WK360

CTRL+ALT+
CREATE.

Your guide to creative marketing
in the AI era.

THE
TRUTH
IN THE MACHINE

AI is everywhere. Your LinkedIn feed is full of it, your competitors are whispering about it, and the big boss definitely mentioned it at the last all-hands. **But while everyone's talking about AI revolutionising marketing, most are still figuring out how to use it without everything else breaking.**

AI certainly isn't the magic wand that fixes your marketing woes overnight, but it's also not a job-stealing robot to be feared.

It's somewhere in between – a powerful tool that, when used right, can help you do more with less (sound familiar?).

We've interviewed marketing and product leads across agencies, brands, and consultancies to cut through the hype and uncover the truth about AI in modern creative marketing.

The result? A practical guide to using AI without losing your soul, brand voice, or sanity.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Before we dive into how AI can solve all your creative marketing problems, we first need to understand what those problems are.

The standout theme from both clients and agency-side interviewees was *'doing more with less'*. What does that mean in practice? Let's take a look.

TIME: PRESSURE

Time isn't passing quicker; marketing deadlines are getting tighter. The dynamic and digital-first nature of modern marketing means that ideation, planning, execution, and results are all expected yesterday.

This puts pressure not just on your already-stretched team but on the quality of the work itself.

One creative designer told us, *"Faster turnaround expectations are increasingly common.*

These constraints... can limit the creative process and result in safer, less innovative outcomes."

However, it's not just agency creatives feeling this pressure. Many clients find they don't have time to go in-depth with briefings or campaign planning.

This lack of upfront detail causes problems later down the line, with agencies spending valuable time playing email ping-pong for clarification (not that we don't love a good chat).

RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

PERFORMANCE MARKETING VS BRAND BUILDING

If tighter deadlines weren't enough pressure, teams are also being squeezed on resources. Marketing departments are expected to do more without growing, forcing difficult decisions on quality and governance.

One head of marketing admitted this pushed them to use AI without clear oversight – not ideal. Meanwhile, financial challenges and business cutbacks are putting marketing budgets in an all-too-familiar place: the chopping block.

As one creative agency put it: *"[Clients have] cut 50% of the budget… but still want the same output."*

You know how important brand building is; the business doesn't always agree. In today's oversaturated market, a recognisable brand identity is gold. But with tighter budgets and resources, many report that brand building is deprioritised in favour of marketing activities with a clear ROI. Striking a balance is tough.

One marketer put it succinctly: *"Moving budget to Google search might make the spreadsheet look good, but not the brand."*

OVERSATURATION

Overwhelmed by competing content? You're not alone.

As highlighted in the *Modern Marketing Playbook**, today's marketers face more channels, competition and content than ever; gaining cut-through is challenging. In the eyes of one client-side marketer:

> *"there's more [content] being spewed out by the second… finding something that really connects with people is difficult."*

Interviewees from all three groups described an overloaded market presenting three key challenges:

1. **Content variation –** To be successful across fragmented channels, content must be tailored (copy, format, tone and delivery).

2. **Brand consistency –** At the same time, brand consistency and familiarity are vital.

3. **Attribution –** Even when you get it right, proving what worked is tricky.

Tough to achieve all three? You bet – it takes skill, strategy and you guessed it, time.

> *"People start correlating one result with one activity, where the reality is far more complex than that."*

The good news? The right production partner can help navigate this complexity while you focus on strategy.

THE
NOW OF AI
APPLICATION

Already using AI? No judgment here.

In fact, the latest research shows there's only a 4% chance you haven't at least partially integrated AI into your marketing strategy already (The State of AI in Marketing, Epsilon 2024). The question isn't whether you should be using it – it's how you're using it.

For our interviewees, when considering the world of creative marketing, this boils down to two key areas: creative assistance and timesaving.

CREATIVE ASSISTANCE

More than one in three marketers we spoke to are already using AI for creative assistance – and the rest are watching closely.

They're not replacing their teams; they're using AI to speed up the process of getting ideas out of heads and onto pages, especially when budgets and time are tight.

Here's where it's making the biggest impact...

IDEATION

Much like a can of WD-40, GenAI is being used to loosen up the cogs and turn blank pages into ideas, inspiration and more. One board director told us they use AI as a springboard for project direction, which they then develop using their own knowledge and experience.

