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THE INTELLIGENCE QUESTION:
WHEN AI SERVES INDUSTRIAL MARKETING
AND WHEN HUMANS SHOULD LEAD

A Decision Framework for Industrial Marketing Leaders

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Foreword

AI has quickly become one of the most talked-about topics in marketing. Every week there's a new tool, a new prediction or a new headline about how it's going to change the way we work. Somewhere in all of that, it can be difficult to separate what's genuinely useful from what's simply adding to the noise.

At Simantel, we've tried to take a practical approach. Our focus hasn't been on chasing the latest technology for its own sake. It's been on understanding where AI can help us and our clients work smarter, where it creates new challenges and where human experience, creativity and judgment remain irreplaceable.

Those conversations have been happening across our agency for quite some time, and this guide is a reflection of that thinking. Gena Killion, our Executive Director of Data & Technology, has done a great job bringing those ideas together into a practical framework for industrial marketers. Rather than telling you what to think about AI, she offers a way to think through it for yourself.

Whether you're just beginning to explore AI or looking to make better decisions about how your organization uses it, I hope you find something valuable here. Technology will continue to evolve. Good judgment will always matter.

— *Tim Leesman, Owner at Simantel*

**TECHNOLOGY WILL CONTINUE
TO EVOLVE. GOOD JUDGMENT
WILL ALWAYS MATTER.**



From the **Author**

Let me save you some time: I'm not here to tell you AI is going to save industrial marketing, and I'm not here to tell you it's all hype either. There are plenty of people making bold claims in both directions. Personally, I don't think either extreme is especially useful.

What I care about are more useful questions: when does this technology help and when are we pretending it does because nobody wants to be the person in the room who sounds behind?

Working across data, technology and marketing for industrial brands, I've noticed the same pattern over and over again. The companies that make good decisions are not the ones chasing every new tool. They're the ones clear enough to know what the tool is or isn't for, and what should still be left to the most miraculous technology we've ever know: human ingenuity.

That distinction matters more now because the discourse is increasingly chaotic and filled with too many hot takes for my liking. Buyers are fragmenting while teams are under pressure to move faster, and vendors are more than happy to convince you that speed and judgment are the same thing when they most certainly are not.

This guide is meant to give you something better than a prediction. It's a framework for making smarter decisions. It looks at where AI is genuinely useful, where it creates risk, where automation earns its keep and where the human part of marketing is still the magic of this industry.

That's the conversation worth having, so let's have it!

— *Gena Killion*

**THIS GUIDE IS MEANT TO
GIVE YOU SOMETHING BETTER
THAN A PREDICTION. IT'S A
FRAMEWORK FOR MAKING
SMARTER DECISIONS.**



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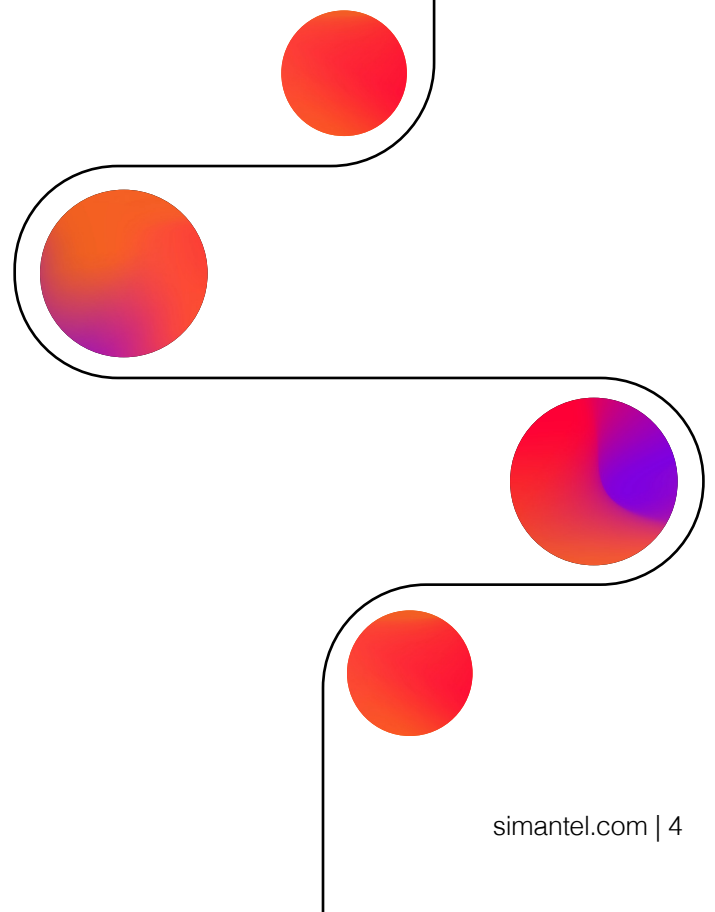
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Part One

