STRATEGIC | MEDIA



Media Trends

B2B MARKETING - INDUSTRY MEDIA BUYING TRENDS

UPDATED: H2 2026

B2B marketing is entering another period of rapid change as AI reshapes not only how marketers work, but how buyers discover, research, and evaluate potential partners. At the same time, increasing pressure to prove business impact is changing how marketers approach demand generation, media investment, and measurement. The trends below highlight some of the shifts we believe will have the greatest impact on B2B media planning and buying heading into 2027.

1. AI Is Moving From Marketing Assistant to Media Operating Layer [12, 13]

The next phase of AI in marketing is less about generating a headline or summarizing a brief and more about connecting intelligence directly to planning, buying, optimization and measurement. New integrations are allowing marketers to interrogate live campaign data in natural language, explore inventory, build campaigns and even make changes from within assistants such as ChatGPT, Claude and Gemini.

One early example is Vibe's MCP integration for CTV, which demonstrates the broader direction of travel: AI assistants can connect to an advertising platform, retrieve live account data, answer performance questions, recommend changes and execute approved campaign actions without requiring the user to move between dashboards. The important trend is not one vendor-it is the emergence of conversational interfaces as an operating layer across ad tech.

What this means for B2B marketers:

- Planning gets faster: teams can use AI to synthesize briefs, audience research, historical performance, partner proposals and competitive information into initial channel and budget scenarios.
- Buying and optimization become more conversational: connected AI systems can increasingly query live performance, diagnose pacing or efficiency issues and recommend or execute changes.

- Human oversight becomes more important, not less. Budget controls, approval workflows, data governance and QA are essential when AI moves from “read” access to “write” access in media platforms.
- The highest-value use cases will be grounded in proprietary data. Generic AI can brainstorm; connected AI can reason across a company’s actual campaigns, CRM signals, content performance and audience data.

***2027 prediction**: AI will increasingly sit across the media workflow rather than inside one point solution. Marketers will still need platform specialists, but more routine analysis, planning and campaign operations will be initiated through natural-language interfaces.*

2. The B2B Buyer Journey Is Becoming AI-Mediated-but Trust Still Has to Be Earned [1, 2, 3]

AI is now a mainstream research tool for B2B buyers. EMARKETER, citing Semrush research, reports that 41% of U.S. B2B professionals who use AI for work begin research with AI and then validate the answer through traditional search. G2’s 2026 research similarly found that 51% of B2B software buyers now start research with an AI chatbot more often than Google. IDC reports that 68% of buyers use AI always or often to compare products and solution features during evaluation.

The key nuance is that AI is not simply replacing search, websites, analyst research or peer validation. It is reorganizing the journey. AI can create the initial category map or shortlist in seconds, while buyers then seek proof from sources they trust.

Implications for demand generation and content:

- Visibility now means being discoverable by both humans and AI systems. Traditional SEO remains important, but marketers also need clear, authoritative content that can be understood, summarized and cited by AI answer engines.
- Third-party credibility matters more. Reviews, analyst coverage, reputable publishers, expert commentary and syndicated thought leadership can become the evidence buyers use to verify AI-generated recommendations.
- Original research and distinct points of view gain value in a sea of AI-generated sameness. Content that contributes a new statistic, framework or expert perspective is more likely to earn attention and citation than generic “what is” content.
- The website shifts later in the journey. It still matters enormously-but increasingly as a validation, proof and conversion environment after buyers have already formed an initial view elsewhere.

***2027 prediction:** B2B marketers will add AI visibility / answer-engine visibility to SEO and share-of-search reporting, while content strategies will place more emphasis on authoritative third-party distribution and verifiable proof.*

3. Demand Gen Is Resetting Around Lead Quality, Buying Groups and Pipeline-not Raw Lead Volume [4, 5, 6]

The pendulum is moving away from "more leads" as the primary definition of demand generation success. LinkedIn's 2026 demand generation research highlights the pressure marketers face to prove ROI and the risk of chasing low-quality volume. Sagefrog's 2027 B2B Marketing Mix findings show the same reset: low lead volume declined as a top demand-generation hurdle, while limited budgets and resources became a much larger concern; 71% of reported funnel bottlenecks occur after initial lead capture.

At the same time, the B2B purchase is becoming more collective. Forrester's 2026 buyer research says a typical buying decision now involves 13 internal stakeholders and nine external influencers. That makes a single form fill or MQL an increasingly incomplete picture of real demand.

What changes in practice:

- Account and buying-group engagement become more useful than isolated lead counts. Marketers need to understand whether multiple relevant people at an account are researching, consuming content and progressing together.
- Content syndication evolves from a volume tactic to a signal and account-access tactic. Activate's 2026 State of Demand Gen report specifically points to high performers balancing ABM with scalable digital channels and syndication, rather than relying on tactical chasing.
- Qualification gets stricter. Human validation, first-party engagement and multiple intent signals can help distinguish genuine buyer activity from low-quality database or bot-driven interactions.
- Measurement moves downstream: sales acceptance, opportunity creation, pipeline sourcing, buying-group penetration and velocity become more meaningful than CPL alone.

***2027 prediction**: the strongest demand-gen programs will connect content syndication, ABM, paid media, CRM and intent signals around accounts and buying groups, with fewer conversations centered on "how many leads did we buy?"*

4. B2B Media Spend Is Becoming More Selective: Social/LinkedIn, Brand and High-Intent Environments Gain Ground [6, 7, 8]

The 2027 planning environment is not simply "budgets up" or "budgets down." Recent B2B research points to selective investment: teams are lean, scrutiny is high and marketers are being pushed to defend each channel based on its contribution to pipeline and future demand. Activate describes 2027 budget optimism as the strongest in five years, while Sagefrog characterizes budget growth as increasingly selective.

