



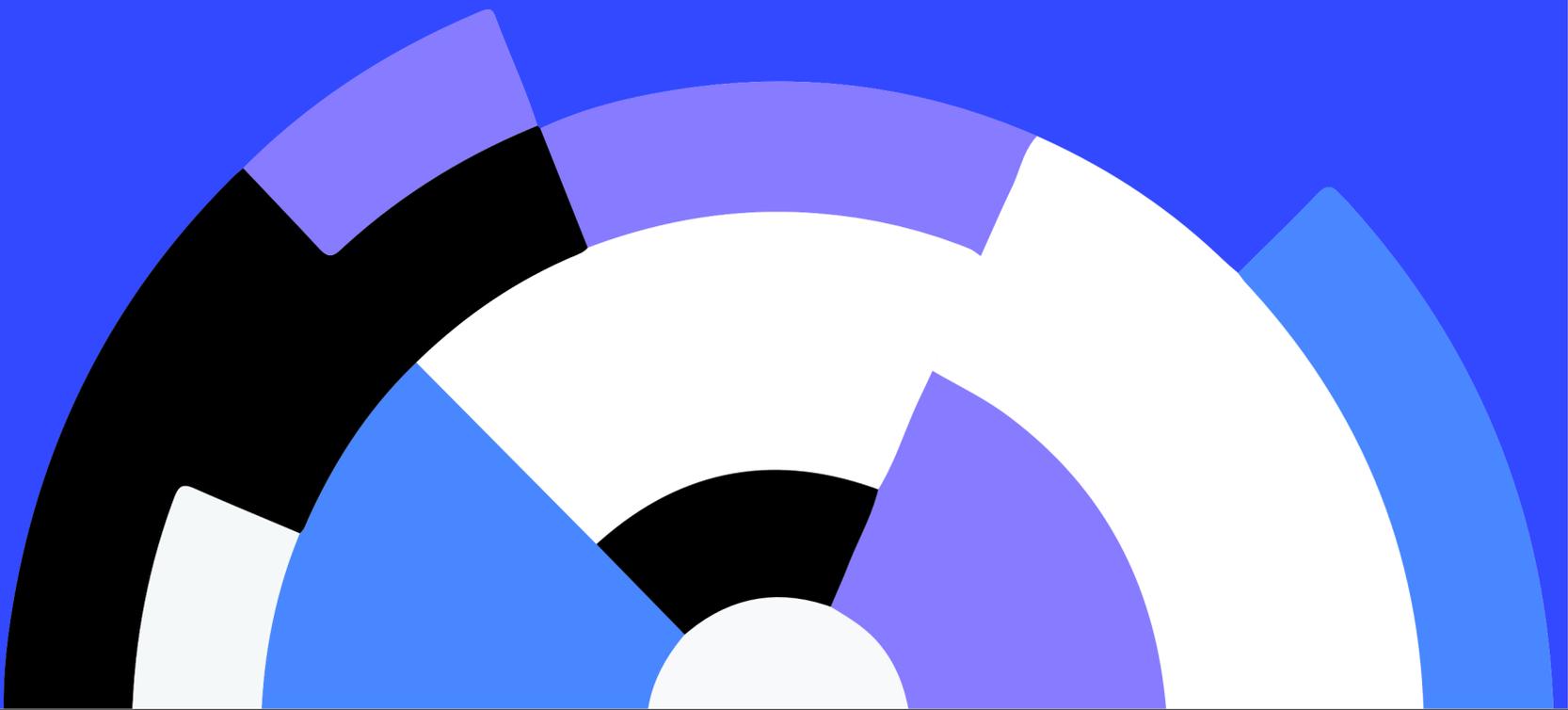
PROPHET

A LEADERSHIP BRIEFING

The CMO Paradox: Growth and Marketing Transformation in the Age of AI

**The Uncommon
Growth Company**

Growth and Transformation: The CMO Paradox



Marketing teams are being asked to deliver on two very different vectors at once:

Growth Outcomes. This is why marketing exists: to build desire and demand. It's also how CEOs and CFOs measure success. To deliver this, marketers must reach and meet customer needs at scale, apply proven approaches that drive ROI, and be masters of craft, building consistency and laddering every action to a holistic, growth-driving view.

