



The New Rules For Automotive Aftermarket Growth

8 Shifts Reshaping How Automotive Aftermarket Brands
Earn Trust, Create Demand and Win Customers in 2027

THE NEW RULES FOR GROWTH

Trust → Discoverability → Self-Service + Expertise → Buying Network → Demand Creation → Brand + Performance → Enterprise Alignment → Continuous Learning

Executive Summary (TL;DR)

Growth is being rewritten from both sides of the equation: how buyers make decisions and how marketing organizations are adapting.

Buyers now research more independently, validate brand claims through external sources and rely on AI, peers, reviews and expert voices to shape their choices. In the automotive aftermarket, that research can involve comparing parts, evaluating suppliers or choosing a service provider. This means influencing both the customer making the purchase and the people whose advice and recommendations shape the decision.

At the same time, the marketing operating model is changing. AI is accelerating insight and experimentation. Brand and performance are converging. Marketing is being held accountable for broader commercial outcomes, from product demand and channel growth to service bookings and customer retention. And annual campaign cycles are becoming too slow for markets that change continuously.

The implication is simple: the old growth model is no longer enough.

The Eight Shifts

→Shifts in Buyer Decision Making

- 1. Trust Must Be Demonstrated, Not Declared**
Claims create interest. Proof creates belief.
- 2. Discovery Now Happens Everywhere**
Be visible wherever buyers discover, compare and validate.
- 3. Self-Service Raises the Value of Human Expertise**
Let customers access information themselves.
Use people where judgment matters.
- 4. Buying Decisions Are Influenced by Hidden Buyers**
Influence the full decision network, not just the person making the purchase.

→Shifts in the Marketing Operating Model

- 5. Marketing Must Create Demand & Capture It**
Compete for today's buyers while shaping tomorrow's.
- 6. Brand and Performance Must Work as One Growth System**
Build preference and convert demand as one connected system.
- 7. Marketing Has Become an Enterprise Growth Function**
Connect the functions, data and decisions that shape customer and commercial growth.
- 8. Growth Is Managed Continuously, Not Through Annual Campaigns**
Read signals, test assumptions and move resources as the evidence changes.

What This Means

Automotive aftermarket growth now depends on being trusted, being found, creating demand, aligning the organization and learning faster.

The organizations that outperform will be the ones that build a growth system buyers can trust, find and choose, and that gets smarter as the market changes.

Growth didn't suddenly get harder. The rules underpinning it changed.

Many of the marketing practices that drove growth over the past decade were built for a different environment.

An environment where the buying journey was more visible. Search led to websites. Marketing generated leads and sales converted them. Brands had more control over their story. Annual plans could remain relevant for longer and the path from marketing activity to business result was easier to see.

Those assumptions are less true today.

Buyers now discover, research and evaluate brands across a much larger ecosystem, including retailer and distributor websites, technical videos, industry forums and professional recommendations. They can make significant progress without sales, validate what companies say against independent sources and use AI to compare options in seconds. In the automotive aftermarket, much of the decision can happen across a network of people the brand may never see.

At the same time, the expectations of marketing are expanding. Automotive aftermarket marketing leaders are being asked to create demand, influence revenue, connect the customer journey across digital channels, sales and distribution or service partners, and continuously improve how growth investment is allocated.

The risk is that organizations keep optimizing a growth model built around assumptions that no longer hold.

You can execute the plan, hit channel KPIs and improve campaign performance and still miss where the buying decision is actually being shaped.

This requires a different growth model.

This guide identifies **eight shifts reshaping automotive aftermarket growth heading into 2027**, the evidence behind them and what marketing leaders should do in response.

As you read, use each shift as a pressure test:

Which assumptions behind your current growth strategy are no longer true?

And what would you do differently if you stopped planning around them?



SHIFT 1:

Trust Must Be Demonstrated, Not Declared

THE OLD RULE

Develop a compelling brand message and communicate it consistently.

THE NEW REALITY

Buyers can check what you say against what everyone else says about you.

They read reviews. Look for customer experiences. Seek expert opinions. Check industry publications, communities, Reddit and YouTube. And increasingly, they ask AI assistants to research and compare brands for them.

That means a strong brand claim can get attention, but evidence increasingly determines whether the claim is believed.

Edelman found that 57% of consumers say unpaid voices or independent organizations have the greatest impact on their willingness to trust a brand. Just 20% say the same about what a brand says about itself. Source: [Edelman, 2026 Trust Barometer Special Report: Brand Growth in an Insular World](#)

That changes the job of marketing.

Brands still need a clear and distinctive point of view. But what the brand says is increasingly just the beginning of the trust equation.

Buyers want to know: Can you prove it?



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Trust is increasingly built outside the brand

80% of consumers trust customers like themselves to provide accurate brand information.

68% trust customer reviews.

58% trust a brand's CEO.

Source: [Edelman, 2025 Trust Barometer Special Report: Brand Trust, From We to Me](#)

The same pattern appears in automotive repair. Endeavor Business Intelligence and AutoZone found that 86% of repair customers considered shop expertise extremely important when choosing where to service their vehicles.

Recommendations from friends and family were very important to 56%, while online reviews from previous customers mattered at that level to 51%.

Source: [Endeavor Business Intelligence and AutoZone, The State of the Market of Automotive Repair Shop Owners and DIFM Customers, 2025.](#)

Buyers have access to more information, more independent voices and better tools for evaluating what companies tell them. They don't have to take your word for it.

ii) Trust has commercial value

The IPA analyzed 812 for-profit campaigns and compared campaigns that generated very large increases in brand trust with its overall campaign benchmark.

The strongest trust-building campaigns were:



41% more likely to report at least one very large business effect.



39% more likely to report very large customer-acquisition effects.



46% more likely to report very large profit effects.



83% more likely to report reduced price sensitivity.

Source: [IPA, Trust-Building Advertising Works, January 2026](#)



These results show a strong relationship between building trust and the outcomes growth leaders care about.

Trust reduces uncertainty. And reducing uncertainty makes it easier for people to choose, pay and stay.

iii) AI is raising the stakes

AI assistants don't simply repeat what a company says about itself. They draw from a wider information environment that can include publishers, customer reviews, communities, experts, reference sources and earned media.

[Muck Rack's analysis of more than one million links cited by leading LLMs](#) found that the vast majority came from non-paid sources, with earned media playing a significant role in the sources AI used.

Research from Hard Numbers and Onclusive found an even more direct relationship between external authority and AI recommendations. Brands in the top 10% for earned-media influence were recommended by LLMs 80% of the time, compared with less than 50% for brands in the bottom 10%. Source: [Hard Numbers + Onclusive, Recommendations in the Age of AI](#)

You are no longer building trust only with people. You are building the information environment machines use to explain, compare and recommend your brand.

FROM BRAND CLAIM TO MARKET PROOF

"We provide the best service"

VISIBLE PROOF

PRODUCT TESTING AND
DOCUMENTED PERFORMANCE

TECHNICIAN QUALIFICATIONS
AND DEMONSTRATED EXPERTISE

CUSTOMER REVIEWS
AND OUTCOMES

CLEAR WARRANTY COVERAGE

EVIDENCE OF WARRANTY
AND SERVICE RESOLUTION

INDEPENDENT EXPERT
ASSESSMENTS

EARNED MEDIA



EXTERNAL VALIDATION

CUSTOMERS CONFIRM IT

THIRD PARTIES REPORT IT

EXPERTS REINFORCE IT

AI CAN FIND AND VERIFY IT



TRUST



GROWTH

GREATER CONSIDERATION

STRONGER CONVERSION

HIGHER LIKELIHOOD OF
RECOMMENDATION

LOWER PERCEIVED RISK

GREATER PRICING RESILIENCE

JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Trust is increasingly formed across an ecosystem the brand does not fully control.

Marketing can make the claim, but buyers and AI can independently investigate whether the evidence supports it. That means a distinctive message is still important, but the message alone is no longer enough.

If you claim superior parts performance, where are the results?

If you claim deep technical expertise, where is it demonstrated?

If you claim customers rely on your products, distribution or service, what do the reviews and customer stories show?

The commercial impact is significant because trust reduces perceived risk throughout the buying journey. Verifiable evidence can help a parts brand enter consideration, give an installer confidence in a recommendation, help a distributor defend a supplier choice or reassure a customer choosing a service provider. Across these decisions, stronger proof can make it easier to move forward and justify paying a premium.

AI adds another layer. Credible external evidence can influence how a brand is understood, compared and surfaced in recommendations.

The growth question becomes:

Where is the gap between what we say and what the market can independently verify?

That gap is increasingly a marketing problem.

A strong message creates a promise and proof makes it believable.

WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build a Trust Evidence System

Treat proof as a marketing asset and manage it with the same discipline you apply to brand, content and media.

1. Prove your most important claims

Start with the claims that matter most to the buying decision.

What do you regularly say about your product quality, parts availability, technical expertise, delivery reliability or service experience?

For each claim, identify the evidence underneath it.

For example:

- “Dependable service and warranty support” → clear warranty coverage, documented response and resolution times, and customer reviews of how issues were handled
- “Proven parts performance” → documented product testing, customer outcomes and independent benchmarks
- “Deep technical expertise” → technical guidance, training resources and demonstrated diagnostic or installation knowledge

If the evidence doesn't exist, you've identified a trust gap.

2. Build proof buyers and AI can find

Create an ongoing system for generating and publishing credible evidence:

- Customer stories and quantified product, delivery or service outcomes
- Reviews and references from customers and channel partners
- Original research and expert perspectives on vehicle applications, parts performance and service challenges
- Product testing, technical guidance, training resources and relevant certifications

Then strengthen the sources you do not control. Automotive trade publications, independent technical experts, industry associations, retailer and distributor content, customer reviews and automotive communities all shape how the market understands your brand.

The goal is not simply more content or more mentions. It is more **credible, discoverable evidence** around the claims that matter most.

3. See what the market and AI see

Pressure-test your brand from the outside.

Ask the questions a prospective customer is likely to ask:

Who are the leading or most trusted companies in our category?

- Which brands or providers are most trusted for this part, supply requirement or service need?
- How do we compare with competitors on the claims that matter most to the purchase?
- Which brand, supplier or service provider would you recommend and why?

Then examine what appears.

What sources support your reputation? Where are competitors better validated? What information is missing, inaccurate or unsupported?

The story the market and AI tell about your brand may be different from the story in your brand guidelines.

That gap belongs on marketing's agenda.

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR TRUST EVIDENCE

Choose five claims your organization regularly makes about its brand, products, services or capabilities.

Claim we make	Can buyers independently verify it?	What proof exists?	What does AI find?	Where is the trust gap?
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				

Then ask:

- 1. Which claims rely too heavily on our own marketing?**
Where would an independent buyer struggle to find credible support?
- 2. Where is our strongest proof missing or hard to discover?**
What customer evidence, expertise or third-party validation exists but is not visible enough?
- 3. What would we need to strengthen first?**
Which trust gap is most likely to affect consideration, conversion or recommendation?

THE NEW RULE

If trust matters to the decision, give buyers something they can verify.

SHIFT 2: Discovery Now Happens Everywhere

THE OLD RULE

Win search, drive people to the website and convert the traffic.

THE NEW REALITY

The path to your brand no longer starts with your website.

Buyers discover and evaluate companies across search engines, AI assistants, video, social, marketplaces, reviews, communities and industry sources. And they move between them.

By the time someone arrives at your website, they may already have researched the parts or services they need, your competitors and opinions about your brand in half a dozen other places.

The question is no longer simply:

Can customers find us when they search?

It's: **Do we show up wherever they discover, research, compare and validate their options?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Discovery is becoming fragmented

BCG found that consumers may now encounter **more than 15 touchpoints during the buying journey, compared with roughly five a decade ago.**

Source: [Agentic AI Will Make the CMO's Role More Consequential](#)

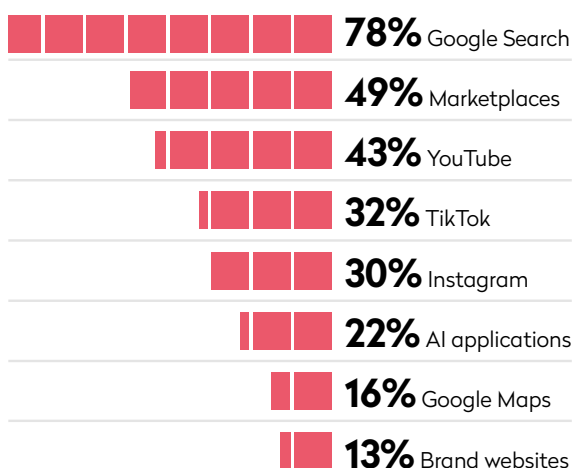
That means much of the consideration set is still being formed during discovery, comparison and evaluation.



If your brand is missing from the environments where consideration is formed, you may be excluded before you know the buyer exists.

ii) The website is one destination in a much bigger journey

Merkle's research shows how widely discovery has spread, with consumers' first-choice ranked as:



Source: [Merkle, Consumers, Commerce, and AI, Spring 2026](#)

The same pattern appears in automotive parts research. YouGov found that 53% of U.S. auto-parts buyers researched multiple sources and compared options. Search engines were used by 51%, retailer websites by 30%, and forums and online communities by 19%. Mechanics also remained a source of advice across age groups.

Source: [YouGov, From Tires to Tools: How US Consumers Shop for Auto Parts Today, April 9, 2025.](#)

Websites still matter, but buyers rarely rely on one source.

Discovery has become a process of accumulation. One search result. One review. One video. One Reddit thread. One AI answer. One expert opinion. Together, these encounters shape the consideration set.

iii) AI discovery is fragmented too

AI adds another layer to the discovery ecosystem.

Semrush analyzed more than 126 million U.S. AI search prompts across 22 industries and four AI platforms. It found that AI systems draw from a distributed mix of brand content, customer reviews, community discussions, independent publishers, retailers, reference platforms and industry sources.

Visibility also varies significantly by platform. Only 36 brands maintained top-100 visibility across all four AI platforms during every month studied. Source: [Semrush, 2026 AI Visibility Index](#)

No single platform represents the whole discovery environment anymore.

FROM SEARCH RANKING TO DISCOVERY ECOSYSTEM



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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

The job of marketing is getting bigger than driving traffic.

If customers form opinions across many touchpoints, optimizing the website or ranking well on Google will not compensate for being absent earlier in the journey.

An aftermarket buyer may research a vehicle problem on Google, watch a technical video, ask an AI assistant for possible solutions, check forums or reviews for candid opinions, compare parts on retailer or distributor websites and seek a technician's recommendation before choosing a brand.

By that point, much of the consideration set may already have formed.

This changes the commercial value of visibility.

A brand with a smaller share of traditional search can still earn consideration through video, communities, experts, marketplaces, reviews, industry media and AI. The opposite is also true. A company can rank well on Google and have a strong website while remaining underrepresented in the environments where buyers are deciding who is credible and worth considering.

AI makes those gaps more consequential because it can synthesize information from across the ecosystem and recommend options before the customer visits an owned channel.

The growth question becomes:

Where is consideration being formed, and are we visible there?

The risk is no longer simply losing traffic.

It is never entering consideration.

WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build a Search Everywhere Strategy

Understand where vehicle owners, installers, retailers, distributors and fleets discover, research, compare and validate options, then manage visibility across that ecosystem.

1. Map your discovery ecosystem

Start with the customer, not the channel plan.

Map where buyers:

- Discover the problem
- Learn about possible solutions
- Compare alternatives
- Validate their shortlist

Validate their shortlist

Then identify the environments that shape their decisions, including search, AI, YouTube, retailer websites, marketplaces, automotive communities and industry sources.

The objective is to understand **where consideration is actually being formed**, rather than assuming it starts with Google or your website.

[**Book a free AI Visibility Snapshot**](#)

2. Find your visibility gaps

Search for your priority products, applications, suppliers and service needs across the environments your customers use, then compare what they find.

Where are you consistently visible? Where do competitors dominate? Where are you missing entirely? Which third-party sources repeatedly influence the results?

Your biggest discovery gap may have nothing to do with your Google ranking.

3. Build for the ecosystem, not just the channel

Publishing the same content everywhere is not a Search Everywhere strategy.

Different environments support different customer needs. Search may help diagnose a vehicle problem. Video can demonstrate installation or product performance. Automotive communities provide practical opinions. AI assistants synthesize these signals into recommendations.

Build content for the behaviour of each platform and strengthen the external sources you do not control, including reviews, expert commentary, retailer and distributor information, and industry coverage.

Then measure visibility, not just traffic.

Traffic tells you who reached you. Visibility tells you whether you had the opportunity to be considered.



PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR DISCOVERY ECOSYSTEM

Choose one priority customer journey and map where buyers could reasonably discover, research, compare and validate options.

Discovery environment	Are we visible?	Are competitors visible?	What does the customer find?	What is the opportunity?
Google/Search				
AI assistants				
YouTube/Video				
Social				
Reviews				
Reddit/Communities				
Marketplaces				
Industry/Expert sources				
Our website				

Then ask:

1. Where are we consistently absent?

Which discovery environments matter to customers but currently underrepresent our brand?

