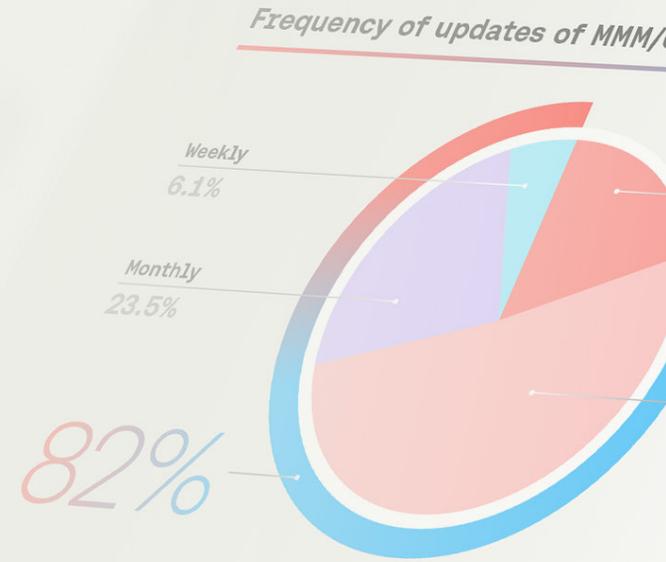


Five Forces Shaping Marketing Budget Decisions in 2026

What Senior Decision Makers at Industry-Leading (\$1B+) Advertisers Told Us

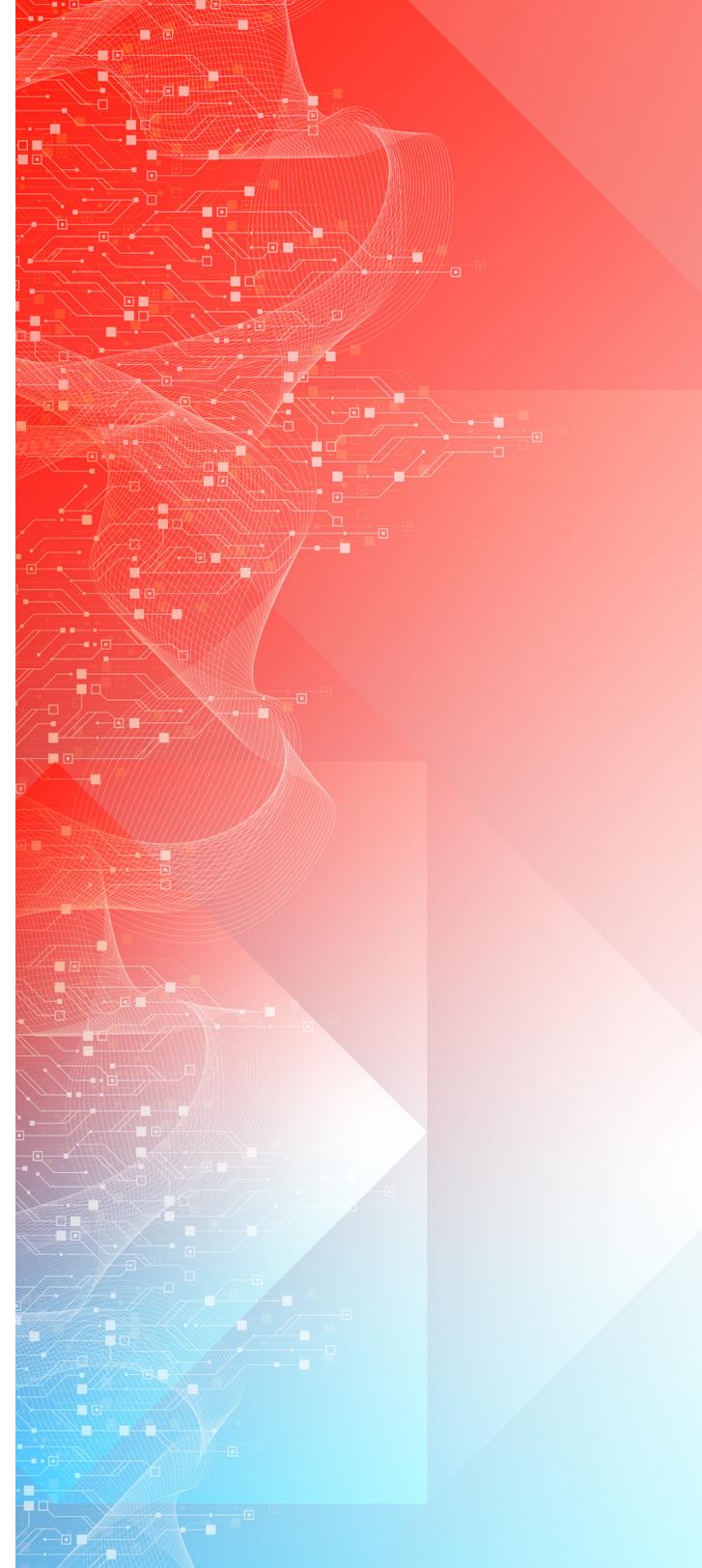


Barriers to using marketing analytics for investment decisions



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Executive Summary

The Survey

The **2026 State of Commercial Decisioning Survey** by Analytic Partners delivers a rigorous, data-driven view into how leading advertisers make strategic decisions and shape their marketing budgets in volatile business environments. The research, grounded in a carefully verified sample, surfaces the role of insights, measurement, and company norms in decision-making across Analytics, Finance, and Marketing. The study draws on responses from 455 executives, each responsible for substantial marketing investments, and provides a direct comparison of priorities and practices across these three critical functions.

This Report

Data has long constrained the impact of analytics on major marketing decisions, and in 2026, that gap remains indisputable. Our research shows that the solution isn't more data—with one key exception—it's a decisioning system that combines context and speed. When advertisers adopt these approaches, they can finally move from slow, cautious adjustments to confident decisions that drive growth. This report focuses on **five key insights** from the 2026 Survey that are currently redefining how leaders allocate and optimize marketing budgets.

Data Collection Period

October 2025 — December 2025

Approach

Qualitative interviews: 45 Minutes

Quantitative survey: 15-20 Minutes

