



# ReModel: Tales of Marketing Transformation

Six Conversations, One Vision for Change



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# Introduction

# Why the Right Marketing Operating Model Matters

## Marketing should be the function that owns growth.

It is the only discipline with a complete view of the customer, the market and the commercial levers that shape demand, experience and long-term value.

Yet, in most organisations, marketing has been narrowed by short-term performance pressures, fragmented technology and an operating model that hasn't kept pace with the complexity of the work. The result is a function that is busy but not always delivering consistently, and strategic in ambition but constrained in execution.

That gap matters. Without a robust operating model behind the ambition, strategies don't land, customer experience becomes inconsistent, talented people burn out firefighting, and marketing's credibility with the wider business erodes quietly but steadily.

This is why the Marketing Operating Model has moved to the top of the CMO agenda. Across People, Partners, Process and Platforms, the leaders in the ReModel series describe the same shift: the gap between marketing's potential and its impact is not a strategy problem: it's a delivery problem. Solving it demands the same rigour, investment and leadership attention as the creative and commercial work it is meant to enable.

Part of this is leadership: translating strategy into language the organisation can act on, holding the line on priorities when everything feels urgent, and modelling the behaviours that make change feel possible, not overwhelming.

Part of it is structural: building the right teams, partner ecosystem, processes and platforms, and giving each the ownership and investment required to work well together.



“Leading these conversations has been a reminder of how hard modern marketing really is. Every leader I spoke to is navigating complexity that does not slow down: new channels, new expectations, new technology. At the same time, they are trying to create clarity for their teams and consistency for their customers. What struck me most was not the differences between organisations, but the similarities. Everyone is wrestling with the same gap between what they want marketing to achieve and what their current ways of working allow. This report brings those lessons together. It is not theory; it is the lived experience of leaders who have built, rebuilt and refined their operating models under real pressure. My hope is that it gives you confidence; that the challenges you face are shared, and that there is a practical path through them.”

Victoria Fox, CEO, AAR



“The pace of change in our industry is only accelerating, widening the competitive gap between advertisers with agile, future-fit marketing operating models and those constrained by legacy ways of working. While the drivers of change aren’t new, their increasing intensity is putting real pressure on models that are no longer fit for purpose. That’s why future fit marketing operating models is a core ISBA priority for the next five years, and why our partnership with AAR is so valuable. Working together to help members move from theory to practical, actionable transformation.”

Nick Louisson,  
Director of Agency Services, ISBA



# ReModel Contributors



**In our ReModel series we sit down with some exceptional marketing leaders who are reshaping how their marketing teams operate, how they are governed and how they deliver to drive business impact and growth.**

These conversations unlock how they have engineered the right conditions for their marketing strategies to succeed. They get into the reality of what it takes to transform across people, process, platforms and partners - the four pillars of a modern marketing operating model. You'll hear honest reflections from leaders who have lived it: what's hard, what breaks, what needs rebuilding and the lessons they've learned along the way. These are big thinkers who know that getting the operating model right is now just as important as getting the strategy right.



**Elliot Moss**

Chief Brand Officer  
Mishcon de Reya



**Mark Vile**

Chief Marketing Officer  
Fred.Olsen Cruise Lines



**Reuben Arnold**

Former Chief  
Marketing Officer  
Haven



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[To watch the conversations,  
click here.](#)

# Context

# The Backbone: Marketing Operating Models

AAR's 2025 ***Evolution of the Marketing Operating Model*** research shows that the Marketing Operating Model (MOM) is the structural foundation for transformation. It's not about campaigns - it's about designing systems that enable creativity and growth at scale. The 4Ps framework - People, Partners, Process, Platforms - is central to this evolution.

## People

The human architecture of modern marketing, spanning organisational design, skills, and evolving roles. It's about building teams fit for purpose, balancing centralised strategy with decentralised execution, developing core competencies, and enabling the cross-functional collaboration that drives growth.

## Partners

The agency model that extends marketing's reach and capability. This encompasses choosing the right partners, defining clear roles and accountability, managing agency relationships and governance, balancing in-house and external expertise, and ensuring remuneration models that incentivise the right outcomes.

## Process

The governance and ways of working that connect strategy to execution. This covers campaign planning and development, how agencies and internal teams collaborate day-to-day, the playbooks and frameworks that align global and local marketing, and the operational rigour that eliminates friction and accelerates delivery.

## Platforms

The technology infrastructure that powers modern marketing: from Martech assessment and selection to data integration, creative automation, and GenAI readiness. Effective platforms enable seamless workflows, smarter investment decisions, and the ability to optimise campaigns at scale.