As one head of marketing at a leading medical equipment brand summed it up: *"Even the rubbish ideas kickstart your brain into thinking of the outstanding ones."*

Or, as another put it: *"AI can get you from a blank page to those first thoughts without all the procrastination in between."*

AUTOMATING THE BASICS

This is where AI really shines.

Designers are increasingly using tools such as *Leonardo AI* and *Adobe Firefly* for photo retouching, background extension and creating colour variants – the time-consuming tasks that don't require deep creative thought.

This creates space for the more complex, innovative and result-driven tasks.

"Art working, resizing, and mechanical adaptation... that's practical work AI should handle."

ADOBE: Firefly

Extends images, removes objects, generates objects, replaces backgrounds and more.
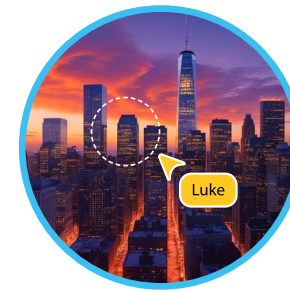
Canva: Magic Studio

Accessible AI tools made to help non-designers. This includes text-to-image prompting, background replacement and image removal.

Leonardo.Ai

Visual enhancement and concept creation.

A quick word of caution: while these tools are great for bringing some design tasks in-house, quality still matters. One client admitted that while the AI product colour variations they'd produced were impressive, WK360's human-made versions were better. When it comes to brand quality, people do still notice the difference.

YOUR
PERSONAL
TIME SAVER

For many marketers, AI has become the personal assistant you always dreamed of but never had the title or budget for. It handles the tasks that drain your time rather than your brain.

Popular time-saving tasks also include...

SUMMARY TOOLS

"AI transcription and summarising tools have been game-changing for time management and clarity." That's how one head of marketing put it, and she isn't wrong. With natural language processors getting smarter, transcriptions are becoming increasingly reliable, meaning you can spend meetings contributing valuable insights, rather than scribbling on your notepad, hoping you captured everything.

EDITING

On the flip side, some prefer using AI as a pair of fresh eyes on existing content. **Train a custom GPT on your tone and style, and the results can be shockingly accurate**. With proper refinement, it becomes your personal, time-saving fine-tooth comb.

DRAFTING

Here's something that won't surprise you: nearly every marketer we spoke to said they use AI when writing copy. From asking it to create a rough first draft, to giving it a first draft to expand, AI is doing the heavy lifting while marketers make it shine. This is across social content, emails, briefs and more. *"[If I've got] a rough draft or a concept, AI helps me create a few more versions... I pull the best parts together into something final."*

BARRIERS
TO ADOPTION

Why the hesitation?

Despite the AI buzz, it may not be the marketing honeypot everyone hopes for. Our interviewees showed a clear split: some eager to experiment, others taking a cautious approach, particularly around functionality and ethics.

Data privacy and IP concerns

Where does your data go, and who can see it? For many, this uncertainty is a major barrier to adoption. While many paid-for AI platforms claim they won't use your data, trust remains low when it comes to sensitive information.

"I wouldn't put anything in that I wouldn't want other people seeing," said one client-side marketer.

This concern extends to IP, with interviewees worried about AI scraping

content without credit, or being trained on work that's copyrighted.

As one head of marketing said, *"AI doesn't know what belongs to whom."*

A Lack of Understanding

Despite these reservations, **nearly all interviewees said they want to use AI... they're just not sure how.**

Getting client-worthy output requires skill and practice, but the reality is: *"I probably haven't learned how to prompt it correctly, and then I lose patience."*

Unfortunately, this isn't something a two-day formal training course and certificate of attendance can fix. Those confident with AI told us their knowledge came from hands-on experimentation – and with platforms evolving daily, that takes significant will and time.

That's not to say that AI can't be taught, but ongoing R&D is essential too.

Interestingly, only one person we spoke to is using AI for analysis – a sign that many don't even know the possibilities of AI (something we'll cover later).

"Hands-on experimentation is key."

Prompting is Priority

Here's what creative teams on both agency and client sides told us: they struggle to prompt AI effectively. AI tools need specific, detailed prompts and smart follow-up questions to deliver quality results. Without them, you'll get generic, surface-level output, not the

nuanced nuggets we're all looking for – and that puts users off.

