Raconteur

November 2025
#0943
raconteur.net

An independent publication in association with
THE TIMES

The C-suite Agenda

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Distributed in THE TIMES

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POLICY

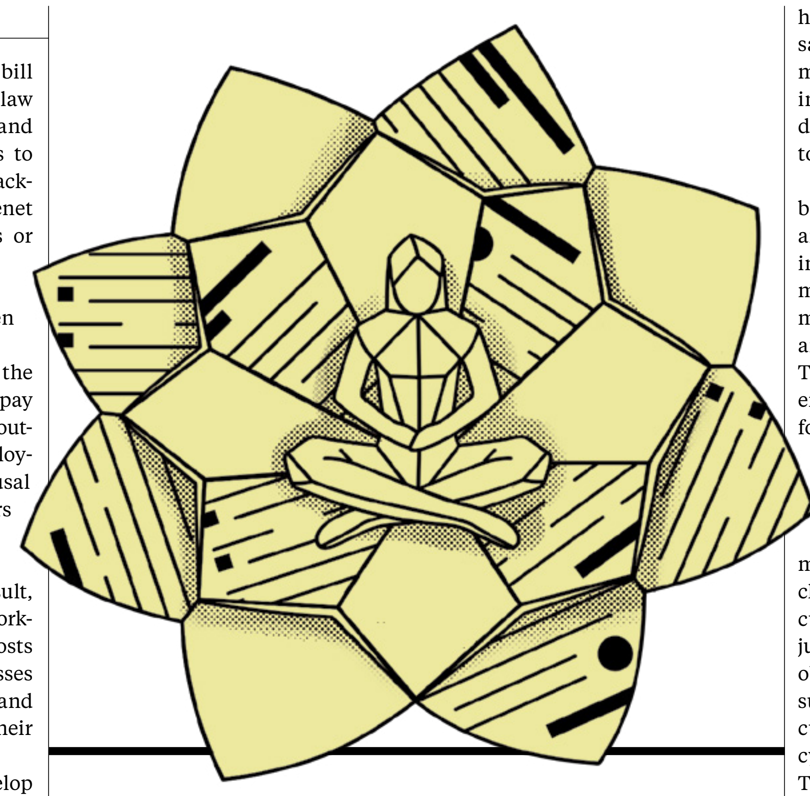
How to prepare a policy for menopause support

Large businesses in the UK will soon be required to publish equality action plans outlining, among other initiatives, how they will support menopausal staff

Sarah Dawood

The employment rights bill is expected to become law by the end of this year, and will usher in a raft of changes to improve working conditions. Tackling gender inequality is a key tenet – businesses of 250 employees or more will be required to publish 'equality action plans', first voluntarily from April 2026, then mandatorily from 2027.

Alongside demonstrating how the firm aims to reduce its gender pay gap, equality action plans must outline support for menopausal employees. A majority of menopausal women say their employer offers no basic support or has made no reasonable adjustments to accommodate them. As a result, many of these women leave the workforce in their 40s or 50s. This costs the UK economy, causes businesses to lose experience in their teams and stops women from reaching their earning and career potential.



For employers seeking to develop menopause-support plans, Julie Dennis, the head of inclusive workplaces policy at Acas, says the first step is to do some research. Look at existing data, such as how many sick days the business is losing to menopause, and survey employees to understand how they feel about the firm's menopause-support culture and how it could be improved.

There are plenty of free resources available, such as Acas's online guide, Menopause at Work, which includes ideas for training managers, conducting health and safety assessments and appointing menopause and wellbeing champions. Businesses can also certify with Menopause Friendly UK, which helps members create bespoke menopause action plans.

The most important thing, Dennis advises, is to keep it simple. "Don't overstretch yourself. Have three key actions to begin with," she says. For instance, survey the workforce, provide training to line-managers and clarify guidelines and procedures on flexible working or sick leave.

HSBC UK, which includes HSBC, First Direct and M&S Bank, won menopause-friendly employer of the year for the private sector at Menopause Friendly UK's Employer Awards 2025. Jackie Williams, the programme manager and UK menopause lead at HSBC, explains that the company has three core menopause-support principles: create awareness, remove barriers and be adaptable.

Creating awareness involves providing educational sessions and training for line managers and other colleagues to create an open culture around menopause. Removing barriers means implementing reasonable adjustments, from flexible hours to workspace modifications, both for employees going through the menopause and others who might be impacted, including partners. And being adaptable means taking a flexible and bespoke approach to support, recognising that every individual's needs are different and may change over time.

HSBC has also used its intranet to create awareness campaigns. Involving senior leaders in these has been crucial in normalising the conversation. It partnered with a training organisation, Over the Bloody Moon, which has created two devices to simulate hot flushes and menstrual cramps in men. Video of senior male leaders testing these was published internally. "They put themselves out there and made themselves vulnerable," says Williams. "And that's been really successful in breeding male allyship."

The banking group also provides its staff with Bupa healthcare and access to meno-health nurses, who help them prepare for GP appointments and advocate for the most appropriate medical care. For businesses that cannot afford private healthcare, providing staff with access to educational apps such as Balance can be a good alternative.

There are also many low-cost workplace adjustments that can help with symptom management, says Dennis. Temperature control measures, such as desk fans or seating near air conditioning or windows, can make a huge difference to staff experiencing hot flushes.

Switching work uniforms to breathable fabrics such as cotton and providing free period products in toilet cubicles are also effective measures, given that many perimenopausal people have heavy and erratic periods, says Helen Tomlinson, head of inclusion and employability at Adecco, a workforce-solutions provider. Uniform changes should be made for all staff, she adds, so that employees do not stand out.

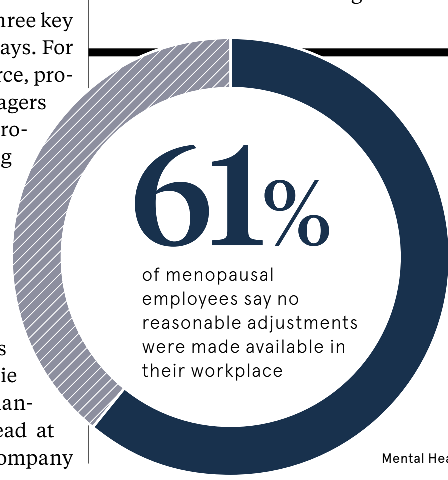
Tomlinson, the former government's menopause employment champion, believes that broader cultural change in the workplace is just as important as fulfilling legal obligations. At Adecco, menopause support is organised in four core cultural pillars: education, advocacy, lived experience and leadership. This structure is a solid starting point for any employer looking to put together a menopause action plan, she says.

