

The State of Marketing Attribution 2026

Building the Marketing Control Tower

A Research Report by
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Part I: The Shifting State of Attribution

Introduction

Marketing attribution did not deliver on its promise. The promise was to show how **marketing attributes** to company outcomes and the bottom line.

The promise itself was not false. It aimed to address one of marketing's biggest pains. But the language was off. Attribution spoke *conversion*. The board speaks *revenue*. It was like asking for directions in Italy in Chinese. Good luck.

And so, in every round of budget cuts over the past decades, marketing was first in line. An easy target, because missed opportunities do not show up on the balance sheet. The board only needed to ensure they were safe until the next investor review.

We could say: ignorance is bliss.

But the board will never know how much value was left uncaptured. How many unpursued opportunities were killed, how much potential revenue was missed, how much unrealized market share growth slipped away, and how many new profitable customer experiences were never delivered?

We can only imagine the magnitude.

Meanwhile, marketing has not gotten easier. Attribution has not gotten easier. There is more data. More models. More technology. More channels. More touchpoints. More media. And now generative AI produces endless dashboards and instant reports.

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We built the case for attribution because we kept getting the same question: what impact is marketing actually having?

Charlotte Franco

If there is one word to describe the current state of marketing, it is *fragmentation*. But that is just a polite way of saying what often feels like a total loss of control. Feel free to call it *anarchy*.

Time to throw in the towel for marketing attribution, you ask?

Not so fast.

After interviewing successful companies in 2026 about how they apply attribution in today's reality (AI madness, really), we began to see something different. In the right hands, attribution does not function as mere conversion tracking or dashboard dazzle. **It operates as connective tissue.** It aligns teams around a shared understanding of the customer. It informs decisions that drive real revenue. These companies are aligned. Their boards are listening.

What stunned us was that in an era where AI generates insights instantly and at scale, disciplined attribution is not becoming less relevant. It is becoming essential. The secret these companies revealed could not be more timely.

So perhaps we should start this introduction all over again. Because if we are honest, the current opening sentence is far from ideal to begin a report on *The State of Marketing Attribution*.

So, here we go. Take two.

Introduction, Revisited

This may be one of those rare moments in history when a marketing capability matures precisely because complexity forces it to do so. When everything seems to fall apart, something new becomes possible. Like a force of nature, it has to.

Let us explain.

Nothing appears to be holding marketing efforts together anymore. Fragmentation has made them feel uncontrollable. But control was always an illusion. Total control over all marketing activities has always been the goal, never the reality. It was like trying to nail jelly to the wall.

What we see successful companies do instead is very different. They do not attempt to control everything. They focus on controlling what matters. They track what truly contributes to the bottom line. Not dogmatically, but pragmatically. They use insights where they are reliable, and judgment where they are not. This is how they learn. This is how they drive results. For them, attribution becomes a shared vocabulary and mindset to align and scale the efforts that matter most to the customer and the company.

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There's a big mindset shift required; we had to coach people that attribution and influence tell different stories.

Charlotte Franco

So, what makes this moment rare and different is that two historical forces are converging.

First, the technological shift. Generative AI adds the missing reasoning layer. It makes insights instant and abundant. But insights require context. The scarce skill is no longer plumbing data, but shaping context. The modern marketing technologist becomes a **context engineer**.

Second, the organizational shift. As marketing efforts increasingly auto-optimize, the human is not removed from the loop but elevated above it. Roles move upward: from plumber to choreographer, from operator to moderator, from campaign manager to **value engineer**.

Together, these forces redefine attribution. It evolves into the connective tissue of the AI-powered, revenue-driven organization. This is the shifting state of marketing attribution.

The Technological Shift: Context Engineering

For more than two decades, marketing technology was built on deterministic, rule-based logic. Systems executed rules, stored data, and generated dashboards. Visibility improved, but interpretation lagged. We accumulated data faster than we could turn it into actionable insights, let alone decisions or revenue.

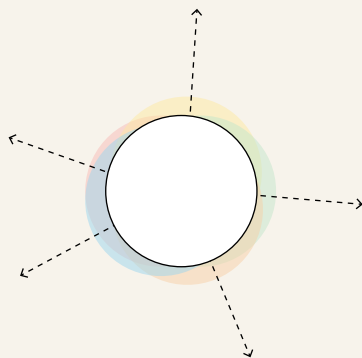
Artificial intelligence turns out to be a structural break. It does not replace rules-based software; it adds a reasoning layer on top. Deterministic systems still structure data and track interactions. But now AI interprets patterns, surfaces probabilities, and highlights trade-offs. **It turns information into context.**

Context is what modern marketing has been missing.

