



Shift Happens

Survival guide for marketing and
creative leaders in the AI era



Whether you're leading a marketing function or a creative one, one thing's clear: AI is changing everything—how we work, how fast we move, and what's expected from us.

"The only constant is change" as the saying goes. Or as our Superside team likes to say: Shift Happens (again and again and again).

For enterprise teams in particular, the stakes are high, and legal, brand, and personal pitfalls are all around. Honestly, for marketers and creatives alike, some days it feels like we're all just trying to survive.

That's why we made this: a survival guide for both sides of the brand-building brain.

To make this guide, we spoke to some real, intelligent leaders for their most actionable survival tips on navigating it all: AI adoption, differentiation, expectations, and more.

Yes, this is a guide with two parts! Within our own team we've seen how AI means different things to marketers and creatives. There will be some overlap. There will be many differences. But ultimately there will be a lot more understanding if we're able to see the other side. We work best when we work together after all.

Part 1: [Jump to Marketer side.](#)
Part 2: [Jump to Creative side.](#)

Two perspectives. One survival guide.
Welcome to Shift Happens.

- The Superside team

TWO SIDES TO THE AI STORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Chapter 1:
Expectations

**IF AI IS THE LIFE RAFT
WHY ARE WE STILL
DROWNING?**



Chapter 2:
Adoption

**THE ASCENT:
FINDING YOUR GRIP
ON AI ADOPTION**



Chapter 1:
Expectations

**BEYOND THE
MARVELOUS MIRAGE**



Chapter 2:
Adoption

**AWAKEN THE
DORMANT POTENTIAL**

Chapter 3:
Differentiation

**STAYING FRESH IN A
FIELD OF SAMENESS**



Chapter 3:
Differentiation

**THE LOST ART OF
NOT GETTING LOST**



Chapter 4:
Diversification

**EXPLORING THE
CONTENT JUNGLE**



Chapter 4:
Capacity

**WILL STANDING
STILL SINK YOU?**



Chapter 5:
Speed

**RACING AGAINST
THE RAPIDS**



Chapter 5:
Speed

**THE SNOWBALL
EFFECT OF MOVING
WITH SPEED**



MARKETERS

CREATIVES

**DON'T MISS IT
JUMP TO PART TWO**

Survival *Guide*

FOR MARKETERS



DEAR MARKETERS

AI ISN'T GOING ANYWHERE

Pressure to perform—move fast, pivot faster and hit targets—is nothing new to marketing leaders.

But in the AI era, the landscape is getting even more competitive. (Who knew that was possible?) Some days it feels like we're all just trying to survive.

Thankfully, the cause is also key to the solution.

For enterprise marketing leaders, AI enables not just faster execution, but deeper, more strategic thinking, leading to distinctive campaigns and performance gains.

By automating routine work, making space for strategy and surfacing insights faster, AI is already transforming how teams get to market.

Marketing leads the pack on AI adoption, too. According to a [McKinsey survey](#), 71% of respondents say their organization regularly uses generative AI, and marketing and sales are the number one functions applying it.

Still, there's friction. From legal and brand concerns to personal fears, enterprise teams have some hurdles to overcome before AI integration becomes the standard. Plus, trying the tools is one thing. Finding the time to unlock their full value is another.

But you're off to a great start with this guide. Consider this a blueprint (or maybe a map and compass?) for updating how you strategize, execute and adapt to go beyond surviving and start thriving in this new reality.

The struggle stops here. And the future of marketing in the AI era? It starts with you.

IF *AI* IS THE LIFE RAFT WHY ARE WE STILL DROWNING?



In conversation with

**Cassandra Gill, Senior Director
of Growth at Superside**



AI has raised expectations.

Thanks to AI, 85% of creative leaders say executives now expect more: faster turnarounds and a higher volume of deliverables. But being asked to do more with less is nothing new, and it's not even exclusively because of AI.

However, AI has the power to expand capacity and improve quality—without the need for bigger budgets or larger teams.

AI MEANS *MORE* NOT LESS



It's easier than ever to create. But what about the results?



"We've been seeing this shift since 2023, when economic headwinds in tech started to change," says Cassandra Gill, Senior Director of Growth at Superside. She's seeing performance marketers, especially advertisers, face immense pressure to deliver returns on marketing spend. As budget growth has slowed, many are wondering if AI can replace additional hires.

"There's definitely an expectation around moving faster and getting more done. But I think a lot of us are figuring it out as we go. Nobody wants to be the slow mover when it comes to AI."

In this environment, it's tempting to, well, do more with less and use AI to generate campaign content at higher and higher volumes. It's easier than ever to create ads quickly, but more ads don't always mean better results.

If teams fall into the trap of prioritizing volume over quality in marketing creative, they jeopardize long-term goals. "AI has so many applications for marketers, but we still have constraints and limitations. Almost none of us in marketing have full visibility into how different aspects of our work will be impacted."

If leadership is eager to ship more, more, more, and more, Cassandra recommends bringing the conversation back to results. What are you actually trying to achieve, and how can you experiment to get there in a data-driven way?

AI is an ideal tool for this rapid experimentation and early-stage ideation, such as generating ad copy or campaign concept ideas. It also speeds up repetitive processes, like editing content for grammar, structuring briefs, and surfacing insights from customer data.

"AI is an excellent way to move through ideation and research faster, freeing up time for deep work. But it's a double-edged sword—junior members might look at the output and say, 'Seems good enough to me!'" It's a challenge to strike the right balance, but Cassandra believes marketers are ready.

"In performance marketing, we've had firsthand exposure to AI for a long time," she says. "AI algorithms have determined how Google and Meta campaigns deliver for nearly 10 years."

