

2026

PREDICTIONS

B2C Marketing, CX, & Digital

THE RACE TO TRUST AND VALUE

In 2026, organizations will face a reckoning. The AI hype bubble will deflate, exposing fragmented vendor ecosystems and growing consumer skepticism. CX fatigue will deepen as expectations rise and tolerance for surface-level efforts fades. Leaders will shift from optics to outcomes, embracing evidence-based decision-making and operational discipline.

This year's predictions reveal why trust and value must become the guiding beacons for B2C marketing, CX, and digital teams. Consumers in much of the world will increasingly choose offline brand experiences that feel more authentic and emotionally resonant. Legal action tied to AI-driven privacy breaches will surge, forcing brands to confront the consequences of misused data.

The message underlying our predictions is clear: Disconnected strategies and performative personalization will no longer earn loyalty. To succeed, leaders must prioritize transparency, relevance, and measurable impact. Those who deliver real value and earn trust in the process will pull ahead in a landscape shaped by scrutiny, substance, and strategic clarity.

PREDICTION

Advertisers will cut display ad budgets by 30% as consumers leave the open web.

As consumer usage of generative AI platforms grows, click-through rates will decline, shrinking addressable audiences on the open web — and the amount that advertisers spend to reach them with display formats (both static and outstream video). Instead, some of those ad dollars will shift to genAI platforms with the emergence of new, personalized, and interactive formats, such as Microsoft Advertising’s Showroom ads. The rest will supplement already growing budgets for entertainment-driven platforms like CTV, streaming audio, and social video, where consumption of content is less likely to be mediated or supplanted by genAI. Use consumer insights to ensure that your channel and platform mix evolves alongside consumer media diets to reflect where your target audience spends its time.



PREDICTION

AI-driven privacy breaches will lead to a 20% surge in class-action lawsuits.

A convergence of forces — growing privacy awareness, regulation, data breaches, and AI — will drive a spike in US consumer class-action lawsuits. As privacy concerns continue to dog the AI industry, consumers and law firms will expand their focus from tracking pixels to AI applications and the companies that use them. Privacy class-action lawsuits primarily drew from wiretapping laws in recent years, but the proliferation of AI is bringing security breaches and privacy violations with it. While some lawsuits may seem frivolous or far-fetched, they'll tap company resources and erode trust all the same. Marketers must stay on the right side of consumer expectations and join their organization's privacy team to proactively build positive, beneficial relationships now, rather than being forced to work together in the face of a lawsuit.



PREDICTION

A third of consumers will opt for offline (over online) brand experiences.

Forrester's 2025 data shows that 52% of US online adults actively pursue in-person, tactile experiences — making up for lost time (even five years later) after secluded pandemic lockdowns. According to Forrester's Consumer Pulse Surveys, agreement with "I plan on doing more in-person shopping in general" during the winter holiday shopping season is up seven percentage points in 2025 versus 2023 in the US. This share of in-person shoppers is comparable internationally and even higher in markets such as Hong Kong and Australia. And brands are betting big on in-person experiences, too: Starbucks plans to phase out its drive-through and mobile-only stores in 2026, TikTok is adding a feature that enables college students to meet up, and Coach will launch 20-plus Coach Coffee Shops globally — all in service of IRL connections. No, digital experiences aren't going away, but consumers will choose to disconnect online to connect offline. In 2026, marketers should reconcile their budgets to bolster offline consumer interactions, as in-person experiences present stickier impressions that you can't easily scroll past or swipe away.



PREDICTION

Two-thirds of CX teams will abandon journey mapping due to a self-inflicted stigma.

CX teams have spent years defaulting to journey mapping, but stakeholders are dismissive. Managing journeys — customers' paths to goals — is certainly valuable, as companies such as Nedbank and Nissan have shown. Yet most CX teams don't manage journeys — they only map journeys. What's worse, only 30% of CX decision-makers say that their CX teams have the skills to create high-quality maps and most journey owners are on CX teams instead of in business units or teams, so maps remain disconnected from business decision-making tools and processes. CX teams can overcome journey mapping's stigma with journey management that solves real business problems in customer-focused ways. Start by building a strawman journey atlas and prioritizing lighthouse journeys. Blend ad hoc and permanent journey teams to drive continuous improvement and create a central budget to fund break/fix activities and some breakthrough improvements.



PREDICTION

Five major brands will unify agentic commerce experiences.

Unification is a perennial problem in commerce tech, forcing vendors to now rethink how they're building and connecting the vital pieces of their ecosystem. As for brands, Nestlé is already developing its own conversational AI platform to combine shopping, promotions, and customer service in a single conversational experience, as it didn't see vendors combining processes with ready-to-use components. A handful of powerhouse brands with similar resources and wherewithal will follow suit. The big struggle for brands in 2026 is interoperability as vendors launch isolated conversational agents that only pull from the data that each vendor houses. Even model context protocol (MCP) servers that unify agents and data are still served separately by each vendor.

These siloed genAI tools will create disjointed experiences for customers. For most of the market, custom development like this isn't possible. Watch for standalone platforms to emerge and stabilize. In the meantime, smooth out customer experiences with handoffs between agents that are as seamless as possible and test agentic/conversational apps for positive experiences.



PREDICTION

A dentsu or WPP acquisition will spawn a dozen agency reviews.

Omnicom's acquisition of IPG is the first shoe to drop. 2026 will see another blockbuster holding company deal. We predict that Havas will acquire dentsu's international operations. The Tokyo-based company secured M&A partners to identify potential buyers. "Havas is one of the most acquisitive groups in the industry: between five and 10 acquisitions every year constantly for the past 10 years," said CEO Yannick Bolloré. A second scenario is that WPP restructures to ready itself for a sale to private equity or Accenture. Either scenario will push marketers to review assignments in three- and five-year contracts; 85% of US B2C marketing executives plan to review their media agencies in 2026. Six major brands reviewed media assignments in 2021, and 20 did so in 2023. CMOs considering an agency review in 2026 can start by identifying the agency operating model that best meets their priorities and budgets.



ACTIVATE OUR PREDICTIONS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Forrester analysts predict changes for 2026 that will challenge assumptions and create new opportunities. Take the next step to explore the full impact of these predictions and uncover strategies to build trust, deliver value, and drive measurable growth.

2026 B2C Marketing, CX, & Digital Predictions Webinar

On **January 21, 2026**, we'll unpack the trends shaping the year ahead — from AI's shifting role to evolving consumer expectations — and share actionable guidance to help you lead with confidence. If you can't attend live, catch the on-demand version anytime.

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