CMO OUTLOOK

How marketing leaders should be thinking about AI and data-driven decisioning heading into 2025

A welcome *from Marta Cyhan-Bowles*

We're pleased to share our annual CMO Outlook report with you. This year's survey not only highlights the evolving priorities and concerns of senior marketing leaders around the world; it also explores how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the marketing function for organizations of all sizes.

What's very clear? While other aspects of CMO strategy remained stable in 2024, Generative AI (GenAI) is at the forefront of significant growth and change. Indeed, it's becoming a core element of the marketing mix for accelerating business growth.

To drive sales in 2025, senior marketers will need to fully integrate responsible, consumer-centric GenAI tools into their overall marketing strategy. Our teams are leading the way, helping partners to see how AI is a healthy, growing extension of their organization. In this time of rapid change, NIQ is committed to keeping you at the forefront of the data-driven insights that give you a competitive edge.

Marta Cyhan-Bowles
Chief Communications Officer and Global Head of Marketing COE

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New year, new opportunities for marketers

NIQ's annual CMO Outlook survey offers crucial insights for senior marketers, spotlighting the dynamic challenges they face and emphasizing the importance of continuously gauging CMO perspectives globally to help shape future strategies.

The 2024 survey revisited themes from 2023 while also focusing on the tangible impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on marketing strategies. **This report not only highlights the findings of the survey; it also explores AI's potential in the years to come, offering retail and manufacturer CMOs critical analysis to guide their 2025 planning.**

About the survey

Timing: April-June 2024

Respondent pool:
- Nearly **600** senior marketing leaders from companies with over $50 million in annual revenue or 250-plus employees

- **18** countries represented (spanning Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East/Africa, and North America)

As the world's leading consumer intelligence firm, NIQ delivers unparalleled measurement data and AI-powered advanced analytics to consumer packaged goods (CPG), retail, and Technology & Durables (T&D) businesses. This expertise enables senior decision-makers to identify where to strategically invest in the fast-evolving AI landscape.

Clients across the globe have trusted NIQ with their data for more than 100 years. Today, we empower clients across 100-plus countries, 1.4 million stores, and trillions of records with AI and machine learning (ML) that drive actionable insights.

Read on to discover how senior marketing leaders are approaching strategic planning in 2025—and where AI fits in.

Market overview
Where we've been—and where we're headed

NIQ's latest CMO Outlook survey highlights the evolving priorities and concerns of senior marketers in 2024, revealing **both consistency and change** compared with last year's inaugural survey. While marketing leaders remain optimistic about the future, several shifts in sentiment reflect the economic realities of market disruptions, including the pandemic, rising inflation, and ongoing energy pricing pressures.

Consistent with 2023, **78%** of marketers in the 2024 survey remain confident that they will be in a stronger position three years from now. However, fewer marketers have reported strong growth over the past three years, particularly in regions like North America, Europe, and the Middle East. Despite these regional declines, **70%** of marketers are still seeing healthy brand growth.

6%
Anticipated growth
in global consumer
spending in 2025

Source: World Data Lab, Mid-Year Consumer Outlook: Guide to 2025

While marketers may be optimistic about the future, many of the consumers they market to continue to face challenges, with rising costs—especially in food and utilities—still key concerns. These pressures, coupled with the looming threat of an economic downturn, continue to shape the cautious spending patterns seen in CPG and retail. In turn, this is likely to have a major impact on marketing strategies and both promotional and brand activity for the foreseeable future as consumers continue to search for value and savings.

However, there are positives in other categories. In our role as a partner to the world's leading B2C businesses, **NIQ has identified opportunities for growth even where there is economic pressure on consumers.** Even though many are focusing much of their spending on essential items, there are signs of renewed interest in T&D categories such as Photo (+8.2% year over year) and Telecom (+2.3% YOY). As inflationary pressures ease, consumers are expected to begin replacing older products, leading to steady, if moderate, growth in the T&D sector heading into 2025.

Other categories poised for volumetric sales growth, despite rising inflation, include Health Care (+3.5% YOY), Health & Beauty (+2.3%), and Beverages (+2%).

It's important to understand these [consumer behaviors](#) within the context of the broader economic environment and competitive landscape. In 2023, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the CMOs we surveyed found it easy to justify marketing investments. In 2024, that figure dropped to **60%**, indicating **heightened challenges in securing marketing budgets.**

Additionally, fewer marketers now see marketing as a purely short-term tool. While **56%** still view marketing as key to achieving immediate sales targets, this is down from 64% in 2023, reflecting a **shift toward longer-term brand building**.

That said, marketers in some regions—particularly North America and Europe—are increasingly focused on short-term spending. In 2024, only **59%** of marketers allocated at least 60% of their budget to long-term brand building (down from 67% in 2023).

Marketers are also becoming more disciplined in how they measure return on investment (ROI). With the challenge of securing budgets becoming more pronounced, **rigorous ROI measurement is essential not only for optimizing investments but also for making the case to senior executives.** The percentage of marketers who find it easy to advocate for marketing spending has decreased (falling to **60%** this year, compared with 65% in 2023), underscoring the need for accountability and precise measurement to justify budget increases.

Investment in long-term strategic goals related to sustainability and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remains a priority for marketers, though these areas have seen little change since 2023. Notably, **29%** of marketing leaders now view sustainability as a potential competitive differentiator (up from 26% YOY), while **26%** see DEI as a differentiator (down from 29%).

Finally, the 2024 survey once again asked senior marketing leaders to assess the three key pillars of a "marketing-centered organization": impact, alignment, and investment. Respondents indicated their agreement (or lack thereof) with the following statements, which collectively illustrate the overall health of the marketing function within an organization:

Marketers are under pressure, with changing consumer behavior leading to brands being unable to predict a single path to purchase. To understand consumers and where they play, modern marketers need to maximize marketing's impact and understand what drives sales. [Contact us](#) to find out how to connect the dots between your efforts and your revenue.

