

How to win influence in B2B tech

A CMO's marketing
and communications
playbook for 2026

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How B2B tech brands stay visible, relevant, and credible is changing

CMOs need to keep pace with influence or risk losing brand visibility

The way in which B2B tech brands get discovered, evaluated, and chosen is going through its most significant shift in a lifetime. AI has rewritten the rules of competition in two profound ways: (1) the speed at which new disruptors can take market share, and (2) how buyers shortlist providers through AI-powered recommendations rather than traditional search.

To understand how tech organisations plan to compete in this new landscape, we interviewed 400 B2B tech marketing leaders across the US and UK, split evenly between billion-dollar companies and venture capital-backed start-ups.

We wanted to know how CMOs are responding to the shifts in influence that are impacting how brands remain visible, relevant, and credible – changes like:

- **Website traffic declining:** B2B tech websites have seen a 34% decrease from 2024 to 2025.
- **AI-generated traffic accelerating:** rising from 2-6% of B2B traffic at the start of 2025 to a projected 20% by the end of the year.
- **Personal LinkedIn page performance dropping:** 95% of creators saw reach fall by 50% and follower growth drop by 31%, due to algorithm changes in early 2025 (Richard Van Der Blom).
- **Company page visibility on LinkedIn diminishing:** organic company content has slipped from 2.1% to 1.6% of share in users' feeds from March to October 2025.
- **Media influence evolving:** titles like TechCrunch have been forced to downsize, while others – like the FT – have doubled down on newsletters, print, and podcasts in order to grow their subscription base.
- **New media formats rising in influence:** publishing platform Substack, for example, received 95m visits in December 2024, with tech (16%) and business (10%) among its top topics.
- **New crisis threats emerging:** AI-generated deepfakes have brought new vulnerabilities to brands, and an urgent call to rewrite crisis playbooks.

What we found was clear: **levers that once drove brand growth are being replaced by a new set of competitive currencies.**

This shift brings opportunity: 2026 will reward brands that reclaim influence fastest – shifting marketing and communications strategies to build brand trust, earn high-quality attention, and win AI recommendations.

CMOs feel underequipped to compete with fast-moving challengers in 2026

You've heard it before. You'll hear it again: deliver growth.

Revenue growth, market share, and market size expansion are the top three priorities for B2B tech CMOs in 2026. But while this universal 'north star' hasn't changed, virtually everything else in B2B PR, marketing, and social has. It's why chief marketers feel uneasy about their ability to keep up: six in ten (62%) feel they lack the skills, budget, or resources to compete with fast-moving challengers.

Marketing pace and search proficiency are pressure points

Contending with challenger brands has always been a concern for tech CMOs, but AI has pushed the competition into a new gear. It means new disruptors can now launch faster, with leaner teams and far more agility than before.

Meanwhile, traditional search is losing impact. It's projected to represent just 45% of all search queries by 2027 – a fall of 42% – leaving 61% of marketers feeling underequipped to lead on share of search in the evolving AI-led landscape.

That anxiety is justified: without clarity on how brands optimise for zero-click experiences, they risk not only failing to be cited by AI search engines but also failing to be recommended by them.

Tech brands are putting content before AI to stay competitive

Concern over search presence is one reason why CMOs are choosing thought leadership as their top tactic for achieving business goals in 2026. 40% selected it for its ability to gain them recognition as a cutting-edge player in their sector, ranking it above 'forming or expanding strategic partnerships to boost reach, credibility, and market access' (38%), and 'integrating AI into their core proposition and communications to strengthen positioning and drive efficiency across marketing' (33%).

Stephanie Robotham

Value Accelerator
Operating Advisor

Goldman Sachs Asset
Management



AI has handed venture-backed start-ups a strategic advantage. It lets them build visibility fast by shaping marketing and communications to influence both their buyers and the algorithms. The trick is spotting the new levers of influence, so brands can earn trust and relevance at a quicker rate than their competitors.

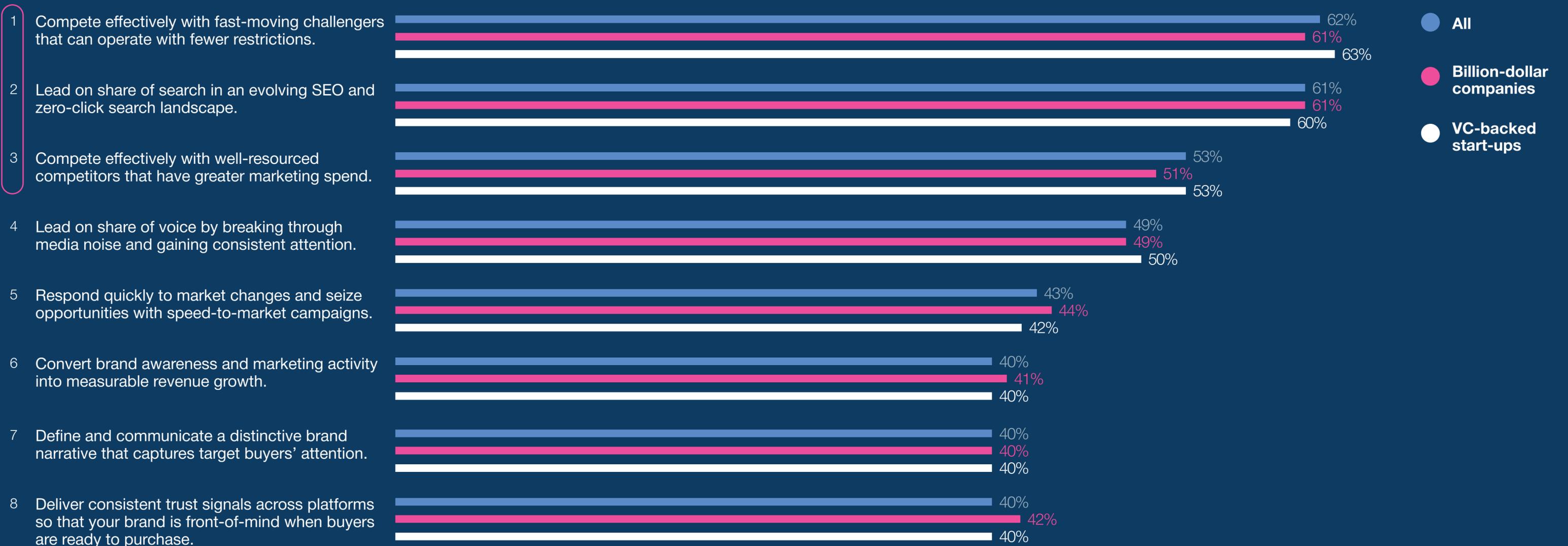
The PR and marketing crisis of confidence is deep rooted

62%

of B2B tech CMOs feel they lack the skills, budget, or resources to compete with fast-moving challengers

▼ Chart 01

Areas where CMOs say their PR & marketing function lacks the skills, budget, or is underequipped to deliver proficiently or at all



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01

Search rewritten

GEO is non-negotiable for showing up online

Right now, around one-in-three Google searches surfaces an AI overview. In B2B tech, the rate is even higher, surging from 40% in December 2024 to 70% by May 2025. With AI search and traditional search expected to reach parity in 2027, it's no surprise that six in ten B2B tech CMOs (61%) are already rethinking their marketing for generative engine optimisation (GEO).

CMOs are being spurred on by three clear motivations:

1. Performance from traditional search is declining

CMOs at VC-backed start-ups feel this most sharply (56% vs. 29% at billion-dollar companies), underscoring how up-and-coming tech brands rely on search to drive brand recognition.

