

The Deloitte logo is positioned in the top left corner. It features the word "Deloitte" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, followed by a small green dot. The background of the entire slide is a dark blue gradient with a large, glowing circular light effect in the center, composed of concentric rings of blue and orange light with radiating lines.

CMO Insights: How to become and be a successful CMO

Research comparing the thoughts, experience,
behaviours and activities of Chief Marketing
Officers with Senior Marketing Leaders

February 2025

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Foreword

Marketing continues to be an exciting place to work; technology is prompting disruption left, right and centre; economic fragility is forcing us to work smarter; consumers face more choice than ever; the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) role continues to broaden. The future is approaching ever faster and needs to be approached responsibly. However, some things remain constant like basic marketing principles and the fundamentals of leadership.

We created this unique research to help CMOs understand how their thoughts, experiences, behaviours and activities compare to their peers. And, to help Senior Marketing Leaders (SMLs) understand how the way they're thinking and what they're doing, differs from their leaders.

We do this across three sections of Leading your Board, Leading Your Colleagues and Teams; and Leading Yourself. Performing across each of these three areas is critical for success.

This year's report contrasts responses against last year's findings with some interesting results and potential trends. We also compare male and female responses for a few questions for the first time with some interesting results.

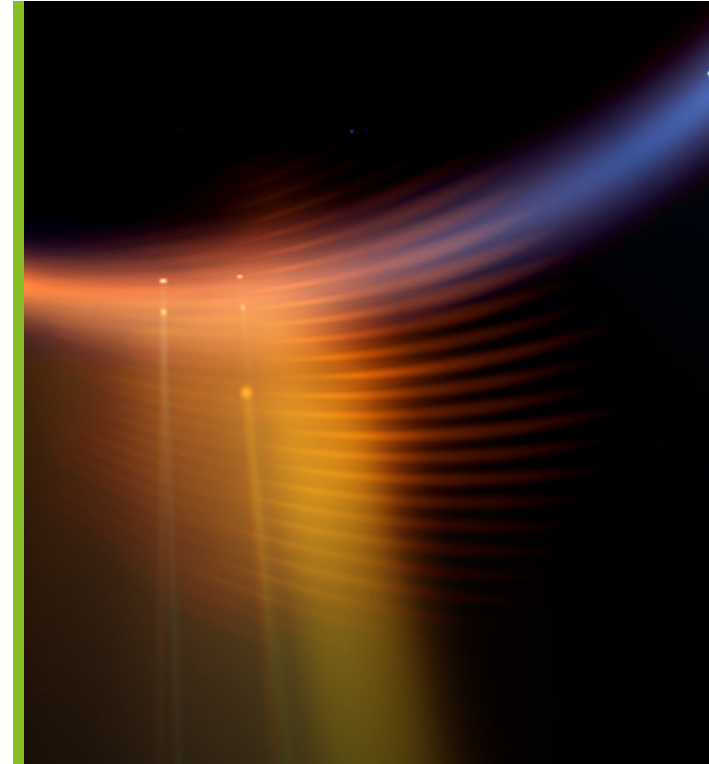
I'm excited about the insights this second CMO Insights report reveals, and how it can be a useful guide to both CMOs and SMLs, recognising that others have the same fears, aspirations and challenges. Our aim is that it helps you in your own growth journey, and sparks interesting debate with your peers and teams. I'd love to hear your thoughts on the findings.

My thanks to all our respondents and all who helped pull this report together.

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Introduction

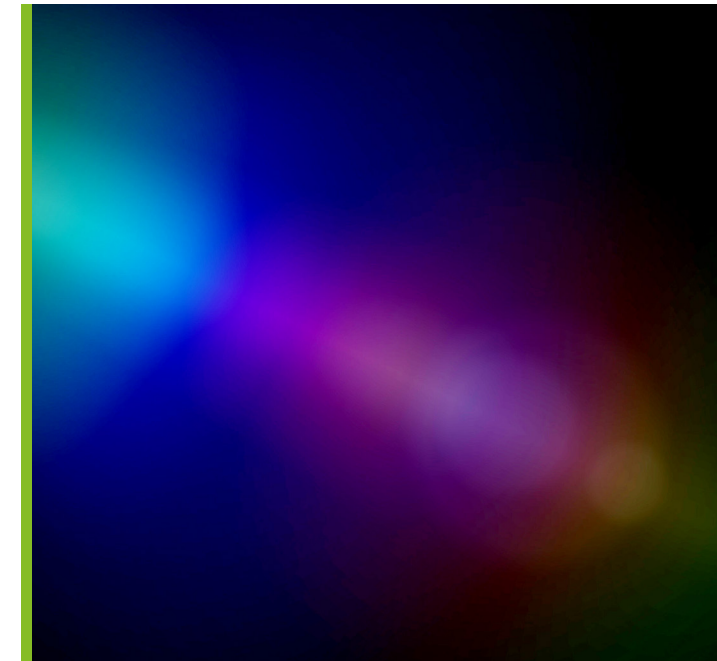
What does it take to become a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO)? Our latest annual research provides unique insight into the thoughts, experience, behaviours and activities of CMOs and offers a comparison with Senior Marketing Leaders (SMLs) to determine how to become and be a successful CMO.

The role of a CMO extends far beyond traditional marketing expertise and marketing metrics. By examining the evolving skillset required for success, the importance of work-life balance, and the impact of emerging technologies like Generative AI, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to not only become a CMO but to thrive as a leader in the ever-dynamic world of marketing. CMOs need to be futurists with the skills and agility to balance and meet the challenges of today, while shaping and delivering the vision for tomorrow.

Drawing on insights from 84 CMOs and SMLs, this research explores the challenges and opportunities facing marketers. This year we take the research further by exploring the nuances around gender to better understand the path to becoming CMO.

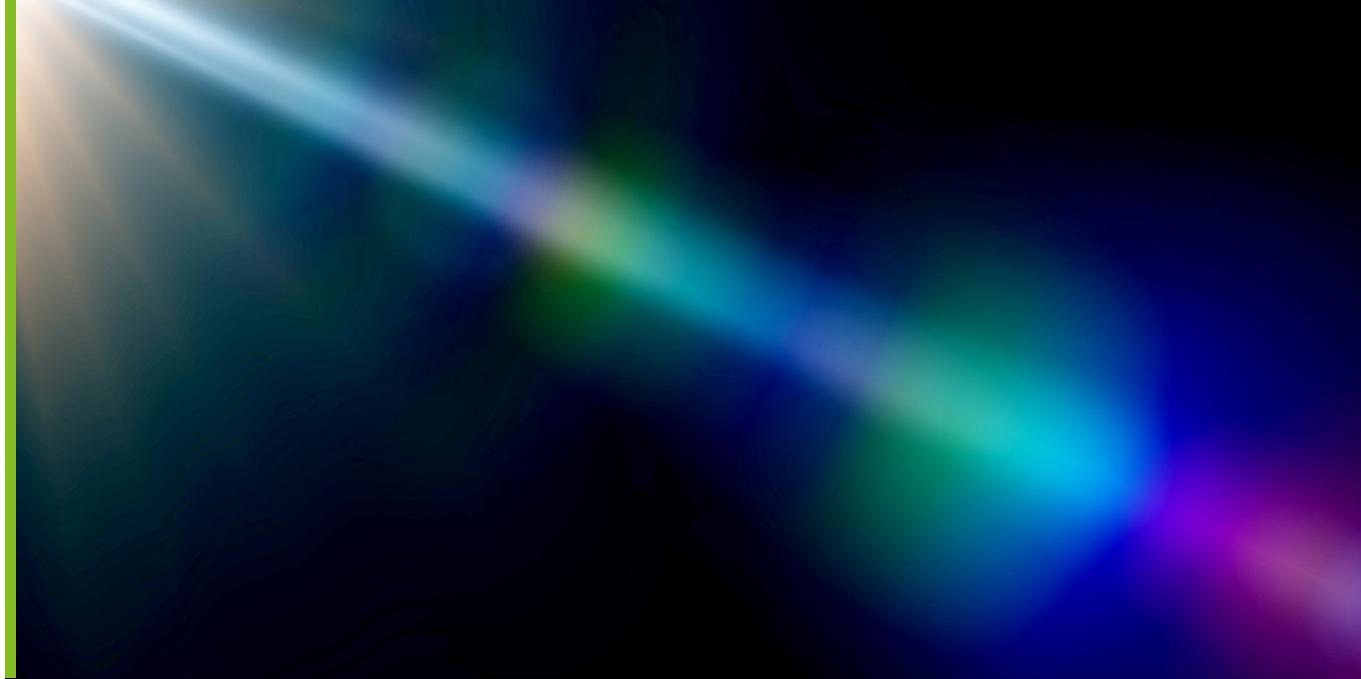
Our research set out to help CMOs understand how they compare against their peers and for SMLs to understand what they need to do differently as they make their transition to the top role and the C-suite. As this is the second year we've carried out the research, we are able to track how the role continues to evolve and how CMO priorities are changing over time. In this way, our survey provides the most up-to-date insight to SMLs in an ever-evolving environment that could help them on their path to not only becoming a CMO, but becoming a successful one. The research explores topics related to leading your board, leading your colleagues and team, and leading yourself. This provides a deep-dive into how CMOs and SMLs compare in their behaviour and activities, as well as their experiences along their career path. We've enjoyed researching this topic and sharing the findings is one of the ways we are able to help

empower CMOs and SMLs to fulfil their potential, that of their organisations and the wider marketing industry. We'd love to hear your views so please feel free to get in touch with one of the team if you'd like to discuss any of these findings in more detail.



Methodology

The study was conducted by Deloitte UK. Data was collected in October 2024 and surveyed 34 Chief Marketing Officers and 50 Senior Marketing Leaders in the United Kingdom – giving a total sample of 84 marketing leaders. The respondents had a wide range of experience, half of all respondents have 11 or more years of experience in marketing, and nearly a quarter of the CMOs have more than 20 years. The organisations were across seven key industries, ranging from an annual revenue of less than £5 million up to more than £50 billion and were a mix of Business to Business (B2B) and Business to Consumer (B2C).



Trend 1

Navigating uncertainty:
How CMOs are steering marketing strategy

Marketing leaders are tasked with shaping and communicating their vision to internal stakeholders across the breadth of their organisation and then reflecting that externally through brand and marketing. Senior marketers view soft and strategic skills as the key to the execution of this task.

