. Product, customer experience, channels, campaign, service, even sales all fit a definition of marketing more than ever before. The leaders who own those disciplines – including how they connect to customer value – are the ones earning the strategic influence the function needs.

The useful question isn't whether to rebrand; moving beyond the 'M' word was perhaps the most contentious issue in the interviews. One recommendation is to start with the work, not the label. Define the function by the commercial outcome it is responsible for, map every activity to a business value driver, and let the title – and the credibility – follow.

## *THE RECOMMENDATION*

Start with reclaiming customer thinking end to end. You may tread on some toes, but organisations without this end-to-end leadership will not only build fragmented experiences, but also prioritise the wrong work and focus on the wrong outcomes.

# 02

## WE'RE SCORING THE WRONG GAME

Here's a paradox worth sitting with. Marketing has better data and more sophisticated tools for measuring effectiveness than ever before. Yet proving marketing's value to the organisation remains the number one challenge facing marketing leaders globally, as shown in three consecutive CMO Survey waves. That's a problem of framing, not measurement.

The function has spent a decade getting better at measuring the right things but using them in the wrong ways. Impression numbers, brand health scores, NPS movements: these metrics are all helpful diagnostic tools, but they are largely illegible to a CFO thinking in revenue and margin, or a board asking whether the business is building or eroding its competitive position. Marketing has built a very sophisticated scoreboard for a game the rest of the organisation is not watching.



Marketers are still talking in marketing outcomes – ROI, CPMs, reach – rather than the business outcomes that actually matter. The question we should be answering is: how does this activity drive incremental revenue?

**Kate Bailey**, *General Manager Brand and Marketing, Coles Group*



When the function reports in metrics the board or executive cannot read, it gets managed as a cost line, not an investment. And when profits disappoint, marketing pays the price: the 2026 CMO Survey finds that companies cut marketing expenses 45% of the time when profits fall short – more frequently than any other expense category.<sup>3</sup> The rational response to that reality is to demand short-term proof of return biasing performance marketing at the expense of brand building. This in turn makes long-term value harder to demonstrate, reinforcing the cost line treatment, and around it goes.

The data contains one particularly sharp contradiction. Almost half of US marketers cite building loyalty and retention among existing customers as their primary strategic response to economic uncertainty. Yet acquisition budgets are 26% larger than retention budgets – and growing.<sup>4</sup> Companies are saying one thing and spending another. That's a reflex, not a strategy.

The tenure dynamic accelerates this loop. In Australia, Andrea Martens, former CEO, ADMA and Non-Executive Director, cited approximately 20–22 months as the norm.<sup>5</sup> The 'impact cliff' – the point at which failure to show measurable progress becomes the leading cause of early departure – typically arrives at year two. Short-termism is not a character flaw, but a rational response to a short-tenure environment.

With the increasing focus on data-driven decision making at the board level, marketers have a significant opportunity to align measurement with business priorities. Focusing on what genuinely drives effectiveness, customer growth and long-term value.

