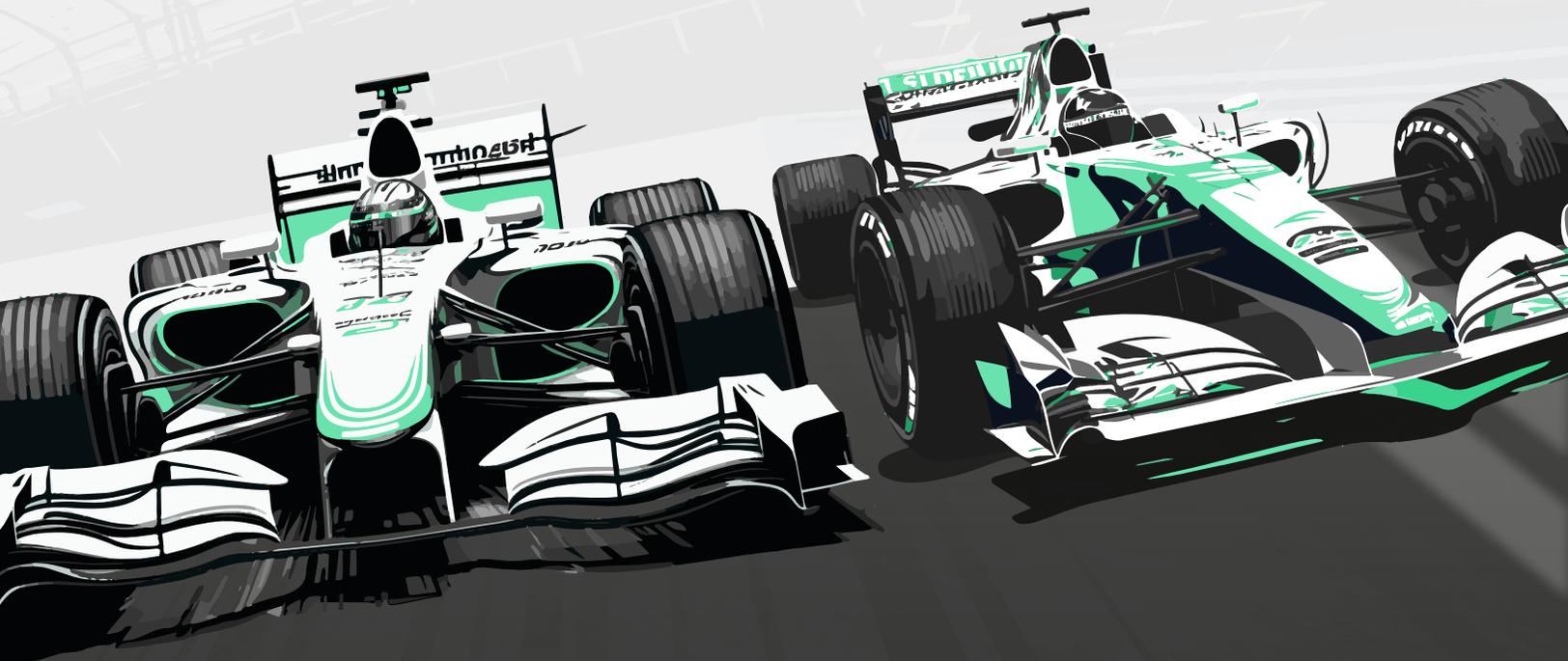




CaliberMind

MARKETING MEANS BUSINESS: A TRILOGY

A three-part reflection on shaping the marketing value narrative to win the boardroom, tame the algorithm, and own the bottom line



Part 1.

A race to justify the budget and prove the value: the story behind the numbers.

Part 1.

Like it or not, marketers are in the business of growing the business



THE PROBLEM:

Marketing isn't getting the credit it deserves

Few things can be more demoralizing to a marketer than a QBR.

Maybe you know the feeling.

Your team just finished pouring blood, sweat, and tears into shaping brand messages, building campaigns, and designing experiences. And from everything you can see, you drove real results.

But then it's time to present those results to stakeholders.

