

**DESELECT**

REPORT

# 2025 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

Common challenges, innovative strategies,  
and emerging trends shaping the field



# Foreword



WELCOME TO THE 2025 STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS REPORT

This year, we explored the perspectives of **34 marketing operations leaders** across various industries to uncover common challenges, innovative strategies, and emerging trends shaping the field. With contributions from marketing operations thought leaders in **healthcare, consumer goods, SaaS, retail, education, and more**, this report offers a comprehensive view of the opportunities and obstacles faced by marketing teams today.

# Executive Summary



**Marketing operations is at a crossroads:** balancing technological advancements with organizational alignment. Across 34 in-depth interviews conducted between December 2, 2024 and February 5, 2025, recurring themes include challenges in audience management, the limitations of AI in data segmentation, and the ongoing need for role clarity within teams. This report identifies *six key insights* along with other learnings and offers actionable advice for navigating the evolving landscape of marketing operations.

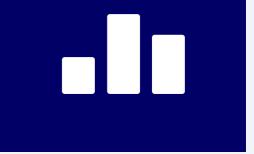
***“Marketing automation is only as effective as the strategy behind it. Tools amplify, but they don’t define success.”***

**Anthony Lamot**   
CEO & Co-Founder, DESelect



# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword/Intro</b>	<b>01</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>Objective and Methodology</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>Key Takeaways</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>Insights</b>	<b>06</b>
1. Managing Audience Overlap is Critical	07
2. AI Tools Struggle with Data Model Nuances	10
3. Organizational Clarity Drives Success	13
4. MarTech Needs Alignment with People and Processes	16
5. Platform-Agnostic Solutions are Preferred	19
6. Email Deliverability Remains a Challenge	22
<b>Other Things We Learned</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>31</b>



## INTRODUCTION

# Objective & Methodology

The insights in this report are based on in-depth interviews conducted between December 2, 2024 and February 5, 2025. Each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes and involved marketing operations leaders from diverse industries, including

Healthcare

Consumer Goods

SaaS

Retail

Education

+ more

Participants represented roles such as

Senior Marketing Automation Specialist

CRM Analyst

Director of Marketing Technology

Martech Consultant

A total of 34 individuals shared their perspectives, providing a robust foundation for identifying common marketing operations challenges and innovative strategies.

# Key Takeaways

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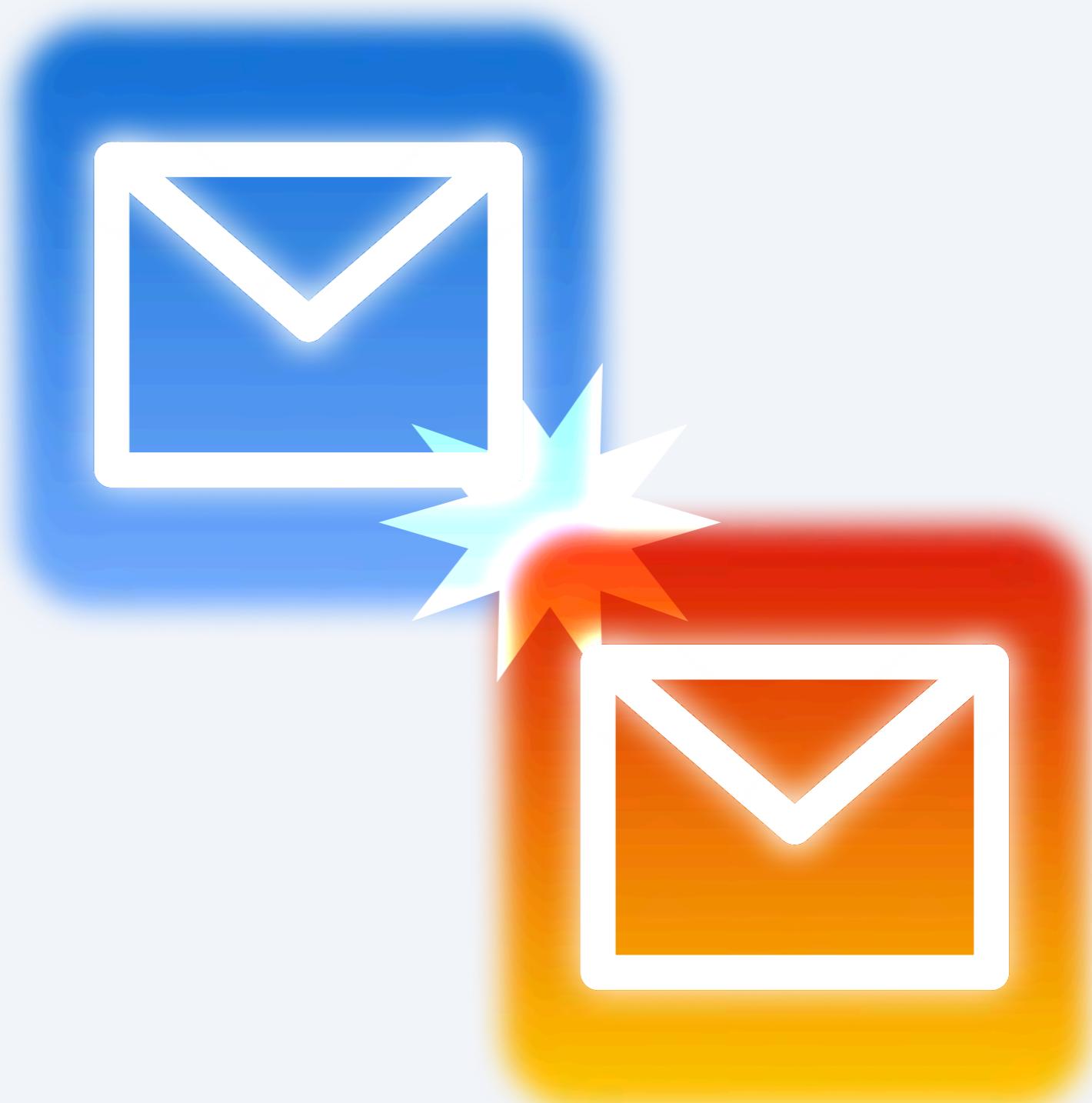
*THE GOAL ISN'T TO ADOPT EVERY NEW TECHNOLOGY—IT'S TO ADOPT THE RIGHT ONES THAT ACTUALLY SOLVE A PROBLEM.*