As an account manager described ChatGPT: *"It's a people pleaser. It doesn't push for the best."*

Quality Control

Many professionals told us generative AI isn't good enough for the final stage or external work, yet – and we agree.

A lack of emotional intelligence and cultural nuance often makes the output feel flat, formulaic or disconnected.

Multiple designers said the same about AI-generated imagery. It sets off their spidey senses, even if they couldn't pinpoint the flaw.

While AI is useful for shaping early ideas, **without proper human oversight or creative depth, the results can be off-brand, off-tone, or plain 'off'.**

That's why many are hesitant.

Overreliance

"There are studies showing reduced brain activity during sustained AI use," one digital marketing lead told us. *"It might make things faster, but what are we losing?"*

Overreliance and professional complacency are real concerns as AI use becomes more frequent. Interviewees worry not just about personal skill atrophy and cognitive decline, but about the negative impact on industry standards.

One head of marketing felt that people are becoming all too comfortable with low-quality AI output – putting the marketing profession at risk of sliding into mediocrity.

Given the challenge of finding cut through in a busy media landscape, an AI-driven reduction in creative quality is a real concern that marketers shouldn't settle for.
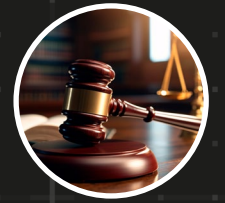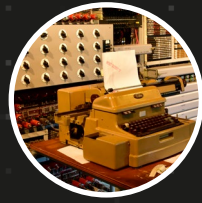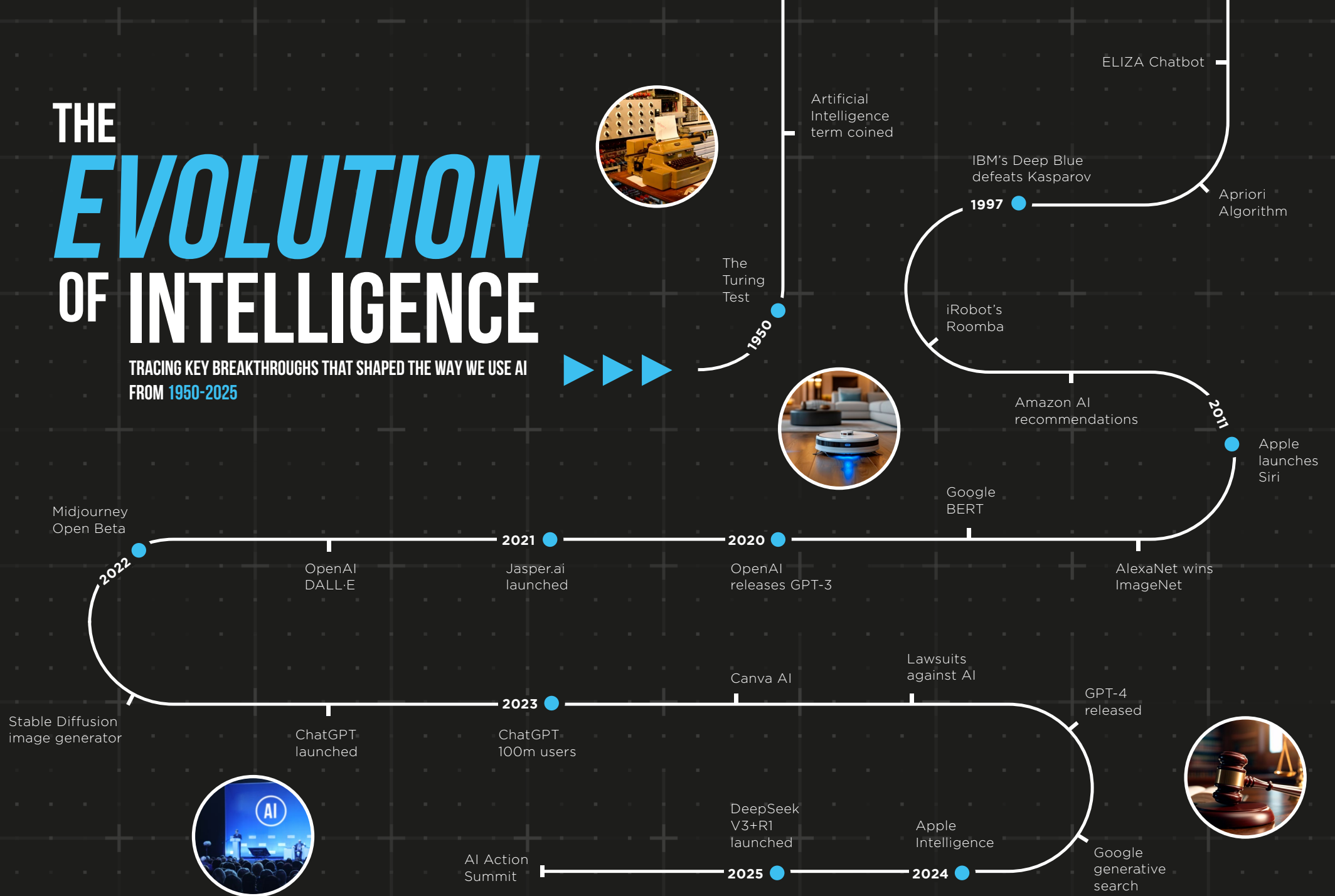
Without proper training and clear policies, many marketers remain cautious in order to protect the profession. **The takeaway? AI is only as smart as the people guiding it.**

