Data masking: il punto cieco sono i dati fuori produzione



Data masking è la tecnica che affronta un rischio nascosto in piena vista: le organizzazioni proteggono con cura i dati nei sistemi di produzione, e poi ne fanno copie su copie in ambienti di sviluppo, test, formazione e analisi che nessuno sorveglia allo stesso modo. In quelle copie ci sono gli stessi dati sensibili, gli stessi nomi, gli stessi numeri di carta, gli stessi codici fiscali, ma con accessi più larghi, controlli più deboli e una vita più lunga. È un punto cieco strutturale, perché si dà per scontato che il dato sia a rischio solo dove vive in produzione, mentre ogni sua copia mal protetta è la stessa esposizione, privata però delle difese.

Il data masking interrompe questa moltiplicazione silenziosa del rischio sostituendo i valori sensibili con valori falsi ma realistici. Lo scopo è permettere a chi sviluppa, collauda o analizza di lavorare con dati credibili, che si comportano come quelli veri, senza maneggiare un solo dato reale. La differenza, per la sicurezza, è enorme: una violazione di un ambiente di test mascherato non porta via informazioni utili, perché lì dentro non c’è nulla di autentico da rubare.

Il pericolo che si copia da solo

Vale la pena soffermarsi su quanto sia sottovalutato questo fronte. Un database di produzione è di solito presidiato: accessi ristretti, monitoraggio, cifratura, audit. Ma quello stesso database viene clonato di continuo per dare ai team materiale su cui lavorare, e ogni clone eredita i dati sensibili senza ereditare le protezioni. Gli ambienti non di produzione si moltiplicano, restano attivi a lungo, sono

accessibili a più persone, e quasi mai ricevono la stessa attenzione di sicurezza della produzione. Sono, in pratica, lo stesso forziere con le porte spalancate.

Il problema non è teorico, anche se l'esempio più citato va preso per quello che è. Uno scenario descritto dalla letteratura di settore, costruito a fini illustrativi, racconta una piattaforma di commercio elettronico europea con sette ambienti non di produzione, tra sviluppo, collaudo, staging e formazione, ciascuno con una copia completa del database; un audit di conformità vi individua dati personali non mascherati in tutti, per circa 4,2 milioni di record cliente. Costruito o reale, è lo schema tipico: nessuno aveva deciso di esporre quei dati, semplicemente erano stati copiati per comodità operativa e dimenticati. Per questo il data masking si lega tanto alle pratiche di protezione del dato quanto al modo in cui le pipeline DevSecOps costruiscono e alimentano gli ambienti di lavoro.

Sostituire con il falso realistico

Il cuore della tecnica è la sostituzione: ogni valore sensibile viene rimpiazzato con uno fittizio che ne conserva le caratteristiche utili. Un nome diventa un altro nome plausibile, una data di nascita un'altra data coerente, un codice una sequenza valida nel formato ma priva di corrispondenza reale. Le modalità sono diverse, dalla sostituzione con valori da dizionari, al rimescolamento dei valori esistenti tra i record, alla variazione controllata di numeri e date. L'obiettivo comune è che il dato resti realistico e strutturalmente corretto, perché un test o un'analisi su dati assurdi non servono a nulla, ma che non contenga più nulla di vero.

La proprietà decisiva, almeno nella forma destinata agli ambienti non di produzione, è l'irreversibilità. Un dato mascherato bene non si può riportare all'originale: non c'è

una chiave come nella cifratura, non c’è un archivio di corrispondenze come nella tokenizzazione. È proprio questa assenza di una via di ritorno a far sì che, agli occhi delle norme sulla protezione dei dati, un’informazione mascherata correttamente sia trattata come anonima, e quindi esca dal perimetro della maggior parte degli obblighi. Qui sta la differenza con la cifratura e la tokenizzazione, entrambe reversibili per chi ha la chiave o il vault: per i dati di test, non poter tornare indietro non è un limite, è il punto. Va riconosciuto che alcune tassonomie elencano la cifratura tra le tecniche di mascheramento; in questo articolo la si tiene distinta proprio in base alla reversibilità, che è la proprietà rilevante quando si parla di ambienti non di produzione.

Data masking statico e dinamico: due scopi diversi

Sotto lo stesso nome convivono due approcci che rispondono a problemi diversi. Il mascheramento statico produce una copia permanentemente mascherata dei dati, da usare al posto dell’originale negli ambienti non di produzione: è la risposta al rischio dei cloni di sviluppo e test, perché quei cloni, da quel momento, non contengono dati reali. Il mascheramento dinamico, invece, non altera i dati memorizzati, ma li nasconde al volo nel momento dell’accesso, in base a chi sta guardando: un operatore dell’assistenza vede solo le ultime cifre di una carta, mentre il dato completo resta intatto sotto, accessibile solo a chi ne ha diritto.