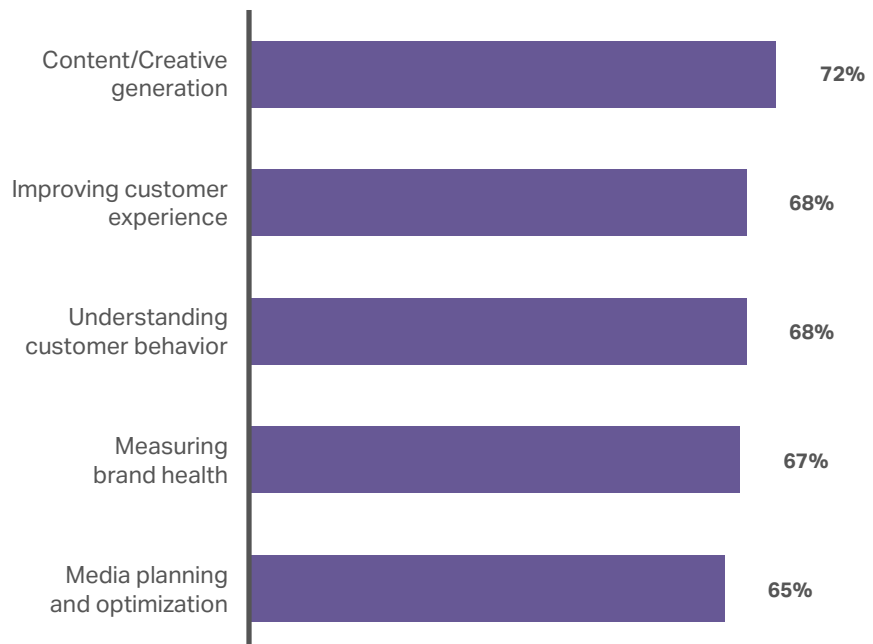| Impact	Alignment	Investment
• *I have a clear understanding of which activities, channels, and marketing levers give the best ROI.*	• *Beyond our commercial goals, we have a clear mission/purpose as a brand.*	• *We have the right balance between short-term return and long-term brand building in our marketing.*
• *We have a strong team with all the skills we need to deliver our marketing strategy.*	• *Our brand is an asset that really helps us to deliver commercial success.*	• *My CEO and CFO believe in the value of investing in our brand over the long term.*

Year over year, the **overall "health" of marketing is on the rise.** Europe experienced the most significant gains (**up 4 points**), driven primarily by improved alignment and the C-suite's belief in the value of long-term marketing investments. Meanwhile, sentiments among marketers in North America **fell 7 points**, due mainly to declining alignment and a mismatch between short- and long-term marketing goals.

Marketing and AI: What's next?

One of the most significant trends highlighted in the CMO Outlook 2024 survey is the growing importance of AI—particularly Generative AI (GenAI). **Senior marketers are increasingly deploying AI tools across a range of areas**, including product development, with **30%** of CMOs now using GenAI for this purpose. According to one survey respondent, "Companies are developing custom GenAI model applications by fine-tuning them with proprietary data. We are [accelerating] R&D through generative design and new, emerging business models."

Marketers who have already embraced data-driven approaches and GenAI report greater confidence in their teams and optimism about future performance. Beyond content creation, GenAI is playing an expanding role in enhancing customer experience and service, indicating that its impact will continue to grow across various marketing functions.

Top 5 uses of GenAI across marketing tasks

Task	Percentage
Content/Creative generation	72%
Improving customer experience	68%
Understanding customer behavior	68%
Measuring brand health	67%
Media planning and optimization	65%

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

As the use of AI matures, marketers are moving beyond the experimental "test and learn" phase, focusing instead on driving tangible results. This shift signals a **new era for AI in marketing, where the technology is being used to deliver measurable improvements in areas such as data utilization and consumer insight.**

The CMO Outlook 2024 survey also emphasizes the importance of collaboration, both within organizations and with external partners—particularly when harnessing the full potential of AI. A key challenge identified by **31%** of senior marketers is the difficulty of connecting data from different sources, a slight improvement from 33% in 2023 but still a significant barrier to maximizing data-driven insights.

As marketers look toward 2025, the results of the CMO Outlook 2024 survey make clear that while many of the challenges remain the same, AI—particularly GenAI—will be a critical enabler in addressing these challenges. Whether through enhanced customer experiences, or more effective collaboration, **AI is set to redefine how marketers navigate the increasingly complex landscape ahead.**

> *GenAI is transforming the CPG industry. Listen to **NIQ's four-part webinar series** to discover the knowledge and skills that can help your team develop a winning AI strategy.*
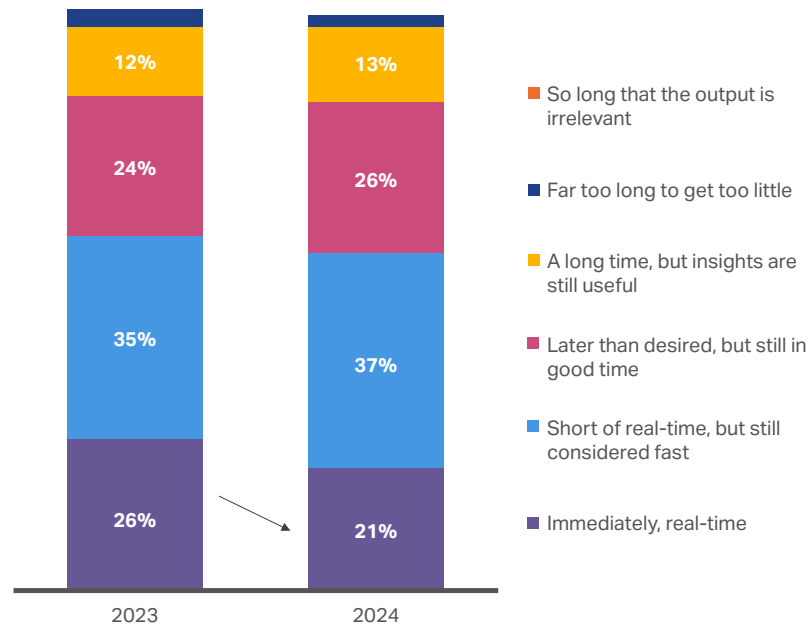
Data utilization trends
Moving toward prescriptive outcomes

The CMO Outlook 2024 survey reveals that senior marketers continue to prioritize data-driven strategies, with minimal variation in how data is utilized across industries. However, **AI is playing an increasingly critical role in building confidence around data usage.**

Last year's report highlighted marketers' embrace of insights-driven cultures, with a focus on leveraging data to identify opportunities and manage risks in real time. Yet, the 2024 findings show a slight decline in real-time data usage, with only **21%** of marketing leaders reporting they receive actionable insights in real time (down from 26% in 2023). This suggests that **while expectations for faster insights are increasing, much of the current data analysis remains descriptive.**

Speed to insight

How would you describe the time it takes to move from data gathering to actionable insights?

