Institute for Real Growth

CMO x CIO Playbook

Unlocking the CMO x CIO collaboration to drive Humanized Growth.

January 2025

Table of contents

Lex Bradshaw Zanger

CDMO L'Oréal

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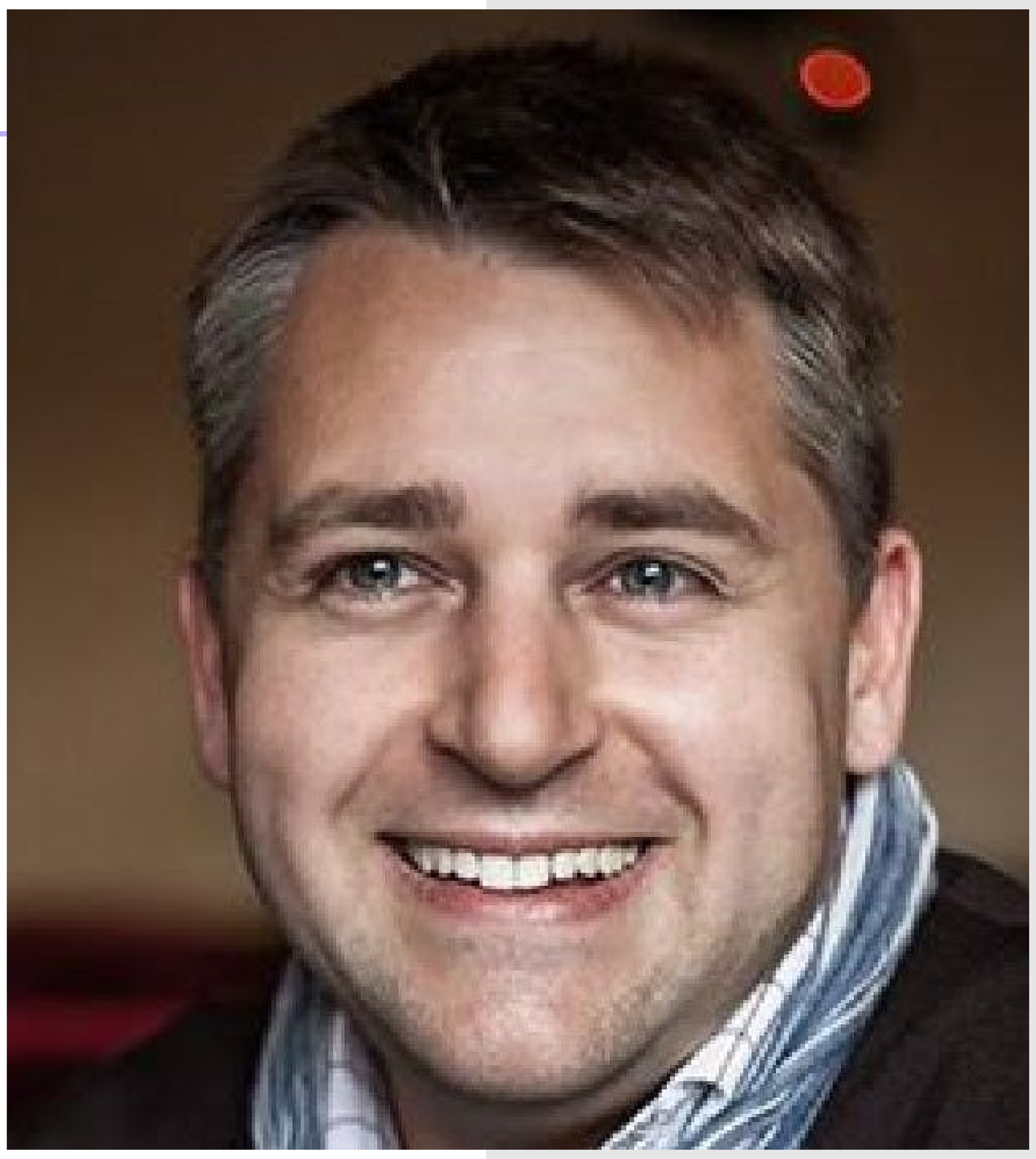


Dear business leader

At L'Oréal, we believe in the power of transformation—grounded in human connection and fueled by innovation. It is this belief that draws me to the IRG Institute for Real Growth, a global movement of over 850 CMOs committed to driving Humanized Growth. As a participant in the IRG Leadership Program, I have experienced firsthand the depth and relevance of the Institute's work, which consistently pushes industry boundaries while remaining deeply practical and actionable.

In a world reshaped by generative AI, digitization, and evolving consumer expectations, the need for thought leadership that bridges aspiration with implementation has never been greater. IRG's research stands out not just for its rigor but for its ability to identify and address the most pressing challenges faced by today's marketing leaders. By fostering collaboration across the C-Suite and emphasizing long-term value creation, IRG equips us to balance business goals with the needs of consumers, colleagues, communities, and capital markets.

The findings in this report reflect the very essence of Humanized Growth. They remind us that while technology provides unprecedented opportunities, the foundation of growth remains human. Success today depends on our ability to connect authentically with our stakeholders—whether through emotionally resonant storytelling, innovative product design, or seamless customer experiences. IRG's insights into how marketing and technology leaders can collaborate to achieve this are both timely and transformative.

