

**DESELECT**

2025 TRENDS REPORT

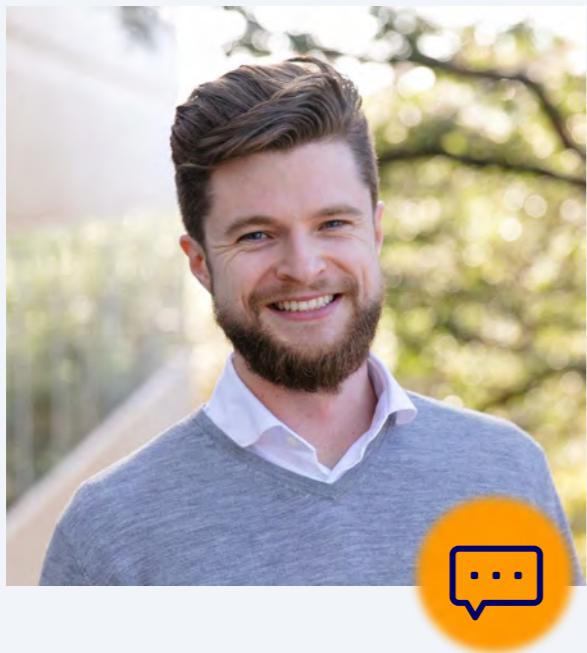
# THE STATE OF MARKETING OPERATIONS

Insights from 34 marketing operations leaders around the globe

**EXCLUSIVE EDITION FOR  
INTERVIEWEES**



# Executive Summary



**Anthony Lamot**  
*CEO*  
DESelect

Welcome to the **Interviewee Edition** of the **2025 State of Marketing Operations Report**. This version was created exclusively for those who participated in the interviews with DESelect CEO Anthony Lamot. Our goal is to share what we heard from you, provide in-depth context around key themes, and give actionable takeaways tailored to marketing operations professionals like yourself.

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, and more. Participants represented roles such as senior marketing automation specialists, CRM analysts, directors of marketing technology, and martech consultants. A total of 34 individuals shared their perspectives, providing a robust foundation for identifying common marketing operations challenges and innovative strategies.

Your collective perspectives helped shape the public version of this report, to be published next month. This edition includes exclusive quotes and behind-the-scenes learnings and recommendations that are not included in the public version.

With heartfelt thanks and regards,

Anthony



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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Audience Overlap & Suppression:** Many of you described manual processes for audience management, particularly for multi-brand organizations, leading to inefficiencies.

**AI's Limitations:** While AI presents exciting opportunities, nearly everyone we spoke with expressed skepticism about its ability to handle real-world data models effectively.

**Orchestration Challenges:** From email deliverability to cross-channel alignment, most of you agreed that lack of structured processes makes execution more difficult than it should be.

**The Need for Platform-Agnostic Tools:** Several of you shared frustrations around vendor lock-in, particularly within the Salesforce ecosystem.

**Marketing Operations Still Feels Undervalued:** Many of you feel that your work is still misunderstood or undervalued internally, with some teams not recognizing marketing ops as a strategic function.

**Executives Still Don't Get Marketing Ops:** Many leaders feel that marketing ops is expected to be both the firefighter and the architect, yet leadership often only sees the firefighting.

**Over-Reliance on a Few Key People is a Major Risk:** Some teams admitted that if their one SFMC admin left, everything would fall apart.

**The 'Shiny Object Syndrome' in Martech is Worse Than Ever:** Many of you shared that companies keep buying new tools instead of optimizing the ones they already have.

**Some Teams Don't Even Know What Metrics They're Tracking:** Despite heavy investments in marketing automation, many teams struggle to define what success actually looks like.

**AI-Generated Marketing Copy is Still...Pretty Bad:** While AI helps with automation, many of you admitted that AI-generated email and ad copy often sounds generic or robotic.

## Managing Audience Overlap Is Critical

**75% Of Interviewees Said Email Collision And Overlap Remain Major Pain Points For Marketing Teams, Particularly For Multi-Brand Organizations.**

- “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.”
- “We rely on suppression lists to avoid overlap, but it’s completely manual and time-consuming.”