- ❖ The top challenge cited by marketing leaders is audience management, particularly email collision and overlap.
- ❖ Generative AI tools are not yet mature enough to handle the nuances of customized segmentation models.
- ❖ Effective marketing operations rely on a blend of skilled talent, process alignment, and Martech solutions.
- ❖ Organizational clarity and role definition are critical for team productivity.
- ❖ Marketing operations leaders seek tools that prioritize platform-agnostic solutions and integration across ecosystems.

# *Key Insights*

## Insight 1: Managing Audience Overlap is Critical

Email collision and overlap remain major pain points for marketing teams, particularly for multi-brand organizations.



## INSIGHT 1: MANAGING AUDIENCE OVERLAP IS CRITICAL

During the interviews, a recurring theme was the difficulty in managing overlapping audiences across brands and campaigns. Leaders from industries such as consumer goods and retail highlighted the inefficiencies caused by email collisions, which can lead to audience fatigue and diminished campaign performance. One CRM leader added that orchestrating CRM alongside other channels is another layer of complexity, making unified messaging a challenge.

Marketing operations managers often found themselves manually prioritizing or suppressing audiences to ensure that brand messaging did not conflict or overwhelm recipients. Despite being somewhat effective, these manual processes were described as time-consuming and unsustainable. One interviewee was challenged with coordinating across *19 countries and multiple business units*, reinforcing the difficulties of managing so much complexity, as each country has different expectations for campaign execution. Without centralized orchestration, audience management becomes chaotic and inefficient.

”

WE’VE HAD TO CREATE MANUAL PROCESSES TO PRIORITIZE AND SUPPRESS AUDIENCES BY BRAND TIER. IT’S EFFECTIVE BUT **LABOR-INTENSIVE**.

”

WITH SO MANY BUSINESS UNITS AND NO STRUCTURE, MANAGING CAMPAIGNS ACROSS COUNTRIES IS **NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE**. EVERY TEAM WANTS SOMETHING DIFFERENT, AND WE NEED A UNIFIED APPROACH.



## ***Take Action:***

- Invest in centralized audience management tools with built-in governance features that offer real-time visibility and suppression capabilities. Streamlining this process reduces friction and ensures that campaigns reach the right audiences without cannibalizing engagement across brands.
- Additionally, evaluate how these tools can integrate with your existing marketing stack to provide a centralized view of audience segmentation.
- Provide training to ensure your team can effectively utilize these tools, reducing the risk of manual errors and inefficiencies.
- Ensure that all regions and business units follow the same data taxonomy to prevent discrepancies in segmentation.

