

MARKETING LIVE CONFERENCE RECAP

Cut Costs, Not Corners: Effective Marketing in Lean Times

BY JESSICA SWENSON | MAY 13, 2026



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Don't be afraid to question things you've always done, says Allison Gillespie, VP of marketing for [O'Reilly Media](#). "We as marketers always need to look at that, while also leaving room for experimentation, because everything is changing and the playbooks we've been using for years are not working anymore," she said.

Rapidly changing landscapes in technology and customer behavior are forcing organizations to think creatively about fundamental shifts in their marketing effectiveness. This was the topic of a panel discussion moderated by Workforce Observer founder Subadhra Sriram at [From Day One's Silicon Valley marketing conference](#).

Traditional qualified leads can feel like a marketing-driven initiative without any sales buy-in. That's why Kumarbabu Vanapalli, VP of digital experience & engagement for [Infineon Technologies](#), worked with junior sales reps to co-define valuable leads and experiment with continuous feedback loops and weekly iterations to refine lead targeting. "Our job is to enable salespeople to sell, not tell them which leads they have to go after," he said. This strategy grew Infineon's lead pipeline to over 55,000 per year over the course of three years.

With customer indicators coming from multiple sources, customer voice, leads, socials, marketing now requires an omnichannel approach, says Gillespie. She believes it is crucial to find the right mix of channels and be flexible enough to redirect underperforming initiatives into new opportunities.



Leaders spoke on the executive panel titled, "Effective Marketing in Lean Times: Creative Approaches to Delivering Value"

AI search functionality is quickly reshaping marketing measurement as we know it. Hugh Burnham, head of search (SEM / SEO) at [Ford Motor Company](#), shared that 70% of informational Google searches do not get past the AI overview, which makes traditional metrics like website visits and page flow less relevant. He encourages active optimization of your website content for AI-driven discovery.

"Being passive and looking at your Google Analytics or Adobe is last year," Burnham said. "You really need to change things, like crawlability, citation score, sentiment analysis, and how is your citation viewed?"

Echoing the need for updated metrics, Andrea Cutright, VP of marketing for [Upwork](#), says that Upwork replaced over one-third of its KPIs within its most recent annual planning cycle. “If you haven’t swapped out a lot of your KPIs, you’re not watching where the market’s going.”

Sajag Chikarsal, VP of marketing at [DigiCert](#), advocates for a shift to revenue-aligned marketing measurement. By redirecting his marketing organization’s focus from top of the funnel to metrics like deal velocity, average sales cycle, and average sales price trends, he is able to connect focus areas back to specific marketing channels.

“Now you can even say how many leads or MQLs or engagements am I getting from the AEO,” Chikarsal said, “and are they converting at a faster pace than the leads that I’m generally getting from the website from just pure SEO?”

Rather than building content based on brand messaging, Burnham suggests researching real user questions and using FAQ structures and schema markup tools to create content that’s more easily discoverable by AI agents. “What ends up happening is, your answers from your website populate the Google ‘also asked’ questions. That also helps get a signal to the AIO so your data ends up showing your circuit.”

Treating FAQs as living documents and ensuring they are written conversationally, says Vanapalli, makes your content more likely to match AI query patterns, increasing the chance that it will show up in searches.

Internal AI transformations can drive marketing value as well, as long as organizations avoid some common mistakes like misalignment with customer needs and focusing solely on AI as a tool rather than a broader strategy.

A clear definition of success and structured experimentation are important steps to effectively pilot and implement AI, says Cutright. Lack of confidence in outcomes can create barriers, but working together to define success provides a tangible, shared goal for teams to pursue. “You can visualize or feel your path to that success, rather than what I’ve seen some peers struggling with, where you just need to move to AI. That can be a little bit overwhelming, and it can’t really feel real.”

To ensure consistency and avoid legal risks, warns Burnham, companies must standardize any LLM tools used by their teams, including the capability to monitor use and inputs. It’s also critical to reskill talent from authors and creators to editors and strategists. When using AI for content, journalistic integrity is paramount. “Make sure that your editors are also very good at prompt data and make sure that they read it. They just don’t copy and paste it.”

Framing AI as a growth opportunity rather than a threat can help gain marketer buy-in and encourage skill-building, says Cutright. Show employees how they can eliminate repetitive or disliked tasks, she suggests, and create environments that are safe for experimentation. She told the story of Upwork’s Festival of Failure, which celebrates learnings based on failed initiatives, creating a safe space for employees to explore new things and learn from each other.

Marketing leaders also embrace unconventional methods to drive ROI. To maximize his team’s cost efficiency, rather than investing in expensive event sponsorships, Chikarsal sends sales development reps to events with meeting quota targets. This has reduced their cost-per-opportunity from \$23,000 to \$6,500, while giving them better insights from direct customer interactions and breakout sessions.

In-person engagement through trade shows, dinners, and events are outperforming digital marketing for O’Reilly Media, says Gillespie. People want to see that there is a human behind the brand, so direct interaction, especially at trade shows, helps reinforce trust. “Going back to that very human face-to-face is actually moving the needle. And we get so much direct attribution from trade shows.”

Cutright advocates for a simple solution that empowers teams and helps integrate new processes: “Just give people permission to move in the new direction without trying to hang onto what’s in the past.”

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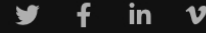
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