**Andrea Martens**, former Chief Executive Officer, ADMA and Non-Executive Director.

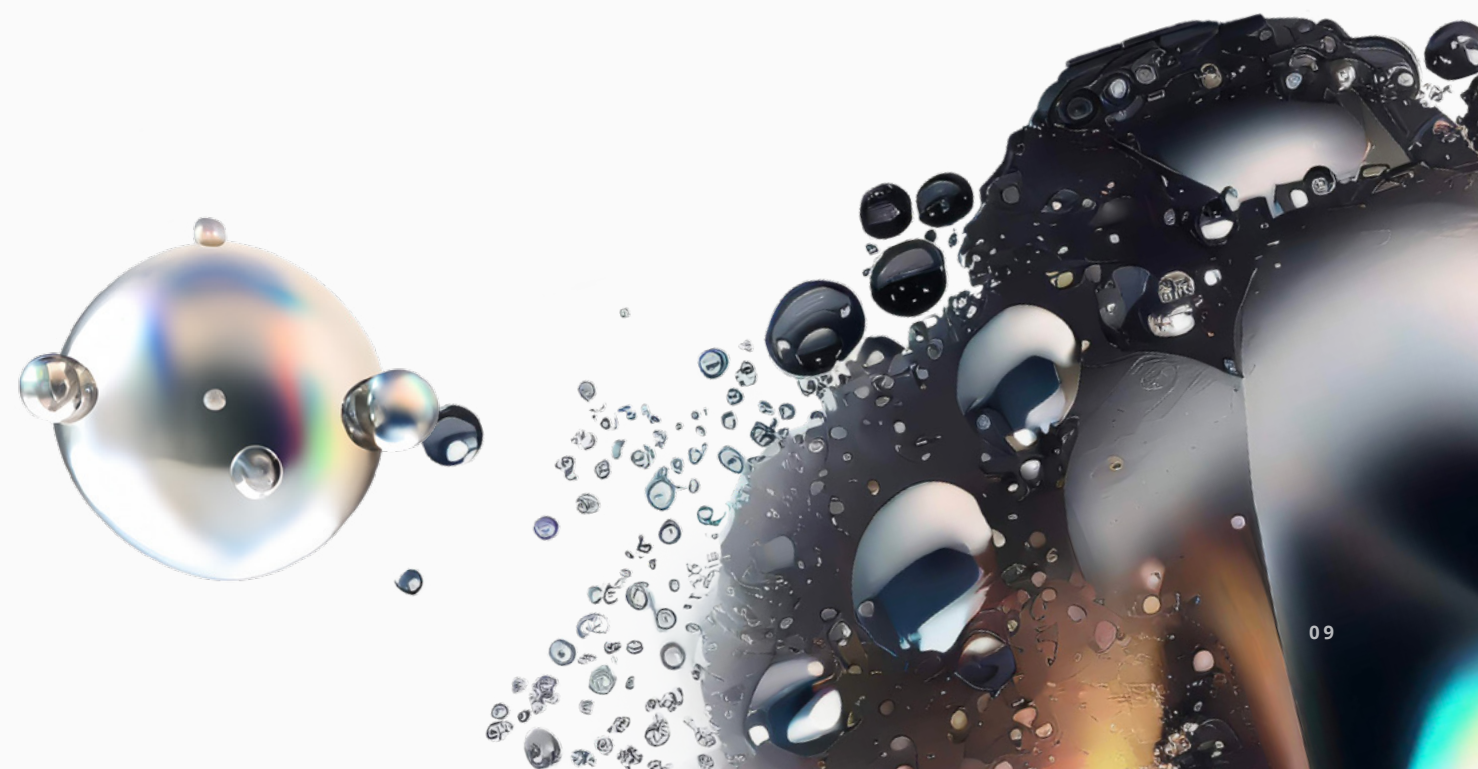


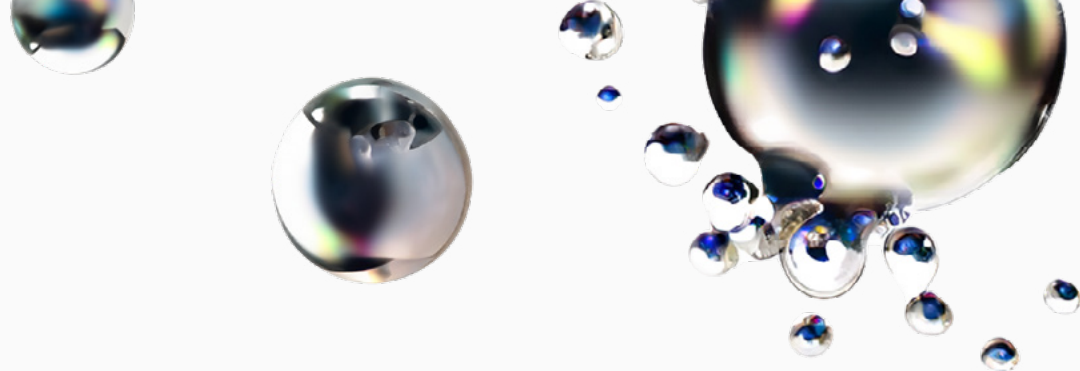
The speed of change means we're always on the hamster wheel – not lifting our gaze. AI is just making this worse. We're doing more, in shorter time, and often not thinking.

**Chaminda Ranasinghe**, Chief Customer and Student Officer, RMIT University

We need to show that marketing is the best place for any incremental investment. That the returns are consistent and improving over time. That we continue to do more with less through transformation and optimisation.

**Sian Chadwick**, Chief Marketing Officer, ANZ





The good news is that this is solvable, and several executives in this study are already doing so.

## FIRST

**Restructure how you report.** Lead with business outcomes – revenue contribution, customer acquisition cost, retention rates, share of wallet – and use marketing metrics as supporting evidence. Bernard Wilson, Chief Customer Officer at Kmart and Target, described the shift from measuring incremental improvement to measuring against an aspiration: not ‘we increased consideration by two points’ but ‘when are we actually going to get to a satisfactory outcome for the customer?’ That is a different relationship with the board.

## SECOND

**Get upstream with the CEO and CFO before budget season.** When a CEO has articulated a growth thesis that depends on building consideration in a new segment, brand investment becomes a logical instrument – not a discretionary line item. The marketing leaders making this work are not winning the argument in budget season. They are making the argument unnecessary.

## THIRD

**And this one is collective:** the case to propose industry consultation and discussion on whether a more consistent approach to measurement principles would be beneficial. Several interviewees independently raised the need for a common marketing attribution and effectiveness framework that takes the methodology debate off the table. No one asks the CFO to justify the income statement methodology before trusting the numbers. At a minimum, the marketing community needs greater consensus on the core principles with input from the financial measurement leaders.



Media mix modelling lacks a common rulebook. Every provider includes different variables and excludes others, forcing leaders to spend a lot of time working through what is right for their business. What’s missing are shared principles – like accounting standards for marketing.