## Insight 2: AI Tools Struggle with Data Model Nuances

While generative AI promises efficiency, it often lacks the contextual understanding required for advanced segmentation.



## INSIGHT 2: AI TOOLS STRUGGLE WITH DATA MODEL NUANCES

Interviewees were optimistic about the potential of AI but expressed concerns about its current limitations. Many noted that AI tools struggle to adapt to the specific nuances of their organization's data models, leading to inaccurate or incomplete segmentations.

One leader reinforced this concern, highlighting that AI is still in an experimental phase and requires constant oversight to avoid errors. This was particularly evident in organizations with highly customized datasets, where critical filters or logic were missed by AI-generated models. These limitations often required manual intervention, negating some of the efficiency gains promised by AI.

Another interviewee specified that AI cannot be leveraged effectively without proper data normalization, reinforcing the theme that AI's effectiveness depends on structured data: "*Without normalized data, AI is not just ineffective—it's unusable.*"

”

*GENERATIVE AI-GENERATED SEGMENTS SEEMED SMART AT FIRST, BUT WE QUICKLY REALIZED THEY **MISSED CRITICAL FILTERS** UNIQUE TO OUR DATA MODEL.*

”

*AI SOUNDS GREAT IN THEORY, BUT IN PRACTICE, WE'RE STILL **BABYSITTING** IT TO MAKE SURE IT DOESN'T MESS THINGS UP.*

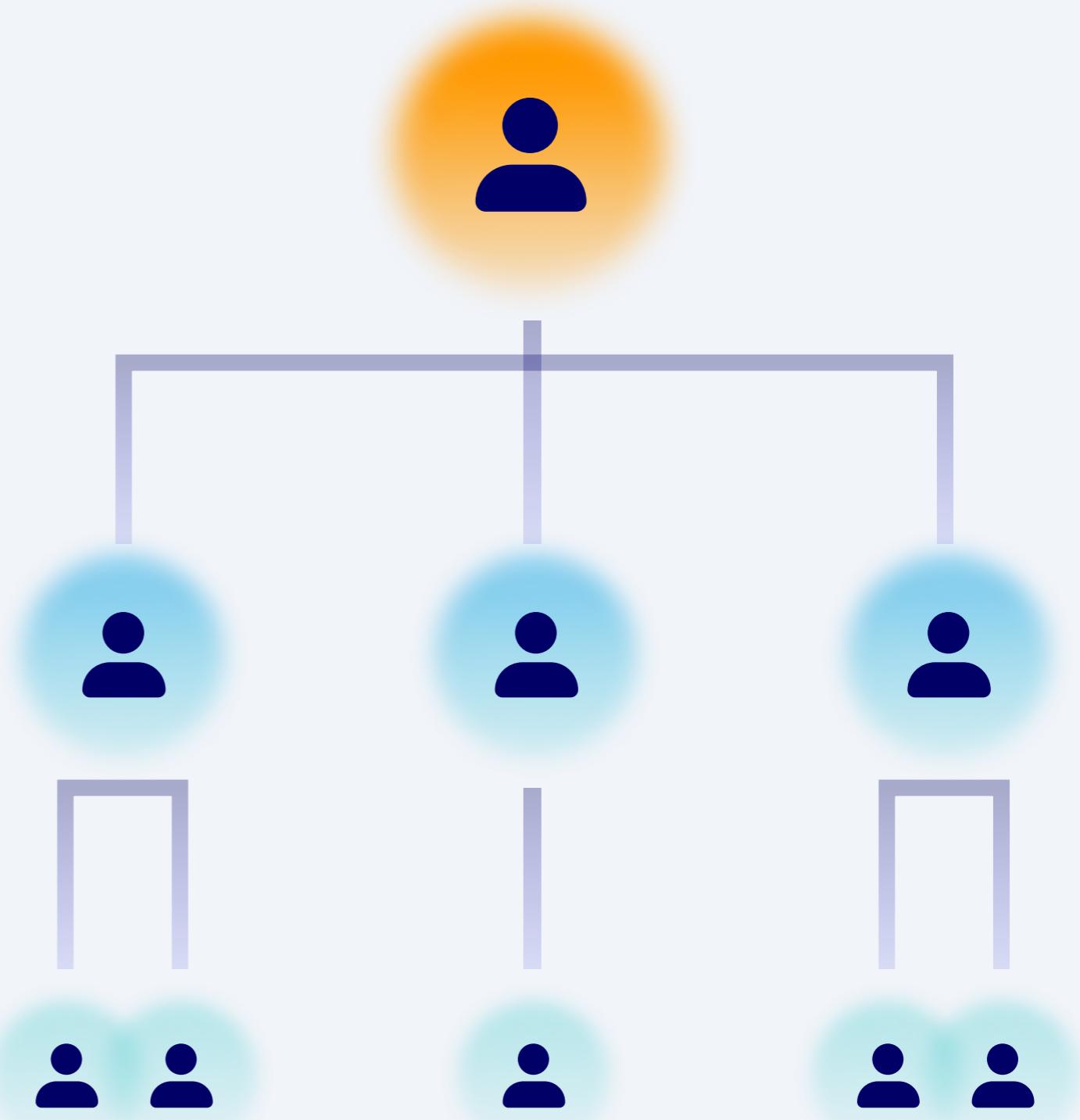


## ***Take Action:***

- Leverage AI tools for repetitive tasks, but maintain human oversight for complex segmentation.
- Test AI models on smaller datasets before deploying them at scale to identify potential gaps in logic or performance.
- Collaborate with vendors to ensure the AI solutions you adopt can be customized to align with your organization's unique requirements.