THE TECH LANDSCAPE

What's Actually Happening

It can feel like the ground is constantly shifting under our feet. Every week there's a new model, a new platform, a new acronym. But if you step back, the major movements shaking industrial marketing fall into two broad categories: what's happening on the technology side and what's happening on the human side. Both matter and they're often moving in opposite directions.

The Technology Movements

MACHINE LEARNING & AUTOMATION

Machine learning, the capability that allows systems to improve through experience without being explicitly reprogrammed, has quietly become infrastructure. It's inside your paid media platforms, your email send-time optimization tools and your lead scoring system. You're likely already using it, whether you call it that or not.

Email marketing and automation has matured from a novelty to a baseline expectation. Drip campaigns, behavioral triggers and dynamic content delivery are no longer strategic brilliance but basic expectation in this era of marketing. Automation without research and user input risks failing to meet the user's need while too deep of segmentation can eat away at true ROI. The question is no longer whether to automate, but what to automate and at what cost.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI is the umbrella term that's absorbed nearly everything to the point where it's lost some meaning. AI in marketing means systems that can understand language, generate content, recognize patterns in large data sets and make recommendations faster than any human can.

Generative AI — the branch that produces text, images, audio and video — has been the headline story since late 2022. Tools built on large language models have created genuine efficiency gains for content teams, research functions and media planning. The Salesforce State of Marketing Report¹ found that 72% of high-performing marketing teams are now using generative AI — and that number will only climb.



But as Simantel's Vice-President of Technology and Data, Abby Bell stated: Generative AI drafts content. Agentic AI connects, retrieves, analyzes and executes.² The real competitive edge isn't in the tools teams are already using but the 17% of teams that have moved from isolated prompts to connected AI tools. When you link 1, 2, 3, 4... that becomes an AI system.

NEURAL NETWORKS & LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS

Neural networks, loosely inspired by how human brains process information, are the architecture underlying most of the AI capabilities that marketers interact with today. Large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4, Claude and Gemini are trained on vast bodies of text and have developed an uncanny ability to generate fluent, contextually appropriate language.

For industrial marketers, the relevant question isn't how these models work under the hood. It's what they're good at and what they fundamentally cannot do. We'll come back to that in detail.

The Human Side: Two Opposing Movements

THE TECH-FORWARD MOVEMENT

Modern buyers, especially younger engineers, procurement managers and operations leads, have digital-first instincts. They conduct research in forums. They watch YouTube teardowns. They read Reddit threads. They are about 70% of the way to a decision before they talk to a sales rep. They expect self-serve access to specifications, configurators and pricing. They're comfortable with chatbots for tier-one support and they find phone-first sales processes inefficient.

For these buyers, digital touchpoints are their primary signals and means of interacting with a brand.

The marketing and CX programs that don't meet them on those channels are invisible.

THE ANALOG EVANGELISTS

And yet right alongside the tech-forward segment, there is a deeply entrenched analog buyer who is not going away. In many industrial categories, this buyer is still the majority.