2. Buyers are discovering and evaluating brands differently

42% of CMOs cite this as a driver for AI search optimisation, likely recognising the growing tendency for buyers to be guided by AI-powered recommendations over old-school browsing and comparison.

3. CMOs are concerned that rivals are getting ahead with GEO

35% of CMOs say their rivals are already adapting for GEO and zero-click search – and they clearly don't want to get left at the starting blocks.



CMOs at billion-dollar tech brands are alert to the trust economics of AI search. One in three (33%) say they're adapting because AI increasingly prioritises results from authoritative sources. By contrast, only 1% of CMOs at VC-backed start-ups are adapting for this reason – likely reflecting that they are already investing in this area.

Understanding how answer engines work

When a user prompts an AI tool, it doesn't just take the query at face value – it often splits it into multiple underlying searches to retrieve relevant information. For example: if a CTO asks: "How can I stop ransomware spreading across my company network?", the AI might fan out that prompt into queries like:

- "ransomware lateral movement prevention 2025"
- "best EDR solutions for mid-market businesses"
- "real-time threat containment peer-to-peer security"

Optimising content to get recommended

Brands must address not only the surface query, but also the latent queries the AI may generate – especially the ones tied to specific disciplines (e.g., lateral movement, containment), product categories (e.g., EDR, XDR), and buyer contexts (e.g., mid-market, enterprise).

Knowing if your GEO strategy is working

Consider investing in prompt-volume and AI-search tracking tools, like AthenaHQ, Profound, or Writesonic. These tools help brands gain a good understanding of what prompts they should aim to optimise for, and how they can pivot to capture a higher share of search from the likes of ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Claude.

Samanyou Garg

Chief Executive Officer

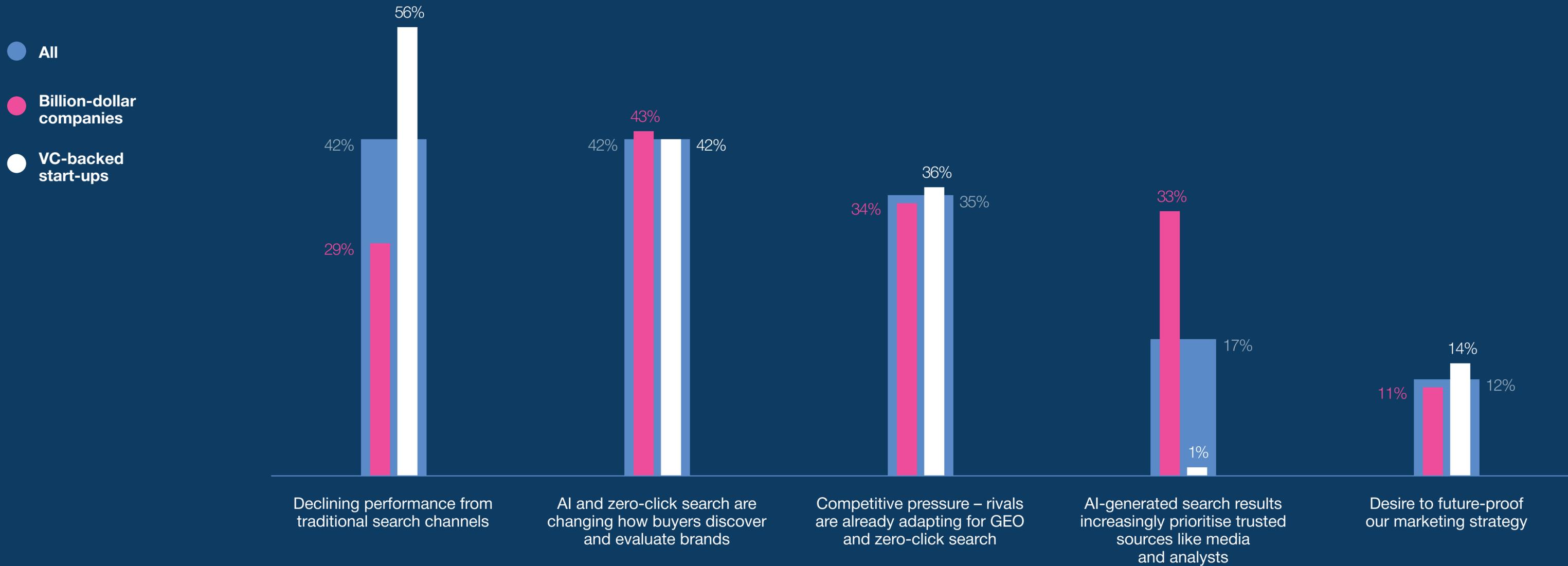
Writesonic



B2B tech brands should focus on understanding three key AI search metrics: AI visibility score – how often your brand is recommended; citation share – how often your content is used as a source; and share of voice – how prominently you appear versus competitors in AI answers.

▼ Chart 02

Why B2B tech CMOs are adapting for GEO and zero-click search in 2026



02

Content restructured

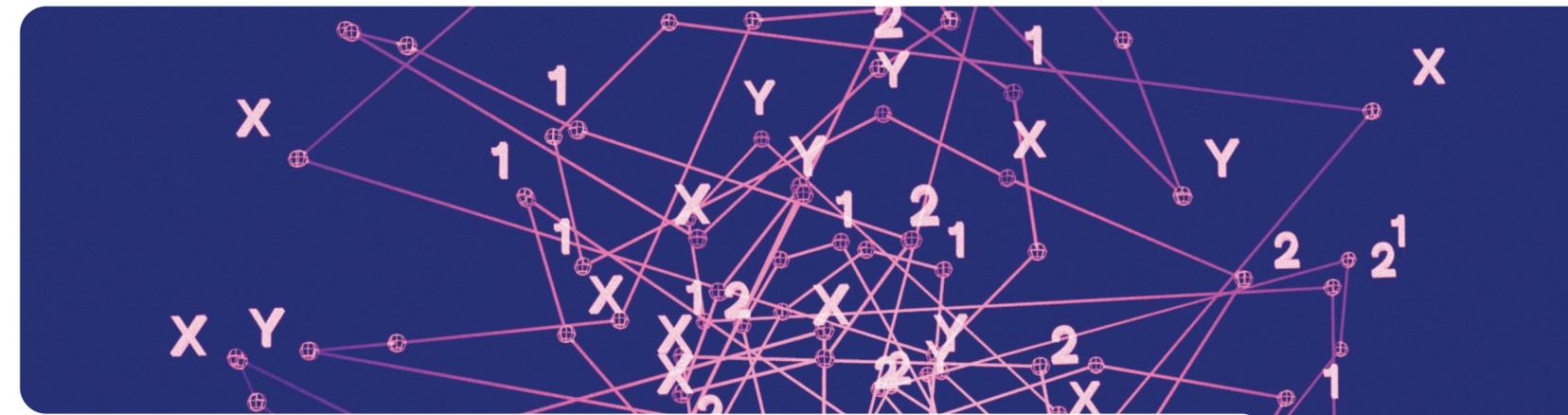
Learn the content ingredients that AI can't resist

AI search prefers trusted brands, which gives established names an advantage: 15-22% of B2B tech-related queries currently return results from the likes of Amazon, Microsoft, and IBM, for example.

But that doesn't mean it's game-over for VC-backed start-ups. There's a big opportunity to move early, shift strategies, and claim share of voice on ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude.