- Prioritize data normalization - uniform naming conventions, deduplicated records, aligned taxonomy - to ensure your data is standardized and free of inconsistencies.
- Continue monitoring the AI landscape for advancements that address current limitations, and be prepared to iterate your strategies as tools evolve.

## Insight 3: Organizational Clarity Drives Success

Teams with clear roles and structured processes are better equipped to execute campaigns effectively.



### INSIGHT 3: ORGANIZATIONAL CLARITY DRIVES SUCCESS

A lack of organizational clarity was a major bottleneck for many teams. Interviewees highlighted that unclear roles often led to duplicated efforts, missed deadlines, and misaligned priorities. Multiple leaders emphasized that marketing operations is often overlooked as a formal discipline, which leads to structural inefficiencies and inconsistent execution.

One interviewee noted that many marketing operations professionals are expected to lead projects across multiple teams without direct authority. She described how her ability to execute is hindered by a lack of standardized processes across teams, leaving her unable to delegate tasks effectively: *“I’m not a manager of anyone, but I’m a manager of everything.”*

Some organizations resolved these challenges by hiring dedicated project managers or implementing more robust onboarding processes. This clarity not only improved team efficiency but also enhanced cross-functional collaboration and accountability.

”

HIRING A **DEDICATED PROJECT MANAGER** TRANSFORMED OUR TEAM’S EFFICIENCY. CLEAR OWNERSHIP OF TASKS REDUCED DELAYS.

”

MARKETING OPERATIONS ISN’T A ONE-MAN SHOW. YOU CAN’T JUST IMPLEMENT A TOOL AND EXPECT IT TO RUN ITSELF.