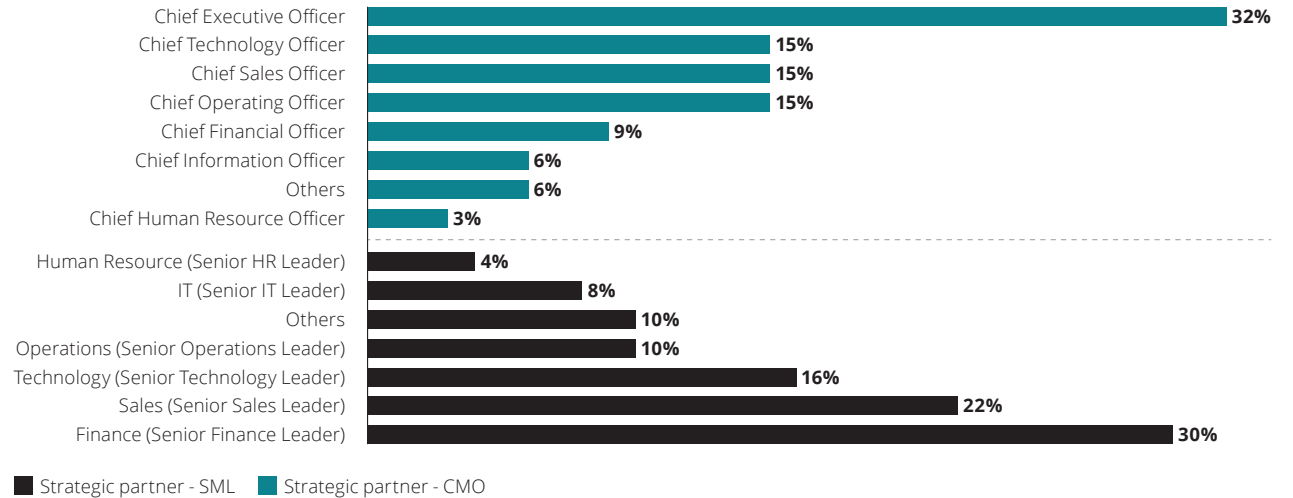
For the second year in a row, the economic environment is the most pressing concern, with uncertain market conditions influencing senior marketers' thinking and how they flex their strategies and optimise their teams in order to stay relevant. However, despite economic headwinds and shrinking marketing budgets, Chief Marketing Officers are increasingly confident that their budgets are being allocated optimally.

Marketing leaders wide-ranging influence

To deliver effective and integrated customer experiences, the role of Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) or Senior Marketing Leader (SML) relies heavily on effective cross-departmental collaboration. Yet, how does the level of seniority affect who marketers work most with and who do they view as their most important collaborator?

As CMO, your strategic partner will most likely be the CEO. In fact, for around one third of CMOs, their most important partner is the CEO. This reflects the need for the CMOs to connect the marketing vision of the firm to broader leadership objectives – to be working with, not just for, the CEO. Chief Technology

Figure 1: Who is your most important strategic partner in the organisation outside marketing?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (CMO) = 34, N (SML) = 50

Officer (CTO) (15%), Chief Sales Officer (CSO) (15%) and Chief Operating Officer (COO) (15%), are the second most frequently selected by CMOs as their most important partner.

It is likely that over time a CMO's most important strategic partners will change given business conditions. For example, when innovation is the focus, the CTO may become more likely to be their key partner. Or when launching a new product, there might be an increased focus on synchronisation between marketing and sales, making the CSO their most important partner. As a CMO, it is important to be adaptable, recognising that your most important strategic partner can change over time as a reflection of internal and external conditions. The most successful CMOs place the business first, and marketing second, earning the trust of the CEO, CFO and the entire leadership team.¹

SMLs work more with finance and sales than any other function

SMLs show greater diversity in who they work with and who their strategic partners are than CMOs. Together, finance (30%) and sales (22%) make up just over half of SML's most important partners in marketing. The selection of finance and sales as keys partners underscores the pressure on senior marketers to demonstrate the financial impact of marketing initiatives on the organisation, moving beyond simply reporting costs, and focusing on the return on investment and growth they create for the organisation.

For SMLs, their most important partners are also the ones who they spend the most time with – 28 per cent work with sales most frequently while 24 per cent work with finance most frequently. This might reflect the more operational role of SMLs in ensuring that marketing initiatives are financially viable and tied to sales targets compared to CMOs' more strategic role. SMLs collaborating directly with finance and sales suggests that they are making use of financial metrics and sales performance insights to inform the wider marketing strategy.

CEOs are the most important partner for CMOs, but not their closest collaborator

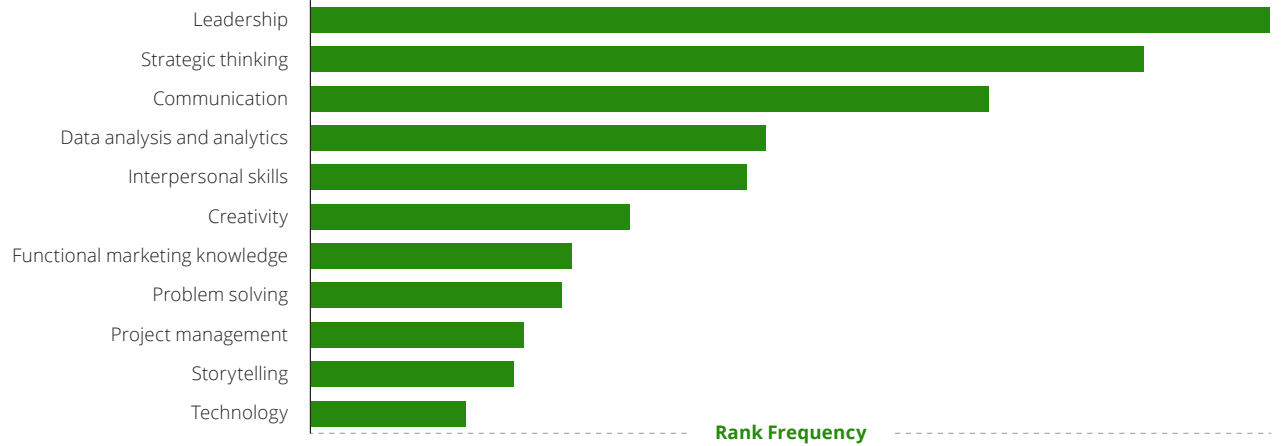
There is a notable difference between who CMOs report as their most important strategic partner and who they work with the most. For CMOs, the CEO is most commonly selected as their most important strategic partner (33%). Despite the prioritisation of the CEO as their most important strategic partner, both CSO (29%) and CTO (24%), rank above the CEO (21%) in terms of who they work the most with. For 15 per cent of CMOs, they work with the CEO less than any other C-suite executive. This highlights the disparity between who CMOs view as most important and who they collaborate most with. It is important that CMOs carve out adequate time with the CEO to ensure they are able to influence and help shape organisation-wide priorities like market positioning and growth planning.

Soft and strategic skills outrank technical know-how

CMOs and SMLs are aligned in choosing the same top three skills useful for their current role as leadership, strategic thinking and communication. This is the second year running where these have been found as the three most important skills. While leadership drives the overall vision, strategic thinking enables a roadmap to get there with communication acting as the pathway to make it clear to others. The mutually reinforcing relationship between these skills makes having all three essential for CMOs and SMLs and ensures that internal teams are aligned, stakeholders are adequately informed and the brand's voice resonates authentically with its audience.²

On the other hand, technology ranks as the least important skill. The marketers within our sample have likely reached a level of seniority where others are carrying out operational activities using marketing technologies, enabling them to prioritise higher level more strategic activities.

Figure 2: What skills are most useful for your current role?



Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N = 84 (CMO+SML)

Economic conditions remain the central concern for marketers

For the second year in a row, economic conditions are viewed as the most pressing issues facing marketers. CMOs and SMLs are used to adapting in an economic downturn, where price sensitivity and reduced discretionary spend become a real factor in shifting consumer behaviours. Understanding customer behaviours and needs here is key.³

Current economic conditions are not just affecting consumers - many organisations have reduced their marketing budgets as a proportion of overall spend.^{4,5} Where marketing budgets are reduced, CMOs and SMLs are handed the unenviable task of trying to do more with fewer resources. Pressure on senior marketers is further intensified because when revenue is not growing or profit margins are becoming thinner, there is often an increased expectation for greater return on investment on marketing spend.⁶

Figure 3: What do you think are the most pressing issues you're facing in your role today?



Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N = 84 (CMO+SML)

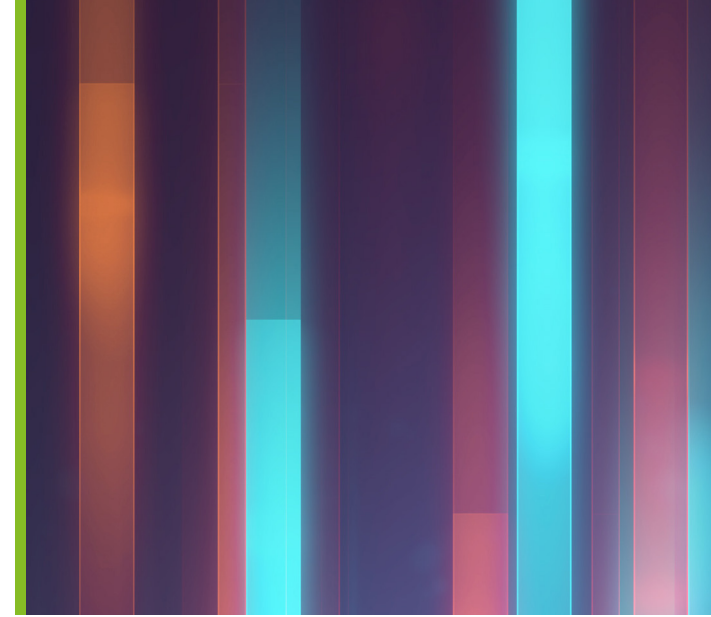
Digital transformation remains steadfast as the second most pressing issue and leveraging AI has risen two percentage points from last year, making it the joint third most pressing issue. The pressure to engage in digital transformation, and utilise technologies like AI, are likely because they enable marketers to tackle the other issues which marketers face more effectively. Digital transformation and

leveraging AI can allow marketers to collect and analyse data more effectively – enabling a more comprehensive understanding of what customers want, greater personalisation of experiences and better customer targeting and retention. More efficient data collection and analysis liberates time for marketers and allows them to dedicate more effort to more value-adding tasks.