One visible shift is occurring inside digital budgets. LinkedIn published Dreamdata benchmark data showing LinkedIn captured 41% of B2B ad budgets in its dataset, up from 39%, while non-branded

paid search fell from 37% to 33%. A separate Factors.ai benchmark found LinkedIn ad budgets grew 31.7% versus 6% for Google across the period studied, while the share of LinkedIn campaigns focused on brand awareness or engagement nearly doubled from 17.5% to 31.3%.

Why the mix is changing:

- AI answers and zero-click behavior put pressure on non-branded search as a pure traffic engine, even as branded search and high-intent search remain important validation and capture mechanisms.
- Professional social environments can reach entire buying committees before they are actively searching, supporting both brand creation and demand capture.
- Brand investment is being reconnected to pipeline. When buyers arrive with a shortlist already forming, being known before the active buying window has direct demand-gen value.
- Niche B2B publishers, content syndication and contextual environments remain useful because they combine professional relevance with first-party engagement signals and third-party credibility.

***2027 prediction**: expect fewer channel decisions based solely on last-click CPL. Budget will increasingly be evaluated as a portfolio-brand, demand creation, demand capture and account activation-with each channel assigned a different job.*

5. Measurement Is Shifting From Attribution Reporting to Decision Systems [9, 10, 11]

Marketers have more measurement techniques than ever, but translating those outputs into action remains difficult. IAB's State of Data 2026 describes a measurement ecosystem strained by privacy regulation, signal loss, fragmented platforms and inconsistent cross-channel approaches. Forrester reports that adoption of marketing mix modeling and incrementality testing increased from 2025 to 2026, yet 49% of B2C marketing decision-makers still say analytics findings do not translate into action.

AI is beginning to reshape this process. EMARKETER notes that AI can touch every stage of marketing mix modeling-from data cleaning and model building to explaining findings-but the bigger opportunity is helping marketers move from measurement to decisions while keeping humans in the loop.

The emerging measurement stack:

- MMM (Media Mix Modeling) for strategic allocation and understanding channel contribution over time.
- Incrementality testing to determine whether media caused an outcome rather than merely receiving credit for it.
- Platform and attribution data for faster tactical optimization where observable signals still exist.

- AI as the translation layer that can synthesize model outputs, scenario-plan budgets and surface recommended actions more quickly.

***2027 prediction**: marketers will rely less on one "source of truth" attribution model and more on triangulation. The winners will be teams that connect strategic measurement, experiments and in-platform data into a repeatable decision process.*

What Strategic Media Is Watching for 2027

Across these trends, the common theme is not simply AI. It is a shift from volume and channel-level optimization toward connected decision-making: better buyer signals, stronger content and credibility, buying-group visibility, more intentional media allocation and measurement that can guide the next action.

- AI becomes an interface to media systems-not just a content-production tool.
- B2B discovery fragments across AI, search, social, publishers, communities and peers, increasing the value of coordinated multi-channel presence.
- Content syndication remains relevant, but quality, intent, account fit and downstream progression matter more than raw lead delivery.
- Brand and demand generation converge as marketers recognize that future pipeline depends on being known before buyers enter the market.
- Measurement becomes more experimental and forward-looking, combining MMM, incrementality and AI-assisted scenario planning.

Sources / Recommended Reading

1. EMARKETER – B2B buyers start with AI, then check its work - https://www.emarketer.com/content/b2b-buyers-start-with-ai--then-check-its-work
2. G2 – The Answer Economy: 2026 AI Search Insight Report - https://learn.g2.com/g2-2026-ai-search-insight-report
3. IDC – Your Buyer Has Moved: What IDC's 2026 Data Means for Your Sales Funnel - https://www.idc.com/resource-center/blog/your-buyer-has-moved-has-your-gtm-what-idcs-2026-data-means-for-your-sales-funnel
4. Forrester – The State of Business Buying, 2026 summary - https://investor.forrester.com/news-releases/news-release-details/forresters-2026-buyer-insights-genai-upending-b2b-buying-leaders
5. Activate Marketing Services – 2026 State of Demand Gen Report - https://www.activatems.com/2026-state-of-demand-gen/
6. Sagefrog – 2027 B2B Marketing Mix Report - https://www.sagefrog.com/resources/2027-b2b-marketing-mix-report/
7. LinkedIn – Why B2B Marketing Budgets Are Shifting to LinkedIn - https://www.linkedin.com/business/marketing/blog/research-and-insights/why-b2b-marketing-budgets-are-shifting-to-linkedin
8. LinkedIn – Factors.ai 2026 GTM / LinkedIn Benchmark - https://www.linkedin.com/business/marketing/blog/research-and-insights/refine-your-go-to-market-strategy-with-insights-from-the-factors-ai-linkedin-benchmark-report
9. IAB – State of Data 2026: The AI-Powered Measurement Transformation - https://www.iab.com/insights/2026-state-of-data-report/
10. EMARKETER – Reshaping marketing mix modeling in the AI age - https://www.emarketer.com/content/reshaping-marketing-mix-modeling-ai-age
11. Forrester – AI Moves Marketing Measurement From Insights To Action - https://www.forrester.com/blogs/ai-moves-marketing-measurement-from-insights-to-action/
12. Vibe – MCP: CTV advertising inside Claude, ChatGPT and Gemini - https://www.vibe.co/p/mcp
13. Division-D – B2B Strategy Deck - https://divd.divisiond.com/b2b-strategy-deck