In a fragmented ecosystem of channels, touchpoints, and platforms, AI makes probabilistic sense of complexity. But it still requires structure and a common language. Attribution provides that structure. It organizes signals into a narrative and direction.

The vector diagram illustrates why coordination matters. When teams push in different directions, energy cancels out. A lot of motion. No action. When vectors align, impact compounds. Focused motion. Real action.

When teams are misaligned and uncoordinated, the energy of their work reduces their net impact



Teams with a coordinating mechanism can align their "vectors" for additive impact, moving in the same direction

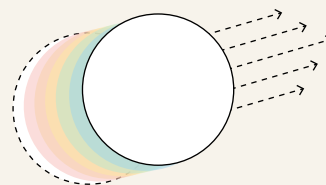


Figure 1. The vector alignment principle.
Concept credit: Elon Musk and Dharmesh Shah.

In this sense, attribution becomes the contextual operating layer of the AI-powered GTM organization, enabling technology to move from reporting activity to guiding action.

The Organizational Shift: Value Engineering

Artificial intelligence is not just changing technology. It is changing the marketing profession itself. Generative AI is quietly reshaping the roles of marketing and marketing operations within organizations.

For years, insights were scarce. Data was abundant. The dominant skills were campaign optimization, data cleansing, system integration, and reporting. Operators and system admins kept the machinery running.

That era is ending.

What happens when insights are no longer scarce? When dashboards generate themselves? When workflows self-adjust? The human is not removed from the loop, but elevated above it. Space is created to upskill. Marketers no longer manage campaigns. They engineer business cases based on signal interpretation. The real shift is not campaign automation. It is human judgment moving up the stack.

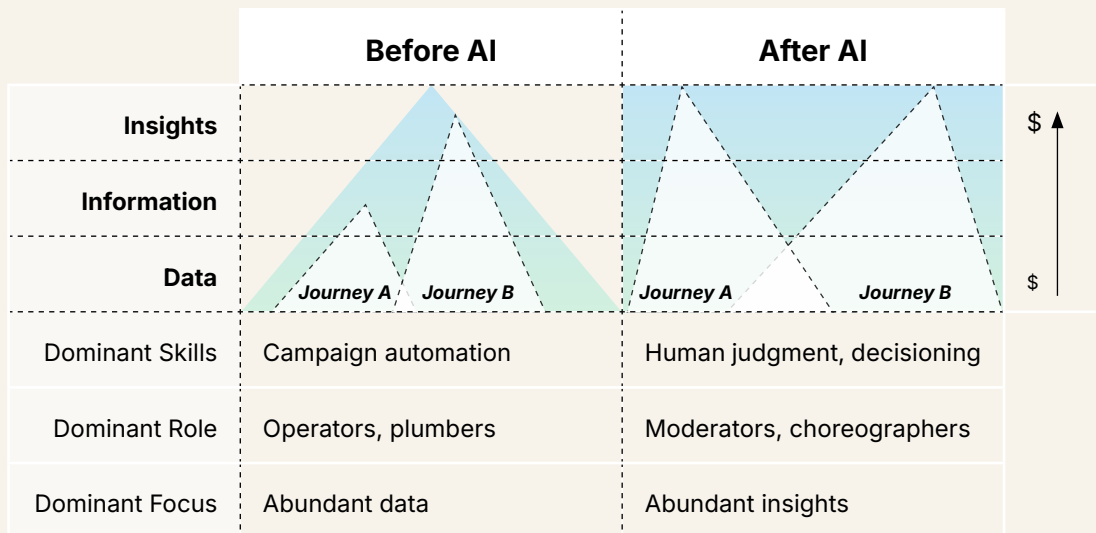


Figure 2. How AI shifts the dominant skills, roles and focus of marketing teams.

Without the plumbing burden, marketers can focus on engineering value for the customer and the company. They transform customer data into information, and information into decisions that move revenue.

Instead of optimizing campaigns, Value Engineering reverse-engineers revenue. The notion is simple: every customer is proven revenue, and every customer was once a lead.

Revenue forensics starts with asking three questions.