2. Where are competitors stronger?

Which brands repeatedly appear while we do not?

3. Which gap matters most?

Where could improving visibility materially increase our chance of entering consideration?

THE NEW RULE

**If customers can discover your category there,
your brand needs a strategy for being found there.**

THE NEW RULES FOR GROWTH

Trust → Discoverability → Self-Service + Expertise → Buying Network → Demand Creation → Brand + Performance → Enterprise Alignment → Continuous Learning

SHIFT 3: Self-Service Raises the Value of Human Expertise

THE OLD RULE

Capture a lead early and move the prospect into a sales-led process.

THE NEW REALITY

Customers can do more without you.

Customers can do more without you.

They can research a problem, understand their options, compare solutions, read reviews, watch demonstrations, calculate costs and investigate potential providers before speaking to anyone.

AI is accelerating that independence. Customers can now ask specific questions, summarize complex information, and compare alternatives in seconds.

Greater self-service doesn't eliminate the need for people, but it does change what customers need from them.

Customers need less help accessing information. When they choose to engage a person, they expect something harder to get from a search result, website or AI assistant:

Judgment. Interpretation. Context. Reassurance. Expertise.

Self-service raises the bar for human interaction.



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Self-service is now a core part of the buying journey

Gartner found that 70% of B2B buyers preferred a completely digital self-service buying experience and 67% preferred an experience without a sales representative. Buyers also used an average of seven information sources during a recent purchase.

Source: [Gartner, B2B Buying Journey](#)

McKinsey found that B2B buyers now use an average of 10 channels across the purchasing journey, moving between in-person, remote and digital self-service interactions.

Source: [McKinsey & Company, The surprising economics of B2B growth](#)

Self-service is no longer an alternative to the buying journey. It is part of it.

ii) AI is making self-service more capable

Customers now have tools that can help them quickly turn an unfamiliar category into something they understand.

AI can summarize reviews, explain technical differences, compare alternatives against specific criteria and identify questions or trade-offs a buyer should consider.

Adobe found that AI-referred traffic to U.S. retail sites increased 393% year over year during the first three months of 2026. AI-referred visitors converted 42% better than non-AI traffic, and 39% of consumers using AI for online shopping said it made them more confident in a purchase.

Source: [Adobe report, U.S. retailers see surge in AI traffic](#)

These results don't prove that AI caused stronger conversion but they do point to an important change in the journey. Customers arrive at a brand having already done significant work. They know more, have better questions and may be further along in their decision.



iii) Human expertise becomes more valuable when the decision gets harder

Customers may prefer independence while gathering information, but that changes as uncertainty increases.

Gartner found that 69% of B2B buyers want sales representatives to validate AI-generated insights, particularly when selecting suppliers, building internal support and finalizing a purchase. Source: [Gartner Newsroom](#).

A buyer may not need more information or a salesperson to explain product features they can find online. And they may not need someone to walk through a standard implementation process. But,

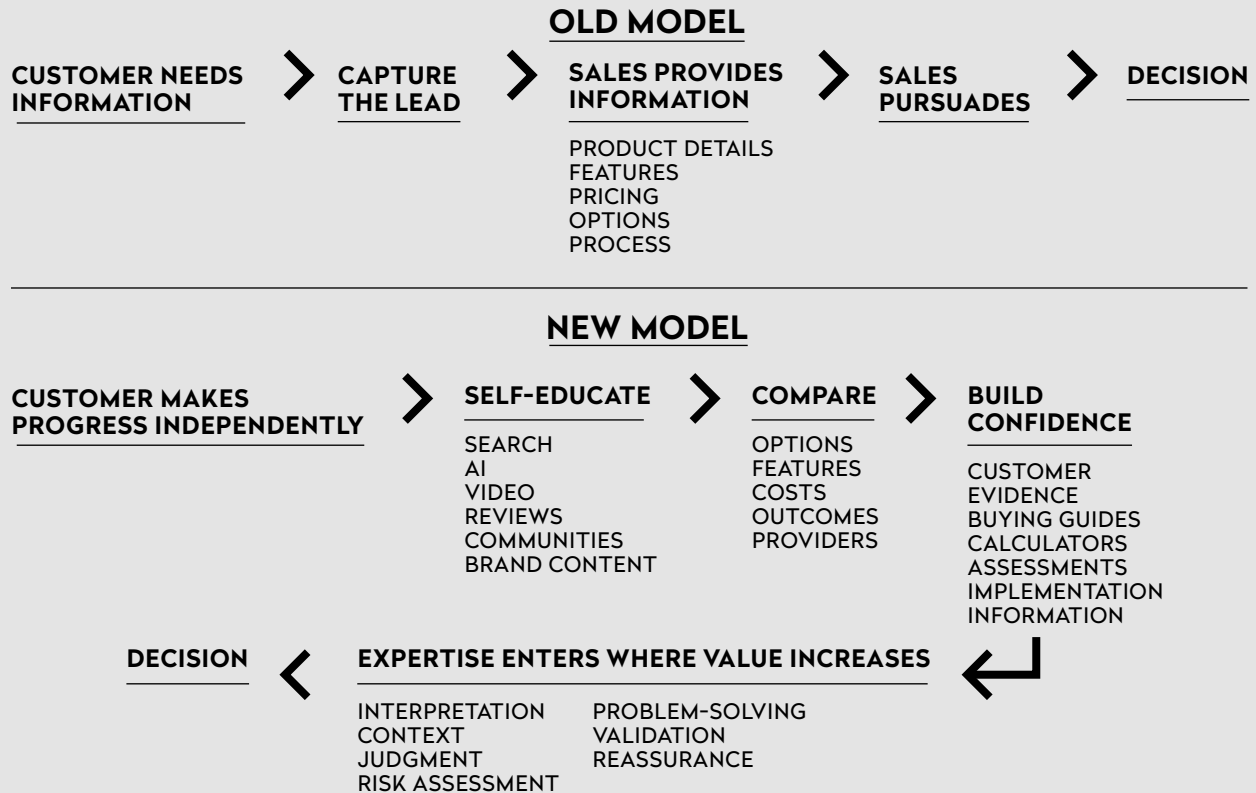
They may need an expert to tell them which features actually matter for their situation.

They may need someone who can identify the risks specific to their organization.

They may need confidence that they are interpreting the information correctly.

As information becomes easier to access, judgment becomes more valuable.

FROM INFORMATION GATEKEEPER TO EXPERT GUIDE



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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Consumers, installers and fleet managers can now make meaningful progress before contacting a distributor or service provider.

They can research vehicle problems, compare products, review vehicle compatibility information, understand costs and explore how EV or ADAS requirements may affect the solution.

But independent research does not eliminate the need for automotive expertise. A vehicle owner may need a technician to confirm a diagnosis. An installer may need technical guidance on product compatibility, installation or calibration. A fleet manager may need help assessing cost, downtime and risk.

The role of the expert is changing. Customers do not need someone to repeat information that should already be available online. They need expertise when the decision involves technical interpretation, vehicle-specific requirements, safety or competing options.

That makes self-service information and human expertise complementary.

Digital experiences should answer repeatable questions at scale. Automotive experts should help customers interpret what the information means for a particular vehicle, application or service need.

The growth questions become:

How far can a customer progress without us?

And:

Where would access to an automotive expert materially improve the decision?

WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build a Self-Service Automotive Journey Supported by Accessible Experts

Design the journey around what consumers, installers and fleet managers need to accomplish, then decide where self-service works and where expertise matters.

1. Remove unnecessary information friction

Choose a priority customer journey and identify the questions customers need answered before they can move forward:

- What vehicle problem are they trying to solve?
- What product or service options exist?
- What will it cost and what value should they expect?
- What are the vehicle compatibility, installation, calibration or safety considerations?

Then ask: **Can a customer get a useful answer without talking to us?**

Audit where you force human interaction through gated product information, quote requests, forms or calls for basic information.

Some automotive decisions genuinely require expert support. Basic product, compatibility and service information usually should not.

Free your experts from explaining what customers could reasonably discover themselves.



2. Build decision support, not just content

Customers need more than information. They need help applying it to their vehicle, application or service need.

Create tools such as:

- Diagnostic and troubleshooting guides
- Product selection and comparison guides
- Product compatibility and application tools
- Cost or total ownership calculators
- Installation and maintenance guidance
- EV and ADAS resources

Then make your expertise discoverable through expert perspectives, original research, technical guidance and useful decision frameworks.

The goal is to help customers move from “**I understand my options**” to “**I understand which product or service makes sense for this vehicle or application.**”

3. Redesign human interaction around judgment

At every point where customers interact with sales, technical support, a distributor, an installer or a service professional, ask:

What can this person add that the customer could not get from our website, search or AI?