- You present slides showing Marketing's performance for the quarter, but your stakeholders stay unenthused, with skepticism written all over their faces.
- Sales leaders challenge how much pipeline you say Marketing drove, even when you show them what you feel are indisputable numbers.
- Your CFO asks a simple question — “How is this \$5M budget moving revenue?” — and the answer you give doesn't seem to land.
- You walk out of executive meetings frustrated, thinking: “They want marketing to work like a vending machine: budget in, revenue out. But it's not that simple. How can I get them to see our results on their terms without glossing over all the complexity, caveats, and nuances?”

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

A LinkedIn-commissioned study of 1,014 B2B marketers working for large companies across the US and a few other countries found that “87% say measuring long-term impact of campaigns is becoming increasingly difficult.”¹

¹ Tequia Burt, “The ROI Challenge in B2B Marketing — and How AI Is Changing the Game,” <https://www.linkedin.com/business/marketing/blog/marketing-collective/the-roi-challenge-in-b2b-marketing-and-how-ai-is-changing-the-game>

Similarly, Gartner found that 70% of marketers say they face considerable challenges measuring ROI, and 66% struggle to demonstrate marketing impact to key stakeholders.² What’s worse, 65% of CEOs don’t trust their CMOs,³ and less than half of CMOs pass their executive team’s expectations.⁴

70% OF MARKETERS
HAVE CHALLENGES MEASURING ROI

65% OF CEOs
DON’T TRUST THEIR CMOs

We’ve all heard tales from marketing leaders who say their department is misunderstood, sidelined, and treated as a cost center rather than a growth driver. We’ve all seen posts by frustrated marketers on LinkedIn, saying, “If we stopped marketing today, the CFO would be out of a job in a year.” And they’re not wrong.

Over time, all that friction can sap your motivation, erode your confidence, and breed resentment. It’s no wonder so many marketing leaders jump ship and go fractional.

Just know:
We see you. We hear you.

Many of us at CaliberMind have been where you are. And today we’re helping marketing leaders like you tell better stories with clean data.

But the point of this ebook isn’t to be your crying shoulder. That would be a disservice to you, because it wouldn’t help you improve your experience.

Instead, we want to help you face the problem head-on with a roadmap you can use to chart a better course.

In fact, some of what we’re about to say may come across like tough love (operative word “love”).

But in the end, there’s no denying you’ve got two choices:

Option A.
Sulk in the status quo

Blame a common enemy — like the economy, the CEO, outlandish growth targets, or VC/PE pressure.



Option B.
Step into solutions

Identify what’s in your power to change, take ownership, and take intentional steps to reshape the conversation.

² Sara Karlovitch, “Marketing Campaign Issues Multiply: Here’s What the Numbers say,” *MarketingDive*.

³ Alvarez & Marsal, “60% of CEOs Don’t Trust Their CMOs. It’s Time to Shake Things Up,” <https://www.alvarezandmarsal.com/thought-leadership/65-percent-of-CEOs-dont-trust-their-CMOs>

⁴ Gartner, “Gartner Survey Reveals Only 45% of CMOs Surpass Senior Executive Expectations Despite Achieving Objectings,” <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-02-24-gartner-survey-reveals-only-45-percent-of-cmos-surpass-senior-executive-expectations-despite-achieving-objectives>

Neither option is “fun.”

The difference is that Option A (blaming an enemy) will keep you uncomfortable quarter after quarter, because it won't change your situation. Plus, all the metrics we used to measure marketing on are dead. Just dead. This is not the path we recommend, as it's a race to the bottom!

On the other hand, Option B (taking ownership) may feel uncomfortable at first, but you'll feel empowered as you take action. (And you won't need to down a whole bottle of wine after your next QBR. ••)

We are much more interested in Option B. And we believe you are too. Because you want to build a better leadership experience moving forward — one where you get the validation, visibility, and vote of confidence you deserve.



WHY IT'S HAPPENING:

When you don't talk business, executives leave the chat

Let's forget marketing for a second.

Step into the driver's seat of a Formula 1 car.

Between races, you're putting in hours of practice to beat your personal best — all so you can (1) qualify for the next race, (2) successfully finish the race, and (3) perhaps even come in first place.

To help you hit your performance goal, you and your crew track all sorts of skill-related metrics and telemetry data:

- **Sector times** — how fast you take each stretch of the track
- **Fuel consumption per lap** — how quickly the tank is depleting under race conditions
- **Aerodynamic drag** — how much air resistance is slowing the car down on straights
- **Brake pressure and throttle traces** — whether you're maximizing acceleration
- **Tire temperatures and wear rates** — how grip changes as the race goes on
- **Fuel mapping** — how efficiently you burn through the tank
- **Pit stop times** — how quickly the crew can get you back on track

For you and your engineers, these numbers are everything. They're your operational and tactical KPIs. They show you where you can shave off another millisecond to get you closer and closer to your goal.

