



KANTAR

Analytics Live

The promise of the machine in marketing

Experts explain how AI and ML improve
marketing decision-making

Introduction

For years, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) have been touted as the answer to better marketing decision-making. But so far, use of AI in this area has been limited.

So how are leading companies actually incorporating AI and ML in their processes, and what advice would they give to others?

[Leo Meakin](#), Global Analytics Leader at Kantar spoke with three marketing and data experts to hear about their successes and challenges using AI and ML. Our experts ([Elaine Rodrigo](#), Chief Insights & Analytics Officer, Reckitt, [Jenny Bullis](#), VP, Marketing Science, EMEA, Meta, and [Cynthia Vega](#), Global Product Lead, Dx Analytics & iLab, Global Partnerships, Kantar) reflect on how they use AI and ML, the importance of human insight and creativity, and how they help lead the marketing data journey within an organization.

"From personal digital assistants to self-driving cars, AI and ML are transforming the way we live and work," says Meakin. "They're also transforming the way marketers reach consumers, how we understand consumers, and how advertisers and publishers plan, optimize, and execute marketing. As the importance and application of these technologies accelerates, marketers need to understand how to adapt to this new reality."

How can AI and ML improve marketing decision-making? Our experts explored these key topics:

1. Defining AI and ML
2. Enabling more strategic decision-making
3. Balancing AI with HI
4. Navigating a cookieless world
5. Increasing digital fluency
6. Looking ahead for opportunity

Panel of experts



Leo Meakin
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Elaine Rodrigo
Reckitt



Jenny Bullis
Meta



Cynthia Vega
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Defining AI and ML

What are the differences between AI and ML, and how should we think of them in terms of marketing?

"For me, artificial intelligence is really when you can remove the human and have decision-making, while machine learning is just about copying or replicating," says Cynthia Vega.

Vega uses her toddler daughter as an example. *"She's learning the route to school, so she's machine learning today. But she would not be able to replicate that to go to the center of London. She hasn't developed the ability to make autonomous decisions."*

While AI and ML are distinct terms, some marketers confuse or conflate them, and don't clearly understand the limitations of technology. *"I'm finding that the terms AI and ML are becoming more interchangeable as they're normalized, and that AI is increasingly generalized as a catch-all term,"* notes Jenny Bullis. *"I also think AI is used with quite a lot of exaggeration a lot of the time. It's not as intelligent as I think the term suggests."*

Ultimately, says Elaine Rodrigo, marketers should focus on the outcome, not just the shiny new toys. *"It's about starting from business use cases and business questions, and then saying, 'what kind of technology do you require in order to answer this.' I'm less obsessed about AI and ML, and more obsessed about how I can help my team use these different kinds of new sources of data for insights and foresights, and the AI and ML is an enabler for them to do it."*



Cynthia Vega
Global Product Lead,
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Jenny Bullis
VP of Marketing Science, EMEA
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Elaine Rodrigo
Chief Insights &
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Enabling more strategic decision-making

How are marketers using ML and AI to be more strategic—and what concerns do they have about the technology?

In many organizations, says Bullis, the principal purpose of AI and ML is to automate non-strategic, labor-intensive tasks so marketers can get to decisions faster. *“You can train the system to seamlessly and thoughtlessly take action,”* she notes.

At Reckitt, for example, Rodrigo and her team use AI-driven tools to search more than 400,000 reports in their marketing research library. *“It actually gets smarter the more you use it, which helps us really milk the value of the insights that we already spent money on.”* Rodrigo also uses AI for its speed in analyzing data, especially for brands where *“you need to be on the cusp of what people are talking about.”*

But how much should marketers trust the information they get from AI and ML? *“It’s been a very, very long time since a stakeholder asked me whether this was 99.9% confidence interval,”* adds Rodrigo. Instead, conversations today might center around 80% confidence levels, trying something, and then pivoting along the way.

Marketers can even use AI to promote diversity and inclusion; Rodrigo recalled a time when AI pointed out a piece of creative in which *“all the servers at a restaurant basically were Hispanic, and all the diners were white.”* But it’s up to the people designing and running the AI to ensure that it is inclusive, and does not have any implicit bias.

This is just one of the reasons why Bullis urges companies to set a high bar for data ethics. *“It’s really important for any organization to actually understand where to look for biases, because sometimes you can’t see them.”*



Elaine Rodrigo
Chief Insights &
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Reckitt



Jenny Bullis
VP of Marketing Science, EMEA
Meta

Balancing AI with HI

Even as AI becomes more powerful, marketers must use human intelligence (HI) to interpret data and make decisions.

In marketing, says Vega, people tend to go straight to the numbers. *“But when you think about intelligence, we also need to think about empathy, reasoning, social and emotional engagement, and everything that makes us intelligent as humans.”*

As Vega points out, *“our clients are humans. Our consumers are humans. Our employees are humans. We learn from other humans. That’s important when we think about what AI is going to help us understand, whether we’re looking at patterns, emotions, or purchase decisions.”* Vega also urges marketers to keep encouraging creativity, perhaps especially with new technologies.