**Exclusive Perspective:** In large enterprise teams, audience overlap is often managed through governance models and internal workflows. However, in smaller teams, suppression lists and manual exclusions are the norm, slowing down execution.

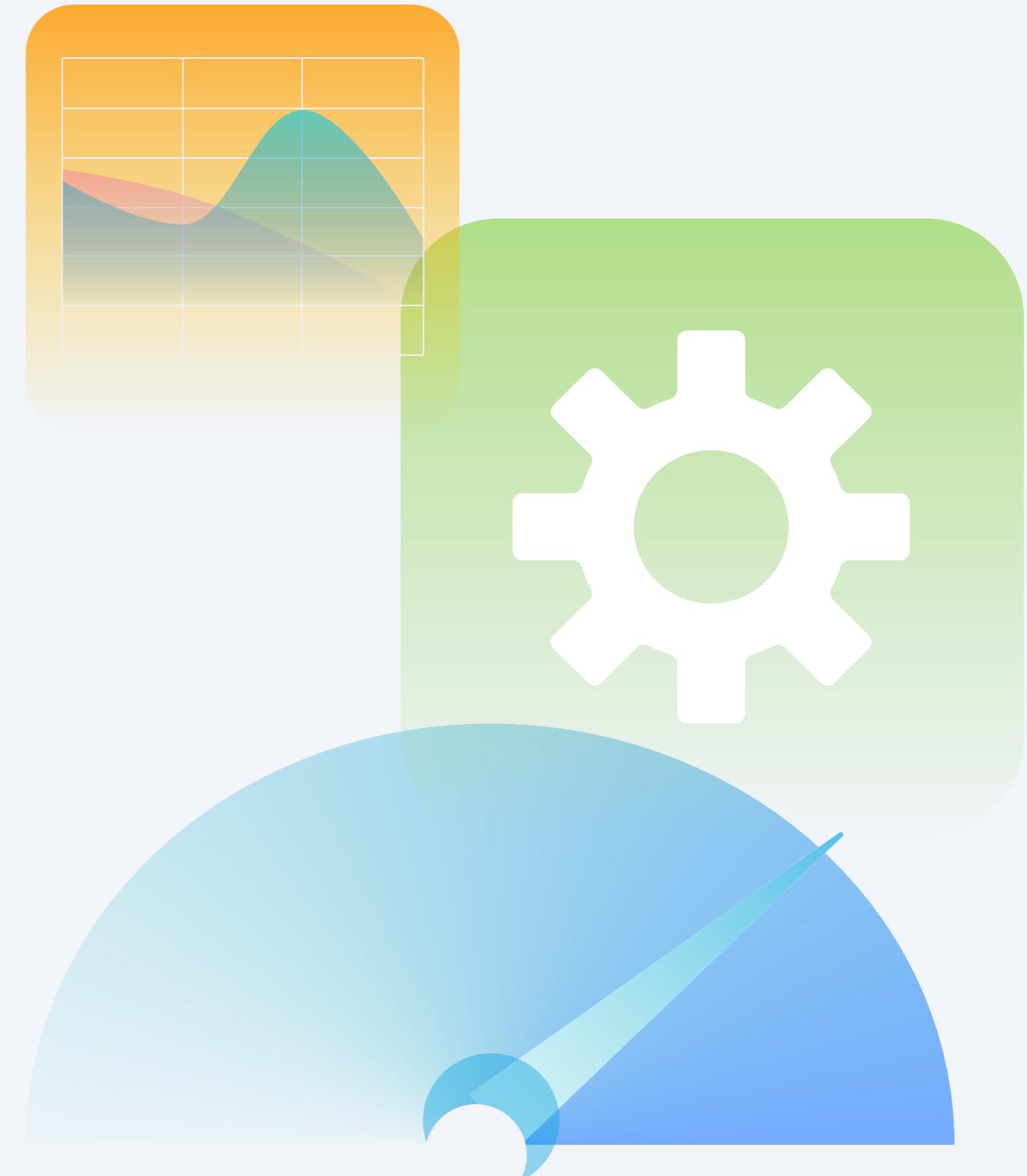
Many of you shared that audience suppression remains an ongoing challenge, with some teams relying on manual workarounds to prevent email collision. Several leaders working across global teams noted that different business units often create their own segmentation rules, leading to inconsistencies and increased risk of duplicate outreach.