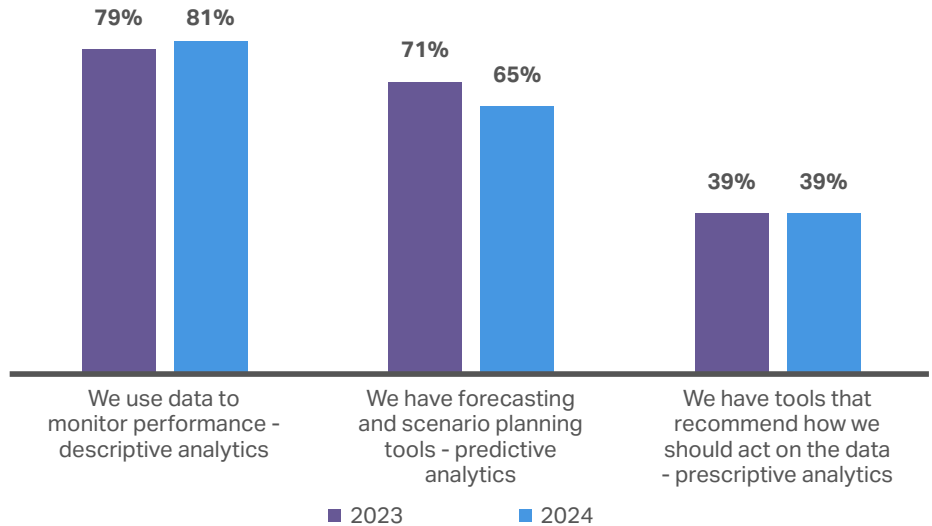|	2023	2024	
So long that the output is irrelevant			
Far too long to get too little			
A long time, but insights are still useful	12%	13%	
Later than desired, but still in good time	24%	26%	
Short of real-time, but still considered fast	35%	37%	
Immediately, real-time	26%	21%	

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

What's more, just **39%** of marketers report having prescriptive analytics tools that suggest specific actions—a figure unchanged from 2023. Additionally, **81%** of marketers still rely on data to monitor performance descriptively (a slight increase from 79% last year). Despite slow progress toward more advanced data-led strategies, **overall confidence in data insight and analytics capabilities has risen.**

Sophistication of data analytics

Which of the following describes how your marketing team works with data to achieve your goals?

Bar chart showing:
- We use data to monitor performance - descriptive analytics: 2023: 79%, 2024: 81%
- We have forecasting and scenario planning tools - predictive analytics: 2023: 71%, 2024: 65%
- We have tools that recommend how we should act on the data - prescriptive analytics: 2023: 39%, 2024: 39%

Legend: ■ 2023 ■ 2024

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

Within this context, one major factor to consider is that **AI cannot distinguish between good and bad data.** Since AI models are trained on vast amounts of data, the quality of the input directly affects the accuracy of predictions. Poor data can exponentially increase prediction errors, underscoring the importance of maintaining high-quality data.

Given that marketers use data for a wide range of decisions—including brand positioning, customer experience, product development, and pricing—ensuring data quality is paramount. More than **40%** of marketers view at least 10 data use cases as essential to decision making.

A key trend emerging from the report is the growing sophistication of AI-driven technologies in marketing. While GenAI was initially used for "data-light" tasks, its future applications promise deep competitive advantages. This could come from proprietary AI models for companies with the resources to develop them or from extracting deeper insights from proprietary data assets.

Alongside GenAI, marketers are also investing in non-generative AI solutions that enhance data analytics. As one survey respondent noted, "AI algorithms can analyze complicated data patterns to forecast consumer behavior, market trends, and campaign performance. As well as boosting our skills and capabilities, increasing data literacy, and making efficient use of AI tools, we are investing in understanding AI principles and technology."
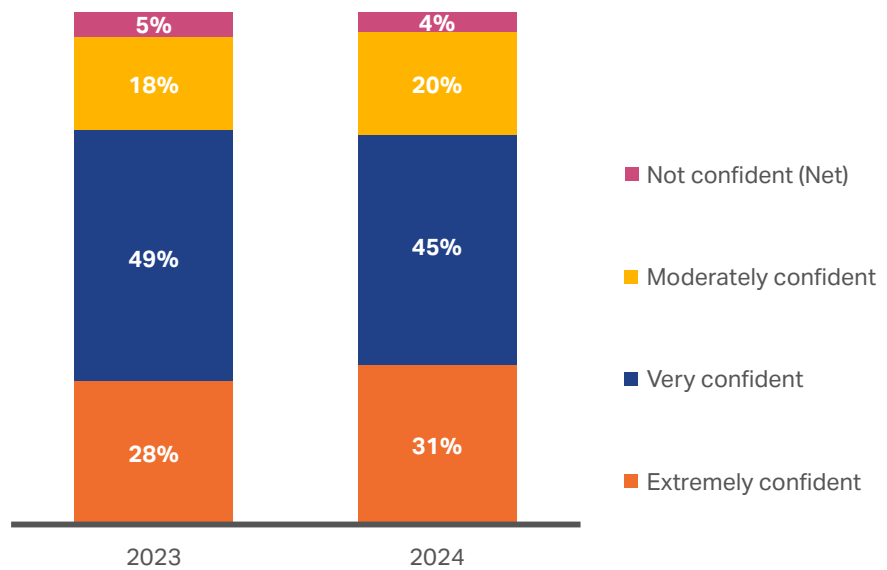
As AI becomes increasingly integral to marketing strategies, its effective use hinges on the quality of data and the sophistication of the tools applied. **Looking ahead to 2025, data-driven insights will be a key differentiator for businesses seeking a competitive edge.**
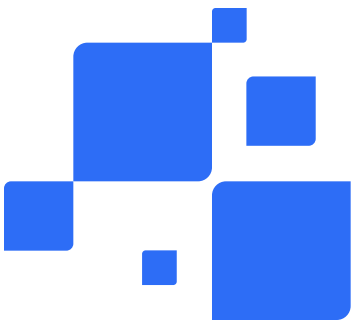
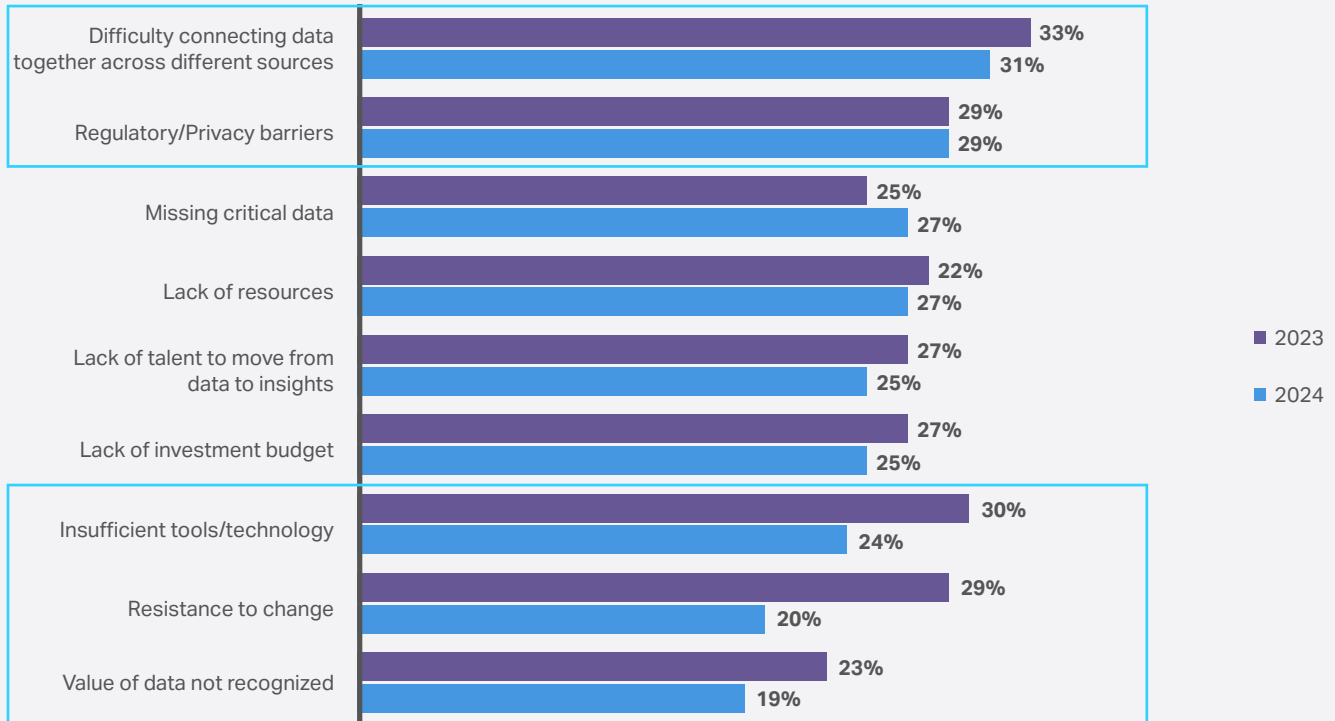## Confidence in insights and analytics capabilities

