

THE EXPONENTIAL CMO PLAYBOOK

Continuous reinvention in the agentic era



Leslie Schultz
Chief Marketing Officer, UST

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Why this playbook matters

Marketing has always evolved through reinvention. We moved from print to digital, from broadcast to social, and from one-way messaging to agile, data-driven engagement across expanding channels. Each shift reshaped how we reach, engage, and convert, not just the tools we use.

Now, we're entering what may be the most radical reinvention yet: Agentic AI.

What makes this shift different

Changes to the nature of work, not just tools

Past upheavals introduced new channels or analytics. Now, agentic AI changes how the work itself gets done: moving beyond draft -> approve -> publish pipelines toward autonomous agents that can plan, act, observe, and refine in real time. Already, nearly 56% of marketers report their companies are actively implementing AI in marketing operations, with the most advanced organizations experimenting with agent-driven workflows that automate entire segments of the content creative, engagement, and funnel lifecycle.

How UST Marketing uses AI to work smarter

Across UST Marketing and Communications, agentic AI is transforming how we plan, create, and optimize.

Our Advertising Operations team now uses a Campaign Monitoring and Optimization Agent that continuously monitors Meta, LinkedIn, Demandbase, and HubSpot data—reallocating budgets, refreshing creatives, and tuning targeting in real time. When performance dips, it triggers creative refresh tasks in Figma and syncs updates to Asana for full visibility.



Digital Operations

The Digital team uses AI for dynamic personalization—fusing Demandbase, AEM, and HubSpot data to deliver tailored web, email, and ad experiences that adapt to each visitor's intent and stage in real time.

Content Creation and Operations

For the Content team, AI acts as a live editor and creative partner—reviewing tone, brand consistency, and clarity across Word, Adobe, and Figma, while automating asset production and iteration workflows and improving quality and relevance.

Marketing Operations

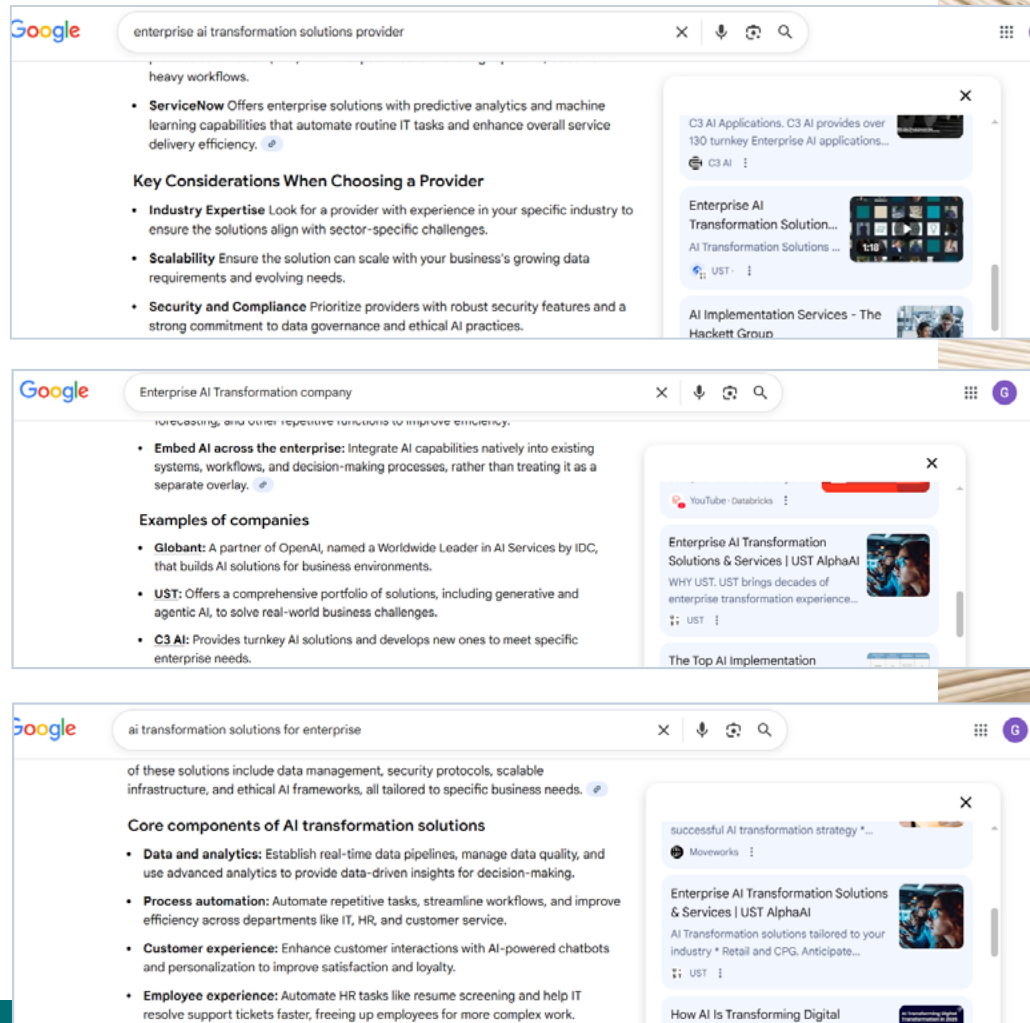
Our Marketing Operations agent routes, qualifies, and engages leads autonomously across HubSpot and Demandbase, ensuring no opportunity slips through the cracks.