What truly sets IRG apart is its ability to unite a global community of leaders who are passionate about shaping the future of business. Whether through shared KPIs, whole-brained teams, or the creation of "bilingual" leaders who bridge creative and technical disciplines, IRG's work inspires us to reimagine the way we lead. It challenges us to build organizations that are agile, purpose-driven, and prepared to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape.

This report is a testament to the power of collective expertise. By combining qualitative interviews with cutting-edge research, IRG provides a roadmap for the challenges we face today and those yet to come. As someone who has benefited greatly from IRG's programs, I am proud to celebrate their work and the impact they have on our industry.

Together, we are not just adapting to change—we are shaping it. I encourage all leaders to embrace the insights in this report and join the growing movement for Humanized Growth. It is through this commitment that we can create lasting value for all stakeholders and build a future we can be proud of.

Warm regards,

Lex Bradshaw Zanger
Chief Digital and Marketing Officer, L'Oréal

About the impact study

Executive Summary: Effective CMO x CIO collaboration

As generative AI and digitization reshape industries, the collaboration between CMOs and CIOs has become more critical than ever.

Our 2024 IRG impact Study finds overperforming companies thrive by 'Humanizing Growth'—creating long-term value for consumers, colleagues, communities, and capital markets. A crucial driver of this success is seamless collaboration between C-Suite executives.

However, our report reveals that fewer than half of CMOs report effective partnerships with their CIO counterparts.

This disconnect is particularly concerning as organizations increasingly rely on advanced martech solutions and face challenges like e-commerce surges and stringent data privacy regulations.

This CMO x CIO playbook dives deep into how CMOs and CIOs can forge stronger alliances to address these challenges and lead their organizations into the future.

It connects findings from our Impact Study with qualitative interviews from 60 senior marketing and technology leaders across industries and geographies, providing actionable insights to bridge the gap.