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.

You often find yourselves manually prioritizing or suppressing audiences to ensure that brand messaging does not conflict or overwhelm recipients. Despite being somewhat effective, you described these manual processes 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.

## KEY INSIGHT 1: 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.



## AI Tools Struggle With Data Model Nuances

**83% Of Interviewees Said That While Generative AI Promises Efficiency, It Lacks The Contextual Understanding Required For Advanced Segmentation.**

- “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.”
- “We tried AI-driven segmentation, but it missed key nuances in our data model, so we had to manually fix everything.”

**Exclusive Perspective:** Multiple participants noted that AI in marketing is still in an experimental phase, and AI tools are often marketed as more capable than they truly are.

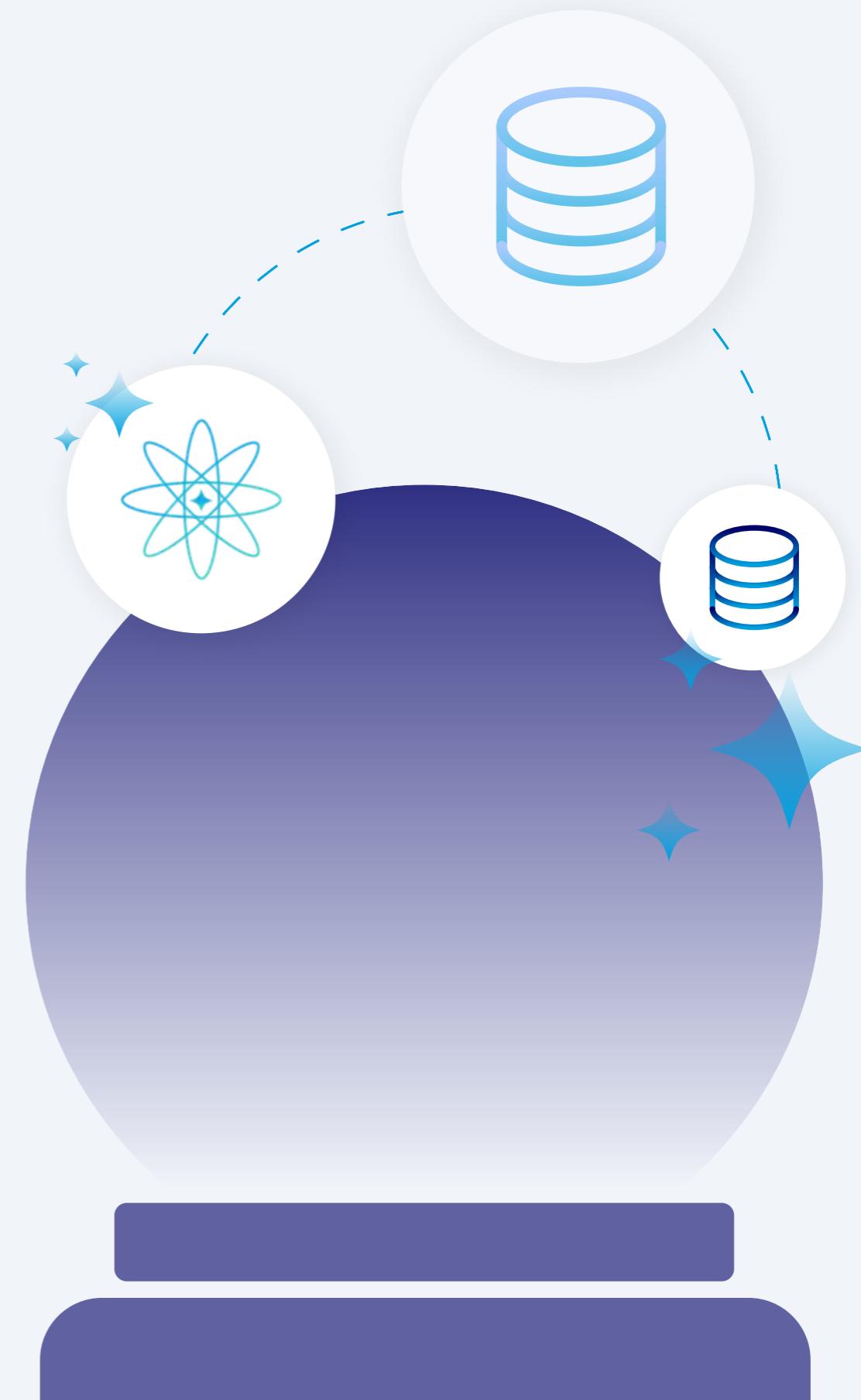
While AI tools have become more common in marketing operations, nearly all of you emphasized that AI’s effectiveness is dependent on clean, structured data. Without proper data normalization, AI models produce unreliable results.