Talent, societal and environmental concerns rank last for senior marketers

Availability of talent was ranked lowest in the list of pressing issues for marketers. Moreover, when it comes to identifying their most important strategic partner – both SMLs and CMOs ranked the human resource function as their least important partner. Economic conditions and the pressure felt most by marketers is likely a key contributor to these outcomes. As organisations have become more cost conscious and pressures have increased on marketers to demonstrate value for money, one consequence of this is likely lowering their cost base by reducing the number of new hires into the function.⁷ One report found that the number of people working in advertising and marketing in the UK fell by 14 per cent between 2019 – 2022.⁸

Societal and environmental concerns were ranked the second least pressing issues for CMOs. This is likely also driven by economic conditions as organisations focus on key growth areas. The issues which are most pressing for marketers are a reflection of consumer concerns. In the UK, the cost-of-living crisis has made most consumers more cost conscious and reduce discretionary spend – around 6 in 10 adults in Great Britain said they were spending less on non-essentials due to the cost of living.⁹ Economic hardship has meant that for many people, cost is increasingly the driving force behind purchase decisions and thus diminishing the role of social and environmental concerns on spending behaviours.¹⁰

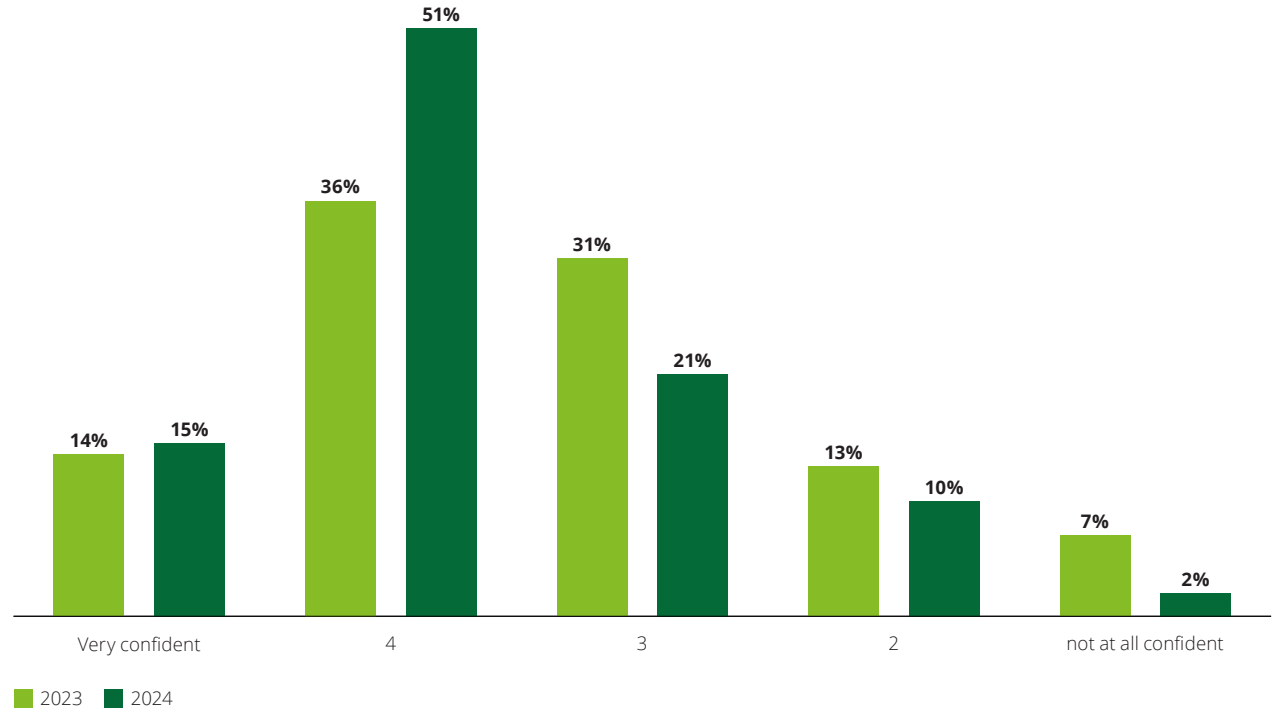


Marketers are growing increasingly confident their budget allocation is being used optimally

From 2023 to 2024, the number of senior marketers who are confident or very confident that their marketing budget allocation is being optimised has grown by 16 percentage points to 66 per cent. CMOs also tend to be more confident than their less senior counterparts, with 74 per cent of CMOs at least confident that their budgets are optimised compared with 62 per cent of SMLs.

An increasing emphasis on return on investment may be partially responsible for this growth in confidence. A 2024 study from Gartner found that marketing budgets as a proportion of company revenue declined from 9.1 per cent in 2023 to 7.7 per cent in 2024.¹¹ As marketing budgets fall, it is likely there has been increased focus on demonstrating measurable results. Given these pressures, senior marketers have likely become more focused on budget optimisation, effective resource allocation and spend monitoring.

Figure 4: On a scale where 1 means "not at all confident" and 5 means "very confident", how confident are you that your marketing budget allocation is optimised?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 CMO+SML) = 72, N (2024 CMO+SML) = 84

Key recommendations

- **Choose who you spend time with wisely**

While CMOs ranked the CEO as their number one most important strategic partner, this is not reflective of who they spend the most time with. For some CMOs, they spend less time with the CEO than any other member of the C-suite. To bridge this gap, CMOs should meet with the CEO and their other most important partners regularly. This can help to ensure CMOs can appropriately exert influence across the organisation and align the marketing function with organisation-wide objectives.

- **Leverage digital transformation and AI**

CMOs and SMLs should utilise data analytics and AI-powered solutions to gain deeper insights into customer behaviour, predict market trends and personalise customer experiences at scale. By leveraging data and AI, marketers can best position themselves to deal with many of their most pressing issues like the current economic conditions, changing consumer preferences and the need for efficient resource allocation.

- **Use data to demonstrate ROI on marketing spend**

As marketing budgets in organisations tighten, it is important that both CMOs and SMLs are able to measure and track the impact of marketing initiatives effectively. Collaboration with other departments, like finance and sales, can help marketers gather data on the effectiveness of marketing campaigns. While CMOs are increasingly confident that their budgets are being spent optimally, it is crucial that they have the data to substantiate this.

Endnotes

1. **What's Happening With the Role of the CMO?** | Wall Street Journal, 2024.
2. **15 Things You Need To Create A Highly Successful Career As A CMO** | TheCMO, 2024.
3. **REDI-Updates: How are Consumer Trends Changing in the Cost-Of-Living Crisis?** | City-REDI, University of Birmingham, 2023.
4. **Gartner CMO Survey Reveals Marketing Budgets Have Dropped to 7.7% of Overall Company Revenue in 2024** | Gartner, 2024.
5. **Don't Cut Your Marketing Budget in a Recession** | Harvard Business Review, 2020.
6. **CMOs Are Under Pressure Again: Tips For Navigating Through Turbulent Times** | Forbes, 2024.
7. **CMOs are under intense pressure to get more bang for their buck** | Deloitte Africa, 2024.
8. **Ad Association puts Investment in Talent at Heart of 3-year strategy** | Creative Salon, 2023.
9. **Cost of living latest insights** | Office for National Statistics, 2024.
10. **The Sustainable Consumer** | Deloitte UK, 2024.
11. **Gartner CMO Survey Reveals Marketing Budgets Have Dropped to 7.7% of Overall Company Revenue in 2024** | Gartner, 2024.



Trend 2

The evolution of marketing leaders
in the technology renaissance

With technological advancement happening at an exponential rate, marketing leaders and their teams, like many others, are experiencing a profound transformation. While the fundamental components of the marketing mix remain, Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) that embrace digital transformation and adopt new technologies such as AI by integrating them into their marketing operations will sustain value creation. This also enables them to harness valuable data-driven insights into what is important today and what will be critical tomorrow. This evolution in roles and responsibilities is not just beneficial, but essential for delivering enhanced value and staying ahead in a dynamic market.

The role of marketing leaders continues to evolve, with today's changes dominated by technology, data and Generative AI (GenAI). In our second year of conducting the CMO Insights research, there have been some fascinating shifts in the mindset and operational approaches of marketing leaders as they adapt during this technological renaissance. This renaissance is characterised by groundbreaking innovations that are fundamentally transforming marketing strategies and practices. GenAI has revolutionised marketing capabilities and will transform marketing practices.

One area where this shift to focus on emerging technology is evident is the prioritisation of digital marketing as the biggest change to the role in the last year. The 2024 research highlights that the top three ranked role changes over the past five years are an increasing focus on digital marketing, the role becoming more data-driven, and a greater emphasis on analytics and the use of AI. This evidences just how much technology and data are becoming integral to the role of marketing leaders. Their roles are increasingly dependent on digital platforms and technologies to reach target audiences more effectively, with wider reach, lower costs, better targeting capabilities and measurable results.

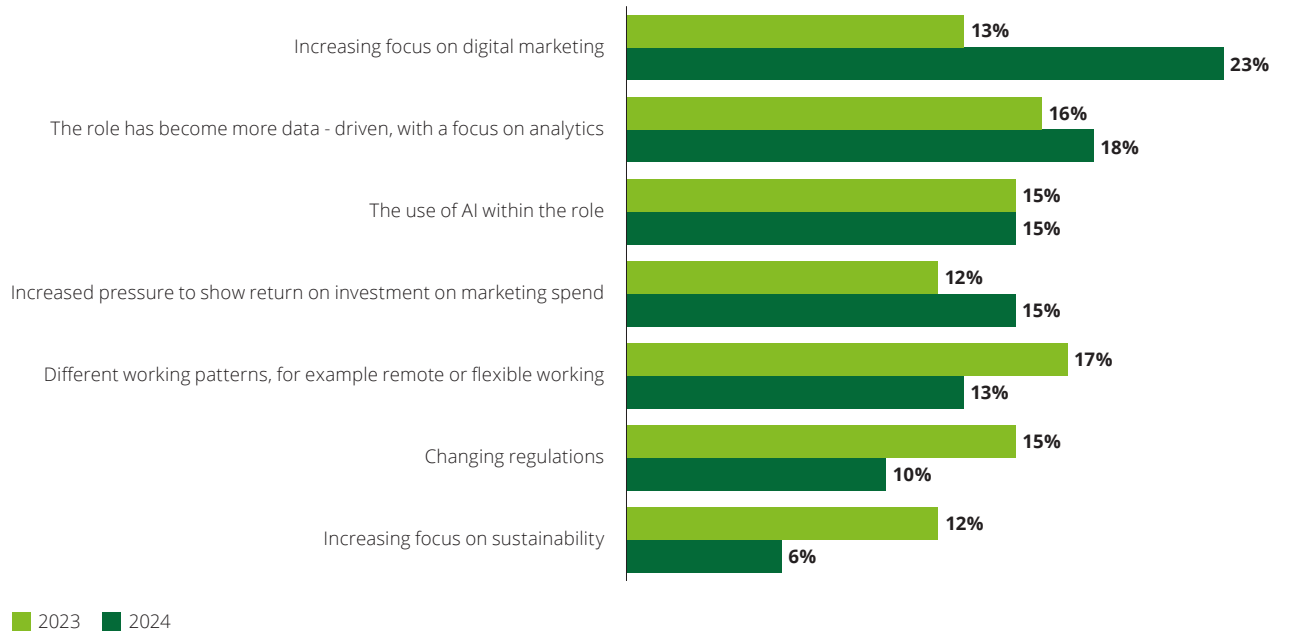


This year's findings indicate that flexible or remote working is no longer a primary focus for marketing leaders. Last year, this change was ranked first when respondents were asked about the most significant changes to the role over the past five years. However, now in our latest research findings, this role change has dropped to fifth place, with the top-ranked change now being an increased focus on digital marketing, which was ranked fifth in the previous year.