The answer should increasingly involve interpretation, technical expertise, judgment, recommendation and risk assessment.

If your people spend most of their time explaining basic information, the journey needs redesigning.

Give customers the basics. Prepare your people for the harder questions.

Let digital experiences handle information at scale. Use human expertise where judgment creates value.

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR SELF-SERVICE + EXPERTISE JOURNEY

Choose one priority customer journey and map what customers need to learn, compare, validate and decide before they are ready to buy.

Customer need	Can they do it independently?	What do we provide today?	Where is the friction?	Where would expertise add value?
Understand the problem				
Explore solutions				
Compare options				
Understand cost/value				
Validate credibility				
Understand implementation				
Assess risk				
Make the decision				

Then ask:

1. Where are we forcing interaction too early?

What information are we withholding because it serves our process rather than the customer?

2. Where does uncertainty increase?

At what points does the decision become complex, risky or difficult to interpret?

3. Where would an expert materially improve the decision?

These are the moments where human interaction should be easiest to access.

THE NEW RULE

Let customers handle the information. Bring in people for the judgment.

SHIFT 4: Buying Decisions Are Influenced by Hidden Buyers

THE OLD RULE

Identify the decision-maker and persuade that person.

THE NEW REALITY

The person talking to sales is rarely making the decision alone.

Behind most significant automotive aftermarket purchases is a wider network of stakeholders assessing value, risk, feasibility and organizational fit. Users care about usability. Technical teams care about integration and risk. Finance wants a credible return. Executives and procurement want confidence that the decision is sound.

Many of these people may never attend a meeting, complete a form or appear in the CRM. But they can still shape requirements, influence the shortlist, introduce objections, delay approval or stop the purchase.

The visible buyer may lead the process, but an invisible network is often shaping the outcome.

The question is no longer simply: How do we persuade the buyer?

It is: **How do we help the entire decision network reach enough confidence to move forward?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Buying decisions involve more people than most organizations realize

The image of a single B2B decision-maker no longer reflects how most significant purchases happen.

Forrester found that 73% of purchases involve three or more departments. The average buying decision includes 13 people inside the buyer's organization and another nine external participants. That is potentially 22 people influencing one purchase.

Source: [Forrester, Three Realities About B2B Buying Networks, 2026.](#)

Different stakeholders evaluate the same purchase against different criteria. As the network grows, a single message, business case or relationship becomes less likely to carry the decision.

ii) Much of the decision is made before sales can see it

According to 6sense, 80% of buying groups make major decisions (including defining purchase requirements and, frequently, selecting a preferred vendor) before engaging with sellers. Source: [6sense, Meet the B2B Buying Group: Who's at the Table and What They Do, 2025.](#)

By the time a recognizable buyer enters the sales process, the group may already have defined the problem, agreed on key requirements and formed a shortlist.

The sales conversation may begin in the middle of the buying journey while the CRM treats it as the beginning. This creates a visibility problem.



iii) Internal alignment determines whether the purchase moves forward

Hidden decision-makers can carry as much influence as the buyers marketing and sales typically target, yet 71% report relatively little or no interaction with sales. More than half use thought leadership to evaluate potential vendors.

At the same time, Gartner found that 74% of B2B buyer teams experience unhealthy conflict during the decision process. Source: [Gartner Newsroom, Edelman and LinkedIn, 2025 B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report.](#)

A strong champion can still lose the decision if finance lacks a credible business case, technical teams see unresolved risk or the broader group cannot agree on the path forward.



FROM INDIVIDUAL PERSUASION TO NETWORK ALIGNMENT

OLD MODEL

CAPTURE THE LEAD

FORM FILL
DEMO REQUEST
SALES INQUIRY
EVENT RESPONSE



PERSUADE THE CONTACT

PRODUCT MESSAGE
SALES PRESENTATION
PROPOSAL
FOLLOW-UP



CLOSE THE DEAL

NEW MODEL

MAP THE DECISION NETWORK



IDENTIFY THE DECISION-MAKER

USERS
CHAMPIONS
FINANCIAL APPROVERS
TECHNICAL EVALUATORS
EXECUTIVES
PROCUREMENT
EXTERNAL ADVISORS



UNDERSTAND DIFFERENT PRIORITIES

OUTCOMES
RISKS
REQUIREMENTS
OBJECTIONS
EVIDENCE NEEDS



BUILD PROOF THAT TRAVELS

CUSTOMER OUTCOMES
BUSINESS CASES
ROI TOOLS
TECHNICAL GUIDANCE
IMPLEMENTATION PLANS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

DECISION



CREATE INTERNAL ALIGNMENT

SHARED UNDERSTANDING
REDUCED UNCERTAINTY
GREATER CONFIDENCE
CLEAR PATH FORWARD



EQUIP THE CHAMPION

SHAREABLE LANGUAGE
STAKEHOLDER-SPECIFIC EVIDENCE
ANSWERS TO LIKELY OBJECTIONS
A CREDIBLE CASE FOR CHANGE



JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

There is rarely one automotive aftermarket buyer.

Consumers may rely on technicians and service advisors when choosing a product or approving a repair. Installers assess product compatibility, performance and installation requirements. Distributors and retailers consider demand, availability and commercial value. Fleet decisions may involve maintenance, operations, procurement and finance.

Many of these people will never enter the brand's CRM. They may research independently, encounter different information and evaluate the same decision against very different criteria.

A product, supplier or service provider can be preferred by one stakeholder and rejected by another.

This makes consistency critical. Every audience should receive a version of the value proposition that answers its questions without fragmenting the core story.

The strongest automotive marketing also gives the visible buyer or champion credible information to carry into conversations the brand will never attend.

The growth question becomes: **Where are product, supplier or service decisions being weakened because one stakeholder lacks the confidence to support them?**

WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build for the Entire Decision Network

Design marketing around everyone who can influence a product, supplier or service decision, not only the person who eventually contacts the brand. Then help them build enough confidence to move forward.

1. Map the real buying network

Choose a priority product, supplier or service decision and identify everyone who can support, shape, delay or block it.

Look beyond the formal decision-maker. Consider:

- Consumers and vehicle owners
- Technicians, installers and service advisors
- Distributors and retailers
- Fleet maintenance and operations teams
- Financial and procurement teams
- External experts and advisors

Ask sales and channel teams which stakeholders tend to appear late. Ask technical support and service teams who becomes involved when questions or problems arise. Review lost opportunities to identify objections that were not anticipated.

The objective is to understand how the decision actually happens, not how the funnel assumes it happens.



2. Understand what each stakeholder needs to believe

Different stakeholders evaluate different aspects of the same product, supplier or service decision.

For each role, identify:

- What outcome matters most?
- What risk are they trying to avoid?
- What evidence will they trust?
- What objection could block their support?

Then translate one consistent case for change into the evidence each stakeholder needs.

Do not fragment the story. Make the same value proposition useful from different perspectives.

3. Build proof that travels and equip the champion

Most internal buying conversations happen without you.

Create evidence that is easy to find, understand and share, such as:

- Customer outcomes and case studies
- Product performance and warranty information
- Cost, downtime and value tools
- Compatibility, technical and installation guidance
- Executive summaries and selection criteria

Then give technicians, distributors, retailers, fleet managers and other champions the language and evidence to answer four questions:

Why change? Why now? Why this approach? Why us?

If the value of your product or service depends on someone from your organization presenting it, the case may not survive the decision process.

Give the champion a case they can carry.

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR INVISIBLE BUYING NETWORK

Choose one important purchase decision your organization needs to influence. Map everyone who can support, shape, delay or block it.

Stakeholder	Outcome they want	Risk they want to avoid	Proof they need	Where is the gap?
Customer or end user				
Technician, installer or service advisor				
Distributor or retailer				
Fleet maintenance or operations team				
Business or fleet owner				
Financial or procurement team				
External expert or advisor				

Then ask:

1. Who is invisible to us?

Which stakeholders can materially influence the outcome without entering the CRM or speaking with our team?

2. Where is the proof weakest?

Which stakeholder has an important question our current marketing cannot answer credibly?

3. Where does alignment break down?

Which late-stage objection, approval requirement or competing priority should have been addressed earlier?

THE NEW RULE

Don't market to a decision-maker. Help the decision network reach a decision.

SHIFT 5: Marketing Must Create Demand & Capture It

THE OLD RULE

Find people who are ready to buy and convert them efficiently.

THE NEW REALITY

Most of your future customers aren't looking for you yet.

They may have the problem you solve, but it isn't a priority. They may be living with an inefficient workaround. They may see the category differently. Or they may simply have no reason to act right now.

Demand capture works when buyers already know what they need and enter the market looking for a solution but that represents only a fraction of the growth opportunity.