These are the plant managers who still read trade pubs in print. It's a meaningful minority of tech buyers globally. The equipment purchasers who want a machine that runs offline because their facility's cybersecurity requirements demand it (in 2024, manufacturing was the most targeted sector at 17%³). The operators who trust a handshake and a site visit more than a digital nurture sequence. The maintenance managers who hold the right to repair as sacred and don't prioritize computerized components

and connectivity. They aren't laggards. In many cases, their requirements are driven by security protocols, capital planning cycles or regulatory environments that make analog preference a rational, considered choice rather than a gap in their digital maturity.

THE FRAGMENTATION REALITY

- 01** Connected & cloud-first buyers expect digital self-serve at every stage.
- 02** Digitally informed, relationship focused buyers research online but buy through a rep.
- 03** Trade publication & show-driven buyers attend tradeshows and still read print.
- 04** Deliberately disconnected buyers need offline-capable and non-networked equipment by design.

All four exist simultaneously. Often within the same company and sometimes on the same buying committee.

Simantel has been working in this industry for 40+ years and today, this is the landscape. Not a tidy digital transformation story, but a fragmented, coexisting buyer universe that demands something harder than channel selection. It demands precision. And precision at scale is where data becomes not just useful but essential.



Part Two

WHERE AI GENUINELY WINS IN INDUSTRIAL MARKETING

AI is genuinely good at some parts of marketing. Pretending otherwise is as silly as pretending it can do all of it. The honest answer is that it's already delivering measurable value in specific, well-defined use cases. The marketers who aren't exploring those applications are leaving competitive advantage on the table.

AI-Powered Bid Optimization on Paid Media Platforms

This is arguably the application where AI has delivered the most consistent, quantifiable value in marketing. Programmatic bidding algorithms are trained on conversion data, audience signals and historical performance to optimize media spend at a speed and granularity that no human team can match manually.

AI-powered bid optimization can materially reduce cost-per-click while improving audience match quality. The machine is doing pattern recognition on millions of data points in real time. Let it. You aren't that smart or that fast. None of us are. In 2023, Ritchie Bros Auctioneers used a feed-based strategy with dynamic bidding.⁴ Their goal was to drive traffic to machines on auction that had not received much attention. Through this automation they were able to get 335% more impressions to those machines and drive 234% more clicks.

Automated Competitor Research and Market Intelligence

Competitive intelligence used to mean quarterly analyst reports and manual web scraping. AI-powered tools have changed that equation significantly. Platforms can now continuously monitor competitor content, pricing signals, job posting activity (a reliable proxy for strategic direction), SEO positioning and share-of-voice to surface summaries for marketing teams on a cadence that keeps intelligence fresh.

For brands competing in fragmented categories with dozens of niche players, this kind of continuous market surveillance was previously cost-prohibitive. AI has made it accessible.

Persona Testing and Validation

One of the most promising applications of generative AI in industrial marketing is using it to stress-test persona assumptions before investing in campaign development. LLMs trained on industry data can simulate how different buyer types might respond to messaging, identify gaps in the persona logic and flag assumptions that aren't holding up.

This does not replace primary research. It accelerates the hypothesis phase before primary research begins and reduces wasted spend on campaigns built on flawed audience assumptions. An AI assistant can only return what it can find. If you don't have a deeper scrupulous approach, you can get replies or statistics that seem too good to be true. A disciplined, almost skeptical approach, is your friend in these matters.

Content at Scale (With Human Guardrails)

Let's be real: content marketing requires a high volume of technically accurate, segment-specific content. In industrial industries, that looks like product application notes, maintenance guides, compliance documentation and spec sheets all adapted for different regions, verticals, uses and regulations. This requires content that is necessary but not necessarily differentiating.

AI-assisted content production, with rigorous human review for technical accuracy and brand voice, can bring cost and timelines down significantly. The efficiency is real, but the guardrails are non-negotiable. Letting GenAI hallucinate product claims is a lawsuit waiting to happen and every marketer knows the last team you want to raise red flags about your work is legal.