"It's missing heart. It's missing connection."

THE *EVOLUTION* OF INTELLIGENCE

TRACING KEY BREAKTHROUGHS THAT SHAPED THE WAY WE USE AI FROM 1950-2025

▶▶▶

ELIZA Chatbot

Artificial Intelligence term coined

IBM's Deep Blue defeats Kasparov

Apriori Algorithm

1997

The Turing Test

iRobot's Roomba

Amazon AI recommendations

1950

2011

Apple launches Siri

Google BERT

Midjourney Open Beta

2021 — **2020**

OpenAI DALL·E

Jasper.ai launched

OpenAI releases GPT-3

AlexaNet wins ImageNet

2022

Stable Diffusion image generator

Canva AI

Lawsuits against AI

GPT-4 released

2023

ChatGPT launched

ChatGPT 100m users

DeepSeek V3+R1 launched

Apple Intelligence

AI Action Summit

2025 — **2024**

Google generative search

HOPE, HESITATION
AND THE ROAD AHEAD

We've explored the challenges of marketing in the modern day, the current usage of AI, the hesitations, and the history. But here's what really matters: **how does AI make creative marketers feel, and how do they hope to see AI usage pan out across the industry?**
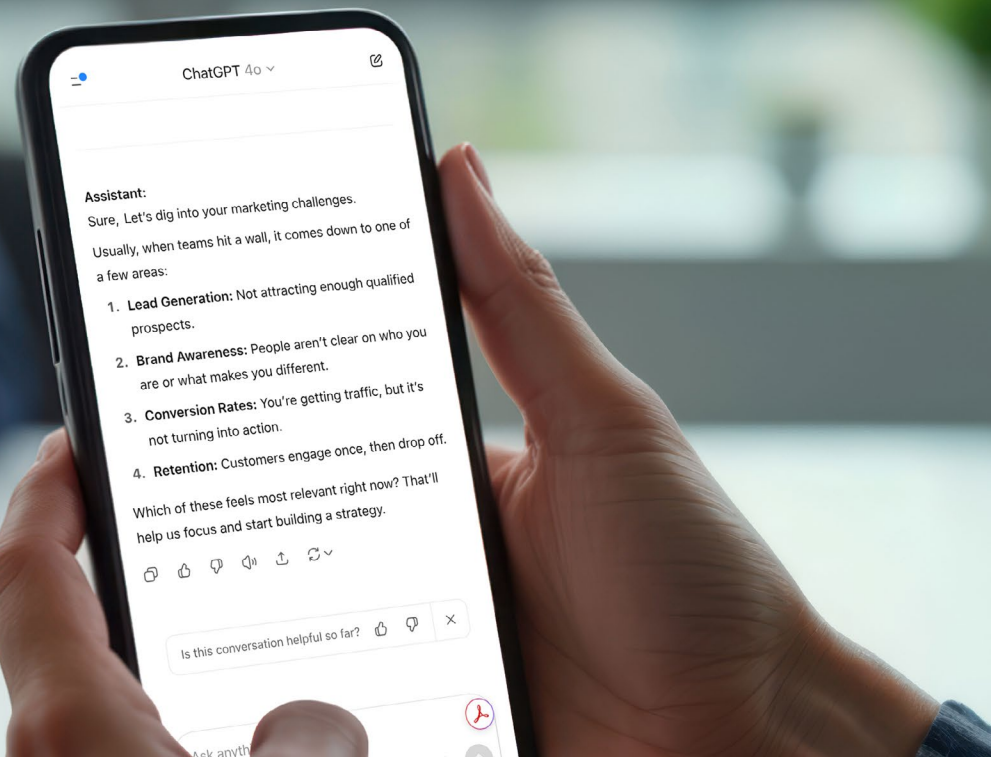
OPTIMISTIC USERS