Here are the top ways CMOs are making changes to optimise for AI search:

- 1. Enhance structured data and schema markup:** 33% plan to adjust structured data to improve AI search recognition.
- 2. Increase PR budget to strengthen presence:** 32% plan to strengthen presence in trusted, high-authority sources like media and analyst reports.
- 3. Create more search-intent content:** 28% plan to answer the exact questions buyers type into AI search engines.
- 4. Produce multilingual content:** 25% plan to produce multilingual content to reach non-English-speaking audiences.
- 5. Use visual and structured formats:** 23% plan to create infographics, lists, and indexable whitepapers that are optimised for zero-click visibility.



Again, the tactics diverge depending on company size. Billion-dollar companies' top priority is to create more search-intent content (29%), whereas VC-backed start-ups prefer to increase PR budget (45%).

Overall, though, these priorities show that CMOs recognise that AI-search success means a holistic shift from keywords to confidence signals. Respecting tenets like credibility, clarity, and currency throughout PR and marketing efforts will multiply online authority.

Restructure content in ways that matter

- **Keep content fresh to prevent decay:** Recency matters. AI downgrades content after one to two months. Profound data shows that adding the current year to URLs, title tags, and meta descriptions can boost ChatGPT citations by up to 20%.

- **Break content into digestible chunks:** Short, self-contained 'chunks' perform best. Almost a third of AI citations come from listicles, for example.
- **Prioritise earned over owned:** Muck Rack reports that earned content accounts for up to 89% of AI search citations.
- **Focus on problem-solution content:** More than 40% of AI searches are generative. That means users are asking for actions, not information. Identify your audience's problems, then build experiences that solve them.
- **Use structured schema data:** This enables AI to understand what your brand does, and who for. It gives AI pointers about your audience, use cases, and solutions.
- **Add LMS.txt to build trust:** Machine-readable documentation on your website can direct LLMs to the most important content.

Andrew Yan

Founder & CEO

AthenaHQ
(Former Google Search Product Manager)



AI search is one of those once-in-a-generation platform shifts, akin to the move from web to mobile. It's a huge opportunity for brands, but they need to move fast and do their homework. That means knowing what citations are surfacing. Understanding why they're surfacing. And being able to craft content that sends trust signals to AI. It's not about having the loudest headline – it's about being the most reliable voice in the room.

03

Brand recall reinvented

Rhythm and repetition:
the keys to getting remembered

Brands go to great lengths to get remembered – think AWS’s ‘Every Play’ Superbowl Ad, or Coinbase’s Times Square stunt on IPO day... These headline-grabbing activations are notable, but they aren’t enough to hold onto customer attention.

Now, CMOs need to drive brand memorability by showing up consistently across every channel, in any region, all the time.

So, what’s stopping B2B CMOs from creating unforgettable brands? They believe it’s their inability to:

- **Craft distinctive narratives:** 61% say they perform ‘below par’ or ‘struggle’ to define and sustain a distinctive narrative that buyers instantly recognise, recall, and repeat.
- **Hold onto buyer attention after campaign moments:** 58% find it difficult to sustain audience attention over time, not just during launches or campaigns.
- **Gain internal alignment on core brand messages:** 50% say they’re substandard at achieving internal alignment on core brand messages across teams.

Building distinctive narratives is made harder by the tech market being saturated with similar products, features, and jargon. It’s why CMOs need to ditch the ‘market-leading’ word fluff.

Instead, brands should focus on telling stories that are reinforced by proof points, then carry those messages consistently throughout PR, marketing, and sales. That’s how brand messages become easier to recognise, recall, and repeat.



Choose a storytelling rhythm that is successful

Think about B2B brand messages that have stuck with you... The likelihood is they fall into one of several archetypal structures, time-honoured for their memorability – such as:

- **Three-part constructs** – like Slack’s ‘Where work happens’.
- **Problem–solution framing** – like HubSpot’s ‘Marketing without the madness’.
- **Visionary casting** – like LG Electronics’ ‘Life’s Good’, which paints a rosier future with its products.

B2B CMOs believe the following storytelling structures are the most effective for making brand campaigns memorable:

1. **Two-part contrasts** are the favourite storytelling structure (23%). These are stories framed around

‘before/after’ or ‘problem/solution’. The benefit: clarity at speed, with an urgency for change.

2. **The ‘rule of three’** remains a staple for brand campaigns (16%). Combinations of three messages, three-word slogans, or three-part narrative arcs create an irresistible rhythm that makes messages easier to recognise, recall, and repeat (see what we did there?).

3. **The ‘villain-hero’ arc** (15%) casts a market challenge as the ‘villain’ and the brand as the ‘hero’ – lending itself especially well to challenger brands.

The missing opportunity, though, is customer-first content. It was cited by just 11% of CMOs as their most effective storytelling technique. But, when you think about the power of customer activations – Salesforce’s ‘Trailblazers’ being a good example – there’s a clear opportunity for brands to stand out. It’s a great trust signal for AI search engines too.

Sophie Hodgson



We’re bombarded by information on multiple platforms. All the time. It never stops. In this environment, brand recall only happens when organisations have a distinct message that they communicate clearly and thoughtfully.

Communications Director

Cisco

Jonathan Brown



Brand consistency has never been more critical to business success. But consistency should not equal sameness. Finding creative and engaging ways to tell your core brand story and staying true to that narrative across every marketing channel is more important in this noisy, digitally congested age of AI than ever before.

Director, Creative & Brand, Global

Akamai Technologies

▼ Chart 03

CMOs are proud of their brands' proof points - but struggle to convert them into unforgettable narratives

● We're superb / market-leading ● We're on par with competitors ● We struggle / are below par

Reinforce trust and credibility through compelling proof points

Maintain consistency of message across PR, marketing, and sales channels

Adapt our brand narrative quickly to respond to market shifts and emerging opportunities