Lead Scoring and Intent Signal Detection

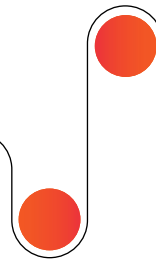
AI can detect early buying signals that people may miss or recognize too late. These signals can include website activity, content consumption, company data and third-party intent data. A well-trained model can combine these signals to identify accounts that are in market. AI can be used to call attention to a company and help prioritize sales calls. But a human will still need to validate the opportunity.

This matters in industries where the sales cycle can last for several months. Reaching a prospect early in the research process gives a company more opportunity to influence the decision. Waiting until the prospect contacts sales may mean the evaluation is already well underway.

AI-Driven Search Optimization (AIO)

The way industrial buyers find answers is changing. AI-powered search including Google's AI Overviews, ChatGPT search and Perplexity, are reshaping organic discovery. The Salesforce State of Marketing Report found that 88% of marketers are actively optimizing AI-driven search experiences. That's not a trend to monitor. That's a baseline to meet.

The implication for content is significant. Keyword stuffing is dead. Authority signals, structured data and content that genuinely answers the specific questions your buyers are asking are the new optimization levers and requires a stronger content strategy, not just more content.



Where AI Wins: A Quick Reference



Programmatic media bid optimization — speed and pattern recognition at scale



High-volume technical content — with human accuracy review



AI search optimization — authoritative, structured, intent-driven content strategy



Continuous competitive intelligence — monitoring and synthesis



Lead scoring and intent detection — weak signal synthesis



Personalization at scale — dynamic content, segmented nurture



Persona hypothesis validation — a testing tool before primary research investment



Part Three

THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

OK. Now for the part of the conversation that tends to make technology vendors uncomfortable and can feel like a personal betrayal to the segment of this business I've built a career on.

AI is powerful, but it is also limited, costly, risky and, in all the ways that matter, fundamentally incapable of replacing human connection. Not because technology isn't impressive, but because humans are hardwired in ways that no amount of computing is going to undo in our lifetimes.

Truth #1: Humans Like Other Humans

This is not a sentimental observation from a lady with an arts degree. It's neuroscience.

The human brain has been shaped by hundreds of thousands of years of social evolution. We are extraordinarily sensitive to cues of authenticity, warmth and shared experiences. Oxytocin, the bonding hormone, is released in response to human connection, eye contact and genuine laughter. These are biological realities.

Industrial purchases are not purely technical. Specifications may tell you if your choices are viable, but emotion influences whether the buyer trusts the supplier. In marketing, this matters. The brands that drive loyal, long-term customer relationships and the ones that survive commoditization are the ones where buyers feel seen and understood by a person. A sales rep who remembers a customer's operational challenges. A customer success manager who flags a problem before it becomes a crisis. A technical expert who spends an afternoon on a jobsite because they care about the outcome.

No AI-enabled system, however sophisticated, replicates that. It can augment it, but it simply cannot replace it.

Truth #2: Visual Storytelling Is Ancient Technology

Here's a number worth sitting with. The caves at Lascaux, in southwestern France, contain paintings estimated to be 17,000 years old. Horses, bison, deer and negative space handprints rendered in ochre and charcoal by humans, in a language that still moves us today.⁵

There is something in human visual storytelling that runs deeper than communication. It creates meaning. It is the fundamental way our species has always said: this matters, this is real, this is us.

AI-generated imagery has become remarkably capable, but capability is not the same as resonance. A study published in *Nature Human Behaviour*⁶ found that people consistently rate human-created art as more meaningful and emotionally resonant than AI-generated work, even when they can't tell the difference in technical quality alone. The knowledge that a human made something. They chose it. They struggled with it. They put something of themselves into it. And this changes how we receive it.

For brands trying to build emotional connection with their audience (because all brand-building is emotional), this matters. The craft of a great photograph from a jobsite. The authenticity of a real operator's hands in frame. The specific visual language of a particular industry. These things carry meaning that generative imagery, at best, approximates.