But for the sponsors, organizers, and fans, none of those details matter. They only want to know:



Did you set a new personal record?
Did you qualify for the race?
Where did you place?

Your metrics are vital for you and your team. But the only KPI the outside world cares about is whether all that effort adds up to performance on race day.

You see where we're going with this. (This is where the tough love comes in.)

Not all marketing metrics matter. And those that do, don't matter to everyone.

The main reason leadership looks down on marketing is because they genuinely don't see how our reports are relevant.

Traffic, impressions, opens, click-throughs, form-fills, downloads. Those metrics are important ... to us. They're like our vital signs — they tell us something's working. And if we know what we're doing, those details tell us if we're making progress.

But a CEO, CFO, or even your Head of Sales, doesn't have a frame of reference to be able to evaluate whether those numbers are good or bad. They do not operate in our world.

In other words, stakeholders don't see our marketing metrics and KPIs as evidence of Marketing's success. They want to know whether Marketing is contributing to business-level KPIs, like new opportunities opened, pipeline progression, deals closed, and revenue generated.

As Philip Kotler, the father of modern marketing, puts it:

“CEOs wonder how much to spend on marketing. They hope that the CMO could supply a reliable report on marketing's ROMI (return on marketing investment). The CEO is less interested in customer awareness levels, click rates, and other key metrics that marketers use.”⁵

⁵ Philip Kotler, “The Past, Present, and Future of Marketing,” Journal of Marketing, <https://www.ama.org/2024/03/12/a-lifetime-in-marketing-lessons-learned-and-the-way-ahead-by-philip-kotler/>

If we're being honest, stakeholders aren't asking for much.

So why do so many marketing leaders struggle to demonstrate value? Well, there are a few things at play.

Coming to terms with our roots

One of the reasons many marketing leaders struggle in this area is because of how they got here.

- **Communications or PR.** Traditional marcom is the starting place for many marketers in the corporate world. And while it provides a good foundation, one weakness here is that marketers don't, by default, develop business acumen. It's just not something those roles require.
- **Tactical success.** Many marketers get their start deep in the weeds in a specific channel, such as SEO, PPC, social, or content marketing. They learn the nuts and bolts of a marketing domain really well and deliver results both in strategy and execution. Even though they may branch out from there, they still focus on performance and don't learn how to think on a business level.
- **The startup world.** B2B SaaS startups are like the cool kids on the block. They're fun. They're loud. And everyone secretly wants to be like them. And sure, startup growth marketers are pretty amazing. They're under a ton of VC pressure, have to do a lot with very little, and they can't hide behind a large team. However, startups and small companies often have narrower ICPs, flatter orgs, and simpler data. So the line between marketing metrics and business outcomes is easier to draw. But often, when those marketing leaders work their way up to enterprise, they're in for a rude awakening.

Bottom line, the way many of us rise into marketing leadership leaves us underprepared to speak on a business level.



Seeing our marketing silos for what they are

Another reason there's a disconnect between marketing and the business layer has partly to do with our siloed tech.

Every marketing tool produces its own set of metrics that are specific to that system.

- Google Analytics measures traffic, sessions, page views, scroll depth, and conversions.
- Your email service provider measures opens and click-throughs.
- LinkedIn measures impressions and other engagement metrics.
- Your ABM platform serves ads to target accounts and reports on clicks and anonymous visits — without showing which individuals in the buying group actually engaged.

And what do you get with all that? A galore of walled gardens with black-box algorithms, each running in its own silo. Marketers aren't allowed to peek under the hood to understand how it works or how the tool measures performance.

And because each platform is its own little universe, your individual contributors (ICs) often end up working in silos, too. The email specialist lives in email. The paid media manager lives in GA4 and LinkedIn. The ABM manager stays in their platform. They become fluent in the tools they own, but rarely get the connective tissue across domains. Which means when they report up to you, it's usually from inside their own little bubble.

