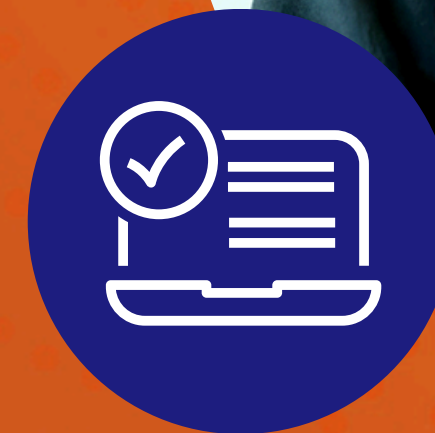




The New Marketing KPI: Relevance

Commercial Credibility in the AI-Led Buying Journey.



Marketing leaders are being held to a higher bar. In an AI-driven, digital-first buying environment, relevance is now the strongest indicator of whether marketing will influence pipeline and revenue. As buying journeys become increasingly AI-mediated, proof has become the currency of credibility.

This brief is designed for marketing leaders who are under pressure to show results. It outlines why relevance has emerged as marketing's most critical KPI, and how proof-based selling converts relevance into measurable pipeline impact.



1. The KPI Reset: Why Relevance Now?

Marketing teams are facing a structural shift in how success is judged. Economic pressure, AI acceleration, and longer buying cycles have pushed CMOs beyond activity metrics toward direct business contribution.

IDC research shows a growing percentage of marketing leaders are being asked to justify spend in terms of pipeline, revenue influence, and payback, not engagement volume. In this context, relevance has emerged as the clearest signal that marketing is working.



Middle of funnel reality:

If content, offers, and messaging are not immediately relevant to a buyer's role, context, and decision stage, they are filtered out—by both humans and AI.



46% of CMOs report increased pressure to justify ROI of marketing investments; **68%** are prioritizing AI and automation to drive measurable outcomes.

Source: IDC 2025 B2B Technology Buyer Behavior Survey



2. Relevance as a Pipeline KPI (Not a Brand Metric)

Relevance is often treated as a qualitative brand concept. In practice, it is a performance lever.

IDC data consistently shows that relevant, personalized engagement drives materially better outcomes across conversion, deal velocity, and lifetime value. Conversely, generic messaging increases friction, slows consensus, and erodes trust.

For marketing leaders accountable to pipeline, relevance answers three critical middle of funnel questions:

- ➔ Does this message reflect the buyer's current priority?
- ➔ Does it map clearly to a business outcome?
- ➔ Does it help the buyer justify a decision internally?

If the answer is no, the asset will not convert, regardless of how compelling the narrative sounds.



Highly personalized, relevant interactions outperform generic ones by **30–80%** across clicks, cart value, churn, satisfaction, and LTV.

Source: IDC 2025 Market Analysis Perspective: Worldwide Marketing Campaign Management Software



3. How Relevance Turns Into Revenue

Relevance gets attention. **Proof gets decisions.**

Proof-based selling is the disciplined use of outcome evidence, validated ROI, customer results, and production-scale use cases, to reduce buyer risk and accelerate commitment.

IDC guidance is clear: buyers are moving past pilots and proofs of concept. They want evidence that a solution works in real operating environments, at scale, and under real constraints.

In middle of funnel stages, proof performs three jobs:

- De-risks the decision by replacing claims with evidence
- Enables internal alignment by giving buyers defensible justification
- Accelerates sales conversations by answering the hardest questions upfront



Highly personalized interactions outperform low personalization by **30%+**, yet less than **50%** of interactions are highly personalized, a major opportunity.

Source: IDC 2025, Market Analysis Perspective: Worldwide Marketing Campaign Management Software



4. ROI Claims That Convert (And Those That Don't)

ROI claims are everywhere. Credible ones are rare.

High-performing organizations differentiate by how they frame ROI:

- ➔ Clear time-to-value benchmarks
- ➔ Transparent assumptions and methodology
- ➔ Outcomes tied to business KPIs buyers are measured on

IDC research shows that while AI-driven initiatives can deliver outsized returns, buyers discount claims that lack context or proof. In contrast, ROI narratives grounded in customer results materially improve conversion and deal velocity.



Takeaway

ROI must be specific enough to be repeated in a budget conversation, and strong enough to survive finance scrutiny.



5. Where Proof Matters Most in the AI-Led Buying Journey

AI has reshaped how buyers evaluate options. Most decisionmakers now rely on AI-enabled research, comparison tools, and digital self-service long before speaking with sales.

As a result:

- ➔ Digital content does the majority of persuasion
- ➔ AI filters out low-signal, low-proof messaging
- ➔ Human engagement is reserved for validation moments

Proof-rich assets, case studies, benchmarks, ROI models, analyst perspectives, are the primary drivers of movement from consideration to commitment.



of decision-making information now comes from digital self-service and digital interaction channels.