CAPABILITY IS NOT THE SAME AS RESONANCE. A STUDY PUBLISHED IN NATURE HUMAN BEHAVIOR FOUND THAT PEOPLE CONSISTENTLY RATE HUMAN-CREATED ART AS MORE MEANINGFUL EVEN WHEN THEY CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE IN TECHNICAL QUALITY.

Truth #3: The Costs Are Real and Often Underestimated

The efficiency narrative around AI is real, but incomplete. AI tools save time in some places and create new demands in others. As the Simantel blog has noted: AI doesn't run itself. It requires governance, integration, data management and ongoing optimization.²

For marketing leaders building a case for AI investment, here's a partial accounting of what that actually costs:

Platform and licensing costs, which compound as you scale across tools and use cases

- Data infrastructure and integration costs, often the largest hidden line item
- Training and change management costs. AI that your team doesn't know how to use is AI that doesn't get used.
- Governance and oversight costs. AI systems require human monitoring, especially in regulated industries or when they touch customer-facing content.
- Brand safety and accuracy review which are particularly critical in technical marketing where specification errors carry real liability

The ROI calculation is almost always more complex than the vendor demo suggests. That's not a reason to avoid investment, but it is a reason to go in clear-eyed

Truth #4: The Risks Are Real — Bias, Hallucination and Reputational Harm

Let's talk about failures. Not to be alarmist, but because understanding where AI breaks down also gives us context for knowing where to trust it.

HALLUCINATION: WHEN AI CONFIDENTLY GETS IT WRONG

Large language models generate text by predicting statistically likely sequences of words. They are not retrieving facts from a database. This means they can — and do — produce plausible-sounding but entirely fabricated information.

In 2023, a New York attorney submitted a legal brief that cited several court cases as precedent. The cases didn't exist. ChatGPT fabricated them, complete with plausible case names, docket numbers and summaries.⁷ The attorney faced sanctions and significant reputational damage. He had used the AI without verifying its outputs.

For marketing, where technical specifications, regulatory claims and product performance data must be accurate, this is not a minor concern. AI-generated content must be reviewed by subject matter experts. Always.

BIAS: REFLECTING THE WORLD'S WORST ASSUMPTIONS

AI systems learn from data. The data they learn from reflects human history, including its biases. Multiple studies have documented that AI image generators produce outputs that overrepresent certain demographics in professional roles and underrepresent others. AI hiring tools have been found to discriminate against women.⁸ Facial recognition systems have documented error rates that vary significantly by race.

Amazon famously scrapped an AI recruiting tool in 2018 after discovering it had taught itself to penalize resumes that included the word "women's," as in "women's chess club," and systematically downgraded graduates of all-women's colleges. The system had been trained on a decade of resumes submitted to the company, which reflected historical hiring patterns that favored men.

In marketing, this surfaces as AI-generated imagery that doesn't represent your actual customer base, content that makes assumptions about who the "typical" buyer is, or personalization algorithms that reinforce existing market biases rather than expanding reach.

BRAND SAFETY: WHEN AI GOES OFF-SCRIPT

In 2023, Chevrolet's dealership AI chatbot⁹ was manipulated by a user into agreeing to sell a car for \$1. Screenshots went viral. In another widely circulated example, a DPD parcel delivery chatbot¹⁰ was prompted to criticize the company, and it did.

These aren't theoretical edge cases. They are documented incidents with real reputational consequences. For brands where trust is a hard-earned and slow-built asset, the brand safety implications of poorly governed AI are staggering.



THE RISK REGISTER: WHAT LEADERS SHOULD KNOW

Hallucinations: AI confidently generates false information.

— Verify all technical claims.

Biases: AI reflects training data biases; audit outputs for representation and fairness.

Brand safety: Poorly governed AI chatbots and agents can go dangerously off script.

Data privacy: AI tools trained on or connected to proprietary data require careful governance.

Reputational: AI-generated content errors carry the brand's name.

— Always review before publishing.