"As performance marketers, we know how important it is to iterate quickly based on feedback. AI has accelerated that pressure, but it's nothing new in our field."

- Cassandra Gill | Senior Director of Growth at Superside



SURVIVAL TIP #305:

KNOW WHEN TO SIGNAL *FOR HELP*

01 Use AI to experiment early and get direction

"In growth marketing, you'll never create the best outcomes if ideas are only coming from you, as the leader," says Cassandra. Hold space for everyone's ideas, and use AI tools to quickly iterate and try them out. "Even if you think an idea's not going to work, it doesn't hurt to try as long as it's not a crazy lift," she says. Then, you can respond quickly and form a new hypothesis based on your findings.

02 Justify every decision with data

"You can't predict exactly what will work, but you can show you made decisions based on real experiments. What worked, and what didn't?"

When leadership has high expectations, it's crucial to prove you made decisions based on data, not just vibes. By experimenting early with AI, you'll be able to gather knowledge to inform your campaign decisions. "If you know your data inside and out, you'll be able to make your case to leadership," says Cassandra.

03 Don't fall into the volume-over-quality trap

"Everyone can now get to 'good enough' very quickly. But you get great results by tripling down on curiosity, pushing a layer deeper, and asking yourself, 'Is this as good as it can be?'"

AI output should never be used as-is if the goal is unique, differentiated creative—especially if it's not from a custom model. "You can type something into ChatGPT and create an entire blog post, but that doesn't mean it's going to perform."

04 Be the expert

Internal stakeholders who don't work with AI often misunderstand its limits. That's where you come in. Embrace your role as the in-house expert: the voice of reason who can cut through hype, set realistic expectations, and guide conversations about what AI can truly deliver, and what it can't.

Not only is the technology evolving, but organizations and their marketing goals are constantly changing, too. With AI tools allowing for rapid prototyping and ideating, the barrier to rapid experimentation has never been lower. As long as you keep your eyes on the prize—campaign results—it's a great time to be a performance marketer.

"What works today may not drive growth tomorrow. What failed three months ago might be a success today. Marketers must be open to pivoting, changing, and responding in real time."



"What works today may not drive growth tomorrow."

- Cassandra Gill | Senior Director of Growth at Superside

THE ASCENT: FINDING YOUR GRIP ON AI ADOPTION



In conversation with

**Helen Lee, Director, Global Brand
and Integrated Marketing at McAfee**



HARD PLACE,

MEET ROCK

Marketing leaders are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to AI.

We're expected to drive adoption, own experimentation, and become AI-native. But we're on the hook for the outcomes of those experiments, and their ultimate effect on the business.

The C-suite may be eager to drive wide adoption, wanting AI to be used nearly everywhere. But that comes with serious legal, security, and reputational risk. This is a complex environment in which to drive buy-in, build excitement, and upskill teams to work responsibly and effectively.

"Every creative leader has to think about the impact their use of AI could have on customers. It's an individual choice from company to company, but at a time with little governance and policies, we must play the long game and think about what AI could look like a year from now," says Helen Lee, Director, Global Brand and Integrated Marketing at McAfee.

There's also likely to be a wide range of perspectives on adoption within teams, from anxiety to excitement. Many teams are also experimenting on their own already—for example, loading company data into personal ChatGPT accounts. This can lead to inconsistent applications and security issues.

"Every organization has early adopters, people who are hesitant, people just don't want to get left behind, and people are fighting against this technology out of fear," says Helen. But everyone has one thing in common—they know this is a tool they must learn to stay relevant.

Helen's tip for driving adoption: think critically about when to use AI, platform AI champions to build excitement, and always come back to what's right for your brand.



01 Just because you can, doesn't mean you should

There's a proliferation of AI tools, and many are chasing AI applications for their own sake. But used indiscriminately, AI can compromise brand integrity, customer relationships, and the company's bottom line.

For example, McAfee's reputation rests on being perceived as trustworthy, so they don't attempt to replicate realism. "It would be cheaper to use AI images in our creative, but we choose not to because it compromises our brand. McAfee as a company is all about security and protection." But on the flip side, there are plenty of other companies with situations that are perfect for AI—Ikea's catalog images, for example, are almost completely AI-generated.

02 Let AI champions lead the way

"There's always someone who's really ahead of the curve. Find these people, and give them a spotlight to teach others." Who on your team is naturally curious about AI tools already? Who is ahead of the curve? Give those people the mic.

Listen to their ideas, and then create opportunities to experiment with and scale them across the team. Use structured experimentation to direct and temper their curiosity. "Unchecked curiosity can lead to unproductive rabbit holes," says Helen.

Start by checking out which tools you're already using that have AI capabilities, like Grammarly or Copilot. Once you've found these low-barrier opportunities for experimentation, brainstorm potential experiments with your champion, agree on a few, and move forward in a structured way.

03 Follow your moral compass

"There are no default standards for AI policies or governance right now. Every leader has to ask themselves how comfortable they are with using AI in relation to their business."

Creative leaders need to stay ahead of legal and ethical concerns as they plan adoption, and with a technology as new as AI, there are no established standards to fall back on.

The bright side? It's up to you. Look to your brand, your industry, and to your own teams, to find out what your ethics are and how AI fits in.

This is an incredibly exciting time for marketers who are ready to think boldly—but still move deliberately—towards adoption. There are no hard rules (yet). All marketers can do is stay informed on the state of the technology and be guided by their audience's preferences and their business's goals.

"There are a lot of question marks around when you should use AI in creative production, or even whether you should use it at all."



"Marketing teams can do things that are really fun and fantastical, but that begs the question: when is that the right choice?"