Sono due strumenti per due esigenze. Lo statico serve a fare in modo che il dato reale non finisca dove non deve stare, cioè nei tanti ambienti secondari. Il dinamico serve a limitare ciò che gli utenti vedono in produzione, come una forma di controllo degli accessi applicata al singolo campo. Confonderli, o pensare che uno copra il bisogno dell’altro,

porta a lasciare scoperto proprio il fronte che si credeva protetto.

L’insidia tecnica: l’integrità referenziale

C’è un dettaglio che separa un mascheramento utile da uno che rende i dati inservibili, ed è l’integrità referenziale. Lo stesso dato mascherato deve restare coerente in tutte le tabelle e i sistemi che vi fanno riferimento: se un identificativo cliente viene sostituito con un certo valore, quel valore deve essere lo stesso negli ordini, nei pagamenti, nelle spedizioni. Se il mascheramento procede campo per campo senza questa coerenza, le relazioni tra i dati si spezzano, le interrogazioni che le attraversano falliscono, e il database mascherato smette di comportarsi come quello vero, vanificando lo scopo per cui lo si è creato. È la parte difficile della disciplina, quella che distingue uno strumento serio da una semplice cancellatura, e che richiede di mascherare i dati in modo consistente, non isolato.

Mascherare bene, non solo mascherare

Resta un’ultima avvertenza, perché il data masking dà sicurezza solo se fatto con rigore. Un mascheramento debole può essere annullato: se restano abbastanza elementi originali o abbastanza regolarità, i dati si possono re-identificare, ricollegando i valori finti alle persone reali. La distinzione che le norme sulla privacy tracciano tra anonimizzazione, irreversibile e fuori perimetro, e pseudonimizzazione, che resta dato personale perché in qualche modo riconducibile, passa esattamente di qui. Un mascheramento che lascia una porta sul retro offre una falsa tranquillità, e lo stesso riconoscimento del mascheramento come misura di sicurezza in standard come la ISO 27001 presuppone che sia robusto, non

cosmetico. La verifica della non re-identificabilità è parte del lavoro, non un dettaglio.

In definitiva, il data masking risponde a una verità che la sicurezza tende a rimuovere: il dato non è a rischio solo dove lo si custodisce con attenzione, ma in ogni copia che se ne lascia in giro. E le copie, negli ambienti di sviluppo, test e analisi, sono quasi sempre molte più di quante si pensi. Mascherare significa permettere a tutta l'organizzazione di lavorare con dati realistici senza detenere nulla di reale fuori dal luogo che davvero lo protegge. È la stessa logica della tokenizzazione, non perdere ciò che non si possiede, applicata però alla proliferazione invisibile dei dati fuori produzione, ed è uno dei modi più concreti, e più trascurati, per ridurre la superficie di un'eventuale violazione.

Condividi sui Social Network:
https://www.ictsecuritymagazine.com/cyber-security/data-masking-dati-produzione/

NBCU Faces Major Merger Questions After Its Comcast Split

Comcast is spinning off NBCUniversal, and the TV industry has questions.

The company's tax-free spin-off of NBCU, announced on Monday and expected to take a year to complete, creates two separate

companies: Comcast will continue to focus on its core technology businesses, while NBCU will focus on media and entertainment.

In announcing the separation, Brian Roberts, chairman and co-chief executive officer of Comcast, said that the split has the potential to "unlock a more entrepreneurial management approach and open up a multitude of new opportunities for each business."

Among those opportunities, the separation gives both companies more flexibility, according to Julie Clark, svp, diversified markets, media and entertainment, TransUnion.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/convergent-tv/nbcu-faces-major-merger-questions-after-its-comcast-split/

Miroma Group Acquires Ad Results Media For Big U.S. Push

London-based independent marketing conglomerate Miroma Group has acquired a majority stake in Ad Results Media, a creator, audio, and performance media agency.

Miroma Group is buying the stake from Los Angeles private equity firm Shamrock Capital, which also owns ADWEEK.

The acquisition is Miroma Group’s most significant move into the American market since its founding in 2002.

ARM operates as one of the world’s largest buyers of podcast and audio media, connecting brands including FanDuel, Molson Coors, and ZipRecruiter with audiences across podcasts, YouTube, streaming platforms, and radio.