1. Who are our most profitable customers?
2. What do they buy most?
3. Where are the corresponding margins?

Nine out of ten marketers are not able to answer these three questions on the spot. Our interviewees could. Rather than spreading efforts evenly across channels, they identified the few profitable journeys and detected those signals that disproportionately drive impact. From there, focused optimization compounds.

In such an environment, attribution becomes a mechanism of alignment. Not a reporting tool, but a coordination system that aligns people, decisions, and capital around where value compounds.

Navigating meaningful insights is the new skill. It requires mastering three mindsets.

- **Data** needs **analysis** and **rigor**.
- **Information** demands **storytelling** and **empathy**.
- **Insight** requires **alignment** and the **courage** to make decisions.

Three Complementary Mindsets

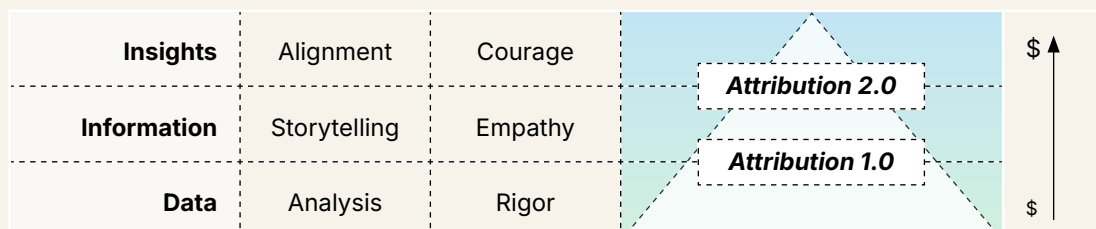


Figure 3. The three mindsets required to navigate Attribution 2.0.

Before AI, competitive advantage lay in data access and integration. After AI, it lies in decision quality. The competitive advantage no longer lies in collecting more data. It lies in knowing when to shift mindset, from *rigor* to *empathy* to *courage*. When insights stop being scarce, human judgment becomes the differentiator.

Attribution 2.0 combines deterministic systems with probabilistic AI, guided by human judgment. It does not chase a single truth. It relies on a shared language. It operates like a control tower. Different teams and systems may have their own cockpit dashboards, but they align on the same navigational signals.

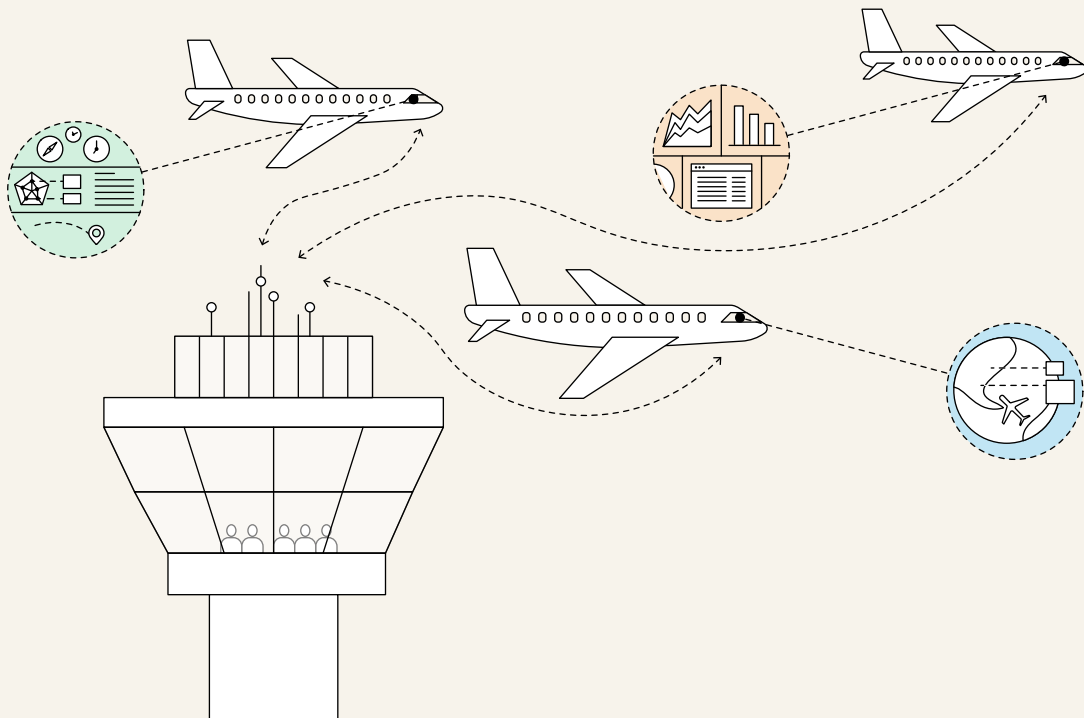


Figure 4. Attribution 2.0 as a control tower coordinating different teams.