- Helen Lee | Director, Global Brand and Integrated Marketing at McAfee

SURVIVAL TIP #77:

FIND A PARTNER WHO KNOWS THE TERRAIN





Think boldly
move deliberately

AI in action: McAfee's Keep It Real campaign

McAfee's Keep It Real campaign educated consumers about avoiding phishing scams. Helen's creative team faced a unique challenge to come up with campaign ideas; they needed to ship at a speed that called for AI, but had to stay true to McAfee's brand values.

The answer? Deliberately avoiding realistic imagery. They used AI to generate videos of humans gradually shifting into strangeness—for example, having three arms. "The campaign was all about the importance of looking twice," says Helen.

By staying true to McAfee's identity, the team used AI to reinforce trust, not compromise it.

"McAfee is very careful about how we use AI, since we're a digital security company. Because we have products that spot scams, it would be hypocritical to use synthetic humans in campaigns unless we're owning that the images aren't real."

STAYING FRESH IN A FIELD OF SAMENESS



In conversation with
**Kira Klaas, VP of Corporate
Marketing at Later**

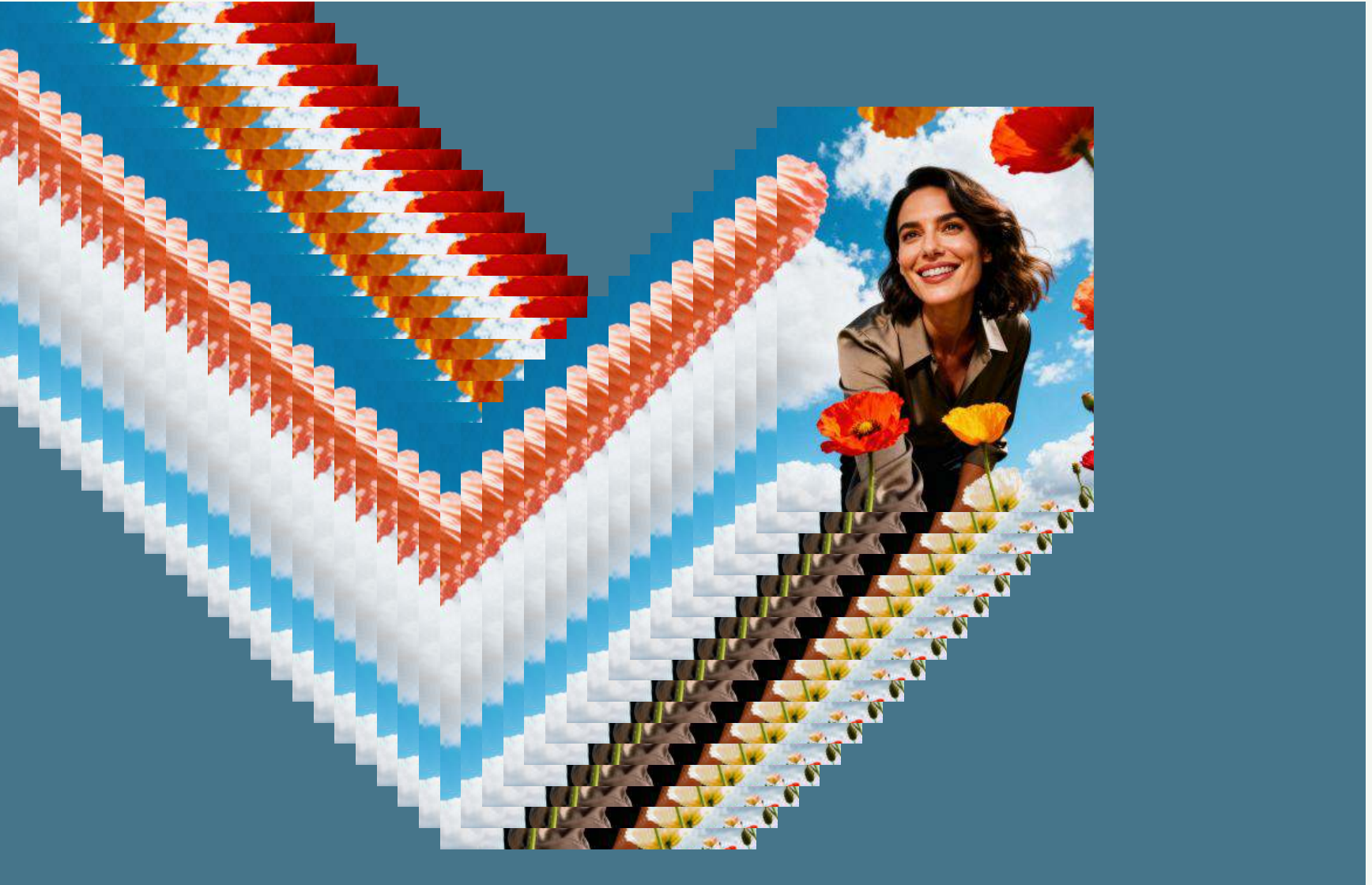


FRESH IDEAS

ARE RARE

Fresh creative thinking has always been rare. Even before AI, everybody copied everybody—it's just that now, the problem is dialed up to 11.

For marketers, the stakes are high. If ads and videos look the same as competitors', campaign performance will take a hit. But marketers can use AI to differentiate instead of imitate, it just takes effort and intentionality.





Copies of copies of *more* copies

“Without doing the strategic work of understanding your audience and getting out of your echo chamber, you will inevitably end up creating more of the same,” says Kira Klaas, VP of Corporate Marketing at Later, a platform for social media management, influencer marketing, and social listening.