Context

# The art of leading marketing is becoming a unicorn discipline.

It demands a fusion almost no other leadership role requires: strategic clarity, creative instinct, commercial acumen, emotional intelligence on steroids, and the operational confidence (or at least literacy) to rewire how work actually happens.

It's a role that spans logic and imagination, brand and performance, long-term value and real-time adaptability.



Context

# The truths are not new

We've known them for a decade.

And yet almost none of us, even the largest, most capable brands are consistently getting them right.

**We're not facing a knowledge gap.  
We're facing an execution gap.  
A structural gap.  
An operating model gap.**

The leaders in this series have worked inside that gap and found ways to close it. This report explores what they changed, why it worked and what it took to make it real.



# Why we're not cracking the things we all know

## Marketing is structurally overloaded

Channels, content, data, personalisation and real-time demands have multiplied faster than operating models have evolved.

## Org design hasn't caught up

Many teams still work to a linear campaign cadence in a world that requires different rhythms across the journey.

## Operating model change can't be a side-of-desk project

It needs dedicated resource, a clear roadmap and translation that reaches every level, not just the leadership team.

## Process is under-invested

Everyone knows it matters; few stop to redesign how the work runs, so fire-fighting continues.

## The emotional side of change is real

Teams that have lived through repeated restructures need reassurance, rhythm and visible trade-offs.

## Marketing still needs a shared language with the business

Translate contribution into revenue, risk and long-term value, or marketing gets treated as a cost centre.

## AI accelerates everything

On weak data and process foundations it scales problems; on strong foundations it lifts performance.



# People

# Strategic clarity is about making strategy usable

A clear strategy written on a slide does not automatically lead to clear decisions in the work.

The gap is rarely about intent. More often, it is about translation.

Strategic clarity exists when the connection between marketing strategy and business outcomes is clear at every level of the organisation - from annual planning to live campaigns, from performance dashboards to frontline execution.

This requires expressing the same strategy in the language each audience uses to make decisions.

For the executive team, that means commercial outcomes, trade-offs, and risk. For teams, it means clear priorities and clarity about what not to pursue.

For partners, it means defining what “good” looks like beyond delivering a brief. For functions such as finance, product, and operations, it means being explicit about what marketing will deliver and what it needs in return.

Measurement is part of this translation. If a strategy cannot be expressed through metrics the organisation trusts, it will remain a marketing narrative rather than a business driver. The task, therefore, is to create a shared understanding that links customer insight to commercial impact and to organisational action - and to reinforce that link until it becomes routine.

Strategy does not live in a presentation deck. It lives in how decisions are made every day.

“High confidence  
and low ego is  
a really good  
combination.”

Michelle McEttrick

“You have two  
ears, one mouth  
use them in that  
proportion”

Kate Mackie



# Leadership behaviour shapes culture

Culture is shaped less by formal statements and more by everyday behaviour.

Teams watch how leaders make decisions, how they explain trade-offs, and how consistently they reinforce priorities. They notice tone as much as content. Calm and clarity spreads quickly. So does uncertainty and anxiety.

Self-awareness is as important as visible behaviour. When leaders are open about what they are learning and where they still need to improve, it creates space for others to do the same. Curiosity and growth become normal, not exceptional.

The point is straightforward: culture is built through repeated signals, not slogans.

Leadership programmes that focus only on communication skills, but overlook behaviour and self-awareness, miss the most powerful driver of culture. Teams align themselves to what leaders do, not simply to what they say.

"Always smile. Never run. And at that stage of the Christmas party where things are about to kick off – leave."

Michelle McEttrick



# Purpose is a tool for change not just a brand asset

Purpose matters most when work gets hard. During transformation, people are asked to leave behind habits that once made them successful and adopt ways of working that feel unfamiliar.

Teams engage more fully when they can connect disruption to something meaningful - not abstract statements, but a clear link between marketing decisions, customer outcomes, and the real-world value the organisation delivers.

Purpose becomes practical when it helps teams answer: ***Why this change? Why now? Why does it matter to the people we serve?***

When this connection is made explicit and repeated consistently, it generates energy, resilience, and a willingness to stretch beyond comfort zones.

It's not about inspiration. It's about giving people a reason to care about the hard parts of change.

“Leadership is less about being right and more about enabling your team to succeed.”

Zoe Eungblut



# Change happens in the middle

New ways of working rarely fail because they don't make sense. They fail because people don't use them. Top-down rollouts often assume teams will adjust just because the new way is "better." But the people doing the work feel the friction first.

They know the tricky spots, the shortcuts, and the hidden dependencies that keep things moving. When their reality isn't taken into account, even good processes quietly fall apart.