Financial terms were not disclosed.

According to Michael LaSalle, co-president & partner Shamrock Capital, the private equity group will retain a “significant minority” stake in the business. “We believe in this combination,” LaSalle said, referring to Miroma and ARM, “which is why we are still minority shareholders and and opted to retain that.”

ARM CEO Jordan Fox will remain in his role.

The deal brings ARM’s offices in New York, Houston, and Los Angeles into a group that now comprises more than two dozen specialist agencies across entertainment, creative production, performance marketing, and technology.

Combined, the group employs more than 900 people globally and will oversee more than $750 million in annual media investment.

For Miroma founder and CEO Marc Boyan, the acquisition gives Miroma a foothold in creator-led media as that ecosystem has matured into a dominant advertising channel.

“ARM has spent years building deep expertise in the ecosystem,” Boyan told ADWEEK in an email, referring to the company’s track record of helping brands connect with audiences of creators and podcasters. “[These] relationships, measurement, planning and performance – that simply can’t be replicated overnight.”

Boyan said the acquisition will give ARM access to Miroma’s

global client relationships—which include Adidas, Amazon Audible, McDonald's, Live Nation, and Google—while Miroma clients gain access to ARM's creator and audio infrastructure. "This isn't about folding a business into a holding company," he said.

ARM CEO Fox sees a huge opportunity in Miroma Group's network. "Marc and the Miroma Group have extraordinary client relationships across their businesses, and the growth opportunities in front of us as part of the Miroma Group are enormously exciting," he said.

Boyan's long-term ambition is to make Miroma one of the leading independent specialist marketing groups in the U.S. "With ARM joining the Group," Boyan said, the company has "the scale to compete with much larger networks while retaining the agility and entrepreneurial culture that independent agencies are known for." While the group said they are not trying to produce another generalist holding company, they are developing specialization in bringing together creator media, audio, performance, out-of-home, entertainment and brand experience under one platform. "We believe that's where the market is heading," he said, "and we want to lead it rather than follow it."

In a press release, Fox called Miroma "the natural partner" for ARM's next phase, citing the group's global scale and service breadth as accelerants for growth the agency couldn't achieve independently.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/dealroom/miroma-group-acquires-ad-results-media-for-big-us-push/

Rewriting the Brand Discovery Playbook in the AI Era

The future of brands gets decided here. Join the industry's top marketers at Brandweek for the ideas, insights, and connections shaping what's next. **Get your ticket.**

This post was created in partnership with Moloco

Key takeaways

- Brand discovery is increasingly happening through direct chats with AI agents, and marketers are trying to work around it.
- Strong customer relationships protect brands from AI's disruption of the customer journey.
- The changing world of AI could provide marketers with a renewed opportunity to tap into the human and community aspects of marketing.

Marketing leaders are grappling with how AI is reshaping traditional funnels, whether it's through generative AI summaries usurping consumer clicks, or being at the mercy of what AI agents say (or don't say) about their brands.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions group chat co-hosted with Moloco, industry executives shared how they are trying to reclaim discovery, strengthen direct customer relationships, and bolster their owned digital surfaces.

Moloco’s Paul D’Arcy

Shifting from SEO to GEO

Paul D’Arcy, CMO of Moloco, kicked off the conversation by sharing a key finding from Boston Consulting Group and Moloco’s research about AI’s impact on the customer journey.

“It showed that the best protection against disruption is longer-term, stickier customer relationships,” D’Arcy said. That includes finding ways to bring people onto your own digital surfaces, apps, and experiences so that your brand becomes the destination, he added.

With AI mediating so many consumer decisions, Jane Hendrick, managing VP of global integrated marketing at Marriott International, said it’s important that brands ask this

question: “How do you make sure you’re part of the consideration set before someone even goes into the platform?”

For Marriott Bonvoy, it means tapping into cultural moments and driving more relevance so that the brand is a natural part of the conversation. “You have to make sure you are leaning into the algorithm and the machine and all of that, but you also have to be top of mind for the consumer,” Hendrick said.

In fact, being part of the cultural conversation can pull double duty since it can also help brands from a generative engine optimization (GEO) perspective, shared Julie Foster, SVP and managing director of EA Experiences.

“What’s fascinating to me is, if we’re building beyond SEO into a GEO-type space, a lot of the things that it’s pulling from to figure out authority actually ends up being whether or not you’re part of culture,” Foster said. “They’re pulling from the conversations on Reddit, and so if you’re not top of mind, top of conversation, the GEO piece isn’t going to pull through.”

