

# GET READY FOR '26: **MARKETING** **STRATEGY** **PLAYBOOK**

Read the comprehensive marketing strategy playbook to grow and scale your business. **Built for CEO's, Founders and Marketing leaders in-mind.**

# #1 WHY STRATEGY MATTERS

*“Strategy is about making choices, trade-offs, it’s about deliberately choosing to be different.”*

– Roger Martin

## 2026 will reward clarity, not complexity.

Going into 2026 without a clear strategy is like setting sail without a compass, you might move, but not necessarily in the right direction.

In a landscape where tools, AI, and platforms change weekly, strategy is your constant. It’s how you decide *where to play* and *where to win*.

The businesses that grow won’t be the ones doing *more*, but the ones choosing *better*, making clear calls about what to stop chasing, and where to focus.

According to the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM 2025), **62% of UK SMEs plan to refresh their marketing strategy before the end of Q1 2026, but only 1 in 3 have a clear framework for how to do it.**

### Mini exercise

List three things your business is doing today that may not serve your 2026 goals.

## #2 TAKE STOCK OF 2025

Encourage reflection, not just reporting. Before you plan for 2026, look back with purpose. Don't just analyse performance... interpret it. The goal isn't to gather every metric, it's to spot the patterns that reveal what's genuinely driving trust and performance.

### Look for:

01

A mix of quantitative (CRM, analytics, sales) and qualitative (customer reviews, interviews) insights

02

Trends over time, not one-off spikes

03

"Trust signals": reviews, testimonials, brand mentions, and AI citations that prove authority

### The 4 Pillars of a Known and Trusted Brand (Endless Customers)

**Say**

What you claim

**Show**

What you prove

**Sell**

How you make it easy to buy

**Be**

More human than competitors



#### Mini exercise

What built trust this year? What didn't?

## #3 MEASURE PERFORMANCE AGAINST YOUR 2025 GOALS

"The essence of strategy is choosing what not to do"

– Michael Porter

Activity means little without progress. Now's the time to get honest about what drove growth and what didn't. **Focus your 2026 energy on turning ambers green.** Don't waste time optimising what's already working.

### Ask yourself:

- Which channels brought the most *trust-based* leads, not just traffic?
- Where did sales and marketing *align* (or drift apart)?
- Did your content and messaging answer *real buyer questions* (inside-out messaging, *Endless Customers*)?

### Mini exercise

Create a three-column scorecard:

Working/ Needs work/ Stop doing

## #4 UNDERSTAND HOW THE LANDSCAPES CHANGED

**Your goal isn't just to *rank* anymore, it's to be *referenced*.**

The rules of visibility have changed. Buyers now discover, research and shortlist businesses *before you even know they exist*.

In 2026, buyers are getting answers in AI engines like ChatGPT, Perplexity and Copilot summarise information directly in the search experience. So, your visibility now depends on whether AI recognises your business as trustworthy and relevant.

### Mini AI glossary:

- **AI citation:** When AI tools reference or summarise your business or content within their answers.
- **Trust signals:** Elements (reviews, transparency, tone, authority) that show buyers and AI your brand can be relied on.
- **Entity optimisation:** Structuring your digital footprint (e.g. consistent naming, profiles, schema) so AI can "understand" who you are and what you do.

### The new reality:

#### AI tools

(ChatGPT, Perplexity, Copilot) are replacing traditional google search.

#### 'Zero-click' search

Search means fewer website visits, but more *AI citations*.

#### Brand authority

Brand authority now lives across search, social, and third-party sources

#### 📄 Mini exercise

Ask ChatGPT or Perplexity about your company. Do you appear?

## #5 RE-DEFINE WHAT STRATEGY MEANS

*"Strategy is about making choices, deliberately choosing to be different."*

– Roger Martin

Strategy isn't a document, it's a system. It lives in your decisions, focus and rhythm. **Your 2026 strategy should be built on...**

1

### Clarity

Who you're for, and who you're not for

2

### Focus

Choose the few moves that deliver the biggest return

3

### Customer-first thinking

Trust and transparency as the core advantage (Endless Customers)

4

### Culture

Align sales, marketing and service around one goal, revenue through customer insight

#### Mini exercise

Write your 2026 strategy sentence:

"In 2026, we'll win by \_\_\_\_\_."

## #6 TRENDS SHAPING 2026

Keep this grounded, not speculative:

01

### AI Personalisation

Go beyond tools, consider how AI will reshape customer expectations and buying behaviours.

02

### Search beyond Google

Visibility across AI engines, industry platforms, and digital PR.

03

### Video credibility

Video-first brands build human trust faster (Selling 7 concept).

04

### Community and personal brand:

Leaders need to “show what others aren’t willing to show”, be authentic and discuss the tough topics facing your industry.

05

### Human tone and transparency:

Authenticity becomes the real differentiator.

06

### Optimise

Optimise your website, LinkedIn profile, and email nurture sequences to ensure you have a solid foundation.

### What this means for you?

- *54% of UK consumers now expect AI-enhanced experiences (Ofcom 2025).* Before you invest in tools, clean up your data, personalisation is only as strong as your inputs.
- *Brands using regular video updates see 48% higher engagement (WARC 2025).* Prioritise human-led video that explains, not sells.

## #7 WRITE YOUR 2026 MARKETING PLAN

The businesses that thrive in 2026 will be the ones that choose focus, lead with trust, and adapt faster than the algorithms.

- 1 — **Review 2025 data and lessons**
- 2 — **Clarify your 2026 goals (growth, visibility, efficiency)**
- 3 — **Identify 3 strategic priorities**
- 4 — **Map the resources and skills required**
- 5 — **Set quarterly checkpoints**

## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

We use **The VALUE Builder Method™** to turn this into a simple rhythm, quarterly plans, monthly reviews, and clear metrics tied to trust and visibility.

[Download the free playbook](#)

# GET READY FOR 2026: PLANNING CHECKLIST

## Strategy

- We've defined clear growth goals for 2026
- We know who our ideal customer is, and what they're searching for
- We've decided what *not* to focus on

## Measurement

- We can see where leads come from and which convert
- We have one marketing dashboard linking traffic → leads → revenue
- We review performance monthly and act on what's working

## Trust & Visibility

- We've run our AI Trust Index report and fixed top priority trust gaps
- Our website and content clearly answer buyer questions
- We're building digital authority with reviews, PR and citations

## Team Alignment

- Marketing and sales share one definition of success
- Everyone understands how their role impacts revenue
- We test and learn every month

## Mindset

- We lead with trust, not tactics
- We adapt faster than the algorithms
- We're building visibility that lasts beyond the next campaign

# Need help implementing writing your 2026 Marketing plan?



Schedule a **FREE** marketing audit, to get started.

[Book FREE marketing audit](#)

## Here's a few businesses we've helped grow with the **VALUE Builder Method** driving their lead machine

"WeAreSMC conducted a Marketing Strategy Workshop with us in October 2024, which has **helped bring clarity to the marketing of our business in 2025**. Their approach really helped us get more strategic with our marketing, and shortly after the workshop, we received a marketing strategy and plan that has given us direction for 2025. WeAreSMC has been working with our Marketing Manager to help execute the strategy and plan, **and we're already starting to see early results with our Google search rankings improving and bringing us qualified leads**. We're excited to continue working together as we build a brand that grows with the business."

**Ben Duffy, Director at PKB Civils**

"We have been working with WeAreSMC since the beginning of 2024, **they have helped us with strategy, planning and now generating leads for our business**. They have helped transform our website into one that **frequently generates inbound leads** rather than a static brochure website"

**Gabor Szalay, Founder at Gabor Logistics**