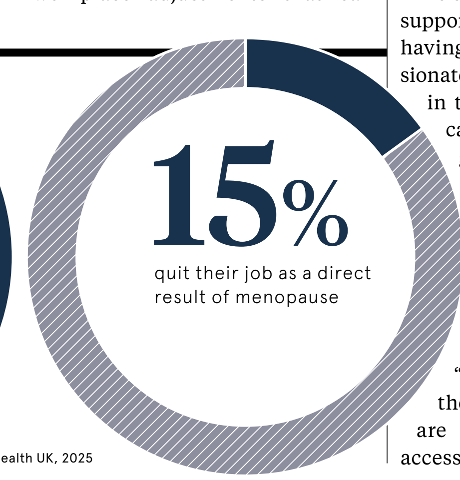
The government is also expected to launch a reporting platform for large businesses to make their equality action plans publicly available. Doing so will be voluntary initially. Dennis notes that this will provide a good opportunity for businesses to share best practices.

Although SMEs will not be obligated to publish menopause action plans, they can still take steps such as signposting staff to free external resources or investing in tailored training. And such initiatives work best when individuals with lived experience are appointed to lead the change, says Williams.

"Identify somebody who feels strongly about this topic," she says. "The creation of that safe space and supportive culture will come from having somebody who is really passionate about making a difference in that area." The right support can also help employees navigate menopause outside of work and advocate for their physical and mental health.

Menopause is a significant life event during which women have historically been given little support at work, Williams says. "You want to make sure that the next generation of women are better informed and have access to the right support."





Mental Health UK, 2025

INSIGHT

'Avoiding the climate issue is more dangerous than engaging with it'

Despite apparent public backlash to corporate sustainability initiatives, "climate" is not a dirty word for most consumers

Climate initiatives require clear and ambitious communication if they are to make an impact. Without it, firms get stuck in incremental, back-office efforts that do little to move the needle. The big stuff – changing the service, the product or how people use it – requires customer consent, and often customer demand, to justify the business case.

Over the past decade, however, corporate climate communication has been gradually silenced. 'Greenhushing' has become the norm, as brands fear consumer backlash or even regulatory penalties for imprecise climate claims. This inevitably turns climate action into a technical compliance exercise rather than a bold corporate narrative.

As anti-net-zero rhetoric becomes more mainstream, brands could be forgiven for thinking that now is the worst possible time to talk climate. Yet there are good reasons to believe the opposite is true.

First, although the climate debate appears deeply divisive on social media, the situation in the real world is different. Simon Glynn, founder of the think-tank Zero Ideas, has shown that rightward political shifts globally haven't produced a significant decline in climate worry. Instead, more 'right-wingers' are worried about the climate.

If climate change is no longer coded as a purely progressive issue, brands need not fear that speaking about it will alienate half their customers. In fact, ignoring climate risks looking detached from reality.

Consider the US insurers State Farm and Allstate, which have been heavily criticised for ending their coverage for homes in wildfire- and flood-prone regions. Because these firms have been reluctant to connect the moves to a climate narrative, their decisions appear callous.

Brands must recognise that "climate" isn't a dirty word. And sometimes avoiding the issue is more dangerous than engaging with it.

Environmental NGOs were once nemeses of certain industries. But that old orthodoxy is fracturing.

WePlanet, for instance, advocates for nuclear power and genetically modified foods – positions unthinkable for mainstream environmental organisations a decade ago. And NGOs have partnered with corporations in climate-positive coalitions to press governments for more ambitious climate policy.

Meanwhile, regulators around the world are in retreat. The European Commission announced plans to pull the proposed green claims directive, citing industry pushback. In the US, the Securities and Exchange Commission has stopped defending its climate-disclosure rule in court, and the Environmental Protection Agency is moving to rescind its 2009 'endangerment finding', which underpins federal greenhouse-gas regulation.

Marketers still must ensure they can back up their brand's climate claims, but the space for creativity has increased dramatically. Showcasing hero innovations, even small ones, or announcing grand ambitions, even if the journey is just beginning, is back on the table.

But the best evidence that climate communication isn't brand suicide is that some companies, such as Vattenfall and SSAB, have already done it, loudly and provocatively – and they're still standing.

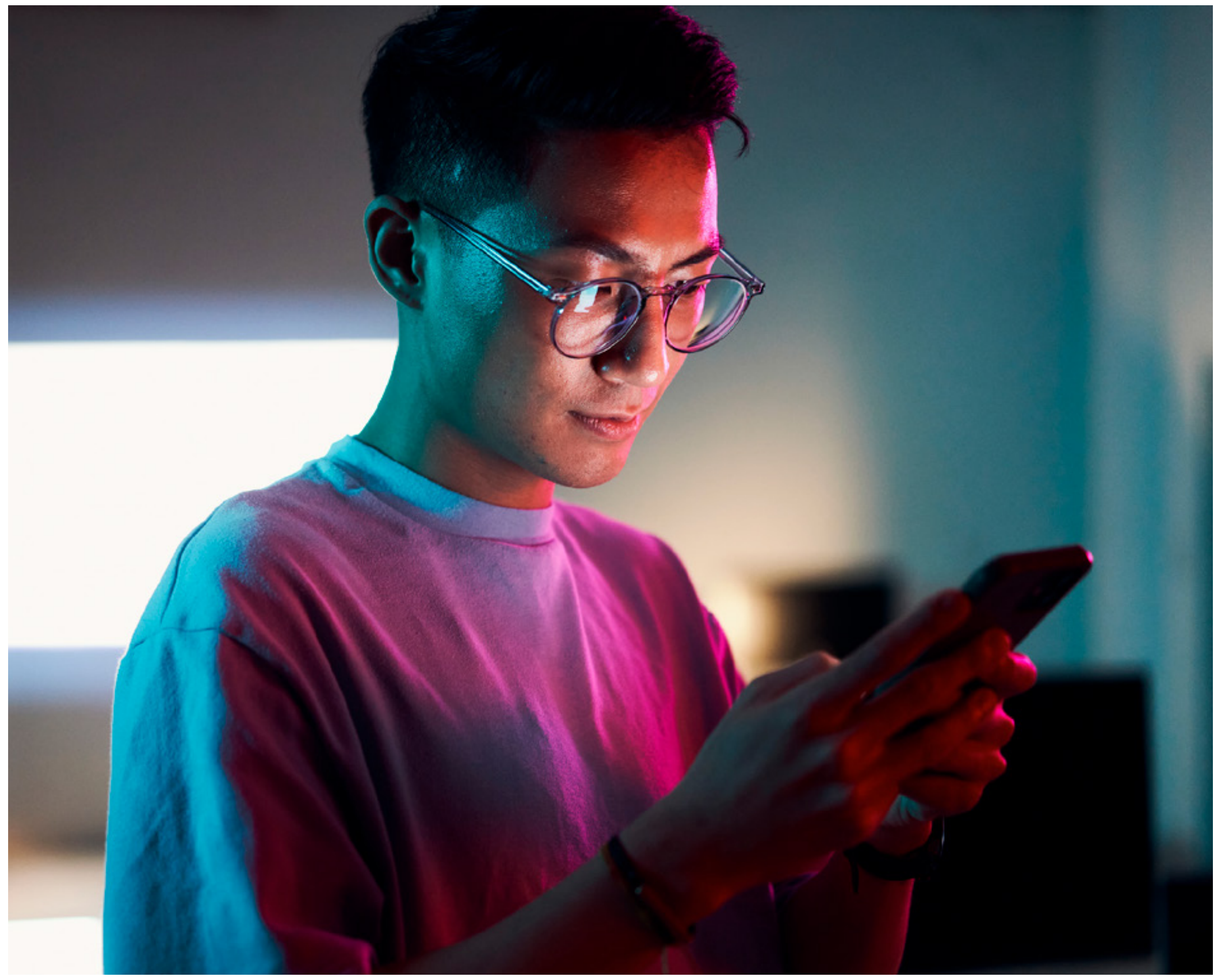
So how do you get started? First, find something meaningful to say. Nobody benefits from another green pile-on. Decide if climate is truly a competitive advantage. Determine if you have something worth talking about. Then get creative in bringing it to the world.