(L-R) EA Experiences’ Julie Foster, Codeword’s Kyle Monson

Rethinking brand discovery and consumer journeys

Brand discovery is increasingly happening through direct chats with AI agents, and marketers are trying to crack the code to earn their endorsements.

“You’ve got a brand ambassador sitting between yourself and the customer, which is the chatbot,” said Kyle Monson, founding partner of Codeword. “Word of mouth is powerful. Word of bot is going to become very powerful,” he added.

Third-party platforms like Pinterest are another avenue for brand discovery, where billions of searches take place monthly, said Stacy Malone, VP, global business of marketing at Pinterest.

“It’s literally turning into Gen Z’s search engine,” she said.

But what’s interesting, Malone noted, is that only about half of those searches have commercial intent.

“Many times, they’re not looking for the answer, which is what a lot of the AI platforms are giving people. They want to explore, discover, which is a great place for a brand to be,” she said. “We hear a lot of consumers say, ‘I don’t know what I want yet, but I’ll know it when I see it.’”

Richard Case, VP of growth marketing at GoodRx, acknowledged that while brand discovery acquisition is becoming more challenging, things do get easier for brands if they can win customers over during that first interaction.

“I still think that in-person or user product experience just becomes that much more tangible and creates a certain feeling to make you want to go back,” Case said.

(L-R) GoodRx’s Richard Case, Marriott International’s Jane Hendrick

Anticipating what comes next

Change is nothing new for media companies, with major platform shifts shaking things up every couple of years, said Dan Gardner, co-founder and executive chairman of Code and Theory. “It’s literally the same pattern since the Internet was started for media companies, but it’s usually mainly hurt them or disrupted them,” he explained.

This time around with AI, however, Gardner predicts that every industry will be affected. That said, he sees a silver lining. “Things are changing, and that is both a disruptive moment and a huge opportunity.”

(L-R) Code and Theory’s Dan Gardner, Pinterest’s Stacy Malone

Monson sees investment in top-of-funnel and middle-of-funnel marketing becoming even more crucial. “It’s expensive, and it takes a lot of time to build brand preference. But if you’re not building brand preference with a consumer, then you’re stuck with whatever the preference of the chatbots is going to be, and you don’t have as much control over that model,” he said.

Along those lines, getting consumers into the brand’s loyalty ecosystem is a top priority for Hendrick. “And of course, delivering on the experience, because you know all of that other stuff literally doesn’t matter if they have a bad experience with your product,” she said.

Ending on a hopeful note, D’Arcy said that a positive outcome

of this period of rapid change could be a renewed appreciation for the human and community aspects of marketing. “And hopefully a pride and a return to craft as everything becomes automated.”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Richard Case, VP of Growth Marketing, GoodRx
- Paul D’Arcy, CMO, Moloco
- Julie Foster, SVP and Managing Director, EA Experiences
- Dan Gardner, Co-Founder and Executive Chairman, Code and Theory
- Jane Hendrick, Managing VP, Global Integrated Marketing, Marriott International
- Liz Kneebone, VP, Community Programs and Development, ADWEEK
- Stacy Malone, VP, Global Business Marketing, Pinterest
- Kyle Monson, Founding Partner, Codeword

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/rewriting-the-brand-discovery-playbook-in-the-ai-era/

When Every Moment Becomes a Shopping Moment

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your ticket.

This post was created in partnership with Roundel

Key takeaways

- Marketers are focusing more on how to meet consumers at the right place at the right time, because modern discovery happens wherever consumers are.
- AI can’t replace emotional connections, but it can reduce friction in the shopping experience without replacing what makes shopping memorable.
- Physical stores still play a strong role in shopping, and retailers tailor their stores to reflect the specific communities they reside in.

Shopping no longer starts in one place—or follows a predictable path.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions group chat co-hosted with Roundel, leaders from retail, technology, media, and consumer brands discussed how AI, creators, and omnichannel experiences are reshaping retail media as consumers move fluidly between digital and physical touchpoints.

Roundel’s Jenny Holleran

Discovery begins wherever consumers are

Where the shopping journey begins depends on the consumer. Stephanie Sandbo, chief revenue officer at LTK, argued that there is no universal starting point anymore because consumers move directly between inspiration and purchase.

“I don’t think the funnel is dead. I think it’s collapsed because now you can purchase where there’s awareness, and that is then considered conversion. It’s less about where it starts, but really about meeting that person at the right moment, when they are ready for that, with the relevant product,” Sandbo explained.

For Kristin Patterson, VP of omnichannel retail at Pinterest,

the consumer’s mindset matters more than the platform itself. She noted that discovery starts everywhere.