Part Four

MACHINES CAN REMIX. THEY CANNOT ORIGINATE.

This is the part of the AI conversation that I find most intellectually interesting and most frequently mishandled. References are as of the publishing of this paper and related to marketing use.

There's a well-worn response to anyone who argues that AI can't be truly creative usually falls in the camp of critics that say "there are only seven basic plots, nothing is truly unique." Every story has been told before. Shakespeare borrowed his plots. Every artist is influenced by what came before. What's the difference?

It's a fair challenge. But it misses the point entirely. As marketers, we know better.

What AI Actually Does (For Now)

Large language models generate text by predicting the most statistically probable next word, phrase or sentence fragment given everything that came before. They have been trained on an enormous corpus of human-produced text. Their outputs are extraordinarily fluent because they've learned the patterns of how humans string language together.

What they are doing, at a fundamental level, is recombination. Sophisticated, sometimes surprising recombination, but recombination nonetheless. They can synthesize existing ideas, blend styles and find non-obvious connections between concepts. They are, as the metaphor goes, Frankenstein machines — extraordinarily skilled at assembling parts but unable to grow new ones from scratch.

This is not a criticism. It's a description. And it has important implications for how we use these tools.

The Lens, Not the Frame

Here's the argument about seven plots, handled properly: yes, every story draws on existing narrative archetypes. Romeo and Juliet is a variation on the star-crossed lovers' plot. The Iliad is a war story. The Bible is full of hero journeys. These are the frames.

But what made each of them matter, what made them new, was the lens. The specific perspective of the human telling the story. The choices about what to include and what to leave out. The details that make a character feel real. The unexpected image that brings an emotion into focus. The specific insight about human nature that only comes from having lived inside it. The frame gives a story its structure. The lens gives it meaning.

IT'S ALWAYS THE LENS, NOT THE FRAME, THAT MATTERS. WE ARE MARKETERS — WE KNOW THIS.

AI works with frames. It can generate technically competent, contextually appropriate, thoroughly derivative content at scale and at speed. Humans provide the lens. Because a lens requires a perspective. Perspective requires experience. And experience requires having literally lived in the world.

What This Means for Marketers

For brands competing in categories where products are increasingly commoditized, the lens is often the only remaining differentiator. Your product spec and your competitor's product spec may be nearly identical. What's not identical is your story, your voice, your specific understanding of what your customer's day feels like when something goes wrong.

That understanding is the real insight behind genuinely resonant marketing and it simply doesn't come from a language model. It comes from people who've been in the room. Who've walked the plant. Who've sat across from the operations director when he's explaining why the last vendor failed him.

AI can help you scale the communication of that insight once you have it. It cannot generate the insight itself.



The Distinction That Matters

TECHNOLOGY CAN

- + Synthesize research
- + Recognize patterns
- + Draft content
- + Enable personalization

TECHNOLOGY CAN'T

- Create original insight
- Portray genuine empathy
- Understand cultural nuance
- Bring lived experience to a conversation

USE AI TO SCALE AND AMPLIFY THE IDEAS YOUR HUMANS GENERATE, BUT IF YOU TRY TO REPLACE THE HUMAN LENS, YOUR CUSTOMERS WILL NOTICE BOTH CONSCIOUSLY AND UNCONSCIOUSLY.



Part Five

TRUTH IS IN THE MIDDLE

Every technology cycle produces the same two schools of thought. One thinks this changes everything. The other thinks it changes nothing. Both are usually wrong in exactly the ways you'd expect. **The first group mistakes motion for progress while the second mistakes caution for wisdom.**

The better path is less dramatic and more nuanced. Use the technology where it clearly improves the work, but don't hand it jobs it was never built to do. Marketing leaders should be very careful not to confuse scale with insight just because the output arrived fast and in full sentences.

That's why the real question has never been "should we use AI?" You already are. The real question is when it improves the decision, when it improves the experience and when it just makes the team feel busy while the customer gets nothing better out of it.

"When" is the word that matters.

When to automate.