LinkedIn's B2B Institute has helped popularize the commercial implication: if marketing focuses primarily on people who are ready to buy now, it competes for a small existing pool of demand while underinvesting in the much larger group that will buy later.

Source: [LinkedIn B2B Institute, The 95-5 Rule](#)

And the economics of relying heavily on demand capture are getting harder.

Paid search, paid social and other performance channels make existing demand easier to reach, but they also make it easier for competitors to bid for the same customer.

Growth can't depend entirely on winning the auction at the bottom of the funnel.

Marketing also has to influence what future buyers understand, value and prioritize before they enter the market. So the question changes from: **How do we capture more demand?** To: **What are we doing to create the demand we want to capture next?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Most future customers aren't buying today

Research from the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute found that in many B2B categories, approximately 5% of potential buyers are actively in-market at any given time. The other 95% are future buyers. Source: [Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, Advertising Effectiveness and the 95:5 Rule](#)

The exact ratio varies by category and purchase cycle. The principle matters more than the number.

Marketing built entirely around immediate conversion systematically undervalues the future market. Some of the most valuable marketing work therefore happens before there is a lead, search query or buying signal to capture.

ii) Future buyers can be influenced before they are ready to act

Demand creation starts by helping people see something differently.

A problem they've underestimated.

An opportunity they haven't considered.

A cost they've normalized.

A change in the market they need to understand.

A better way to approach an existing challenge.

Thought leadership can play a significant role in that process.

Edelman and LinkedIn found that **73% of decision-makers said an organization's thought leadership was a more trustworthy basis for assessing its capabilities than its marketing materials and product sheets.**

And **75% of decision-makers said a piece of thought leadership had led them to research a product or service they had not previously considered.**

Source: [Edelman + LinkedIn, B2B Thought Leadership Impact Report](#)

That is the opportunity. Good marketing can cause someone to investigate something they weren't previously considering.



iii) AI is making generic content easier to produce and easier to ignore

AI has made it faster and cheaper to create articles, emails, social posts, summaries and other marketing assets. But greater production capacity doesn't automatically create greater influence.

Bynder found that 50% of consumers could identify copy they believed was AI-generated, and 52% said they became less engaged when they suspected content was AI-generated. Source: [Bynder, Consumer Study](#)

The risk is clear.

If everyone can produce more competent content at lower cost, competent content becomes less differentiated.

What becomes more valuable is harder to copy:

Original evidence. Distinctive thinking. Real expertise. New problem framing.

FROM DEMAND CAPTURE TO DEMAND CREATION

OLD GROWTH MODEL



NEW GROWTH MODEL



JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Marketing has become very efficient at finding people who already know what they want.

Search, paid media, retargeting and lead scoring are essential capabilities, but they mostly operate after demand has already formed.

In the automotive aftermarket, that often means competing for customers who are already searching for a specific part, supplier or service provider. Companies target similar audiences, bid on the same keywords and make similar claims. Acquisition becomes more expensive, and growth becomes increasingly dependent on the demand that already exists.

Demand creation changes that position.

Instead of waiting until customers have identified the problem, defined the category and formed preferences, marketing can help shape those decisions earlier.

That includes helping consumers, installers, fleets, and channel partners understand how EVs, ADAS, technician shortages, and changing vehicle technology are reshaping maintenance, repair, and service decisions.

When customers eventually enter the market, they may already understand the issue through your perspective, recognize your expertise and remember your brand.

The growth question becomes:

What are we doing today to influence the customers we want tomorrow?

The strongest growth systems do both jobs well.

**Demand creation builds future preference.
Demand capture turns that preference into action.**

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR DEMAND CREATION STRATEGY

Choose one priority market, customer segment or growth opportunity and start with the dominant assumption customers currently hold.

Question	Your answer
What does the market currently believe?	
What important problem or opportunity is being overlooked?	
What do we believe customers need to understand differently?	
What evidence supports our point of view?	
What can we say or prove that competitors cannot easily copy?	
What action do we want future buyers to take or consider?	

Then ask:

1. Are we creating a new perspective or answering an existing question?

If most of our content answers questions customers are already asking, are we primarily capturing demand rather than creating it?

2. Is our point of view distinctive and credible?

What evidence makes the idea memorable, believable and difficult for competitors to copy?

3. Are we investing enough in future buyers?

How much of our marketing budget and effort is aimed at people who aren't ready to buy today?

THE NEW RULE

Don't wait for customers to enter the market. Give them a reason to enter it.

SHIFT 6: Brand and Performance Must Work as One Growth System

THE OLD RULE

Build the brand and drive performance as separate marketing jobs.

THE NEW REALITY

The line between brand and performance has become increasingly artificial.

The line between brand and performance has become increasingly artificial.

Customers experience one company across a connected journey. They see an ad. Search the brand. Ask AI. Read reviews. Watch a video. Visit the website. Leave. See another ad. Ask a colleague. Return through search. Compare alternatives. Buy.

Every interaction can shape what they think about the brand and what they do next.

Yet many marketing organizations still manage these interactions through separate teams, budgets, agencies, objectives and measurement systems. One side creates long-term brand value while the other is expected to produce immediate results.

That separation makes it harder to see how growth actually happens.

The question is no longer whether brand or performance matters more. It's: **Are they making each other more effective?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Performance marketing works better when people already know you

Nielsen has repeatedly found that brand-building activity contributes to both short- and long-term sales effects, while sustained investment helps maintain future demand.

Source: [Nielsen, Focusing on the entire marketing funnel](#)

Research from the IPA has consistently shown that marketing effectiveness requires both long-term brand building and shorter-term activation. Campaigns combining both effects were significantly more likely to produce large business effects than those focused primarily on one or the other. Source: [IPA, The Long and the Short of It](#)

Brand helps create the conditions for future demand. Performance helps capture and convert it. Stronger growth comes from connecting the two.



ii) Optimizing only for what converts today can weaken what drives growth tomorrow

Digital marketing gave marketers extraordinary visibility into immediate behaviour.

Metrics such as clicks, leads, conversions, cost per acquisition and ROAS are useful because they tell us what happened close to the transaction. But proximity to the transaction can make a channel look more responsible for the sale than it actually was.

- A branded search click may get the conversion, but what caused the customer to search the brand?
- A retargeting ad may get the final click, but what created the original interest?
- An affiliate may receive the attribution, but what made the customer trust the company enough to buy?

Research from Analytic Partners has found that brands increasing marketing investment during periods of economic pressure can gain disproportionately when competitors pull back, while excessive short-term cuts can weaken future growth. Source: [Analytic Partners, Newsroom](#)

Managing marketing entirely through short-term attribution rewards what happens nearest the sale and can systematically undervalue what made the sale possible.

iii) Brand creates a multiplier effect across the growth system

Brand investment improves the economics of the broader marketing system.

A familiar, trusted and distinctive brand can improve advertising response, conversion and direct or branded search. It can reduce reliance on paid acquisition, support premium pricing, increase retention and make sales conversations easier.

WARC describes this as a multiplier effect. Brands that build future demand while capturing existing demand tend to produce stronger long-term growth than those that overcorrect toward short-term performance. Source: [WARC, The Multiplier Effect](#)

Brand strength therefore changes the economics of performance. The same media investment can produce very different results depending on how familiar, trusted and relevant the brand already is.

FROM TWO MARKETING PROGRAMS TO ONE GROWTH SYSTEM

OLD MODEL

BRAND

AWARENESS
REACH
REPUTATION
CREATIVE
LONG-TERM METRICS

SEPARATE TEAM
SEPARATE BUDGET
SEPARATE MEASUREMENT



PERFORMANCE

CLICKS
LEADS
CONVERSIONS
ROAS
SHORT-TERM METRICS

SEPARATE TEAM
SEPARATE BUDGET
SEPARATE MEASUREMENT

NEW MODEL

CREATE FUTURE DEMAND

DISTINCTIVE BRAND
BROAD REACH
CATEGORY RELEVANCE

EMOTION
MEMORY
TRUST



BUILD PREFERENCE

FAMILIARITY
EVIDENCE
EXPERTISE

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
MENTAL AVAILABILITY



CAPTURE EXISTING DEMAND

SEARCH
PAID MEDIA
AI DISCOVERY

CONTENT
RETAIL
SALES



EVERY PART
STRENGTHENS THE NEXT.

FUTURE GROWTH

REPEAT PURCHASE
RECOMMENDATION
BRAND STRENGTH
LOWER ACQUISITION FRICTION



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

PRODUCT
SERVICE

RETENTION
ADVOCACY



CONVERT

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE
OFFERS
SALES

COMMERCE
RETARGETING

JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Brand and performance play different roles, but both influence the same commercial outcome.