The value of modern attribution lies not in precision, but in coordinated action under uncertainty. It is better to be approximately right than precisely wrong. That is the discipline required to operate in the AI Age.

That is the real shift.

Part II: What Actually Works in Practice

So what does this look like in the real world? Across the companies we studied, attribution did not evolve through theory. It evolved through practice. Not by debating models, but by redesigning outcomes, reshaping organizations, and rebuilding the architecture that supports them.

Three shifts consistently separated the mature from the stuck.

1. What changes? **The outcomes**
2. Who changes? **The organization**
3. What enables it? **The architecture**

Let's unpack each.

The Outcomes: From Reporting to Revenue

The Focus Shift: Value over Credit

In the companies we studied, the most important shift was not a new attribution model. It was a change in what attribution is for. They moved away from attribution as a scoreboard and toward attribution as a value lens. Less "who gets credit?" and more "which efforts are actually driving revenue?" Not "what should it say?", but "what does it say?".

The goal becomes clarity about what is working, where it is working, and what to stop doing. This replaces "the

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 **Altana**

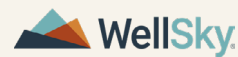
You shouldn't use one attribution model for everything; it depends on the question you're trying to answer.

Aidan McGrath

way we've always done it" habits and strengthens the ability to think critically about the insights revealed, rather than relying on simplistic single-touch or last-touch conclusions.

The shift begins with what attribution is explicitly not used for. High-performing teams avoid credit fights and do not chase a single "true" model. They see that as a dead end, because it encourages internal competition rather than customer outcomes. Instead, attribution is framed as a shared way to understand contribution across journeys, a neutral data layer for cross-team conversations.

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We needed an attribution layer to make more well-rounded decisions with our limited budget.

Shannon Pike

In flat or shrinking budget environments, the incentives would naturally drift toward a "Hunger Games" dynamic, where each team defends its own slice. But successful companies use attribution to change the framing. Instead of fighting over percentage share, teams gain visibility into which journeys actually grow the overall pie.

Without a shared understanding of contribution, organizations optimize locally. With it, they optimize economically. Attribution is therefore used to justify spend with defensible reasoning, reduce friction between marketing and sales, and align leadership around common revenue signals.

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Checkmarx

It's not about fighting over credit, it's about where marketing is most effective and how to do more of that.

Brooke Bartos

In other words, the output of attribution is not a ranking of channels. The output is alignment of efforts around the customer, across teams. It is a disciplined way to keep attention on revenue contribution, not internal credit.

That is the focus shift: value over credit.

The Decision Shift: Proactive over Reactive

In our research, attribution reshaped how decisions are made. Before, decisions were often reactive. Teams leaned on last-touch reports, primary campaign source, Google Analytics, CRM dashboards, and stitched spreadsheets. This created siloed views and inconsistent definitions of success. Decisions defaulted to habit, politics, or whichever channel had the easiest reporting, not necessarily the strongest contribution.

In the organizations doing this well, attribution is used as directional decision support. It is applied contextually: different models for different questions, without forcing everything into a single ROI lens. That changes the nature of planning and optimization. Instead of debating whether an activity “worked” in isolation, teams discuss patterns across journeys and what to double down on, or stop investing in.