“It might start on Pinterest and then go deeper with Google Search to find more credible information, and then you might walk into a Target store. Being there in all those moments and having the consumer context in mind is how brands best show up,” Patterson said.

(L-R) LTK’s Stephanie Sandbo, Google’s Katie Babcock

Katie Babcock, director of retail performance solutions at Google, said consumers are discovering products now across more touchpoints than ever before.

“We’re seeing it start in all different places,” Babcock

explained. “I was getting on the plane, and somebody had a bag. I took out my phone and took a picture, which is now a search, to find the bag online. Then, I saw it in a video ad, for example, and that is now streaming, plus shopping, plus searching in a whole new way. So, it’s complex, but it’s everywhere.”

Fandom is part of the journey, too. Mahta Eghbali, VP of strategic alliances and global partnerships at Mattel.

“I think fandom begins at a very early age, but needs to be nurtured. The relationship can be easily broken these days, so we think about the fan, who is a shopper, a gifter, a child, or the millennial enjoying it in a different way,” Eghbali shared. “The funnel to me is not dead, but it definitely needs to be nurtured. It’s not as direct as it was before.”

Mattel’s Mahta Eghbali

AI is reducing friction—not replacing experiences

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in commerce, panelists agreed that its biggest role is to make shopping easier while preserving the enjoyment of discovery.

Babcock pointed to increasingly detailed searches that provide richer context for retailers. “Search queries are longer than they were in the past, and we have more context behind that query. It’s how we reduce the friction to lead you to a purchase,” she noted.

Sandbo added that consumers now search more conversationally, asking detailed questions instead of entering simple product keywords. “People are searching with a lot more specificity

than we've ever seen before," she explained. "It's about making sure that you are set up for success as it relates to a real, tangible answer vs. just scraping and indexing web pages, which is a brand's approach."

The group also emphasized that AI cannot replace emotional connections. Reflecting on creator marketing, Sandbo shared that storytelling-centered campaigns often outperform transactional messaging. "People are looking for that connection, and that's ultimately what makes it so effective, and what AI really can't quite touch," she said.

Eghbali agreed, arguing that technology can strengthen experiences without replacing what makes them memorable.

"I don't think AI is going to take away taste," said Eghbali. "I don't think it's going to take away how walking into a Target store makes you feel. I think it's going to inform it. I don't think it's going to replace it."

Pinterest’s Kristin Patterson

Physical retail continues to matter

Although digital commerce continues to evolve, panelists discussed the enduring importance of stores.

Jenny Holleran, VP of partner solutions group at Roundel, said shoppers still value the experiences that physical retail offers. “People want that physical experience to get out and have some joy,” she said.

The in-store experience includes digital discovery. Holleran noted that shoppers often use their phones while browsing—not because they’re distracted, but because they’re looking for additional information before making a purchase.

“Our guests are on their phones in the store. At first, you’re like, ‘What are they doing?’ But it’s that discovery. They’re in the store, but maybe they just want a little more information,” Holleran explained.

For Mattel, creating those in-person moments starts well before consumers reach the shelf.

“Our responsibility to the consumer and the fan is to engage them everywhere, so that when they go to Target, they’re grabbing the product,” Eghbali explained. “That means we have to engage them on socials, through short-form content, through digital games, through location-based entertainment, through experiential, and through meaningful brand partnerships.”

The conversation also explored how retailers adapt stores to reflect the communities they serve. “Target’s ambition is to be the most delightful experience in retail,” Holleran said. She added that creating that experience starts with understanding each community. “It’s really starting to think, where are we, who are our guests, and how do we create that moment in time?”

Featured Conversation Leaders

- Katie Babcock, Director, Retail Performance Solutions, Google
- Mahta Eghbali, VP, Strategic Alliances and Global Partnerships, Mattel
- Jenny Holleran, VP, Partner Solutions Group, Roundel
- Ryan Joe, Editor-in-Chief, ADWEEK
- Kristin Patterson, VP, Omnichannel Retail, Pinterest
- Stephanie Sandbo, Chief Revenue Officer, LTK

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/commerce/when-every-moment-becomes-a-shopping-moment/

Streaming Is Becoming a Storefront

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This post was created in partnership with Paramount Advertising

Connected TV is evolving into more than a viewing platform—it is becoming a dynamic bridge between storytelling, commerce, and consumer action.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lion fireside chat co-hosted with Paramount Advertising, Mark Stenberg, senior media reporter, ADWEEK, sat down with industry leaders to analyze how modern streaming networks and interactive ad formats change consumer habits and retail choices.