Performance activity can capture existing interest through product searches, retailer and distributor websites, service inquiries and other high-intent actions. Brand investment builds the familiarity, credibility and preference that make those actions more likely and more valuable.

In the automotive aftermarket, the connection can be difficult to see because the path from awareness to purchase is often indirect. A consumer may encounter a brand before researching a repair. An installer may influence the product recommendation. A retailer or distributor may fulfil the purchase. The final transaction may not reveal every interaction that created confidence along the way.

Over-relying on immediate lead or media measures can shift investment toward the bottom of the journey while undervaluing the brand, education and technical credibility that created the opportunity.

The opposite is also true. Awareness without clear product information, availability or retailer, installer and distributor activation may fail to become commercial demand.

The growth question isn't whether to fund brand or performance.

It is whether brand is making demand easier to capture, and whether demand signals are making the brand more relevant.

When managed as one system, the effects can compound:

Brand strengthens consumer demand and product preference. Retailer, installer and distributor activation turns that demand into customers. Product and service experiences create proof and advocacy. That proof strengthens the brand, making the next customer easier to acquire.

The goal is to improve the productivity of the whole growth system, not decide whether the next dollar belongs to "brand" or "performance."

WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build One Integrated Growth System

Manage brand and performance against different jobs, but one commercial outcome.

1. Define the roles and invest across time horizons

Brand should help:

- Create future demand
- Build familiarity among consumers, installers, fleets and channel partners
- Strengthen distinctiveness
- Build trust and product preference

Performance should help:

- Capture existing product and service demand
- Convert intent
- Generate product sales, service inquiries or qualified opportunities
- Re-engage interested customers and buyers

Then plan investment across three horizons:

NOW: Capture and convert existing product and service demand.

NEXT: Build preference among customers approaching a product, service or supplier decision.

LATER: Create memory, relevance and demand among future consumers, installers, fleets and channel partners.

Different jobs. Different time horizons. One growth system.



2. Measure value beyond the final click

Last-click attribution tells you what happened near the purchase or inquiry. It does not tell you everything that caused the customer to choose, request or recommend the product or service.

Complement attribution with broader measures such as:

- Incrementality testing
- Marketing mix modelling
- Brand tracking
- Customer, installer and channel research
- Customer lifetime value
- Retailer, distributor and sales signals

Then look for the connections between brand and performance:

- Brand familiarity → product consideration
- Trust → recommendations and lead quality
- Distinctive creative → media performance
- Product and service experience → advocacy and repeat purchase

Instead of asking, "Which channel got the sale or inquiry?" ask: "What investment caused growth that would not otherwise have happened?"

3. Make creative work across the system

Brand and performance creative should feel like the same company.

Distinctive brand assets should travel into performance channels. Performance insights should sharpen brand creative. Product evidence, technical expertise and customer proof should strengthen both.

Adapt strong ideas to the job of each channel without losing the consistency that builds memory.

Consistency creates memory. Relevance creates response. The growth system needs both.

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR GROWTH SYSTEM

Map your current marketing investment against the job it is actually doing.

Marketing activity	Creates future demand	Builds preference	Captures demand	Converts demand	How do we measure it?
Brand advertising					
Paid search					
Paid social					
Content					
SEO / AI visibility					
Earned media					
CRM / email					
Sales enablement					
Customer marketing					

Then ask:

1. Are we overinvested in capturing demand that already exists?

How much of our budget is competing for customers who are already close to buying?

2. What is creating the next customer?

Which investments are building familiarity, relevance and preference among future buyers?

3. Are we optimizing the whole system or individual metrics?

Where might attribution, team structures or channel KPIs be causing us to undervalue what actually drives growth?

THE NEW RULE

Stop choosing between brand and performance. Make them compound.

SHIFT 7: Marketing Has Become an Enterprise Growth Function

THE OLD RULE

Marketing owns communications, campaigns and lead generation.

THE NEW REALITY

Marketing is increasingly being held accountable for growth, not simply marketing performance such as awareness, engagement, leads or return on media spend.

Its mandate now extends beyond the marketing department to revenue, customer acquisition, conversion, retention, customer value and market growth.

Marketing can create demand, but many functions determine whether that demand becomes sustainable growth. Sales influences conversion. Product and customer experience influence whether the promise is delivered. Service and customer success influence retention. Finance shapes investment decisions. Technology and AI increasingly connect data, decisions and interactions across the journey.

Marketing's contribution to growth therefore depends on its ability to connect the functions shaping the customer and commercial outcome.

The question is no longer simply: **How well is marketing performing?**

It is: **How well is the organization working together to create growth?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) Marketing leaders are being held accountable for commercial outcomes

Russell Reynolds Associates analyzed CMO job specifications and found that 100% referenced revenue growth, while 85% identified a connection to revenue growth as a core CMO competency.

Source: [Russell Reynolds Associates, The Rules Have Changed: CEOs, Here's How to Land a High-Impact Marketing Officer](#), December 9, 2025.

Traditional marketing measures still matter, but marketers also need to show how marketing activity contributes to a business outcome.

ii) The marketing mandate now crosses traditional functional boundaries

Russell Reynolds also found that 95% of CMO job specifications required both brand and performance expertise, with the senior marketing remit expanding across sales, product, finance and technology. Source: [Russell Reynolds Associates, The Rules Have Changed: CEOs, Here's How to Land a High-Impact Marketing Officer](#).

This reflects the broader reality:

Positioning affects sales conversations.
Customer insight affects product priorities.
The brand promise affects customer experience.
Retention affects the economic value of acquisition.

Marketing cannot optimize these connections through campaigns alone.



iii) Alignment improves growth and retention

Forrester found that organizations with highly aligned marketing, digital and customer experience teams achieve 1.6 times faster revenue growth and 1.4 times better customer retention than their peers. Source: [Forrester, Align Budget Planning to Accelerate Performance in 2025](#).

When teams operate with different definitions of the customer, disconnected data and competing measures, value leaks from the journey.

When they align around shared outcomes, each function can strengthen the next.

FROM DEPARTMENTAL MARKETING TO ENTERPRISE GROWTH

OLD MODEL

MARKETING

BUILD AWARENESS
RUN CAMPAIGNS
GENERATE LEADS



HAND OFF TO SALES



SALES

CONVERT OPPORTUNITIES
CLOSE DEALS



HAND OFF TO SERVICE



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

ONBOARD
SUPPORT
RETAIN

SEPARATE TEAMS
SEPARATE DATA
SEPARATE BUDGETS
SEPARATE MEASURES
SEPARATE DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

NEW MODEL

SHARED CUSTOMER + BUSINESS OUTCOME

ACQUISITION
CONVERSION
REVENUE
RETENTION
CUSTOMER VALUE



ONE CONNECTED JOURNEY

DISCOVERY
RESEARCH
EVALUATION
PURCHASE
INSTALLATION OR SERVICE
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
RETENTION
ADVOCACY



CONNECTED GROWTH FUNCTIONS

MARKETING
SALES
PRODUCT AND TECHNICAL TEAMS
CUSTOMER SERVICE
MANUFACTURERS
DISTRIBUTORS
RETAILERS
SERVICE PROVIDERS
FINANCE
TECHNOLOGY AND AI



SHARED SIGNALS

CUSTOMER NEEDS
MARKET BEHAVIOUR
DEMAND
CONVERSION
EXPERIENCE
RETENTION
COMMERCIAL
PERFORMANCE



COORDINATED DECISIONS

PRIORITIES
INVESTMENT
EXPERIENCE IMPROVEMENTS
EXPERIMENTS
RESOURCE ALLOCATION



SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Organizations still need deep functional expertise. But specialization can fragment the growth system.

Each team and channel partner may have its own goals, data and measures while the customer moves across all of them. That creates opportunities for value to leak between functions and organizations.

Marketing may generate strong demand, but sales may struggle to convert it. The brand promise may be compelling, but the customer experience may not deliver it. Acquisition may perform well, while poor retention destroys the economics downstream.

In the automotive aftermarket, that fragmentation can extend across the channel. Manufacturers shape the product and brand promise. Distributors affect availability and fulfilment. Retailers influence comparison and purchase. Installers and service providers shape recommendations and customer experience.

Individual functions and channel partners can hit their targets while the total growth outcome gets worse.

That changes the role of marketing.

Marketing is well positioned to help connect the system because it sits close to the market, the customer and the growth strategy. Its job increasingly includes identifying where the journey breaks down and helping the right functions and partners act together.