Transformation. At the same time, marketing must operate within rapid change. Senior marketers have navigated disruption for decades, but this moment feels different and faster. The pace of AI adoption is reshaping how people interact with brands almost overnight. CMOs must accelerate into new tools, tactics, digital measures, specialist skills, and ways of working.

The modern CMO must keep one eye on business outcomes and another on reinvention; holding the line on growth while rebuilding the very system that delivers it.

The ground has already shifted.

Consumers are already using AI to discover, compare, and decide: 45% use GenAI in their shopping journeys, especially in the pre-purchase "explore" and "consider" phases. They expect transparency and ethics. This isn't hype; it's how decisions get made.

Trust has never been more fragile and attention spans never shorter. To stay relevant, brands must lead with authenticity, humanity, and creativity.



The Five Shifts **Rewriting Marketing**

THE FIVE SHIFTS OF REWRITING MARKETING

01

Hyper-Fragmentation and Personalization

Audiences have splintered even as expectations rise.

Digital now accounts

60-90%*

of spend; short-videos dominates; search and social blur.

And personalization can improve performance of individual marketing half of budgets assets by up to

15%**

ABM delivers outsized B2B results and yet still funds assets not fit for problem.

The modern marketer must master the art and science of “lots of littles” by balancing channels, formats, and craft to deliver cohesive, human stories built on big ideas and universal insights.

This takes uncommon creativity.

NEXT STEPS

As demand grows for creative that bridges strategy and execution, it's crucial to deliver bold, results-driven work that elevates brands in a fast-moving world. [Watch: Uncommon Creativity for Uncommon Growth.](#)

*eMarketer, Digital Ad Spending Forecast (July 2025)

**Salesforce, State of Marketing Report (2024)

***BCG, The Creator Economy: The Next Frontier of Brand Engagement (2024)

02

Algorithm-Curated Culture

Algorithms now decide what billions see and believe—rewarding things that invoke extreme reactions- rage, puppies, novelty. Yet at the same time, everything seems to look and feel the same. By some accounts, people spend nearly two and half hours a day on social media, giving brands barely two seconds to earn attention.

Creators have become the new gatekeepers, driving

3X*

higher engagement and shaping what culture buys across thousands of micro-communities.

Culture spreads through feeds, not media buys. Yet at the same time, in-person experiences are resurging—events, retail activations, and live moments that rebuild trust and tangibility.

To stand out, brands must engineer visibility and trust at scale inside these algorithm mediated, and increasingly human-reclaimed, micro-cultures.

NEXT STEPS

The smartest brands are leveraging the collective power of digital communities to grow. [Read: Lower-case 'c' creators are Quietly Taking Over Brand Marketing.](#)

THE FIVE SHIFTS OF REWRITING MARKETING

03

The Ever-Collapsing Funnel

Discovery, decision, and purchase now happen in a single swipe or chat. Social shopping, zero-click behaviors, chat-to-checkout journeys, and self-serve B2B buying have compressed time and space.

And this isn't just Gen Z—

80%*

of all generations now search and shop outside traditional channels.

To stay visible, brands must adapt fast.

AI Engine Optimization (AEO) and marketing to machines are the new must-dos: when AI-generated overviews appear, more than 80% of searches end without a click.

Marketers need long-form content for findability, storytelling for memorability, and the human relationships and scaled channels that still convert intention into growth. Even as digital journeys collapse, in-person sales, service, and events remain vital in B2B and services, proof that human expertise still closes the deal.

NEXT STEPS

SEO isn't dead. It's evolving but now is the time for companies to build a new AEO strategy. [Read: The New Rules of Search: Why AEO Is the Next Frontier in the Age of AI.](#)

*Prophet analysis based on Salesforce "State of Marketing" (2024) and HubSpot "State of Marketing" (2025) data.

**HubSpot, *State of Marketing Report* (2025)

04

AI is Changing the Game

AI has moved from disruptor to default.