The leaders who make change stick start in the middle. They find the people who feel the pain of the old system most sharply, give them the tools and support they need, and let the benefits spread through real experience.

These "super users" turn ideas into practice, adapt tools to their context, and earn trust in ways that training sessions alone can't.

Change lasts when the people doing the work carry it forward.

“It’s about moving  
from a ‘my’ impact  
to an ‘our’ impact.”

Kate Mackie



# Build the team for where you're going, not where you are

Transformation often exposes a common trap: teams hire for today's workload and fall behind where the organisation is heading.

Leaders who avoid this plan ahead. They map the skills the future operating model will need, take an honest look at the gaps, and make deliberate decisions about whether to build, buy, or borrow talent, rather than reacting to immediate needs.

This requires clarity about where you're going and the courage to invest before the need is urgent.

The skills that matter most - adaptability, data fluency, integrated planning, content at scale, comfort with ambiguity - rarely develop by accident.

The fastest-moving organisations revisit their capability map regularly and adjust as the environment changes. Building for the future isn't a one-off task. It's about staying a step ahead, continuously.

"The key skill and capability you need is someone who is adaptable and can learn. If you memorise everything that's happening right now, you're no good next week."

Michelle McEtrick



# Hire the data leader early

Many transformations stall not because teams don't try, but because the data foundations can't support the ambition. In almost every case we've seen, progress picked up when a senior data and insight leader took ownership - of quality, architecture, definitions, governance, and turning data into decisions.

Without this role, responsibility gets scattered, and momentum dissolves into well-meaning workarounds.

Hiring early matters because clean, trusted data takes time and careful work. It requires someone with authority, technical know-how, and the influence to set standards before complexity grows.

When this leadership is in place from the start, teams move with confidence, technology investments land properly, and AI becomes a help, not a headache. Waiting isn't just a delay. It's rework.

"I feel like we were a little bit slower to get to where we've got to now. Actually, recruiting the right person with the right skills - having that role sooner rather than later - is really fundamental."

Nicola Smedley



# Thoughts from AAR

## High-performing marketing teams are built by shaping the conditions for success

**Clarity** starts with a marketing strategy that truly aligns with the business, but it doesn't stop there. It means turning ambition into clear priorities, defined decision-making, and visible trade-offs. Teams need to know not just what matters, but what doesn't.

A clear operating framework removes guesswork and friction by showing who decides, how success is measured, and how resources are allocated. Data matters too, not just as reports, but as a shared story that connects marketing actions to business impact.

**Alignment** happens when the operating model reduces silos.

True cross-functional alignment isn't just about talking collaboration. It comes from shared accountability and integrated planning. That means aligned KPIs, joint ownership of outcomes, and structured forums with clear outputs.

When teams work towards the same metrics and priorities, friction drops naturally. The structure should support coordinated action and joint responsibility, not separate, parallel work.

**Capability** grows through deliberate choices about the future, not just the present.

It starts with designing roles around outcomes, with clear ownership, the right mix of seniority, and defined skill depth. Modern marketers need hybrid strengths: commercial smarts, data fluency, digital confidence, and the ability to turn insight into action. AI can speed things up, but it doesn't replace judgment. Building capability - through skills, workflows, and workforce planning - is ongoing, not optional. It's not just about training; it's about designing roles and talent strategy for the future.

**Culture** is the multiplier.

When teams have clarity and clear accountability, culture stops being a "soft" concept and becomes a performance driver. Leaders set the tone through visible decisions, transparent trade-offs, consistent standards, and most importantly, the behaviours they model every day.

Psychological safety encourages experimentation, while accountability drives results. People follow what is measured and rewarded. A strong culture balances curiosity with discipline and learning with ownership, amplifying the effectiveness of the whole operating model.



# Partners

# The client must own the customer, no matter how good the agency

Customer understanding starts inside the organisation. Customer insight drives every meaningful marketing decision, but it only works when the organisation owns it.

Agencies can add analytical depth, outside-in perspective, and the distance to spot patterns, but that isn't the same as owning the customer.

When insight, data strategy, or audience definitions live mostly outside the organisation, teams become dependent on partners for decisions they should make themselves.