Create emotionally resonant content that sticks with our audience

Sustain audience attention over time, not just during launches or campaigns

Simplify complex ideas into clear, memorable messages

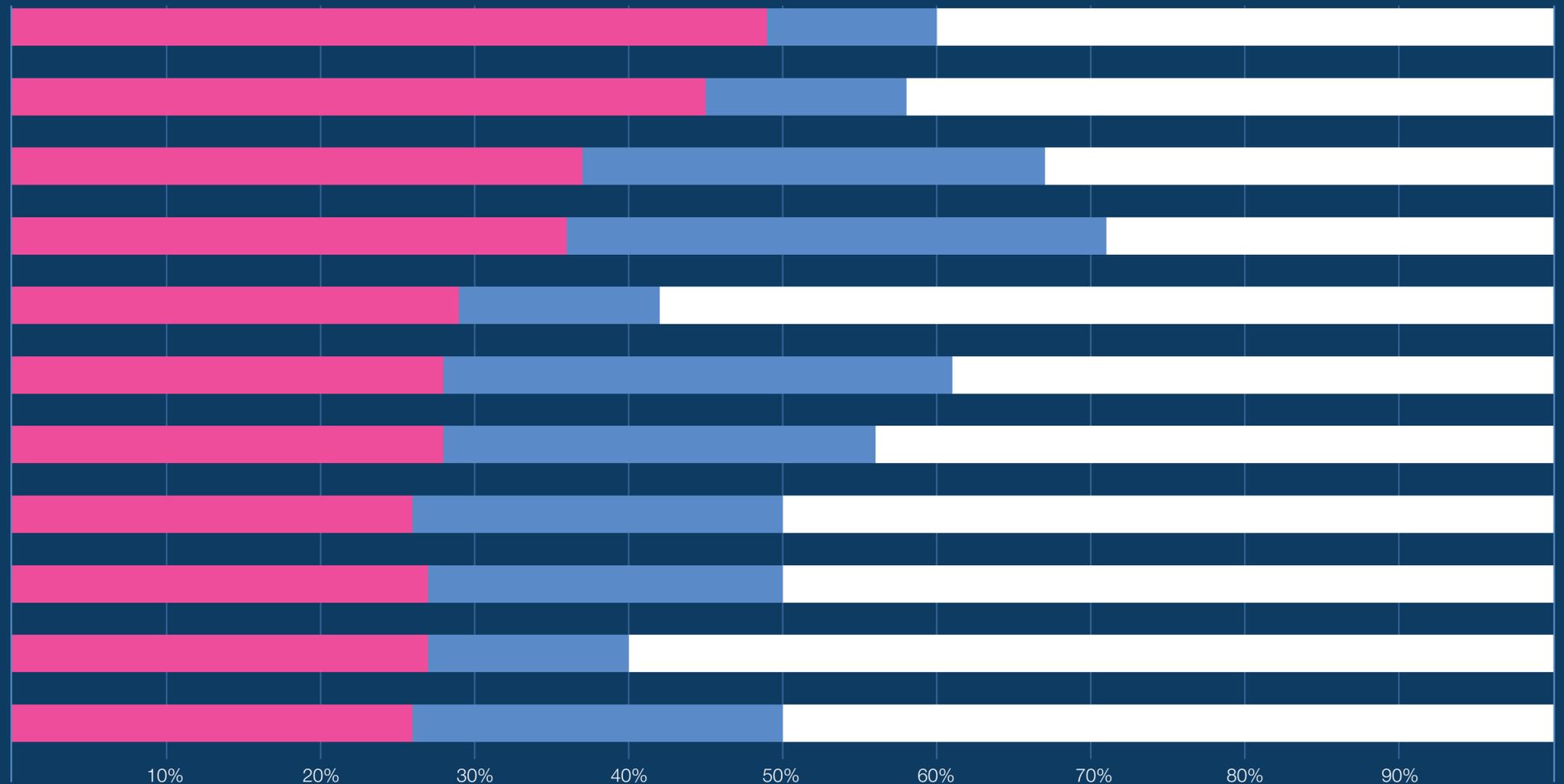
Deliver a consistent and distinctive brand experience across every customer touchpoint

Maximise impact within available resources to invest in brand-building

Achieve internal alignment on core brand messages across teams

Define and sustain a distinctive narrative that buyers instantly recognise, recall, and repeat

Cut through competitive noise so our messaging stands out in a crowded market



04

Brand influence redefined

New need-to-know formats and outlets for earned, owned, and paid engagement

B2B brands are being forced to rethink their earned, owned, and paid strategies. Declining search performance, the rise of new media, and the fall in LinkedIn engagement rates have all had an impact. And there's the emergence of new content formats and communities to consider too...

Take publishing platform Substack, for example. It's become a new point of influence, hitting 95m visits within a month in December 2024, with tech (16%) and business (10%) as its top topics. Journalists from the likes of TechCrunch have found a new home there, and even traditional media titles like The Economist have established a presence on the platform.

So, how are B2B tech CMOs adjusting to these shifts in influence?

1. Diversifying storytelling formats: Billion-dollar tech CMOs are leading the shift to multi-format storytelling, including broadcast, webinars, and podcasts (37%). Venture-backed start-ups are following the same path, though at lower scale (26%), possibly reflecting their budget gap.

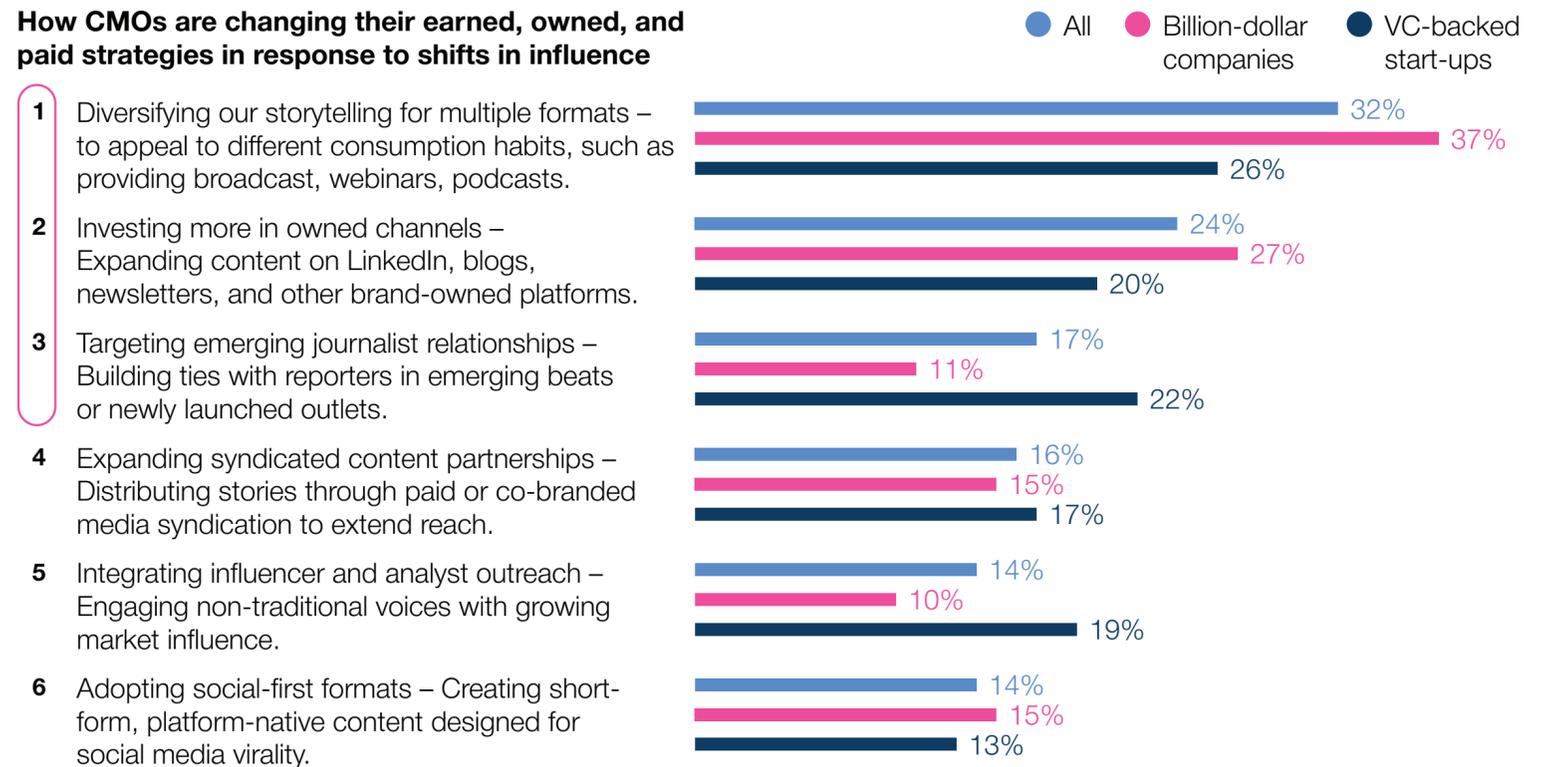
2. Investing more in owned channels: Big tech brands are doubling down on LinkedIn, blogs, newsletters, and other owned platforms – likely in an effort to reclaim attention, especially on LinkedIn, which has seen company page performance decline due to algorithm changes.