Viewer adoption of interactive video formats

TV advertising is evolving, as networks can now pair on-screen items with product inventory codes. Marika Roque, chief strategy officer at KERV Interactive, explained that viewer engagement rises when technology respects the audience’s immediate desires.

“We are always partnering with our publisher partners to make sure that we’re innovating at the speed of the viewer and giving them what they want—giving them the moments they want to help them shop in the most relevant way,” Roque explained.

Publishers can change their software layouts to support these tools. Dan Reich, EVP, streaming product and global head of product at Paramount+ and Pluto TV at Paramount, explained, “On the Paramount+ side, we’re really focused on content discovery. How do we get users to engage more and more?”

To drive engagement, Paramount is using AI for poster art optimization—continuously testing to see what’s driving the biggest clickthrough rate and the biggest engagement—and has rolled out context-rich interactive features. For example, the network recently debuted Inside Peek on Roku for the new season of The Agency—a feature reminiscent of VH1’s classic Pop-Up Video—to give viewers real-time insights into production and the actors on screen.

Paramount also adjusts ad placements based on what happens in a scene rather than relying on fixed commercial breaks. “We want to have flexible ad breaks and flexible ad loads, so that we can place the ad break in the right spot for the right user,” Reich said.

Automation and industry standards across networks

While some view shoppable TV as a novelty, KERV Interactive’s data proves consumer adoption is real. In a joint study, Paramount and KERV Interactive found that over 60% of viewers who engaged with a “pause-to-shop” feature enjoyed the experience, resulting in a pause rate 7X higher than standard benchmarks.

Scaling this ecosystem requires long-term industry standards. Roque emphasized that sharing consistent data across entertainment platforms improves programmatic performance. “Brands and agencies really push the technology partners like

us to create a standard, so that you can have the same data across the ecosystem," Roque stated.

Roque also discussed how broad compatibility enables automated systems to manage complex retail environments. That opens the door to scene-level targeting, in which major retailers like Wayfair, Walmart, and Target can bid on specific product moments.

Roque noted that advanced tools will help navigate this environment: "Agentic AI is going to help us a ton to normalize this and allow the demand side to understand what signals match their demand."

Success relies on constant optimization. Paramount relentlessly A/B tests features to protect the viewer experience and provides concrete sales metrics. "Every time you iterate, you test, you learn, you evolve, and that's really been the core for us." Reich explained.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/convergent-tv/streaming-is-becoming-a-storefront/

How Brands Can Build Creative Infrastructure for the AI Era

The future of brands gets decided here. Join the industry’s top marketers at Brandweek for the ideas, insights, and connections shaping what’s next. **Get your ticket.**

This post was created in partnership with Empathy Lab

The campaign had a good run. One big idea launched everywhere, studied, repeated. Now? Not so much.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with Empathy Lab, industry leaders explored what replaces it: a connected creative infrastructure where engineers, creative talent, data, and AI production work together.

The infrastructure shift

When AI production tools reach everyone, the real competitive question comes into focus. What keeps one brand from sounding exactly like the next?

The answer is not necessarily more tech.

“I think the creative teams are the ones that now matter more than anything,” said Roland Butler, head of product, content solutions at Zalando.

“What we are now building is a whole creative system around those teams, maintaining their agency and their creative freedom, and allowing them to respond faster and better,” he added. Designers and engineers now work alongside one another on prompts, quality controls, editorial guidelines, and cultural trend signals.

Ben Hall, VP at Empathy Lab, sees this moment as a clarifying one. “The fundamentals are more important than ever,” he noted. “The idea, the insight, the cultural relevance has become massively important. Teams are now surrounding themselves around this again.”

None of that completely went away. What shifted is the strategic foundation. “You’ve got to have systems thinking, you’ve got to have people who really understand how this idea can translate to composable systems across and outside of the Internet,” Hall continued.

Keeping speed from turning generic

During the Met Gala this past spring, the Zalando team used tooling to link trend signals, product relevance, visuals, and an editorial review, then published a campaign within 24 hours.

“The speed to react, I think, is something that you should track, and then the speed to insight,” Butler said. “If you’re just counting the volume of AI output, you’re adding to the problem of a world of blandness.”

Hall added that speed “can actually be an antidote to blandness, because you can read signals from culture and speed that roll in. You can create content really quickly, but it actually has meaning.”

The upstream role

Hall’s framework for where people fit is clear: “You need the empathy upstream, and the machines power the creative downstream.”