92%**

of marketers say it has already impacted their role, and CMOs are investing heavily.

AI expands what marketing can do; predicting behavior, personalizing content, orchestrating agent-led experiences and accelerating workflows, closing the strategy-to-execution loop.

Leaders must define how AI integrates into daily operations, what new skills are needed, and how creativity evolves alongside it.

AI raises the floor, humanity sets the ceiling. Strategy, ideas, and creativity remain the ultimate differentiators.

NEXT STEPS

CMOs these days knows two things: Generative AI is changing how marketing works and they don't have time to wait. To help, Prophet reimaged what a marketing maturity model should look like in the GenAI era. [Read: Rethinking Marketing Maturity in the Age of GenAI.](#)

THE FIVE SHIFTS OF REWRITING MARKETING

05

Brand and Performance: Escaping the Short-Term Doom Loop

Short-termism remains marketers'

#1*

strategic challenge.

Dashboards reward immediacy, but growth depends on endurance. Marketing science proves that effectiveness rests on reach, consistency, and emotional salience, yet pressure to prove ROI biases teams toward the next click or quarter.

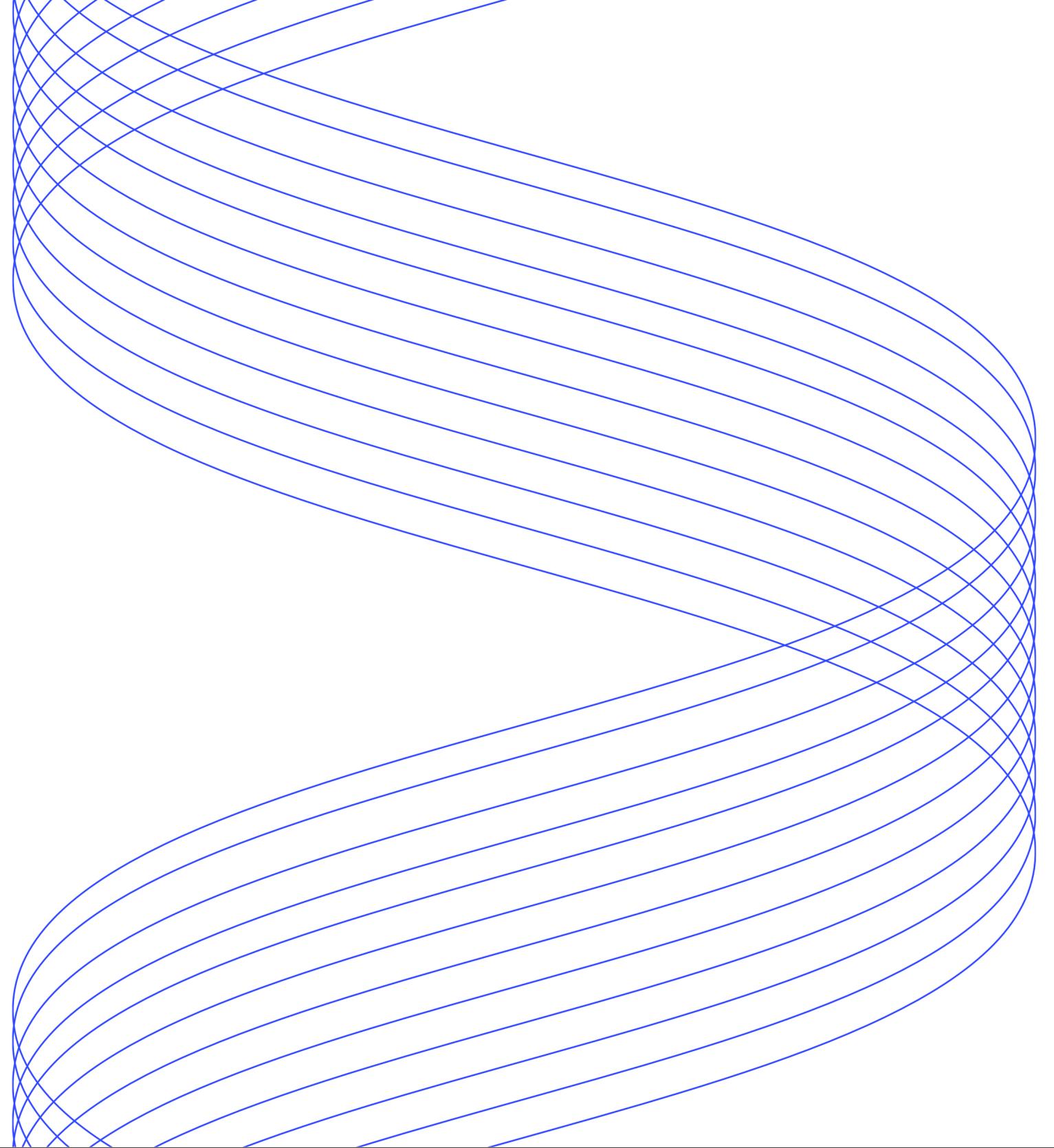
The best CMOs treat brand and performance as one growth system—brand builds pricing power and trust; performance drives velocity and conversion. Together, they amplify each other across the full funnel.