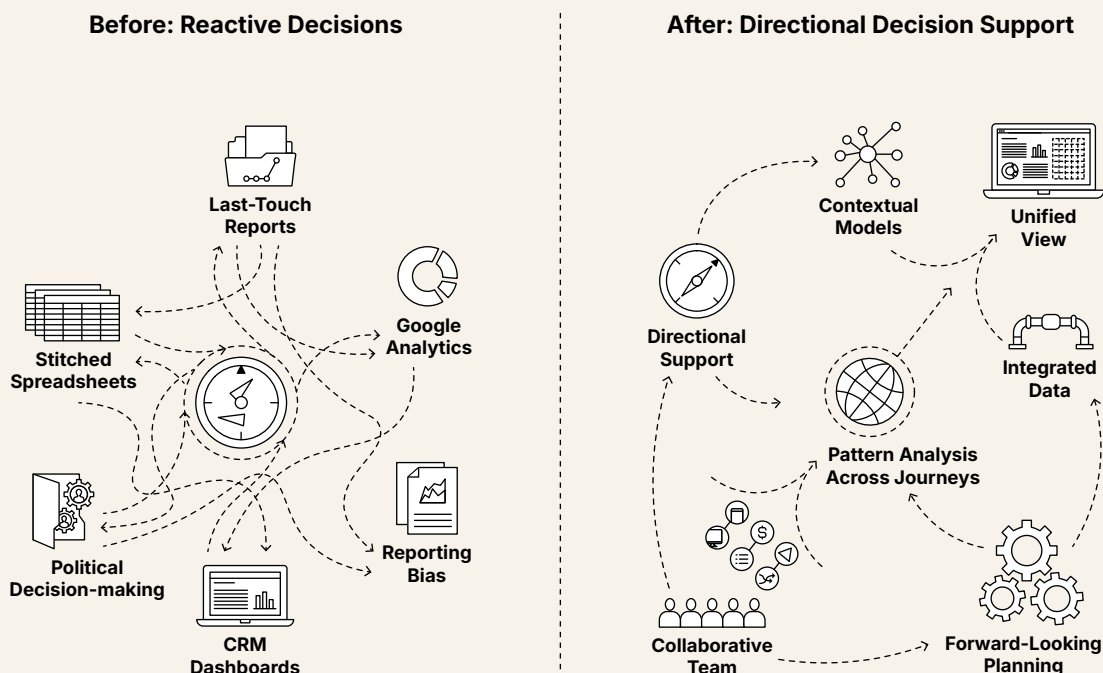


Figure 5. From reactive reporting to directional decision support.

Practically, this shows up in recurring decision cycles: channel mix adjustments, event selection and sponsorship choices, mid-quarter budget reallocations,

pipeline prioritization, and funnel optimization. Leaders and strategy teams often have direct access to attribution views, while broader teams receive curated narratives or summaries. Adoption typically starts with concrete use cases, not theory.

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One-size-fits-all measurement doesn't work as marketing programs diversify.

Tyler Chapin

The shift is clear: attribution turns marketing from “reporting what happened” into “choosing what really worked”, grounded in a shared and defensible basis for trade-offs.

Outcomes Shifts	Attribution 1.0	Attribution 2.0
Model	Single-touch	Multi-touch
Journey Truth	Single interpretation	Contextual interpretation
View	Campaign-centric	Customer Journey-centric
Analysis	Isolated standard reports	Lifecycle revenue
Definition	Different truths	Shared language
Focus	Activity outputs	Revenue outcomes
Timing	Reactive	Directional
Decision	Tactical optimization	Strategic coordination
Purpose	Scorekeeping	Decision support
Output	Dashboarding	Journey modeling

Figure 6. How attribution outcomes shift from activity tracking to revenue decision-making.

The Organization: Value Engineering as the Operating Model

The Alignment Shift: Alignment over Automated Decisions

Across the organizations we studied, attribution maturity was not driven by more sophisticated models. It was driven by team alignment.

The most mature teams added another discipline: they followed the money. Instead of optimizing for coverage across channels, they identified which segments, journeys, and triggers generated disproportionate revenue. Value engineering begins where revenue concentrates, not where activity accumulates.

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 **Altana**

Multi-touch removes the 'you versus me' between teams.

Aidan McGrath

Model selection depends on the decision at hand. A first-touch view may inform acquisition strategy, while a multi-touch model helps evaluate nurture performance. Scenario testing is common. ROI guardrails are explicit. Definitions are sharpened. Models are challenged, not blindly trusted. Leaders treat attribution outputs as structured inputs to discussion.

In high-performing teams, attribution is not automated. It is orchestrated. Education and expectation management across the organization are ongoing. Teams are coached not only on how to use attribution, but when not to rely on it. Attribution scales only when designed for alignment, not automation. Humans interpret. Humans challenge. Humans decide what matters.

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 **Superside**

If we want to optimize campaigns and scale, we have to fix attribution first; it's the foundation for better decisions.

Cassandra Gill

In this model, the human role evolves from attribution model user to model interpreter and informed challenger, within shared definitions and agreed guardrails. Uncertainty is not eliminated. It is orchestrated deliberately. Attribution, like AI, works best when judgment moves up the stack.