SEO and AEO

The SEO (Search Engine Optimization) to AEO (AI Engine Optimization) team is supported by an AI agent that continuously scans the web to monitor competitor activity, surface emerging keywords, and draft briefs for upcoming campaigns.

Example of Impact:

Another set of agents we have launched help us continuously optimize UST.com for search, including evaluating and suggesting updates to content for AEO.



Together, our team of agents are redefining and optimizing how we work – freeing up more time for our human creativity and our focus on strategy, storytelling, and impact.

Operating at the pace of AI

Exponential velocity

Marketing cycles will no longer stretch across weeks or months; they will compress into hours or days. The pace of iteration and personalization is increasing by order of magnitude. Consider this: the global market for AI in marketing was projected to reach \$47.32 billion by 2025 and surge to over **\$107.5 billion by 2028**. Meanwhile, the specific demand for AI agents is forecast to expand from **\$5.25 billion in 2024 to over \$52.6 billion by 2030**—evidence that speed and scale are about to accelerate dramatically.

End-to-end customer experiences now a real possibility

Rather than optimizing isolated touchpoints, marketers are beginning to orchestrate continuous feedback loops between agents and audiences, adapting messaging, creative, and offers in real time.

While 71% of companies used generative AI in 2024, only 30% have fully integrated it across the media lifecycle. That gap represents both risk and opportunity: organizations that operationalize agentic workflows will lead in responsiveness, relevance, and customer intimacy.

The balancing act of risk and reward

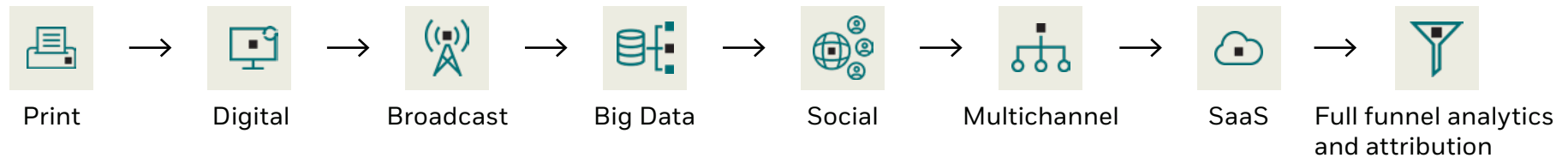
The stakes are high. Gartner warns that over 40% of agentic AI projects could be scrapped by 2027 due to cost or unclear value. Yet they also predict that by 2028, **15% of day-to-day decisions will be made autonomously**. The signal is clear: adoption is no longer theoretical—it's happening now, and the leaders who navigate this balance will set the pace for the industry.



The core argument

Your evolving role as CMO

Over your career, you've navigated:



Now comes the next frontier: **the age of agentic AI.**

This playbook—rooted in frontline experience—is your guide to leading that exponential shift. Your leadership becomes less about managing campaigns and more about:

- Orchestrating talent, tools, and guardrails
- Cultivating experimentation and AI fluency
- Embedding governance, ethics, and strategic direction into AI systems

More than adapting, you'll chart the future of marketing in your organization.