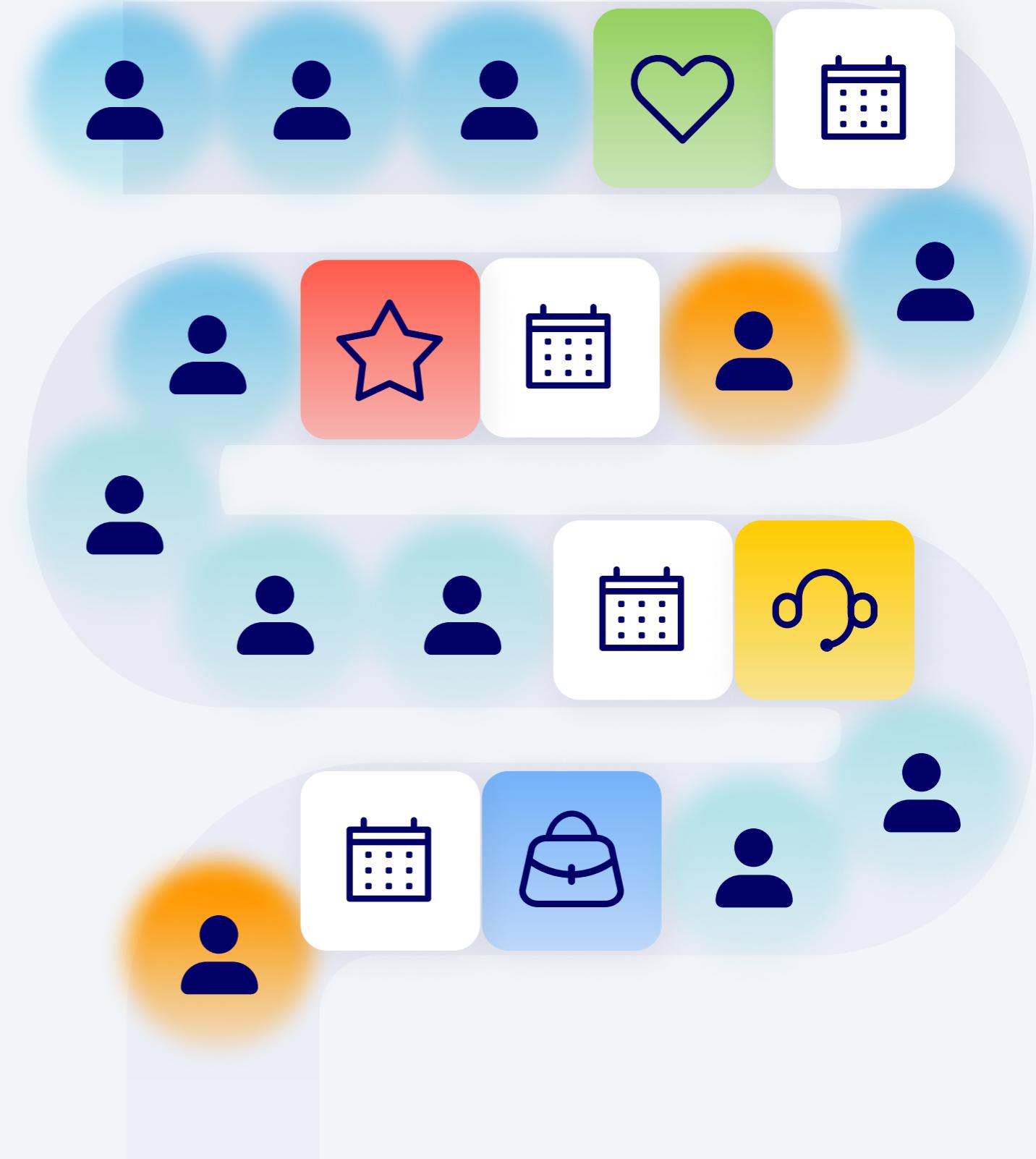


## ***Take Action:***

- Prioritize onboarding processes and define clear responsibilities for all team members. Implement tools such as RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) matrices to clarify task ownership.
- Regularly review team structures and workflows to identify bottlenecks and address inefficiencies.
- Provide ongoing training and foster open communication to enhance team alignment and productivity.

## Insight 4: Martech Needs Alignment with People and Processes

Over-reliance on Martech without proper alignment of people and processes leads to inefficiencies.



## INSIGHT 4: MARTECH NEEDS ALIGNMENT WITH PEOPLE AND PROCESSES

While technology can be a powerful enabler, several interviewees emphasized the importance of aligning martech investments with team capabilities and business goals.

A common frustration was the tendency to adopt “shiny new tools” without addressing foundational gaps in processes or training. Interviewees consistently pointed out that misalignment between marketing and IT teams slows execution, making cross-team collaboration a persistent issue.

Organizations that failed to align their tools with team workflows often experienced low adoption rates and diminished ROI.

”

*THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OPERATIONS OFTEN TAKE A BACK SEAT TO SHINY NEW TOOLS. SUCCESS LIES IN **ALIGNING** TECH WITH TEAM GOALS.*

”

*MARKETING AND IT SPEAK DIFFERENT LANGUAGES, AND THAT MISALIGNMENT MAKES EXECUTION **HARDER THAN IT NEEDS TO BE.***



## ***Take Action:***

- Audit your Martech stack regularly to ensure it aligns with your team's needs and goals.
- Provide ongoing training to enhance adoption and integration.
- Focus on building processes that empower your team to get the most out of the technology and document performance metrics to ensure alignment with your strategic goals.
- Make sure that documentation is regularly updated and actively used so it feels “alive.” Besides ensuring process alignment and consistency, documentation can also mitigate the risk of team turnover.

## Insight 5: Platform-Agnostic Solutions are Preferred

Closed ecosystems create limitations for data integration and campaign flexibility.



## INSIGHT 5: PLATFORM-AGNOSTIC SOLUTIONS ARE PREFERRED

Many interviewees voiced frustrations with vendor lock-in, particularly within closed ecosystems like Salesforce, where restrictions on data access limit efficiency and innovation.