3. Targeting emerging journalists: VC-backed start-ups are moving fastest here: 22% plan to build relationships with reporters in new beats and emerging outlets, compared with just 11% of billion-dollar companies.



▼ Chart 04

How CMOs are changing their earned, owned, and paid strategies in response to shifts in influence



05

Campaign coverage redirected

Campaign reach vs. attention – and the media that can deliver

Securing media coverage for major campaigns isn't just about reaching senior decision-makers like CEOs or CTOs – it can also improve your visibility in AI-powered search, as these tools favour reputable sources such as Bloomberg, Fortune, and Forbes.

The big questions for media strategists are: Which outlets will deliver the most impact? And is it more effective to go 'wide' with a story or secure a premium 'exclusive'?

When marketers do opt for exclusives, they then need to decide which outlet and format best align with their narrative and goals – whether that's attention, engagement, reach, or power to influence AI-driven recommendations.

The top choices for CMOs are:

- 1. Persona-driven newsletters:** 38% would opt to give an exclusive story to a premium newsletter, such as Fortune CEO Daily. This way, their story will often appear on a premium website and in the CEO's inbox, likely garnering more attention than a news story alone.
- 2. Digital-first nationals:** 29% would prioritise digital-first premium national/business publications (e.g., Bloomberg) to achieve high audience reach. Comparatively, just 14% would prioritise premium publications with a print edition (e.g., Financial Times).



3. Media with relationships with LLMs: a new factor for CMOs to consider is their target publications' partnerships with LLMs (e.g., The Washington Post and Financial Times partner with OpenAI, while The Independent partners with Perplexity). 12% of CMOs said they'd choose to give exclusives to a publication on this basis.

Consider if attention is more valuable than reach

Premium titles are increasingly launching newsletters to boost attention and engagement – but there's evidence that print can still deliver a stronger and more lasting impact than digital formats. [McKinsey's 'attention equation'](#) showed that print offers a higher equivalent monetary value (\$0.62/hour of consumption) than digital (\$0.27) or social (\$0.25) – reflecting the more focused, less divided attention that readers are likely to invest in print coverage.

That said, finding the right balance between attention quality and reach is important. That comes down to having a diverse media strategy, and agreeing a media 'magic circle' that will drive influence across all personas.

Keep your finger on the pulse of media formats

Different media formats and focuses present an opportunity to engage in different conversations. Here are three of our top picks:

- **Bloomberg Weekend Edition:** Provides in-depth coverage of finance, culture, and modern work-life topics after markets close, giving readers time to engage with longer-form analysis.
- **Fortune CEO Daily:** Reaches roughly 140,000 subscribers with a weekday briefing that distils the key issues shaping global business leadership.
- **Financial Times 'The AI Shift' newsletter:** Tracks how artificial intelligence is reshaping the world of work, spotlighting where and how AI is displacing jobs.

06

Social influence reclaimed

Why LinkedIn performance dropped – and how to get it back for good

In early 2025, LinkedIn company posts accounted for only 2.1% of the average user's feed. By October, that had dropped to 1.6% ([Richard Van Der Blom](#)).

Brands now need to work harder to capture attention by transforming their LinkedIn pages into hubs for thought leadership, events, and community – and by using authentic, human storytelling that stands out from AI-generated mush.

The good news is, B2B tech brands understand the need to reclaim social influence, and are making moves to do just that:

1. VC-backed start-ups are leading on video and multimedia formats

Six in ten (60%) venture-backed start-ups are gearing up to produce more short-form video, podcasts, carousels, and interactive formats, compared to 48% of billion-dollar companies.

2. Nearly a quarter will optimise content for AI-powered search

23% plan to optimise content for AI-powered search – structuring posts and articles so they surface in GEO and zero-click results. That means tactics like keeping LinkedIn text 'chunkable', offering Q&As, listicles, and comparison content.

3. Just two in ten CMOs plan to use AI-assisted content creation

Just 22% of B2B brands plan to accelerate AI-assisted content creation in 2026, such as posts, visuals, and thought leadership. This caution likely reflects LinkedIn's prioritisation of human-centric content.

Keep on top of LinkedIn's algorithm changes

LinkedIn's algorithm keeps changing. What worked six months ago is unlikely to be optimal now. The result? CMOs need to continually tweak content formats to prioritise what the algorithm favours. Take carousels for example: in 2024, the optimal length was 12 slides; now it's dropped to 6-9 slides.

Edward Brice

Vice President Marketing
RecVue



AI has squeezed brand, sales, and search closer together. That's made LinkedIn even more powerful. It's where brands shape identity, sales teams build relationships, and marketers sow the signals that influence AI recommendations. But winning on LinkedIn takes nuance: a human voice, genuinely relevant insights, and answering real customer questions can all boost performance.



▼ Chart 05

Tech CMOs' top LinkedIn move for 2026: using more video and multimedia formats

Expanding video and multimedia use – Incorporating short-form video, podcasts, carousels, and interactive formats

Optimising for AI-powered search – Structuring posts and articles so they surface in GEO and zero-click results

Using AI-assisted content creation – Accelerating production of posts, visuals, and thought leadership

Increasing content frequency – Posting more often to maintain visibility and engagement

Boosting paid promotion – Increasing investment in sponsored posts and targeted LinkedIn ads

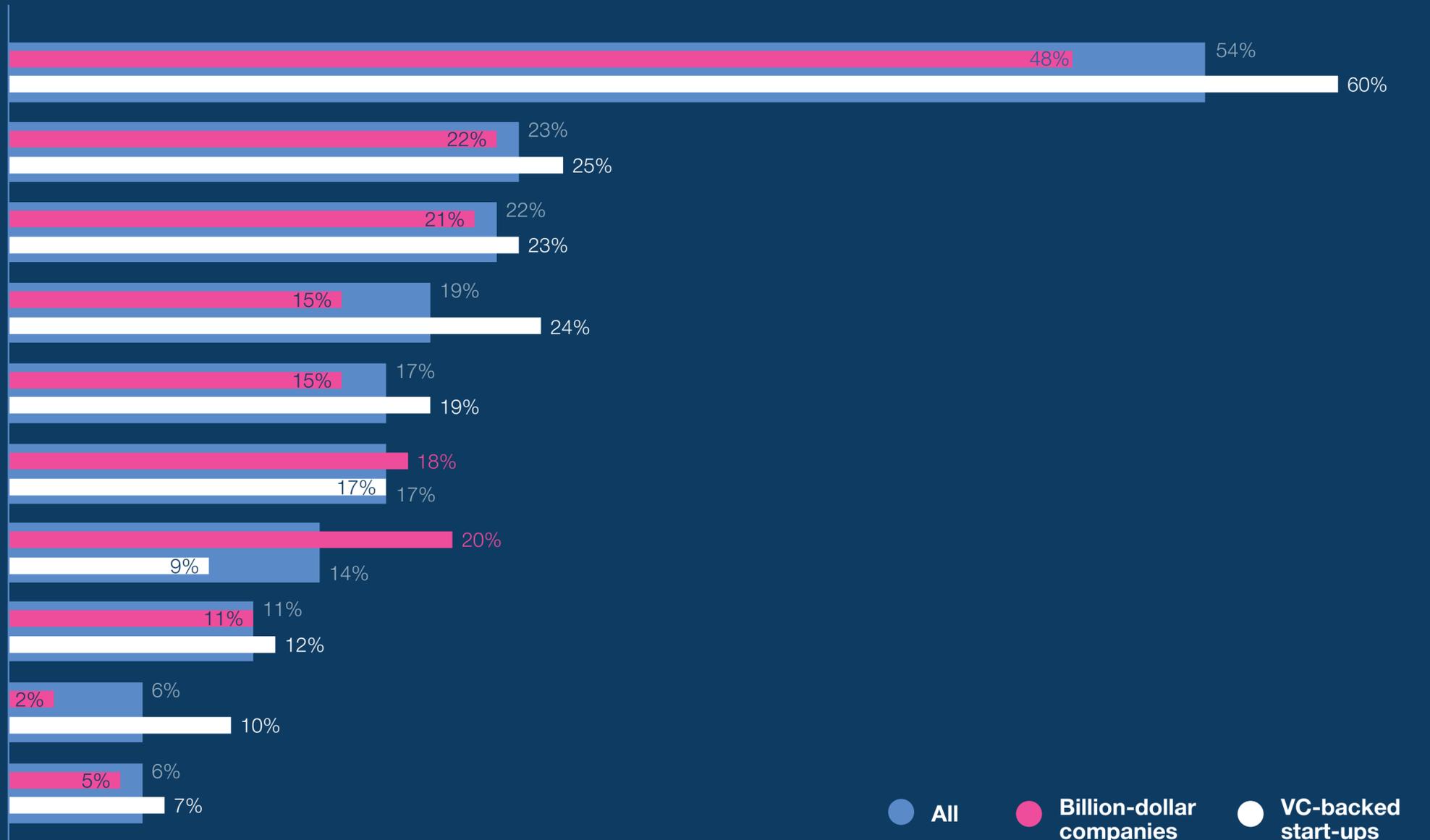
Targeting niche and persona-specific audiences – Creating tailored content for specific buyer segments or decision-makers

