



Rewriting the B2B GTM Rulebook: Smarter, Leaner, AI-Ready 2026 Strategies

CMO Brunch Recap: Key Themes Shaping 2026 Marketing



Inside the CMO Brunch: Meet the Voices Shaping Modern GTM

The event brought together 45 Boston-based B2B tech CMOs for an open, peer-to-peer conversation about what's truly working in modern GTM today. The panel shared unfiltered insights, practical frameworks, and real-world lessons from the organizations they shape every day. Here are the pioneering companies and visionary panellists who made it all happen:

Event Panelists



Grant Ho
CMO at IRONSCALES



Bernd Ledger
Founder, GTM Transformation
and Interim CMO at
Showpad



KC Lincoln
CMO at Lionbridge



Peter Mahoney
CCO at GoTo



Event Moderator



Lora Kratchounova
Founder and CEO at
Scratch Marketing + Media



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The 2026 GTM Rulebook: Back to Basics

The old B2B GTM playbooks are fundamentally breaking down due to declining returns on media spend, shifting buyer behavior, the rise of AI agents, and market demands for radical efficiency in 2026 budgets. Here are the core strategic and tactical shifts for navigating the evolving B2B landscape, as revealed by our stellar panel of experts at the forefront of B2B transformation.



Foundational GTM Principles: What Stays

Imperatives + Key Takeaways



Coherence of Story

Brand still wins. A strong brand and clear, sharp messaging remain the ultimate differentiator, despite the surrounding rapid change. Organizations must prioritize story and coherence.



Focus on Basics

The “shiny dangly object” of new tech is often overhyped; but fundamentals are what matter most. This includes the discipline of looking closely at your business needs.



Audience Strategy

Meet your audience where they already are. Invest in the specific communities and conversations that matter to them and speak their language. Stories only resonate if they hit people at the right level.



Radical Truth

Transparency strengthens credibility and accelerates alignment. If a motion isn't working, say it; your CEO will thank you. Do not try to manipulate the numbers.

AI ≠ a Full-Funnel Fix

“What’s most overhyped is that a lot of the AI will be the panacea for solving your entire GTM content, your entire GTM attribution, and your entire market’s full funnel.”

Grant Ho, CMO at
IRONSCALES

The New Mandate: Consolidate, Optimize, and Experiment

CMOs are under pressure from CFOs to slim down bloated tech stacks and achieve radical efficiency.

Tech Stack Consolidation

Rationalization is not purely cost-cutting; it requires enormous discipline and cross-team alignment to ensure performance boosts. Peter Mahoney, CCO at GoTo, noted cutting approximately two-thirds of his tech stack, eliminating tools where usage was low (e.g., having 19 million contacts but only emailing 3 million in the last year, leading to wildly overpaying).

Data Actionability

Tools that are not being actively measured, or where the collected data does not lead to action, must be retired. Maintaining tools without a clear owner or business purpose is wasteful.

AI Investment Strategy

The AI space is evolving too fast for long-term commitment.

- **Rule:** Never sign a multi-year contract for an AI tool.
- **CMOs should prioritize:** Continuous testing, learning, and adapting.
- **Overhyped:** AI is not a “panacea” that will solve your entire attribution, content, or full-funnel strategy.

Deployment of AI Agents

AI agents are being leveraged to prevent the need for incremental headcount. Successful use cases include:

- Automating your social media and community content workflows.
- Enhancing competitive intelligence by uncovering and synthesizing daily updates for field teams.
- Replacing or augmenting BDR/SDR functions (automating tailored outreach to high-intent website visitors).
- Automating tasks like lead upload, data cleaning, and deployment into marketing automation systems drastically cuts processing time (e.g., from overnight to 90 seconds).

Rationale and Actionability

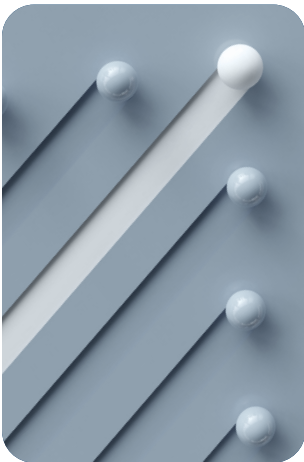
“If nobody’s looking at this data, then why do we have the tool to begin with?”

**Bernd Leger, Founder, GTM Transformation
and Interim CMO at Showpad**

The Modern CMO Role: Time, Alignment, and Finance

The CMO must balance long-term brand vision with short-term urgency, especially given the average CMO tenure of just 18 months.

Challenge	2026 Rulebook Strategy
Balancing Short and Long Term	Think in years, act in weeks. Develop a multi-year, financially grounded plan (e.g., 3-year vision) that outlines strategic milestones and business goals. This plan must be broken down into tangible 6-month increments.
Earning Trust	Earn the right to buy time by putting “points on the board.” This means delivering short-term impact and showing quick wins through early top-of-the-funnel dashboards (e.g., organic traffic growth for specific keywords) to gain executive confidence.
Organizational Alignment	Marketing’s impact is dependent on strong integration with sales, product, and the broader business. The critical thing is alignment with the sales and product leaders, sharing common goals.
Speaking the Right Language	Tune your message to the audience. When interlocking with sales leaders, speak their language: Pipeline and ARR (never MQLs or general marketing metrics). When speaking to the CEO, CFO, or Board, focus on P&L impact and translating brand investment into financial outcomes.
CMO as Data Scientist	Adopt the scientific method. Present a thesis, set up experiments, analyze data clinically, report honestly, and decide the path forward. Do not act like a promoter; be brutally honest about failures.