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.”

## KEY INSIGHT 2: 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, de-duplicated 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.



## Organizational Clarity Drives Success

**71% Of Interviewees Discussed The Lack Of Defined Roles Within Marketing Operations**

- "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."
- "Marketing operations is expected to be both the firefighter and the architect—but leadership often only sees the firefighting."
- "If our one SFMC admin quits, we're screwed. There's no documentation, and no one else knows how to run our segmentation workflows."

**Exclusive Perspective:** Enterprise organizations tend to have more structured role definitions, whereas mid-market companies struggle with defining marketing ops responsibilities clearly.

The lack of defined roles within marketing operations leads to inefficiencies or worse: some leaders admitted their entire marketing ops function relies on just one or two key individuals, creating a single point of failure if they leave. Several participants noted that while they are responsible for execution, they have no clear ownership over strategy. Several interviewees also mentioned that C-level leadership undervalues marketing operations, seeing it as a tactical function rather than a strategic one.

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.

### KEY INSIGHT 3: 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.



## Martech Needs Alignment With People And Processes

**63% Of Interviewees Cited That Over-Reliance On Martech Without Proper Alignment Of People And Processes Leads To Inefficiencies.**

- "Marketing and IT speak different languages, and that misalignment makes execution harder than it needs to be."
- "We have 15 different tools that technically do the same thing, and leadership still wants to buy more."

**Exclusive Perspective:** While technology can be a powerful enabler, several interviewees emphasized the importance of aligning Martech investments with team capabilities and business goals.