Success demands confidence with marketing performance science, the fluency to engage CEOs and CFOs on leading and lagging metrics and to make the creative case with commercial clarity.

NEXT STEPS

As far as we're concerned, the debate between brand and demand is settled. Marketers know that integrating brand and demand tactics drives the greatest ROI. [Read our Report: Brand & Demand: Marketing's Great Love Story.](#)

*IPA, Effectiveness Conference Findings (2024).



What Comes Next?

Building the Reboot

The next era of marketing won't be defined by algorithms or tools, it will be defined by the leaders who know how to use them with imagination and intent.

CMOs now sit at the intersection of growth and transformation where human creativity meets machine intelligence, and where the role of marketing is to connect what drives revenue with what drives meaning.

At Prophet, we help leaders design that connection—turning disruption into direction through five connected disciplines that power modern growth.

Our Services



Growth Strategy

Growth starts with clarity—knowing where to play and how to win. We uncover the uncommon truths others miss: insights, data, and human signals that open new paths to relevance and revenue.



Brand Building

Brands are built on belief, not algorithms. We craft uncommon stories—creative ideas and systems that break sameness, evoke emotion, and build recognition in a world that scrolls at speed.



Marketing Excellence

Modern marketing must move fast and stay true. We help organizations make uncommon moves, uniting brand and demand, embedding AI and analytics, and elevating creative craft so every action grows both sales and meaning.



Innovation & Experience

Growth happens at the intersection of human and machine. We design uncommon connections—products, services, and experiences that turn inspiration into transaction and make every interaction matter.