Sales Alignment

“I never talk about MQLs. I never talk about the market metrics. I only talk about pipeline and ARR. Those are the shared goals.”

**Bernd Leger, Founder, GTM Transformation
and Interim CMO at Showpad**

Navigating the LLM-Driven Buyer Journey

Buyers are increasingly starting their research journey with LLMs like ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Claude, challenging traditional channels.



Audience-Centricity

The GTM strategy starts with identifying where the audience is and where the conversation is taking place. The audience is moving away from traditional Google searches.



Content Quality Over Algorithm Chasing

Quality content still wins. Helpful, practical thought leadership will be found by both humans and LLMs. Trying to “game” the LLM algorithms or “algorithm chase” is highly discouraged, as the models change frequently, and it is a waste of resources.



Gaining Visibility

LLMs use third-party signals. Tactics to improve rank and resonance include:

- Focusing content creation on topics signaled as important in your market.
- Building relationships with high-visibility media for story inclusion.
- Prioritizing review sites, as LLMs use these for signal.
- Investing in analyst relations for highly considered products.
- Engaging in communities like Reddit, not because LLMs index them, but because that’s where the audience is already conversing.



Buyer Intent

Buyers coming in via LLM research often have higher purchase intent, potentially leading to quicker sales cycles and larger deals, as they have done extensive research prior to engaging directly.



Attribution Reality

Attribution is highly challenging when buyers use LLMs, reinforcing the necessity of working on marketing fundamentals rather than chasing traceable digital channels.

Fundamentals Over Algorithms

“Fundamentally, if you try to algorithm-chase, you’re going to lose. It’s like trying to, you know, beat the stock market.”

Peter Mahoney, CCO at GoTo

Optimizing Partner & Vendor Relationships

To maximize the value of agencies and tech vendors, CMOs require a shift in how these partnerships operate.



Execution and “Kid Gloves”

CMOs are “bad clients” because they lack the time (cycles) to re-architect systems or manage complex onboarding. Agencies and vendors must execute for the client and “kid glove” the relationship to ensure success. Value is only added if the vendor executes and changes things for the client.



Vertical Specialization

Vendors should bring a deeper understanding of customers and industries (subject matter expertise). Help comes from vertical specialization, providing the necessary vertical knowledge to complement a company’s technical knowledge.



Strategic Challenge

Agencies should challenge the organization’s existing messaging and GTM strategy, bringing new thinking rooted in deep domain and customer understanding.



Business Case for Speed

Decisions on vendors or agencies move very quickly (e.g., signing a contract in 30 days) when the proposal solves a specific, hard business problem and is grounded in a strong business case that shows clear financial savings or measurable impact (“Show me the money”).



Modern Tooling

Tech vendors need to provide tools that are foolproof and efficient to make junior teams work smarter, improving employee performance in their jobs and addressing the lack of innovation in legacy tools.

Trusted Partnerships

“This is only going to add value if you execute for us and you change things for us. You need to kid glove me.”

KC Lincoln, CMO at Lionbridge

Continue the Conversation

The findings in this guide are derived from a candid, peer-driven conversation among top B2B tech CMOs. Their combined expertise, operational lessons, and GTM frameworks informed the insights and strategic guidance presented. Hear more from the experts shaping modern B2B GTM.

Scratch Marketing + Media

ScratchMM is a full-funnel integrated B2B tech marketing and communications agency that turns complex technology narratives into growth-driving brand experiences. With deep domain expertise across AI/ML, cloud, cybersecurity, telecom and more, we craft strategic positioning, creative design systems, digital experiences and account-based programs that help technology leaders boost visibility, influence and pipeline.

Talk with an expert



Sendoso

Sendoso is an innovative sending-platform designed to help companies build meaningful relationships in a crowded digital world. By combining AI-driven gift recommendations, seamless integration with CRM and marketing stacks, and global fulfillment of physical gifts, e-gifts, handwritten notes, and branded swag, Sendoso enables marketing, sales, HR and customer success teams to stand out, engage more deeply, and drive measurable results.

Talk with an expert



VertoDigital

VertoDigital is a growth-focused B2B digital marketing agency that combines advanced analytics, paid-media expertise, SEO, and content strategy to help companies turn complex data into measurable revenue outcomes. With a data-first mindset and global reach, VertoDigital partners with clients to build performance-driven programs and sustainable growth frameworks.

Talk with an expert



Trendemon

Trendemon is a purpose-built platform for B2B marketers that transforms website visits into revenue. By combining AI-powered personalization, account-based marketing insights and seamless integration with tools like Salesforce and HubSpot, Trendemon enables businesses to guide outbound visitors through tailored journeys, improve conversion rates and attribute every interaction to pipeline outcomes.

Talk with an expert