Source: IDC 2025, Redefining B2B Tech Buying: The Rise of Digital and AI and the Changing Role of Human Touch

6. Operationalizing Relevance at the Middle of the Funnel

Relevance at scale is not a creative problem. It is an operating model.

High-converting organizations share three traits:

- ➔ Unified data foundations enabling accurate personalization
- ➔ AI-driven orchestration across accounts and personas
- ➔ Consistent proof deployment across digital and human touchpoints

Trust is the multiplier. Buyers increasingly expect transparency, explainability, and responsible AI practices as part of relevance, not as separate brand statements.

By **2028**

AI agents will automate **75%** of ABM programs in the G1000, increasing pipeline value by **40%**

Source: IDC FutureScape 2025: Worldwide Chief Marketing Officer 2026 Predictions



7. Measuring What Actually Converts

As relevance replaces activity as the KPI, measurement must align to outcomes.

Leading marketing teams track these key metrics:

- ➔ Relevance score (contextual fit, personalization effectiveness)
- ➔ Proof engagement (case study views, testimonial usage)
- ➔ ROI realization (payback period, revenue lift, cost reduction)
- ➔ Brand trust (NPS, sentiment, integrity incidents)

AI-enabled analytics are closing the loop, connecting engagement directly to revenue impact and exposing which proof assets move deals forward.



8. What Commercial Credibility Looks Like in Practice

In the AI-led buying journey, proof is no longer theoretical. Buyers want to see how leading brands are actually operating at scale, and what results they are achieving under real-world conditions.

The examples that follow are drawn from IDC analysis of practitioner-led case studies presented at the 2025 ANA Masters of Marketing, a global event that brought together more than 3,000 senior marketing leaders. These cases reflect how global brands are using AI to increase relevance, strengthen trust, and drive measurable performance.

While many of these examples originate in B2C environments, the consumption, trust, and engagement patterns they reveal increasingly apply to both B2C and B2B buyers, particularly as AI-mediated discovery and digital self-service become dominant.

Case study 1: Global enterprise, AI-driven personalization at scale

Context: A large global enterprise used AI-driven personalization to modernize digital engagement while under pressure to reduce operational costs and improve loyalty metrics.

Measured outcomes:

- 60% reduction in content production time
- 25% increase in loyalty program enrollment
- +15-point improvement in NPS

Why it converted: Proof was anchored in speed-to-value and operational efficiency, not technology claims, allowing marketing, finance, and digital teams to align quickly around tangible business impact.



Case Study 2: Consumer Brand, Revenue Growth

Context: A global consumer brand deployed AI-powered recommendations to increase conversion and basket size while operating under strict privacy and compliance requirements.

Measured outcomes:

- 22% higher conversion rates
- 35% increase in average order value
- 28% lift in customer retention
- Zero increase in privacy or compliance incidents

Why it converted: The proof combined commercial growth metrics with explicit trust safeguards, addressing both revenue owners and risk stakeholders in the buying group.

Case Study 3: Midmarket, Accelerated AI ROI

Context: A midmarket organization adopted AI-enabled marketing automation to improve time-to-impact under constrained budgets and limited internal resources.

Measured outcomes:

- 2× faster digital payback timelines
- 25% reduction in campaign launch cycles
- Improved pipeline predictability

Why it converted: ROI was framed around time-to-impact and financial defensibility, not long-term transformation narratives, critical for budget-constrained buyers seeking fast validation.



Across industries and company sizes, IDC analysis shows that proof driving conversion shares three traits:

- Specific, quantified outcomes rather than directional benefits
- Operational context rather than pilot-level results
- Language buyers can reuse directly in budget, governance, and executive discussions

This is the difference between proof that informs and proof that closes the gap between interest and commitment.

9. A Middle of Funnel Action Checklist for Marketing Leaders

To increase MQL-to-SQL conversion:

- 1 **Audit** your current assets for relevance gaps
- 2 **Replace** generic value claims with outcome-based proof
- 3 **Align** ROI narratives to buyer-level KPIs
- 4 **Deploy** AI to personalize proof delivery
- 5 **Track** proof engagement as a leading indicator of intent



Final Thoughts

In the AI-led buying journey, relevance is no longer subjective, and proof is no longer optional.

Marketing leaders who treat relevance as a measurable KPI, and proof as a repeatable system, are better positioned to influence decisions, accelerate pipeline, and defend budget in an increasingly automated buying environment.



Next step

Evaluate whether your current marketing assets would pass an internal buyer scrutiny test, and whether your proof is strong enough to close the gap between interest and commitment.

See how marketing leaders provide the proof buyers now expect or dive deeper into the full IDC research behind research brief.

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