This shift may be attributed to the diminishing impact of the pandemic. In the UK, "flexible" jobs accounted for only 16.5 per cent of total vacancies advertised on a recruitment site in February 2024, a slight increase from 2019.¹ This data suggests that while flexible working remains an important aspect for marketing leaders, it is no longer the most pressing need.

An unexpected finding in this year's research emerged when marketing leaders were asked about the biggest changes to their roles over the past five years. Notably, the impact of changing regulations, which was ranked as the third most significant change in 2024, has dropped to sixth place in 2025. This shift is surprising given that organisations must navigate an increasingly complex global regulatory landscape

Figure 1: What do you think has been the biggest changes to your role over the past five years? (Rank top 3 with 1 being the biggest change)



Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 CMO+SML) = 72, N (2024 CMO+SML) = 84

with jurisdictions moving at different speeds.² Despite this complexity, it appears that these regulatory changes have not significantly influenced the responsibilities or priorities of marketing leaders. This

suggests that marketing leaders have either adapted effectively to these regulatory changes or that other factors, such as technological advancements, have taken precedence in shaping their roles.

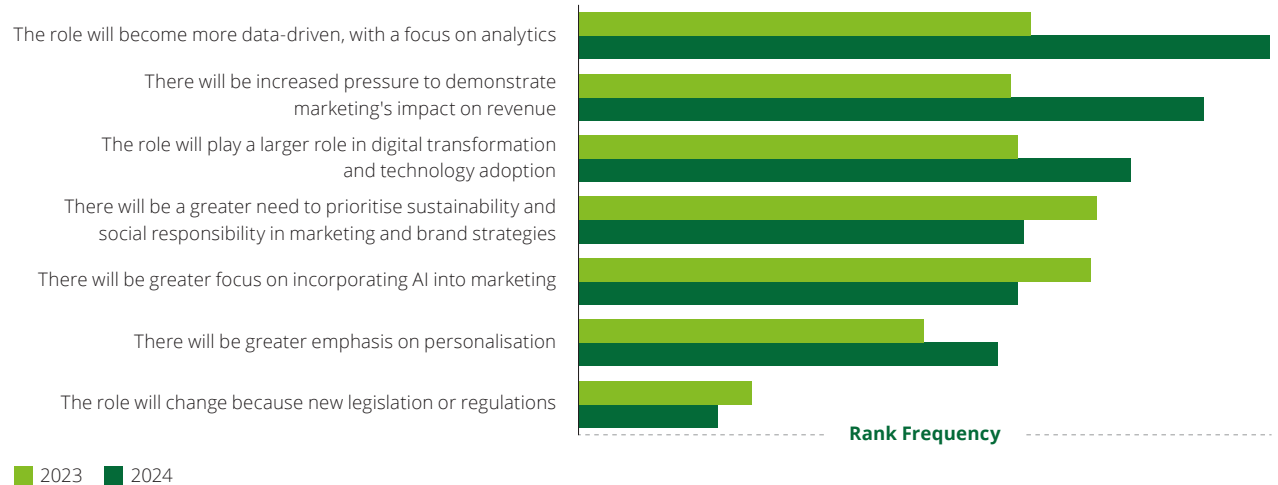
Evolving priorities of marketing leaders: Balancing data-driven decision making, revenue impact and sustainability

The perception of how marketing leaders' roles will change over the next two years contrasts sharply with their views from just a year ago. This indicates the rapid pace at which the responsibilities of marketing leaders are changing and the speed at which they must adapt. Last year, sustainability and social responsibilities in marketing were ranked as the top priority. However, in 2025 these aspects dropped to fourth place in terms of how marketing leaders perceive their roles will change over the next two years. This shift appears despite research suggesting business leaders are clear on the return on investment (ROI) from sustainability initiatives and a significant proportion of companies plan to increase their sustainability investments in 2025.³

Adding to this complexity, a recent CMO Spend Survey reveals the 2024 average budgets have fallen by 15 per cent, as CMOs pursue growth in the 'Era of Less'.⁴ This budget reduction further complicates the prioritisation of sustainability as marketing leaders must balance limited resources with the need to drive growth. Within the CMO community, there is a debate if sustainability as a market focus

is now a given and should be integrated seamlessly into all marketing efforts, while others contend that focusing on sustainability is too costly during tough economic times. It is essential to acknowledge both perspectives, recognising that while sustainability is a long-term commitment, immediate financial constraints may necessitate a strategic recalibration of priorities.

Figure 2: How do you perceive your role will change in the next two years? (Rank top 3 with 1 being the biggest change)



Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

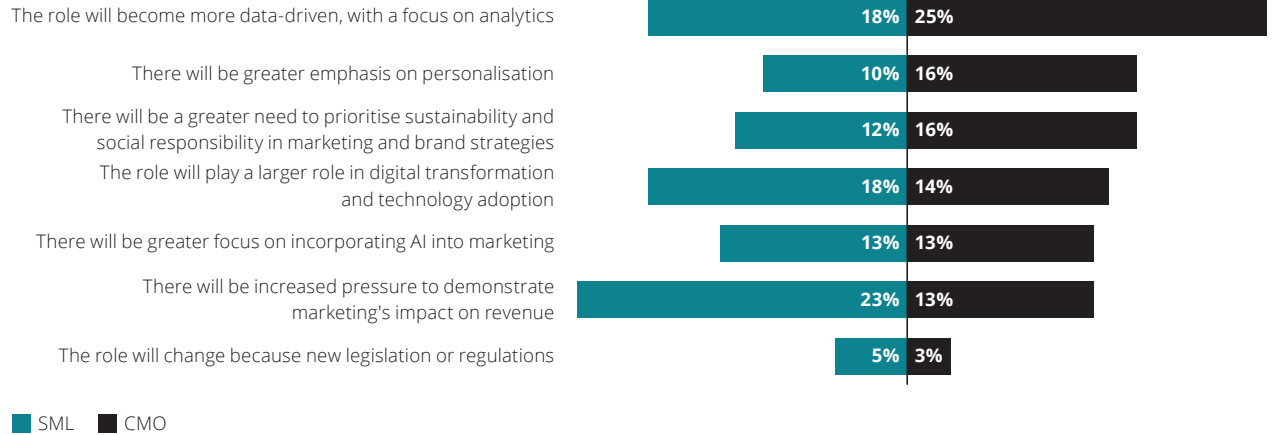
Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 CMO+SML) = 72, N (2024 CMO+SML) = 84

Another notable shift in this year's results is the focus on AI in marketing. AI was ranked second in 2024 but dropped to a surprising fifth place in the ranking of perceived changes in marketing leaders' roles over the next two years. This decline occurs even though the impact of AI remains significant, with a staggering three-quarters of leaders predicting that GenAI will lead to substantial or disruptive changes in their industries in the coming years.⁵ This suggests that while AI's potential is still recognised, there are other, more pressing matters that marketing leaders need to address. The urgency of these other priorities may be overshadowing the immediate focus on AI, even though its long-term impact is still anticipated to be significant.

Currently, marketing leaders are most focused on becoming more data-driven and analytical in their roles, followed closely by demonstrating marketing's impact on revenue. For CMOs, data and analytics are now the top-ranked perceived role change over the next two years. The emphasis on data analytics allows CMOs to move beyond instinct and assumptions, enabling them to base their decisions on concrete evidence. By collecting and analysing data from various sources such as customer interactions, social media, website traffic and sales

Figure 3: How do you perceive your role will change in the next two years? (Rank top 3 with 1 being the biggest change)

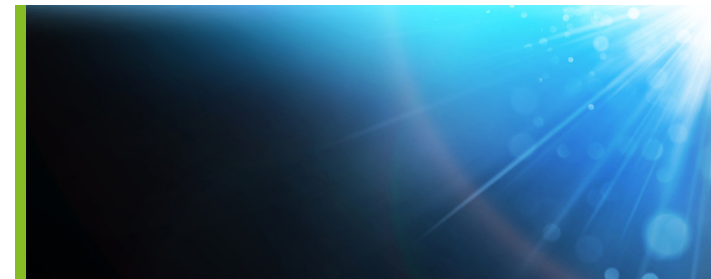


Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (CMO) = 34, N (SML) = 50

metrics, CMOs can uncover patterns, trends and correlations that inform their strategies.⁶ This data-driven approach is essential for CMOs as it provides an opportunity to create a new strategic direction for the organisation, fostering a truly data-driven firm where every decision is backed by data and there is a clear sense of direction in the organisation's marketing efforts.



In contrast, Senior Marketing Leaders (SMLs) are primarily focused on driving revenue through their marketing efforts and generating ROI for the business, followed by technology adoption and digital transformation of the business function. This highlights a clear difference in the approaches of CMOs and SMLs to their roles and responsibilities and distinguishes the end goals they are working towards. CMOs should communicate their priorities and achievements using insights harnessed from

data and analytics to SMLs to ensure that objectives are shared, and the impact is more achievable. By aligning their efforts and sharing insights, both CMOs and SMLs can work towards common goals, leveraging data-driven strategies to enhance their marketing effectiveness and drive business growth.