Audience

Target: Marketing budget decision makers

Geography: US, Canada, UK, Germany

Budget: \$100M annual media and advertising budget (median)

Industry: Consumer, Retail, Financial Services, Health, Education, Hospitality

Department: 150 respondents each from Data & Analytics, Finance, Marketing

Seniority: 45% Director, 55% VP+



Five Forces Shaping Marketing Budget Decisions in 2026

Current State: Gaps in Data and Decisioning

INSIGHT 1

Data remains a limiter. The top three obstacles to investment decisions for large advertisers are: data, data, data.

INSIGHT 2

External factors are the critical gap, limiting the use of analytics to inform marketing spend.

INSIGHT 3

No surprise, **marketing budget decisions are the least data-driven,** especially among marketers.

Thrive in 2026: Holistic Measurement with Speed

INSIGHT 4

Marketing Mix Modeling/Commercial Analytics is the most-cited source of truth to inform and track marketing spending decisions.

INSIGHT 5

Marketing Mix Modeling/Commercial Analytics must match the speed and volatility of your business.



INSIGHT 1



Data remains a key limiter
on budget decisions for
large advertisers.

INSIGHT 1

Data remains a key limiter on budget decisions for large advertisers.

The Findings:

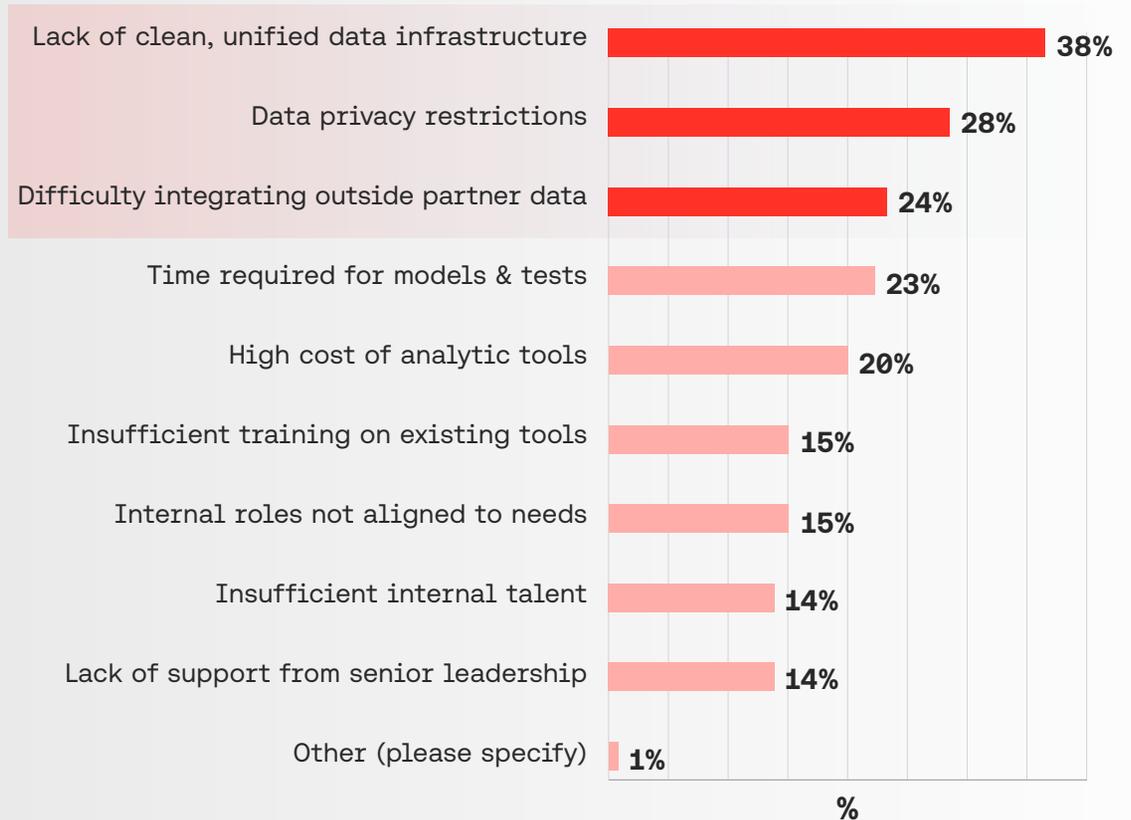
Data-related challenges are the most frequently cited barriers preventing organizations from fully leveraging analytics for investment decisions. These data gaps—fragmentation, privacy, outside data—outweigh organizational or financial issues by a wide margin. The result is a persistent bottleneck that limits how effectively teams can use analytics to guide budget choices.