These systems often limit their ability to integrate with other tools or adapt to changing business needs. One leader commented, “*Vendor lock-in makes true integration difficult.*”

Several leaders highlighted the difficulty of “stitching together” data across platforms, forcing teams to rely on manual processes or external consultancies to bridge integration gaps. One CRM leader expressed frustration over how internal data teams restrict access to critical insights, creating a bottleneck for marketers. He noted that while security concerns are valid, the inability to freely access data within closed ecosystems hinders learning and decision-making.

These leaders expressed a strong preference for platform-agnostic solutions that offered greater flexibility, interoperability, and innovation opportunities.

”

OPEN, CONNECTED SYSTEMS ALLOW US TO DO MORE, FASTER. CLOSED ECOSYSTEMS HINDER INNOVATION.

”

SALESFORCE IS SELLING AI, BUT IF DATA IS LOCKED IN SILOS, IT'S USELESS. **WE NEED FLEXIBILITY, NOT ANOTHER BLACK BOX.**



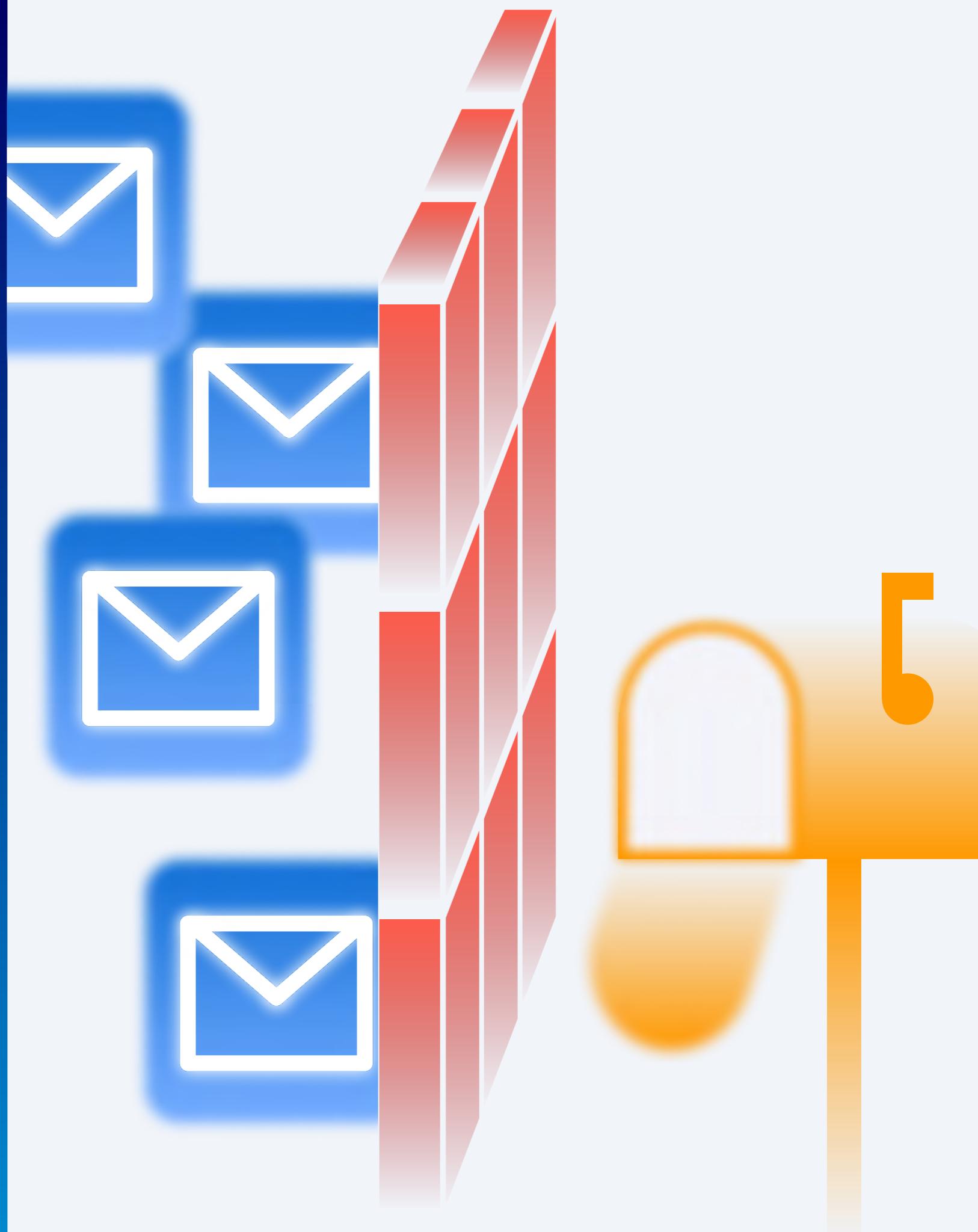
## ***Take Action:***

- Explore platform-agnostic tools that enhance interoperability and reduce reliance on a single vendor. This flexibility helps future-proof your operations and improves adaptability.
- Engage with your vendors to ensure their roadmap aligns with your vision for integrated, scalable systems.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### Insight 6: Email Deliverability Remains a Challenge

Changes in privacy settings, such as Apple's Mail Privacy Protection, are reshaping email marketing strategies.