Next, build a coalition. Don't go it alone. Reach out to NGOs, startups or even competitors to back your position and share some of the risk.

Lastly, check yourself before you launch. Is this about climate or is it a broader progressive position? Is your audience aligned? If not, how can you isolate the climate element?

Brands that embrace climate communication thoughtfully and strategically can gain a powerful competitive edge. Far from being overly risky, speaking on climate is an opportunity to engage customers, shape narratives and drive meaningful impact in a turbulent operating environment. ●

Alex Paine
Partner at Lippincott



Human truths in an algorithmic era

With AI reshaping how people search, shop and socialise, anchoring media strategies in timeless human behaviour is the key to sustainable growth in 2026

No matter how complex technology becomes, people still crave simplicity. We want tools that make life easier, messages that make sense and experiences that fit seamlessly in our routines. For leaders navigating media in the current business landscape – where it's easy to chase trends and lose sight of what matters – this instinct for ease could be their most powerful competitive advantage.

"Our brains are wired for simplicity and social connection, and our tendency to focus on what most interests us," says Will Swayne, global practice president for media and integrated solutions at Dentsu. "These are enduring behaviours regardless of how technology, data or media platforms evolve. In the algorithmic era, where platforms' algorithms increasingly act as gatekeepers to what people see, like and buy, these 'human truths' are the foundation for making strategic decisions."

This foundation can counteract the kind of short-term thinking that might dilute impact at a time when it has never been more critical.

Swayne explains: "Focusing on real human behaviours helps leaders to make more grounded decisions about where to invest and how to engage – whether designing a commerce experience that sparks desire, building narratives that foster community or developing creative campaigns that earn attention rather than demanding it."

Dentsu's *Media Trends 2026* report explores these human truths in detail and demonstrates their role in driving sustainable growth. The report details how these truths will continue to influence the way consumers discover brands, search for products and engage with companies and communities in the algorithmic era. At the same time, it shows that channels are evolving quickly. For instance, search is becoming more conversational and contextual, which requires new approaches.

"The way consumers are making choices about brand or product is increasingly being driven by generative AI," says Swayne. "You need to make sure that you're optimising correctly towards that, similar to what happened with search engine optimisation (SEO), so your brand stands out, remains distinct and shows up in the right way."

This requires thinking about content and messaging in more expansive and holistic terms. "In the SEO-based world, it was about making sure your website was optimised and included the right words that would show up in the right way. Now, you've got to think about your content and your messaging across all the different channels and platforms, because that's how AI agents will develop an understanding of your brand."

Simplicity and community

Delegation is becoming a default setting. Consumers increasingly expect technology to act on their behalf, from recommending what to watch to managing what to buy. Dentsu's *Consumer Vision 2035* study found that half of consumers would welcome AI clones to take over routine shopping, administrative and communication tasks in the next 10 years. Initiatives such as OpenAI's 'agent' mode and Amazon's 'buy for me' feature are bringing us closer to full digital delegation.

But rushing to release agents that don't deliver great customer experiences could damage brand trust. "Leaders must tread carefully and avoid 'performative AI'," says Swayne. "AI tools must support the business strategy. They should not be deployed for the sake of it."

Rather than scaling quickly, leaders should focus on building adaptive systems that evolve with customers and strategy. A centralised platform to manage agent life cycles, dependencies and communication is also essential, as is strong governance to prevent off-brand messaging or false claims. This approach enables businesses to capture agentic opportunities without risking brand equity.

According to Dentsu's latest *CMO Navigator* survey, 34% of leaders are prioritising figuring out AI use cases and risks, while 31% are focusing on developing new AI agents and improving data analysis. Three in 10 are concentrating on media planning, optimisation and creative strategy. This illustrates how central AI has become to growth planning.

Brands that help people connect – through shared interests, live experiences or direct messaging – are likely to gain an edge in 2026. In uncertain times, familiar faces and real voices carry more weight than polished campaigns. Authentic video reviews from users often outperform even the slickest ads.

Messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, with more than 3 billion users worldwide, offer brands a new way to engage consumers through social, conversational interactions that support long-term growth.

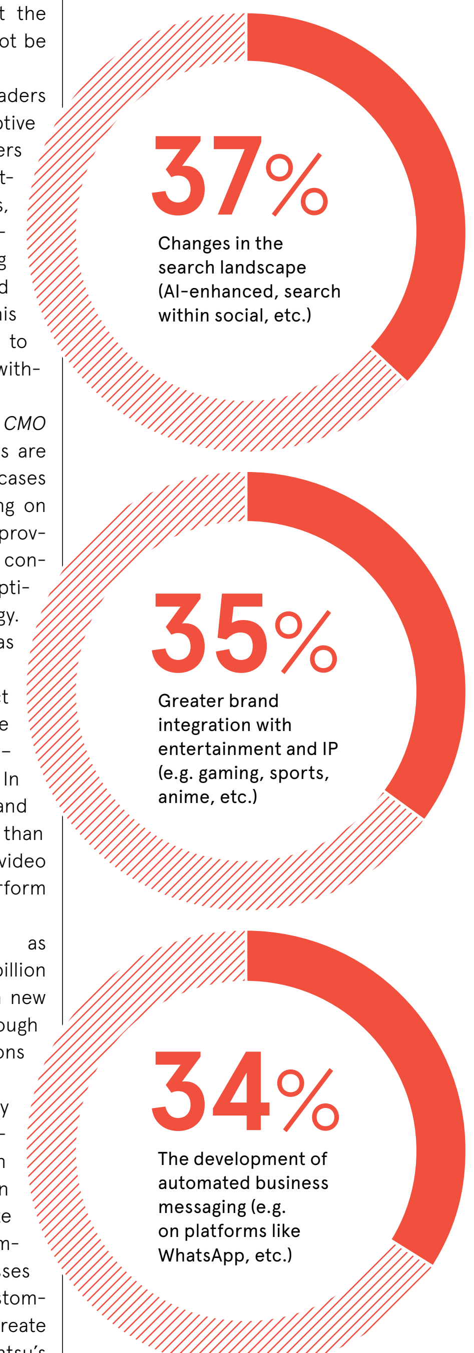
"Unifying content that is typically dispersed across multiple channels – apps, websites, emails – in a single persistent conversation offers a real opportunity to create seamless experiences for customers," says Swayne. "It encompasses advertising, commerce and customer-experience management to create connected engagement. Dentsu's WhatsApp Business Gateway streamlines access to the WhatsApp API, providing solutions from journey creation through to analysis and optimisation."