**Laura Halbert**, General Manager,  
Customer Strategy and Marketing, Allianz Australia



45.4%

of the time, companies cut  
marketing when profits disappoint  
– more than any other category  
(CMO Survey 2026)

9.0%

Marketing budgets as %  
of company revenue –  
lowest since 2021  
(CMO Survey 2026)

## THE RECOMMENDATION

Rebuild reporting around business outcomes first, marketing metrics second. Get upstream linking customer outcomes to revenue by showing how customer activity moves value levers. And invest in industry-wide consultation and discussion, with contributions from financial measurement leaders.



# 03

## **NOT IN THE ROOM AND NOT MISSED**

Customer leaders may have a seat at the table, but in Australia many remain one step removed from the executive team and the board. This is ultimately an influence problem. Better reporting alone will not solve it. What's needed is a renewed mandate for customer leaders to shape and own customer strategy.

The diagnosis first. The proportion of Australian CMOs with genuine boardroom access has fallen from around 20% a decade ago to just 5–10% today, according to Nick Garrett. Andrea Martens offered the most pointed summary: peers are 'not missing the CMO's absence' at board level. In the US, 43% of CMOs now rate it likely that a top marketing leader will become CEO.<sup>6</sup> In Australia, the structural barriers remain more acute – almost half of Australian CEOs have a finance background, and the CMO-to-CEO pathway is narrow.



So many Australian CEOs are sceptical of marketing. How have we not done a better job, as senior practitioners, to change this?

**Sian Chadwick**, *Chief Marketing Officer, ANZ*



Fix the scoreboard, as the previous section argues, when customer leaders measure what matters to the business, the conversation changes. Rather than defending spend, they contribute to the growth agenda. And when commercial accountability is paired with deep customer insight, the function becomes a strategic partner that executives rely on to shape decision-making.

The marketing leaders who have rebuilt influence share one pattern above all others. They did not do it by improving their marketing metrics. They did it by becoming commercially indispensable – understanding the customer better than anyone else in the organisation, connecting that understanding directly to P&L outcomes, and giving the executive team intelligence it could not get from anywhere else. They made themselves useful to the problems – not marketing's problems, but business problems.



Moving from order taker to trusted advisor is the journey. It means deeply understanding business priorities and then narrating the business strategy into the marketing world – not the other way around.

**Natalie Lockwood**, *Chief Marketing Officer, NAB*



CEOs have never been more aware of what's happening with their customer. The CCO who brings that insight – who helps the CEO understand the customer opportunity and connects it to the commercial strategy – achieves equal footing with the CFO and the product leader.

**Chaminda Ranasinghe**, *Chief Customer and Student Officer, RMIT University*



Another key factor influencing those whose respect and remits are increasing is an understanding of, and ability to deliver, genuine customer strategy. Leaders who are stepping into the corporate and strategic planning windows with a clear view on what customers understand, value, and need – and can connect that directly to the commercial agenda – are the ones earning their seat at the table. The share of marketing and finance teams working together on growth has improved from 30% to 50% over three years.<sup>7</sup> That is meaningful progress. But with the absolute level still below half, there's plenty of work to do.



We are one of the few functions that touch all parts of the organisation. We have realised that an important part of our role is to become a kind of glue – making sure shared data and insights are more widely known, understood and acted on.

**Brendan Cooling**, *Director Digital Experience & Marketing, University of Melbourne*



The tools for doing this have never been stronger. Today’s marketers have access to first-party data, customer journey analytics, and the ability to connect marketing investment to commercial outcomes. The question is whether the function is using those tools to solve organisation-wide problems – or just its own.

49.5%

of marketing & finance teams are now working together on growth – up from 29.9% in 2023 (CMO Survey 2026)

4.6/7

Marketing leader participation in board meetings, up from 4.4 in 2024 (CMO Survey 2026)

# THE RECOMMENDATION

Own the customer strategy and walk into the commercial conversation with a P&L perspective, not a campaign update. The fastest path back into the room runs through commercial fluency and customer insight that the executive team cannot get from anywhere else.



# 04

## THE TRANS- FORMATION WE'RE ALL AVOIDING

Here's a piece of good news that doesn't get framed as good news often enough: While Australia has had one of the fastest rates of consumer AI adoption, organisations have been more cautious, often for good reason. AI adoption is not a race with a clear finish line. Many of the frameworks, governance models and ways of working needed to support AI at scale are still evolving. While momentum matters, strategy matters more. Organisations that make deliberate choices about where and how AI creates value are likely to be better positioned over the medium term than those pursuing speed alone.

What is outside an organisation's control, however, is the speed at which consumers adopt agentic shopping assistants. At the time of writing, 50% of Australians say they would trust an AI agent to search, compare and transact on their behalf. While organisations may choose to pace their internal transition, they must also ensure they are ready to meet consumers in the channels where purchasing decisions are increasingly being made. The organisations moving fastest in more AI-forward markets are also making the most mistakes. The frameworks are still being written and the governance questions are still being worked out. The organisations that get the strategy right, rather than just move first, will be in the stronger position over the medium term.