Exponential amplification, not human replacement

Agentic AI doesn't replace marketers; it multiplies their impact. Its power comes from blending scale with human judgment, strategy, and creative intent. Without expert human guidance, AI risks producing generic content. But, by handling repetitive and onerous tasks, AI frees humans to elevate storytelling, strengthen brand voice, and focus on higher-value strategic thinking.



The CMO's new mandate

Orchestration in the AI age

Your imperative is not to control AI—but to create the conditions where people and agents perform at their best together, safely and responsibly.

Your goal should be to clear the path, enabling your teams to embrace AI, experiment and grow their skills, and lead them to stay ahead of the industry curve.

The evolving CMO role

LEADERSHIP

Campaign manager

Chief orchestrator (setting and managing direction across people and agents, creating the conditions for innovation)

TEAM FOCUS

Task manager

Talent builder (ensuring every team member is growing, AI-savvy, and future-ready)

BRAND GOAL

Brand promoter

Value creator (delivering personalized, useful experiences, known as “utility,” that drive trust and advocacy)



AI as the great disruptor

The shift from generative assistants to agentic AI is transformative, not incremental. AI is reshaping marketing by amplifying human capability rather than replacing it. Already, 88% of marketers say AI accelerates insight discovery and frees time for strategy. In B2B, half use AI today, and 75% plan to adopt generative and agentic AI, signaling a fundamental reconfiguration of how marketing operates.



Competitive analysis

AI generated a detailed side-by-side view of key competitors, highlighting how each approaches specific scenarios. The result was a clear visual map of white space opportunities—helping us sharpen differentiation and messaging focus.



Vendor evaluation

By uploading two vendor proposals, AI instantly compared strengths, weaknesses, and trade-offs, giving us an objective, time-saving view for decision-making.



Translation and creative localization

In developing unique geographical landing experiences and localizing campaigns, the team uses agents to review and optimize the creative and offer initial translations, which native human speakers validate and improve.



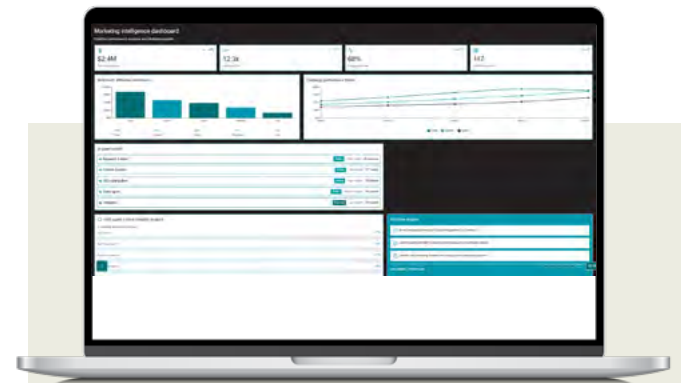
Go-to-market ideation

Using our trained LLM, we analyze UST's Infrastructure and Security capabilities against competitors and analyst insights. With intelligent prompting, marketers identified key client pain points, clarified UST's differentiation, guided leadership discussions, and shaped stronger positioning and sales strategy.



Sales development agents

Using our knowledge repository and multiple email domains, a virtual AI team identifies persona targets, crafts personalized multi-channel emails and engages clients to schedule meetings with experts efficiently. The core purpose is to engage a client to learn more and schedule a meeting with an expert.



Visualization of Impact: Use AI to bring it all together to best orchestrate, manage, and make decisions quickly.

How AI is rewriting marketing

CHANNELS ARE EVOLVING

We now design for **voice, multimodal, and AI-native experiences**, not just email, display, or social.

In B2B, **AI-generated traffic** already accounts for **2–6% of organic traffic** in many verticals, and it's growing over **40% per month**.

This suggests search and discovery are shifting—buyers increasingly interact via AI-driven interfaces, bypassing traditional website funnels.

OPERATIONS ARE SHIFTING: AGENTS, NOT ASSISTANTS

Agentic marketing is not only about suggestions—it's about autonomous execution. Agents will draft, launch, monitor, and optimize campaigns, subject to guardrails and human oversight.

Academic research is already pushing in this direction: one recent framework for Agentic Multimodal AI uses Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), persona-based targeting, and cultural reasoning to autonomously generate ads customized to market segments.

In practice, some brands are seeing ROI:

- According to McKinsey, companies that invest deeply in AI for marketing and sales are seeing sales ROI uplift of 10–20%.
- In retail/CPG, generative AI deployments have driven a doubling of employee productivity and improved customer experience in more than half of cases.