Dentsu's *CMO Navigator* survey shows that 34% of leaders are most excited about automated business messaging on platforms such as WhatsApp, and 31% see communities and creators as one of the biggest media opportunities. A third expect consumer adoption of AI agents to accelerate in the coming year.

However, brands must ensure they engage with communities and messaging in nuanced and strategic ways that add value. Marketers should focus on the value their brands bring to audiences' passions, rituals and identities, and let creators take the lead in conveying this to audiences.

> Don't lose sight of the human truths that will endure despite the changes happening within the marketplace

Which opportunities are exciting CMOs for 2026?



Dentsu, 2025

Driving sustainable growth

Brands that keep investing in media during uncertainty often emerge stronger. With measurement tools now far more precise, media has shifted from a cost centre to a proven driver of ROI and growth, according to Swayne. This shift is already showing up in budgets.

As Dentsu forecasts ad spend to surpass $1tn (£765bn) for the first time in 2026, half of CMOs (49%) plan to increase investment in search and agentic AI. A similar share are boosting influencer spending, and 46% are putting more into short-form content. Four in 10 expect to increase outlay on retail media, social commerce and livestream content.

Media's growing influence in the C-suite reflects its central role in modern life.

"Our screen-based lifestyles provide infinite opportunities to connect with people, shop, share and experiment," Swayne explains. "That's why media has become the new frontier for business growth."

He believes a multi-tiered approach is crucial for media success in the algorithmic era, which is more diverse, more multifaceted and more fluid.

Swayne explains: "You need to think about media, data and technology to make sure you've got the right audience strategies; media, creative and production to make sure you've got the messaging targeted; and media, sports and entertainment to ensure your brand is embedded into culture. We've built this approach to help clients navigate the algorithmic era and ensure media drives growth and delivers against business goals."

Collaboration and alignment between media and marketing, sales, technology and other business functions is important. Swayne points to Pandora, the global jewellery retailer, which Dentsu has worked with, to illustrate what can be achieved with such an approach. "They've been on a multi-year transformation journey that reframed media from a channel cost to a growth driver by aligning data, creativity and commerce. They moved from media simply promoting products to cultivating a connected brand ecosystem, which ultimately contributed to sustained high-growth performance year after year."

As algorithms increasingly shape culture, commerce and communication, brands that thrive will be those that remember what remains unchanged: our need for simplicity, our desire for connection and our tendency to pay attention to what genuinely interests us. "Don't lose sight of the human truths that will endure despite the changes happening within the marketplace," says Swayne.

How do CMOs intend to evolve their investment in each of the following areas in the next 12 months?

Area	Increasing investment	Same level of investment	Decreasing investment	Not applicable to our brand
Search and Agentic AI	49%	40%	8%	
Influencer marketing	49%	39%	8%	
Short-form content (e.g. Shorts on YouTube)	46%	42%	10%	
Media effectiveness measurement solutions	44%	44%	9%	
Integrating into livestream content	43%	43%	10%	
Advertising in VOD platforms (e.g. Netflix)	43%	42%	11%	
Integration into gaming	42%	43%	9%	
Dynamic content optimisation	42%	43%	11%	
Organising or sponsoring virtual events (e.g. esports)	42%	43%	10%	
Production and sponsoring of original content (e.g. TV shows)	42%	44%	9%	
Retail media networks (e.g. Amazon or local retailer)	41%	46%	10%	
Social commerce	41%	45%	10%	
Organising or sponsoring live events (conferences, concerts, sports)	41%	45%	10%	
Integrating with identity platforms	38%	47%	11%	
Semantic matching*	37%	49%	10%	

*matching brand's audience attributes to a partner's audience based on shared meanings and intent

Dentsu, 2025

CMOs' top priorities for media investment in 2026

Dentsu's latest *CMO Navigator* survey shows marketing leaders are grappling with fundamental changes in the way people search and shop online. Focusing on fundamental human truths could help them adapt

1 Search is changing, but human recommendations still matter

When it comes to what excites CMOs most about the year ahead, changes in the search landscape tops the list (37%), followed closely by branded integration in entertainment and IP, such as gaming, sports and anime, (35%) and the development of automated business messaging on platforms such as WhatsApp (34%).

These priorities reflect where media is heading in the algorithmic era. Succeeding with search is no longer about simply choosing the right keywords, for example. It's about being present across conversational AI, social channels and retail platforms.

As generative AI drives more zero-click searches, brands must ensure they remain visible as direct site traffic declines. Nearly half of CMOs (49%) plan to increase investment in search and agentic AI over the next 12 months, making it the top area of focus for more spending.

> While AI may increasingly automate elements of search, human recommendations will remain highly valued in an increasingly complex media landscape

At the same time, 49% of CMOs also plan to increase investment in influencer marketing, underscoring the value audiences see in trusted and familiar personalities. Indeed, while AI may increasingly automate elements of search, human recommendations will remain highly valued in the increasingly complex media landscape.

2 Short-form content shows real potential

Short-form content will be another significant area of focus for CMOs in 2026, with 46% planning to increase investment in formats such as YouTube Shorts.

The survey results reveal continued interest in other forms of video too. Two in five (43%) CMOs plan to invest more in livestream content integration, with the same share planning to increase advertising on VOD platforms such as Netflix and 42% upping spending on the production and sponsorship of original content, such as TV shows. This suggests that marketing leaders still believe that investment in a variety of formats can help to capture attention across the consumer spectrum.

3 Commerce and community are converging

Retail media networks will continue to command CMOs' attention in 2026, with 41% increasing investment in this space. Unsurprising, considering retail media has become an essential component of many strategies over recent years, enabling brands to reach customers where and when they are most likely to make a purchase.

Social commerce will receive similar attention, with 41% of CMOs increasing investment there, as will sponsorships of live events. Another 42% of marketing chiefs plan to increase investment in gaming integration and sponsorship of virtual events, such as e-sports. Clearly, CMOs are still keen to embed their brands in communities that capture the attention of particular consumer demographics.

These investment intentions show that the most valuable media opportunities in 2026 are those that close the distance between inspiration and transaction, between passive viewing and active participation.

4 Attention measurement tools excite, but agentic AI requires caution

Almost a third (31%) of CMOs are excited about new data and analytics capabilities that could help them to better understand audiences and to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how attention influences long-term sales. In addition, 44% plan to increase investment in media-effectiveness measurement tools next year.

When it comes to AI and its application in the media space, CMOs are taking a considered approach. The top priority, cited by 34%, is understanding uses, opportunities and risks of GenAI, with developing AI agents and related technologies ranked second (31%). Rather than rushing ahead with AI agents, leaders are keen to first explore whether they can deliver genuine value.