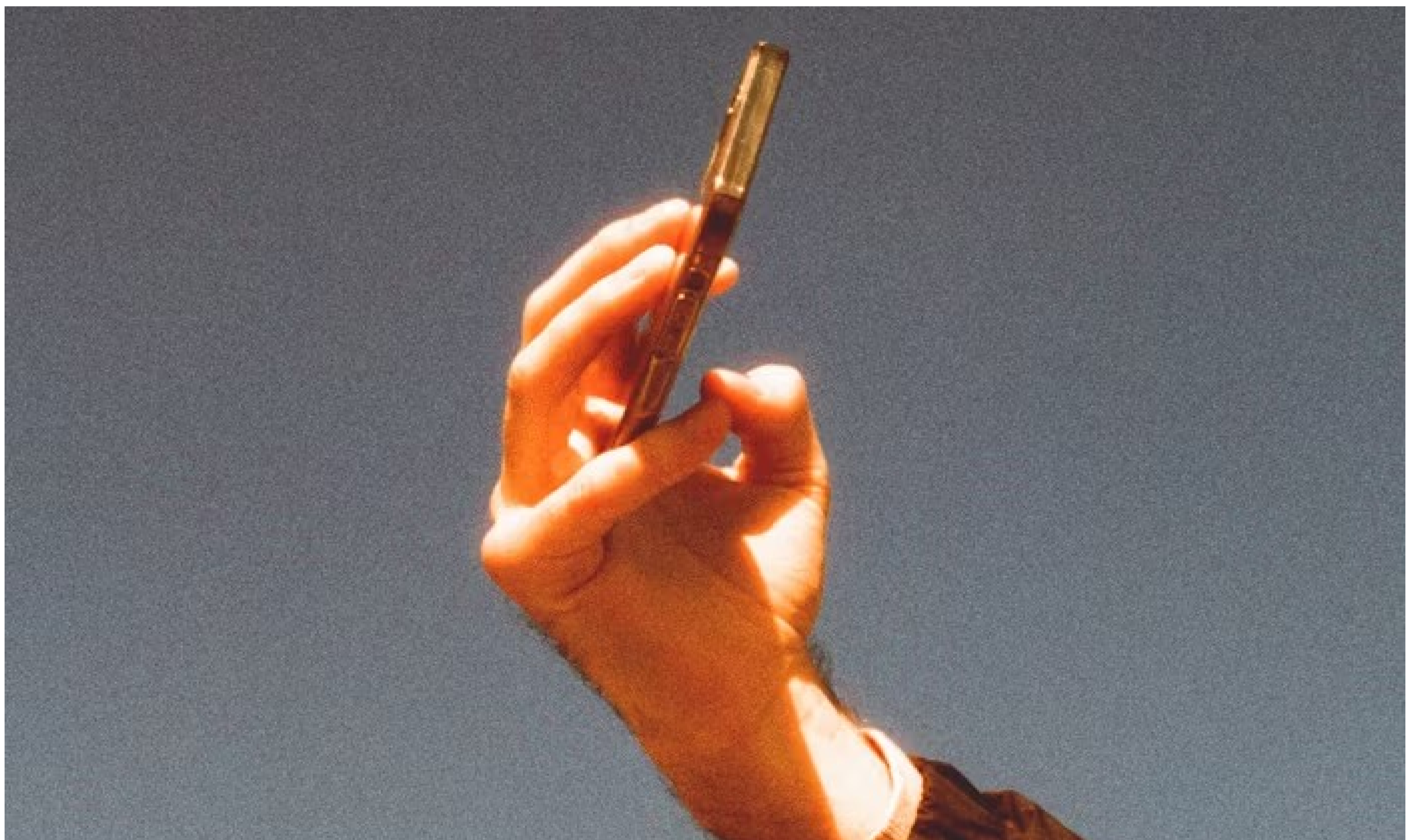
Why: human first & digital first

Evidently, driving multi-stakeholder value, calls for effective collaboration among C-suite leaders. In it, the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) plays a uniquely orchestrating role.

Why? CMOs naturally act as the organization's link to its stakeholders, offering an "outside-in" perspective, gathering insights, and giving voice to stakeholder needs.

To achieve key business objectives in today's digital world, like data-driven decision-making, enhancing customer experiences, and driving digital transformation, the CMO and CIO can work together to leverage marketing technology and other technologies, including artificial intelligence. This approach emphasizes the importance of integrating a human-first with a digital-first mindset, as fostering humanized growth requires both aspects.

How then, should the CMO x CIO go about driving humanized growth?



How: Key learnings

CMOs focus on storytelling, while CIOs maintain technical systems, but without a shared language or mutual understanding, progress stalls. Bridging this divide requires fostering "bilingual" leaders who can translate technical expertise into actionable marketing strategies. Joint strategic planning, shared KPIs, and collaborative processes are essential for alignment.

As our interviewees explored the future of tech and marketing, a consensus revealed itself. AI can enhance efficiency, streamline tasks, create content and assist in the media buying process, but it cannot replicate the creative intuition and emotional intelligence essential for emotionally resonant narratives. Marketers remain central to guiding AI toward meaningful, human-centric outcomes. True success lies in uniting marketing and IT teams to deliver both technical excellence and emotionally compelling customer experiences.

Our IRG Impact Study identified five key drivers that offer a framework for understanding and implementing strategies to humanize growth and create value for all stakeholders, rather than focusing solely on shareholder primacy.

The next page captures how the CMO x CIO collaboration can collaborate on each of the five drivers. This playbook is further amended with conversation guides and practical guidelines to forge an effective CMO x CIO partnership.

Five drivers of Humanized Growth for successful CMO x CIO partnerships

1. Ground: To truly ground the organization in the stakeholder realty, our findings suggest the CMO & CIO establish a joint learning agenda to understand stakeholder needs and serve those through technology. Define the tech stack and analytic tools to make sense of the world and identify or even predict market shifts and new opportunities.

2. Reimagine: Overperformers develop a future-backwards vision for their organization. The CMO and CIO are uniquely positioned to reimagine that future. How? By picturing a dystopian or utopian future for the organization and understanding the future of technology. Next, by deciding how the organization can play a role for stakeholders in that future, with technology as an enabler.

3. Focus: Together, decide on which adaptive and transformative change areas the organization should focus on. Develop collective KPIs to drive the business case in a marketing-led and tech-enabled way.

4. Organize: Develop whole-brained teams where creativity and analytics are connected to drive the desired value for the organization. Together shape the right culture, define the future (human and tech) skills needed, and recruit talent.