The global data establishes the context. AI use in US marketing has nearly doubled in two years, rising from 13% in 2024 to 24% in 2026, with companies projecting it will account for 60% of all marketing activity within three years. Generative AI has accelerated even faster, growing 220% – from 7% to 22% of marketing activities – over the same period.<sup>8</sup> Australia is meaningfully behind on operational adoption and the executives in this study were candid about it.



AI is a real opportunity to shape a technology that has historically been seen as a cost efficiency measure but is increasingly being seen as a growth measure. That could be the next lever marketing rightfully claims – if we move quickly enough.

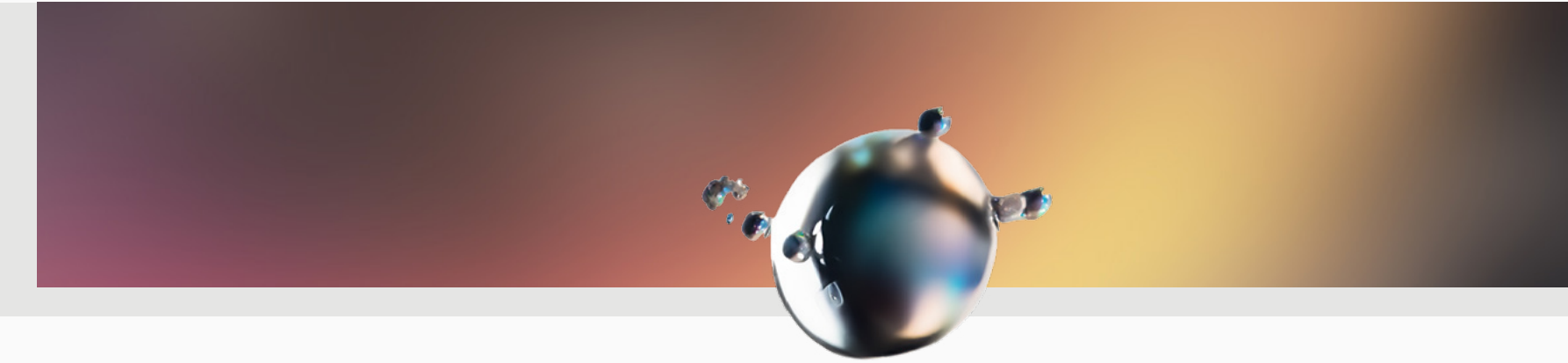
**Emma Jensen**, *Executive General Manager, Small Business, Optus*



The caution is not entirely irrational. Legal and regulatory frameworks for AI in marketing are genuinely unsettled in Australia. The governance swing between late 2024 and early 2025 was instructive: organisations that had been actively trialling new tools swung to ‘use only what’s embedded in our existing approved platforms’ following board-level risk reassessments. Some of the caution is legitimate. Some of it, frankly, is convenient.

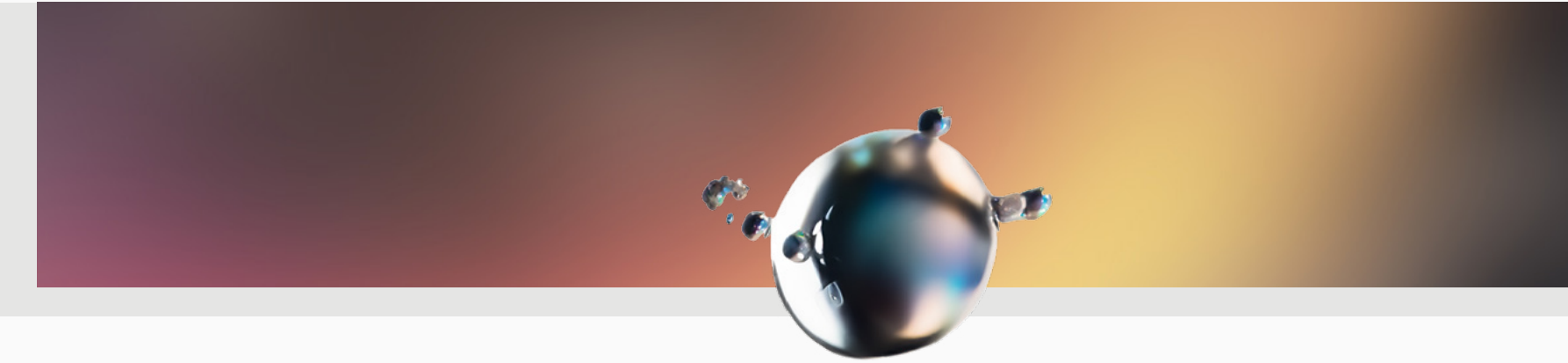
The operational gap is closing. Michael Magee, Chief Marketing and Category Officer at Kraft Heinz Australia & New Zealand, offered a useful example of practical, grounded AI adoption: content that used to take two weeks now takes two to three days, and testing and research cycles are accelerating.