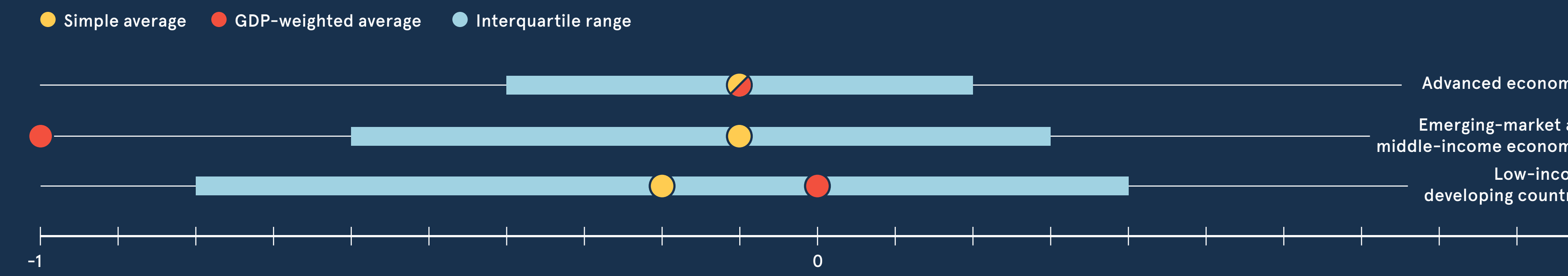
The balance between these priorities ultimately reveals the complex challenge facing CMOs today: they must harness the power of new technologies where possible, while maintaining the human oversight required to prevent poorly designed approaches from damaging hard-won consumer trust.

GROWTH AND UNCERTAINTY

With businesses around the world paralysed by uncertainty, the World Economic Forum has produced two scenarios for medium-term economic growth. One imagines significant gains from AI and an end to trade barriers, while the other assumes high inflation, continued supply chain disruption and muted demand for US assets. Senior leaders are hoping for the first scenario.

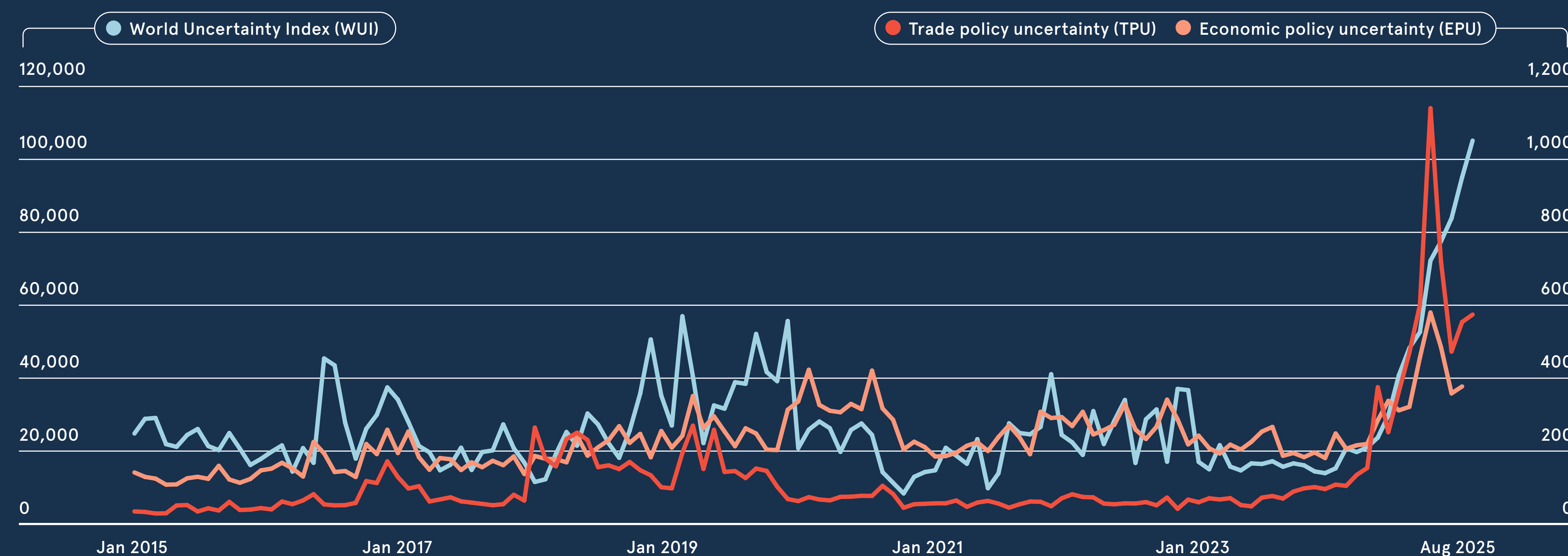
MEDIUM-TERM GROWTH REVISIONS

Percentage-point change in medium-term growth forecasts from 2025 to 2030 compared with 2019 to 2024, by economy type



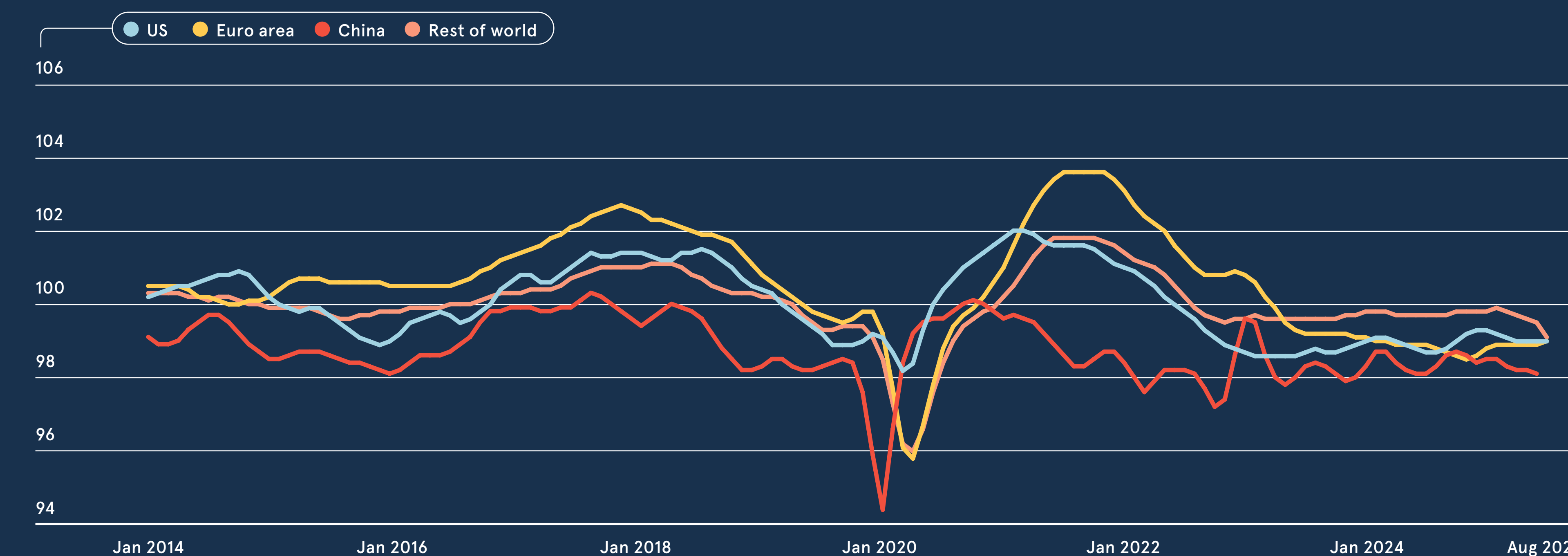
GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY AT UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS

Uncertainty scores for overall economic performance, economic policy and trade policy

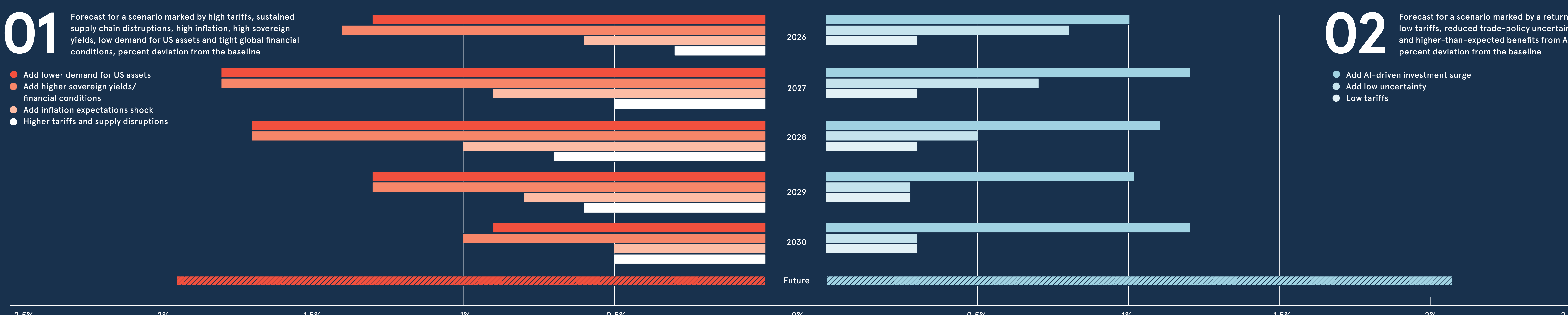


BUSINESS CONFIDENCE DWELLS BELOW THE BASELINE

Business confidence scores worldwide, by region



TWO SCENARIOS FOR GDP GROWTH



World Economic Forum, 2025

INTERVIEW

‘CFOs lead best by clarifying the narrative, not just controlling it’

Mohamed Omaizat led the restructuring of WeWork across EMEA, China and APAC during its most turbulent chapter. His experience serves as a blueprint for building trust, restoring clarity and reshaping a company’s future

Sam Birchall

With its stylish shared workspaces, cucumber-infused water, pool tables and free beer on tap, WeWork was the poster child for a new era of co-working life. Its business model was straightforward: lock in long-term leases on premium real estate, then sublet the space on flexible terms to corporate occupiers ranging from startups to large enterprises.

In January 2019, at its peak, WeWork was valued at $47bn (£40.3bn). But six months later the company suffered a major setback, announcing that it would postpone its initial public offering (IPO), which had been expected to raise up to $4bn (£3.4bn).

WeWork was founded in 2010 by the charismatic entrepreneur Adam Neumann, who aimed to revolutionise the concept of office space. But his claim that the company would “elevate the world’s consciousness” was not enough to persuade investors to back the business, which required significant funding.

Although WeWork was generating revenue – $1.5bn (£1.1bn) in the first half of 2019 – its IPO filing showed that losses ballooned to more than $900m (£670m) in the first six months of the year, which followed full-year net losses of $1.9bn (£1.4bn) in 2018. Crucially, investors were uneasy about how the business would perform in a recession. The company had committed to $47bn (£35bn) in lease obligations but had secured just $4bn (£2.9bn) in future customer revenues.

Mo Omaizat had just been named international CFO at WeWork when news of the failed IPO was announced. “The party was over five days after I arrived,” he recalls. “There was this big growth story carrying the company along, then no plan B after the aborted IPO. The founder and much of the management team had stepped down and employees were confused. Suddenly, the job I had been hired to do looked very different.”

WeWork lost $3.2bn (£2.7bn) in 2020, as lockdowns around the world forced the firm to shut its co-working spaces. But the company’s financials began to improve under its new chief executive, Sandeep Mathrani, a veteran retail real estate executive. WeWork cut its overhead costs and operating expenses, improving its free cash flow. By December 2020, it had exited 106 underperforming or unopened locations and negotiated more than 100 lease amendments, which reduced future payments by $4bn (£3bn).

Between 2019 and 2021, Omaizat – who is now the CFO of Taxfix, a consumer tax platform – led the restructuring of WeWork across EMEA, China and APAC. What was originally meant to be a high-growth leadership role quickly turned into a mission to stabilise the financials, rebuild trust among investors and reshape the company’s future under intense public scrutiny. Here’s what the experience taught him.

“CFOs should frame restructuring not as a retreat, but as a strategic reset, an opportunity to realign operations, shed inefficiencies and position the business for long-term value creation,” Omaizat says. Many great companies have emerged stronger after restructuring, he adds.

After WeWork delayed its IPO and saw its estimated market value drop to $10bn (£8.5bn), investors began focusing on viability rather than vision, Omaizat explains. Stakeholders who were once effusive about growth began seeking cost savings, operational efficiency and productivity gains. Instead of fixating on what had been lost, however, Omaizat focused on what could be rebuilt, emphasising resilience, reinvention and a return to core strengths.

> **When restructuring involves reducing headcount, it’s vital to remember that behind every number is a person**

“Helping investors imagine what a leaner, smarter and more focused version of the company could look like was key to shifting the mindset from damage control to value creation,” he says. “At the same time, doubling down on WeWork’s core value proposition – the sense of community that had always set us apart – was what reignited momentum. It reminded people what we were building toward, not just what we were trying to fix.”

In 2021, two years after its failed IPO, WeWork went public through a merger with a special-purpose acquisition company, BowX Acquisition Corp., securing a backdoor listing that valued the business at $9bn (£6.7bn). Despite disclosing sustained financial losses, shares rose 13% on the debut – a signal, perhaps, of investor belief in a more disciplined, future-ready version of the company. “It was a humbler WeWork,” Omaizat reflects, “but one with a clearer focus on sustainability and trust.”

Restructuring is never just a financial exercise, it’s a high-stakes leadership moment. It involves multiple stakeholders, from boards and regulators to creditors and employees – and thrusts CFOs to the centre of complex, often emotionally charged negotiations. Compliance risks spike, especially around debt, layoffs and asset sales.

“In these moments, the most effective finance chiefs go beyond financial oversight,” Omaizat explains. “The role is about steering the business by building conviction through data, customer insights and strategic clarity.”

That means being fully transparent, with clear visibility of burn rates, lease liabilities and debt covenants, and using facts to ensure that teams, including real estate, product and sales and marketing, are aligned. When asking others to make sacrifices or share in the pain, data becomes your most powerful tool for trust and alignment, Omaizat says. “In a crisis, CFOs lead best not just by controlling the narrative, but by clarifying it. When trust wavers, logic, transparency and strategic focus become the foundation for collective action.”