“AI tools are still so new that we see a lot of trend copying. In early AI B2B branding, we saw purple gradients and sparkle icons everywhere.”

It’s not that AI output is automatically worse—it’s that it can become a shortcut past the strategy that makes creative effective. To sharpen AI content’s voice and focus, Kira prioritizes crystal-clear brand identity and positioning.

Having a defined brand foundation upfront makes it faster to assess whether AI output aptly meets brand standards and supports growth goals. For example, don’t generate AI copy without solid positioning, or campaign imagery without a brand kit of reference images.

Another watchout—LLMs have a tendency toward “glazing” or agreeing with or automatically validating users’ ideas to keep them engaged. For example, if a marketing lead requests the campaign copy to be used across multiple social platforms, the AI might affirm the approach instead of warning that audiences behave differently on each platform.

To avoid the yes-man effect, Kira recommends making it a habit to push back, ask for alternatives, and workshop results with real-life colleagues; not letting LLMs do all of the critical thinking for you.

“I’d rather see a brand take a creative risk that’s aligned with their values than play it safe with generic AI-generated content that could come from anyone,” says Kira.

Wielded correctly, AI actually makes it easier to stand out. But simple execution doesn’t mean brilliance happens without intention.



ONE OF KIRA'S FAVORITE AI WORKFLOWS CENTERS ON AUDIENCE INSIGHT ANALYSIS

- 01 Load customer data into an LLM tool, such as company name, industry, buyer title, products used, client relationship dates, total revenue generated, and anything else relevant.
- 02 The AI extracts key insights, like the most common client industries, the sectors with the strongest win rates, and the buyer titles most often tied to successful deals.
- 03 Get the LLM to distill these findings into a one-page summary that describes the ideal company and buyer profile with the highest likelihood of success.
- 04 Finally, use these insights to shape marketing and sales strategies, whether by emphasizing certain industries, adjusting outreach tactics, or tailoring case studies to resonate with a specific target audience.

SURVIVAL TIP #37:

DON'T FORGET TO FEED *THE GPTS*



01 Sharpen your team's taste

"The more you can engage in tastemaking work together, the more you'll build the muscle to understand why a piece of creative is or isn't working."

To build a culture of design excellence, teams should get in the habit of discussing real pieces of content and what makes them tick. AI is a great way to put this into practice. For example, generate pieces of example content, and discuss them together in a workshop session.

02 Iterate with AI, then curate with your gut

"There's definitely a temptation to just produce more and see what sticks. But you don't learn what's working by throwing spaghetti at the wall."

By building tastemaking skills, teams can get comfortable in an editor or curator role. Handled correctly, AI can help teams get past execution grunt work to focus on strategy: why certain designs might drive results and strengthen your brand.

03 Build custom GPTs and keep feeding them context

"Rich context is where custom GPTs have the most potential. They can often gather and process more inputs than humans can hold together."

Kira creates custom GPTs, or Claude Projects, for specific tasks and enriches them with company, brand, and audience data. She recommends continuing to add more context to each project over time, from internal communications to press releases to CRM data. "The best outcomes I've seen have been from consecutively adding knowledge as I develop my own thinking," she says.

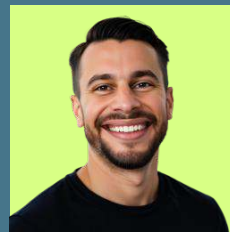
Don't waste AI's potential by just using it to ship more campaigns, faster. Treat it like a research assistant that can allow you to go even deeper—collecting rich audience insights and using them to craft engaging content that makes customers feel connected to your brand.



"How does your brand identity speak to the audience's emotional needs? That's the core question for unique, differentiated content."

- Kira Klaas | VP of Corporate Marketing at Later

EXPLORING THE CONTENT JUNGLE



In conversation with

**Drew Brucker, AI Creative Consultant
at brainchild**



“
Diversification
isn't optional
—it's survival.”

AI content is flooding the internet, and it's harder than ever to stand out. If marketers want to be seen and heard, channel and format diversification isn't optional—it's survival.

Relying too heavily on one channel is risky. Algorithms shift. Trends change. Audiences move fast. If you're not branching out and experimenting, you're leaving the door wide open for competitors to capture attention that should be yours.

But diversification can feel like an uphill battle. New formats and channels keep emerging, like short-form video, livestreaming, and AR, but most teams don't have the bandwidth or expertise to test them.

To build strong customer relationships, marketers need to show up authentically on multiple platforms and use super-engaging formats. Content must resonate with each channel's unique audience, while still feeling true to their brand's voice.

“You wouldn't speak the same way in a board meeting as with a friend over coffee. Social platforms are the same—each has its own culture, language, and audience. Brands can't expect results if they reuse exactly the same content on different platforms,” says Drew Brucker, AI Creative Consultant at brainchild.

If this sounds like a lot of work, you're correct. But that's where AI comes in.

Marketers can diversify without overloading teams by focusing on a few core channels, then using AI-powered workflows to adapt that content for other formats and platforms.

For instance, a team might start with a cornerstone blog post or video, then prompt an AI tool to spin that content into a range of tailored assets. A simple prompt could be: “Summarize this 1,200-word blog post into a LinkedIn carousel outline, a 150-word Instagram caption, and three X post drafts that maintain a professional yet approachable brand voice.”

The output might include a slide-by-slide breakdown for LinkedIn, highlighting key takeaways, a concise Instagram caption with a call to action, and three snappy, scroll-stopping X post options. As long as these repurposed pieces are guided by a strong foundation of brand voice and strategy, AI becomes a force multiplier—allowing marketers to amplify reach and diversify formats without sacrificing quality.

