

# Bright Futures, Complex Legacies

*changemakers.*



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# Contributors



**QUENTIN LANOTTE**  
Marketing Director North & Eastern Europe, Puratos



**PATRICK PUTMAN**  
Global CDIO



**DIVYA GHAI**  
Chief Commercial Officer - Enterprise, GMS



**CHRISTOPH VANDEWIELE**  
Senior Strategy Director MarCom at Colruyt Group



**CHARLOTTE VAN CAUTEREN**  
Brand Strategist, Colruyt Group



**THOMAS DE GANCK**  
Senior Associate, XPlus



**SOPHIE M'SALLEM**  
Marketing & B2C Revenue Director, RSC Anderlecht



**LORENA CERAULO**  
Global Downstream Marketing Manager, Philips



**JAMES HARRIS**  
Founder & Host, Change Makers Club



**JOUKE VAN DER BRUG**  
Club Director, Change Makers Club



**XAVIER DE HAIRS**  
Customer Experience, Senior Account Executive, SAP



**DAVID COOK**  
Senior Solutions Consultant, SAP

# Where is Belgian Marketing today?

## Current operating reality, maturity level, and shared market dynamics

*“Marketing has reached a paradigm-shifting moment. Digital transformation has fractured consumer journeys into unpredictable, nonlinear patterns, and AI’s rise will only intensify this complexity.”*

***Boston Consulting Group 2025***

Customer journeys are becoming ever more complex. According to McKinsey (2025), B2B customers are engaging with brands across an average of ten channels, and if the experience isn’t seamless, they will switch suppliers. That puts sales at risk. According to Forbes, sub-par CX is suppressing global revenues to the tune of \$3.8 trillion.

And while companies have invested heavily in CRM, ERP and service platforms, many are failing to orchestrate the experience of customers across all touchpoints. Leaders understand the importance of providing a consistent customer experience. However, they are often grappling with legacy systems, siloed brands and inconsistent data structures. AI is opening the door to a new era of personalised customer engagement, but deployment, in most cases, is still at the experimental stage.

Against this backdrop, our panel discussed how businesses can meet the evolving demands of customers.

# Where is Belgian Marketing today?

## Customer Visibility is Partial

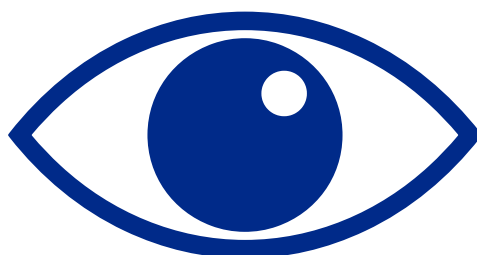
*“Data is spread around, and the bigger the companies the bigger the legacy and the spread of data”*

***Xavier De Hairs, SAP CX Senior Account Executive, SAP***

As highlighted in a recent Boston Consulting Group report (2025), consumers demand a personalised experience at every online and offline touchpoint. The same can be said for B2B customers.

In theory, businesses are well placed to provide a seamless cross-channel journey, not least because they hold a wealth of data that can be used to underpin consistency across every engagement. In practice, however, many companies have only partial visibility of their customers. In particular, they often lack the capability to capture the behavioural signals that would provide insights into sentiment and buying intent. B2B marketers face a particular challenge in that the available data typically says little about the decision-making processes within customer organisations.

Even when the company's systems do capture sufficient information, the insights are not necessarily actioned.



# Where is Belgian Marketing today?

## Customer experience is constrained by operational complexity rather than strategic vision

This is not due to any lack of intent. Leaders are acutely aware of the urgent requirement to provide customers with the best possible experience. However, their ability to move forward is constrained by a range of operational realities, including fragmented IT.

Many companies are working with multiple technology stacks that support different functions within their organisation, and there may be only limited connectivity. To complicate matters, businesses that have grown through acquisition often operate with a legacy of different systems and data structures that have never been fully integrated. The same problem can occur when companies expand geographically or launch new brands, with local management teams making independent technology decisions that are not aligned with the business as a whole.