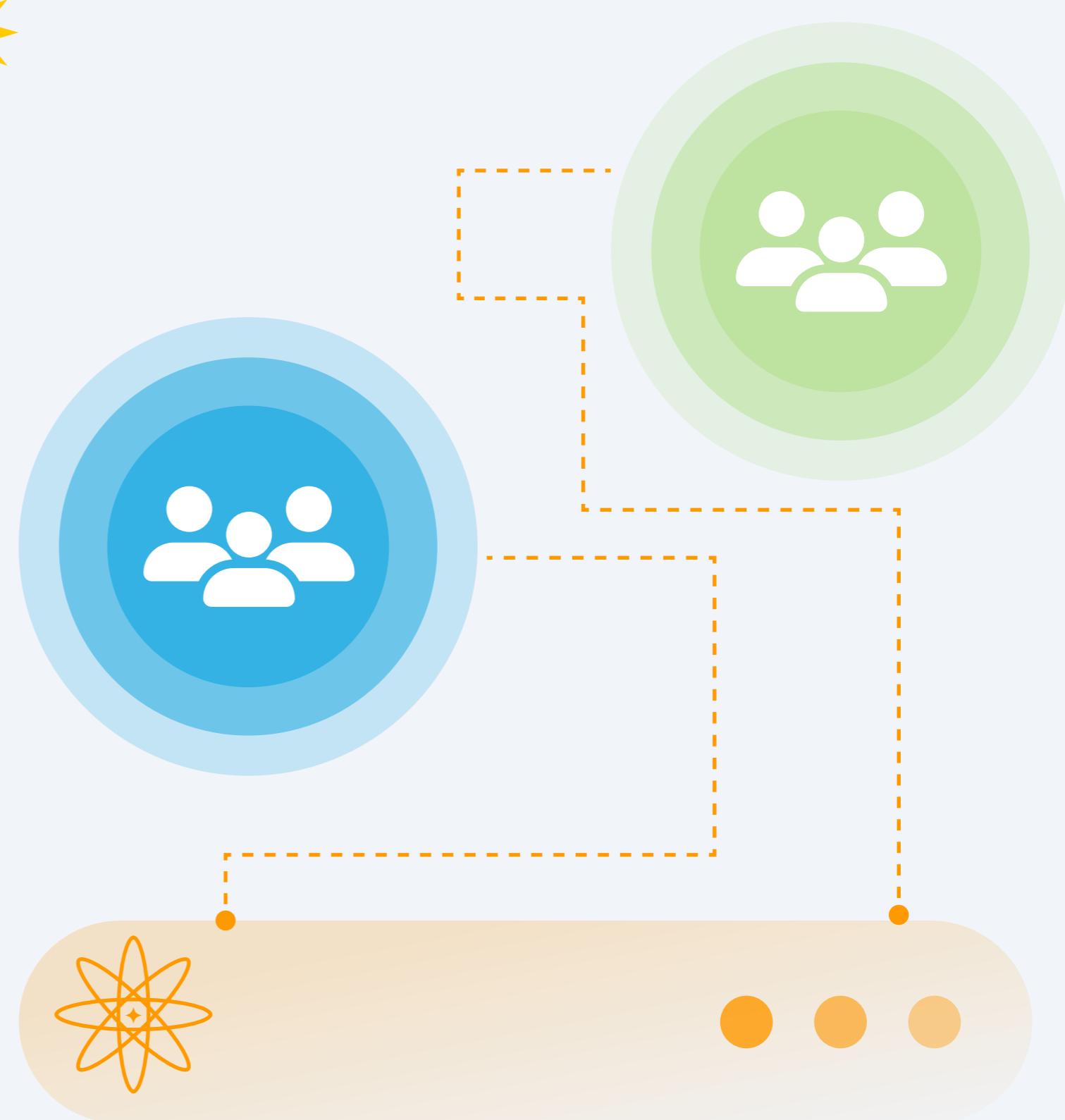
Many interviewees expressed frustration that companies keep buying new tools instead of optimizing the ones they already have. Shiny object syndrome is a real problem. Teams are spending money on new tools without addressing foundational gaps in processes or training and while underutilizing their existing Martech stack, causing wasted budget and fragmentation.

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."



## KEY INSIGHT 4: 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 measure performance metrics to ensure alignment with your strategic goals.
- Make sure that documentation is regularly updated and actively used so it feels "alive". Asides from ensuring process alignment and consistency, and can also mitigate the risk of turnover.



## Platform-Agnostic Solutions Are Preferred

**58% Of Interviewees Believe That Closed Ecosystems Create Limitations For Data Integration And Campaign Flexibility.**

- “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.”
- “We work across multiple tools, but syncing them is a mess.”
- “Every time we try to integrate a new tool, we realize just how much control our primary platform has over our data—and it's not in our favor.”
- “We need tools that play nicely with everything—not just within their own ecosystem.”
- “Salesforce makes data portability sound easy—until you actually try to do it.”

**Exclusive Perspective:** Many of you expressed frustration with vendor lock-in, particularly within Salesforce and other closed ecosystems.

Some described struggles integrating new tools, while others noted that pre-packaged AI and automation features within certain platforms are often too rigid to meet their specific needs. The overwhelming sentiment? Marketers need flexibility—not another walled garden.

Closed systems often limit the 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.

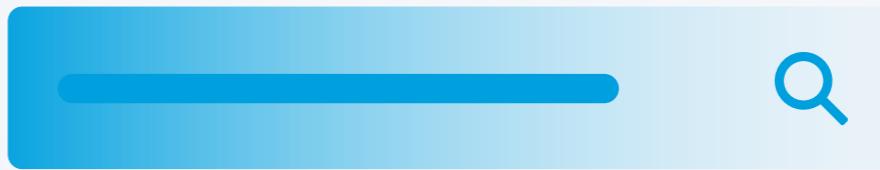
Overall, the majority of leaders expressed a strong preference for platform-agnostic solutions that offered greater flexibility, interoperability, and innovation opportunities.