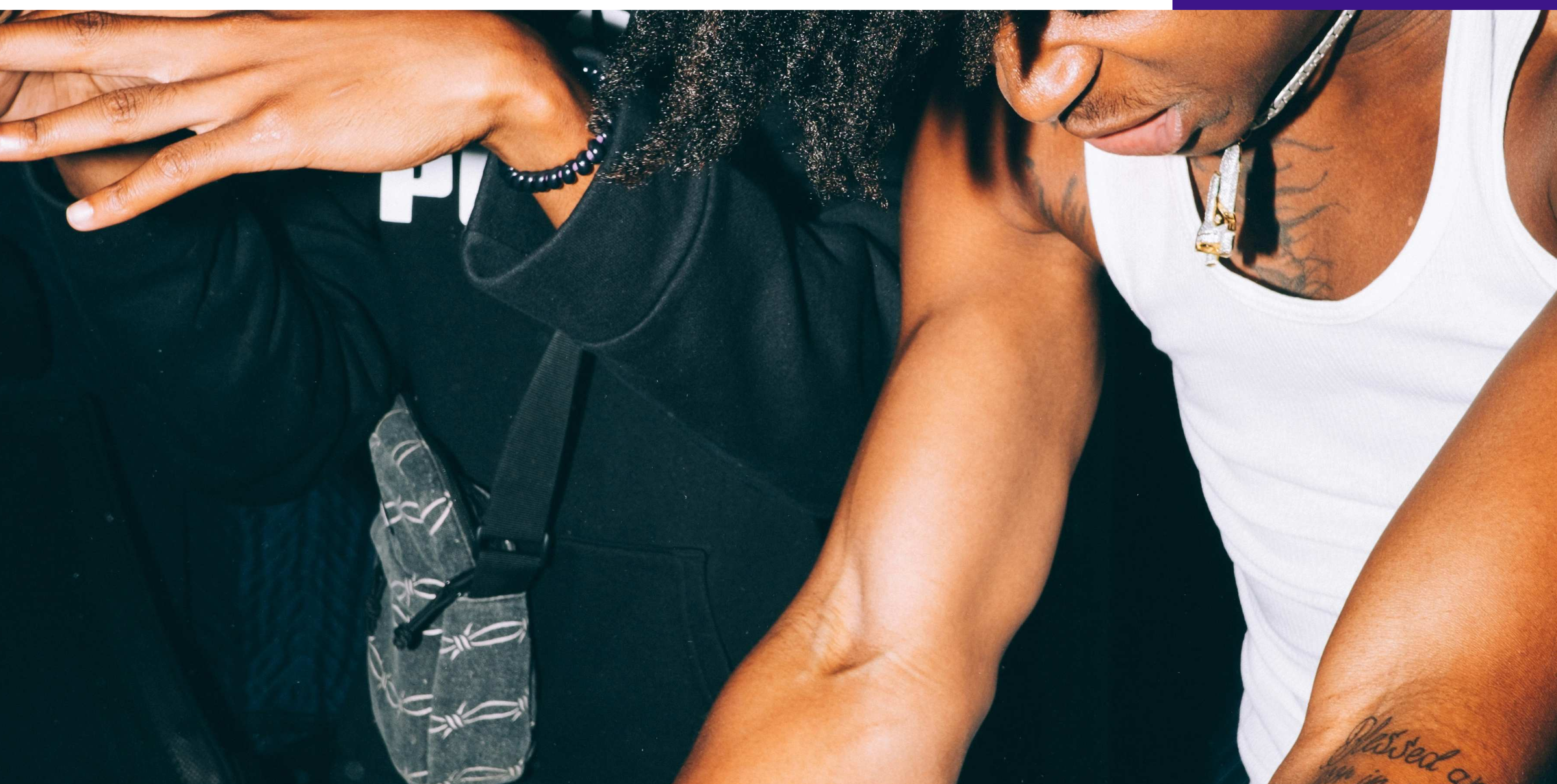
5. Unleash: It is essential to role model the successful behaviors of the CMO x CIO partnership, endorsing and celebrating each other through joint sessions and presentations.

46% actively engage with chief information officers

74% actively engage with chief commercial officers

70% actively engage with chief human resources officers

72% actively engage with chief financial officers



01 The five drivers

The IRG Impact Study points out that overperforming companies start with a human-first perspective, grounding themselves in the realities of their stakeholders internally and externally.

Martech tools like social listening provide real-time customer feedback, empowering teams to create impactful experiences and drive results.

For this to succeed, marketing and technology must collaborate closely, leveraging their combined strengths while understanding each other's contexts.

Despite rapid advancements in martech, many organizations are hindered by outdated systems. To modernize effectively, they must first evaluate the foundations of their current strategies and clearly define the roles of IT and marketing. Is IT critical on an enterprise level only, or does it also contribute to customer understanding? Similarly, is marketing limited to communications, or does it play a strategic role in driving growth?

Mutual alignment

A common barrier to collaboration is the lack of mutual understanding. However, overcoming this creates opportunities for accelerated marketing strategies, enhanced customer engagement, and technology infrastructures that deliver measurable business impact. Aligning roles and assessing gaps between ambitions and capabilities are critical first steps. Jointly evaluating skills like data-driven decision-making or digital strategy can uncover insights, foster trust, and set the stage for a shared learning agenda.

Shared language and vision

When CMO and CIO goals don't align, it can feel like speaking different languages—marketing focuses on customer insights, while IT prioritizes infrastructure. Ideally, both share a vision for advancing customer experience and business growth, with technology becoming a proactive enabler of strategic goals.

Perspectives

"We learn together. I took the CMO to Google Next, and he will take me to Cannes Lions!"
- CIO, consumer goods company

"As a marketer, it is about being conversant in the merging technical solutions, not fluent!"
- CMO, convenience chain retailer

Recommendations

- **Align on the roles of IT and Marketing**
- **Create and sustain a joint learning agenda**
- **Over-invest in the relationship by adopting a -give 60%, take 40%- mindset.**
- **Always consider the external partners' perspective**