To add to the complexity, many customer touchpoints are outside the direct control of managers. In today's environment, these include social media channels, search and the growing range of AI tools.

*"If organisations are unable to agree on common processes, they will never be able to succeed."*  
**Quentin Lanotte, Marketing Director, Puratos**

# Where is Belgian Marketing today?

## Current AI usage reflects experimentation driven by opportunity rather than structured transformation

AI is seen as playing a crucial role in the delivery of next-level customer experience, and the majority of businesses are experimenting with the available tools and technologies. Early use cases have included the acceleration of content creation, price optimisation, process automation and the roll out of bots to answer customer queries.

Often, these initiatives are limited in scope. Rather than being deployed strategically across organisations, they are standalone measures within isolated business functions.



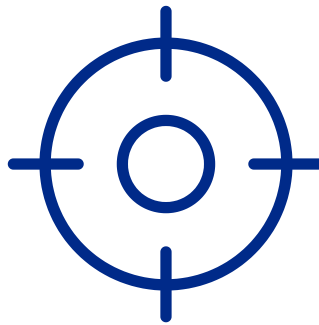
*“A lot of AI initiatives are local initiatives, most of the time it’s not scalable”*

**Xavier De Hairs, SAP CX Senior Account Executive,  
SAP**

# Marketing into 2026

## Where organisations want to get to: strategic priorities and capability ambitions

*“As customer experience has become increasingly digital, managing customer relationships has become more complex. Often, multiple functions—billing, customer experience, customer care, and marketing—interact independently with customers, leading to poor results.” McKinsey 2025*



In a recent article on customer experience, McKinsey invited readers to imagine a world in which AI-powered engines detect when customers need help (before they even realise it themselves) while at the same time coordinating all touchpoints and delivering truly personalised communications.

McKinsey was highlighting the transformational role that AI will play in the future of CX. This was reflected in our panel discussions. Participants shared an ambition to move away from reactive engagement towards predictive and orchestrated customer strategies that will boost sales and improve retention.

So, rather than continuing with standalone pilots, businesses see an opportunity to scale the use of AI across their operations. However, this will require organisations to become fully AI-ready, particularly around data architecture and governance provisions.

# Marketing into 2026

## Moving from fragmented engagement toward predictive and intent-driven customer strategies

A combination of AI and advanced analytics provides an opportunity for businesses to engage proactively with customers. For instance, rather than simply tracking engagement and answering queries, marketers plan to analyse customer sentiment, identify purchase readiness and predict future requirements. By predicting behaviour, companies aim to drive sales and prioritise opportunities for up and cross-selling.

This can not be achieved simply by layering new tools onto existing operating models. To orchestrate customer experience across the whole spectrum of touchpoints, companies will have to encourage collaboration between channels and brands and ensure that data is shared.



*"Anticipating customer intent isn't just a strategy, it's our greatest competitive edge. By understanding their next move before they make it, we deliver value exactly when it's needed, leaving the competition behind."*  
**Divya Ghai, CCO, GMS**

# Marketing into 2026

## Embedding AI into operational workflows to unlock measurable efficiency and scalability

*“They’re saving about two and a half thousand business hours for every automated contact centre.”*

**Thomas De Ganck, Senior Associate, Xplus**

Our discussions revealed an intention to embed AI into core workflows.

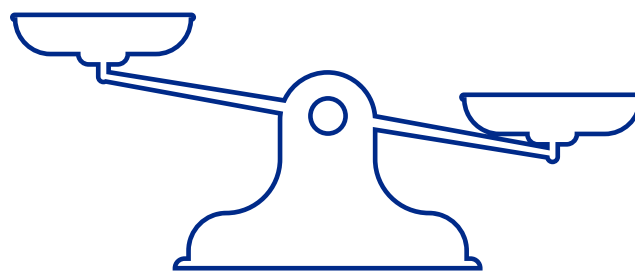
To take one example, our panel identified opportunities to integrate AI into qualification and triage processes, enabling businesses to rapidly identify customers with high potential and direct marketing efforts accordingly. AI was also seen as playing a key role in supporting the decision-making of internal teams.