The transformation most organisations are genuinely avoiding is strategic, not operational. The 2026 CMO Survey introduces a finding that did not appear in any prior wave: 42% of US companies are already using generative engine optimisation, actively working to get their content to appear in AI-generated search results.<sup>9</sup> This is not a 2030 problem. When agents – not humans – are making purchase decisions in response to signals, the marketing question changes fundamentally. What data are we feeding those agents? What are we telling them about our brand and value proposition? How do we win consideration when the customer’s agent is making the call?



I don’t think anyone has taken the time to think through it all end to end. With AI – it’s got to be where it adds value across the total ecosystem. For example, there is pressure on IP protection in content development and a nervousness about the adoption.

**Michael Magee**, *Chief Marketing and Category Officer, Kraft Heinz Australia & New Zealand*





As one retail leader put it, that's a brand and customer question and exactly the kind a well-run marketing function is best placed to answer. The brands that will win in an agentic world are the ones that have been ruthlessly clear about what they stand for, who they are for, and why an agent should choose them.

Australia's window to close the strategic thinking gap is real but not unlimited. Today's rational caution becomes tomorrow's inertia faster than most organisations appreciate. The value of the lag lies not in waiting, but in thinking more carefully than those who moved first, and in building the governance and strategic foundations that enable more coherent and durable adoption.

I'm going to put my cards on the table here. What I've seen over the last three months is something I don't think most executives are fully aware of: most technical aspects of marketing can already be performed by AI agents at the same level, if not a better level, than their human colleagues.

It's important to point out that technical execution is only one part of what we do as marketers. But the uncomfortable reality for many is that a significant portion of that work can now be delivered more effectively and at a lower cost through augmented teams.

This 'capability overhang' (the gap between AI capability and adoption) has closed rapidly in engineering, and there's no reason to believe customer-facing functions won't follow the same path, albeit over a longer timeframe.

We are no longer faced with a question of if, but when and how. How do we best leverage human capital and nurture the best talent organisations alongside machines? How do we build the right capabilities in the right sequence, with clear and measurable outcomes? And how do we do it in a way that is safe, responsible and beneficial for customers, team members and the organisation?

24.2%

of US marketing activity now involves AI – projected to reach 55.9% within 3 years (CMO Survey 2026)

220%

Growth in generative AI use since 2024, now at 22.4% of marketing activities (CMO Survey 2026)

## THE RECOMMENDATION

Understand the role agentic AI will play in your category at every stage of the shopping journey; you may need to reconsider the entire value proposition for consumers and agents. Treat this as urgent, requiring both offensive and defensive action. Internally, stop tinkering in the AI pond and get serious: think through the role of marketing, your future capability requirements, and how they are delivered in a hybrid agentic/human workforce.

# 05

## OUR LEADERSHIP OBLIGATION



Every conversation in this study eventually arrived at the same place. Not at a structural recommendation, an industry initiative, or a technology investment – though all of those came up. At a personal one. The executives making genuine progress were not doing so because their organisations had solved these problems systemically. They were doing so because they had decided, individually, to own the problems personally rather than manage them institutionally.

The talent picture is where the obligation is most visible. In the US, 41% of CMOs cite hiring top talent as their number one people challenge, ahead of identifying, training and retaining them.<sup>10</sup> In Australia, the finding is consistent: the skills the function needs now – commercial generalists, AI-literate strategists, people who can move from data to insight to execution without losing the commercial thread – are in short supply. The skills it has in abundance are increasingly commoditised.

Yet the resourcing picture is worsening. Marketing headcount growth has slowed sharply to 2.5% over the past year, down from 5.4% in 2025, with the largest companies shrinking their marketing organisations outright.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, training and development budgets have continued their long decline, now standing at just 3.8% of marketing spend – down from a pre-pandemic high of 5.8%.<sup>12</sup> Companies say ‘build’ is their capability strategy, but they are funding it less every year. Strategic intent and resource allocation are pointed in opposite directions.



Biggest concern is the war for talent – generalists are the really helpful ones, especially in FMCG. There are a lot of brand people, however the generalist who can think across category, customer, data, studio, and strategy – that’s who you’re fighting for.