Our Perspective:

Eighty-eight percent of leaders across Analytics, Finance, and Marketing expect their decisioning pace to accelerate, meaning today's data barriers will increasingly create a structural drag on marketing investment agility.

Organizations that adopt privacy-safe, model-based methods can overcome many obstacles that have stalled progress. Approaches that integrate data across time and geography, rather than people and devices, are inherently more resilient to fragmentation and privacy constraints. Together, these methods create a more stable, durable, and holistic foundation for confident decisioning.

Barriers to using marketing analytics for investment decisions

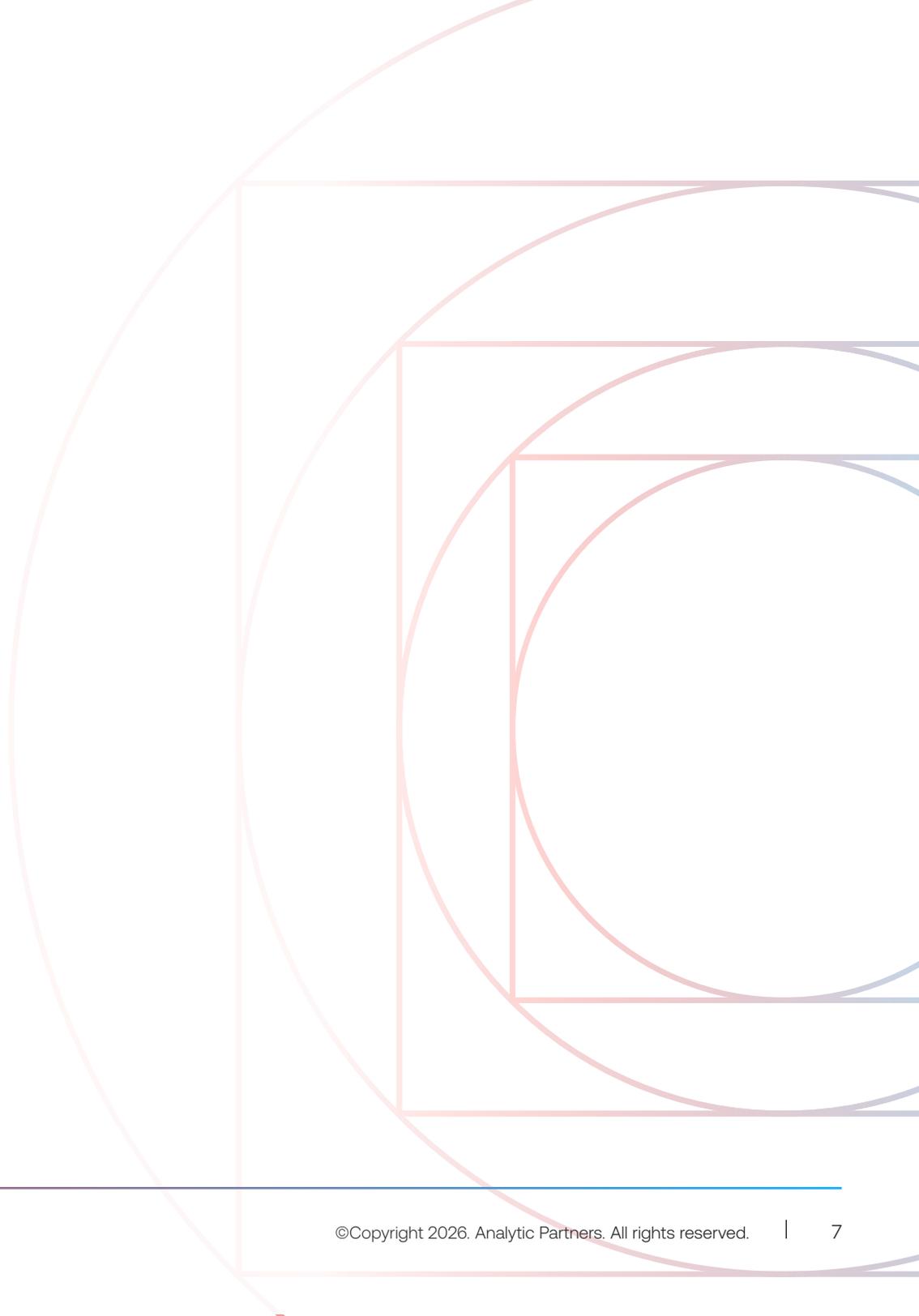


N=455

Q. Beyond skepticism, what are the biggest organizational/technical barriers preventing your organization from fully leveraging marketing analytics for investment decisions?