How confident are you that your data, analytics, and insights systems will be able to adapt to answer critical business questions that will be asked in the future?

	2023	2024
Not confident (Net)	5%	4%
Moderately confident	18%	20%
Very confident	49%	45%
Extremely confident	28%	31%

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

Barriers to reaching data and insight potential

Are any of the following holding your marketing team back from realizing its full data and insight potential?

	2023	2024
Difficulty connecting data together across different sources	33%	31%
Regulatory/Privacy barriers	29%	29%
Missing critical data	25%	27%
Lack of resources	22%	27%
Lack of talent to move from data to insights	27%	25%
Lack of investment budget	27%	25%
Insufficient tools/technology	30%	24%
Resistance to change	29%	20%
Value of data not recognized	23%	19%

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

AI's marketing impact
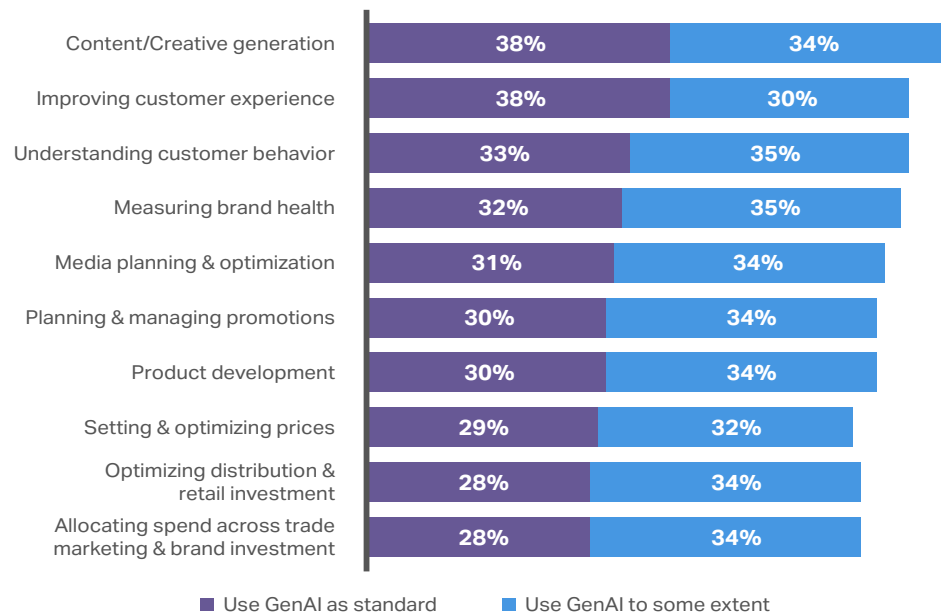## On the verge of transformation

Throughout 2023 and into 2024, businesses have significantly ramped up their investment in GenAI solutions. According to a [McKinsey Global Survey](#) of executives in early 2024, 65% of organizations are now regularly using GenAI in at least one business function—a sharp increase from just one-third in 2023. Furthermore, four in 10 organizations have adopted GenAI in more than two business areas, with marketing and sales (34%) and product and service development (23%) leading the way.

McKinsey's findings underscore that the potential of AI is no longer in question. While many companies are still in the early stages of implementing GenAI, **a clearer understanding is emerging about what works and what doesn't in generating value with AI.**
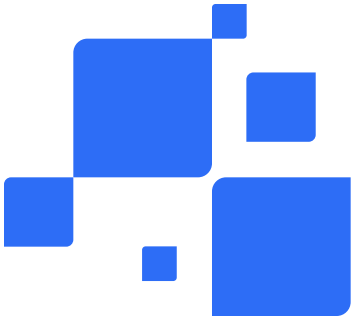
The CMO Outlook 2024 survey further highlights the role of GenAI in marketing departments, where senior marketers are increasingly making AI central to their strategies. Marketers are leveraging GenAI for tasks beyond content creation, using it for measuring brand health **(32%)**, media planning and optimization **(31%)**, and product development **(30%)** as a standard practice. (Still, many respondents indicated that they only use GenAI in these tasks "to some extent," as shown in the chart below.)

Use of Generative AI across marketing tasks

Please tell us the extent to which you are using GenAI for the following tasks:

Task	Use GenAI as standard	Use GenAI to some extent
Content/Creative generation	38%	34%
Improving customer experience	38%	30%
Understanding customer behavior	33%	35%
Measuring brand health	32%	35%
Media planning & optimization	31%	34%
Planning & managing promotions	30%	34%
Product development	30%	34%
Setting & optimizing prices	29%	32%
Optimizing distribution & retail investment	28%	34%
Allocating spend across trade marketing & brand investment	28%	34%

■ Use GenAI as standard   ■ Use GenAI to some extent

These applications show AI's growing utility in enhancing customer experience and supporting more personalized, data-driven marketing.

The evolution of AI tools is expected to further transform marketing, enabling companies to more accurately forecast trends, monitor consumer sentiment, and optimize pricing strategies. Many of these tasks will be powered by integrated chatbot tools and AI functions, bringing real-time data to the forefront of decision-making.