Marketers should look at AI as a tool, not a replacement for human involvement. *“A lot of stakeholders think you just push a button and voila, the insight just shows up because the AI is so intelligent,”* says Rodrigo. *“It doesn’t do that at the moment. The interpretation is very subjective, and there needs to be some expertise around how it’s used and how you put together that story.”*

Finding the right combination of AI and HI can be a challenge, adds Rodrigo, but it’s one that marketers should embrace. *“Some days I do miss a good database that could just do my job for me. But don’t underestimate the power of human intelligence. We surprise ourselves constantly about how much we actually know about our business, our categories, and our consumers.”*



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Elaine Rodrigo
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Navigating a cookieless world

As we move to a cookieless world, how can AI and ML help marketers improve creative, measurement, predictions, and other challenges?

First of all, says Bullis, don't assume that AI and ML are the solution in a cookieless world. *"There are all sorts of ways that advertisers are using their own first-party data to inform, direct, segment, and create insights—and those may or may not include ML and AI."*

When you take away cookies, says Bullis, *"I think it's actually leading to better measurement, because you get away from standard attribution. It's an opportunity to hit reset on how we understand digital effectiveness and ROI, and the capabilities of things like ML and AI."*

Going forward, marketers will have the ability to *"keep moving faster and getting much more granularity into the data, but in a completely private way, without actually looking at an individual's data whatsoever."*

At Meta, for example, Bullis and her team use AI parameter optimization, object detection, and predictive capabilities. *"Constantly feeding these systems and models allows us to fine-tune the accuracy of predictions, get into the granularity and texture of digital data, do better modeling, and do more and better data analysis."*

Another significant opportunity, adds Vega, is thinking about AI and ML for "end-to-end" purposes, to seamlessly connect the data. *"I think at the moment data sets are either marketing and advertising, or innovation, or providing for the customer. So how do you start connecting all of that? How do we ensure that AI and ML help our companies throughout the whole cycle, from identifying who the consumer is, to how we reach them, point-of-sale, pricing, and packaging?"*



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Increasing digital fluency

Marketers are using AI and ML to upskill talent, enabling them to interpret new sources of data, and accelerating an organization's digital transformation journey.

"I know we're talking about technology, but when you're trying to drive change, it's all about people," says Rodrigo. "People drive change."

Learning how to use and integrate AI and ML is a process. "A lot of us are not digitally native, but we can be digitally fluent," Rodrigo adds. "I believe everybody can be data fluent in our organization, but you have to take it in steps."

"We created these tools and then three people used them, but there were another 50 people who wanted that kind of insight—but didn't have time or the expertise to use it," adds Rodrigo. So she worked with Kantar to borrow resources and human intelligence to upskill others. "It went from three people being digitally fluent, to now another 30 or 50 people can say 'Hey, I am too.'"

Different stakeholders may require different approaches, as Bullis notes. "I see analytics communities, analytics professionals, data science professionals, and chief analytics officers being very open-minded about models and outputs and data that actually challenges their original belief systems." However, she adds, "for those who are uninitiated in AI, it's rooted in a bit of scary sci-fi."

One tactic, suggests Vega, is to learn from digitally native organizations, such as rideshare companies. "My dream is having that type of platform for insights and for marketing, something that is just easy to use, and connects data, tech, the human side, and the need in real time."



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Looking ahead for opportunity

As AI and ML become more prevalent, marketers are thinking about ways to take advantage of these powerful tools.

"Without a doubt, AI is here to stay across Meta," says Bullis. "It's not going anywhere, and it will deepen across the board as we all get better at it and it becomes more accessible."

Factors driving the growth include the availability of prebuilt models, increasing data volume, university graduates who can apply AI at scale, and an innovative corporate culture.

"Marketing effectiveness is innovation," adds Bullis. "When the teams are experimenting, we start seeing really interesting, innovative uses of AI and ML—things like simulator code, media allocation tools, smart segmentations, and lifetime value analysis applied in ways that couldn't be applied before."

At Reckitt, Rodrigo sees vast potential for AI to help guide marketing optimization and provide direction. *"I feel like a lot of what I have is still very descriptive. It's not prescriptive in terms of telling you what it should do with the insight that comes out of it."*

Forecasting is another area where technology can play a significant role.

"We have 318 million consumer data points," says Rodrigo. "Now, how do we actually use technologies like AI and ML and other sources of data to sense where the demand is going to go?"

Finally, adds Vega, consider the future of people—not just technology. *"Who are we going to be in 10 years? How are we going to consume media? What will we need in terms of distribution? Who is the consumer in 10 years, what are their emotions and social context and cultural context, and what does that mean for me today? We always need to start with people."*



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