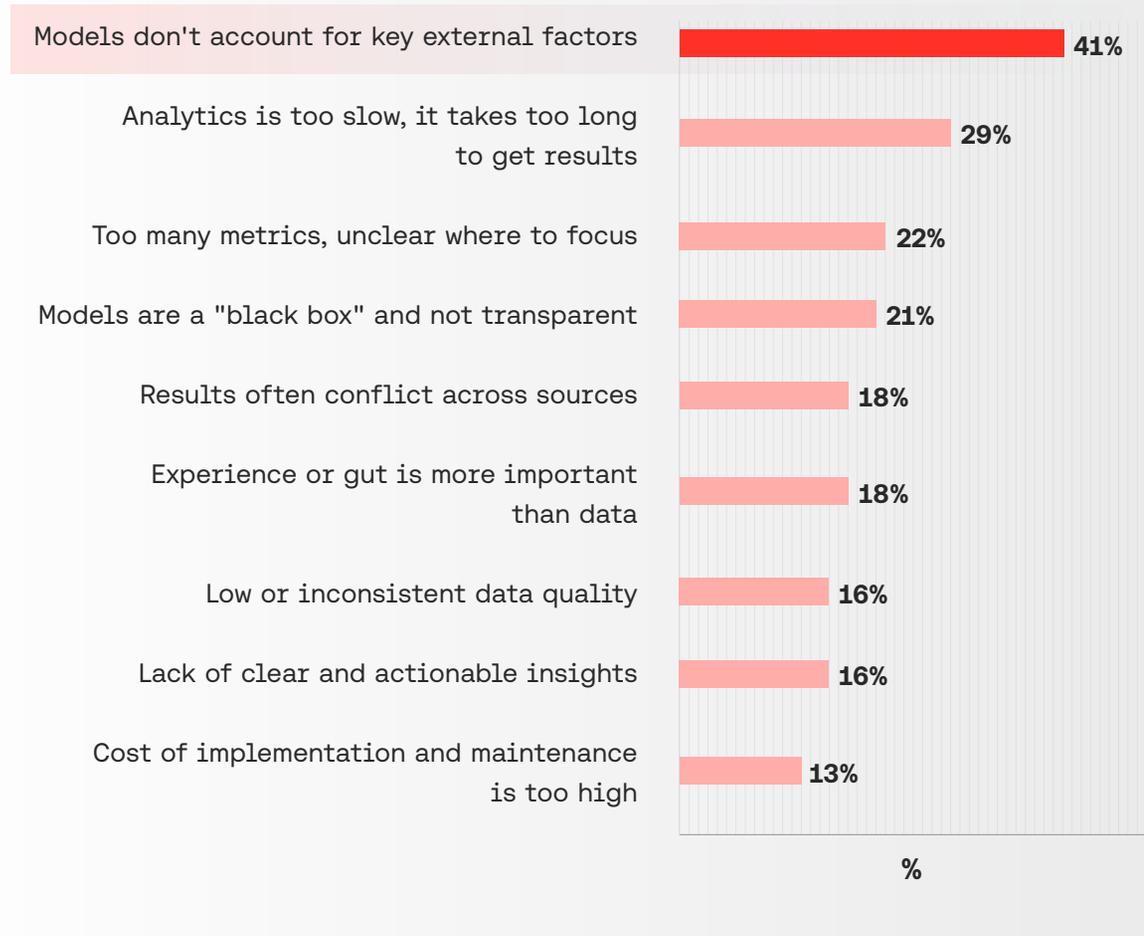
Source: Analytic Partners, 2026 State of Commercial Decisioning Survey

INSIGHT 2



External factors are the **critical link to being fully data-driven.**

Objections towards analytics informing marketing spend



N=374
Q. [Among those who are not fully data-driven]: What are the primary objections to using analytics to inform marketing spending decisions?
Source: Analytic Partners, 2026 State of Commercial Decisioning Survey

INSIGHT 2

External factors are the **critical link to being fully data-driven.**

The Findings:

Among leaders who say their organizations are not fully data-driven, the most common objection is that analytics fail to account for external variables such as economic conditions, competitive actions, and market trends. This factor rises well above all other objections, outpacing concerns about speed, metrics, or the analytic techniques themselves.