However, the CMO Outlook 2024 survey suggests that while AI is useful for understanding and creativity-driven tasks, its role in areas like budget allocation and pricing optimization remains less defined. For these functions, traditional machine learning tools like [programmatic buying](#) are still the go-to solutions.

Despite the benefits, marketers are not without concerns. The potential risks of GenAI include fake content, intellectual property infringement, and biased models that could lead to reputational damage. There's also a fear that overreliance on AI could stifle human creativity and intuition. These worries align with NIQ's consumer research, which reveals that **building trust in AI is a critical challenge.**
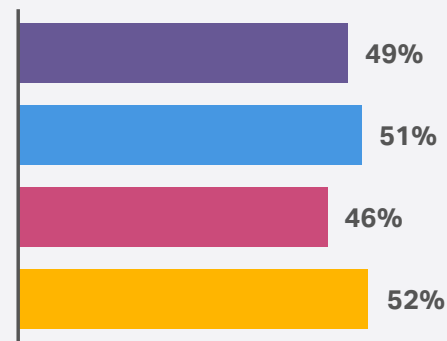
NIQ's [Mid-Year Consumer Outlook: Guide to 2025](#) shows that **56%** of global consumers avoid sharing personal information online due to concerns about AI's ability to protect their privacy. Furthermore, nearly half **(49%)** of consumers still prefer person-to-person interactions over AI-driven support. These concerns are consistent across generations, though **older consumers show the most resistance to AI technologies** (see charts below).

Consumer sentiment varies by generation

Consumers who would avoid sharing personal details virtually because they do not trust data privacy with AI technologies

Gen Z	54%
Millennials	56%
Gen X	54%
Boomers	60%
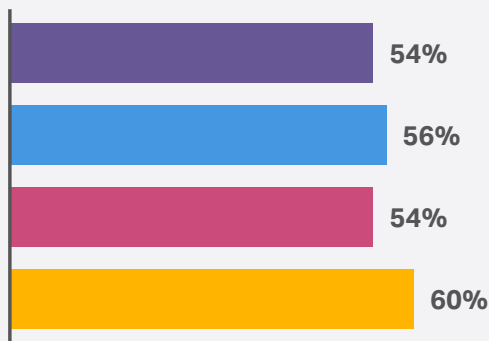
Consumers who would wait longer for support from a human, to avoid interacting with AI-generated support

Gen Z	49%
Millennials	51%
Gen X	46%
Boomers	52%

■ Gen Z ■ Millennials ■ Gen X ■ Boomers

For businesses, this highlights the importance of assessing AI advancements that not only make sense operationally but also resonate with consumers.

One of the critical themes in the CMO Outlook 2024 survey is the need for collaboration in AI adoption. **CMOs must determine how to integrate GenAI into existing workflows, identify the best use cases, encourage learning, and measure its impact.** Often, this requires a proactive mindset: investing in training, partnering with agencies, and experimenting with AI-driven innovations.

However, the **adoption of GenAI varies significantly by industry.** McKinsey's report indicates that in most sectors, companies are investing more than 5% of their digital budgets in GenAI. Yet, this figure is lower in consumer goods and retail (where 64% spend less than 5%) and in business, legal, and professional services (63%). In contrast, those in the technology (40%) and financial services (47%) sectors are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of investment.

Industries more exposed to AI are witnessing a productivity surge. PwC's 2024 Global AI Jobs Barometer reports nearly a fivefold increase in productivity growth in AI-driven sectors. This growth highlights the risks for industries that are slow to adopt AI, as they may fall behind competitors. Retailers, however, appear to be catching up.

A Honeywell study found that 97% of retailers are either already using AI technologies or are actively exploring their use. For retail businesses, the benefits of AI adoption include more efficient marketing through content "co-piloting." GenAI helps marketers transform ideas into impactful content that drives consumer engagement, saving both time and resources.

In the CMO Outlook 2024 survey, marketers praise GenAI's ability to boost efficiency and creative output. One respondent noted, "AI generates high-quality articles and social media content that helps us reduce time and costs, as well as customized marketing messages and campaigns based on our business customer data, improving engagement and conversion rates."

For marketers, the challenge will be to balance AI's immense potential with the need for responsible, consumer-centric adoption.

Research from Persado echoes this sentiment, showing that GenAI's role in content creation can significantly improve key performance metrics such as return on ad spend (ROAS), customer acquisition cost (CAC), conversion rates, and customer lifetime value.

In an era of tighter marketing budgets, the efficiencies driven by GenAI are even more critical. Research from Gartner further reveals that average marketing budgets have dropped to 7.7% of company revenue in 2024, down from 9.1% in 2023. GenAI offers a solution for marketers to maximize impact despite reduced investment. In fact, 64% of CMOs report that they lack the budget to fully execute their 2024 strategies, but AI-driven tools can help extend the reach of their limited resources.

Overall, **the landscape is shifting from GenAI experimentation to demonstrating its clear commercial impact.** As businesses prepare for deeper AI integration, there's a growing emphasis on upskilling teams, investing in AI-driven technologies, and addressing ethical concerns. **For marketers, the challenge will be to balance AI's immense potential with the need for responsible, consumer-centric adoption.**

The road ahead involves a combination of innovation, collaboration, and a focus on trust-building, positioning AI as an enabler of long-term success in an increasingly data-driven world.

5 AI-driven marketing accountability

Senior stakeholders increasingly prioritize actionable insights to achieve key business goals, and the CMO Outlook 2024 survey highlights the growing role of AI in shaping this landscape for 2025. These insights aim to drive revenue growth, enhance customer satisfaction, reduce acquisition costs, boost retention and conversion rates, and improve production efficiency.

One critical example is price elasticity analysis, which helps decision-makers assess how price changes, particularly during promotions, impact profitability and marketing ROI. Real-time data, meanwhile, enables boards to conduct scenario planning, analyzing how decisions or external events may affect future performance and financial outcomes.

Live sales forecasts, lead conversion rates, and marketing campaign performance data further assist boards in evaluating the effectiveness of sales and marketing initiatives. Yet, despite these advances, **42%** of marketers believe that optimizing spend allocation between trade marketing and brand investment remains a challenge for the next 12 months. More concerning, only **36%** have a clear understanding of which activities, channels, and marketing strategies deliver the highest ROI—unchanged from 2023, suggesting **little progress in measurement practices.**

Many marketing departments are still catching up in aligning prescriptive analytics with strategic goals and key performance indicators (KPIs). Even demonstrating how marketing initiatives contribute to broader business objectives remains a challenge. This lack of actionable insight frustrates marketers—and is exacerbated by broader organizational inertia and a failure to grasp the importance of measuring marketing effectiveness.