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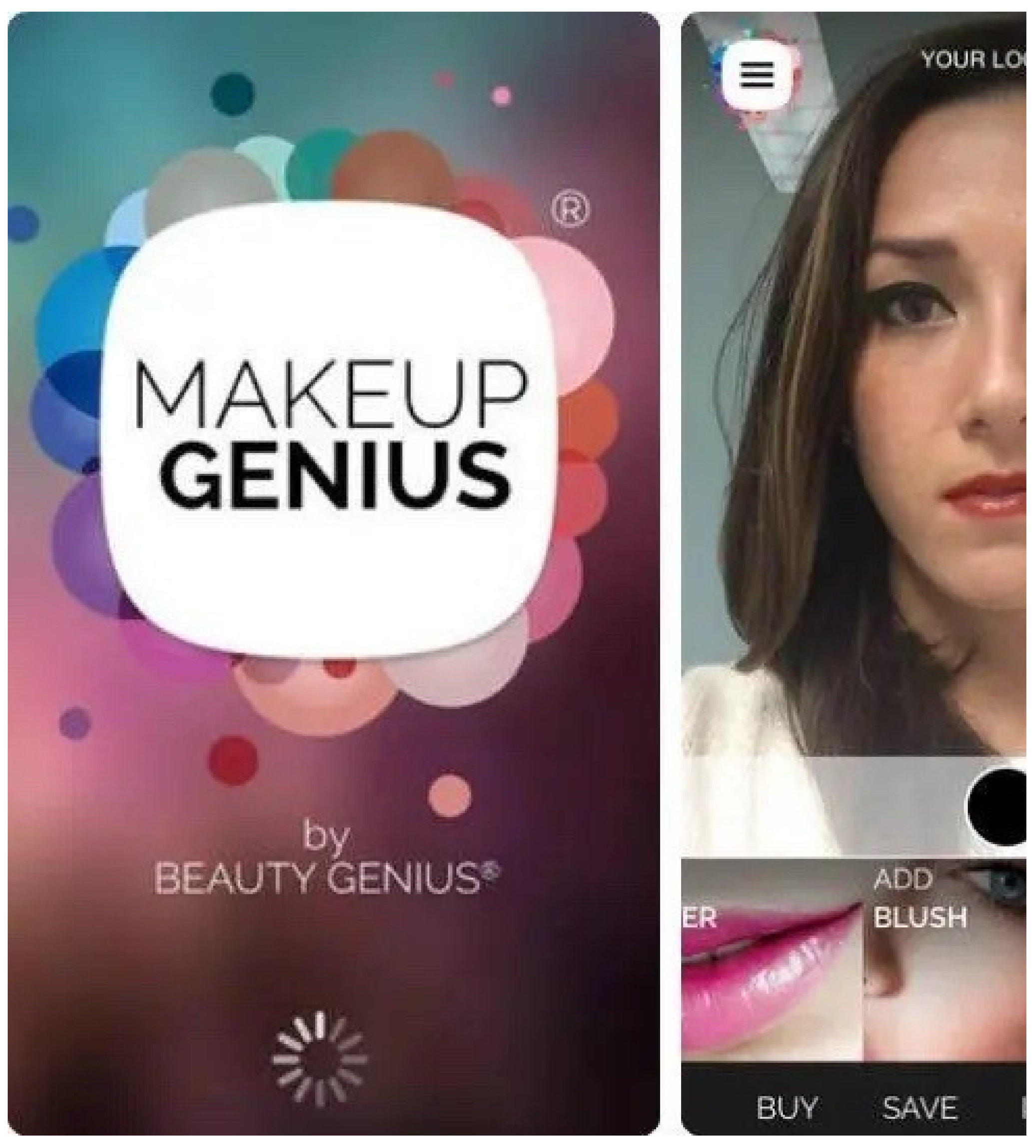
L'Oreal. Beauty Genius App from L'Oréal, which leverages data and technology to boost consumers' confidence. It is an AI-powered virtual beauty advisor that has been trained on more than 6,000 images, 10,000 products, and numerous in-store conversations to deliver an hyperpersonalized recommendation. This enables consumers to purchase exactly the right products for themselves.

AB InBev. Technology is an enabler of stronger customer engagement, as illustrated by Ab Inbev's first direct-to-consumer platform, TaDa Delivery, which offers cold beer in 30 minutes or less. But for AB InBev, this is more than just a sales channel, it is an opportunity to connect one-to-one with its customers and get to know them better; their preferences, their behaviors, and their interests. Ultimately, this leads to a better personalized experience and customer loyalty.

Financial firm. A financial services company realized it was dependent on outdated legacy systems that lacked a unified infrastructure and that it was not ready to embrace new technology advancements.
In response, the leadership took a smart approach to pursue two parallel tracks – tackling the foundational issues for long-term readiness while also outsourcing initiatives in the short term to maintain competitiveness.



The results of the IRG Impact Study clearly show that growth overperformers excel in long-term thinking. In other words, they aren't solely focused on winning today. In fact, growth overperforming companies invest twice as much on foresight (predicting the future) as they do on insight (describing the present or the past).

The pressing question for every organization—"What's the future of technology?"—becomes irrelevant if the technologies never find real-world use.

While new and shiny innovations generate excitement, true impact lies in an effective CMO x CIO collaboration. Together, they must focus on the intersection of stakeholder needs and how technology can deliver meaningful solutions or enable transformative outcomes.

Purpose guides AI

Organizations are entering a period of peak complexity, but with it comes immense opportunity. We are moving from a time when we asked, "Can technology do what we want?" to an era in which we question, "Do we want what technology can do?"

This shift means that organizations need to reimagine the impact of generative AI on all their stakeholders: colleagues, consumers, communities, and capital markets.

It is up to the CMO and CIO to explore how a blend of technology and human insight can help define the future of their industry.

Having a clear purpose is essential to guide this exploration and navigate the complexities that lie ahead.