Our Perspective:

Analytics gain credibility when they reflect the environment in which decisions are made. Models that incorporate external context allow leaders to explore what-if scenarios with shifts to that context and forecast new expected outcomes.

Certain time series-based approaches are particularly well-suited to this because they can integrate market-level signals without relying on person-level tracking. Bringing context and scenarios into measurement helps leaders move from cautious interpretation to confident action.

INSIGHT 3

Marketing budget allocation
**remains the least data-
driven strategic decision.**

INSIGHT 3

Marketing budget allocation remains the least data-driven strategic decision.

The Findings:

Across strategic decisions, very few leaders rely purely on gut—only about 3%. Most blend data with experience, and the remainder depend on the data (shown here). Marketing budget allocation stands out as the least data-driven area.

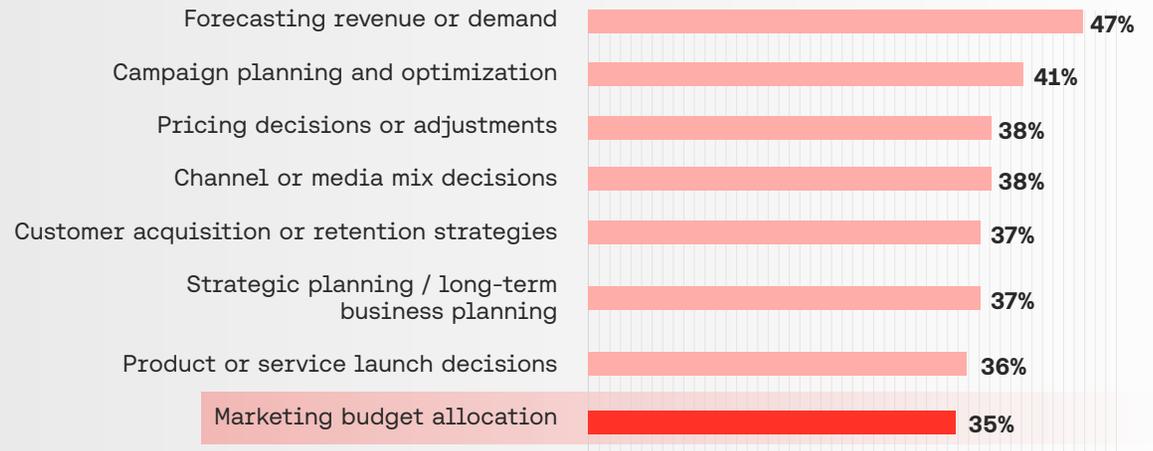
Marketing leaders are far less likely to take a highly data-driven approach (22%) compared to their Finance (45%) and Analytics (36%) counterparts. This gap shows that even with widespread analytic tools, many teams still default to judgment over data when setting budgets.

Our Perspective:

Organizations that anchor budget decisions in robust measurement consistently outperform their industry peers. While all roles can strengthen their use of data, marketing leaders have the greatest opportunity: by raising their own decisioning rigor, they can lift marketing budget allocation from the least data-driven strategic area to one that performs on par with other decisions.

Fortunately, the methods discussed next—while often used to right-size marketing budgets—can also address many of the other strategic decisions shown here, including pricing, demand forecasting, and media mix decisions.

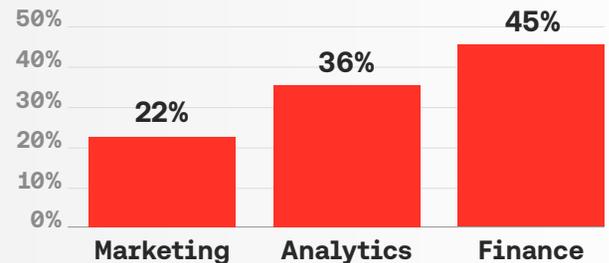
% of Experts reporting decisions are highly data-driven across strategic areas



Rely on data-driven marketing budget allocations

Top 2 Box Results

(% of Leaders)