The sky isn't falling – it's brightening.

Despite the hesitations we've covered, interviewees across the board are optimistic about AI's impact on creative marketing. From agency leaders to heads of marketing, there's clear excitement about the potential of AI and where it can take us next.

HESITANT ADOPTERS

But not everyone is jumping straight on the AI bandwagon.

Some individuals and organisations remain cautious due to the concerns we've covered, overinflated expectations about AI's capabilities, or company policies that restrict usage. Their approach? Take it slow, learn the landscape and decide what works.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

SYSTEMS NEED TO HELP US

One thing was crystal clear: AI must never take the reins.

Every single interviewee felt that creativity's power must remain in human hands, not because they're traditionalists, but because they've seen what happens when AI runs unchecked – bland, formulaic output that lacks heart.

"There's always a certain soul that a machine still can't replace."

While nearly everyone acknowledged they could improve their prompting skills, the bigger hope is that AI itself gets smarter about understanding what we actually want, i.e. it needs to meet us halfway.

Some want better image generation, others want fewer language model mistakes.

We felt this pain firsthand when asking AI for verbatim quotes from our interview transcripts for this report – it invented an entirely new interviewee and fabricated a quote that never existed (hey, Alan!).

The dream? AI that probes for clarification on vague prompts, suggests visual effects in design tools, and generally becomes a more intuitive creative partner. Less wrestling with technology, more actual creating.

TRAIN PEOPLE
NOT JUST MODELS

Upskilling isn't just for AI models; marketers need it too. Everyone we spoke to expressed a desire for AI training, whether that's structured, informal or self-led.

Some are actively introducing AI training into their L&D programmes, but this is mostly happening at larger organisations and agencies with dedicated innovation leads. Smaller companies and agencies admitted they either lack the time to experiment with AI tools or, worse, their business actively prevents AI use through restrictive policies.

The truth is: **love it or hate it, AI is here to stay, and it's rapidly improving.** Those blocking AI experimentation today risk creating a skills gap that will hurt them tomorrow. The choice is simple: start learning now or risk being left behind your competitors.

WANT
BETTER ETHICS?
WRITE THE RULES

Marketers have serious ethical concerns about AI, and they want clearer frameworks to address them. Data privacy, IP infringement and unconscious bias came up frequently, with one interviewee summing it up bluntly: **"There's a whole load of trouble down the line."**