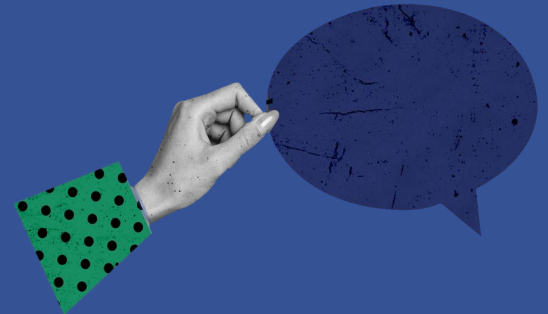
The strongest organisations strike a clear balance: internal teams hold the customer truth, set strategy, and make the decisions only they can make, while agencies amplify that foundation with scale, specialist skills, and fresh perspective.

When ownership is clear, agency work is sharper and more effective. When it's blurred, even the best partners end up leading decisions the client is ultimately accountable for.

Clarity isn't about control. It's about helping everyone do their best work.

“The client must own the responsibility for the customer. And so that would point to customer insight, customer data, customer experience, journey mapping, all being done in-house with as much help as you need from externally.”

Michelle McEttrick



# Partners need to share your business goals, not your briefs

Partnership shifts from delivery to impact when agencies understand the outcome the work is meant to achieve. A brief describes the task; business goals explain why it matters.

When partners see the commercial ambition, constraints, and trade-offs, they start optimising for results, not instructions.

They spot issues earlier, question assumptions, and suggest alternatives when the original plan won't deliver.

This requires a level of transparency that still feels unusual in many organisations - sharing priorities, growth targets, and the reasoning behind decisions, not just the outputs required.

Teams that make this leap report better thinking, faster decisions, and fewer surprises.

Work improves because partners are aligned on the same definition of success, and relationships strengthen because everyone is focused on the same outcome, not just completing their part of the process.

“I see partners as an extension of our team. It's critical that they share our goals – our income goals, as an example – as much as we do. And fundamentally, if we're operating to the same goals, everyone has been getting it right to achieve those targets.”

Nicola Smedley



# Collaboration between agencies must be designed, not hoped for

Effective collaboration isn't just a personality trait of agencies. It depends on the environment they're asked to work in.

Without shared objectives, common metrics, and structured forums for joint decision-making, agencies naturally protect their own remit and optimise for their own scope.

That's not being difficult - it's rational. True collaboration only happens when the operating model makes it the easiest way to work.

When multi-agency ecosystems succeed, the pattern is consistent: clear roles, aligned KPIs,

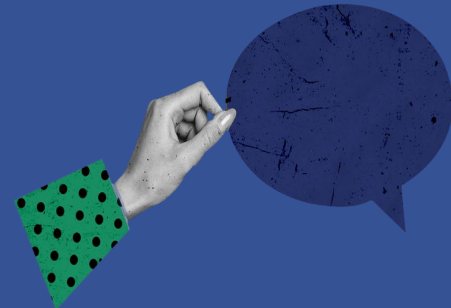
integrated planning, and moments where partners solve problems together, not in parallel, and when commercial models and incentives are used cleverly as levers.

The client's role is key: setting expectations, modelling the right behaviour, and acting as the convenor who keeps everyone focused on the same priorities.

When collaboration is deliberately designed, duplication drops, friction eases, and the combined output becomes more ambitious than any single agency could deliver alone.

"I structured the pitch to have those agencies pitch together. So it was a dual pitch and they had to demonstrate throughout the entire process how they would work together and how they would deliver the right results for the brand. So right from the outset, you're being intentional about how those agencies are going to work together on your behalf."

Michelle McEttrick



# A true partner turns insight into business impact, not just output

Strategic partnership isn't shown by credentials. It's revealed in the questions partners ask, the issues they raise unprompted, and how they connect insight to business impact.

The best partners bring clarity: they make sense of data in commercial terms, frame choices with their implications, and show how creative or media decisions drive real outcomes.

They don't overwhelm with complexity. They focus on what truly matters.

Equally telling is when these signals are missing. Interesting insights without a "so what," creative ideas detached from the problem, or optimisation that improves metrics but not outcomes. These patterns rarely reflect a capability gap. They usually reflect gaps in context or expectations.

When partners understand the business well enough to show judgment, not just craft, the relationship becomes far more valuable.

Strategic partnership isn't declared - it's demonstrated, consistently, in the work.

"I've always had long standing relationships with the agencies I've worked with. I think it is becoming more difficult for agencies to be more upstream. Far less conversations about what the next ad is going to look like and far more around the measurement. And I'd love to bring that back."

Mark Vile



# In-house versus outsourced is the wrong question

The real question is what each capability needs: depth, breadth, or both. Internal teams excel where deep customer understanding, institutional memory, and cross-functional trust matter most.

Agencies shine where specialist expertise, scale, and outside-in perspective are critical.

Organisations that get this right don't pick sides. They make intentional decisions about which capabilities are core and which are best delivered through partners.