> **When trust wavers, logic, transparency and strategic focus become the foundation for collective action**

“For a business once proud of its purpose and identity, rebuilding trust, both internally and externally, was a challenge during the restructuring,” says Omaizat.

Many employees had joined WeWork because they believed in its values. Over time, however, the company’s sense of purpose had been eroded. Re-establishing it required more than new strategies, Omaizat says; it demanded authentic leadership. “The only real way to build trust is for people to see their leaders as genuine,” he says. “That meant being transparent about what I knew and, just as importantly, what I didn’t. That openness is what helped foster productive conversations with investors and rebuild trust across the business.”

Omaizat recalls a virtual town hall, where employees asked about the company’s cash position. Rather than offer a vague or scripted response, he replied, “Let’s go find out together.” He then gave a candid presentation of WeWork’s financials. That simple act of honesty resonated more than any polished reassurance, Omaizat says. “It was a turning point in rebuilding credibility.”

Restructuring often tests employee trust. CFOs, who are typically seen as enforcers, must balance financial discipline with empathy. “Show up not just as the financial steward, but as a credible leader aligned with the company’s values. When restructuring involves reducing headcount, it’s vital to remember that behind every number is a person,” Omaizat says.

Even when difficult financial decisions are necessary to build a more sustainable company, leaders must acknowledge the human impact of those choices. “It’s about treating people with respect, transparency and care throughout the process,” he adds. “That’s how you preserve trust – even in the most challenging moments.” ●

PERFORMANCE

Why search may need new management

Generative AI is revolutionising how people search and shop online. As brands compete for recognition from the bots, a new marketing role has emerged to direct their efforts

Olivia Gagan

There's a new high-stakes marketing role being hired by major brands across the globe. Apple recently filled the post in its Cupertino HQ. Adobe offered as much as $197,000 (£150,000) a year for the position in its San Francisco office. In Paris, L'Oréal is outsourcing the work. And Hawksford, a fund manager, is advertising for the role in Dubai.

What position are they hiring for? The generative-engine optimisation (GEO) manager, the successor to the search-engine optimisation (SEO) manager. Now a standard marketing hire, the SEO manager works to improve their company's performance in Google Search rankings, landing coveted first-page results and driving traffic and business to the website.

Newly minted GEO managers, by contrast, are tasked with making their firm stand out in generative AI results, strategising the best words, data, tone, website infrastructure and social media content to build and manage their brand's reputation with the bots.

The job has emerged because consumers are increasingly relying on AI to guide their search and buying behaviour online. Some analysts project that GenAI chatbots such as ChatGPT will overtake Google Search as the primary online search method by 2030.

Currently, many companies are delegating GEO work to their public relations partners. Sabina Mack is the head of digital for Palm Digital, a PR agency, whose clients include the global hotel chain Hyatt and the US chocolate brand Hershey.

Mack says in the past six months GEO has become a hot topic in brand-marketing conversations. "Clients are starting to mention it now, whereas earlier this year nobody even knew what to call it," she says.

In-house marketers and agency partners are learning as they go. Some digital marketers are nervously asking how to perform the role on industry forums. And, Mack says, mastering chatbot relevancy was the talk of October's brightonSEO event, one of the world's largest search-marketing conferences.

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Performance metrics for GEO managers are opaque. SEO managers can use Google Analytics to demonstrate how their work helps to increase traffic to the company website or tally the clicks a new blog post has generated. For GEO managers, however, success is still being defined.

"We currently can't see [brand website traffic] that has come from being featured in GenAI results," Mack says. "That's a piece of the puzzle we are waiting for Google to implement."

Another challenge for a GEO manager is that GenAI owners are keeping schtum on how exactly it all works. The methodologies deciding whether a brand or a product rank in a ChatGPT response, or are included in Gemini's AI overview at the top of a Google page, are not disclosed.

But Mack says brands that exhibit strong digital and business fundamentals will be the ones to win GenAI's attention.

Ensuring the brand website is well built and technically sound is key, she says. It must demonstrate with tangible evidence that the business holds authority in its field. Firms would also benefit from external content online that says the brand is worth including in GenAI results.

This is good news for small businesses that lack large marketing budgets. Unlike traditional search rankings, which can be purchased through Google Ads, GenAI rewards good technical foundations, not advertising spend, Mack explains. "You can't just appear in position one in GenAI search results because you've spent £2,000 to be there."

Mack adds: "Another key benefit of GenAI search currently not being monetised is that people are trusting its results more [over ad-enhanced results]."

However, experts say the window of opportunity for brands to optimise for GEO before it becomes a paid-for marketing channel is small.

Thierry Lalande is the CEO of Ipsos Synthesio GEO, which tracks and analyses GenAI results for its clients and helps them improve their rankings.

"Businesses will soon be able to influence their GenAI rankings, as they already can with SEO," says Lalande. This will likely be through a combination of paid-for advertising – the GEO version of Google Ads – and better knowledge of how GenAI rankings work.

Mack agrees: "It is predicted in the industry that by the end of 2026, ChatGPT will roll out its own ad platform. OpenAI has already said it's in the works."

GenAI shopping is the next logical step. In October 2025, PayPal agreed a partnership with OpenAI to integrate its digital wallet in ChatGPT. The same month, a 'buy now' option was enabled for the online marketplace Etsy in ChatGPT search results.

"I wouldn't be surprised if GenAI providers roll out their own booking platforms in 2026," Mack says. This could revolutionise industries such as hospitality and travel.

Businesses must prepare for rapid changes in the way people browse, research and buy online, says Lalande. "Brands that make GEO a priority now could take a very strong share of voice in the LLMs if they can understand the system."

Looking further ahead, GEO could reshape company marketing teams. Large businesses, Lalande says, will need teams of people to analyse GenAI data and act on it.

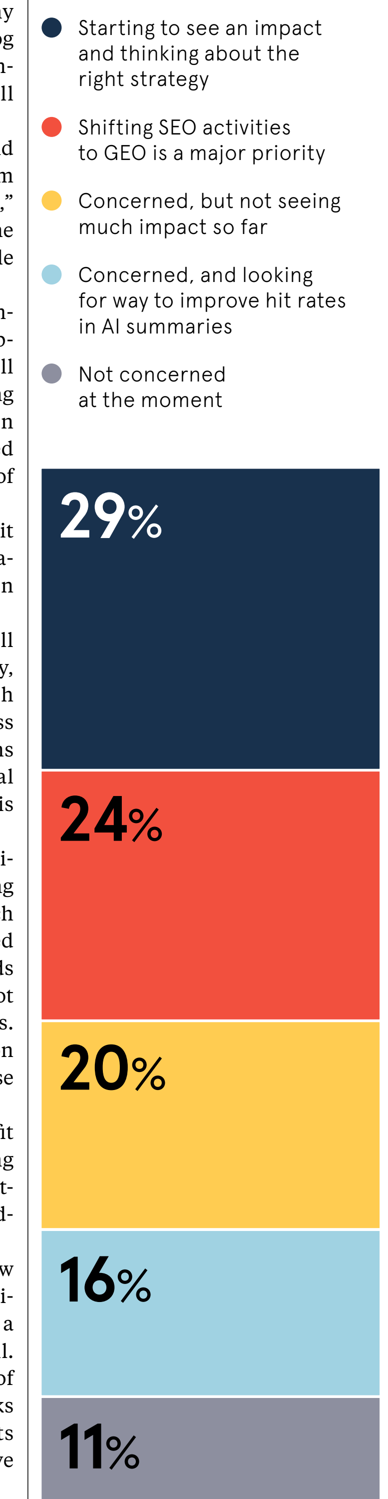
Both Lalande and Mack caution brands to be realistic: don't expect instant, quantifiable results from GEO efforts. "It's a new field. Everyone is learning," says Lalande.