Growing employee advocacy – Encouraging staff to share, comment on, and create content aligned with brand messaging

Shifting towards thought leadership – Publishing more opinion pieces, insights, and industry commentary from senior leaders

No major change planned – Current LinkedIn strategy remains effective

Integrating analytics and search insights – Using performance data and search trends to refine approach



● All ● Billion-dollar companies ● VC-backed start-ups

07

Social selling reimaged

The quota-reaching traits of top-performing social sellers

Social selling shares a lot in common with AI search. It puts the emphasis of value on trust, authenticity, relevance, and ultimately solving problems.

When B2B sellers hit these markers, the returns are rewarding: LinkedIn data shows that social selling leaders create 45% more opportunities than peers with lower social selling index (SSI). And they're 51% more likely to reach quota.

Variety can be the spice of growth on LinkedIn

LinkedIn's early-2025 algorithm changes rewarded creators whose content reflected variety over promotion. Those who balanced five pillars – personal storytelling; educational 'how-tos'; achievements; conversions / offers / referrals; and industry insights – saw a 20% boost in follower growth. Others, however, were penalised – 95% of creators lost 50% of their reach year-on-year; their follower growth fell by 31%; and average engagement dropped by 25%.

Now, LinkedIn's AI model, Brew 360, has further refined its ranking criteria to spotlight posts that are highly relevant, specific, and tailored to a clearly defined audience. This shift closely mirrors the principles behind AEO and GEO optimisation, signalling that content performance is now driven by what users genuinely value rather than generic engagement tactics.

Growing reach on LinkedIn now means adapting to these evolving criteria. Social sellers can still succeed, but the platform increasingly rewards a community driven approach over overt promotion. Building influence takes consistency and resilience – especially after the 2025 algorithm update reduced visibility for most creators. Despite these challenges, LinkedIn remains one of the most effective platforms for B2B tech brands to shorten lead research time and deepen client relationships.



So, how are CMOs planning to raise their social selling game in 2026?

▼ Chart 06

How CMOs plan to update their social selling strategies in 2026



Daniel Michelson

Head of Marketing
LG Electronics

Authenticity should be at the heart of all brands' communication. It's something we earn by aligning PR, marketing, and sales around a single purpose – one that also demonstrates how we can answer a customer's problem, and dovetails into their wider business environments. At LG, it's about improving life and business through innovation. When our story stays consistent across every touchpoint, social engagement stops being a one-off tactic and becomes another multiplier of positive brand perception.

08

GTM alignment redesigned

Amplification, not simplification: why having just one GTM message matters

Creating a strong connective tissue between PR, marketing, and sales has always mattered to brands. But now, with prospective customers increasingly turning to AI for B2B tech recommendations, building that muscle is non-negotiable.

The strengths that count are consistency and recency – the latter becoming more important due to AI's tendency to 'forget' content that is more than one-to-two months old. So, just how prepared are brands for this alignment?

Strong starts, fragmented finishes – where alignment falters

CMOs say these are the areas where PR, marketing, and go-to-market are **most aligned** to maximise impact across the funnel:

- **Joint planning and goal setting** – PR, marketing, and sales teams set shared objectives and KPIs together. (46% say it's an 'embedded' or 'advanced' skill at their organisation)
- **Shared technology stack** – Common CRM, analytics, and content management tools across all three functions. (46%)
- **Joint content creation** – Cross-functional teams co-develop content to ensure consistency and maximise relevance across the funnel. (38%)
- **Social selling alignment** – Sales teams actively amplify PR and marketing content on LinkedIn and other platforms. (33%)



On balance, though, more CMOs highlighted areas of **poor alignment**:

- **Shared brand narrative** – One story consistently used in PR, marketing campaigns, and sales materials. (61% say their organisation is not proficient' or only 'mildly proficient' in this skill)
- **Measurement integration** – PR and marketing metrics tied directly to sales pipeline and conversion data. (59%)
- **Integrated campaign orchestration** – Coordinated earned media, paid marketing, and outbound sales activity. (51%)
- **Sales enablement through PR content** – Media coverage, thought leadership, and case studies used directly in sales decks and outreach. (46%)

Operationalising marketing execution seems to be the area where most brands need to focus. Strong performance on shared planning cycles and joint KPIs clearly shows that teams have intent. But they stumble when it comes to putting those plans into practice. To overcome that hurdle, CMOs should look to invest in campaign playbooks, define new operating structures, and apply governance at the execution layer.

Two moves can generate significant returns: (1) aligning in-house marketing and comms teams to redefine roles and responsibilities, and (2) involving external agencies more closely with campaign orchestration to deliver a cohesive narrative across all channels.

Kari Hanson

Chief Marketing Officer
Robin Powered

“AI has erased the linear buyer journey. If your message isn't clear enough to survive summarisation or be consistent across GTM touchpoints, you've already lost control of the narrative.”