This balance isn't fixed. As strategy evolves, technology advances, and expectations shift, the mix of internal and external capability should adjust accordingly.

What matters most is clarity: who leads, who supports, and how the pieces work together to create better outcomes. Effective agency models are built consciously, not inherited by default.

When each capability sits where it can create the most value, both internal teams and partners operate with greater confidence, speed, and ambition.



"I don't think there is a silver bullet. My observation would be your internal teams bring the depth of what the brand is fundamentally, and your agency teams can bring the breadth and deep understanding of how your brand is perceived. It's at the intersection of those two things that the work really needs to happen. And so you need both."

Michelle McEttrick

# Thoughts from AAR

Partnership only works when everyone acts like one team. Clients and agencies share context, ambition, and accountability. Agencies collaborate with each other just as readily as they do with the client. When this happens, the relationship becomes a multiplier, not a transaction

**Partnership** shows when agencies act as an extension of the team. They stay close to the business, work transparently, and focus on long-term outcomes.

Partnership is visible in behaviour - proactive challenge, commercial awareness, and the confidence to bring new ideas early. Relationships evolve from delivery to strategic counsel when both sides act in the organisation's best interest.

**Integration** emerges when organisations deliberately design the balance between internal and external capability. Clients retain ownership of the customer, data, and strategy, while agencies provide specialist depth, fresh perspective, and scale. Outside-in inspiration, from culture to commerce, social signals to measurement innovation, lifts internal thinking.

This balance works best when it's intentional: clear on what stays core and what flexes externally.

**Collaboration** works when agency models are designed, not assumed. Clear roles, decision rights, and structured ways of working let teams operate as one system, not parallel streams.

Shared KPIs, aligned definitions of success, and transparent planning rhythms reduce friction and speed execution.

Clients orchestrate the ecosystem by setting expectations, enabling timely decisions, and giving partners the clarity they need to succeed.

**Creativity** accelerates when partners are empowered to expand possibility.

Agencies combine creative excellence with commercial insight, helping organisations make confident leaps rather than incremental tweaks. Creative business thinking connects brand, culture, and growth strategy, turning insight into distinctive, scalable ideas.

With ongoing investment in technology, data, and AI-enabled workflows, agencies transfer knowledge and raise the ambition of the entire marketing system.



# Process

# Clarity drives alignment and speed

Marketing generates demand from all directions, and teams often feel overwhelmed when every request seems urgent.

The solution is a clear priorities framework. This shows everyone what matters most, how it connects to business goals, and how decisions are made when trade-offs arise.

It covers both long-term priorities and the smaller shifts that occur between planning cycles, where most confusion happens.

Cross-functional alignment matters. Simple RACI or RAPID models make roles and responsibilities clear - who leads, who supports, and who approves - reducing the confusion caused by unclear ownership.

When priorities are visible, decision rights are clear, and success is shared, teams move faster, negotiation is easier, and work feels more purposeful.

At the edges of the organisation, this clarity is felt as confidence, not constraint.

"Not everything is going to get done. But to have the confidence to know which balls to drop - I think that's really helpful."

Michelle McEttrick



# Process is not the enemy of creativity; it's the enabler

Many teams associate process with bureaucracy - late, heavy, or poorly designed - so it's easy to blame structure for limiting creative work.

In reality, good process protects creativity. Clear briefs define the problem. Well-timed checkpoints preserve ideas as they evolve. Seamless handoffs between strategy, creative, and media ensure decisions reinforce each other instead of conflicting.

Some organised chaos fuels creativity, but total chaos leaves teams firefighting and ideas unprotected.

The right structure removes noise, reduces rework, and frees people to focus on the leaps only they can make.

When the basics are in place, creative ambition can grow, scale, and deliver impact.

"Controversially, I don't think process has ever been the enemy of creativity. Process is the enabler of creativity. It's the foundation. Creative led, process enabled."

Mark Vile



# Brand vs. performance is a false divide. Focus on the end-to-end customer experience

The “brand versus performance” mindset has fragmented teams, budgets, and calendars that should work as one system. The solution is to plan from the customer journey and run a single operating model that links memory creation with demand capture.

This means one set of shared objectives, one governance rhythm, and one measurement lens so short-term results and long-term impact are read together.

When both horizons are anchored to the same commercial goal, work stops competing and starts compounding.

Integration must be designed, not assumed.

Establish explicit touchpoints where ideas, data, and budgets flow between horizons - shared planning moments, coordinated tests, and rules for adjusting spend when signals change.

Align decision rights so brand and performance teams make joint calls on sequencing, audiences, and assets. Treat partners consistently: one brief, clear roles, and shared KPIs.