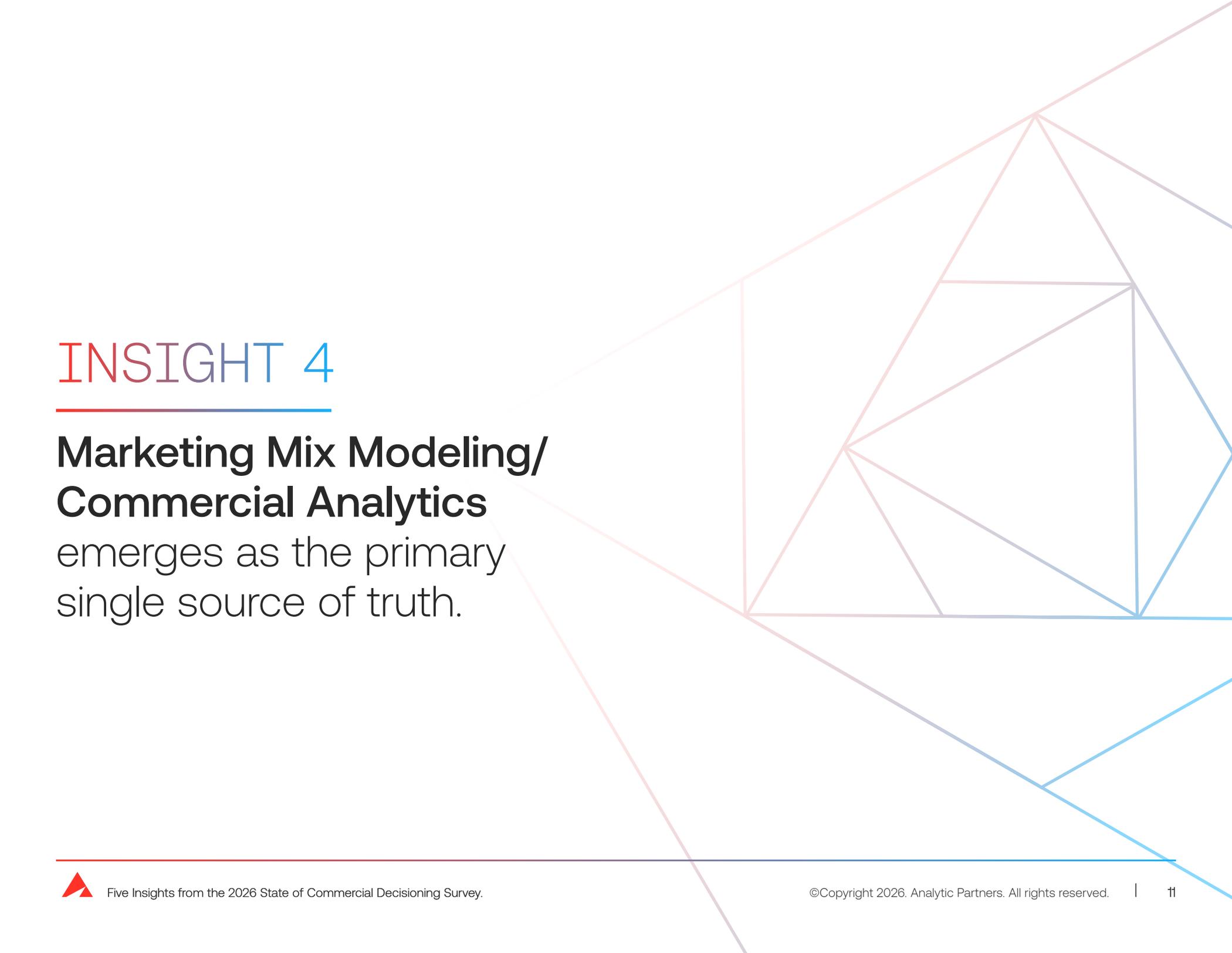


N=455

Q. When your organization is making strategic decisions, how much weight does measurement, insights and analytics carry compared to business experience or judgment?

Source: Analytic Partners, 2026 State of Commercial Decisioning Survey

INSIGHT 4



**Marketing Mix Modeling/
Commercial Analytics**
emerges as the primary
single source of truth.

“In a data-fragmented environment, Marketing Mix Modeling is one of the few measurement frameworks that can penetrate the data black box and provide a comprehensive operational perspective. It can not only quantify the marginal contribution of different channels, but also reflect the impact of external market factors on the overall market, which is something that single-point attribution cannot achieve.”