Kexin Chen

Vice President of Marketing
Harvey

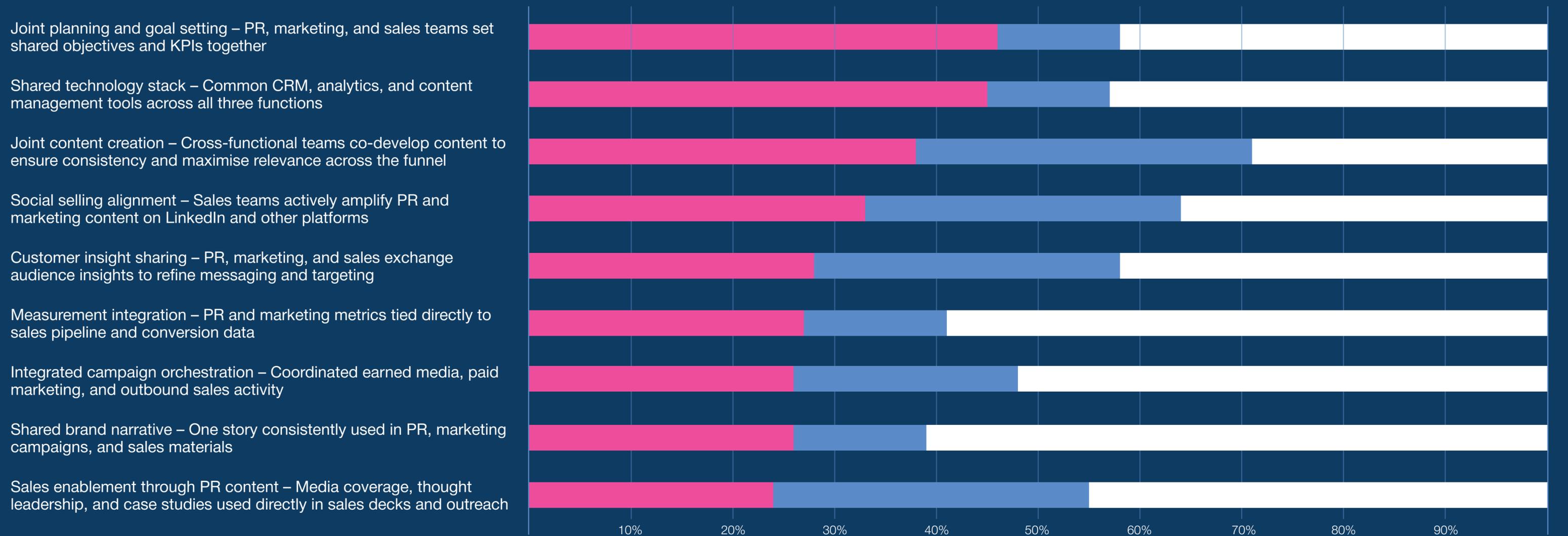
“Marketing will shift from storytelling about technology to storytelling through technology. For example, our product team worked to build Harvey Guide. Now, if a customer asks a common question like 'what features are coming next?', we can surface the newest roadmap content directly in Harvey. It means those interactions become part of the marketing and the message is always aligned.”

▼ Chart 07

Strong in joint planning, but weak in shared narrative

Where CMOs say their PR, marketing, and go-to-market alignment falters

● Embedded / advanced skill ● Emerging skill ● Not proficient / mildly proficient



09

Measurement rewired

The top metrics CMOs report to CEOs – and whether they’re fit for the AI era

With major shifts in influence, you’d expect changes in how performance is measured to follow. So, are new metrics showing up? And are CMOs moving fast enough?

For billion-dollar companies, the top PR and social performance metric reported to CEOs is **audience size** – total reach, unique visitors, impressions, or views – reported by 56% of CMOs. It’s closely followed by pipeline attribution (53%), measuring the contribution of PR and social activity to lead qualification and revenue.

By contrast, VC-backed start-ups take a more targeted approach, looking to understand relevance over pure reach.

Their leading metric is **target audience alignment** – coverage in outlets dedicated to their buyer personas – chosen by 45% of CMOs. Only 13% among this group measure total audience reached. And just 2% measure pipeline attribution.

AI is redefining ‘share of voice’

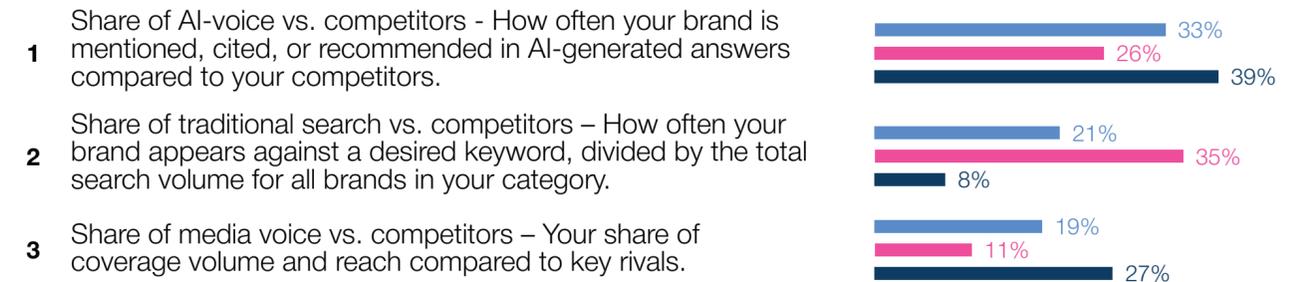
Perhaps the most notable new performance metric is **share of AI voice** vs. competitors – on average, the most-used share-of-voice statistic reported to CEOs (33%).

However, it’s a shift driven largely by VC-backed start-ups, where 39% of CMOs prioritise AI visibility, compared to just 26% at billion-dollar firms. Established brands, meanwhile, still lean on **share of traditional search vs. competitors** (35% vs. only 8% at start-ups) – maybe a sign that the bigger the ship, the slower the turn.

When measuring PR and social success, which metrics do you report to the CEO?

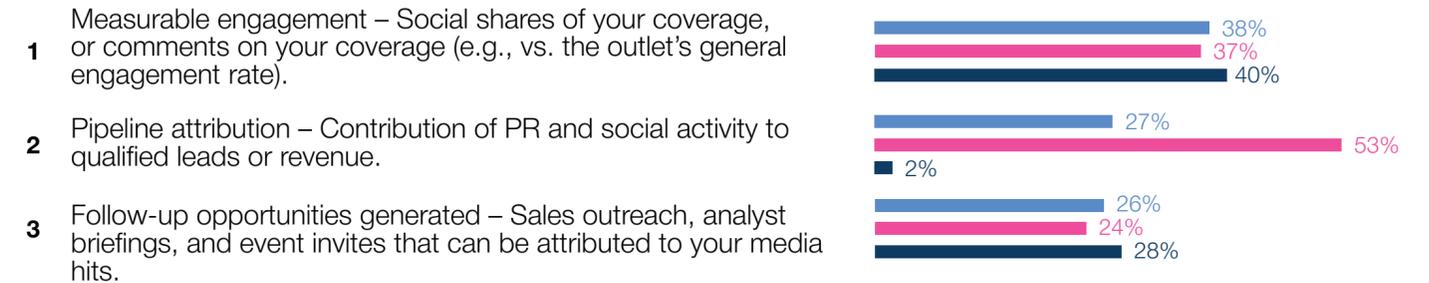
▼ Chart 08

Share of voice



▼ Chart 09

Attention - engagement and outcomes



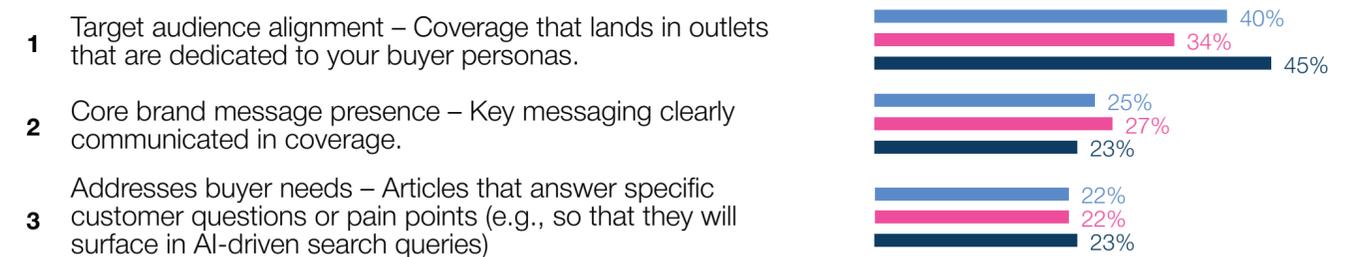
▼ Chart 10

Reach - visibility



▼ Chart 11

Relevance - right audience and message



10

Crisis comms reset

How AI has amplified crisis threats – and whether brands are ready to respond

AI is not only having an impact on brand influence – it’s also affecting reputation. Generative AI tools now make it easier than ever to spread entirely false narratives.