## INSIGHT 6: EMAIL DELIVERABILITY REMAINS A CHALLENGE

Email deliverability emerged as a pressing issue for marketing teams, especially with recent privacy changes. They also cited orchestration and execution issues within their marketing automation systems as significant contributors to deliverability failures.

Leaders reported a significant shift in their email performance metrics, particularly open rates, which are now less reliable. Many teams have adapted by focusing on alternative metrics, such as click-through rates and conversions, to better understand engagement and campaign effectiveness, while others are trying to figure out how to centralize orchestration.

While email remains a leading digital channel in terms of ROI, competition for customer mind space has put engagement metrics and the need to innovate under pressure.

”

*WE'VE HAD TO RETHINK OUR METRICS ENTIRELY. **OPEN RATES ARE UNRELIABLE**, SO WE'RE SHIFTING FOCUS TO ENGAGEMENT AND CLICKS.*

”

*WHEN EVERYONE WORKS IN A SIMILAR WAY, IT'S MUCH EASIER—NOT ONLY TO EXECUTE EMAILS PROPERLY BUT TO **PREPARE FOR THE CHAOS** THAT RUINS DELIVERABILITY.*



## ***Take Action:***

- Adopt metrics like click-through rates and conversions to measure campaign success.
- Implement A/B testing to determine which engagement strategies resonate best with your audience.
- Ensure that all teams follow a structured email testing and validation workflow to prevent execution errors and train teams on journey validation requirements.

# *Other Things We Learned*

## Generative AI and Trust Issues

A few interviewees raised concerns about whether marketers are ready to fully trust AI-driven solutions.

While AI is seen as a powerful tool, some questioned if teams would prefer manual oversight before adopting AI-generated recommendations. For example, one leader highlighted how trust in AI might require more transparency in how decisions are made.

Another leader further reinforced this point, emphasizing that AI in marketing operations is still in an experimental phase and requires human intervention to prevent errors.

### ★ **Take Action:**

- Build trust in AI by using it to augment, rather than replace, human decision-making.
- Provide transparency in AI processes and educate team members on how these tools operate.
- Gradually increase reliance on AI as confidence in its outputs grows, while ensuring manual oversight remains an option for critical decisions.

”

*DO MARKETERS NEED TO SEE EVERY STEP BEFORE TRUSTING AI? OR WILL THEY SKIP STRAIGHT TO AUTOMATION? IT'S STILL AN OPEN QUESTION.*

”

*WE TESTED AI FOR EMAIL COPY, AND LET'S JUST SAY... WE'RE NOT READY TO LET GO OF OUR COPYWRITERS.*

## Overcoming Data Fragmentation

Data silos and fragmentation were mentioned as barriers to seamless campaign execution. One interviewee from a SaaS firm emphasized that integrating data across systems remains a persistent challenge, while another interviewee added that a major frustration is not just integrating data, but also making it accessible so that marketing teams could use it effectively.

And one leader offered a concrete illustration of how fragmented data makes campaign execution difficult: “German” appears as ‘German,’ “DE,” and ‘Aleman.’ Marketers need structured data to personalize experiences, but when ‘German’ exists in five different ways, segmentation becomes a nightmare.” Most noted how platform-agnostic tools could be the key to overcoming these barriers

”

THERE ARE **TOO MANY TOOLS** ADDED TO THE STACK. THE NEED FOR INTEGRATION HAS NEVER BEEN GREATER.

”

THE MOST FRUSTRATING THING IS THAT THE DATA AND THE INSIGHTS ARE THERE, BUT **WE CAN'T ACCESS THEM**. IF PEOPLE NEVER GET ACCESS, THEY WON'T LEARN TO WORK WITH IT EITHER.



### Take Action:

- Investigate working with IT to invest in data integration platforms that consolidate data from disparate sources into a unified view.
- Prioritize tools that offer robust API support.
- Regularly audit your data architecture to identify and eliminate silos.