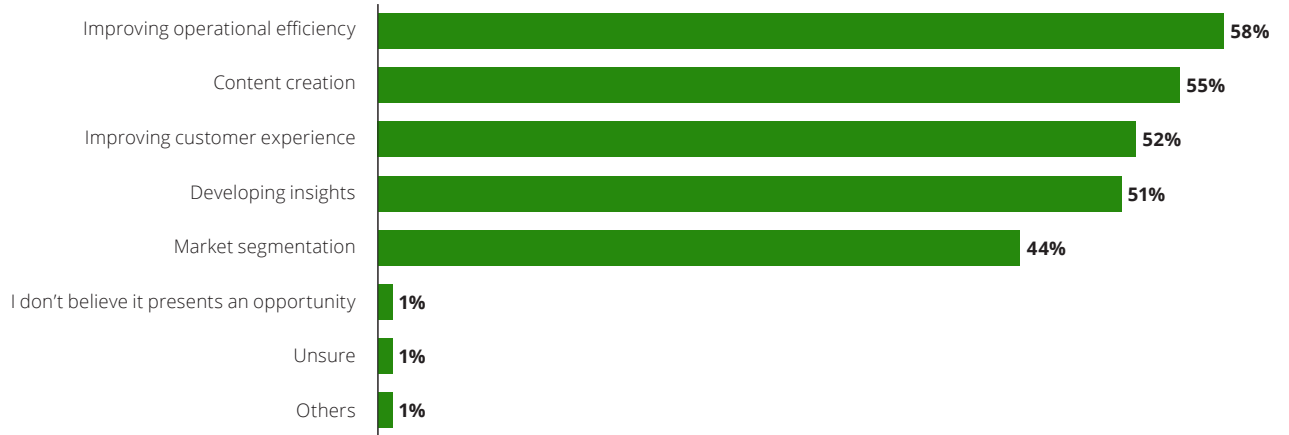
The evolving priorities of marketing leaders underscore the dynamic nature of their roles and the need for continuous adaptation. As they navigate

these changes, marketing leaders must balance immediate priorities with long-term strategic goals, ensuring that they remain agile and responsive to the ever-changing business landscape. By focusing on data-driven decision-making, demonstrating marketing's impact on revenue and maintaining a commitment to sustainability, marketing leaders can effectively steer their organisations towards sustained success.

AI innovation: Redefining marketing strategies and overcoming challenges

Marketing leaders are increasingly leveraging GenAI to enhance their operations. This year's research indicates that 58 per cent of marketing leaders identify "improving operational efficiency" as the biggest opportunity presented by GenAI, followed closely by "content creation" at 55 per cent. GenAI is being recognised as a transformative tool for operational efficiency, significantly enhancing speed and resource utilisation, enabling more agile processes, improving customer experiences and boosting employee satisfaction across various industries. Organisations that have already adopted GenAI are experiencing benefits such as improved operational efficiency, enhanced customer experience and increased sales.⁷

Figure 4: What do you see as the biggest opportunities of Generative AI for your role? (Select all that apply)



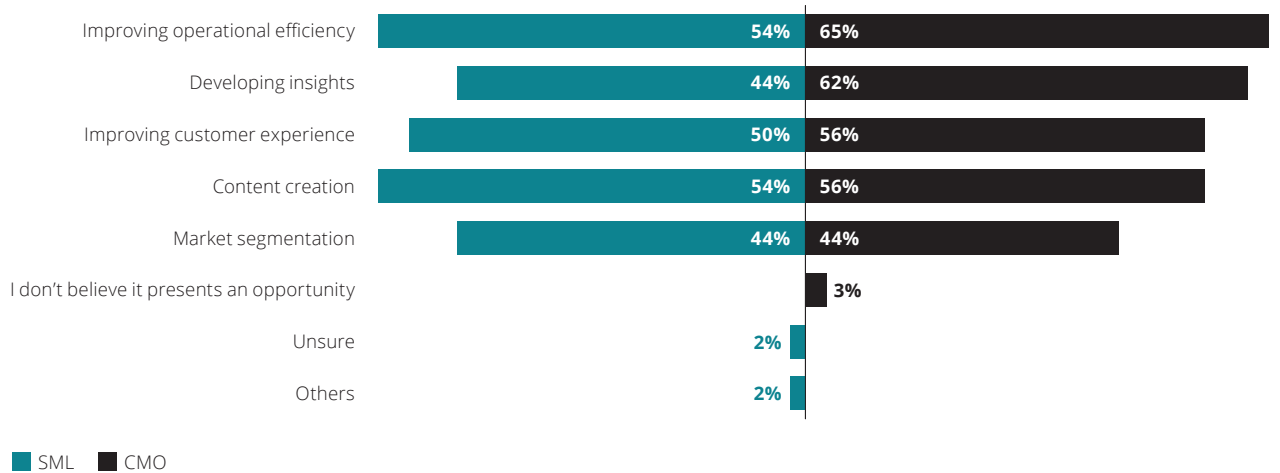
Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N = 84 (CMO+SML)

For CMOs, 65 per cent believe that improving operational efficiency is the primary opportunity offered by GenAI, while 54 per cent of SMLs share this view. Additionally, 54 per cent of SMLs consider content generation as the biggest opportunity for GenAI. GenAI supports various types of content creation in marketing, including personalised email campaigns, social media posts, blog articles, video scripts and product descriptions. Previous research revealed the demand for marketing content grew by 1.5 times in 2023, yet marketing teams were only able to meet that demand 55 per cent of the time.⁸ Marketers leveraging GenAI can potentially stay ahead of this demand by using the technology to support higher quality, more personalised and greater volume of content, thereby enhancing employee productivity.

Figure 5: What do you see as the biggest opportunities of Generative AI for your role? (Select all that apply)



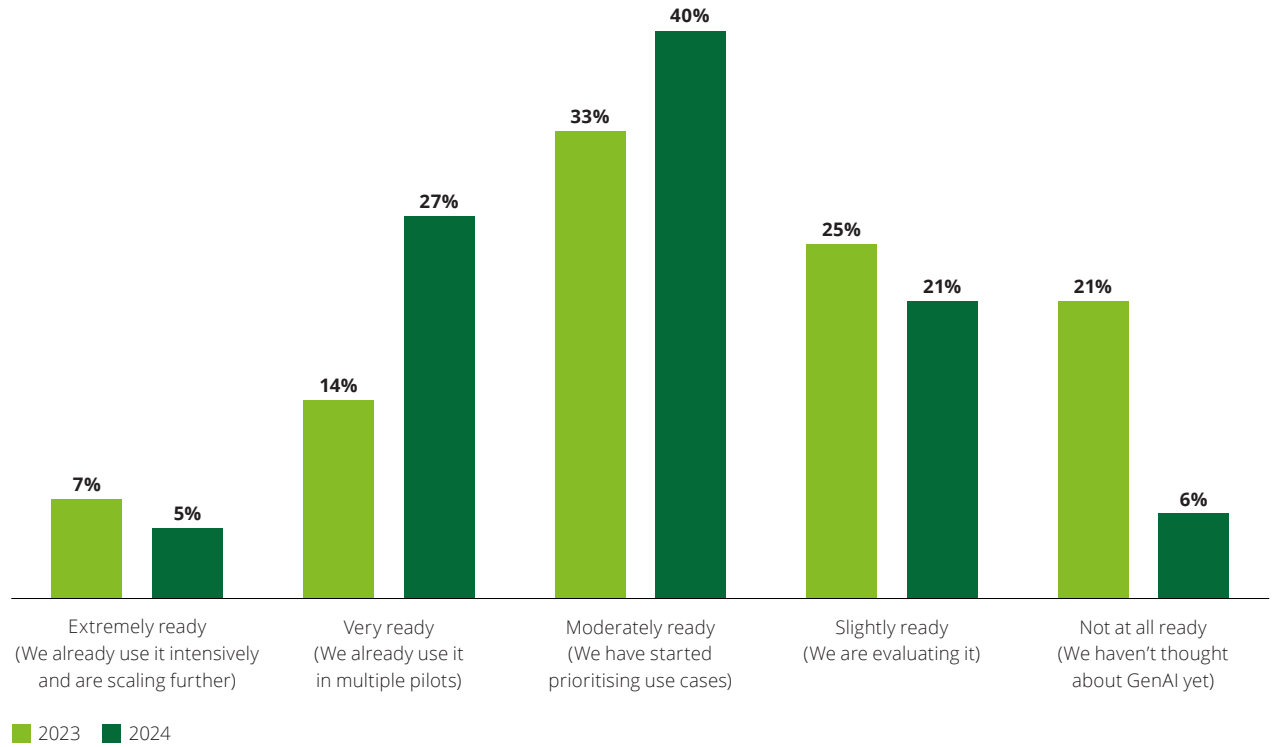
Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (CMO) = 34, N (SML) = 50

The readiness of marketing leaders to adopt AI in marketing has significantly increased. Compared to last year, the readiness has risen by 15 percentage points, with 94 per cent of marketing leaders now slightly to extremely ready to adopt AI in marketing. Of these, one-third are either very or extremely ready, compared to a fifth the previous year. This indicates a growing appetite for AI among marketing leaders. Notably, the respondents who marked themselves as not at all ready has dropped by 15 percentage points (from 21% last year to 6% in 2024). This decrease can be attributed to increased awareness and understanding of AI technologies, as well as more accessible and user-friendly AI tools being available in the market.



Figure 6: How ready are you to take advantage of AI within marketing in your organisation?