Deepfakes (AI-generated audio, video, or imagery that mimics real people and businesses) have emerged as one of the most dangerous tools in the misinformation playbook. Think of the fake statement, purportedly from the CEO of Astronomer, that circulated after the viral Coldplay concert video. That type of misinformation is something CMOs and CEOs need to prepare for.

The risks with deepfakes are varied: imagine the fallout that could come from deepfake CEO statements that talk to bankruptcies, acquisitions, or policy shifts. Or the repercussions of false social media posts from executives or companies during ‘quiet times’, such as during mergers, earnings, or regulatory events.

Despite the risks, tech brands are unprepared for crises

The majority of B2B tech brands lack training, playbooks, and procedures when it comes to crisis preparedness. Only two in ten (20%) have rehearsed crisis scenarios to improve speed and coordination should a crisis hit. Only 16% have a general crisis communications playbook in place so they can act quickly and decisively across channels. And only 14% have considered how they would respond to AI-generated threats such as deepfakes.

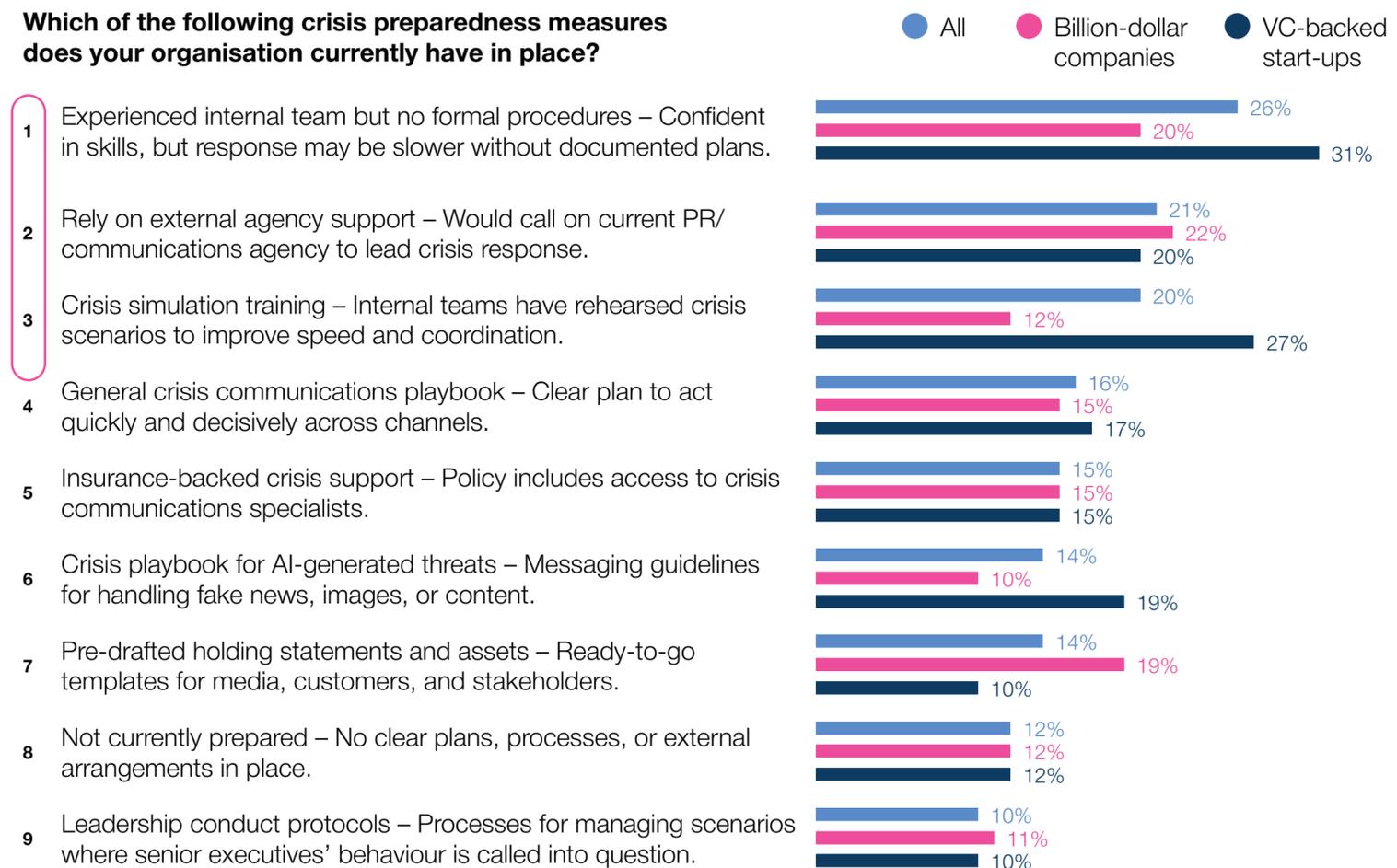
So, how would tech CMOs respond in a crisis? One in four (26%) are confident in the skills of their in-house team to navigate the storm, despite acknowledging their lack of formal procedures. Two in ten (21%) would rely on external agency support – turning to their PR agency to lead the crisis response. And fewer than two in ten (15%) would look to their insurers for crisis support, gaining access to crisis communications specialists included in their policies.



A lack of crisis preparation could be tech CMOs’ Achilles’ heel

▼ Chart 12

Which of the following crisis preparedness measures does your organisation currently have in place?



Conclusion

B2B tech has reached a defining moment. AI has shaken the economics of brand influence and discovery, giving marketers a rare chance to move early and widen their sphere of impact.

That's why 2026 is the year to gain an advantage. Brands that rethink how they're discovered, how their content connects with buyers, and how they build trust across human and machine-driven journeys will pull ahead. But they'll need to unify their story, modernise their content, and build influence across every channel that matters.

The brands that adapt first won't just weather the disruption, they'll develop a distinct marketing and communications advantage.

Ruth Jones
CEO, 3Thinkrs



About 3Thinkrs

3Thinkrs is an award-winning B2B communications agency for brands on a mission to stand out, scale fast, and lead the way. We partner with ambitious tech scale-ups and billion-dollar organisations to grab attention, build influence, and convert demand into sales.

Our superpower is distilling the essence of a brand into clear campaign narratives that provoke debate, spark connection, and drive action. We deliver this through our signature storytelling approach – Think-Sync-Ink – to create:

- 1. Brand stories that stick**, because they're easy to recognise, recall, and repeat.
- 2. Product narratives that travel**, because they earn attention, reach, and recommendation.
- 3. Messages that land everywhere**, because they're amplified consistently across PR, marketing, and sales.

Since our launch in 2021, we've been ranked in PR Week's Top 150 Technology PR Agencies, named a PProvoke Media Global Fast Mover, and recognised by PRCA, PR Moment, SABRE, Start-Up Awards, UK Agency Awards, and Communicate Magazine's Data Comms Awards.

About this report

This study, 'How to win influence in B2B tech: A CMO's marketing and communications playbook for 2026', surveyed 400 B2B tech CMOs across the US and UK in August 2025. Respondents were evenly split between venture-backed start-ups and billion-dollar companies. It examines the shifting state of play in B2B tech marketing and communications going into 2026, and CMOs' readiness to respond.

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