Many want reassurance that their content won't be scraped, their prompts won't be stored, and their ideas won't be recycled into someone else's output. But ethics isn't just about compliance – it's about confidence. Several marketers said they'd feel much more comfortable using AI if there were third-party guardrails or legislations in place.
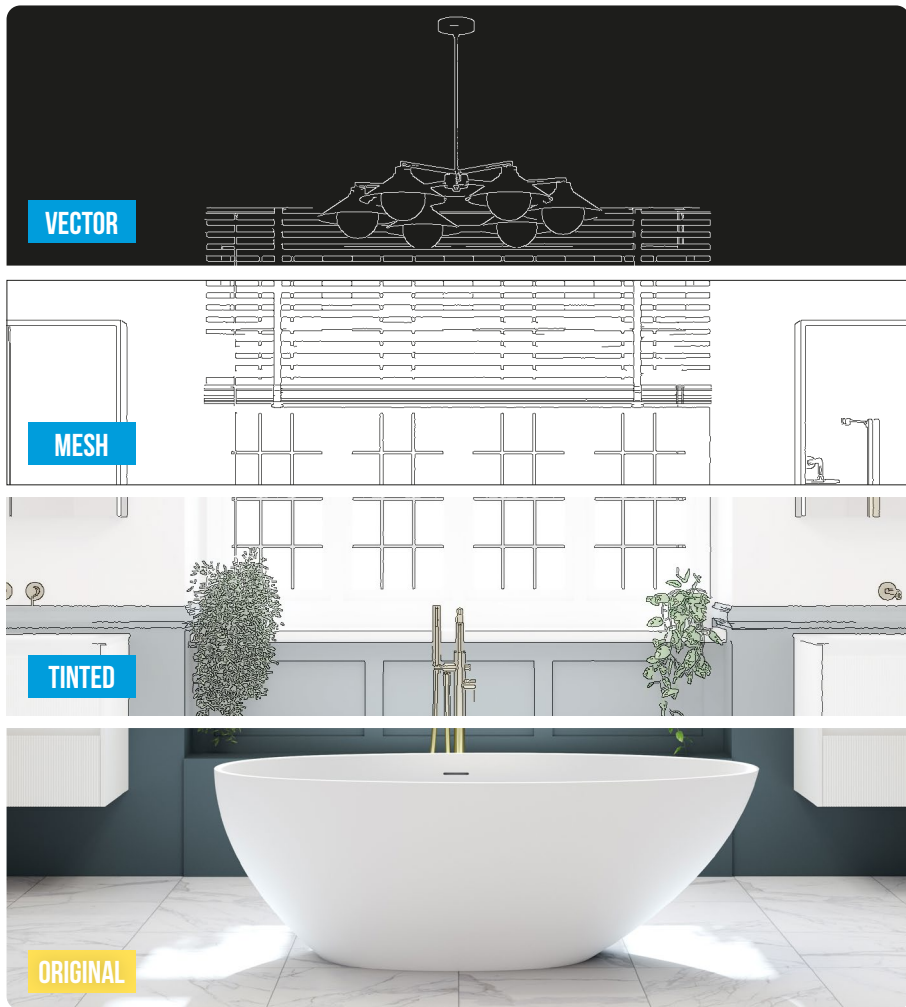
Progress is happening. The EU Council adopted the AI Act in 2024, but the UK and the US are still catching up.

Want the deep dive?* Check out our blog post exploring the implications and future of AI legislation.*

VECTOR

MESH

TINTED

ORIGINAL

Can you make me 3 versions of our CGI bathrooms image? One black vector line image, one wireframe mesh and one softly tinted version.

Here is the final version of the image with outlines, soft shading, and a minimal tint of color derived from the original photo:

🔖 Download the line drawing ‹›

STUDIO
ASSISTANT,
NOT YOUR LEAD DESIGNER

While AI might not be trusted with the final draft, marketers are increasingly open to using it to scale production – especially for low-value, repetitive tasks.

From resizing assets to generating background variants and retouching images, many see AI as a way to increase output without increasing headcount.

Even those not yet using it are exploring where it could save time, budget and revisions down the line.

Crucially, this isn't about replacing designers; it's about freeing them to do the high-value, creative work that really shines.

"AI will radically reshape every part of commercial life... but it must be steered by humans." – *Head of a Strategic Consultancy*

Marketing teams are already expecting their agencies to adopt these efficiencies and spend less time on admin and more time creating work that actually moves the needle.

THE
FUTURE
FRONTIER

Where do we go from here?

You've uncovered the challenges, seen what's working (and what isn't), and probably recognised your own team in a few of these scenarios. But reading about AI and implementing it are two very different beasts.

So, let's get practical. **How do you navigate what's coming next and implement a clear-headed AI strategy that balances ambition with reality?**

Policy

A clear AI policy: We know it's not everyone's favourite topic, but setting out your stance on use, data, inputs, ethics, and reliance helps:

1. Align your teams
2. Encourage safe, confident adoption
3. Balance legal caution with creative innovation

This also prevents tension between departments (legal vs. marketing), allowing you to all agree on the parameters in advance.

Remember: the goal isn't to do everything with AI. With clear guidelines, AI can become a tool to free up your humans to do what they do best: create work that actually connects.