## Adoption of Free Tools

Several interviewees expressed enthusiasm about exploring free tools for segmentation and campaign management, while also pointing out that organizations often underestimate the time required to properly implement and scale them, leading to adoption challenges. Many tools cater exclusively to CRM leads, and our participants mused that these tools would be more valuable if they were designed to pull in broader marketing teams as well.

While CRM specialists often serve as power users, true adoption and impact require tools that enable campaign managers, content strategists, and digital marketers to leverage data and automation effectively. Expanding access and usability beyond CRM-focused users ensures that free tools drive company-wide adoption, making them a gateway to deeper platform engagement.

### **Take Action:**

- Take advantage of freemium tools to test capabilities before committing to paid solutions. Use these tools to build proof-of-concept projects that demonstrate ROI to stakeholders.
- Be mindful of feature limitations in free versions and plan for potential upgrades as your needs evolve.

”

*CLIENTS LOVE FREE TOOLS BUT DON'T ALWAYS REALIZE **THE EFFORT** REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT AND SCALE THEM EFFECTIVELY.*

”

*WE LOVE FREE TOOLS, BUT LEADERSHIP STILL ASKS, '**WHO'S GOING TO OWN THIS?**' AND IF NO ONE STEPS UP, ADOPTION DIES.*

## Role of AI in Campaign Planning

One participant highlighted the use of AI to streamline campaign planning and sponsor vetting. His team employs custom AI models to evaluate and prioritize opportunities, demonstrating how AI can enhance efficiency in niche use cases.

Another noted that AI can be useful for optimization, but only when the data feeding it is reliable and structured properly. Otherwise, AI-driven decisions can be misleading.

”

AI HELPS US VET SPONSORS AND TAILOR OPPORTUNITIES, ALLOWING US TO **WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER.**

### ★ Take Action:

- Explore how AI can enhance specific aspects of your operations, such as campaign planning or data analysis.
- Collaborate with vendors to create custom AI solutions that address your organization's unique challenges.

”

AI-DRIVEN OPTIMIZATION ONLY WORKS IF THE UNDERLYING DATA IS ACCURATE—**BAD DATA LEADS TO BAD DECISIONS.**

## Importance of Strategic Oversight

Some participants emphasized the importance of top-down strategic alignment for successful campaign planning. One noted that without clear KPIs and leadership guidance, execution often falters, and another added that many organizations treat campaign execution as a tactical function when it should be closely tied to strategic objectives.

Yet another provided a strong example of how a lack of standardization in campaign planning leads to inefficiencies. She rejected an initial proposal to create 54 separate journeys for a single use case, advocating for a more scalable approach. *Without proper oversight, execution teams end up making reactive and costly rather than proactive decisions.*

### ★ Take Action:

- Establish clear KPIs and ensure alignment across all levels of your organization.
- Conduct regular strategy reviews to ensure that execution aligns with broader business goals.

”

CAMPAIGN SUCCESS DEPENDS ON A **STRONG STRATEGY** DEFINED BY LEADERSHIP. CLEAR DIRECTION ENSURES EFFECTIVE EXECUTION.

”

EXECUTION TEAMS CAN ONLY BE AS STRATEGIC AS THE LEADERSHIP GUIDING THEM—WITHOUT ALIGNMENT, **THEY'RE JUST REACTING** TO THE LATEST REQUEST.

”

**ONE USE CASE, ONE JOURNEY**—NO NEGOTIATION. OTHERWISE, YOU CREATE CHAOS INSTEAD OF AUTOMATION.

# Conclusion



***“Collaboration isn’t just nice to have; it’s the backbone of any successful marketing ops strategy.”***

The 2025 State of Marketing Operations Report highlights the evolving challenges and opportunities faced by marketing teams across industries. From managing audience overlap to navigating the limitations of AI, **leaders are finding innovative ways to adapt and thrive**. By focusing on strategic alignment, investing in the right tools, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, organizations can enhance their marketing operations and drive meaningful results. As the field continues to evolve, staying agile and informed will be key to success.

# About DESelect

DESelect is a Salesforce Marketing Cloud partner offering the leading Marketing Optimization Platform (MOP) on the Salesforce AppExchange. Fortune 500 organizations around the world leverage DESelect to help marketing teams segment audiences, optimize marketing frequency, and power highly personalized campaigns. Founded in 2019, DESelect has offices in Antwerp, Belgium and Austin, Texas.

**Book a demo and start optimizing marketing performance today**





# Deselect

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