AI tools offer potential solutions by making marketing measurement more cost-effective and precise. External partners now provide services that integrate traditional tools like media mix modeling, web analytics, and attribution modeling with GenAI and algorithmic content analysis. Looking ahead, **predictive AI models are expected to play a more significant role in assessing marketing investments against KPIs**—particularly in driving profitability.

> *We are working toward a world where AI enhances the efficacy of everything we touch—from customer interaction to improved ideation, data collection, analysis, synthesizing insights across projects, and unlocking new opportunities. Learn more about **NIQ BASES'** AI-powered vision for marketing research.*

AI-driven collaboration

The need for close collaboration across departments was a key issue in the CMO Outlook 2023 survey, and its importance has only increased with rising investments in AI and related technologies. This is especially true for the integration of marketing, IT, and data science teams. AI's growing role in business operations has heightened concerns over data connectivity, and **companies with strong data foundations are better positioned to foster collaboration and reap the benefits of AI.**

Organizations that have fully embraced a data-driven approach and use GenAI tools show significantly higher levels of confidence in their data capabilities. According to the CMO Outlook 2024 survey, **60%** of these "data-driven" organizations are "extremely confident" in their data, analytics, and insights systems, compared to just **31%** of the overall sample. Furthermore, **96%** of these businesses believe their systems will be even stronger in three years, compared with **78%** of all respondents.

AI has the potential to bridge internal silos, particularly between IT chiefs and CMOs. Research from McKinsey reveals that **marketing is the function most likely to adopt GenAI**, reinforcing the need for stronger ties between technical and marketing teams.

This growing requirement for collaboration has led to an increase in the appointment of Chief Transformation Officers (CTOs). These leaders are tasked with building capabilities that cut across the organization rather than simply issuing top-down directives. While the rise of CTOs signals a commitment to enhancing collaboration, it also adds pressure on senior marketers to communicate effectively with both technology and finance teams.

This is particularly important given the CMO Outlook 2024 survey finding that less than half **(44%)** of senior marketers say their CEO and CFO believes in the long-term value of brand investment. Although this is an improvement from 41% in 2023, it remains a minority view. Marketers are increasingly learning to "speak the language" of CFOs to secure investment and engage with CTOs to maximize AI's potential. **Collaboration between marketing, data analysts, and business leaders is crucial for breaking down data silos and integrating diverse data sources to deliver more actionable insights.**

The CMO Outlook 2024 survey highlights the value of cross-functional teams in driving AI integration. One survey respondent noted how their organization is "in the early stages of setting up a cross-functional AI committee to develop a roadmap on how and where to integrate generative AI throughout the organization. Presently, it's primarily being used for digital marketing optimization."

AI-driven collaboration can particularly benefit businesses in the CPG, retail, and T&D sectors by improving their ability to listen to consumers and provide enhanced products and services. While consumers may not yet fully embrace AI in their daily lives, many are receptive to the idea of tech-enabled shopping experiences.
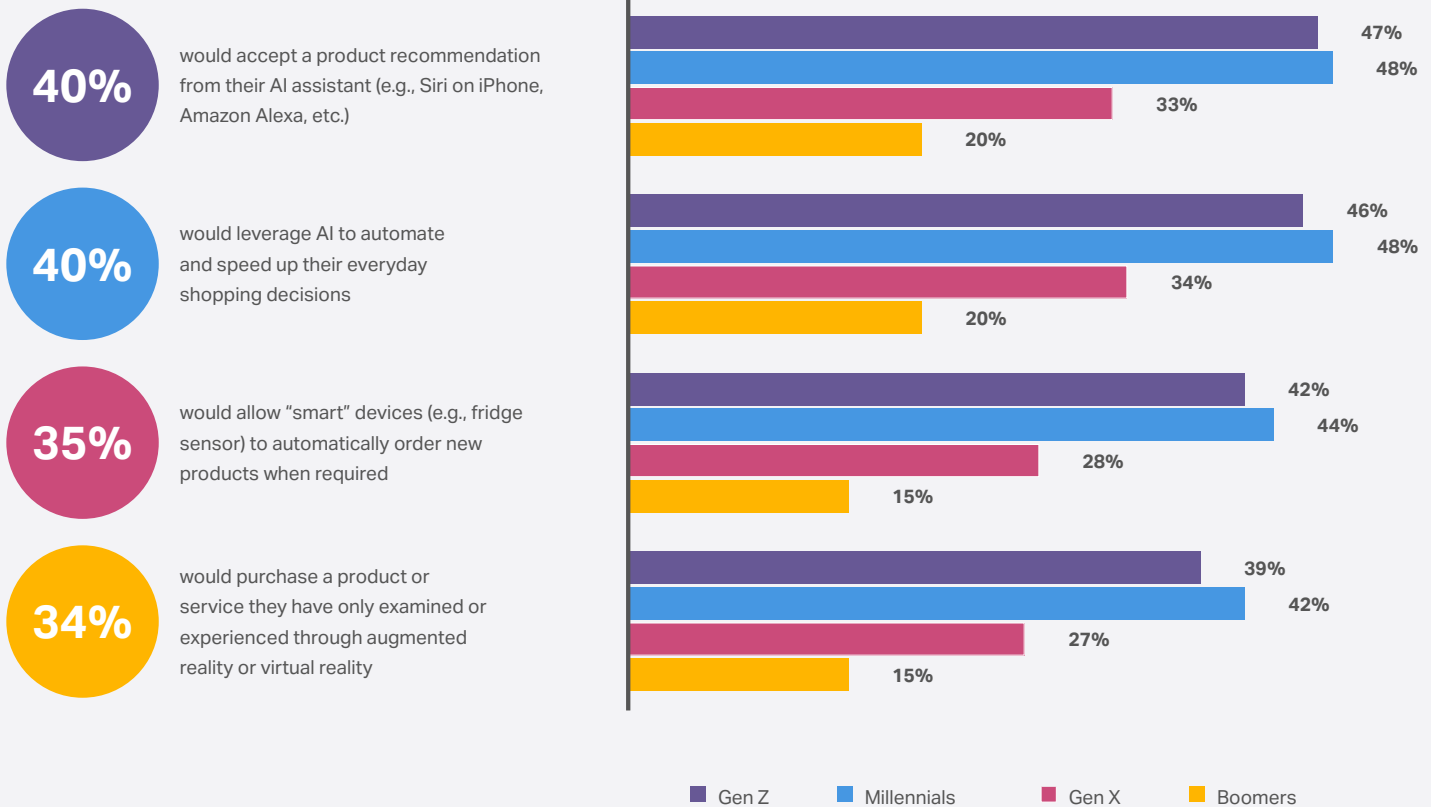
*How will the democratization of GenAI impact CPG product innovation? **[The Innovator's Guide to Generative AI](#)** offers some answers.*

NIQ's [Mid-Year Consumer Outlook: Guide to 2025](#) shows generational differences in openness to AI. Nearly half of Gen Z **(46%)** and Millennial **(48%)** consumers are willing to use AI to automate or accelerate their shopping decisions, compared to **34%** of Gen X and just **20%** of Baby Boomers. As consumer acceptance of AI grows over time, marketers must prioritize cross-departmental collaboration to meet evolving expectations.