## KEY INSIGHT 5: TAKE ACTION

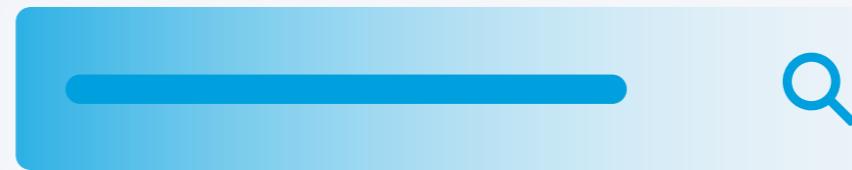
- Explore platform-agnostic tools that enhance interoperability and reduce reliance on a single vendor. This flexibility helps future-proof your operations and improves adaptability.
- Engage with your vendors to ensure their roadmap aligns with your vision for integrated, scalable systems.



Query



Data Extension



1

```
select id,  
first_name,  
last_name, gender,  
state, car_make,  
car_model,  
profile_image from  
customer_master
```

Data Action

- [redacted]
- [redacted]
- [redacted]

%%=Empty(@variable)=%%

%%=Concat(@firstname, "  
, @lastname)=%%

%%=RedirectTo(@samplelink)=%%

## Email Deliverability Remains A Challenge

**67% Of Interviewees Weighed In On How Changes In Privacy Settings Are Reshaping Email Marketing Strategies.**

- “We’re still reporting on open rates, even though we know they’re basically fake data at this point.”
- “Email teams and data teams don’t talk to each other enough. Half of our deliverability issues could be solved with better collaboration.”
- “Marketing thinks IT owns deliverability, IT thinks marketing owns it... meanwhile, no one actually owns it.”
- “When everyone works in a similar way, it’s much easier—not only to execute emails properly but to prevent the chaos that ruins deliverability.”

**Exclusive Perspective:** Many of you shared that email deliverability remains one of the most frustrating and unpredictable aspects of marketing ops.