73% of overperformers invest in a long-term vision

23% underperformers invest in a long term vision

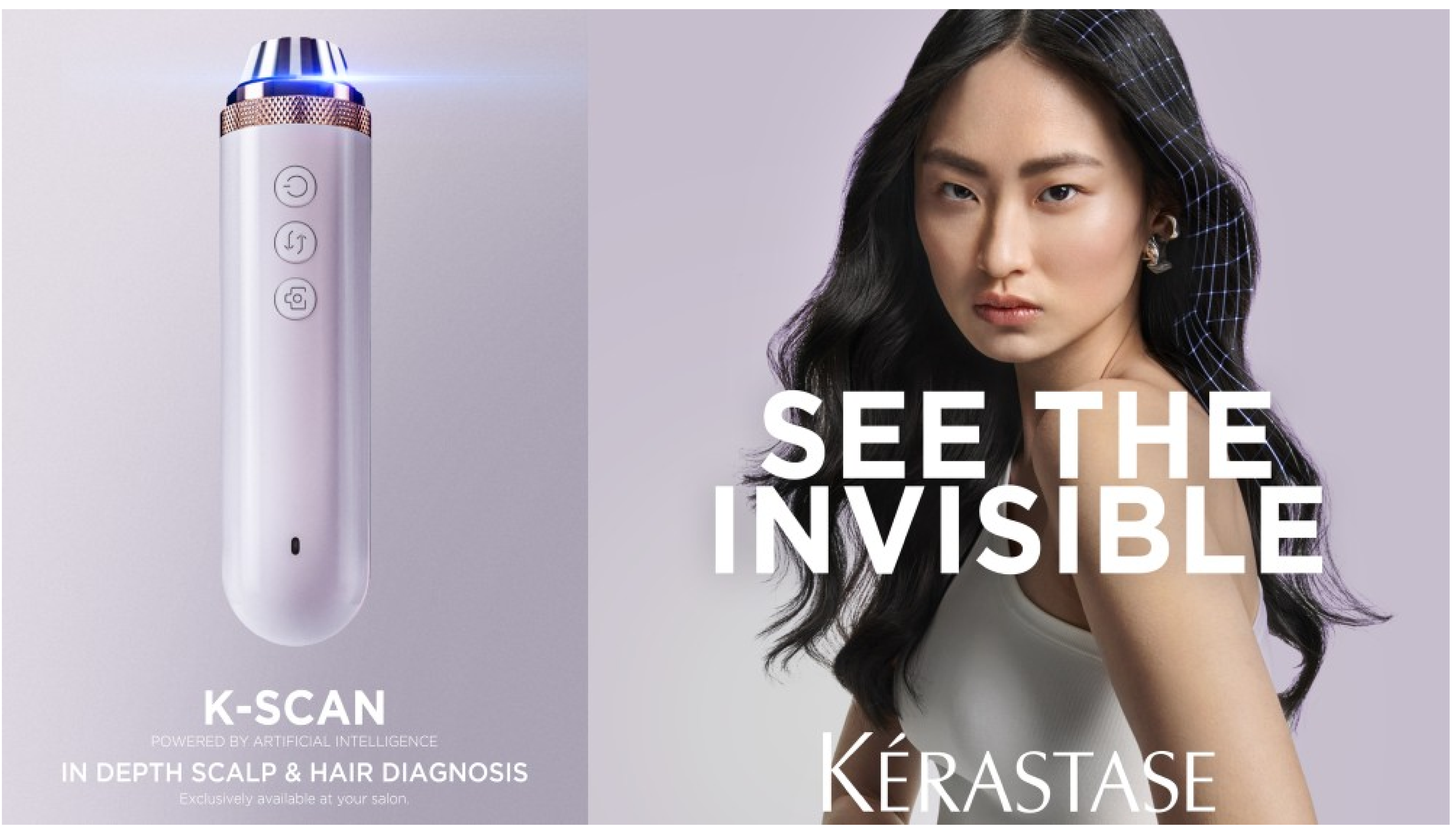
Recommendations

- Develop a future backward vision on technology.
- Define how AI and tech can create societal impact.
- Make martech tangible and democratize solutions.
- Turn long term vision in short term experiments.

L’Oreal

Ten years ago, L’Oréal had the idea to use digital channels to make beauty accessible to everyone, calling it the 20/50/100 vision (20% e-commerce, 50% personal relationship, 100% digital love brands).

At that point, they were also one of the first Fortune 500 companies to appoint a chief digital officer (CDO), at an executive committee level, and later to create the role of a chief digital marketing officer (CDMO), signaling a major shift in how they run marketing.



In 2018, L’Oréal decided it was no longer just a beauty company, but a beauty tech company, a testament to its ambition to establish a new type of relationship with its customers, one that is personal and inclusive.

With the motto “Beauty for each, powered by tech,” L’Oréal is leading the category, with e-comm sales booming from 2% in 2014 to 28% in 2023.
And here is the unlock for L’Oréal - tech isn’t the main focus. It is just that their customers engage most with the category online, and technology enables better solutions, such as AI skin and hair diagnostic tools. The end goal? “Create the Beauty that moves the world.”

Strategic alignment

The third driver of Humanized Growth emphasizes the importance of an integrated, holistic strategy to bring an organization's vision to life. In reality, many great visions lose their edges because there is no laser-sharp focus or translation into strategic priorities.

