

2026 GB Agency marketing trends



GB is a full-service boutique strategy and marketing agency providing traditional and AI growth solutions.

current marketing landscape

The marketing environment in 2026 is defined by AI-driven disruption, fragmented consumer attention, and an urgent demand for measurable returns.



- **Data-driven operations are now universal** — Over 90% of top-performing companies use advanced analytics as a baseline — the differentiator has shifted to how quickly insights are acted upon.
- **Agentic AI is reshaping campaign execution** — AI agents now handle routine customer engagements autonomously — from notifications to reorders — moving marketers into supervisory and strategic roles.
- **Hybrid teams remain the standard** — Brands continue balancing in-house talent with specialist agency partnerships, with flexibility and speed as the primary drivers.
- **Privacy-first marketing is non-negotiable** — With tightening global regulations, data strategies are focused on core infrastructure, not optional enhancements.
- **Digital ad spend continues to climb** — Global digital advertising is projected to surpass \$850 billion in 2026, with short-form video and creator content capturing an ever-larger share.
- **CFOs are demanding ROI accountability** — Marketing budgets face greater scrutiny than ever — CMOs who speak the language of revenue attribution and customer lifetime value are gaining influence and funding.

AI in marketing

AI has moved from experimentation to core infrastructure. 2026 is the year of broad adoption — and the beginning of a backlash against it.

 Google AI		
 Claude	 Bing	 Midjourney
 NovelAI	 perplexity	 Lovable

- **Generative AI has reached critical mass** — 83% of marketing teams now regularly use generative AI for content creation, customer insights, and campaign optimisation (McKinsey, 2025/26).
- **Agentic AI is collapsing traditional martech stacks** — AI agents capable of autonomous decision-making are replacing discrete campaign tools, requiring marketers to govern systems rather than run individual channels.
- **AI-powered creative testing is real-time** — Agentic optimisation tools allow marketers to fine-tune campaigns dynamically — predicting which ads will capture attention, stir emotion, and drive purchase intent.
- **Human creativity is the new competitive edge** — The American Marketing Association identifies human creativity, cultural fluency, and authentic storytelling as the primary brand differentiators for the next decade.
- **AI backlash is building** — Consumer trust in AI-generated content is eroding. 'Human-made' is re-emerging as a premium signal — and brands perceived as over-automating face reputational risk.
- **Data quality is the foundation** — High-quality, responsibly sourced training data is now a strategic asset. Brands investing in clean, consented data will outperform those relying on synthetic or poorly governed datasets.

consumer behavior

Consumers in 2026 are more fragmented, increasingly values-driven, and more resistant to mass marketing — while still spending freely on things that bring them joy.



- **Micro-communities are the new mass market** — Broad demographic targeting has been replaced by hyper-specific interest communities. Brands win by showing up with tangible value — not promotion — and nearly 40% of consumers trust micro-community recommendations as much as personal ones (Kantar).
- **Authenticity is the primary purchase driver** — With AI-generated content flooding digital channels, consumers gravitate toward human, tactile, and culturally grounded content.
- **Treatonomics is alive and growing** — Despite economic uncertainty, 36% of consumers are willing to go into short-term debt for things they enjoy (Kantar). Brands that create joy and celebrate small moments are winning.
- **Social commerce drives discovery** — The majority of consumers say social content and community influence how they discover new brands — with search now used primarily for validation, not discovery.
- **Trust is eroding** — Deepfakes, misinformation, and generative images are eroding digital trust. Consumers are seeking verified creators and transparent brand behaviour.
- **Voice and visual search are mainstream** — Over 65% of consumers under 35 regularly use voice or image-based search when shopping — and ambient, device-driven discovery moments are growing rapidly.

strategic approaches

The most effective marketing strategies in 2026 are built on connected systems, genuine relationships, and cultural relevance — not isolated tactics or always-on noise.



- **Creators are clients, not channels** — The most forward-thinking brands are building creator loyalty infrastructure — offering concierge access, economic upside, and long-term relationships. Creator influence compounds when creators feel protected and committed.
- **Partnerships are replacing competitive positioning** — Strategic collaborations — especially in sports, entertainment, and niche culture — are delivering higher brand equity and more immersive customer experiences than traditional media buys.
- **Physical products are cultural currency** — Collectible, display-worthy physical goods (think limited drops, branded objects) are driving affinity, buzz, and community.
- **Strategic pulsing outperforms always-on** — Rather than continuous presence, marketing leaders are finding better results with intentional campaign timing — concentrated bursts of activity tied to cultural moments.

Measurement and ROI

How marketing is measured is changing as fast as it's executed. In 2026, accountability is non-negotiable — and longer time horizons are finally being accepted.



- **Lifetime value has replaced acquisition cost as the primary KPI** — Brands are shifting from short-term conversion metrics to long-term relationship value — prioritising retention, advocacy, and customer health scores.
- **ROI timeframes have extended** — The average measurement window for marketing initiatives has grown from 3–6 months to 12–18 months, reflecting the reality of longer brand-building cycles.
- **A single endorsed ROI model is emerging best practice** — Consistency matters more than precision — leading CMOs align with their CFO on one ROI framework, even if imperfect, to demonstrate discipline and earn confidence.
- **AI is revitalising marketing mix modelling** — AI now delivers more accurate, granular channel effectiveness insights — with real-time dashboards that include predictive elements and automated recommendations.
- **The bottom 20% of spend must be killed quarterly** — High-performing marketing organisations conduct quarterly reviews to reallocate spend away from underperforming activities — making the process visible to leadership.
- **Brand health measurement is more actionable** — New frameworks combine traditional brand tracking with real-time sentiment analysis, behavioural signals, and AI-assisted evaluation — giving CMOs a fuller picture of brand equity.

Questions?

— We would be delighted to share more insight.

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