- Business Intelligence
Director, Media & Gaming

INSIGHT 4

**Marketing Mix Modeling/
Commercial Analytics**
emerges as the primary
single source of truth.

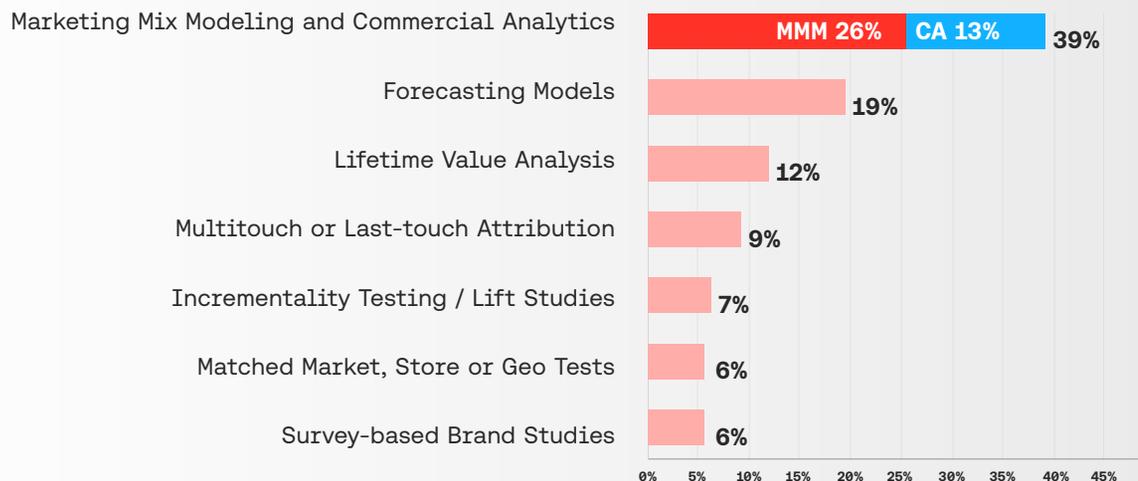
The Findings:

Among major advertisers, econometric approaches are most often named the “source of truth” for major budget allocation decisions. Specifically, Marketing Mix Modeling/Commercial Analytics are cited most frequently compared with other measurement options. In other words, even in a diverse measurement landscape, the center of gravity remains with econometric frameworks.

Our Perspective:

A true “source of truth” is the method that holds up when multiple factors influence a KPI, reporting signals conflict, and stakeholders need alignment. Econometric approaches are well-suited for this role because they can quantify incremental contribution across channels, incorporate broader market forces, and support scenario planning to pressure-test forecasts. This is why organizations increasingly standardize on Marketing Mix Modeling/Commercial Analytics as the foundation for high-stakes allocation, pricing, and promotion decisions.

Source of truth for major marketing decisions



N=455

Q: Which of the following analytic methods does your organization currently use to track or inform marketing spending decisions?

Q: Which of those methods does your organization use as its source of truth when it comes to informing major budget allocation decisions?

INSIGHT 5

Measurement & analytics
**must match business
velocity.**



INSIGHT 5

Measurement & analytics **must match business velocity.**

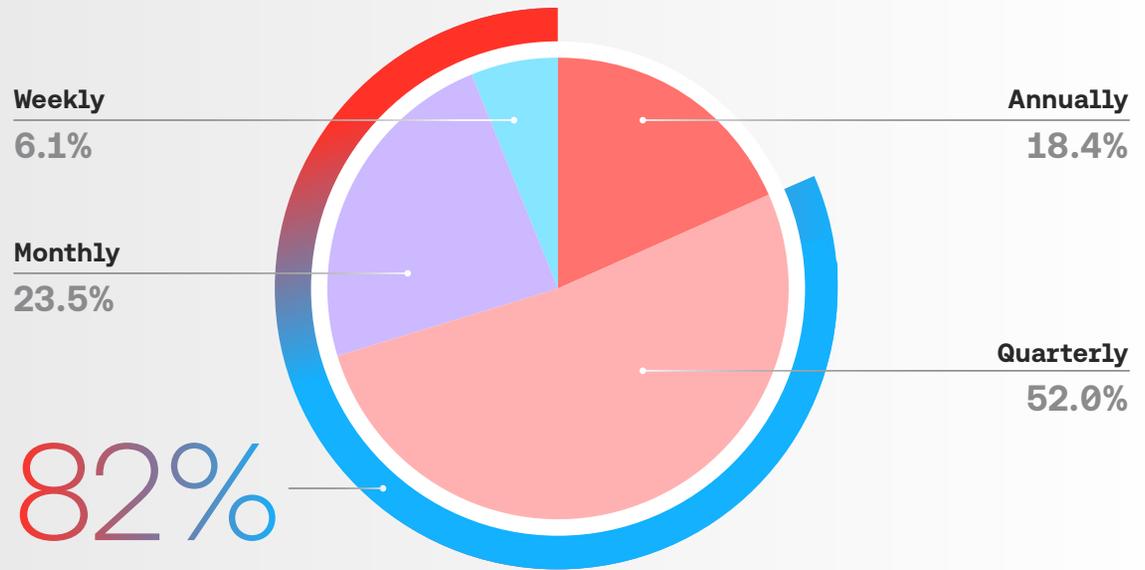
The Findings:

Among organizations using MMM or Commercial Analytics, 82% receive new or updated results at least quarterly. This aligns with the reality that major advertisers revisit budgets and reallocate spend multiple times per year as conditions change. In fact, 38% of the leaders we surveyed said significant adjustments to the budget were routine or constant—roughly aligned to the 30% here who see their results updated at least monthly.