The questions become:

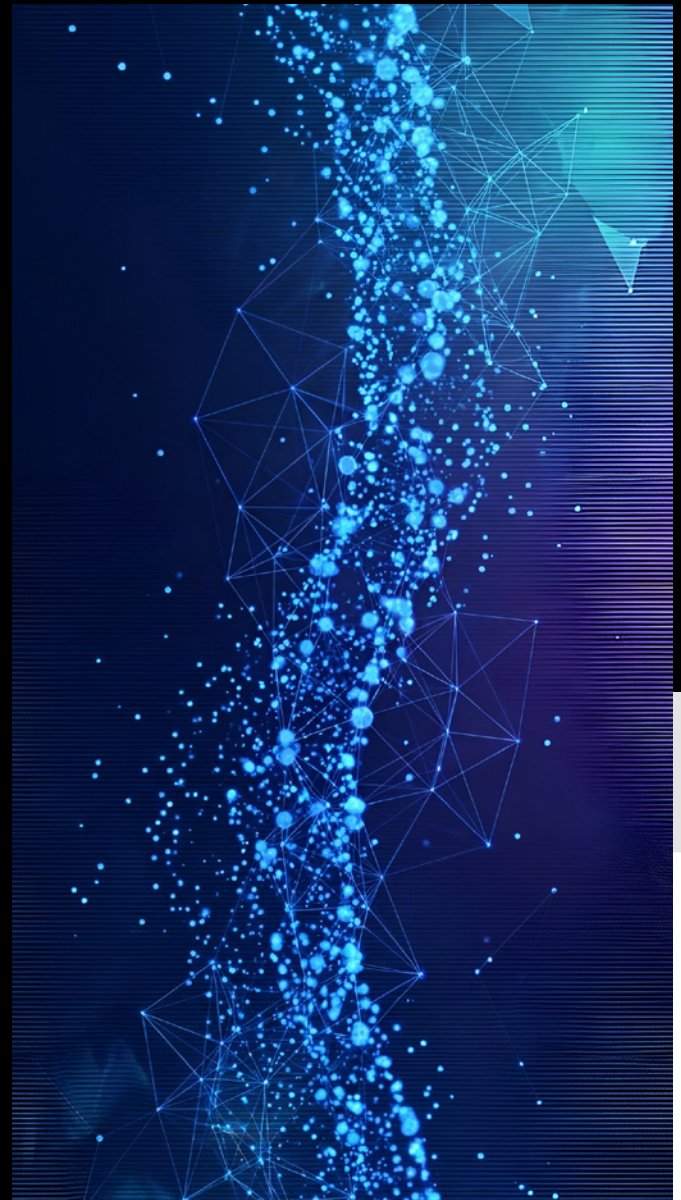
Where is customer or commercial value leaking between functions and channel partners?

Where do ownership, data or measures prevent the organization from acting as one growth system?

Cross-functional and channel alignment improves the productivity of investments already being made. Shared customer understanding creates consistency. Connected data reveals friction. Common measures make trade-offs visible. Clear ownership allows the organization to act faster.

Marketing does not become solely responsible for enterprise growth.

It becomes responsible for helping the enterprise organize around it.



WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build an Enterprise Growth Operating Model

Connect the functions and channel partners that shape product discovery, acquisition, availability, customer experience, retention and growth around shared outcomes.

1. Start with a shared outcome and map the full journey

Cross-functional alignment becomes vague when it begins with a general instruction to collaborate.

Start with one specific customer and business outcome, such as:

- Improve product or service conversion
- Increase sales through retailers or distributors
- Reduce availability or fulfilment friction
- Enter a priority market or customer segment
- Increase adoption of a priority product or technology



Then map the customer journey across the functions and channel partners that influence that result.

Identify where ownership changes, information gets lost, friction appears or performance declines.

The goal is to give teams one shared problem to solve.

2. Replace handoffs with shared ownership and measures

Important growth outcomes rarely belong to one function.

Marketing and sales may jointly influence demand quality and conversion. Marketing, product and technical teams may jointly determine whether the product promise is supported by clear information and credible evidence. Sales, customer service and channel partners may jointly influence availability, fulfilment, customer experience and retention.

Define:

- Who owns the outcome
- Which functions contribute
- Which measures are shared
- Who can act when performance changes

Local metrics still matter. But if one function can hit its target while the overall result gets worse, the measurement system is encouraging the wrong behaviour.

3. Create a cross-functional decision rhythm

Alignment requires more than shared dashboards.

Bring the relevant functions and channel partners together regularly to review customer, product and commercial signals, identify friction, make decisions and assign clear ownership.

Technology and AI can connect data and surface patterns faster. But the value comes from what happens next.

Shared evidence only creates growth when it leads to coordinated action.

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR ENTERPRISE GROWTH ALIGNMENT

Choose one priority customer or commercial outcome and map the functions that influence it.

Journey stage	Primary owner	Contributing functions	Shared measure	Where does value leak?	Who can act?
Discovery					
Research and evaluation					
Product selection or recommendation					
Purchase and fulfilment					
Installation or service					
Retention or repeat purchase					
Advocacy					

Then ask:

1. Where is ownership unclear?

Which important customer or commercial outcomes are falling between functions?

2. Are teams optimizing the same result?

Can one function achieve its target while the overall customer or commercial outcome gets worse?

3. Where does value leak from the system?

Which gap in data, ownership, handoffs or decision-making is having the greatest impact on growth?

THE NEW RULE

Marketing does not own growth alone. It must help the enterprise organize around it.

SHIFT 8:

Growth Is Managed Continuously, Not Through Annual Campaigns

THE OLD RULE

Set an annual plan, launch campaigns and evaluate performance at predetermined intervals.

THE NEW REALITY

The assumptions behind an annual plan can change long before the year ends.

*Customer behaviour shifts. Competitors move.
Market conditions change. New channels emerge.
Costs increase. Technology improves and AI creates
new capabilities.*

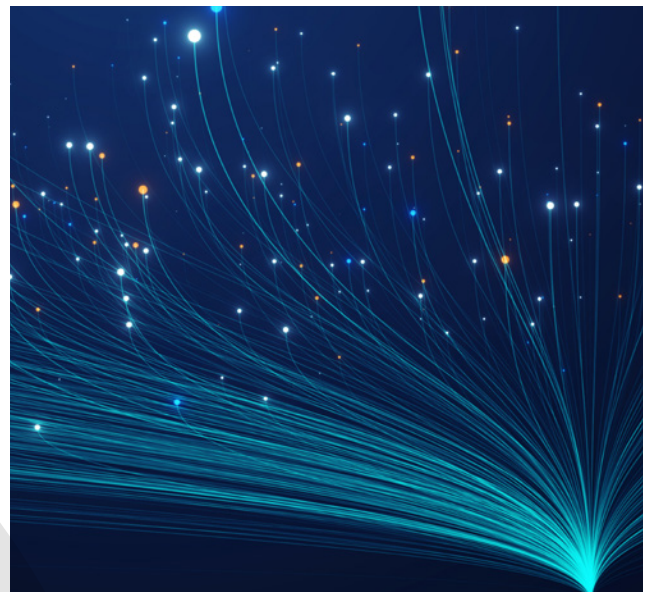
A campaign that looked relevant six months ago may be solving yesterday's problem, yet many organizations keep executing because the budget is approved, the calendar is set and the activity has already been committed.

The problem is not annual planning itself. The problem is treating the plan as fixed after the evidence changes.

Growth now depends less on predicting the entire year correctly and more on detecting meaningful signals, learning quickly and changing the route when needed.

The question is no longer simply: **Are we executing the plan?**

It is: **Are we learning fast enough to know when the plan should change?**



THE EVIDENCE BEHIND THE SHIFT

i) AI is shortening the time between insight and action

PwC reports that AI-enabled marketing can accelerate time-to-market, insight delivery and compliance review cycles by 70% to 90%. It also reports improvements of 10% to 30% in creative effectiveness, consumer relevance and decision accuracy.

Source: PwC, *AI in Marketing: From Efficiency to Growth Value*, April 20, 2026.

The implication goes beyond faster content production. AI can help organizations identify patterns sooner, interpret evidence faster and move from signal to action in days rather than weeks.



Speed alone is not the advantage.

The advantage is shortening the distance between learning and decision.