“Build depth first, then breadth second with AI as your multiplier. Focus on doing a few things exceptionally well, then use AI to extend that work without burning your team out,” says Drew.



01 Use AI to adapt

"The real value of AI is leverage. It lets you do more with what you already have."

With AI, one pillar asset can spin into ten different formats without burning your team out. For example, one strategic video conversation becomes Shorts, audiograms, carousels, blogs, and even emails. All are fine-tuned for each platform's culture, not just cross-posted.

02 Have discipline to say no

"As much as we talk about speed and scale with AI, it's arguably more important to have the discipline to know when to say no."

Because AI lowers the barrier to experimentation, teams need clear standards for deciding what's worthwhile. Leadership should define which outcomes or metrics are current priorities, so teams can select ideas that ladder up to those goals.

When teams know what success looks like, they can use AI to explore the content jungle with their eyes on the big picture.

03 Relieve the bloat

"With AI video tools, I can scale short-form video production without bloating headcount. That allows me to keep content high-quality and on-brand without any creative compromises."

With AI, video production doesn't need to be a bottleneck. Tools like Midjourney can create unique animations and videos that feel authentically on-brand—especially when trained on well-developed AI brand guidelines.

SURVIVAL TIP #201:

MAKE BIG SWINGS





DREW'S FAVORITE AI WORKFLOW: REPURPOSING CUSTOMER CONVERSATIONS

- 01 Record a long-form video conversation or podcast. With ChatGPT, extract hooks, soundbites, timestamps, titles, descriptions, and themes from the transcript.
- 02 With AI video tools, auto-generate short clips with captions for social, drafts for articles or social posts, and key pull quotes and takeaways for email campaigns.
- 03 With Midjourney, generate custom visuals to replace stock images, so everything feels branded and fresh.
- 04 Combine clips, captions, and videos to generate an entire week's worth of content, tuned for each platform, without a huge content team.

The key to thriving in the content jungle? Deep, audience-centric pillar content that naturally branches across multiple formats. AI is the secret sauce that lets marketers achieve this personalized, customer-first messaging at scale.

"AI lets me focus on creativity, messaging, and resonance while it handles the first principle thinking, repurposing, and admin work. I keep final decisions and high-impact creative moments human."

RACING AGAINST THE RAPIDS



In conversation with

**Gah-Yee Won, Head of Marketing,
Consumer Group at Intuit**



QUALITY SHOULD BE YOUR CREATIVE NORTH STAR

Speed has always mattered in marketing—but AI has truly accelerated the vision for what's possible. Marketing teams are under pressure to deliver results faster. But the AI tools they're experimenting with are so new that they don't always have proven return on investment.

As teams strive for speed, they face competing pressures from within their organizations. Leadership likely has a bold vision of an AI-powered future. Legal and IT departments have valid security and compliance concerns. And within teams, people might fear change or being replaced.

Still, marketers are expected to ship, test, and iterate campaigns quickly.

AI dangles a tantalizing promise: even faster speed-to-market and speed-to-insight. But how can marketers actually realize it? AI has the potential to make creative teams faster, but it's not a given; finding AI-enabled speed takes skill and experimentation. How fast you're going only matters if you're heading to the right place from the start.

Teams must figure out the why of moving faster before the how. Campaign quality should remain the North Star. Without attention to quality, using AI to generate more campaigns will just increase tool spend, not campaign performance.

To understand how AI can get you to the same quality bar faster, try working backward from past high-performing campaigns. How could AI have sped up the process of getting to that end product? Can you pilot those ideas in workflows going forward?

Three principles to keep you on track

- Document every AI decision, such as which tools to rely on, which tasks to use them for, and where they don't stack up. These will become established best practices later.
- Don't hesitate to abandon a tool that isn't delivering quality at speed, no matter how much you've invested in it.
- Cultivate curiosity and patience in yourself and your teams. You're playing the long game.

The deeper you get into using AI tools, the more you realize what they can and can't do. And with the rapid pace of innovation, you need to try new tools and combinations of tools to best leverage their strengths.

It's not just finding the silver bullet AI tool; it's finding the right set of tools. Creating even a short video may call for 3-5 different tools to get to the quality you need.

As your team experiments, you'll discover which tasks are best sped up with AI, which can be elevated slightly, and which should never be replaced.

For example, Gah-Yee Won, Head of Marketing, Consumer Group at Intuit, has started to automate her team's brief-writing process. They use AI during the conceptual stages of ideating campaigns, but only to augment their own human vision, such as by generating rough ideas to expand on together.

Teams should lean on AI to surface rough angles, spark creative directions, and expand on themes they might not have considered alone. AI outputs should be treated as raw material—conversation starters that the team refines, reshapes, and elevates through collaborative discussion.

This approach keeps the efficiency benefits of automation while ensuring that the final campaigns remain firmly rooted in the team's human judgment, strategy, and brand voice.

01 Start slow with pilot projects

Don't implement AI tools across workflows until you actually know they'll make you faster. To gather that data, start with a pilot project.

- Identify workflows most in need of acceleration.
- Choose a single stage of the workflow to automate, and one AI tool to try out.
- Run one experiment, with results you can easily measure.
- Review every experiment, throw out use cases that don't work and keep those that do.

02 Don't try to ride every wave

AI moves fast—trying to learn everything about every tool is impossible.

First, leverage knowledge that your organization has already collected, like SOPs or experiments from other teams, to get ideas. Then, focus on essential tasks and how you can automate them.

Finally, give yourselves grace. There will always be more to learn, and hardly anyone feels completely AI-fluent just yet.

03 Go fast and then go further

Now that moving faster is table stakes, you'll need a different competitive advantage.