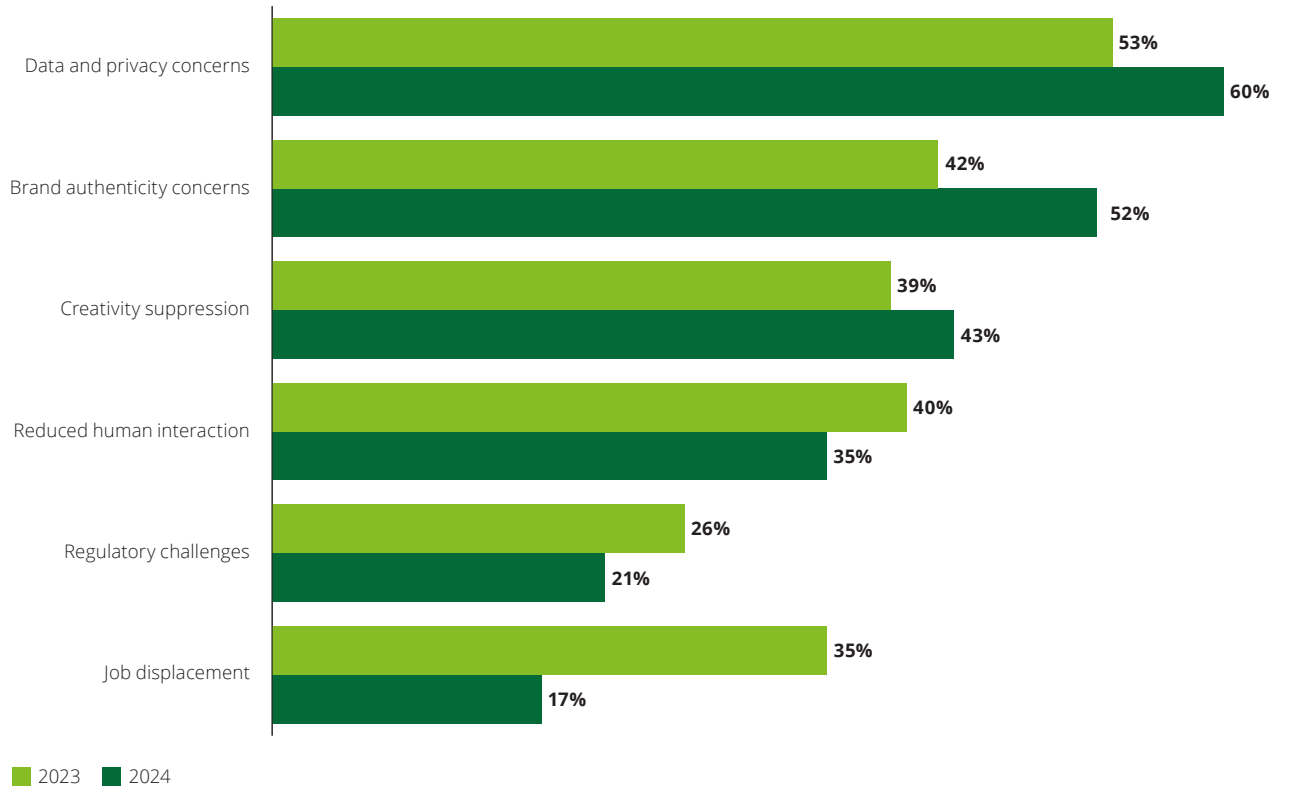
Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 CMO+SML) = 72, N (2024 CMO+SML) = 84

However, there are still concerns regarding the use of GenAI. Concerns about data and privacy are expressed by 60 per cent of respondents, an increase of 7 percentage points from last year. Another significant concern is brand authenticity, which has risen by a staggering 10 percentage points to 52 per cent this year. These concerns stem from several factors. AI-generated content can lack human touch and emotional nuance, leading to a disconnect with audiences. Consistency issues arise as GenAI may produce varying tones and styles. Ethical concerns about transparency and honesty can damage trust if customers feel deceived. Quality control and cultural sensitivity are challenging, risking inappropriate or low-quality content. Over-reliance on AI can also make brands seem impersonal and remove that sense of authenticity.

As AI use cases for marketers become increasingly prevalent, leaders who swiftly embrace these technologies position themselves to capitalise on the competitive advantages they offer. This year's survey underscores a clear message: marketing leaders must be adaptable to new technologies and leverage them to enhance both their own effectiveness and that of their teams.

Figure 7: What do you see as potentially negative consequences of the use of GenAI for your role? (Select all that apply)



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 CMO+SML) = 72, N (2024 CMO+SML) = 84

Summary

A significant transformation in marketing leadership roles is being driven by the technological renaissance and characterised by the integration of digital marketing, data analytics and AI. CMOs must now integrate new and emerging tech into their marketing mix and strategies to drive sustainable growth. Marketing leaders must continuously adapt to stay competitive and effectively steer their organisations towards success in this era of groundbreaking technological advancements. It is more vital than ever to stay informed and understand the implications of emerging technology on their business and seek opportunities to use it to truly be successful – especially with the potential GenAI offers marketers.

Key Recommendations

- **Embrace digital transformation**

Marketing leaders should prioritise digital marketing strategies to reach target audiences more effectively. Leveraging digital platforms can provide wider reach, lower costs, better targeting capabilities and measurable results. By integrating digital tools, CMOs can enhance their marketing efforts and stay ahead in a competitive landscape.

- **Leverage data and analytics**

CMOs must adopt a data-driven approach to make informed decisions. Collecting and analysing data from various sources, such as customer interactions and sales metrics, can uncover valuable insights. This approach enables CMOs to create strategic directions backed by concrete evidence and foster a data-driven culture within their organisations.

- **Integrate AI for operational efficiency**

GenAI offers significant opportunities to improve operational efficiency and content creation. Marketing leaders should leverage AI to enhance speed, resource utilisation and customer experiences. CMOs can boost employee productivity and meet the growing demand for high-quality marketing content by adopting AI technologies.

- **Maintain focus on sustainability**

Despite shifting priorities, sustainability remains a crucial aspect of marketing leadership. CMOs should continue to align sustainability initiatives with broader business goals, demonstrating the ROI of these efforts. By maintaining a commitment to sustainability, marketing leaders can contribute to long-term business success and positive societal impact.

Endnotes

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Trend 3

The path to CMO:

Insights and advice for aspiring marketing leaders

The growth journey to becoming a Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) requires a unique blend of skills, resilience and continuous adaptation. Offering a rare glimpse into the realities of leadership, this research explores the personal journeys of senior marketing leaders Senior Marketing Leaders (SMLs) and CMOs, revealing the challenges they overcame and the valuable lessons learned along the way. Aspiring CMOs must navigate limited connections, conquer self-doubt and cultivate a diverse skillset encompassing both technical knowledge and social skills for communication and collaboration. The increasing need for resilience in leadership and the critical role of continuous learning and building a strong peer-to-peer network are important factors in career success. It's also vital to recognise the significance of work-life balance, particularly for women in leadership roles, as it is crucial for both personal well-being and to attract and retain top talent. While formal qualifications remain beneficial, developing both technical and social skills is crucial for success in today's dynamic marketing landscape.

Competing priorities hinder marketers career growth

There are many challenges that can impact career progression. This study reveals both CMOs and SMLs acknowledge that a key hurdle in their career journeys was establishing the necessary connections and networks. This finding highlights the significance of relationship-building as a critical factor influencing

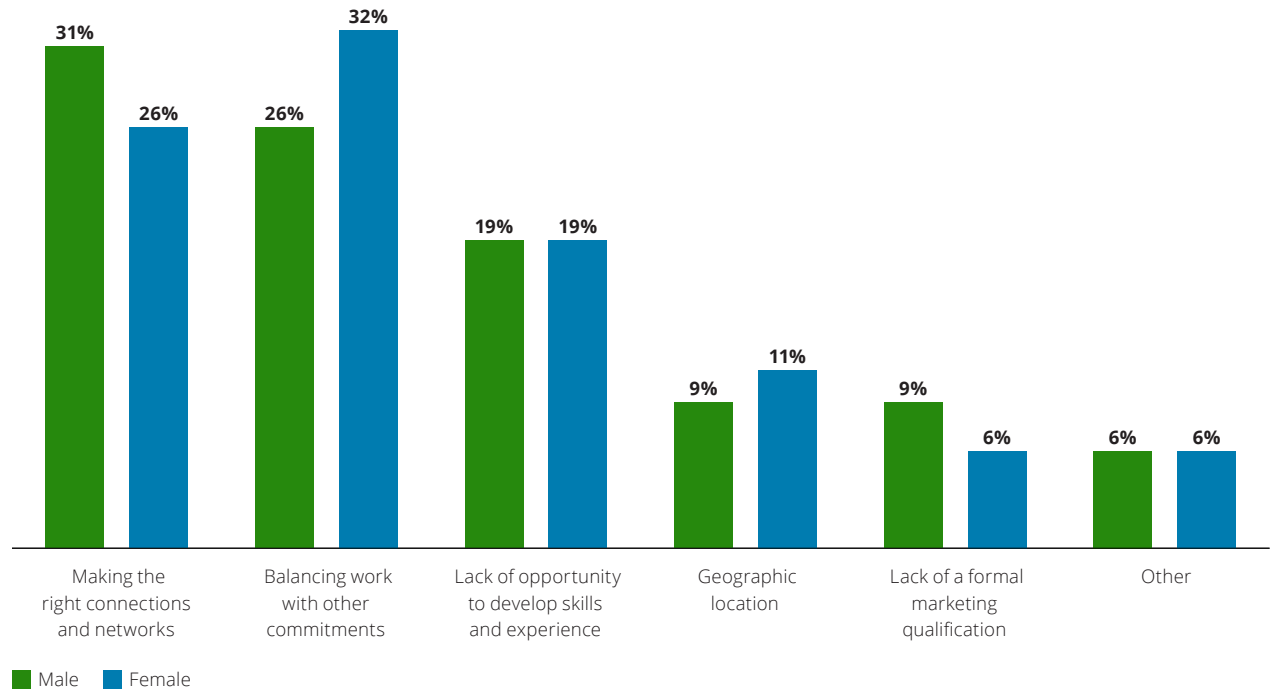
career advancement in the field of marketing, among other potential challenges. The other two obstacles faced by individuals in their career paths to get to their current role was balancing work with other commitments and encountering limited opportunities for skills development and gaining experience.



However, there were notable differences between roles and genders. The challenge felt most strongly by SMLs was making the right connections and networks, while for CMOs it was balancing work with other commitments. CMOs also noted that the lack of opportunity to develop skills and experience was also a hurdle on their path to their current role.

Although both genders face challenges in their career progression, this study highlights the important role of gender. Women were more inclined to identify work-life balance as their most significant hurdle, whereas men predominantly cited networking and relationship-building as their biggest obstacle.

Figure 1. What are the biggest challenges on the journey to your current roles?