Mack adds: "Because it is so new, GEO can't be seen as a performance channel. It must be seen as a brand-building channel initially."

For marketing professionals, the GEO role may present an opportunity for rewarding, AI-proof work in a tough jobs market – and for the businesses that hire them, a chance to be early out the gates before GenAI becomes a global sales channel.

SHIFT IN SEARCH

Marketers' thoughts on the impact of GenAI on traditional online search



Warc, 2025

Commercial feature

Strategic acceleration: the new rules of business transformation

Businesses are turning away from multi-year projects in favour of fast, expert-led transformations that deliver results and embed real cultural change

The accelerating pace of change in the global business environment means that organisations that stand still will inevitably fall behind.

And while transformation has long been central to business strategy, the speed and complexity of business evolution means that the way organisations deliver transformation is also changing.

Driven by cost pressures and a demand for greater efficiency and innovation, boards are increasingly being asked to achieve more with less: accelerating transformation programmes while at the same time demonstrating return on investment at every stage, for instance.

In practice, this means transformations are often shorter in scope and more frequent, with firms moving away from long, costly, multi-year programmes to modular ones. However, research by McKinsey shows that 70% of transformation programmes ultimately fail. So how can businesses succeed using the new rules of business transformation?

"Covid-19 was a wake-up call to businesses that they need to be prepared for major disruptions. The landscape is so disruptive now, with changes in tariffs, escalations with wars and other challenging events happening every month. Companies are now looking at how they can be more resilient and agile, while still addressing cost bases," says Dave Phillips, a transformation partner to Eton Bridge Consulting.

"This is making organisations think that they can't embark on a transformation that takes two to three years, because too much will happen in that time. So they're looking at shorter and more focused projects," he explains.

One way to achieve this is to engage smaller teams of interim experts or consultants to execute more manageable projects. Ben Cowan is partner and head of business transformation at Eton Bridge Partners. He believes that organisations are searching for a better return on investment in shorter transformation cycles.

"Businesses are definitely looking at transformation projects being more bite-sized and controllable. That might mean a smaller, interim team of experts where business can hire in the expertise they need with specific skills to deliver a project. Big and complex is not flavour of the month, so the interim model appeals," Cowan says.

The benefits of interim-led consulting

Using an interim model enables businesses to benefit from tailored transformation expertise at a predictable price. While interim appointments can also help with strategic analysis and programme building, their on-the-ground experience means they are more focused on delivering transformation.

"In the past, clients were happy with a traditional consulting firm bringing in a team of people who were fairly inexperienced but could follow a playbook over a longer period of time. Now, with shorter, more focused programmes, they want experts who have been there and done it multiple times," says Phillips.

Working with a more agile model enables businesses to deal with fluctuations in demand, switching transformation needs on or off as required. Utilising an interim team of delivery experts can also provide a capability uplift to existing internal teams, as skills are transferred through the transformation programme.

"If a business is going to hire outside expertise, those professionals need to transfer their knowledge and expertise to internal teams to allow them to fly on their own in the future. As trusted partners, the interim consulting model is much more aligned for capability uplift," says Cowan.

One key aspect of creating successful transformation programmes is ensuring effective change-management structures are in place to enable the right behaviours and create a positive culture. Without these, the longevity of transformations can be short-lived.

"People talk about transformation being people, process and technology. But at the end of the day all the technology does is allow processes to be automated. It's the people that must change to be able to adopt new processes – it's all about people," says Cowan.

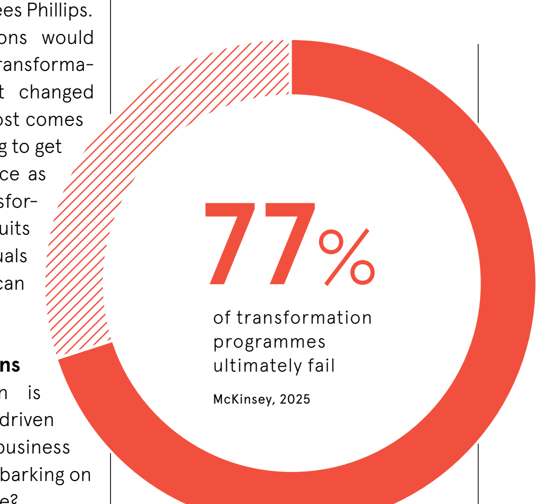
"Clients increasingly recognise the need for cultural behaviour change as part of transformation," agrees Phillips.

"In the past, organisations would have implemented cost-transformation programmes but not changed any behaviours – and the cost comes back. We see clients wanting to get the right behaviours in place as an integral part of the transformation programme, which suits a delivery model of individuals who have expertise and can coach and guide," he adds.

Successful transformations

If modern transformation is about short, sharp change, driven by experts, then what must business leaders consider before embarking on a transformation programme?

> Modern business transformation demands agility, expertise and a focus on people as much as processes



Culture and behavioural change is one aspect, but another is managing competing aims and changing circumstances during the transformation. Effective transformation isn't just about improving each function; it's also about how each function works concurrently across the organisation. Flexibility and adaptability are key.

"There is a danger that organisations try to do everything at the same time in a long, inflexible programme. The problem with that is the market changes. Some of the things that need to be done will evolve," says Phillips.

"When you have a big transformation, you have lots of functions competing for the same resources. It's a skill to programme manage this, rather than project manage. A lot of people feel they need to stick to a rigid plan, but the real world isn't like that. You need to manage day by day, adapting the organisation as the market evolves," he adds.

Above all, it's about ensuring that transformation programmes aren't just theorised, but actually delivered, embedded and acted upon.

"A lot of organisations are comfortable merely receiving a report telling them what's possible. But often, they have no idea how to turn theory and ideas into a programme of work they can deliver. It's one thing to know where you want to get to, but another to mobilise and deliver on that. That's where an interim model can really provide expertise," Cowan says.

Modern business transformation demands agility, expertise and a focus on people as much as processes. By embracing shorter, targeted programmes, leveraging interim specialists and embedding cultural change, organisations can navigate uncertainty and deliver tangible results. Transformation is no longer a long-term aspiration – it's a continuous, adaptable practice.