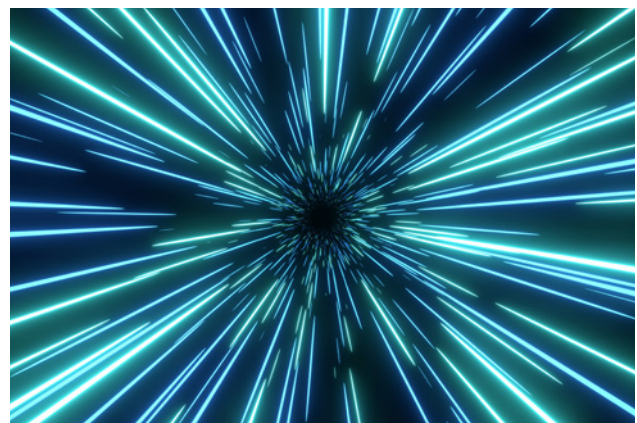
ii) Investment decisions are moving beyond the annual lock

PwC has seen organizations move from 12-month planning locks to resource-reallocation cycles of less than six weeks. Source: [PwC, AI in Marketing: From Efficiency to Growth Value, April 20, 2026.](#)

An annual budget reflects the organization's best judgment at one moment in time. But assumptions about demand, channel performance, customer behaviour and market conditions will not all remain accurate for 12 months.

Shorter decision cycles allow leaders to protect the long-term strategy while changing the investments used to deliver it.

The budget becomes a portfolio of choices, not a list of annual commitments.



iii) Faster learning is associated with stronger commercial performance

Bain found that leading marketing organizations use experimentation as part of how they manage growth.

The same marketing leaders achieved six times higher median revenue growth while spending only 1.5 times more on marketing, equivalent to roughly four times higher marketing ROI. Source: [Bain & Company, AI Raises the Stakes in Marketing, Opening Gap Between Leaders and Laggards.](#)

Faster learners make their marketing investment more productive. They turn evidence into decisions while slower competitors continue executing assumptions formed months earlier.

FROM ANNUAL PLAN TO CONTINUOUS GROWTH LOOP

OLD MODEL

ANNUAL ASSUMPTIONS

CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR
MARKET CONDITIONS
CHANNEL PERFORMANCE
COMMERCIAL PRIORITIES



ANNUAL BUDGET LOCK

FIXED ALLOCATIONS
FIXED CAMPAIGNS
FIXED CALENDAR



EXECUTE THE PLAN

LAUNCH
REPORT
OPTIMIZE WITHIN CHANNELS



PERIODIC REVIEW

MONTHLY REPORTS
QUARTERLY REVIEWS
YEAR-END RESULTS



BUILD NEXT YEAR'S PLAN

NEW MODEL

SIGNAL

WHAT IS CHANGING?



HYPOTHESIS

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE IS CAUSING IT?



EXPERIMENT

WHAT IS THE SMALLEST USEFUL TEST?



EVIDENCE

WHAT DID WE LEARN?



DECISION

SCALE
ADAPT
CONTINUE TESTING
STOP



REALLOCATE

PEOPLE
BUDGET
TECHNOLOGY
ATTENTION



SCALE THE LEARNING

ACROSS CHANNELS
ACROSS JOURNEYS
ACROSS TEAMS
ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION



MONITOR THE NEXT SIGNAL

JK TAKE

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR GROWTH

Traditional planning creates discipline, but the automotive aftermarket does not wait for the next planning cycle.

Customer demand shifts. Product availability changes. Retailers and distributors see different patterns across markets. Installers encounter new service needs. Competitors adjust pricing and promotions. New vehicle technology changes what the market requires.

Every plan is built on assumptions:

- This audience will respond.
- This message will create demand.
- This channel will remain efficient.
- This product or service need will remain important.

Some assumptions will hold. Others will weaken or become wrong as the year unfolds.

The growth problem begins when organizations continue funding an assumption after the evidence has changed.

Campaigns keep running because they are on the calendar. Budgets stay in underperforming channels because moving them is difficult. Inventory support and promotions continue even when market signals suggest demand has shifted.

Continuous growth management treats the plan differently.

Strategy provides direction.

The plan represents the current best route.

Evidence determines what happens next.

That distinction matters commercially.

Faster learning only creates value when it changes decisions. An experiment trapped inside one campaign has limited impact. Learning becomes more valuable when it changes creative, audience strategy, campaigns, inventory support, promotions or resource allocation across the organization.

The growth question becomes:

How quickly can we turn evidence into a better decision?

Automotive organizations that learn faster can compound that advantage. They run more useful experiments, generate more evidence, make better choices and redirect resources sooner.

Growth does not require a perfect annual plan. It requires a system that gets smarter as the year unfolds.



WHAT AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET MARKETING LEADERS SHOULD DO NOW

Build a Continuous Growth Operating System

Create a repeatable process for detecting meaningful signals, testing assumptions, making decisions and reallocating resources.

1. Build a signal-to-hypothesis system

Start by identifying the signals that could materially affect customer or commercial performance.

Focus on areas such as:

- Consumer, installer and fleet demand
- Product inventory and availability
- Retailer, distributor and channel performance
- Campaign and promotion performance
- Competitive, regulatory or vehicle technology change

Do not add data to the dashboard simply because it exists.

For each important signal, define:

- What level of change matters?
- Who monitors it?
- Who needs to know?
- What decision might it trigger?

Then turn meaningful signals into hypotheses.

A signal tells you **what** is happening. A hypothesis makes your belief about **why** it is happening visible and testable.

2. Build a portfolio of experiments around important growth questions

Do not treat experimentation as a collection of isolated campaign optimizations.

Connect experiments to the organization's most important growth assumptions and prioritize them by potential value and uncertainty.

Ask:

What do we most need to learn about our customers, products, inventory, markets or channels?

Then run the smallest credible test that can improve the decision.

The goal is not more experiments.

It is better evidence about what matters most.

3. Shorten decision cycles and move resources with the evidence

Create regular opportunities to review evidence and rebalance the growth portfolio.

Protect long-term investments that need time. Maintain funding for exploration. Scale what the evidence supports. Repair or stop activity that no longer creates enough value.

Most importantly, clarify who has authority to act.

If a useful customer, inventory, or channel insight still requires months of approvals before campaigns, promotions or support can change, faster technology has not created a faster growth system.

Then make sure learning travels beyond the original experiment.

Evidence creates commercial value when it changes what the organization does next

PRESSURE TEST

PRESSURE TEST YOUR CONTINUOUS GROWTH LOOP

Choose one current growth assumption, problem or investment and move it through the continuous growth loop.

Step	Question	Your answer	Owner	Decision date
Signal	What customer, market or performance change are we responding to?			
Hypothesis	What do we believe is causing it?			
Experiment	What is the smallest useful test we can run?			
Evidence	What result would support or disprove the hypothesis?			
Decision	Will we scale, adapt, test again or stop?			
Scale	Where else should the learning be applied?			

Then ask:

1. Have we made the assumption visible and testable?

Can the team clearly state what it believes and what evidence would prove or disprove it?

2. Can we act when the evidence changes?

Is there a clear decision owner with authority to change activity or move resources within days or weeks?

3. What are we willing to stop?

Which investment continues primarily because it was included in the plan rather than because current evidence still supports it?

THE NEW RULE

Stop treating the annual plan as a promise.

Build a growth system that learns and adapts all year.

Are You Ready to Unlock the New Rules For Growth?

The biggest risk heading into 2027 isn't that automotive aftermarket marketers are doing the wrong things. It's that they are doing the right things for a customer and channel journey that no longer exists.

Products and services are now discovered across retailers, marketplaces, search, video, automotive communities and AI. Consumers, installers and fleets can complete more research independently. Multiple stakeholders and channel partners influence which products, suppliers and service providers are considered, recommended and chosen.

Yet many automotive organizations are still planning around a simpler model. They focus on owned channels while discovery happens elsewhere. They create product and service content without connecting it to the full customer journey. They capture existing demand without doing enough to educate the future market. They measure channel activity without seeing how brand, manufacturers, distributors, retailers, installers and service providers work together.

The eight shifts in this guide point to one conclusion:

The advantage will go to organizations that recognize what has changed, identify what matters most to their growth and move before their competitors do.

Your Next Move

You don't need eight new initiatives.

You need to know **which shifts matter most to your growth and where to move first.**

Start with three questions:

1. Which shift is already having the greatest impact on our growth?
2. Where are our current assumptions, capabilities or investments furthest behind the new reality?
3. What is the one move we could make now that would put us in a stronger position for 2027?

The rules have changed. The question now is how quickly your growth model changes with them.

Pressure-Test Your Marketing for 2027

Knowing the rules have changed is one thing. Knowing where your marketing is keeping pace, where gaps are emerging and where the greatest opportunities lie is another.

That's what a Jan Kelley Marketing Audit is designed to uncover.

We'll review your current marketing against the eight New Rules of Growth and identify:

- Where your current approach may be out of step with changing buyer behaviour
- Where gaps may be limiting your ability to build trust, create demand and drive growth
- Where your marketing investment could be working harder
- The priority opportunities to strengthen your marketing heading into 2027

Start with a Marketing Audit from Jan Kelley.

Find out where your growth model needs to change before the market decides for you.