When the organisation centres on the customer experience instead of internal labels, teams stop negotiating for attention and start creating coherent experiences that drive demand today and build preference for tomorrow.

"I would challenge the idea that there is a brand versus performance debate to be had at all. It's about brand experience driving differential outcomes. They are not in competition. You cannot buy your way out with performance alone."

Kate Mackie



# Most teams lack a dedicated marketing operations function

Many marketing organisations have deep expertise in content, data, performance, and creative development, but still struggle with pace and coherence.

The gap isn't capability; it's the absence of a dedicated marketing operations function. This team manages how work moves: workflows, handoffs, timelines, governance, and the link between strategy and execution.

When marketing operations has clear authority, priorities stay connected, teams understand what "good" looks like at every step, and issues surface early enough to solve.

Without it, alignment comes too late, rework increases, and the gap between intention and outcome widens.

Often overlooked because it's invisible when it works, marketing operations is the difference between a team that constantly reacts and one that consistently delivers.

“Creating a dedicated resource or team that was solely focused on marketing operations was one of the biggest game changers. They weren't focused on how do we turn the strategy into a campaign and the assets we needed. They were purely looking at ‘This is my project plan; who needs to deliver what; by when; who do I need to hand off those things to; by when’.”

Reuben Arnold



# Test and learn only works when it's formalised

Most teams support experimentation in principle, but few make it systematic. Test and learn becomes real when it's built into how work runs.

Ring-fence pilot budgets so experiments don't compete with BAU. Define clear guardrails: what can be tested without escalation, what needs approval, and how success will be measured.

Schedule short, regular reviews to turn outcomes into reusable guidance, not one-off anecdotes, and make those learnings easy to access for future decisions.

Psychological safety encourages teams to try; structure ensures the results benefit the whole organisation, not just the team running the test.

Over time, experimentation becomes a default behaviour: ideas are proven or shelved quickly, rework decreases, and performance improves as learning compounds across the system.

"Fundamentally most marketing teams are still based on the foundations of the traditional linear campaign cadence. But the reality is the balance has shifted much more to a two-speed model. And we have a responsibility to help our agency partners understand how that shift has happened and their role within it. So that they are mirroring what's required on our side."

Reuben Arnold



# Treat transformation as continuous, not a programme with a finish line

Transformation isn't a phase with a start and stop - it's the operating context.

Teams feel this most in marketing, where priorities shift quickly and structures change more often than many functions can tolerate. The practical approach is to embed change into the day-to-day: smaller, frequent releases; short learning cycles; and visible improvements that compound over time.

Measure momentum where work actually happens - decision cycle time, quality of cross-functional handoffs, time-to-adopt new tools, and reuse of lessons learned.

Leaders maintain confidence by making trade-offs visible, inviting early escalation, and linking effort to outcomes that matter to customers and the business.

When treated this way, change stops feeling like a disruption to endure and starts feeling like steady progress. Teams stay focused, the organisation avoids boom-and-bust "big bang" resets, and capability grows a little every month.

"I think about it like a wave. Disruption comes in waves and there is no end to it. You can either be on top of the wave riding the energy, or you can be stuck in the barrel of the wave being tossed around. The choice is how you position yourself relative to the wave, not whether the wave exists."

Kate Mackie



# Thoughts from AAR

Process is how strategy shows up in the work. Design a single, customer-first operating model, set a clear cadence for work, and make ownership of decisions, handoffs, and learning explicit. The payoff: faster execution, fewer reworks, and progress that compounds

**Customer-first** means designing process around the real journey, not internal structures.

Alignment works best when work is organised around the customer journey. When planning, briefing, and measurement start from the same moments, teams synchronise - brand, performance, product, and service all pull from the same map. This reduces competing priorities and clarifies sequencing.

Designing process from the customer outwards avoids endless negotiation because the journey itself becomes the brief.

**Integration** comes from a single operating model that unites brand and performance.

Marketing runs best when it isn't split into parallel systems. A coherent operating model connects long-term brand building and short-term activation into one flow of work with shared inputs, decisions, and outcomes.

Instead of debating ownership, teams follow the same rhythm, use the same diagnosis, and measure results on the same scoreboard. Result: fewer lost handoffs, a clearer story to the business, and work connected to customers wherever they engage.

**Priorities** become actionable when they are explicit and someone is accountable for how work moves.

Process breaks down when priorities are unclear or no one manages workflow. A simple priorities framework plus clear decision rights prevents work from bouncing between teams and gives confidence about next steps.