**Michael Magee**, *Chief Marketing and Category Officer, Kraft Heinz Australia & New Zealand*





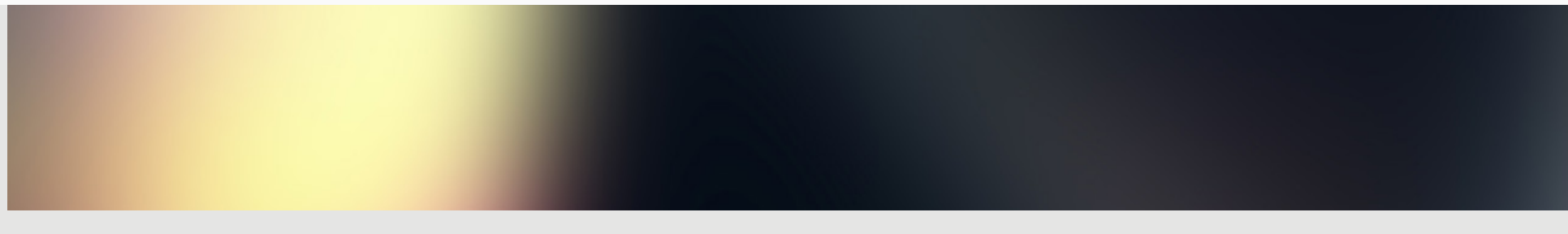
In the post-COVID environment, flexibility has reshaped how work gets done – but it has also diluted the clarity of ownership and the consistency of collaboration many marketing teams rely on. Too often, accountability is fragmented and alignment is assumed rather than actively built. For a function that depends on tight integration across disciplines, rebuilding clear ownership and deliberate collaboration is now critical to delivering impact.

**Michael Magee**, *Chief Marketing and Category Officer, Kraft Heinz Australia & New Zealand*



The post-COVID dimension is worth naming directly. The art of stakeholder influence, the ability to manage up without a script, the commercial instinct that develops from time spent in rooms with senior people – these were never on job descriptions. They were built through proximity and experience. As teams became more distributed, that ambient professional development was disrupted in ways proving harder to replace than most organisations initially expected.

Darryn Wallace, Executive General Manager Retail Sales, Marketing and Partnerships at Bega Group, articulated the challenge for senior leaders directly. Decades of experience build commercial intuition – the ability to assess an opportunity quickly. Is there a customer need? Can it be monetised? Can it be executed at scale? The next generation needs to develop that intuition faster, in a more complex context, without the extended apprenticeship models that built it previously.



My biggest challenge is how to grow these commercial marketers. How do we build a genuine learning and development programme that creates proper strategic thinkers – people with real business acumen, not just marketing technique?

**Darryn Wallace**, *Executive General Manager Retail Sales, Marketing and Partnerships, Bega Group*



The AI readiness dimension is the most urgent capability gap. Andrea Martens (Formerly ADMA) points out that approximately 65% of marketers are already using AI tools in their daily work and around 20% have been formally trained in how to use them well.<sup>13</sup> That gap – between unsupported adoption and structured capability development – is a governance and quality risk, not just a skills shortfall.

Then, there’s the need for mentoring, raised directly by Carolyn Bendall and deserving of more attention than it typically receives.



Every leader needs to take two or three people under their wings. We have to find the time. We have got to help our younger professionals coming through.

**Carolyn Bendall**, *Non-Executive Director; fmr. CMO, ANZ Banking Group & Medibank*



Bernard Wilson framed the capability challenge in a way that connects it all together.



The only path to executing on ambitious strategies is human connectivity. Trust is even more important now. Invest more time in people.

**Bernard Wilson**, *Chief Customer Officer, Kmart and Target*



In a function being reshaped by AI, in an environment where team cohesion has been disrupted by remote and hybrid working, in a market where the right talent is genuinely scarce, the leaders who invest in human connectivity are building a structural advantage that compounds. Buying a new platform does not.

## THE RECOMMENDATION

Take two or three people under your wing. Build a structured commercial development program and run it yourself – don’t hand it to HR. Close the gap between AI tool adoption and AI capability and invest more time in human connectivity: it’s the one thing in this function that doesn’t have an automated alternative.

An abstract background featuring a dark, textured surface with numerous water droplets of varying sizes. A vibrant rainbow arc is visible in the lower-left quadrant, blending into the dark background. The overall composition is artistic and modern.

# *WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE*

## **FOR THE CMO OR CCO IN THE ROLE**

Stop leading with marketing metrics. Lead with business outcomes and let marketing metrics do the supporting work. Get upstream with the CEO and CFO before budget season, not during it. Own the customer strategy – not as a positioning exercise, but as a commercial framework that connects customer behaviour to revenue outcomes. The fastest path to expanded influence runs through commercial fluency and genuine usefulness to problems across the whole organisation.

AI is not someone else's strategic priority. The organisations that do the end-to-end thinking now – about what an agentic customer world means for their brand, their data, and their customer model – will have advantages that are genuinely difficult to replicate later.

## **FOR THE CEO AND CFO**

It's appropriate to scrutinise marketing investment when the right questions are asked. It's easy to query what marketing delivered last quarter, but much more useful to consider how it influenced the commercial levers that deliver long-term value. This requires a shared view of customer strategy that many executive teams have not yet developed. Build that shared view early in a marketing leader's tenure. Treat the function as a growth capability, not a communications service.

## **FOR THE FUNCTION AND THE INDUSTRY**

An industry-wide measurement standard is long overdue and worth the collective investment. An industry that cannot agree on how to measure itself will continue to have CFOs unpicking methodology rather than debating strategy. The investment would pay back many times over in time saved, credibility gained, and budget conversations elevated from methodology arguments to strategic choices.