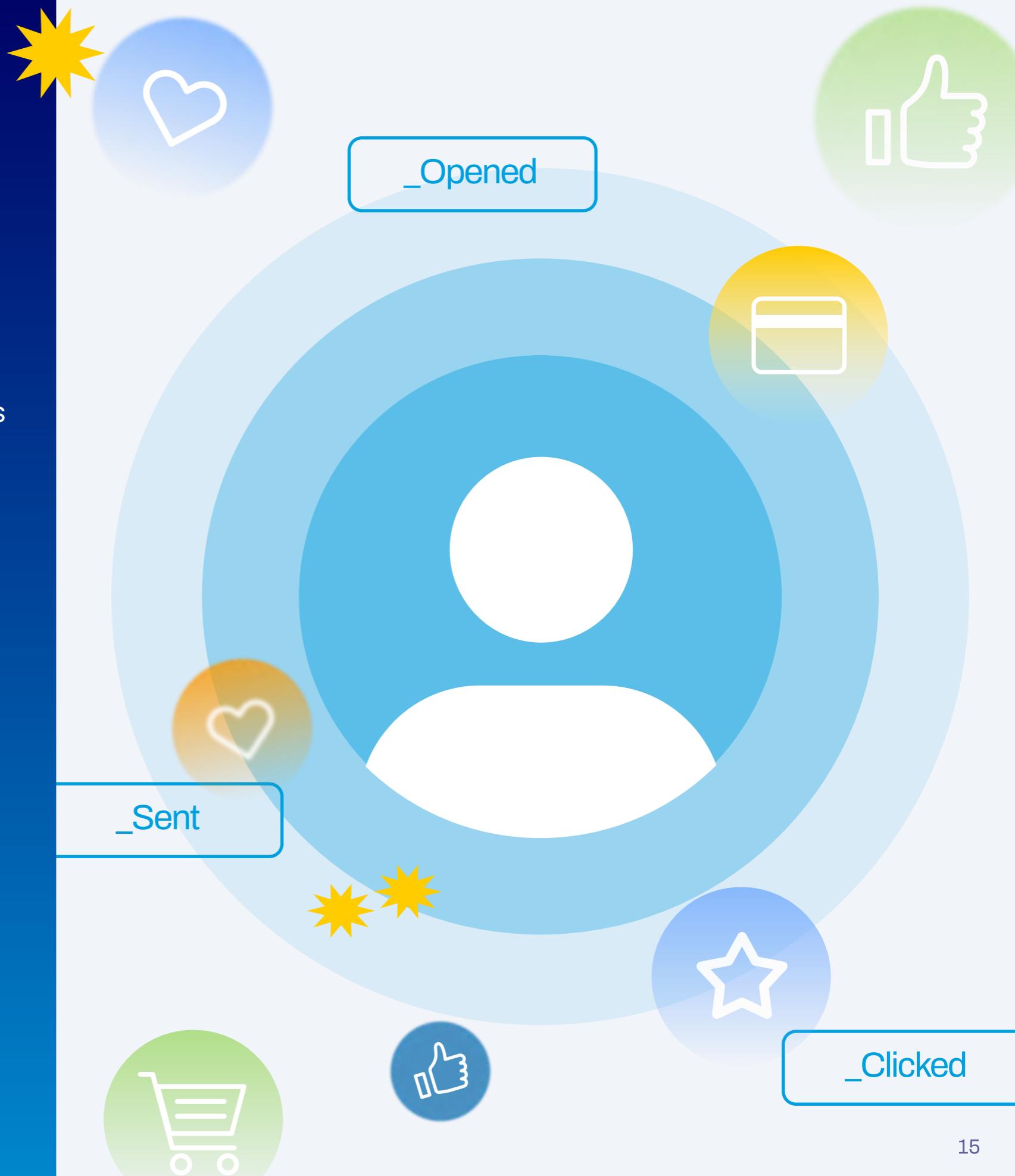
Privacy changes like Apple Mail Privacy Protection (MPP) have made traditional metrics like open rates unreliable, while internal process breakdowns, lack of proper testing, and poor data quality are just as much to blame for deliverability failures. Some teams even admitted that they don’t know why some of their emails land in spam and others don’t.

Orchestration and execution issues within your marketing automation systems were also cited 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.

## KEY INSIGHT 6: 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 & Trust Issues

Overcoming Data Fragmentation

Adoption of Free Tools

Role of AI in Campaign Planning

Importance of Strategic Oversight

## **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. Further, while AI is useful for certain repetitive tasks, multiple interviewees pointed out that AI-generated email and ad copy often sounds generic or robotic.

“Do marketers need to see every step before trusting AI? Or will they skip straight to automation? It’s still an open question.”



“AI sounds great in theory, but in practice, we’re still babysitting it to make sure it doesn’t mess things up.”



“We tested AI for email copy, and let’s just say... we’re not ready to fire our copywriters yet.”



### **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.

## ***Data fragmentation is one of the biggest blockers to efficient marketing operations and campaign execution.***

Data silos are slowing down execution and reducing campaign effectiveness. Several of you expressed frustration that even with modern integrations, marketers still can't get a single, reliable source of truth. 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."

“We technically have all the data we need, but getting it in the right place at the right time is another story.”



“It’s crazy that we’re still stitching together spreadsheets when we’ve got enterprise-grade marketing automation.”



“There are too many tools added to the stack. The need for integration has never been greater.”



### **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.

## ***Free tools can be incredibly useful for testing new solutions, but they often come with hidden challenges.***

Some of you noted that freemium versions rarely provide enough access to determine real business value, while others explained that internal resistance—from IT, procurement, or leadership—can slow adoption even when a tool is free. The biggest issue? Getting beyond the “cool new tool” phase and into real, long-term usage. While CRM specialists are often power users, true adoption requires tools that enable campaign managers, content strategists, and digital marketers to leverage data and automation. Expanding beyond CRM-focused users ensures that free tools drive company-wide adoption, making them a gateway to deeper platform engagement.

“Free trials are great, but if I have to go through five security reviews to install it, I may as well just buy the tool.”