Hall and Butler agreed that strategic thinking has to be baked into the infrastructure, not applied at the end. Brands need the people responsible for taste, emotion, and cultural judgment to be involved in designing the operating models. AI can help teams move at the speed of culture, but creatives bring the empathy and storytelling instinct that make a brand memorable.

“Keep your teams curious, and focus on systems rather than projects,” Butler concluded.

Recommended videos
https://www.adweek.com/creativity/how-brands-can-build-creative-infrastructure-for-the-ai-era/

When AI Becomes the Gatekeeper of Brand Visibility

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This post was created in partnership with Adobe

Brand discovery has always happened in places companies don't fully control. What's different now is that the intermediary doesn't just surface options. It makes a judgment call.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions sunset series panel co-hosted with Adobe, marketing leaders explored how to earn credibility and trust when consumers first encounter brands through AI before reaching an owned channel.

Brand discovery becomes conversational

Brand voice has long lived in campaigns and creative. For Rachel Thornton, CMO of enterprise at Adobe, that's the part

that’s changing. Now it has to come through in an AI summary.

“Your brand matters now more than ever,” Thornton said. “You want to think through your brand visibility strategy and how you show up in places like ChatGPT, Claude, etc.”

This visibility question is tied to how consumers encounter your brand. They have conversations with AI models and often learn about your brand in those conversations. “You really have to think, ‘What’s my conversational brand?’” Thornton added.

Linda Ha, deputy CMO at IKEA Retail, IKEA, sees the change in how people behave. Fewer consumers are clicking through results to make up their own minds. Many simply read what an AI has already concluded. The way they ask questions has changed, too.

“Consumers are having conversations, instead of just searching for information,” Ha said.

Andy Kauffman, chief commercial officer for the U.S. and Canada at Marriott International, resisted the temptation to treat AI as a new game. “I think about AI as just another channel with its set of tactics,” he said.

The goal, in his view, hasn’t changed: understand what the traveler wants and deliver an experience worth coming back to. Marriott’s Ask Bonvoy beta runs on that same logic but uses a different interface. What used to be a “forms, filters, and fields experience” is giving way to intent-led, conversational planning.

Consistency still creates trust

As discovery spreads across AI agents, reviews, creator communities, and more, brands earn credibility through consistency.

Selina Sykes, VP of marketing transformation and social-first,

beauty and wellbeing, at Unilever, said AI systems look for reliable patterns across the places where brands appear.

“If the algorithm goes out there and you say something different on Walmart than a creator says on Reddit, the AI is going to go, ‘We don’t know if we believe this product benefit. We’re not going to recommend it,’” she noted.

When language, tone, claims, or experience feel off across channels, the relationship weakens. Trust softens and eventually breaks.

Sykes pointed to Vaseline as proof that the principle holds over time. The brand is winning Cannes Lions this year with a campaign built around consumer-discovered hacks for a product more than 150 years old. Relevance endures when a company keeps listening to what people actually do with its products, not just what the brand wants to tell them.

Staying attuned to people on the outside requires investing in the people on the inside. Sykes described the challenge as “the poetry and the plumbing.” Creative instinct alongside technical rigor.

Ha echoed that people-first view. “AI has opened up so much opportunity for us. We need to constantly invest in continuous learning and really double down on our creativity and craft,” she said.

Being found in an AI era is only the opening move. Successful brands will be clear and consistent enough for machines to surface, trustworthy enough for people to believe, and meaningful enough for customers to choose.

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Scaling Brands Inside the Story

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Consumers aren’t just avoiding ads—they’re choosing content that feels worth their time. To earn that attention, brands have to show up inside the stories people love, not as interruptions but as meaningful parts of the experience.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions fireside chat, co-hosted with EightPM, Zoë Ruderman, chief content officer of ADWEEK, sat down with marketing executives to discuss how brands can excel in the content economy through authentic storytelling environments and proactive integration strategies.

From one-off placements to always-on presence

Marketers often approach entertainment placements reactively, but scaling those efforts requires constant monitoring.

Grant Regillo, VP of EightPM, shared that his company works with 300 to 350 shows and movies every year. He encourages companies to look across the entertainment market and ask,

“How can I be involved in as many conversations as possible?”

Samantha Catalina, a fractional CMO working with Happy Dad and Noble Pacific, said that these integrations must remain genuine. “You have to integrate it properly, and you have to integrate it authentically, and so whoever you’re doing that with has to actually believe in whatever product they’re marketing,” she said.