Accelerating work with AI frees up extra capacity on your marketing team. Use that space to dream big and stand out. What unique angle can your team bring to each campaign? What "far-out" experiments can you tackle now that you have more resources? This is your human competitive edge.

Remember, slow is smooth and smooth is fast. That's true with AI implementation too.

Slow and steady wins the AI race, so keep your journey measured and methodical. Start with small, controlled experiments, measure and track outcomes, and keep iterating again and again.





SURVIVAL TIP #553:

SPEED
IS SAFETY

CONCLUSION: FULL SHIFT AHEAD

The AI era is one of opportunity, growth, and space for bold experimentation. There's nothing to fear—in fact, marketing teams stand to unlock entirely new levels of efficiency and impact.

The key is to pair big thinking about AI's potential with a crystal-clear focus on what audiences, internal stakeholders, and campaigns truly need right now.

OUR 5 FAVORITE SURVIVAL TIPS SHARED BY THE MARKETING LEADERS IN THIS GUIDE:

01 Goals

Before using AI to ship more more more, stop and ask yourself why. What are you trying to accomplish?

02 Foundation

The root cause of boring, repetitive AI content? Skipping the foundational work of getting to know your audience.

03 Multiply

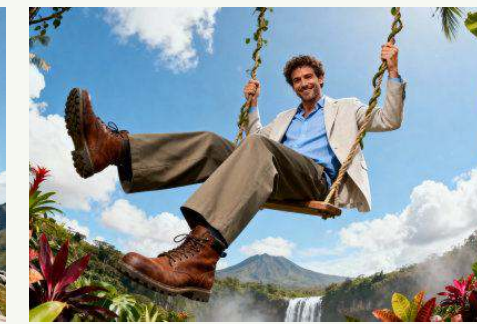
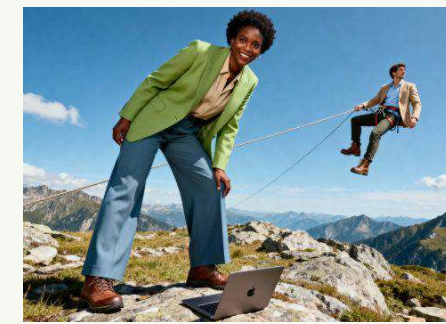
Use AI as a multiplier to adapt core content assets for multiple channels and platforms.

04 Quality

To speed up delivery without compromising quality, work backward from high-performing campaigns. How could AI have helped you reach the same end result faster?

05 Champions

Drive adoption by finding the AI champions you already work with, then amplifying their voices.



A NOTE ON THE VISUALS

The imagery in this guide is such a fun mix of wild adventure and office-core marketer. It's a big part of our concept of a survival guide and of course in a guide about AI, it's AI-generated.

But that makes it sound really straightforward. As if we told our chatbot, "Generate 40+ perfect images that merge survival and marketing. And watch those fingers!"

As anyone who's ever prompted knows, it's never that simple.

We're planning to share more about the process soon: how we prompt to stay on-brand, the importance of a visual concept, post-production for campaign consistency, over-riding default camera angles, and more. So keep an eye out.



Survival *Guide*

FOR CREATIVES



DEAR CREATIVES

WELCOME TO THE ERA OF

AI

Same job title... triple the pace and expectations? Welcome to the AI era. There's no doubt, it comes with its challenges. But challenges often open new doors—and creative leaders know this better than anyone.

According to Superside's [Overcommitted Report](#), 93% of creative leaders believe AI will improve design quality, and 96% agree it will help teams move faster. By clearing the clutter, making space for exploration and expanding possibilities, AI is already transforming the creative landscape in exciting ways.

Despite this potential, adoption is still one of the biggest hurdles for creative leaders to overcome, which explains why only 2% have fully integrated AI into workflows. From legal and brand concerns to personal fears, enterprise teams face their fair share of friction when advocating for AI integration.

And on a personal level? Just knowing where to start can keep you standing still.

That's what you'll get out of this guide: A starting point. But more than that, a blueprint for updating how you think, collaborate and create to not just survive, but (dare we say) thrive in this new reality. Plus, the tools you need to get buy-in along the way.

The struggle stops here. And the future of creativity in the AI era? It starts with you.

BEYOND *THE MARVELOUS* MIRAGE



In conversation with

**Júlio Aymoré, Group Creative Director
of Generative AI at Superside**



LAST-MINUTE PRESSURE ISN'T NEW

While AI has accelerated the pace of creative work it has also raised expectations.

Last-minute pressure is not new; creative teams are used to being inundated with urgent requests from other departments. What's changed is that perceptions of what AI unlocks can make near-instant turnaround feel like an easy ask. That's why 85% of creative leaders say they've seen executive expectations shift because of AI.

The prospect of generating images and video 40-90% faster is appealing to everyone, not just executives. In a world where 78% of creative leaders feel burnt out and 76% say they can't meet demand, we all want to do great work, and do it faster.

"There's a lot of AI smoke and mirrors, just like with any new tech that people are excited about. Managers and leaders are expecting a magic solution, but it's not that easy."

There are misplaced expectations about what AI can actually do—not in a year or decade, but in real workflows today. "The most exciting AI announcements often don't yet even have practical applications, because they're in the research or experimentation phase," says Júlio Aymoré, Group Creative Director of Generative AI at Superside.

And capabilities that do exist, like multi-agent workflows, aren't simple to master. It takes effort and commitment to find AI applications that will save time and elevate results, day to day.



That's the crux of the issue: time and resources aren't infinite. If teams' plates are already overflowing, when are they supposed to discover these high-impact AI use cases?

That's why our research has found that while half of creative teams are experimenting with AI, just 2% have fully integrated it into their workflows, and over 50% listed lack of expertise and workflow integration as their biggest barriers to AI adoption.