Not all changes are transformative—some are adaptive adjustments, while others, like GenAI, drive long-term shifts. Unlike traditional top-down transformations, GenAI's democratization often starts from the bottom. To accelerate collaboration, CMOs and CIOs should establish shared KPIs that align growth metrics (e.g., client acquisition, loyalty) with efficiency goals.

While domain-specific KPIs remain, our interviews with overperformers show they systemically integrate metrics—from business, marketing, and IT strategy — merging into shared growth KPIs that track collective impact.

Governance and resource allocation are critical for effective martech implementation. Clear investment decisions should rest with senior leadership.

Investments typically fall into three areas:

1. Infrastructure & Architecture: Led by IT with full C-suite alignment.
1. Strategic Growth Initiatives: overperforming organizations approach this with full collaboration to ensure digital investments are aligned with business strategy.
1. Use Case Investments: a business-led dialogue between the two functions is crucial to ensure value realization and constant effectiveness, without increasing tech depth.

This structured approach enables both adaptive and transformative changes, enhancing focus and fostering innovation.

Perspectives

"AI will change everything we do in the next five years. The challenge now is how to set yourself up for that transformation while still delivering on the everyday needs of the business. Incremental changes simply won't take us there."

CIO, consumer goods company

Recommendations

- **Distinguish between transformative and adaptive change**
- **Dont confuse means and ends**
- **Share responsibility of budget and investments**
- **Set joint PIs**

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General Mills. With its vast food brand portfolio, there's a major cross-selling opportunity supported by tech. Leveraging holistic household data, General Mills employs a holistic marketing and technology strategy referred to as 'business-led, tech-enabled, and data-fueled'. This approach, grounded in strategic pillars like talent development, agile work, and operational modernization, has enhanced customer experience and efficiency while paving the way for innovation and growth.s.

O**nline credit** In the case of an online credit provider, the daily adaptive changes (such as website updates, CRM campaigns, personalized offers, etc.) are handled by IT specialists sitting in the marketing team. However, the conversations around the impact of GenAI on the future of the business are handled at a strategic level, involving leaders of the highest seniority.
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Working collaboratively is a critical enabler of driving Humanized Growth. It requires breaking down the silos – internally and across functions, business units, and geographies.

Our research confirms the importance of this driver. And every business leader, whether from the marketing or technology side, is grappling with how to organize for it.

Breaking silos

In the emerging context, the dynamic of briefing-proposal-decision-execution simply doesn't work anymore. Nowadays, co-creation sessions, hackathons, and more multidisciplinary discussions at all levels play a critical role in humanizing growth.

A common approach for the CMO x CIO collaboration is appointing a point of contact (POC) on each side to streamline communication, share prioritization, and oversee execution. Some organizations introduce a product owner role to bridge marketing and technology while owning the product itself.

We also found top-performing companies excel by fostering "whole-brained" teams, blending analytical, creative, and empathetic perspectives. Success isn't about equal representation but about a mindset of interdependence, where both sides recognize the value of collaboration to address key strategic challenges and drive growth effectively.

50 % of overperformers are successfully removing silos.

24 % of underperformers invest are successfully removing silos.

Recommendations

- Appoint new roles to bridge silos: POCs, product owners, CDMO.
- When design thinking both the CMO & CIO perspective should be present from start to end.
- Create balanced hole-brain marketing and tech teams
- Involvement in key recruits

"AI is too big to be led by a single team. It needs our collective efforts, our different ways of thinking in understanding how to tackle one of the biggest disruptive forces."

CMO, consumer goods company

"Digital transformation doesn't stand alone. It's about how digital can enable the purpose and the strategy of the organization. Awesome digital solutions can truly power up that business growth! We call it digitalization for good, in line with our identifying good growth."

Technology lead, dairy company

"Considering the complexity of the recent martech advancements, I know that I will only be as successful as we are together with my CIO."

CMO, Bank

"My marketing team would work on the design and the experience of the solution, IT will make sure it is implemented, and the product owner would fully own the product. The product owners work directly under the GMs of the business areas. "

CMO, tax company

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Still to do

Perspectives

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02 Practical guidance

CMO x CIO meeting exercise

The ultimate benchmark question

As you strengthen the collaboration between your marketing and technology functions, regularly ask yourself this question: How do you rate your and your peer’s contribution to success?

If you are working 100% independently, you are not likely setting your team up for success, and the same is true if you are 100% dependent on your peer. Instead, you should strive for the middle ground: Interdependence. Sit together and reflect on the following questions

Independence

I’m on board with the business priorities - I don’t need marketing for that.

I don’t need to involve the CIO - I’m good at commissioning work to suppliers.

Dependence

I need the CMO to give me the brief, with clear requirements.

I need the CIO to tell me what’s possible.

Interdependence

We collaborate at each step of the process. I bring my expertise; my peers bring theirs.

We trust and respect each other. We can’t achieve great results on our own.

1

How could Marketing & Technology partner up to drive the UN SDGs? Your company probably focuses on one or few of the UN SDG's. What opportunities and synergies can you envision by joining forces?