# A FINAL OBSERVATION

Seven years ago, this paper argued that the marketing function needed to become more commercially accountable, more structurally connected to the rest of the business, and more willing to define itself by outcomes rather than activities. That argument has aged reasonably well. What I got wrong was the assumption that the shift would be driven primarily by the function itself – at its own pace, on its own terms.

What actually happened is that the external environment forced the issue. The function did not choose its pace of evolution. The pace was chosen for it.

Yet the executives in this study who are most energised about the future share something in common: they have stopped thinking about their role as simply ‘running marketing’ and started being the person who understands the organisation’s customer better than anyone else – and makes that understanding commercially consequential.

That reframe is a return to what made the function valuable in the first place. The historical strength of the best marketing leaders was never that they produced the most polished campaign. It was that they translated genuine customer understanding into decisions that grew businesses. The tools have changed. The scrutiny has intensified. The job is the same.

Ultimately, this paper isn’t about the future of the CMO as a title, but whether the Australian marketing community is developing enough leaders with the commercial depth, intellectual breadth, and strategic ambition to do the job at its highest level. The evidence is that the capability exists. The question is whether it is growing at the pace and scale the moment requires.

Seven years from now, I will probably be writing this paper again. I hope the answer, by then, is yes.



# INTERVIEW CONTRIBUTORS

The following executives contributed their time, candour, and considerable expertise to this research. Their participation – and their willingness to speak on the record – is what makes a paper like this worth reading. Any quotes attributed to them have been reviewed and approved for publication.

| NAME                | ORGANISATION                                           | TITLE                                                            |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Laura Halbert       | Allianz Australia                                      | General Manager – Customer Strategy and Marketing                |
| Sian Chadwick       | ANZ Banking Group                                      | General Manager Marketing                                        |
| Natalie Lockwood    | NAB                                                    | Chief Marketing Officer                                          |
| Kate Bailey         | Coles Group                                            | General Manager Brand and Marketing                              |
| Michael Laxton      | Woolworths Group                                       | Chief Customer Officer                                           |
| Emma Jensen         | Optus                                                  | Executive General Manager, Small Business                        |
| Darryn Wallace      | Bega Group                                             | Executive General Manager Retail Sales, Marketing & Partnerships |
| Carolyn Bendall     | fmr. ANZ Banking Group (Aust.), Swinburne and Medibank | Non-Executive Director                                           |
| Nick Garrett        | Omnicom Australia & NZ                                 | Chief Executive Officer                                          |
| Andrea Martens      | Formerly ADMA                                          | Former, Chief Executive Officer and Non-Executive Director       |
| Brendan Cooling     | University of Melbourne                                | Director Digital Experience & Marketing                          |
| Michael Magee       | Kraft Heinz Australia & NZ                             | Chief Marketing and Category Officer                             |
| Bernard Wilson      | Kmart and Target                                       | Chief Customer Officer                                           |
| Chaminda Ranasinghe | RMIT University                                        | Chief Customer and Student Officer                               |

# NOTES

- 1. AI use in marketing rising from 13.1% (2024) to 24.2% (2026), projected 55.9% in three years: The CMO Survey 2026, Duke University / Deloitte / AMA.
- 2. 69.3% of US CMOs expect no title change: The CMO Survey 2025, Duke University / Deloitte / AMA.
- 3. Marketing expenses cut 45.4% of the time when companies face profit shortfalls: The CMO Survey 2026.
- 4. Acquisition budgets 26% larger than retention budgets, up from 19.6%: The CMO Survey 2026.
- 5. Average CMO tenure 20–22 months, Andrea Martens, formerly ADMA, 2026.
- 6. 43.4% of CMOs rate CMO-to-CEO pathway as likely: The CMO Survey 2025.
- 7. Marketing and finance teams working together on growth: 49.5% (up from 29.9% in 2023): The CMO Survey 2026.
- 8. AI at 24.2% of US marketing activity, projected 55.9% in three years; generative AI at 22.4%, up 220% since 2024: The CMO Survey 2026.
- 9. 41.5% of companies using Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO): The CMO Survey 2026. This capability did not appear in prior survey waves.
- 10. 41.2% cite hiring top talent as #1 people challenge; 62% finding external people hardest: The CMO Survey 2025.
- 11. Marketing headcount growth slowed to 2.5%, down from 5.4% in 2025; largest companies shrinking marketing organisations: The CMO Survey 2026.
- 12. Training and development budgets at 3.8% of marketing spend, down from pre-pandemic high of 5.8%: The CMO Survey 2026.
- 13. 65% of marketers using AI tools; 20% formally trained: Andrea Martens, formerly ADMA, 2026.

# RESEARCH SOURCES

The Rise of the Agentic Customer, 2026, Deloitte Digital Australia  
The CMO Survey 2026, Duke University / Deloitte / American Marketing Association  
The CMO Survey 2025, Duke University / Deloitte / American Marketing Association  
Deloitte CMO Perspectives, Spring 2025  
Deloitte Digital Marketing Investment Trends 2025  
Deloitte CMO Tenure Analysis 2025

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Phillips is a Partner at Deloitte and leads the CCO/CMO Advisory Practice. For more than a decade, he has advised some of the region’s leading organisations on customer strategy, growth, and marketing transformation.