Nadia Davis, VP of Marketing at CaliberMind says:
“This creates three barriers:



- 1.** No one is connecting the dots horizontally — between individual contributors (ICs) — to figure out how channels and campaigns are working together holistically.
- 2.** No one is connecting the dots vertically — between the tactical marketing KPIs and the targets set for Marketing as a whole.
- 3.** No one is looking at the dots across the matrix of how marketing KPIs rise up and fold into strategic business targets.”

In fact, at QBRs, many marketing leaders simply report a few slides containing marketing engagement metrics, without relevant context. As a result, stakeholders are left inferring their own interpretation, losing trust in the numbers, and questioning Marketing's stewardship.

However, connecting the dots across all of the business dimensions — horizontally, vertically, and diagonally — is critical if you want to be a successful, respected, and sought-after marketing leader.

Do marketing like you mean business

Some marketing leaders complain they don't get enough budget. They feel like they're expected to pull a rabbit out of a hat.

And while it's true that the budget often doesn't match the crazy expectations, let's stop and consider the simple fact that we get a budget at all.

In many cases, when a marketer steps into a VP, Director, or CMO role at a company doing \$50M–\$100M in revenue, they're suddenly responsible for a marketing budget equal to 9–10% of revenue. That's \$4.5M to \$9M!⁶

Irrespective of whether that budget is “enough” to hit those aggressive growth goals set by PE firms, a \$10M marketing budget is no number to sneeze at.

We can't look at that \$10M budget as “the cost of doing business,” the way the company might look at HR, Legal, or Operations. It's an investment. And with investment comes accountability.

Just like you'd expect a stock portfolio manager to report on how your dollars are performing, executives expect you to explain how marketing spend is moving the business forward.

And guess what happens when you are able to explain!

The Benchmarkit research team found that **“Chief Marketing Officers who measure the \$ impact of Marketing investments will find it much easier to ask for increased budgets from the CFO and/or CEO”⁶**

⁶ Benchmarkit, 2025 B2B Marketing Benchmarks,
<https://www.benchmarkit.ai/b2b-marketing-benchmarks>

They also found that **“measuring Marketing cost per dollar of new pipeline has a high correlation to growth rates with 56% companies growing faster than 30% using this metric”⁷**

In other words, companies that properly tie marketing efforts to business outcomes are more likely to (1) increase your marketing budget and (2) grow faster.

Your department will be seen, valued, and treated as a growth driver, not as a cost center.

OK, enough tough love.

It's time to get practical.



⁷ Benchmarkit, 2025 B2B Marketing Benchmarks, <https://www.benchmarkit.ai/b2b-marketing-benchmarks>



WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT:

Elevate your marketing to the business layer. A framework for marketing leaders

To elevate Marketing to the business layer, we've created a framework you can adapt to your organization.

It's called MAP, WRAP, GAP. And after you apply it consistently, you'll earn that "seat at the table" as a trusted business advisor.

You'll go from defending your marketing dollars to driving the business forward.

Introducing the MAP, WRAP, GAP framework

The MAP, WRAP, GAP framework is designed to help you .

Map refers to **mapping** your marketing metrics to one another — and, importantly, to the strategic targets of the business.

Wrap refers to **wrapping** a meaningful marketing story around your numbers.

Gap refers to inevitable **gaps** in marketing data, performance, or resources — and how to use transparency around those gaps to your advantage as a marketing leader.

Let's unpack.

1. MAP. Map your marketing metrics to operational KPIs and the goals of the business

Mapping is all about connecting the dots in a meaningful way.

But before you map anything, first you have to decide whether it matters. At CaliberMind, we like to use the word "curate."