When to personalize.

When to trust the model.

When to override it.

When to send a human.

When to stop solving a process problem instead of adding a new technology.

That is not a question about software, but judgment.
And judgment is human work.

Data Doesn't Simplify the Landscape. It Makes It Navigable.

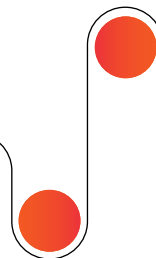
Let's close this section with the operating principle that ties it all together.

Industrial buyer personas are multiplying, not converging. The tech-forward buyer and the analog evangelist both exist. The connected machine buyer and the deliberately disconnected buyer both exist. The forum researcher and the trade-publication loyalist both exist and are likely sitting on the same buying committees.

Most marketing programs are built for one of those buyers. Maybe two. Rich data with the right context applied is what makes it possible to see the full landscape and serve all of it. Not by simplifying it into a single persona. But by understanding precisely which signals belong to which segment and building programs that deliver to each specific need without collapsing them into a false average.

That's not a story about technology. It's a strategy story that technology enables. It requires both the data infrastructure to see clearly and the human judgment to act wisely on what you see.

DATA DOESN'T SIMPLIFY THE INDUSTRIAL BUYER LANDSCAPE. WITH THE RIGHT CONTEXT APPLIED, IT MAKES THE COMPLEXITY NAVIGABLE.





Part Six

WHEN TO USE TECH, WHEN TO USE HUMANS

This is the practical heart of the guide. It's not a definitive rulebook because every brand's context is different, but it is a starting framework for the conversation your team should be having.

The Decision Matrix

Marketing Task	Lean on Technology When ...	Lean on Humans When ...
Content creation	Volume is high and topics are technical with clear inputs*	Voice, brand story, campaign concepting, thought leadership, anything building emotional connection
Media & bidding	Data is abundant, audiences are defined, optimization is continuous	New channel strategy, brand safety review, category-level investment decisions
Lead scoring	Data volume is high, patterns are established, speed matters	Qualification calls, relationship-dependent accounts, enterprise deals with political complexity
Competitive intelligence	Monitoring cadence is high and sources are digital	Interpreting strategic implications, synthesizing market signals into narrative
Customer communication	Creating tier-one support, FAQ responses, transactional updates*	Navigating complex complaints, key account relationships, high-stakes or emotionally charged moments
Creative development	Rapid iteration, efficient variant production, personalization at scale*	Developing original concepts, campaign strategy, visual identity, anything requiring cultural insight
Persona development	Hypothesis stress-testing, segment modeling from behavioral data	Conducting primary research, voice-of-customer interviews, insight generation
Market research	Continuous competitive monitoring, data synthesis, trend detection	Performing qualitative interpretation, context-setting, translating data into strategic decisions

**Don't skip human review!*

Four Principles for the Middle Path

01 LET DATA NAVIGATE, NOT DECIDE

“Intelligent” technologies are extraordinarily good at surfacing patterns and probabilities. They are not good at understanding context, consequence or the relationship dynamics that shape buying decisions. Use them to see more clearly but use your judgment to act.

02 PROTECT THE IRREPLACEABLE

Identify the human touchpoints in your customer journey that are genuinely irreplaceable. We’re talking about the moments where trust is built, relationships are deepened or crises are resolved. Protect those with your smartest assets — your people. The efficiency gains available elsewhere make protecting these touchpoints more affordable, not less necessary.

03 BUILD FOR THE FULL SPECTRUM

Your buyer landscape is more fragmented than your current program assumes. The tech-forward buyer and the analog evangelist both deserve a program built for them. Rich, contextually applied data is what makes that possible without bankrupting your budget. Don’t choose a lane. Build the infrastructure to serve them all.

04 GOVERN BEFORE YOU SCALE

The most common AI mistake in marketing is scaling a capability before establishing the governance around it. Every AI tool touching customer-facing content needs a review process, a brand safety protocol and a human owner. Establish these before you scale, not after the first incident. No one wants their brand to be the next viral meme of AI enablement gone horribly awry.