“It’s easy to get people excited about a free tool. The hard part is getting them to actually use it beyond the first month.”



“We love free tools, but leadership still asks, ‘Who’s going to own this?’ And if no one steps up, adoption dies.”



### **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.

## ***While AI can be valuable for certain aspects of marketing ops, it is far from a plug-and-play solution.***

The biggest frustration? AI often promises automation but still requires a human to “babysit” its decisions. Some of you noted that AI can help with prioritization and data analysis, but when it comes to complex campaign planning, AI still struggles with nuance and contextual understanding. AI-generated content isn’t replacing humans anytime soon. Some teams tested AI-generated emails and found them too generic, uninspiring, or “off-brand.”

“We tested AI for subject line generation, and let’s just say... it was not ready for prime time.”



“AI is great at pattern recognition, but terrible at actual decision-making. It still needs a human in the loop.”



“AI-driven campaign planning sounds amazing in theory, but in reality, I still end up fixing most of what it suggests.”



### **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.

## **A few participants admitted that their organizations struggle to define what success actually looks like—despite spending millions on marketing automation.**

Our 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.

"We're running hundreds of campaigns, but when I ask what success looks like, nobody knows."



"Our biggest data challenge isn't the technology—it's internal politics."



"Execution teams can only be as strategic as the leadership guiding them—without alignment, they're just reacting."



### **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.



# 5 Exclusive Takeaways and Next Steps for Our Interviewees



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

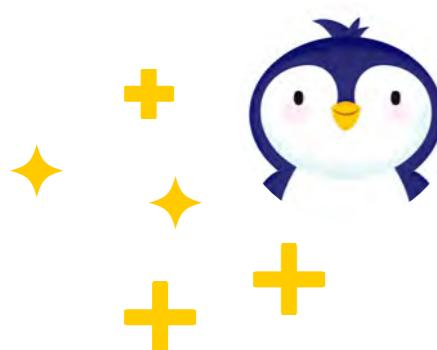


## ***1. Be the Bridge Between IT, Data, and Marketing***

Several of you noted that data teams don't talk to marketing teams enough, and that causes deliverability, segmentation, and reporting issues. Instead of waiting for IT to drive collaboration, be proactive in aligning expectations between marketing, data, and IT teams. Whether it's through monthly syncs, shared dashboards, or more structured workflows, better collaboration is key to marketing ops success.

## ***2. Never Let Leadership Assume Marketing Ops is 'Just Execution'***

Several of you noted that data teams don't talk to marketing teams enough, and that causes deliverability, segmentation, and reporting issues. Instead of waiting for IT to drive collaboration, be proactive in aligning expectations between marketing, data, and IT teams. Whether it's through monthly syncs, shared dashboards, or more structured workflows, better collaboration is key to marketing ops success.



### ***3. Build a Cross-Functional Marketing Ops Framework***

If your organization lacks a unified approach to campaign planning and measurement, develop a cross-team collaboration model that enables better coordination between marketing, IT, and sales.

### ***5. If You're a One-Person Marketing Ops Team—Document Everything***

Some of you admitted that your team would be in serious trouble if a single key person left because there's no documentation of processes, workflows, or dependencies. If you're the "glue" holding your team's marketing ops together, start writing down what you do, creating playbooks, and advocating for more resourcing before burnout happens or turnover creates a crisis.

### ***4. Prepare for AI—but Don't Over-Rely on It Yet***

We heard loud and clear that AI is still in its infancy for real marketing ops applications. While some of you have tested AI-driven campaign planning or segmentation, AI needs structured data and human oversight to be truly useful. Start experimenting with AI for tactical automation, while keeping human decision-making at the center.



# Final Thoughts



*This report was possible because of your insights, experiences, and perspectives. Thank you for sharing your expertise! We hope this exclusive version provides value by reflecting your own challenges, opportunities, and potential next steps in marketing operations and that the feedback from your peers is helpful. If you'd like to discuss any of these findings further, feel free to reach out to Anthony at [anthony.lamot@deselect.com](mailto:anthony.lamot@deselect.com).*



# DESELECT