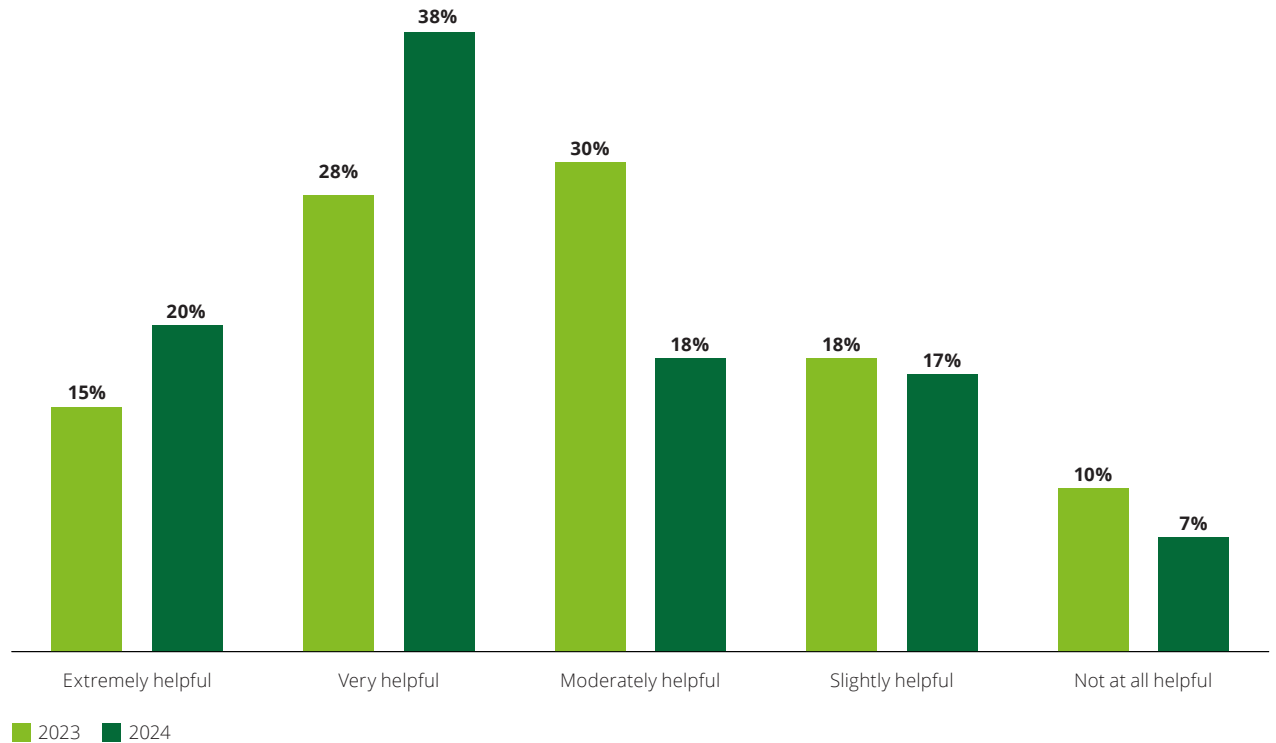
Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (Male) = 51, N (Female) = 33

Another point emerged around whether education helped in obtaining their role. While some of the respondents noted that the lack of formal marketing qualification was a challenge to reaching their current role, this was not as significant as the others. Over 70 per cent of CMOs and SMLs have a qualification in marketing. Of those who do have a qualification, 76 per cent found it helpful to reaching their current role. Interestingly, this figure has increased slightly compared to 2023 (+3%). This reflects the increasingly more competitive job environment and potentially the need to offer more value to prospective employers. CMOs found having a qualification extremely helpful. Having a masters or a bachelors degree were the two most common qualifications.

Figure 2. Does having a formal marketing qualification help to get to your current role?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (2023 Total) = 40, N (2024 Total) = 60; Excluding those who said 'None' when asked for Qualification

Both CMOs and SMLs feel the pressure to lead

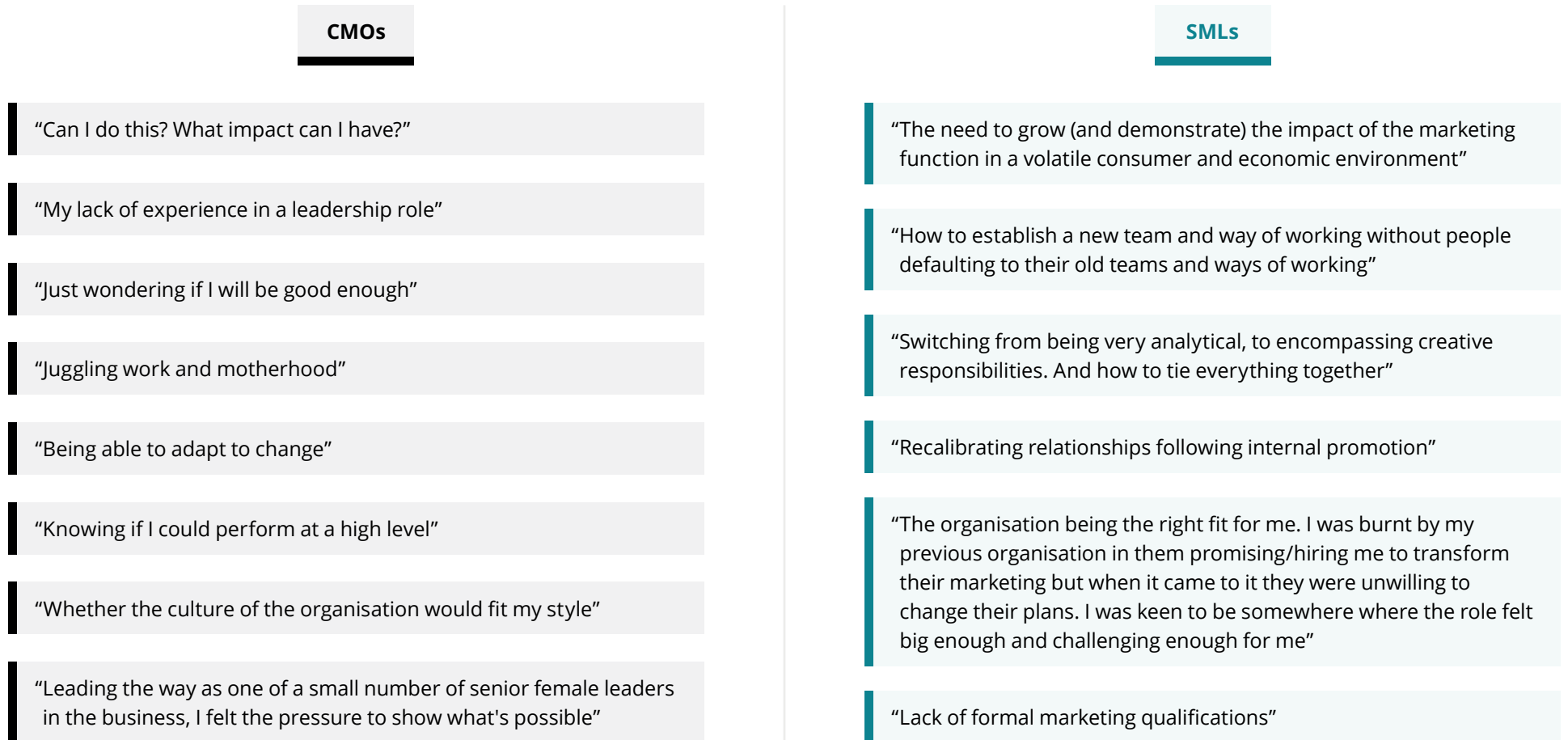
To better understand the journey to CMO, we asked about the concerns they had before starting their current role. This revealed startling differences between CMOs and SMLs and the impact of gender.

CMOs expressed the most apprehension about their ability to lead and succeed in their roles, particularly within a large, diverse and demanding environment. Some CMOs were concerned about navigating a new company culture and industry-specific challenges. Notably, female respondents mentioned worries around juggling family life with work, whereas no male respondent mentioned this. This speaks to the 'second shift' at home women often are expected to do and the expectations around women balancing careers with families.¹

SMLs were most apprehensive about navigating a new role and company environment, often with concerns about their ability to adapt, learn quickly and make a meaningful impact. Some expressed anxieties about team dynamics, strategic influence and demonstrating marketing's value within the organisation. One SML said they were worried about "Switching from being very analytical to encompassing creative responsibilities and how to tie everything together". This points to the need for marketers to be able to use a breadth of skills and how important creativity is.

More CMOs than SMLs mentioned concerns related to imposter syndrome. The term refers to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt despite one's achievements and success.² The self-doubt and disbelief in belonging were mentioned across all roles and genders, but notably the CMOs seemed to feel it more strongly. Several CMOs described their apprehension before starting their role as "Will I be good enough?" and "Can I do this?". Although some SMLs also felt this, they spoke more about it in terms of fears about failing.

Figure 3. Before starting your role, what were you most apprehensive about?



Communication and collaboration deemed essential for C-suite success

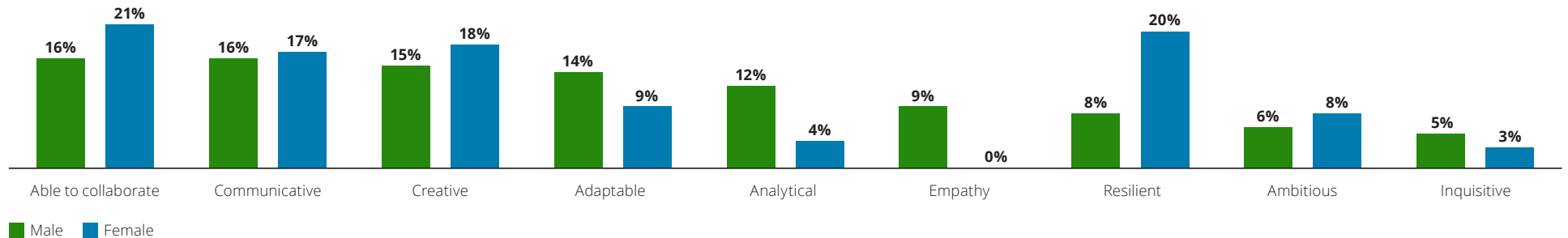
The skills needed to succeed in C-suite roles have evolved with more attention and need for a diverse range of skills. This is especially true for CMOs, who need not only traditional C-suite skills of managing finance and operations but also need strong ‘social skills’.³ Social skills refer to specific capabilities including a high level of self-awareness, the ability to listen and communicate well, a facility for working with different types of people and groups, and what psychologists call ‘theory of mind’—the capacity to infer how others are thinking and feeling.⁴

Our survey found the personality trait deemed most important by CMOs is being communicative compared to SMLs who chose being collaborative. Being an effective communicator is crucial for productivity and being able to convey information. Similarly, SMLs rank collaboration highest. This is important for exchanging ideas and building successful terms.

Although both genders ranked the ability to collaborate as the highest personality trait overall, the genders differed significantly for what was the second most important trait. Men ranked creativity equally with collaboration as a highly desirable trait compared to women who ranked resilience 2nd

highest. Resilience is perceived by men as much less important for their role (ranked 5th). Resilience is a critical characteristic of high-performing leaders because of the ability to handle adverse events, overcome setbacks and cope with disruption.⁵ It may be that the women in this study rate resilience higher for the same reasons they consider themselves to have a poorer work-life balance and experience challenges related to managing responsibilities on the journey to the C-suite. While gender continues to be a factor in leadership dynamics, the increasing number of women recognising resilience as an important trait underscores the value of diverse perspectives in the workplace – and perhaps why women outperform men on key leadership traits.⁶

Figure 4. What personality traits are important for your role?