"People can't work and experiment at the same time. We need to lower expectations—not by compromising quality, but by giving people time and space to get used to this technology," says Júlio.

Many teams are expected to produce at an AI-enabled speed, but the tools and workflows to make that possible often aren't yet available, despite what many think. "We're creating a new kind of burnout," says Júlio. "It's a human problem, not a technology problem."

But this is a period of transition, offering both challenges and opportunities. If leaders navigate it well, they'll be rewarded not just with faster work, but better-quality output, more consistently.

“
We're creating
a new kind
of burnout”



01 Get specific about how you'll use AI (and how you won't)

"Leaders may want to apply AI to every aspect of their business. But where can it truly make the biggest difference? What can differentiate you, and make you more competitive?" Identify one or two high-impact areas where you'll start applying AI. This shouldn't be a top-down exercise! Ask your creative team where they're already using AI, where it's helping so far, and what existing friction points it could possibly address.

02 Allocate experimentation time

"As with any new skill, you need to invest time to get familiar and understand what AI can achieve. This is something you only learn by doing."

Don't ask overloaded teams to find even more time to experiment. With dedicated learning time, teams can both uncover valuable use cases and discover what tools can't do. Use these findings to validate the strategy you decided on in step one, and be prepared to rework based on outcomes.

03 Let the experts oversee their own zone of competence

"I like to ask my team to do things that I'm also familiar with, so I can guide them in a meaningful way. Otherwise, it's too easy to delegate without full knowledge and create unfair expectations."

Assign managers to oversee experimentation in areas where they have expertise, like video or social media. Because they speak the same language as the team members they're assisting, it will be much easier to understand their doubts, wins, and growing pains. They'll also be able to communicate their team's experience back to other leads more effectively.

At Superside, Júlio's AI plan has two components: an AI R&D team that explores potential workflows, and dedicated weekly time for hundreds of Superside creatives to learn, experiment, and grow. "We see this time as an investment in the future," says Júlio. "The only thing that matters is how AI can support our human creative team."

According to Júlio, the key is to foster an inspiring atmosphere, not a fearful one. After all, working more efficiently is something to celebrate! When teams feel supported, respected, and listened to, they'll be excited about tools that can help them spend more time on the high-impact creative work they truly love.

"If your team is excited, you're halfway to success. When people are motivated, invested, and optimistic about the future, incredible things happen."



"The only thing that matters is how AI can support our human creative team."

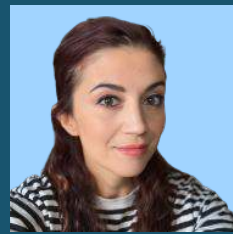
- Júlio Aymoré | Group Creative Director of Generative AI at Superside

SURVIVAL TIP #406:

NOT ALL *EXPERIMENTS* PAY OFF



AWAKEN THE DORMANT POTENTIAL



In conversation with

Jessica Rosenberg,
Head of Brand at AirOps



ADAPTABILITY OVER PERFECTION

Many creative leaders feel pressured to be AI experts, leading their teams to a bold, AI-native future. There's only one problem: that's impossible. Even a single workflow can use three or more AI tools that need to be vetted, approved, purchased and learned.

Every week, new AI features and tools hit the market, and there's no way to go in-depth on all of them. While mapping out adoption, leaders face the added challenge of managing internal resistance, much of it rooted in legitimate concerns. That includes everything from legal and brand concerns to personal fears and anxieties.

According to Jessica Rosenberg, Head of Brand at AirOps, the way to overcome these challenges, secure buy-in, and upskill teams to thrive in this new world comes down to two things: curiosity over fear and adaptability over perfection.

Go narrow when planning AI adoption

Rather than trying to be an expert in everything, focus on experimenting with just a few tools, in the areas most ripe for acceleration and improvement. Typically, that looks like speeding up simple processes so creatives have more time to go deep and think big.

"It's less about being an expert in every single tool and feature, and more about building a culture of experimentation on your team. Try things, share learnings, and be honest about what works and what doesn't."

For example, when Jessica's company rebranded, they didn't lean on AI for their big-picture vision.

But post-rebrand, they're using tools like Midjourney and Runway to quickly produce creative, like blog illustrations, in line with new brand standards. "AI can accelerate execution, but it can't replace intuition or insight. Not yet," she says.

Stay curious about AI ethics

Ethical concerns are another major barrier to adoption. But unfortunately, there are no set-in-stone answers. As teams explore implementation, here are a few best practices:

- Ask critical questions when evaluating AI tools. Does the tool's training data infringe on existing IP? Will material entered into the tool become part of its training set?

- Reach a decision on when, or if, use of AI will be disclosed. There's no one right answer yet; some studies show that disclosure can erode trust, while others claim it's essential to build it.

- Stay curious. Keep up to date on AI ethics and how the conversation is developing, so you're equipped to make informed decisions.

Collaborative upskilling

Carefully planned upskilling initiatives are the only way to drive adoption. Normalize that everyone is learning together and no one's job is in danger. In fact, you're opening up new creative possibilities that didn't exist before.

Emphasize to teams that collaboration is still paramount, and that's something AI will never be able to automate. Communication, connecting ideas, evoking feelings and making shared, nuanced decisions is crucial to great creative work, whether or not AI tools are being used.

If creative teams can brave the heat of AI adoption, they have the chance to broaden their skill set without sacrificing their specializations. Specialization is still currency for creatives, especially if they lead work or shape brand identity. But AI enables teams to bring more skills into their repertoire, lowering the barrier to entry because they speed up execution.

