

AI: Transforming Marketing Strategies

ChatGPT helped to write this column. There were pros and cons in the process, and it needed human editors.

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To demonstrate the power of AI in content creation, I produced this column using ChatGPT. I wrote 17 prompts to research and generate content, including the headline. I checked facts, compiled data and then edited my draft, adding subheads and personalized insights in my voice. Creating my draft would normally require a dozen hours for me to research and write. I completed this column in less than three hours.

The team at *Soundings Trade Only* wrote the column's subhead. Editing and fact-checking on the magazine's end took the same amount of time as always, ensuring that word choices describing AI were not overly promotional or outright false. As just one example, ChatGPT wrote that "creators wonder about the true origin of AI-produced works." That's untrue; there is no question that human-created works are fueling AI-generated content, leading to numerous copyright-infringement lawsuits. *The Atlantic* recently published a searchable database of 183,000 books that were used to train the machines, apparently without the authors' permission.

The biggest lessons I learned in this process are that while speed can be a benefit associated with emerging AI technology, there are equally critical precautions to consider.

AI and Marketing

According to recent surveys, more than 80% of marketers use AI to enhance customer experiences, optimize ad campaigns and personalize content. AI can decipher consumer behavior and trends, and can laser-target audiences. AI-driven analytics offer data insights to shape strategies. Chatbots provide instant customer support, handling an estimated 265 billion customer-support interactions in 2021 alone.

The question isn't whether marine marketers should embrace AI but, rather, how fast they can adapt. To measure the impact of AI, start by tracking traditional key performance indicators, such as conversion rates and click-through rates, but add AI-specific metrics. Customer engagement, measured by response times to AI-driven inquiries, reflects user satisfaction. Analyzing the accuracy of AI-generated content for relevance and sentiment ensures quality.

Customer retention rates and lifetime value can gauge AI's influence on long-term relationships. Testing with and without AI is also a smart strategy. And cost savings should be considered.

There are, however, limitations. For example, relying heavily on AI can erode human creativity and intuition, stifling unique brand voices. I recently read a boat retailer's social-media post that sounded stilted and awkward. I asked if the dealer was using AI for social posts. *Bingo!* Another industry colleague recently sent me a press release; in less than a minute, I could tell it was AI-generated. Take a cue: Invest time to review AI deliverables, and then edit to reflect your brand voice. No one wants his or her content to sound disingenuous or, worse, robotic.

To capture your brand voice, marketers must strategically impart your brand's tone, values and personality into AI algorithms. This means creating and incorporating a style guide as the blueprint for AI developers. Ongoing human oversight is vital, and AI needs regular updates to keep brand content fresh. Continually test and refine AI outputs for consistency and authenticity. This is the best way to maximize AI's power while preserving the essence and integrity of a brand's distinctive voice.

Wisdom also dictates the need to validate AI results regularly, as hiccups result from data inputs, algorithms and context. Rigorous proofing ensures that resulting recommendations align with brand goals and ethics. Cross-referencing AI-generated content with human expertise, and confirming via reliable resources, will deliver authenticity and relevance. Before publication of any AI-generated content, a thorough review should be a non-negotiable protocol to avoid costly missteps and embarrassment.

Data privacy also looms large. Mishandling customer information can lead to severe backlash. Additionally, AI requires investments in technology and training. AI is not immune to rapid technological shifts, rendering once-effective strategies obsolete. AI is a tool, not a panacea, so navigate with caution.

AI and Intellectual Property

Copyright concerns are serious in the era of AI-generated content. As algorithms generate music, art and text based on human-produced content, the companies that make those algorithms continue to challenge long-held standards of authorship and ownership. The law is struggling to keep pace, and the need to safeguard intellectual property is paramount.

Marketers can protect their work by clearly defining AI's role in their creative process, ensuring human oversight at crucial stages. Careful selection of AI tools with transparent policies on data ownership and copyright is essential. Registering original AI-generated content, where applicable, bolsters legal protection. Additionally, it's smart to draft contracts with AI service providers that detail ownership, usage and confidentiality.

The Future of AI in Marketing

ChatGPT predicts that AI-driven hyper-personalization will redefine customer experiences, offering tailored content and products in real time. Predictive analytics are expected to foresee trends, letting marketers stay ahead of consumer demands. Chatbots could evolve into intuitive, empathetic virtual assistants, enhancing customer engagement. Content creation, powered by AI, might become infinitely creative. Ethical AI could enhance data privacy and security, building trust. AI's integration with emerging technologies such as augmented reality and voice assistants should open new marketing frontiers.

The easiest way to embark on this AI journey is to explore user-friendly AI platforms that require minimal coding knowledge. Start small, focusing on specific AI applications, such as chatbots or predictive analytics. Collaborate with colleagues or data experts, and invest in ongoing training. Join AI-focused webinars and marketing communities for best practices.

As you get underway, thoroughly analyze AI-generated insights, combining them with human expertise. Leverage AI for data-driven decision-making and testing campaigns. Prioritize data privacy and ethics to foster customer trust. Continuously test and adapt as AI evolves.

When I asked ChatGPT to provide the five best resources for AI education for marketers, it recommended Coursera's AI-related courses from leading universities; Udemy's courses that provide practical insights and hands-on experience; edX, whose courses are offered at institutions like MIT; Google's AI Education, whose courses are free; and HubSpot Academy, whose AI-related courses offer marketing-specific insights.

My own research includes two more recommendations. First, the Marine Marketers of America recently hosted a webinar spotlighting the best practices of three marine industry marketers who have embraced AI. "Catching the AI Wave: A Roundtable on Empowering Marine Marketing Excellence in the Digital Era" is available on YouTube.

Second, the Marketing AI Institute recently released its third annual State of Marketing Report with results from more than 900 marketers. Some 45% of respondents are experimenting with AI; 29% say it is already part of their workflow; 64% rank it as a top priority in 2024; and 77% expect to use it to reduce time on repetitive tasks. Of those surveyed, 78% had no AI education or training in their organization, while 24% said it is in development.

I believe AI is among the most significant marketing developments of my career, and I encourage all marine marketers to invest in training and development. It was fun to partner with ChatGPT to research and write this month's column. I appreciated the significant time savings as a writer, the insights gained and the ability to continually enhance my own expertise with this emerging technology.

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