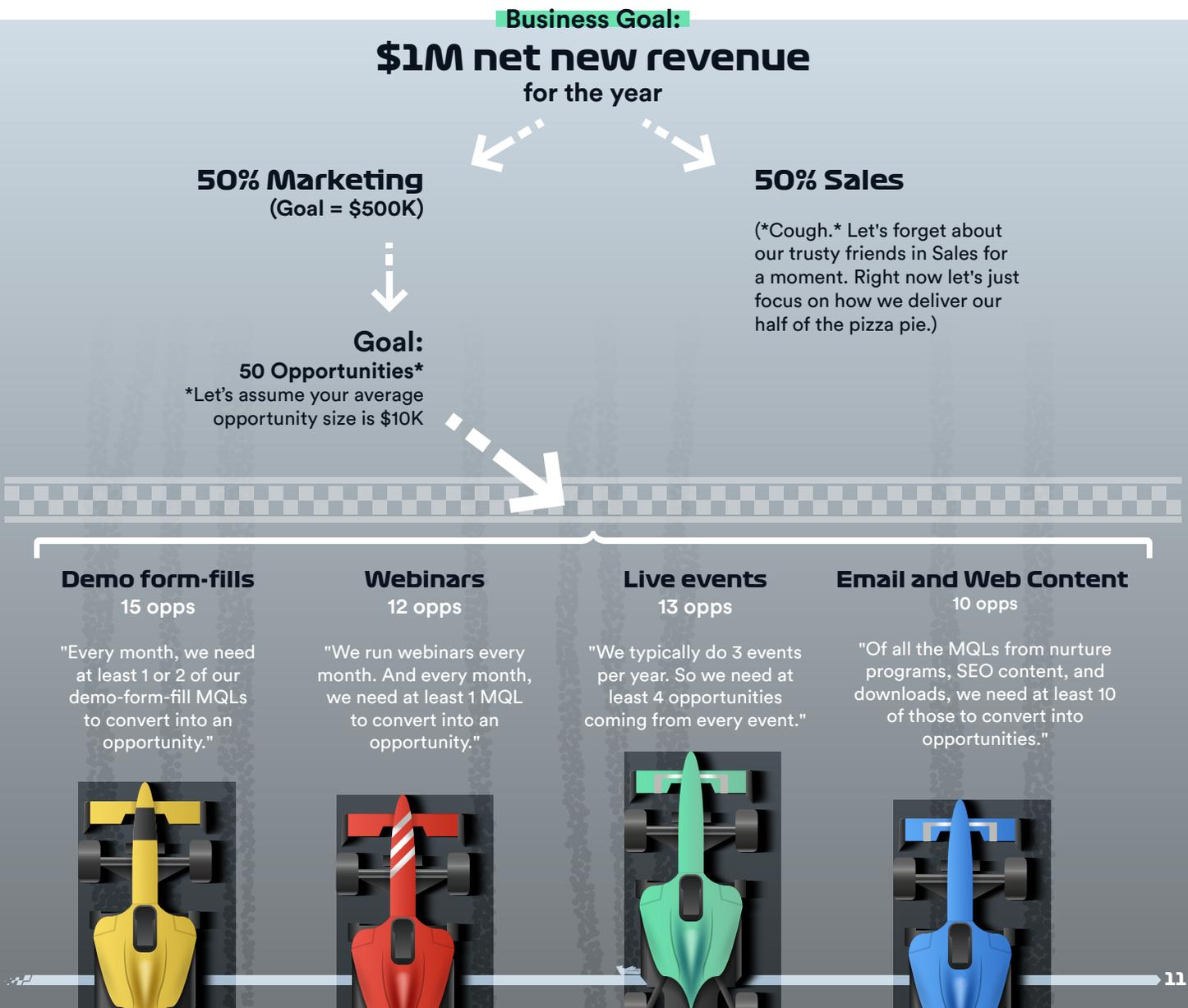
As a marketing leader you must decide:

- Which metrics matter internally to Marketing?
- Which metrics matter cross-functionally across your go-to-market team?
- Which metrics matter to leadership and other stakeholders?

And you can't make those decisions unless you start at the top with the big business goal and work your way down.

Without a clear business target, you won't know what KPIs to set for your channels, campaigns, and the individual contributors overseeing those. Failure to do this is the exact reason we have "random acts of marketing."

Let's pretend your business has set the goal of generating \$1M net new revenue for the year. You would start at the top and set operational and tactical KPIs from there.



Of course, this oversimplified example uses easy round numbers so it's easy to grasp.

You'd have to adapt this to your GTM motion.

But you can see how starting at the top helps to inform the bare minimum each part of your marketing organization has to produce so that the whole department wins. And of course, cross-functional alignment with Sales is a whole other conversation. We're just talking about how to set KPIs.

Once you do that, it's so much easier to:

- Eliminate noise by focusing on the metrics that matter
- Help your ICs plan and execute with greater focus
- Foster collaboration and alignment

If you'd like to dive deeper into mapping the right KPIs to real business outcomes, you owe it to yourself to watch [“Metrics That Matter”](#), by Leslie Alore, SVP of Marketing at Flexera.