A dedicated marketing operations function keeps the framework alive - managing workflow, timings, handoffs, and escalation - so strategy and delivery stay joined-up. This allows others to focus on the work only they can do.

**Experimentation** works best when it's built into the operating model.

Resilient teams treat testing as part of the system, not a side activity. They ring-fence space for pilots, set guardrails so ideas move quickly, and turn reviews into reusable guidance.

They track momentum where it matters: faster decisions, smoother handoffs, quicker adoption. When learning accumulates this way, progress becomes steady and sustainable, not dependent on one-off transformation pushes.



# Platforms

# AI on bad data accelerates problems, not performance

Many teams move quickly into AI without the data foundations to support it.

When data is inconsistent, poorly governed or shaped by legacy assumptions, AI doesn't correct the gaps - it scales them. Targeting becomes less accurate, optimisation loops become harder to trust, and teams begin to question the outputs that were meant to create confidence.

The organisations seeing real gains from AI treat data quality as part of the operating model, not a technical clean-up exercise.

They put the essentials in place: clear terminology, clear ownership and reliable data sources. This gives models something credible to learn from.

Doing this doesn't slow AI adoption; it makes it work. It removes avoidable rework and reduces the guesswork that often follows implementation.

With good data, AI improves performance. With poor data, it simply amplifies what is already broken.

“You have to start with clean data before you even think about AI.”

Elliot Moss



# Personalisation isn't about technology. It's about insight

Personalisation is often framed as a platform feature, but the real challenge is understanding your customers. Tools can scale delivery, but they cannot generate meaningful insight into why people behave as they do.

Teams that personalise well combine behavioural data with human context: experiences, motivations, and the questions people are actually trying to answer.

This creates the raw material automation can amplify. Without it, personalisation is just more precise generic targeting.

The result may feel efficient internally but irrelevant to customers externally.

Organisations that get this right build insight capability first and platform capability second.

Technology only delivers relevance when the inputs are high quality; otherwise, it just delivers more messages, faster.

"Our supporters now expect a level of personalisation - whether that's the type of cancer that's affected them or their family, the type of event they tend to do, even their anniversary of supporting us. That requires really accurate data and the ability to act on it."

Nicola Smedley



# AI raises the floor- making human judgement more valuable

AI can now produce solid, usable content quickly, so basic quality is no longer a competitive edge.

As the baseline rises, value shifts to judgment: deciding what should be made, why it matters, and how it aligns with the brand's commercial goals.

AI can generate volume, but it cannot set direction, define standards, or determine what creates advantage.

High-performing teams use AI to handle repetitive, low-value work, freeing humans to focus on what machines cannot: framing problems, sharpening creative leaps, and ensuring ideas connect to brand meaning and business outcomes.

In this environment, creative thinking and strategic clarity matter more, not less.

Teams that make this shift use AI to raise the baseline and reserve human judgment for the decisions that truly change outcomes.

"The point with AI is it should be a catalyst for greater creative work. But if it drives us to more homogenous work and everything looking the same... I first came into the comparison category talking about the sea of sameness, and I'm using the same phrase 18 years down the track. The risk is big and we have to hold that benchmark high on the creative work."

Mark Vile



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# Measurability is not the same as value

Digital tools can make measurable work look more important than it is. In reality, the easiest metrics are often the least meaningful.

When teams optimise only for what the platform reports, they underinvest in work that builds demand, trust, and pricing power - the work that moves slowly but changes a brand's trajectory.

A mature operating model connects both horizons: it reads short-term signals without sacrificing long-term intent and translates brand investment into business outcomes leaders recognise. This creates a shared language that prevents teams from chasing metrics that move fastest rather than those that matter most.

The challenge isn't choosing between brand and performance; it's designing a measurement system that makes both visible and avoids substituting data for judgement.

"Non-marketers make the mistake of thinking that the more measurable trade driving levers are unlimited. The reality is that the audience is finite, you train customers to only shop on offer, and there's no halo effect. Performance without brand foundation is ultimately unsustainable."

Michelle McEttrick



# Platforms should follow the operating model, not dictate it

Technology delivers the most value when it supports the operating model, not the other way around.

Problems arise when tools are chosen before workflows are clear. Teams then contort their ways of working to fit the platform, creating friction and confusion.

High-performing organisations define roles, handoffs, and decision points first, then select tools to support that flow.

When platforms follow the model, they reinforce consistency, speed, and quality.

When they lead it, they introduce fragmentation and slow teams down.

Technology should make work easier, not reinvent the system underneath it.