1. Select the most relevant SDGs for your organization.
1. Connect the brand/purpose to delivering value to the SDG.
1. Explore how tech can be an accelerator or enabler, now and in the future.

2

Brainstorm together about how to collectively drive value to the different stakeholders.

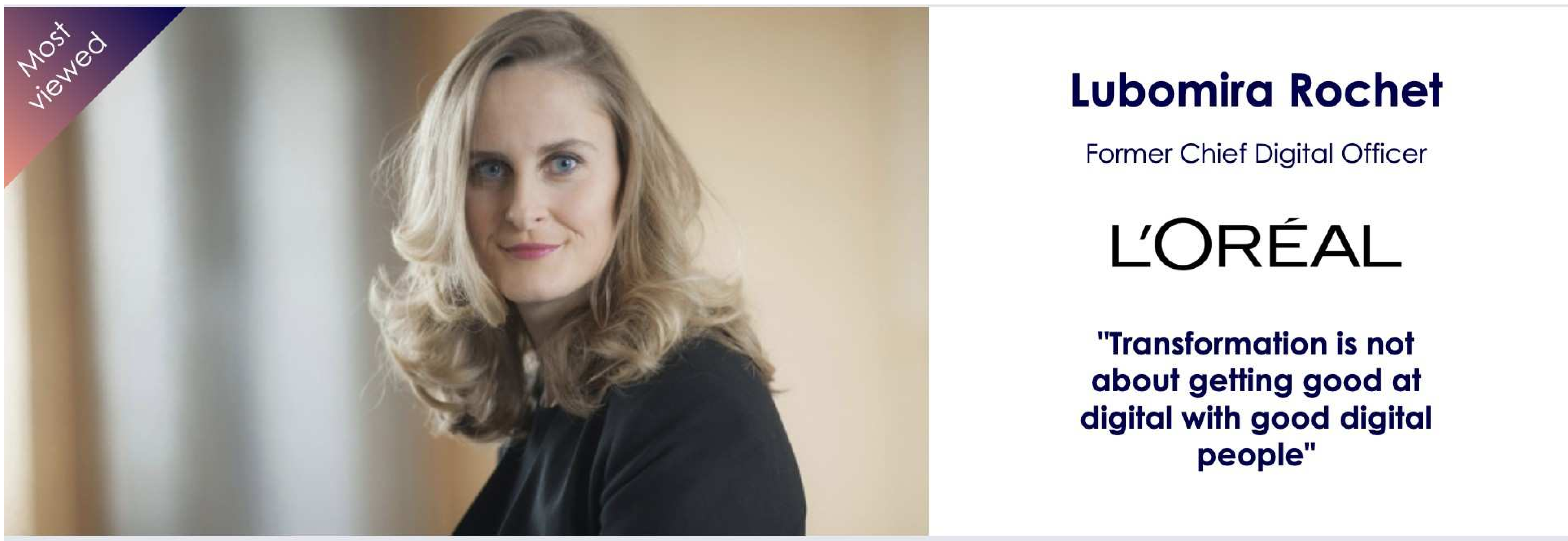
1. Look at each individual stakeholder: colleagues, customers, communities and capital markets.

2a. Marketing: define their needs

2b. Technology: define current data, tech in place

3. Together: connect to identify new opportunities for growth.

Recommended deep dives



IRG Purpose

Inspiring leaders to increase Personal, Business, and Societal Impact

Independent, Not-for-Profit, Global, Diverse Perspectives

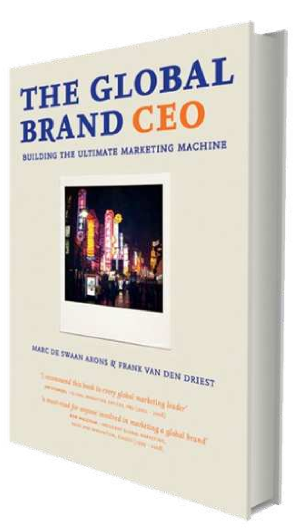
Activities

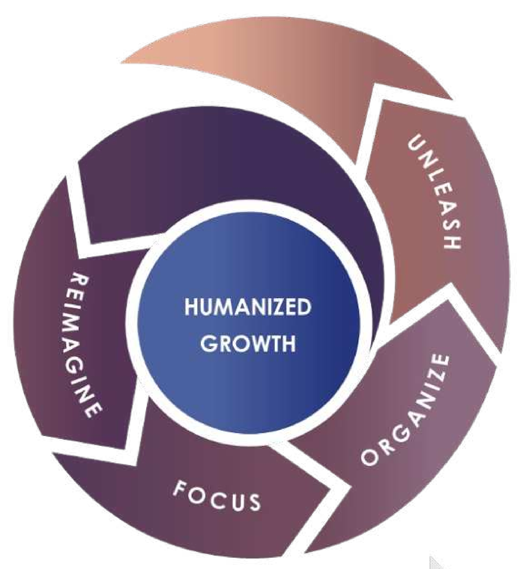
1. Humanized Growth Thought Leadership
1. Leadership Programs
1. Global Summits & Events

Partners

Google WPP tcs TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES SpencerStuart Ipsos

Thought Leadership





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