What surprised many teams was how concentrated the impact truly was. In most profitable journeys, fewer triggers mattered than expected, often three to five decisive moments per segment. Value engineering is not about managing every touchpoint. It is about identifying and strengthening the few that move revenue. It is about separating noise from signal and identifying the few moments of truth that truly move the revenue needle, amplifying those that convert and fixing those that create friction.

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If you've got one goal, revenue, then aligning resources behind that is what moves you forward.

Brooke Bartos

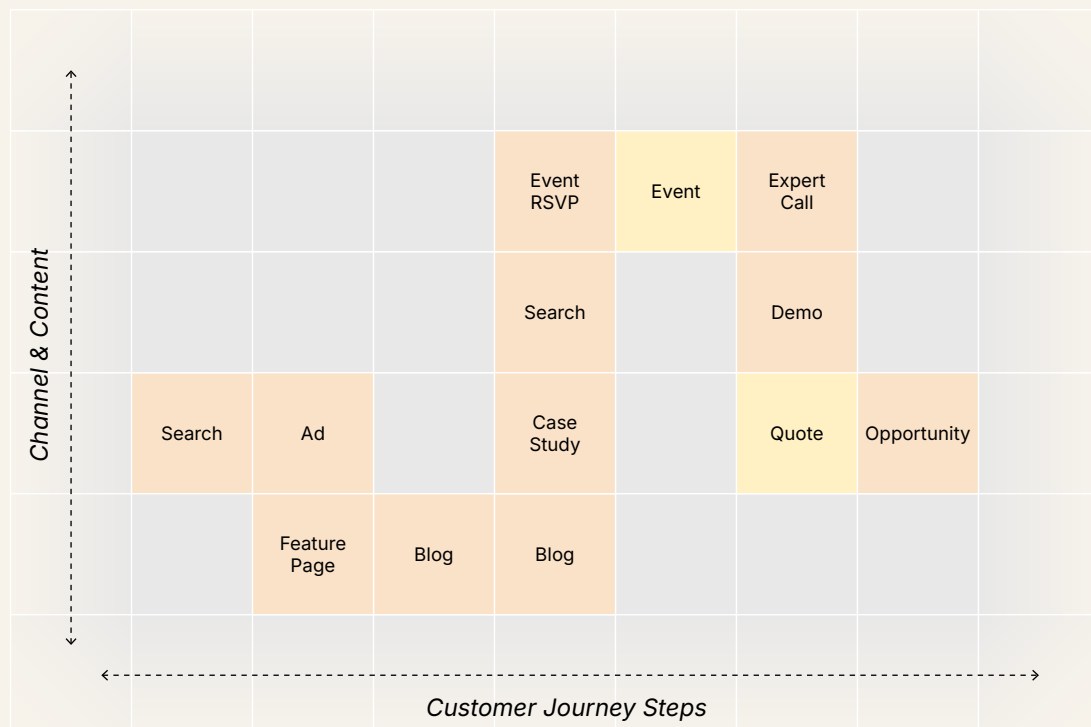


Figure 7. Identifying the high-impact touchpoints across the customer journey.

The Capability Shift: Capability over Automation

If alignment is the condition, capability is the enabler. The companies that applied attribution effectively invested less in model complexity and more in organizational competence. The pattern was consistent: skills mattered more than sophistication.

Critical capabilities included:

- Data literacy, understanding what data can and cannot say
- Storytelling with data, turning analysis into decisions
- Campaign and metadata discipline, consistent taxonomy and tagging

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Marketing has an opportunity to be attribution experts, so the rest of the business doesn't have to learn an entirely new discipline.

Shannon Pike

Data alone does not maximize value. Informed decisions do. High-performing teams operationalized value engineering in three stages:

1. **Data.** What exists? Where does revenue originate? What signals are missing?
2. **Information.** What story explains growth? Which route has the highest economic leverage?
3. **Insight.** What decision changes? What investment shifts? What is the business case?

Organizational patterns reinforce this capability shift. Marketing operations often functions as the center of excellence. Self-service is encouraged and widely available, but always guided by guardrails. Shared terminology is deliberately defined and continuously refined. Metric ownership is clarified. Field definitions and taxonomy are documented.

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Being able to tell the story with the data is one of the biggest skill sets needed.

Alicia Olson

Without this discipline, even advanced attribution models degrade into confusion. Teams are coached not only on how to use attribution but also on when *not* to rely on it, for example, when signal integrity is weak or definitions are misaligned. Attribution maturity is treated as a journey, not a rollout.