In [less than 60 minutes](#), you'll learn how to:

- 1. Define marketing's unique organizational role and scope through clear guiding principles that align with business objectives.** Create documentation showing stakeholder agreement on marketing's responsibilities.
- 2. Implement a marketing contribution methodology** that measures impact across the customer lifecycle, focusing on pipeline creation, progression, and bookings rather than just source attribution.
- 3. Develop a cascading metrics framework starting with strategic targets, then operational KPIs, and finally tactical metrics.** Ensure all metrics directly tie to business goals.
- 4. Create standardized QBR reporting templates that show goals, results, trends, and written commentary for strategic and operational metrics only.** Include clear indicators of what requires attention.
- 5. Establish regular joint performance reviews with sales teams focused on shared outcomes rather than attribution debates.** Use agreed-upon metrics to drive collaborative discussions.
- 6. Transform marketing communication to be more relatable to non-marketing stakeholders** through consumer examples and clear business impact stories.



Watch “Metrics That Matter” on demand

“I genuinely believe that marketing is a function that directly contributes to revenue outcomes in addition to all the indirect beautiful outputs that we help to support. So I want to help you talk about how to do all of those things, indirect and direct impact.”

—Leslie Alore, SVP of Marketing, Flexera



2. WRAP. Wrap a story around your numbers

Wrap is all about how you frame, or package up, those marketing performance numbers.

The wrapper has to be a meaningful story you tell. That story connects your audience to those numbers.

In “Metrics That Matter” Leslie Alore points out an interesting irony:

“We are professional storytellers. We are so good at telling the story of our company to our customers and to the market. We’re great at crafting narratives that explain the value of our businesses, services or products and offerings. And yet, for some reason, we’re not great when it comes to telling stories about ourselves and the value we bring. ...

And what’s interesting about that is our internal stakeholders ... want to hear that story because they actually really care about us succeeding as a marketing function. They care way more about us succeeding than our customers do.”

You see, as marketers we’re really good at crafting messages that resonate with our ICP. And yet we struggle crafting messages that resonate with our internal customer — executives.

The Wrap part of our framework reminds us to weave our reporting into a narrative.

As Eric Westerkamp, CEO at CaliberMind, says in his presentation [Beyond Dashboards: How AI Is Reshaping Marketing Revenue Storytelling](#):

“There’s a difference between stepping into a meeting and showing the data, and stepping into a meeting and giving a narrative supported by data.”

So let’s look at some basic principles of crafting a story around data:

1. **Anchor your numbers in a storyline, not a spreadsheet.** Data without a story loses your audience and leaves executives guessing. The narrative should establish context, highlight the “so what”, and guide them toward a conclusion. For example, with every number you share, include what your target was, so people don’t have to guess whether your outcome exceeded, met, or fell short.
2. **Build excitement around stakes.** Every good story has something at risk. In GTM reporting, the stakes might be that the company had set higher growth targets than ever before, or maybe there was a company-wide decision to go after a new market segment, or maybe there was a drastic shift in the market that added extra challenges. Make those stakes explicit.
3. **Weave cause-and-effect into your reporting.** Stories have momentum. They move forward because one event triggers another, like a chain reaction. Likewise, your data story should connect metrics into a chain. For example: “We increased demo form fills → which led to more qualified opportunities → which fueled \$500k in pipeline.” That’s how you show marketing’s momentum. If you don’t connect the cause-and-effect, your stakeholders will think, “So what?” Or worse, they’ll come to their own conclusions.
4. **Create suspense and then resolve it.** Don’t put all your cards on the table at once. Executives stay engaged when there’s narrative tension. In other words, be mindful to reveal information progressively. For example: “This quarter, to our surprise, webinars were not the biggest driver of engagement. Two new initiatives ended up outperforming them: influencer partnerships and podcasts. So guess what we’ll be doing more of next quarter.”
5. **Use visuals as narrative devices, not decoration.** Your visuals are a great way to add context or make the slide more relatable. Highlight trend lines, annotate turning points, and visually call out anomalies. Don’t be afraid to add bits of humor (tastefully, of course), to make your presentation of the data connect on a human level.