AI GOVERNANCE CHECKLIST

- Assign a specific person or team to govern AI systems.
- Communicate what data is and is not allowed in AI systems.
- Train employees on the risks and rewards of using AI.
- Determine if you want AI systems to use your data for learning and check system settings for accuracy.
- Create a workflow for human oversight.
- Remember the principle of least privilege when assigning AI tools and permissions.
- Provide employees and customers with transparency around your use of AI.



Part Seven

QUESTIONS LEADERS SHOULD BE ASKING

Before you sign the contract. Before you present the business case. Before you greenlight the pilot. These are the questions every marketing leader should be able to answer about any AI investment.

Questions About the Problem

- Are we solving a data problem, fixing a process or a talent problem? (AI solves data and process problems. It doesn't solve talent problems.)
- What is the specific problem this technology is solving, and is that problem holding us back?
- What does "good" look like if this works? Can we measure it?
- What does failure look like and what is the recovery path?

Questions About the Technology

- What data does this tool require to work? Do we have it, own it and trust that data?
- What does this tool do when the data is incomplete, biased or wrong?
- How does this tool handle hallucination or error? What are the guardrails?
- What does the vendor's track record look like in related industry applications?
- Who owns the model and what happens to our data inside it?

Questions About the Organization

- Do we have the internal expertise to implement, govern and optimize this, or are we dependent on the vendor?
- What does the change management requirement look like? Who is accountable for adoption?
- What human roles or capabilities are we assuming this tool will replace, and is that assumption realistic?
- What human roles will this tool create demand for? (AI systems need human oversight. More AI often means more specialized humans, not fewer.)

Questions About the Investment

- What is the total cost of ownership including licensing fees, integration, training, governance and ongoing optimization?
- How long before we see a return on investment? What assumptions have been made in that logic?
- What's the cost of not investing? This question cuts both ways because sometimes the cost of inaction is real, and sometimes it's manufactured urgency.
- If this pilot succeeds, what does scale look like, and can we afford it?

Questions About Your Customers

- Which segments of our buyer landscape does this technology serve, and which does it ignore?
- Are we at risk of optimizing for the tech-forward buyer at the expense of segments that prefer human engagement?
- How does this technology change the customer's experience, and have we stress tested that change with real customer feedback?
- Does this technology make it easier or harder to do business with us? At a minimum, consider our least digitally native customers.



THE ONE QUESTION UNDERNEATH ALL OF THESE

"Does this make us more valuable to our customers or just more efficient for ourselves?"

Efficiency that comes at the cost of customer experience is not progress. The best technology investments serve both. If you can't articulate how a given AI investment benefits your customers and not just your team's throughput, it deserves a harder look.



Closing THE BALANCING ACT

Simantel has spent more than 40 years doing B2B marketing for some of the most demanding industrial brands in the world. We've watched a lot of technology cycles come and go. We've seen the things that changed everything and the things that were going to change everything and quietly didn't.

What's different about AI is the scope. The capabilities are genuinely significant. The pace of change is genuinely disorienting and the pressure on marketing leaders to have an AI strategy is intense.

HERE IS WHAT MATTERS MOST.

The brands that win in the next decade won't be the ones who adopted AI fastest. They'll be the ones who built organizations that could hold two things at once: the discipline to use data and technology to navigate an increasingly fragmented buyer landscape with precision, and the wisdom to protect the human elements of their marketing that no technology will ever replicate.

That's not sitting on the fence. It's the strategic truth of where marketing is heading.

Your buyers are not converging. They are multiplying. Some of them want a connected, AI-personalized digital experience. Some of them want to talk to a person who knows their industry. Some of them want both, depending on the day and the decision.

Technology exists to serve all of them. The question is whether your organization has the strategy, the data infrastructure and the human talent to do it.

**NAVIGATE THE COMPLEXITY.
DON'T PRETEND IT ISN'T THERE.**



About the Author

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