Before joining Deloitte, David was recognised as one of the leading strategists across the region while leading Strategy and Media at McCann following long stints leading brands, insights and innovation within global CPG businesses.

Today, he works with customer leaders across the region to identify emerging consumer opportunities and build the capabilities and operating models needed to capture them.

David first authored this paper seven years ago and has spent much of the time since being proven partially right, which, in his experience, is about as good as predictions get.



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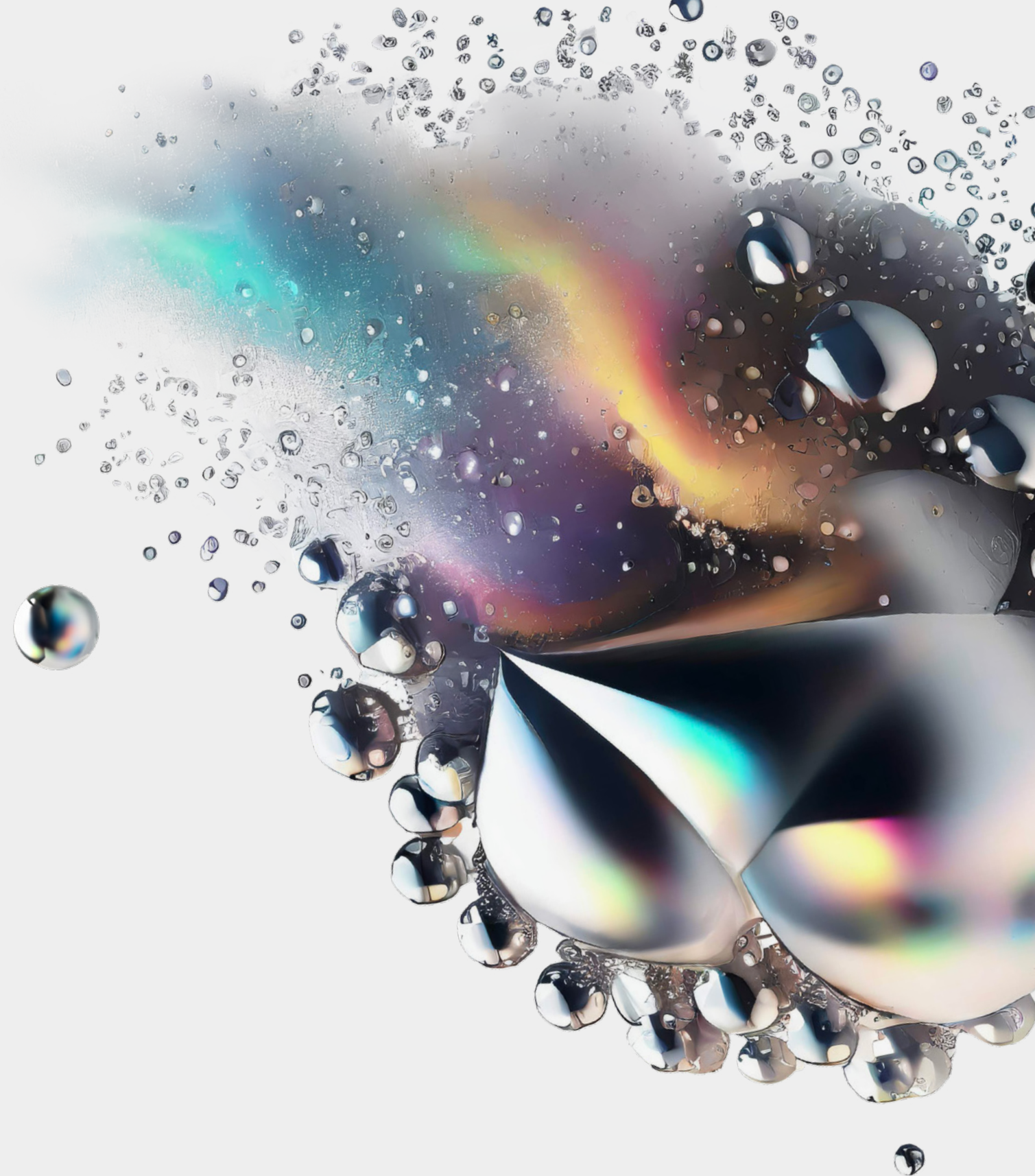
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### About the Marketing Association of Australia

The Marketing Association of Australia is the leading marketing industry body in Australia.

Formed by bringing together the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) and the Association for Data-driven Marketing and Advertising (ADMA), the Marketing Association combines the strengths, expertise and legacy of two respected industry organisations.

We bring the marketing industry together to build a stronger community, grow capability across the profession and provide a powerful, unified voice for marketing in Australia.