Consumers are more open to AI involvement in their shopping decisions

But there are differences across generations around specific shopping-related tasks.

40% would accept a product recommendation from their AI assistant (e.g., Siri on iPhone, Amazon Alexa, etc.)
- Gen Z: 47%
- Millennials: 48%
- Gen X: 33%
- Boomers: 20%

40% would leverage AI to automate and speed up their everyday shopping decisions
- Gen Z: 46%
- Millennials: 48%
- Gen X: 34%
- Boomers: 20%

35% would allow "smart" devices (e.g., fridge sensor) to automatically order new products when required
- Gen Z: 42%
- Millennials: 44%
- Gen X: 28%
- Boomers: 15%

34% would purchase a product or service they have only examined or experienced through augmented reality or virtual reality
- Gen Z: 39%
- Millennials: 42%
- Gen X: 27%
- Boomers: 15%

Legend: ■ Gen Z   ■ Millennials   ■ Gen X   ■ Boomers

Source: [Mid-Year Consumer Outlook: Guide to 2025](#)

The importance of collaboration is clear. One CMO Outlook 2024 survey respondent emphasized the need to "foster collaboration between marketing teams and other departments such as product development and IT to identify opportunities for innovation and stay ahead of the competition."

Ultimately, as businesses continue to invest in AI, **the ability to collaborate effectively across functions will be critical to realizing its full potential.** By breaking down silos, organizations can leverage AI to drive innovation, improve consumer engagement, and enhance overall business performance.

How to collaborate on AI-driven innovation within the organization

- Conduct "test and learns"—perhaps as an extension of the regular process of A/B testing
- Hold brainstorming sessions/hackathons
- Make a clear allocation of budget to AI initiatives
- Preserve a culture of openness to innovation and experimentation— and an acceptance of "failure"
- Create cross-disciplinary teams, including formal working groups
- Invest in training, recruitment, conferences, and relationships with external partners

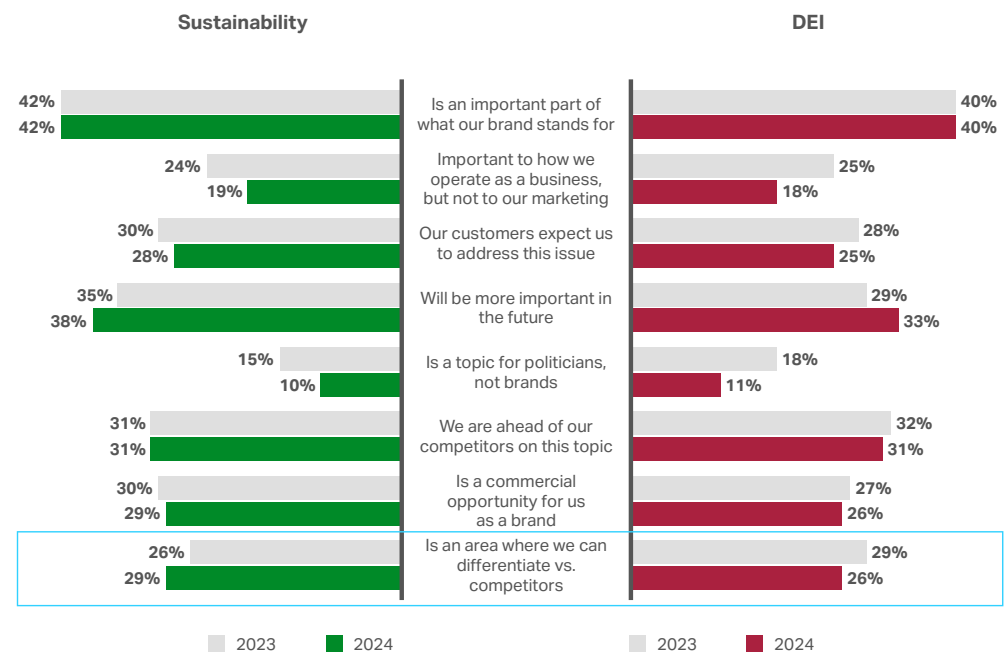# 7 The importance of long-term strategic investments

This year's CMO Outlook survey highlights the consistent long-term commitments from senior marketers in key areas like sustainability, customer experience, and technology. While sustainability and DEI remain priorities, there is a notable increase in confidence when discussing these topics. Moreover, **sustainability is increasingly seen as a competitive differentiator**.

In 2024, a higher percentage of senior marketers believe both sustainability and DEI will play greater roles in the future—**38%** for sustainability and **33%** for DEI, compared with 35% and 29%, respectively, in 2023. The trend toward sustainability is particularly strong in North America, where **39%** see it as a rising priority, versus **28%** for DEI (a decline from 34% in the previous year).

Which of these statements apply to your company or brand? Please select as many as you think apply for each topic.

CMOs continue to recognize the importance of sustainability and DEI

Which of these statements apply to your company or brand? Please select as many as you think apply for each topic.

	Sustainability (2023 / 2024)	DEI (2023 / 2024)
Is an important part of what our brand stands for	42% / 42%	40% / 40%
Important to how we operate as a business, but not to our marketing	24% / 19%	25% / 18%
Our customers expect us to address this issue	30% / 28%	28% / 25%
Will be more important in the future	35% / 38%	29% / 33%
Is a topic for politicians, not brands	15% / 10%	18% / 11%
We are ahead of our competitors on this topic	31% / 31%	32% / 31%
Is a commercial opportunity for us as a brand	30% / 29%	27% / 26%
Is an area where we can differentiate vs. competitors	26% / 29%	29% / 26%

Legend: 2023, 2024

Source: CMO Outlook 2024 survey

AI is also driving efficiencies in long-term consumer-focused product development, offering deeper insights into customer preferences. One survey respondent noted how AI insights into consumer behavior have "changed how we approach consumer-based issues." Clearly, AI is closing the gap between businesses and customers by enhancing the understanding of consumer preferences.

Tools like NIQ's BASES Ad Explorer are helping marketers improve brand equity. **By leveraging AI, marketers can prioritize creative insights, test multiple ad iterations, and meet deadlines without sacrificing quality.**

At NIQ, we are using consumer-panelist scores calibrated with in-market sales to generate highly accurate synthetic respondents. This sophisticated, AI-driven approach ensures that insights accurately reflect real human consumer sentiment, helping businesses make informed decisions about which product concepts to pursue. **By harnessing AI and data at scale, marketers can align their strategies with consumer needs, driving both innovation and sustainability.**

Three steps to using GenAI in sustainable product development

Marketers aiming to optimize their use of GenAI in product innovation should focus on three key areas.