Our research made one thing clear: attribution maturity mirrors process maturity. It correlates more strongly with cross-functional alignment than with tooling investments. The capability shift is therefore foundational.

Organizational Shifts	Attribution 1.0	Attribution 2.0
Usage	Marketing	Cross-functional (owned by MOps/RevOps)
Human Role	Model user	Model interpreter/challenger
Model Logic	One model	Decision-dependent models
Company Truth	One answer	Agreed models per case
Guardrails	Implicit	Explicit ROI guardrails
Success Mode	False precision	Managed uncertainty
Capability Focus	Tools & dashboards	Skills & discipline
Maturity Driver	Software implementation	Strategic & process alignment

Figure 8. Organizational shifts required to move from Attribution 1.0 to 2.0.

The Architecture: Context Engineering as the Operating Foundation

The Data Shift: Data Depth over Data Debt

Across the companies we studied, attribution maturity did not correlate with having more data. It correlated with identifying and applying usable data.

The foundation was consistent: marketing automation systems (Marketo, HubSpot, etc.), CRM platforms (Salesforce, MS Dynamics, etc.), campaign responses, and opportunity data. But the differentiator was not tool selection. It was data discipline.

High-performing teams prioritized:

- Clean and consistent campaign metadata
- Reliable UTM governance
- Clear account-contact relationships
- Shared field definitions across teams

Being realistic about data constraints is essential. Data is never complete. Journeys are only partially observable. Signals are fragmented across channels and offline touchpoints. One theme surfaced repeatedly: "Don't wait for perfect data, but don't ignore data hygiene."

The common pitfalls were familiar: legacy data debt, third-party "black box" reporting, and inconsistent regional definitions. These issues did not disappear with better models. Attribution 2.0 accepts this probabilistic reality rather than assuming perfect observability. And in that reality, generative AI becomes a powerful companion.

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Bad data or lack of data will cripple you, especially if you want to leverage AI.

Brooke Bartos

The data shift is therefore not about accumulation. It is about signal quality over signal volume. Attribution scales when organizations treat data governance as an operating discipline, not a one-time cleanup project.

Data Shifts	Attribution 1.0	Attribution 2.0
Inputs	Digital touch data	Multi-signal, cross-channel, sales & offline
Data Assumption	Complete, observable	Fragmented, probabilistic
Governance	Implicit tagging	Structured metadata discipline
Data Quality Focus	Volume	Signal integrity
Data Risk	Overconfidence	Managed risk

Figure 9. How data practices shift from assumed completeness to structured signal discipline.

The Technological Shift: Intelligent Translation over End-to-End Integration

The architectural diagrams of the technology stacks we observed were surprisingly consistent. Marketing automation feeds CRM. CRM feeds the attribution platform. Attribution outputs feed BI tools such as Power BI or Sisense. In more mature setups, data warehouses like Snowflake and ETL tools are layered in.

Yet the most successful organizations did not obsess over full-stack centralization. They treated attribution as a translation layer, widely accessible and used across the organization.

It did not replace BI. It did not attempt to centralize every data source into a

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The number one request from my CMO was more visibility into what marketing is doing; Salesforce reporting wasn't doing it.

Brooke Bartos

single universal truth. Instead, attribution acted as a semantic bridge between raw activity data and executive dashboards. Attribution succeeds when it sits between systems and decisions, not when it attempts to own the entire data infrastructure.

In the martech architecture, it helps to distinguish between systems of truth and systems of context. CRM and financial systems remain the canonical sources of revenue truth. Attribution does not compete with these systems or overwrite their records. It contextualizes them. It translates validated revenue events into decision-specific meaning for marketing and go-to-market leaders.

This is where the control tower metaphor becomes practical. Individual teams operate their cockpit dashboards. Attribution aligns navigational signals. It connects marketing activity to revenue outcomes without dismantling existing systems.

The architectural shift is subtle, but strategic: less emphasis on building the perfect stack. More emphasis on translating complexity into action. Context engineering, in this sense, is not about completeness. It is about coherence.

Technological Shifts	Attribution 1.0	Attribution 2.0
Models	Predefined, generic	Journey-specific, contextual
Modeling	Rule-based, deterministic	Probabilistic, AI-assisted
Focus	Data & reporting	Actionable insight
Architectural Role	Reporting layer	Intelligence/translation layer
Stack Philosophy	Centralize truth	Translate complexity

Figure 10. The architectural shift from centralized reporting to intelligent translation.