Note: The rank frequency was determined by summing the total ranks for each option. Higher frequencies indicate higher ranking.

Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N (Male) = 51, N (Female) = 33

Work-life balance improving slowly

CMOs are under pressure to achieve better growth and increase revenue, while being more resourceful and adaptable due to limited resources. Marketing budgets are still significantly below pre-pandemic levels, yet CEOs have placed growth as a top business priority for 2024-2025.⁷ CMOs feel this especially so with the increased demands placed on them and the weight of leadership. CMOs must decide what to invest in now for short-term growth as well as for long-term strategic growth. With the

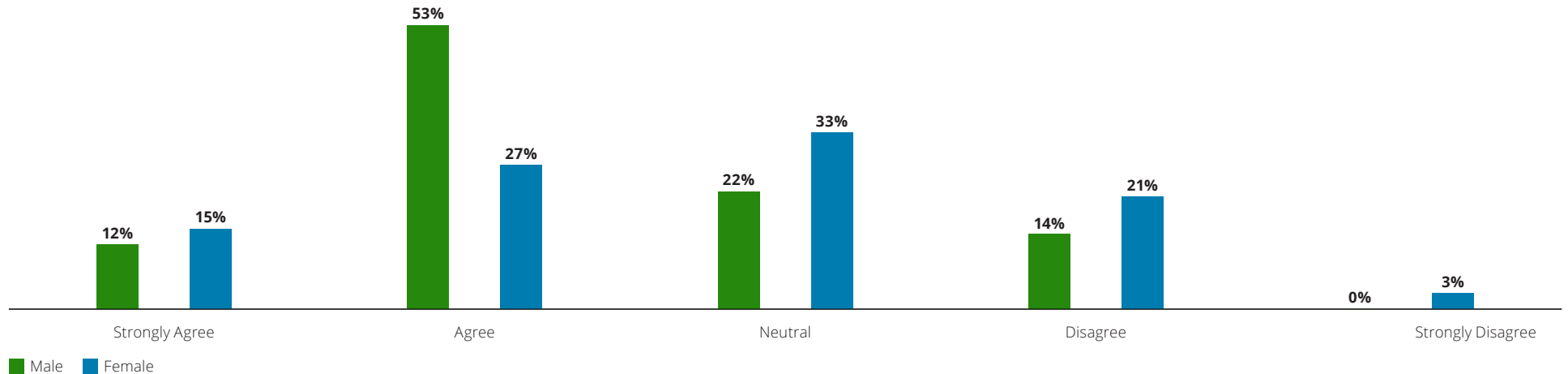
struggle to prioritise well-being, a staggering 70 per cent of the C-suite are seriously considering quitting for a better job which supports well-being and 81 per cent say that improving their well-being is more important than advancing their career.⁸

Our research found that CMOs were more likely to report an unhealthy work-life balance (27%) than SMLs (12%). Interestingly, the year-on-year change suggests that work-life balance is improving overall for both groups. Those that disagree they have a

work-life balance decreased by 11 per cent. Slightly more agree overall this year that they have a healthy balance (up 5% from 2023).

Gender is also a significant factor in having a healthy work-life balance. While 65 per cent of men report a healthy work-life balance, only 42 per cent of women feel the same. This might refer to that second shift women often do at home and the difficulties of managing a successful career while balancing family and health.

Figure 5. Do you feel like you have a healthy work-life balance?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

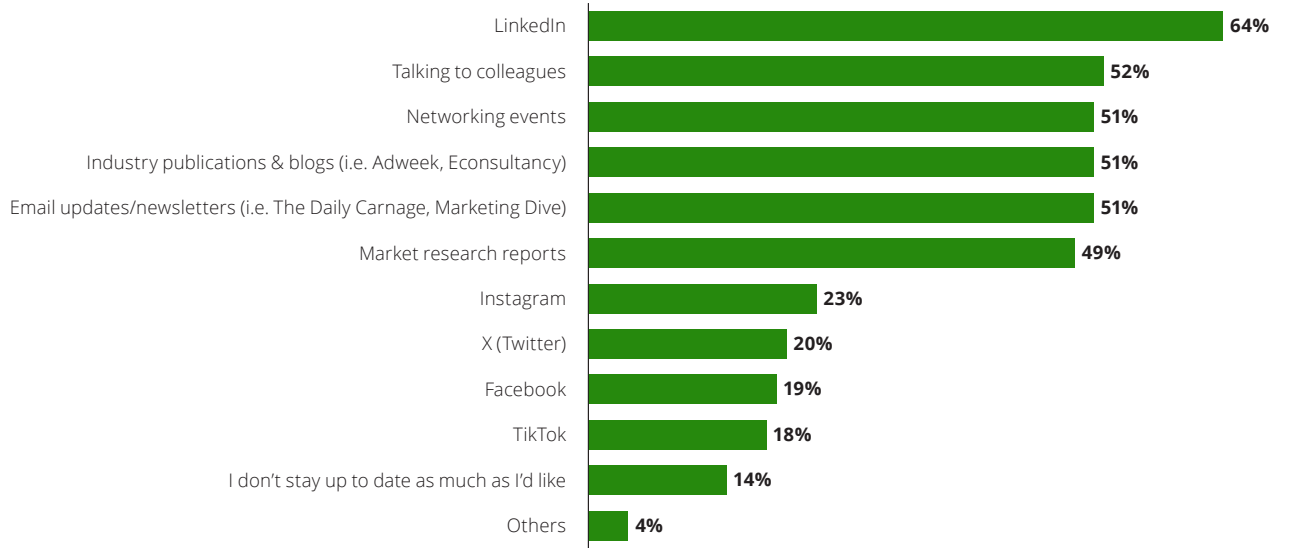
N (Male) = 51, N (Female) = 33

Staying ahead: How marketing leaders stay informed

As leaders in a highly competitive field like marketing, it can be challenging but crucial to keep on top of emerging trends. Our survey found that across both CMOs and SMLs, LinkedIn was the most popular platform for staying informed. Other popular methods were networking and speaking with colleagues to share knowledge and trends which points to the need for maintaining relationships and developing contacts. One CMO said they felt “Networking is part of your job” and an SML said “Make more connections across verticals amongst your peers.” The group also identified reading industry publications and blogs (e.g. Adweek, Econsultancy) and email newsletters (e.g. The Daily Carnage, Marketing Dive) as being helpful to stay up-to-date on the latest marketing trends.

For the first time we asked if the respondents felt they were able to stay up-to-date on the latest marketing trends as much as they wanted to. Within those that responded they were unable to stay up-to-date, we asked the reasons why not. The biggest reasons given why both CMOs and SMLs find it challenging is not enough time (75%), too much information (42%) and not sure which sources to trust (33%).

Figure 6. How do you stay up-to-date on the latest marketing trends?



Source: Deloitte analysis, 2025

N = 84 (CMO+SML)

Self-belief, resilience and continuous learning are key drivers of career growth

Both CMOs and SMLs emphasise the importance of self-belief and resilience as well as continuous learning for career progression. Both groups spoke about believing in yourself and trusting in your abilities. Both also noted the need to keep learning and seeking out new experiences to develop skills while being open to change. There were also several comments about being decisive, and to trust instincts. Many suggested to put in place structures for effective decision-making while also building strong relationships both within and outside your organisation, seek out mentors and actively build networks.

CMOs placed a greater focus on building high-performing teams, fostering collaboration, and demonstrating decisive leadership. Their focus gravitates towards navigating internal dynamics and aligning diverse stakeholders around a cohesive vision. CMOs need to be able to build and lead a strong team with a clear vision.⁹

In contrast, SMLs highlighted the significance of proactive networking, relationship building and effectively managing stakeholders within their organisations. SMLs highlight how critical it is to network and build relationships. Success hinges on cultivating strong external relationships, nurturing key partnerships, and adeptly managing stakeholders within their often-limited sphere of influence. SMLs also said to ask for more feedback and guidance from others.

Figure 7. What advice would you have given to yourself prior to being promoted to your current position, to help your career development?

CMOs

“Believe in yourself more”

“Work hard and listen carefully”

“Create a growth mindset culture in the team”

“Be an expert in your craft - quality always wins”

“Find your superpower - a CMO with great knowledge of Digital”

“Trust yourself - you have built your own career, no one else, you made the various decisions that got you here and others have appointed you to this position which should validate you being in this role - your view/decision you make, the way you manage people and resources through to an ability to apply critical thinking, inspire and lead has got you here... Trust this all counts”

SMLs

“Master the 90-day impact plan. Communicate successes, learn quickly from failures, invest in people and engagement”

“Be more positive, don't be critical of old policies and procedures/ ways of how things have been done”

“To believe in my capabilities, strengths and talents as a marketer and to look for my next opportunity rather than hoping it will appear. You need to own your career progression”

“#1. Laser focus on the customer (directly and via sales leaders)
#2. Be ruthless about recruiting the right talent into your team”

“Just focus on working with the best/smartest people you can find. The rest will follow”

“Don't panic! You can do this!”

“Be prepared to work harder than you've ever worked before”

Summary

This research illuminates the evolving landscape for marketing leaders, highlighting the critical need for a multifaceted, mindful approach to career progression. While formal qualifications remain beneficial, cultivating a diverse skillset encompassing both technological and social skills is crucial for success in today's dynamic marketing landscape. Building strong networks, embracing continuous learning, and prioritising well-being are essential, with a particular emphasis on supporting women in navigating work-life balance. Ultimately, fostering self-belief, resilience and a collaborative spirit are paramount for both CMOs and SMLs striving to thrive in the ever-evolving world of marketing.

Key Recommendations

- **Purposefully cultivate a diverse skillset**

Don't solely rely on formal qualifications. While valuable, they are not enough. Aspiring CMOs need a blend of marketing expertise, strong social skills (communication, collaboration, empathy) and leadership qualities (resilience, decisiveness, team-building).

- **Prioritise networking and relationship building**

Both CMOs and SMLs emphasised the importance of strong networks. Actively seek opportunities to connect with peers, mentors, and industry leaders. This can provide valuable insights, support and open doors to new opportunities.

- **Embrace continuous learning and adaptation**

The marketing landscape is constantly evolving. Stay ahead of the curve by dedicating time to professional development, exploring new technologies and staying informed about industry trends.

- **Prioritise work-life balance**

The research highlights the significant gender gap in perceived work-life balance. Organisations and individuals should prioritise well-being initiatives and flexible work arrangements to attract and retain top talent, particularly women.

Endnotes

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