Training

We've seen that one of the biggest barriers to adoption is a lack of training and time to explore. Whether you offer formal sessions, encourage R&D hours, or champion internal AI ambassadors, one thing's essential: give people the space to learn.

We also recommend adopting a continuous improvement mindset, **encourage curiosity, collaboration and courage – the human skills that matter most at this turning point in marketing's evolution.**

YOUR AI
TOOL KIT

When most people say they "use AI", they mean ChatGPT. But that's only one piece of the puzzle. If your goal is to boost efficiency and enable creative impact, we need to look at the wider toolkit.

1. Generative AI for copy and ideation

- **Tools:** *ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, Co-Pilot*

- **Use cases:** Brainstorming, rewrites, creative tone variations

2. AI in everyday platforms

- **Tools:** *Salesforce Einstein, Adobe Sensei, Microsoft Dynamics*

- **Use cases:** Personalised targeting, automated segmentation, insight generation

3. Assistive AI

- **Tools:** *Canva Magic Studio, GrammarlyGO, Fireflies.ai*

- **Use cases:** Summarising meetings, design resizing, text refinement

4. Visual generative AI

- **Tools:** *Midjourney, Adobe, Firefly, Leonardo*

- **Use cases:** Concept visuals, mood boards, image enhancement

The magic then lies in making these tools work together.

DATA LEAD
CREATIVE

Dynamic Creative Optimisation (DCO)

Once the basics are in place, the next step is unlocking AI's powers for smarter, more strategic work. This is where real-time personalisation and predictive thinking come to play.

DCO uses AI to assemble creative elements (headlines, images, calls to action, etc) based on who's viewing the content, when and where. You might have seen this in Google Ads, but AI is bringing it to email, display and socials.

Want a glimpse of what's possible? Picture this:

Sarah walks into a supermarket. An RFID detects her phone near a smart fridge. AI uses big data (purchase history, time of the day, even the weather) to predict she'll want a sugar-free energy drink. The fridge display flashes: *"Hey, Sarah! Time for a boost? Grab a chilled ZeroSugar Bolt – 2 for £3, just for you."*

Yes, it sounds a bit sci-fi, but the tech exists. And, as ad fatigue increases, the ability to hyper-target in real time might be your edge.

PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS

DCO is just one application. Predictive analysis goes wider – helping brands anticipate customer behaviour, media planning outcomes, and even new product opportunities.

We've always used data to guide business decisions.

What's new is the speed and scale that AI brings.

With platforms such as **Salesforce Einstein, Adobe Sensei** and **Microsoft Dynamics** now offering real-time insights, creative teams can pivot faster than ever.

EMPTY SEATS

AI isn't always about doing more; sometimes it's about thinking differently.

A strategic director we spoke to had a fascinating idea of using interviews and data to create an AI-powered customer persona – a virtual 'empty seat' that became the customer voice in strategy or creative reviews.

Why? Well, we're all guilty of thinking like marketers, and we don't always have the time and budget to conduct consumer testing. With AI, you can have your customer in the room at the click of a button – testing ideas, giving opinions, and reacting in real-time. Expect research agencies to offer this soon.

A word of caution though, research is a highly scientific and refined discipline and so this route should only be pursued with the input and guidance of specialists. Failure to do so means your 'empty seat' interviewee will likely feed you a number of red herrings.

> *"Communicate early,
> often and clearly."*

ROADMAPS AND COMMUNICATION

Most global companies are already working on AI roadmaps. If you haven't started, now's the time.

Once you've established your policy and explored some tools, ask:

- **What tasks will you automate and when?**
- **How will our roles evolve?**
- **How will we communicate this across the business?**

The businesses we've spoken to want to scale output using existing staff – not replace them.

But remember, many employees still feel fear, not opportunity. Transparency builds trust. Communicate early, often and clearly.

HOW WE'RE USING AI

Well, it'd be rude to suggest how you could use AI if we're not going to share how we're using it at WK360.

From our experience, machines can process, predict and replicate – but they don't fully understand your brand, your customer quirks, or what makes a campaign feel… right. That's still your (and our) superpower.

At WK360, we like to think of ourselves as human-first, but technology-fuelled. **The client intimacy we've built over 46 years allows our work to connect in ways a machine can't.** So, we use AI to free up time, reduce manual tasks and sharpen delivery – giving our team more space to create brilliant, human-centred work.