Equally important, participants saw a means to simplify or optimise some of the operational processes that cause friction for customers, often triggering a decision to switch to another supplier.

Use cases such as these indicate a shift of emphasis. Rather than focusing AI strategy solely on delivering generative outputs - such as marketing collateral - leaders are thinking about how the technology can be applied systemically to improve efficiency and consistency while freeing humans to carry out high-value work. To this end, AI will become part of an operational layer, rather than a tool to be applied selectively.

# Marketing into 2026

## Establishing scalable governance models that balance innovation speed with control



The risks associated with AI have been well documented. Lack of transparency in decision-making, bias, and inaccurate information outputs are all issues that businesses must address, along with any concerns about data leakage and privacy.

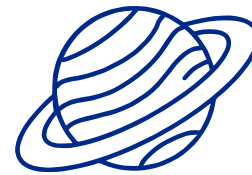
There is, therefore, a clear need to create an environment where innovation can be scaled without increasing reputational, regulatory and financial risks.

Robust governance is crucial. Businesses must define and establish governance models that make space for experimentation while ensuring that the business remains compliant with regulatory and data standards and the expectations of stakeholders.

However, businesses must also address the technology challenges. It is essential to create shared standards for data to facilitate sharing across a potentially diverse estate of technology stacks and platforms. In complex organisations, it is also essential to create a single customer strategy rather than allowing individual functions or local leaders to progress with independent projects.

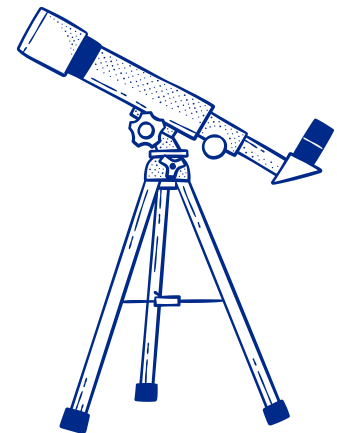
# The Challenges Ahead

## Structural, operational, and cultural constraints



*“While the benefits of transforming customer experience with data and AI are clear, the path isn't without its challenges. True CX transformation requires careful planning and a strategic approach.”*

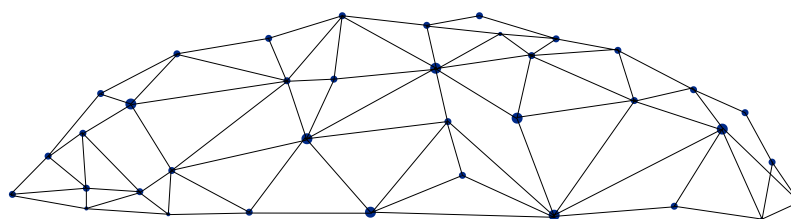
**Forbes 2025**



While the ambition to create a seamless multi-channel experience is strong, there can be tensions within organisations. Leaders are aware not only of the technical challenges but also the cultural, regulatory and budgetary issues that must be addressed if AI-led CX transformation is to become a reality. So while there is urgency, it is tempered by caution and an awareness that risk must be effectively managed.

# The Challenges Ahead

**Data readiness gaps create a foundational bottleneck that limits all downstream initiatives**



*“If we are not cleaning up that data first, we will create more chaos.”*  
**Patrick Putman, Global CDIO**

A lack of data readiness was identified by our panel as a key hurdle.

This is a particular problem for companies that are using a diverse array of systems. For instance, within such organisations, the definition of products may not be fully standardised.

This won't necessarily be a problem if an AI-enabled pilot is confined to a particular function or division, but it will slow down or prevent progress when the time comes to embed the technology as part of an enterprise-wide initiative. Organisations will struggle to reconcile data from disparate sources into a single global model. Equally important, any ambiguity over the provenance of the information makes it more difficult for businesses to establish robust governance frameworks.