Part III: Cash over Coverage, according to the Experts

Across the interviews, one theme surfaced repeatedly: attribution maturity is not about model sophistication. It is about economic clarity across the organization.

Many organizations optimize attribution, data, and architecture for coverage. They track every channel, instrument every touchpoint, and manage their stack for completeness. That is operational logic.

But high-performing teams operate under economic logic.

They recognize that revenue rarely distributes evenly. A minority of journeys, segments, and motions drive the majority of impact.

Attribution is not used to measure everything equally. It is used to identify where value compounds.

This is where the learning system mindset matters.

Experts described running multiple models in parallel, matching models to decisions, and treating outputs as structured inputs into the discussion. AI proposes patterns. Humans validate relevance. Uncertainty is accepted, but disciplined.

Attribution only scales when people stay in the loop. The shift is not from analytics to automation. It is from stack management to value engineering.

The underlying lessons were consistent:

- Design attribution for decisions, not dashboards.
- Accept uncertainty, but demand rigor.

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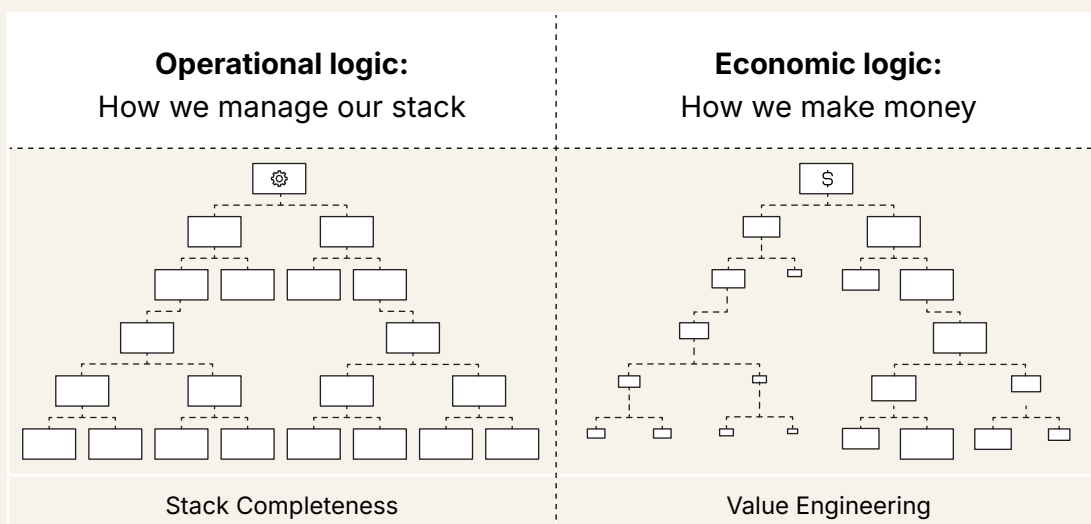
Attribution is meant to inform our mix of tactics and provide real ROI visibility for finance.

Tyler Chapin

- Invest in shared definitions and governance.
- Optimize for cash, not coverage.

Coverage feels comprehensive, but it can be deceptive. Cash reflects impact. That speaks to the boardroom.

Do you optimize for coverage or cash?



80% of revenue comes from a 20% set of journeys, data and tools

Figure 11. Operational logic optimizes for stack completeness. Economic logic optimizes for where revenue compounds.

Organizations that understand this difference treat attribution not as a reporting tool, but as an economic prioritization discipline. That is what moves attribution from measurement to momentum.

Are you ready to face your board and ask for more budget, and stop missing the opportunities that truly matter?

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Superside

We generated 30% more enterprise opportunities at 31% lower cost per opportunity.

Cassandra Gill



The Era of the Savvy Translator is Here:

Marketing has always been about understanding people—what moves them, what motivates them, and what makes them act. Today, that understanding still begins with intuition and a deep connection to the human experience. But with the added lens of deterministic AI and structured data, we have the opportunity to be even savvier. And the more savvy we are, the more strategic we become - and the more value we bring to our organizations.

The marketing leaders who thrive in this next era are more than creative thinkers or tech adopters. They are data-savvy **translators**—weaving together art and analytics, human insight and machine intelligence, storytelling and science.

With all the exponential change in B2B marketing that is here to stay from now on, one thing will never change: **our ability to adapt.**

The next phase in B2B marketing belongs to marketers who connect the dots across people, platforms, and performance—and who lead with both empathy and evidence.

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