- 6. Always interpret for your audience.** Never assume executives will draw the right conclusions. Always be answering, “This means that ...” “Therefore, we will be ...” “As a result, ...”
- 7. End with implications and next steps.** Like any good story, close with what it means for the future. “This trend suggests we’ll fall short of Q3 pipeline unless we reallocate budget to ABM programs. Here’s our proposed next step.” That forward-looking stance builds confidence in your leadership.

The storytelling aspect of presenting data is an area where generative AI can help.

For more on that, watch CaliberMind CEO’s presentation at the 2025 Marketing Analytics Summit: [“Beyond Dashboards: How AI Is Reshaping Marketing Revenue Storytelling.”](#)



Watch “Beyond Dashboards” on Youtube

3. GAP. Gap analysis – Surface what’s missing and offer a solution

Gap refers to the fact that nothing is ever 100%. Those gaps can present themselves as incomplete data, missed targets, or untapped opportunities (a really positive thing!).

One of the common mistakes marketing leaders make is ignoring or glossing over incomplete data, outliers, or kinks in the reporting systems they use. But this can backfire.

As Eric Westerkamp, CEO of CaliberMind says in [Beyond Dashboards: How AI Is Reshaping Marketing Revenue Storytelling](#):

“I don’t want to under-stress the key in having and understanding the outliers of data and surfacing that in the narrative. Because CEOs and CFOs are really good at seeing data outliers and picking them out because it’s how they understand red flags and it’s how they quickly absorb information to find out if it’s on track.”



Remember, executives don't expect perfection. They don't expect "beyond a shadow of doubt." They expect honesty, transparency, and direction.

This is how to use "gaps" to your advantage to demonstrate credibility, build trust, and position yourself as a business-level decision-maker:

1. Openly acknowledge limitations.

Margins of error, incomplete data, or slight mismatches in data are par for the course — not just in marketing but even in more scientific disciplines. So first, rather than shying away from these gaps, strive to become more aware, more comfortable with them. Next, make a habit of including them in your presentations.

So when you're addressing stakeholders, confront those gaps openly, you're pre-empting objections. Plus, you get to shape the narrative proactively rather than having to backpedal.

Eric Westerkamp explains:



“What you do is you build a story, you build a narrative. And then you also highlight the outliers and key takeaways for them. So now your story is not ‘Here’s my contribution to revenue.’ It’s something much more like, ‘In the third quarter, we had these types of results. We saw these channels that were working. We noticed a couple of outliers. They were X, Y and Z. But the final result was that we were able to reduce the sales cycle by, let’s say, 20%. ... But please remember that the data is not perfect. The data is directional, but it is showing this is the direction we’re going.’”

In other words, be real. Say it plainly.

For example, you can say something like: “We can’t account for 15% of pipeline because of offline events, but the directional lift across digital programs gives us high confidence in this trend.”

Moral of the story, most executives are comfortable with directional accuracy. What they want is reasonable evidence so they (and you) can make confident decisions moving forward.

2. Be transparent about underperformance.

Just like executives can handle imperfect data, they can also handle dips in marketing performance. However, one thing they don't handle well is marketers who are blissfully unaware (or simply in denial).

So here's a counterintuitive rule:

Don't hide areas of weakness.

If a campaign flopped, or if a hypothesis didn't reveal the opposite of what you expected, don't be afraid to share that. The fact that you're owning it shows them you're at least aware of it! And since you're aware of it and upfront about it, they now have reason to believe you'll also know what to do about it.