The irony is that while AI will in the longer term drive efficiency, in the short term it often amplifies weaknesses and inefficiencies. Thus, our panel agreed that foundational work on data was a prerequisite for any strategic deployment of AI.

# The Challenges Ahead

**Organisational incentives and cultural dynamics hinder cross-functional collaboration**



*“When it comes to discipline, it is sometimes quite tough to get people to use the same systems in the same way.”*

**Quentin Lanotte, Marketing Director, Puratos**

Business units are not always aligned. Often, channel leaders will prioritise their own commercial targets and priorities, rather than considering the customer outcomes across the group as a whole. In consequence, there can be resistance to collaboration and the sharing of data. The expectations of the customer come second to the priorities of individual brands or business groups.

To achieve the goal of consistent omnichannel CX, businesses will have to change the way business units work together and how they are incentivised within the group as a whole.

# The Challenges Ahead

**External pressures – regulation, tech uncertainty, and investment scrutiny – slow scaling decisions**

***“Is it really good to continue to invest so much in those companies which we don’t know what they do with their data?” – Xavier De Hairs, Senior Account Executive, SAP CX***

Businesses can’t afford to ignore the evolving regulatory framework, particularly as it applies to data security, AI and data sovereignty. In the case of AI, regulators face the challenge of keeping up with innovation and jurisdictions are moving at different speeds and have their own approaches, so there is some uncertainty about future regulatory frameworks. However, the EU’s AI Act is already in force and has defined the risks that organisations must address.

There are also procurement challenges. This is a fast-developing technology and no one can say with absolute certainty which platforms and ecosystems will become dominant. While there is pressure to act quickly, leaders are aware that they must carefully evaluate the available technologies, those providers' longterm AI vision and ethics, and potential ROI before making major investment decisions.

As our panel discussed, natural caution results in longer pilot phases and delayed adoption at the enterprise level.

# Conclusion

Organisations understand the importance of creating a consistent customer experience across multiple channels and the role that AI can play in delivering that goal. However, while leaders are experimenting with AI and automation, a number of factors are preventing systemic and enterprise-wide transformation. These include fragmented data, decentralised systems and a lack of alignment between business units. The tools are available, but if companies are to move beyond pilots and secure a competitive advantage, they must do the necessary foundational work to align their systems while putting the necessary governance structures in place.

As the technology evolves and businesses formulate their strategic objectives, the clear direction of travel is toward embedding intelligence into workflows. There is an opportunity to combine AI and analytics to identify customer intent and sentiment and to engage proactively to drive sales and build loyalty. Equally important, AI is seen as a means to aid human decision-making and free teams to carry out higher-value work. This will be most successful when companies orchestrate customer experience across all touch points and channels.

The barriers are - for the most part - non technical. They are structural and organisational. Inconsistent data quality across functions and divisions and a lack of alignment between teams act as brakes on innovation. There is also a considerable degree of caution. Leaders are seeking both to evaluate the potential of the technology and its ROI, while also taking steps to manage the associated risks.

Ultimately, clean data, organisational alignment and robust governance are the prerequisites for a successful CX strategy that delivers competitive advantage.

# Bright Futures, Complex Legacies

## SAP Customer Experience

SAP Engagement Cloud helps organizations power unique engagement by connecting real-time customer insights with the operational signals that run the business. As part of the SAP Customer Experience (CX) portfolio, Engagement Cloud enables personalized, AI-driven interactions across every channel—turning moments like orders, service events, and loyalty milestones into timely, relevant experiences that build trust, strengthen relationships, and drive growth.

<https://www.sap.com/products/crm/engagement-cloud.html>

## Change Makers Club

Change Makers is a global community of senior executives who aspire to driving long-lasting change within their large and complex organisation. As a community we discuss the opportunities and challenges ahead, bench test our thinking and hear peer review. On a regular basis we meet for confidential meetings and produce industry reports. Learn more about the Club, access content and apply to join up-coming events via our website.

<https://www.changemakersclub.com>

## Authors



**James Harris**  
Founder



**Jouke Van De Brug**  
Club Director