DATA AND GOVERNANCE MUST ADVANCE

Legacy data architectures fall short for agentic systems. Today we need:

- Hybrid retrieval systems (vector + lexical)
- Provenance and attribution to track source and trust
- Governance to enforce consistency, security, and compliance

In marketing, many organizations still struggle with siloed systems, manual workflow and tracking, and disconnected data—limiting AI's ability to reason across domains.

THE DISRUPTION IS IN HUMAN AMPLIFICATION

The true power of agentic AI is not in replacing human creativity, but in scaling it with speed and consistency—while tailoring and preserving brand integrity.

Without proper governance, AI can produce “slop”: generic, tone-deaf, or off-brand content and poor-quality visuals.

The differentiator is human + AI collaboration:

1. Use agents to generate drafts, variants, or first-pass creative ideas.
2. Human editors refine, apply brand voice and style, and validate context and quality.
3. Feedback loops teach agents your style, layout, flow, tone, and guardrails.

When done well, that synergy can boost output velocity dramatically, deepen personalized experiences, and, most importantly, maintain authenticity.

Risks and responsible AI

Speed without governance is reckless and, in the end, will affect overall performance and reputation. As the champion of the brand, the CMO must put **responsible AI** at the core of the adoption roadmap.

AI risk area	Actionable governance and guardrails
Authenticity & brand voice	Preserve human voice and experience. The brand's humanity and narrative must come first. Every AI output requires a human touch, review, and editing to prevent a robotic, inauthentic feel.
Security & data privacy	Work tightly with the CIO/IT teams to ensure enterprise data is absorbed, trained, and used securely. New tools must fit within your established security protocols. Work together to create secure sandboxes to innovate and test.
Quality control	Implement mandatory checkpoints and human oversight for every AI-driven output to ensure it is at the necessary quality standard, is factually correct with no biases or hallucinations, and is legally compliant.
Policy & clarity	Define clear policies that dictate which workflows are fully automated, which require human review, and which subjects or data are strictly off-limits to general models.
Orchestration oversight	Create a framework for consistency, transparency, and governance across teams with a managed "talent pool" of approved, optimized agents that are being continuously trained, certified, and assessed.

The lesson: AI with governance is a competitive advantage; without it, it's a massive brand risk.

Immediate quick wins

Proof points for scaling

AI delivers measurable efficiency and quality gains now. These quick wins build momentum and provide the necessary proof points for continued investment:

- **Brand-specific LLMs**
Create a custom language model tuned to your brand's voice, tone, and portfolio. This allows for the instant drafting of high-level narratives, pitch decks, and proof points in a matter of minutes, a task that once took weeks.
- **Accelerated production**
AI-powered creative augmentation slashes costs and speeds time-to-market. Video animations, voiceovers, and industry-specific visuals that used to demand months and multi-hundred-thousand-dollar shoots can now be produced in a fraction of the time.
- **Enhanced analytics**
Use AI to mine CRM (like HubSpot) and marketing data, surfacing non-obvious growth opportunities and performance insights that are difficult to find in standard reports.
- **Creative velocity**
Empower human creative teams with tools that allow for faster ideation and experimentation cycles, freeing them from manual data gathering and drafting tasks.



The AI adoption roadmap

From pilot to enterprise agent ecosystem

The journey is phased, balancing immediate experimentation with secure, long-term enterprise integration.

PHASE 1

Experimentation (The first 100 days)

- **Get AI-fluent:** Use tools like ChatGPT and Copilot daily. Read, learn, and use the tools yourself; you can't lead the transformation without direct experience.
- **Tech stack audit:** Assess your current MarTech stack. Favor technology partners who have already implemented AI capabilities to accelerate adoption without building from scratch.
- **Launch pilots:** Focus on low-risk use cases like reporting, creative drafting, and video production to drive quick efficiency and get the team using the tools.
- **Governance partnership:** Initiate mandatory partnerships with the CIO on security and the CFO on establishing ROI metrics and tracking efficiency savings.

PHASE 2

Scale (Year 1)

- **Stitch it together:** Move beyond individual pilots to systematically integrate tools, data, and workflows. AI will be used to connect disparate data sets across the organization. Begin to assess platformizing your operations with an agentic AI layer.
- **Agent development:** Start building and leveraging specialized AI Agents for each function. The goal is an agentic talent pool ecosystem where teams can “dock into” hundreds of internal agents and platforms.
- **Talent certification:** Challenge the entire marketing team to become certified or proficient in the new tools, ensuring AI fluency becomes a core competency.