Production crews work on short schedules and frequently have only two or three weeks to secure items for a shoot. Regillo explained that having digital assets, inventory, and guidelines prepared in advance allows crew members to make immediate selections.

“We execute fast so they can film that scene, and they don’t need to look at any other options,” he shared. This preparation helped the prebiotic soda brand Olipop scale when it first entered Whole Foods. Regillo noted that the company “prioritized entertainment and gave us a lot of creative freedom to move really fast” so the brand could present itself as a modern soda instead of a basic health drink.

The art of the subplot—giving up control

Successful placements can mean letting go of corporate control while still adding real value.

Patrick O’Keefe, chief integrated marketing officer at e.l.f. Beauty, shared how the brand responded when creator Oliver Widger’s solo sailing voyage with his cat Phoenix started blowing up on TikTok.

The team hired a plane to airdrop a care package with Pringles, cat food, and e.l.f. sunscreen for Oliver, deliberately avoiding any oversized logo or heavy-handed branding. “We were the subplot, not the main plot. It was in that moment that you truly do give up control,” O’Keefe said, emphasizing that the moment actually belonged to Oliver’s

journey. The partnership continued after Oliver landed in Hawaii, with a Twitch livestream to unpack his story.

Tangible business growth

Entertainment partnerships only matter if they move the business, not just generate buzz. Jackie Widmann, SVP of marketing and commercial at BERO Brewing—actor Tom Holland's NA beer brand—said her team looks beyond impressions to the doors a film collaboration can open.

"When we look at the success of a campaign, it's not just about how many people saw it—it's about whether it drives real leads, retail interest, and forward momentum for the business," Widmann explained. She added that the goal is for buyers to see a collaboration, want to try the product, and ultimately help expand BERO's reach in a meaningful way.

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The Future of Retail Marketing Is First-Party Data

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Retail media that looks beyond ROAS and leverages customer insights can unlock long-term value and customer loyalty.

During an ADWEEK House Cannes Lions panel co-hosted with Sam's Club, Ryan Joe, editor-in-chief of ADWEEK, sat down with industry leaders to discuss how data and predictive modeling are helping brands build relationships that endure long after checkout.

How a membership model can transform brand-building

Being a warehouse club has data advantages—namely, that customers have to scan a membership ID every time they shop, said Harvey Ma, VP and general manager of Sam's Club Connect at Sam's Club. "It's not just a transaction; it's the start of a relationship."

Being able to track behavior over time helps Sam's Club and its partners like P&G create better customer experiences and capitalize on what retail media does best, which is performance, he added.

Jacques Hagopian, SVP of North America brand operations at P&G, noted that the convergence of communication and commerce is one of the major shifts that the industry is experiencing right now, and it's creating a golden opportunity for brand marketers.

"We have retailers that are becoming media companies, and media companies that are becoming retailers," Hagopian said. "Every point of reach is now a point of sale. How exciting is that?"

The Sam's Club ecosystem, in particular, provides a rich

environment for retail media because its members pay to shop in that model, added Hagopian. “That allows us to engage those members with experiences in different aspects of content to take a moment of inspiration and turn it into a moment where they put things in a cart,” he said.

Hagopian then shared a use case of how Sam’s Club’s first-party data is helping P&G tap into consumer behavior to drive long-term business growth. For its Cascade Platinum Plus dishwasher detergent product, P&G wanted to reach the warehouse club members who hadn’t used it before. Specifically, P&G aimed to attract consumers with related interests who might be more likely to love the product, such as cooking enthusiasts. The brand identified 800,000 households to target, and the experiment resulted in a 2X increase in marketing effectiveness.

Hagopian called it “a great example where the consumer behavior, a consumer insight, a product that meets that need, combined with the member data, created a perfect environment for that engagement.”

Ma noted that the warehouse environment is also ideal for unique consumer activations that can convert to sales, such as sampling, live demos, and parking lot events. “Retail media is so much more than just the ads. The ads are just a means to serve and sell products,” he said. “We don’t want to lose that creativity piece, and that human connection is so important.”

AI is powering transformative change in retail media

AI’s influence on retail media is in its infancy, but both panelists shared their excitement about the potential it can unlock.

“The power of AI to create personalized experiences changes the game for brand builders,” said Hagopian. “It’s no longer

batch-based campaigns that you run one at a time. It really is a continuous flow of communication, content, ideas, sensing, listening, responding, adjusting, and optimizing in real time based on the signals that are available."

Ma shared his hope that retail marketers will also use AI for more than just increasing conversion. "There have to be other ways that scale and automation through agentic can help us create better member experiences, because after all, we exist to serve customers and members."

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