Organization & Culture

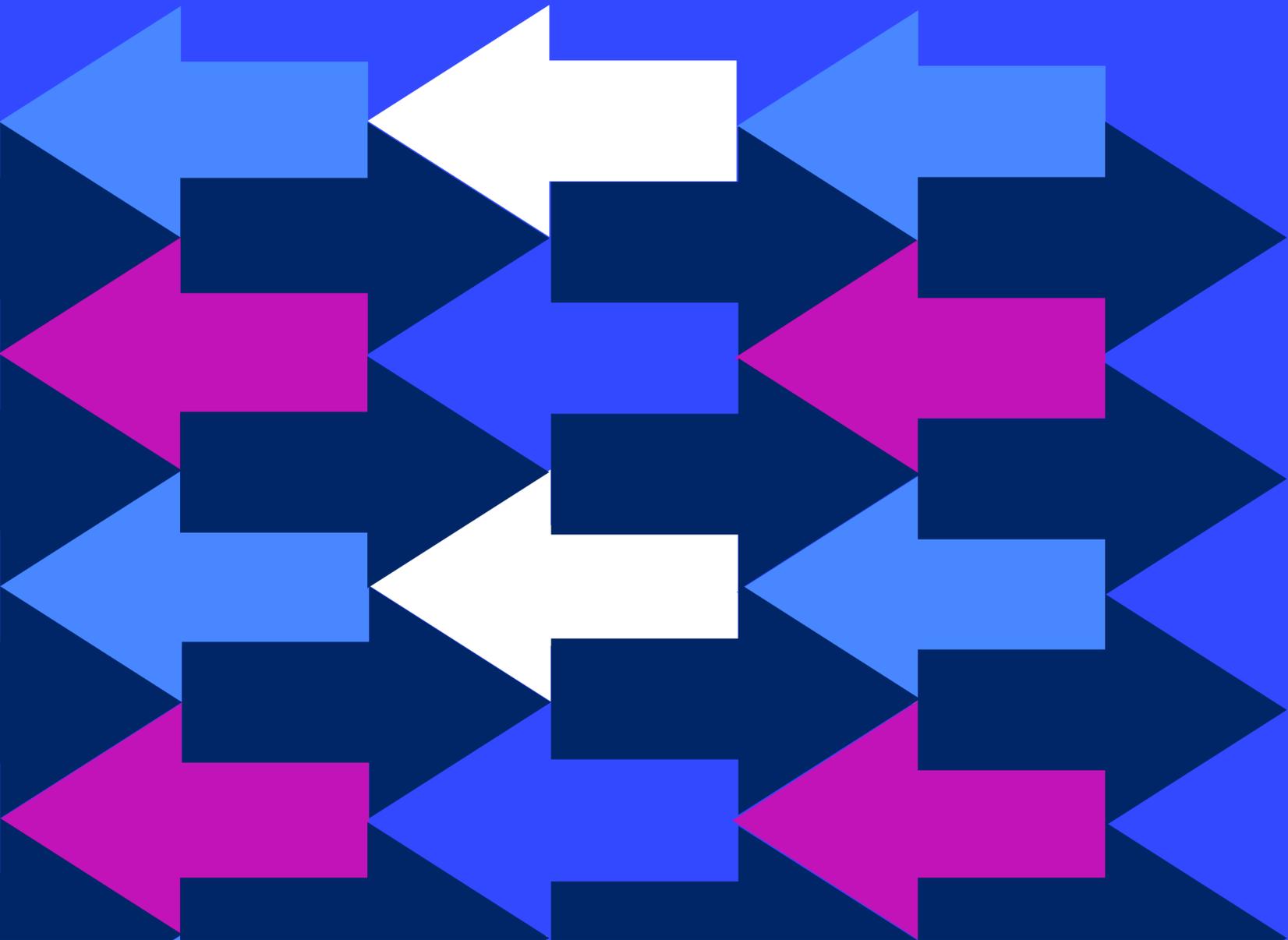
Transformation sticks when people believe in it. We help leaders build connected, creative cultures that make change continuous—powered by curiosity, collaboration, and confidence.



AI Transformation

Unlock the power of agentic marketing through end to end transformation. We assess AI readiness, define high priority use cases, re-imagine op models and workflows with AI.

Final Thoughts



At Prophet, we believe the future of marketing won't be built by chasing every new signal.

It will be built by leaders who combine creativity, clarity, and conviction; balancing human imagination with machine intelligence to drive lasting growth.

That's what we call **Uncommon Growth**: growth that is humanly intelligent, creatively bold, and systemically built to last. Because the future of marketing isn't being invented somewhere else—it's being rebooted right now, by the CMOs ready to lead it.

Get in Touch

Thank you to our many report contributors.

Marketing and Brand Experts:



Scott Davis, Chief Growth Officer
sdavis@prophet.com



Kate Price, Partner
kprice@prophet.com



Mat Zucker, Senior Partner
mzucker@prophet.com



Alex Whittaker, Partner
awhittaker@prophet.com



Adam Tremblay, Partner
atremblay@prophet.com



Virginia Ngai, Associate Partner
vngai@prophet.com

Acknowledgments:

Report Contributors:

Ashlee Davidhizar, Partner
Aviva Tropp, Partner
Jill Steele, Partner
Karen Yang, Engagement Manager
Kate Price, Partner
Kristen Groh, Senior Partner
Monica El-Hassan, Partner
Sarah Mier, Associate Partner
Tristan Otto, Senior Associate
Tenzin Rosson, Associate