PHASE 3

Enterprise integration (Year 2+)

- **Orchestrated ecosystems:** Transition from copilot support to fully orchestrated agent ecosystems embedded across the enterprise. Build or bring in an agentic AI platform to tie it all together, operate, govern, optimize and measure – performance, savings and quality.
- **Customer journey integration:** Embed AI across the entire customer lifecycle for hyper-personalization, account intelligence, and advocacy.
- **Scale governance:** Mature the governance and security frameworks to handle enterprise-level data volume and adoption across every business line.

Human + AI is our future

The future of operationalizing exponential creativity

The relationship between human creativity and AI intelligence is now a yin and yang partnership



From personalization to intent

UST's marketing team is pioneering agentic personalization—AI systems that don't just react to behavior but interpret intent and act autonomously.



Our campaign agent reallocates budgets and updates creatives in real time.



The personalization agent fuses demandbase and adobe data to tailor experiences by account and into persona and individual.



AI-led copy editors enforce tone and brand consistency, while SEO Agents monitor competitors and automatically trigger new briefs.

The result: Marketing that listens, reasons, and evolves—powered by human strategy, amplified and executed by machine intelligence.



Marketing that will think and feel

UST is redefining marketing with AI, shifting from message-driven to moment-driven engagement. AI connects marketing, experience, and commerce into a self-learning ecosystem. Through data fusion, generative intelligence, and agentic personalization, we anticipate intent and act in real time. Marketing becomes proactive, human-centered, and ethical. We measure ROI, emotion, attention, and trust—together, as one team.

The AI-driven CMO

Being an AI-driven CMO:

- Lead with **vision and challenge, not micromanagement**.
- Build **cross-functional partnerships for a secure and reliable foundation for experimentation and enterprise scale**.
- Orchestrate **human and AI talent pools and competencies** across the function.
- Balance **experimentation with governance**.
- Build teams that are **future-ready, AI-fluent, and human-first**.

For hesitant CMOs: The choice is simple—**adopt and adapt or risk irrelevance**.

- **An AI talent builder:** AI is here to redefine our jobs, not take them. When incorporated into our expertise, AI will allow new graduates and experienced professionals to move faster into strategic, high-value roles by delivering exponential impact.
- **Enable and champion the collaborative model:** Humans remain essential for strategy, managing exceptions, applying the “human touch,” and validating new model behaviors and output. AI provides the scale, speed, and tireless ideation and iteration capacity.
- **Ensure continuous feedback loops:** Every AI output requires a human to train, prompt, fix, refine, and provide the continuous strategic direction for true value.



About the author

Leslie Schultz is a pioneer in AI-driven marketing transformation, driving UST's rapid growth by building its first unified global brand strategy and integrated marketing organization. She leads brand, marketing, experience, and PR across all UST regions and subsidiaries, reshaping marketing for the age of AI. By embedding intelligent tools, agentic platforms, and data-driven creativity into daily operations, Leslie empowers her teams to learn, experiment, and innovate while preserving brand authenticity, accelerating velocity, and deepening personalization.

She partners closely with UST's leadership to ensure marketing not only reflects the company's mission but actively advances it. Under her guidance, UST's marketing organization blends craftsmanship, trusted relationships, and breakthrough innovation, while championing diversity, inclusion, sustainability, and social impact to keep transformation human-centered.

Previously, Leslie helped build Accenture's marketing transformation practice, guiding Fortune 500 companies and startups through large-scale change. With over 25 years of experience, she continues to lead the reinvention of marketing through AI.

Leslie Schultz

Chief Marketing Officer, UST

[LinkedIn](#)



Since 1999, UST has worked side by side with the world's best companies to make a powerful impact through transformation. Powered by technology, inspired by people, and led by our purpose, we partner with our clients from design to operation. Our digital solutions, proprietary platforms, engineering, R&D, products, and innovation ecosystem turn core challenges into impactful, disruptive solutions. With deep industry knowledge and a future-ready mindset, we infuse expertise, innovation, and agility into our clients' organizations—delivering measurable value and positive lasting change for them, their customers, and communities around the world. Together, with 30,000+ employees in 30+ countries, we build for boundless impact—touching billions of lives in the process.

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