Our Perspective:

When measurement updates too slowly, it becomes a reporting artifact. Commercial Analytics is designed for decisioning, and as business cadence accelerates, the “MMM program” becomes a powerful test-and-learn engine: opportunities identified in one quarter are implemented the next and remeasured for impact. That repeatable reinforcement cycle builds executive confidence in the outputs. Over time, it accelerates the shift from “balanced” decisions to the data-first decisions that drive predictable growth.

Frequency of updates of MMM/CA programs



N=269

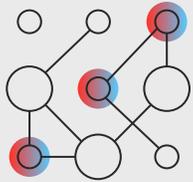
Q.: [Among those who currently use MMM] How often do you receive new or updated marketing mix modeling / commercial analytics results?
Source: Analytic Partners, 2026 State of Commercial Decisioning Survey

“We may have budgeted X dollars towards a certain strategy when we were doing the budget cycle. However, the business has evolved... so we need to reallocate the dollars into some other strategy. We had to shift our strategies... at least 13 times in the (last) year.”

- Finance Director,
Retail & Ecommerce

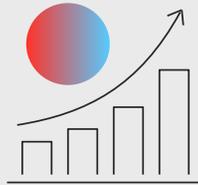
Implications for Senior Executives

This research underscores the imperative for senior leaders across Analytics, Finance, and Marketing to modernize decision frameworks, integrating robust analytics with real-world context.



Data-Driven Equals Context-Rich

Bridge the gap between analytic rigor and business intuition by embedding external context into all budget decisions.



Accelerate Analytic Cycles

Ensure that measurement and modeling tools are updated at a cadence that matches business realities—quarterly at minimum, monthly where possible.



Champion Cross-Functional Alignment

Foster collaboration among analytics, finance, and marketing to drive consensus and maximize the impact of marketing investments.

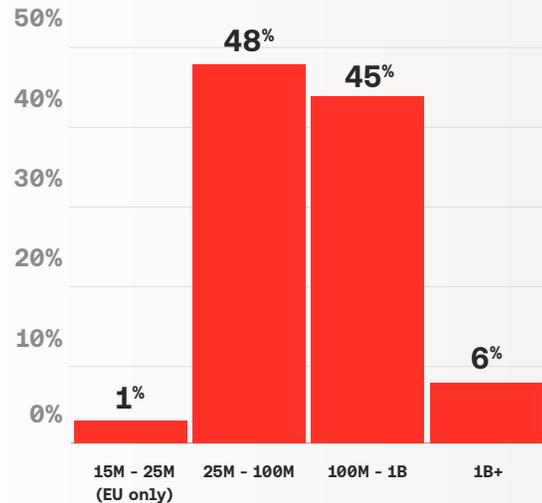
Roles



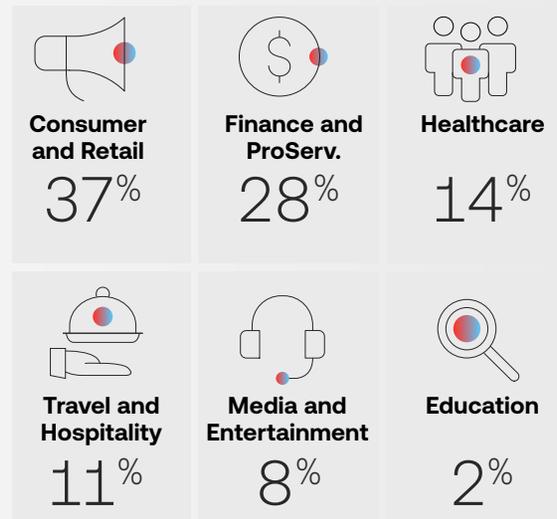
Seniority



Media and Advertising Budget



Industry



More About The Survey

This research used a high-quality, 100% verified sample

To ensure respondent authenticity and data accuracy we identified specific individuals, while maintaining privacy, using custom recruiting and the Newton Knowledge Graph. Additional quality checks were performed on every respondent to disqualify anyone following bad intent answer patterns.

Does high quality sampling matter?

Rigor matters. Comparisons between verified samples and traditional panel providers often show 20%–30% swings in key metrics—differences large enough to reverse strategic recommendations.

For more information on sampling see:

www.newtonx.com/why-newtonx

Contact Us

Analytic Partners is the leader in Commercial Analytics. Our platform, GPS Enterprise®, provides adaptive solutions for deeper business understanding, right-time planning, marketing optimization, and beyond. We turn data into expertise so our customers can create powerful connections with their customers and achieve commercial success.

Contact us at info@analyticpartners.com

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