Provide clear prompts	Conduct foundational research	Supplement existing innovation expertise
Specific instructions with additional context, objectives, and desired outcomes should be clearly stated.	*Leverage unique, trusted data sources to get the most from your GenAI investment.*	*Use GenAI as a tool to augment, not replace, human knowledge.*

Want to learn more about AI exploration in the product innovation space? Contact your NIQ representative today.

Making intelligent use of data-powered AI

This year's CMO Outlook survey highlights how **AI is driving significant growth and change in marketing, while other aspects of CMO strategy remain stable**. The 2024 survey reveals a slightly more optimistic outlook than 2023, as marketers express confidence in their brands, buoyed by a less turbulent economic environment.

The CMO Outlook Index, which tracks key dimensions of a marketing-centered organization, has improved marginally since 2023. The growth has been particularly evident in Europe, driven by a growing recognition of brand investment's value. **Senior leadership, including CEOs and CFOs, increasingly acknowledge that brand strength is a critical driver of business growth**.

AI is at the forefront of this change, particularly in content creation. GenAI is being used to create copy, translations, optimizations, and personalized content—although not yet fully replacing creative generation. As one survey respondent noted, "By autonomously producing content, GenAI is revolutionizing the content production industry. We are utilizing it to produce individualized marketing materials, product descriptions, social media posts, and website content at scale—while saving time and money [and] without sacrificing relevance or quality."

Beyond content creation, GenAI is increasingly recognized as a tool for accelerating marketing innovation. "Promoting innovation within your marketing teams and effectively integrating new technologies and trends involves a combination of fostering a creative culture, continuous learning, and strategic implementation," said another respondent.

While the transformative potential of GenAI is evident, established management tools remain critical in integrating these new technologies. Much like the evolution of social media advertising, machine learning (ML), and programmatic media buying, **AI is being incorporated into business strategies.** Customer experience is another area where GenAI has found widespread use.

However, data-heavy marketing areas—such as budget allocation and price optimization—are still better suited to alternative technologies like automation and machine learning.

A key theme throughout the survey is the need for CMOs to embrace AI as a strategic element, not just a tool for efficiency. AI offers the potential to enhance data maturity and measurement standards, but its full impact will only be realized when it's fully integrated into a company's overall marketing strategy.

> *Brand strength is a critical driver of business growth. AI is at the forefront of this change.*

At NIQ, we've been supporting companies as they navigate the AI learning curve. Our Innovator's Guide to Generative AI offers insights for marketers looking to adapt and accelerate their AI journey. One of the most critical decisions that brands face when developing an AI strategy is selecting the right partner. NIQ positions itself as that partner by offering more than just AI expertise. We bring unparalleled value through our premium data, robust data stewardship, and governance, helping businesses maximize the potential of their AI investments.

Our expertise extends beyond artificial intelligence; it's driven by *human* intelligence. With a presence in over 100+ countries, 30,000 associates, and decades of industry insights, NIQ delivers a unique blend of AI and human expertise. This combination helps clients not only win in the short term but build lasting success for decades.

NIQ was leveraging AI long before it became a buzzword, particularly in the CPG, retail, and T&D sectors. No other organization in these industries has the same depth of data or a more extensive network of relationships with retailers and third-party data suppliers. This connected data ecosystem is crucial for businesses looking to succeed with AI.

Additionally, NIQ leads with ethics, ensuring that we protect the relationships and trust we've built with our partners. Our associates, equipped with unparalleled industry knowledge, layer human intelligence into the AI equation, creating a balanced and insightful approach to AI integration.

NIQ's AI Guiding Principles

NIQ is committed to the responsible use of AI and upholds these principles in all GenAI-related activities, from general business practices to technical and operational processes.

Purposeful and beneficial	**Lawful and compliant**	**Transparent and clear**	**Training and awareness**	**Reliable and verified**	**Robust, secure, and private**
GenAI should only be used to benefit people, companies, and the industry we serve. It should be used in a manner that is compassionate, non-discriminatory, and ethical.	GenAI activities should comply with all current and future laws, regulations, and industry standards, respecting variations in geographical locations and types of data used.	The design, development, and deployment of GenAI systems should be transparent and offer clear explanations for design decisions, data usage, and biases or limitations.	Users and creators of AI solutions should have regular training and knowledge-sharing sessions on GenAI ethics to promote awareness and understanding.	AI and ML solutions can produce unpredictable information—all AI outputs should have human oversight to verify its accuracy.	GenAI systems should operate safely throughout their lifecycles with ongoing risk assessment and management. The privacy rights of individuals must be protected—data collection, storage, and processing activities should comply with applicable privacy laws and regulations.

As the AI landscape evolves, NIQ continues to invest in ensuring that our clients stay ahead of trends. We are committed to keeping your team at the forefront of AI and machine learning, not just by responding to new developments but by anticipating them.

Marketers adhering to NIQ's guiding principles—combining ethical AI usage with robust data and human intelligence—are likely to see the greatest benefits as they navigate this transformative technology.

Key takeaways

This year's CMO Outlook survey revealed both consistency and change in what senior marketers are prioritizing. Established practices continue to remain relevant, but the fast-evolving AI landscape is driving the need for tighter collaboration across marketing, IT, and data science teams.

Heading into 2025, CMOs will need to maximize marketing's impact and understand what drives sales. They also must balance AI's immense potential with the need for responsible, consumer-centric adoption.

It's crucial to remember that AI can't distinguish between good and bad data. As AI becomes increasingly integral to marketing strategies, **it will be essential to invest in sophisticated tools that can deliver high-quality data—an investment that will ultimately inform and yield better long-term decision-making.** Looking ahead to 2025, data-driven insights will be a key differentiator for businesses seeking a competitive edge. Getting a clear, Full View of what's happening, where it's happening—in-store, online, and worldwide—makes this possible.

The bottom line: AI is far more than a tool for efficiency. It offers the potential to enhance data maturity and measurement standards, but **its full impact will only be realized when it's fully integrated into a company's overall marketing strategy.**

NIQ's Global Thought Leadership team values your feedback. Complete this brief survey to let us know what you think of this report.

NIQ

About NIQ

NielsenIQ (NIQ) is the world's leading consumer intelligence company, delivering the most complete understanding of consumer buying behavior and revealing new pathways to growth. NIQ combined with GfK in 2023, bringing together the two industry leaders with unparalleled global reach. Today NIQ has operations in more than 95 countries covering 97% of GDP. With a holistic retail read and the most comprehensive consumer insights—delivered with advanced analytics through state-of-the-art platforms—NIQ delivers the Full View™.

For more information, visit **NIQ.com**