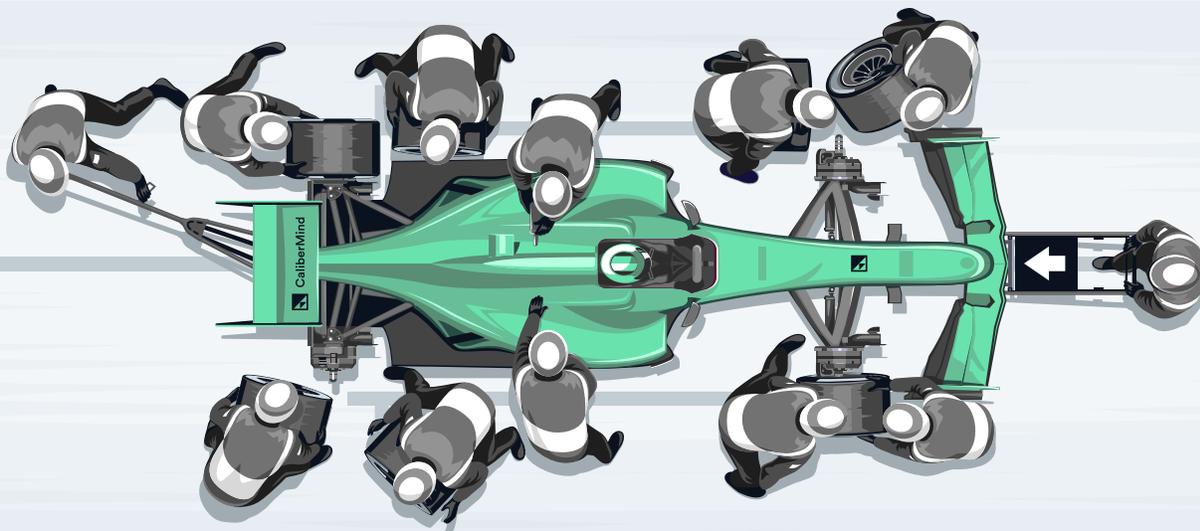
Executives would rather hear, *"Our webinar series underdelivered this quarter. Here's why. And here's what we'll do differently"* than be handed a glossy report with only the good news.

Transparency shows you're self-aware, accountable, and already working on the fix.

Also, as we marketers know all too well, underperformance often isn't even our fault. It could be a cross-functional issue. Or it could be that you're outgrowing your tech and you need to put more capabilities on your roadmap with better tools for the job.

This isn't to say you should point fingers; make sure to only point to solutions. Your leadership will love you for this because you've just made their job easier.

Now Marketing isn't seen as a problem, but a problem solver.



3. Highlight untapped opportunities.

You guessed it! Not all “gaps” are negatives. Some point to unrealized potential.

Maybe you’ve identified a channel with strong engagement but low budget, or a segment that’s responding faster than expected. Frame these as growth opportunities.

For example: “We’ve barely scratched the surface here. With a modest reallocation, we believe this channel could close the pipeline shortfall.”

Or: “Our partner marketing programs are showing above-average deal sizes, but we’ve only invested in two partners. Expanding to five could significantly accelerate revenue contribution.”

When you handle limitations, failures, and opportunities this way, those gaps stop being vulnerabilities. You’ll also find that getting buy-in for new initiatives is easier.



To recap ...

The beauty of MAP, WRAP, GAP is that it gives you a holistic way to reshape the external-facing aspect of your marketing leadership. It’s a simple, easy-to-remember framework, and you can adapt it to the way you run marketing and the way your business operates.

First, you map your marketing metrics to the business goals so every number ladders up to outcomes that matter.

Then, you wrap those numbers in a story that connects with executives and makes the data memorable.

Finally, you gap by being transparent about limitations, misses, and untapped opportunities — and by turning them into proof of your credibility and foresight.

Together, MAP, WRAP, GAP transforms reporting from a defensive exercise into an effective way to lead the business conversation.

And guess what? This is where generative AI can help.

That’s what we’ll be exploring next.





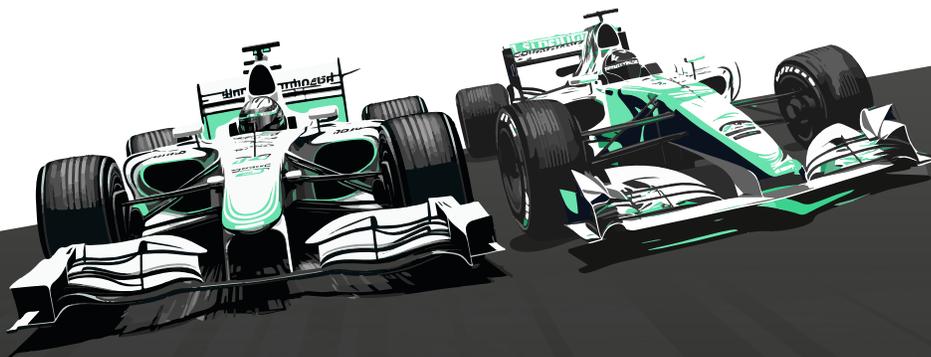
CaliberMind

MARKETING MEANS BUSINESS: A TRILOGY

Win the boardroom, tame the algorithm, and own the bottom line
— a three-part reflection on shaping the marketing value narrative



Read Chapter 2



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