"You have to understand what you're trying to achieve as a business and cascade it down. Once you've got those objectives, then it doesn't become about the technology. The technology's there to enable you to do the activity that will hit those objectives. Objectives down first before you start talking about tools and technology."

Mark Vile



# Technology adoption is a behaviour change challenge, not a training challenge

Platforms rarely underperform because they're the wrong tools. They fail because the organisation hasn't adjusted how work happens around them.

Training alone doesn't shift behaviours. Adoption improves when teams redesign the moments in the week where the platform actually reduces effort or improves decisions, and when leaders reinforce those habits by using the same tools themselves.

Clear workflows, consistent use of shared data, and visible expectations about when the platform is required help people build confidence.

When adoption is treated as behaviour change - supported by process, role clarity, and leadership modelling - teams stop reverting to old ways of working.

The result is a toolset embedded in how work happens, not an extra step people have to remember.

"I think it's being just very cognisant of what skills people have. Sometimes we're expecting marketers to be a jack of all trades, a master of none. We are under-investing in their development or their tools, and yet we're expecting them to do so much more."

Reuben Arnold



# Thoughts from AAR

Platforms don't transform marketing. The operating model does. The strongest marketing functions use platforms to simplify, connect, and accelerate work, always in service of clearer decisions, better customer experiences, and more confident, capable teams

**Customer-led design** keeps technology grounded in real behaviour. Platforms deliver the most value when they reflect the customer journey, not internal team structures.

When tools are chosen or configured around real customer moments, teams make better decisions on data, targeting, and automation. It also clarifies what belongs in the tech stack and removes unnecessary complexity.

A customer-led approach prevents technology from creating process for its own sake.

**Integration** creates coherence across brand, performance, and operations.

Most marketing stacks evolve in fragments. Insight, content, and measurement often live in disconnected systems, which limits alignment. A coherent ecosystem joins these elements so brand signals and performance data inform each other instead of competing for attention.

This reduces duplicated tools, inconsistent definitions, and the divide between “upper funnel” and “lower funnel” systems that many teams experience.

**Enablement** depends on behaviour change as much as technical implementation.

Adoption succeeds when teams adjust how they work around new tools, not just attend training. Clear workflows, consistent data standards, and leaders using the tools in their own routines matter more than feature knowledge.

When the operating model and platform reinforce each other, tools become the easiest way to get work done, and that is when adoption sticks.

**Learning loops** turn platforms into engines for improvement.

Technology alone doesn't build capability. A stack becomes valuable when it enables learning: better targeting decisions, clearer insight into what works, and faster iteration.

When tests are easy to run, results easy to compare, and guidance easy to reuse, performance improves steadily, without relying on major transformation initiatives.

Platforms should make learning visible, shareable, and cumulative.



# Final thoughts



# Top Ten Pieces of Advice



- 01 Lead with clear priorities, not frameworks. Let your strategy shape the operating model, not the other way around.
- 02 Leaders set the tone. What you do speaks louder than any programme.
- 03 Build the team for where you're going, not where you are. Hire for adaptability first.
- 04 Bring in the data lead early; waiting comes at a cost.
- 05 Shape processes to fit the culture. Change at a pace people can keep up with.
- 06 Give marketing operations clear ownership of how the work gets done.
- 07 Treat agency partners as an extension of your team: share the context, not just the brief.
- 08 Don't debate in-house vs outsourced; decide what you need to own and build from there.
- 09 Brand and performance aren't competing forces; they are two parts of the same plan.
- 10 AI raises the baseline for everyone, which makes human judgement and strategic clarity even more critical.

# Closing: The Future of Marketing

The leaders in this series aren't talking about a finished journey - they're talking about a discipline. One that demands as much rigour, investment, and focus as the strategic and creative work it supports. The organisations that will lead marketing in the next decade won't be the ones with the most ideas. They'll be the ones with a system to deliver ideas consistently, at speed, and without burning out the people doing the work

The future of marketing belongs to organisations that pair creative ambition with operational strength. A strong operating model isn't a static blueprint. It's a living system that adapts as the business and customer expectations evolve. When people, partners, processes, and platforms work together, marketing delivers with greater consistency, confidence, and impact.

Transformation starts inside the organisation, but it doesn't have to happen alone. External partners, advisors, and peer networks help teams avoid common pitfalls and move faster. The goal isn't dependence - it's informed acceleration. By combining internal capability with external perspective, leaders create operating models that are practical, resilient, and ready for what's next.

Speed and adaptability matter, but progress doesn't come from starting over. It comes from refining what works, strengthening the foundations, and applying the best ideas in a way that fits the organisation. The path forward isn't reinvention - it's building a system that helps great thinking travel further and perform better.





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