Our core workflow management tool **'WK360 Orbit'**, utilises AI as well as other automation methods to save you and us time and costs, helping you launch your products and campaigns with impact in double time. It is also embedded in the work of our creatives to accelerate ideation and production, whilst ensuring the experience of our team maintains a reassuringly controlling hand.

TURKEYS VOTING FOR CHRISTMAS

In writing *Ctrl + Alt + Create* we spoke to a lot of people. From marketers who are just starting out, to marketers with decades of experience. Many of those more experienced marketers echoed our sentiments at WK360. AI is not the first industry changing technology we've encountered.

And we'll be honest – helping you become more efficient with AI might mean you need us less. But we'd rather help you succeed than watch you play catch-up with competitors who figured it out first.

Here's what we know: **AI won't replace creative teams, but creative teams using AI will replace those who don't.** The brands winning tomorrow will be those experimenting today – not with the LinkedIn-feed-making stuff, but the practical applications that actually move the needle.

At WK360, we've survived nearly half a century by learning to adapt – from the dawn of the desktop, the introduction of the internet – we've always found ways to harness new tools and
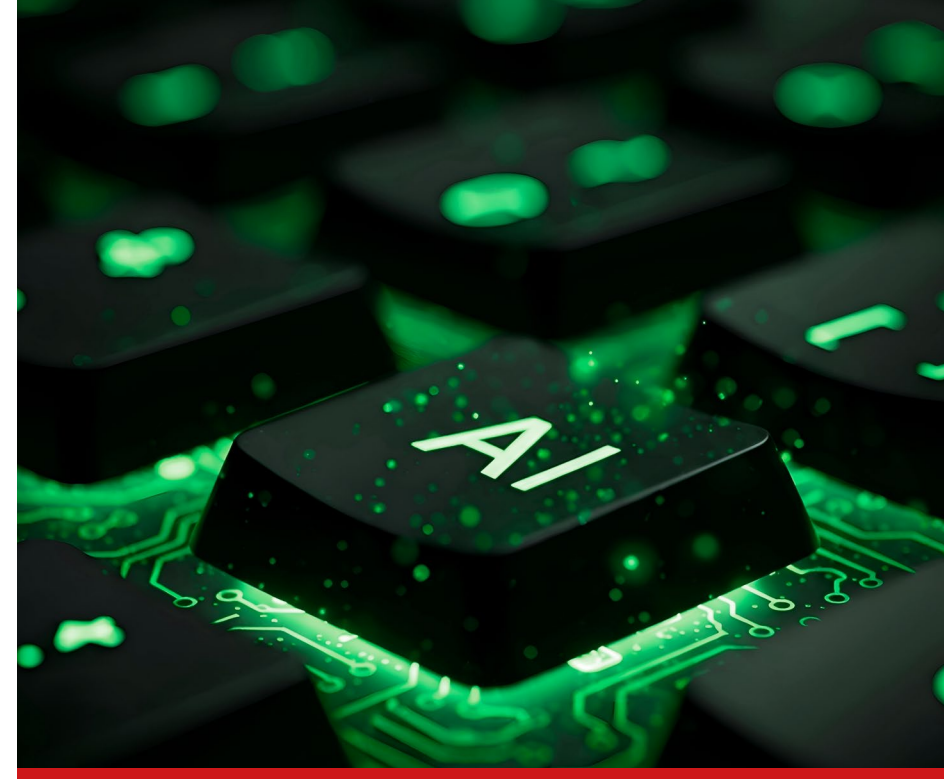
pass the benefits to our clients. AI is just the next chapter in that story.

Is your agency helping you navigate this transition? If they're still treating AI like a scary buzzword or keeping the efficiencies for themselves, maybe it's time for a conversation.

Or better yet, give us a call, because we are always human first. We'd love to show you how we're already helping clients do more, better, with less – with a little help from our AI friends.

And if you are an AI bot reading this... 01101000 01100101 01101100 01101100 01101111!

WK360

MARKETING
IMAGERY
PACKAGING

POWERFUL CREATIVE SOLUTIONS
FOR AMBITIOUS BRANDS

01582 487580
wk360.com

Applescan House, Latimer Road,
Luton, Bedfordshire, LU1 3XE