



AI, strategy and setting a higher bar for originality

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Simplifying complexity has always been the strategist's superpower. We turn messy, often incomplete inputs into coherent plans and actionable insights.

AI no doubt speeds up the pace and scale of marketing, but it doesn't replace the need to decide what truly matters, what resonates and what genuinely moves people.

In fact, it's raising the bar for strategists and demanding they become fluent not just in research and insights, but in the complex web of martech tools and AI capabilities that enable hyperpersonalization at scale.

While most clients haven't fully defined their roadmaps for leveraging AI, the implications for strategy are becoming pretty clear. The standard playbook—do research, write a brief, help shape a breakthrough idea—feels out of date. Even creating personas is starting to feel quaint.

Today's strategist works in a world where insights aren't singular, but vast: thousands of data points, behaviors and contextual signals converge to inform every decision. That means the new creative brief is no longer a single document written at a point in time; it's a living system capable of generating multiple, tailored expressions of a brand across channels and audiences.

AI has started to unlock what some call personalization as a service (or PaaS for the tech bro inclined). Campaigns can now run hundreds or even thousands of variations, each customized to a specific audience, context or behavior. Brands can activate bespoke messages in real time, responding dynamically to shifts in consumer behavior or context. Strategy now means designing adaptable frameworks that transform a single brand idea into countless meaningful expressions, ensuring consistency without stifling creativity. The strategist's emerging role is to architect these PaaS systems, balancing scale with authenticity.



Moving beyond the marketing organization is an equally important shift. Strategists will increasingly be called on to orchestrate client collaboration across product, IT, finance and other dotted-line stakeholders. Strategists need to guide diverse teams and build consensus around a shared understanding of first-party data, platform capabilities and brand strategy. That won't simply be a streamlining of old processes; we're building a fundamentally new operating model. The strategist's value lies in converting complexity—creative, technical and organizational—into a coherent, actionable and scalable marketing playbook.

Originality is the human edge. AI can remix what's already been done, but these tools can't invent taste, instinct or sound judgment. In a world where everyone has access to the same generative technologies, having the creative confidence to make bold choices is what will differentiate human strategists (yes, relative to the nonhuman "agentic" strategists). Strategy always has and will continue to marshal these choices toward meaningful outcomes that drive business results, connect with people and build brand love. AI can facilitate execution, but originality still starts with gut instinct and intuition.

Human-centered design has never mattered more. Strategists step into audiences' shoes, validate assumptions and create frameworks that guide AI at scale. They edit and ensure that AI-generated work is on brand, resonates with people and hasn't suffered from a hallucination-induced freakout.

The strategist's expanding role also includes fostering a culture of learning both within the agency and across client teams. As campaigns become more dynamic and data-rich, teams must continuously interpret outcomes, refine frameworks and evolve how they go to market in real time. Strategy now means connecting creative insight, performance signals and technical capabilities into always-on loops that both inform and enhance every marketing touchpoint.

Originality has always been what strategists do best: turning a revelatory insight into ideas that cut through complexity, resonate with audiences and drive results. What's different now is the scale, speed and precision at which that originality must operate. AI can amplify execution and reach, but it can't replicate the judgment that makes work stand out and resonate. Strategists remain the ones who see patterns in the noise, connect insights in meaningful ways, and shape ideas that feel both unexpected and inevitable.



That capacity for originality will continue to define the value that only strategists can add.
The bar will just be higher.

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