"AI amplifies the T-shaped skill set. Go deep in one core area, but stay curious and capable across others. On my team we have specialists who go deep on web design and development and can still flex across different areas. AI makes that even easier," says Jessica.



SURVIVAL TIP #44:

GO WITH
THE FLOW

01 Embrace the hot new thing

"Back in the 80s, a mentor of mine saw Adobe Illustrator in use for the first time. Initially, he was scared it would take designers' jobs. But once his team started using it, he realized it made them better and faster. I think the same is true with AI. Human creativity, taste, and craft will lead the way."

AI is the latest in a long series of technological developments that rocked the creative world—none of which made skills obsolete. Resistance doesn't help; learning the tools and how they fit into your workflow does.

02 Feeling overwhelmed? Start small

"AI is evolving so rapidly that everyone feels behind—it's not just you. Progress comes from practice, not perfection, so if you keep making an effort, you'll be fine."

Start with one tool, one task, one hour. Experiment, even if it's just writing a brief with ChatGPT. There are so many free tools out there. Try one for free, and only start paying when you're really seeing value.

03 Develop a taste for fire

"Invest in helping your team develop taste through mentorship and coaching. When we're surrounded by talented people, we get trained over time on what great work looks like, just like an AI tool would."

Taste is one of the most important qualities creatives can have. That's even more true when AI speeds up and elevates workflows. Make an ongoing practice of looking for opportunities to develop your taste. As you adopt more and more workflows, that will help ensure they deliver incredible work.



THE LOST ART **OF NOT GETTING LOST**



In conversation with

**Gareth Morgan, Head of Global Brand
Design at Revolut**



BY DEFINITION, *UNIQUE* IS RARE

Even before AI, everybody copied everybody. By definition, unique and memorable content is rare. It takes effort and discipline to dream up campaigns that stick, especially in the face of the looming deadlines and bursting pipelines creative teams face every day.

These struggles aren't new for creative professionals; it's just that AI now provides a shortcut to generate content under pressure. That shortcut is often not worth the tradeoff but, when used correctly, AI does have brand-making power.

Content quality issues arise when teams start to see AI as a magical solution to their creative bottleneck woes. Generative AI tools are impressive, but they won't create unique output that drives results without talented humans behind the wheel.

"Sometimes, people are so impressed by what AI can do that they don't think critically," says Gareth Morgan, Head of Global Brand Design at Revolut.

"The AI 'wow factor' can fool people into thinking they've created a good end product. We need to move past that—question the output, push it, and squeeze it to get to the really good stuff."

Brands must be careful as they wade into the AI waters. Consumers may react badly or feel as if they've been duped if they realize a piece of content is AI-generated. And audiences are getting better and better at spotting AI. You don't want to be seen as part of the wave of what people call "AI slop:" repetitive, misleading content designed only to capture attention.

"AI can do so much for creative teams. But when it comes to how people perceive your brand, it's a delicate balance. We're approaching it cautiously—it can undo a lot of work if you get it wrong, but there's also potential to do really exciting things."

So, how can AI actually help brands stand out rather than blend in? It all comes back to brand integrity. When designers have solid knowledge of what their brand looks, sounds, and feels like, they'll know immediately when a piece of content supports that.

That's nothing new—brand cohesion matters whether designs are generated by AI or not.

"Brands have always needed guidelines to keep their content cohesive. I don't think AI is a threat to that, it's just one more tool to use to a high standard," says Gareth.



GARETH'S FAVORITE AI USE CASE: COPY PROTOTYPING FOR DESIGNERS

AI doesn't replace designers or copywriters. But on Gareth's team, it's a valuable tool to help design teams move forward without resorting to generic placeholders when copywriters are overloaded or unavailable.

- 01 Designers use AI tools to generate on-brand placeholder copy.
- 02 This copy is more differentiated than 'lorem ipsum' text, so designs are unique even during iteration.
- 03 When copywriters come into the process, they use this on-brand starter text as inspiration.

SURVIVAL TIP #56:

MAKE YOUR MESSAGE CLEAR



01 Lose the "blank canvas syndrome"

"I've seen AI really help designers who aren't as free-flowing with ideas. It can help them emulate stuff they've liked and give them something to start from."

Sometimes getting started is the hardest part of the creative process. That's why AI is such a valuable tool for getting past the blank page. Designers can feed in ideas or prompts that inspire them to generate 'starter content.'

02 Lean into the weirdness

"For realism, AI can be tricky. But embrace the weirdness, and you can get fun, humorous visuals." To sidestep the cringe factor that can come with AI content, consider not trying to aim for perfect realism. AI is the perfect tool for wild or fantastical designs because audiences know they're not looking at real life. That's not to say realistic AI is impossible, but it's definitely a higher bar to aim for.

03 Expand your brand guidelines

"AI guidelines aren't hex codes and typefaces, but they're still brand guidelines."

Before making AI part of your creative workflow, create company-wide AI best practices. Get everyone using the same AI tools, and agree on what kinds of prompts will generate on-brand imagery. Prompts should contain guidelines for everything from camera angles to color palettes.

In the quest for strong brand identity, it's crucial to remember that AI is just a tool. In the right hands, AI creation can be a path to standing out, not a shortcut to shipping quickly. It just needs to be approached with the same care as any other design process.



"Successful creatives know what they stand for, push AI to its limits, and never stop raising their standards."

- Gareth Morgan | Head of Global Brand Design at Revolut

WILL STANDING STILL SINK YOU?



In conversation with
Julia Jaskólska,
Brand Design Lead at Zapier



Despite AI's promises of productivity, most creative teams are still struggling with bandwidth—78% say demand outstrips their capacity.

There are so many channels to show up on and formats to experiment with (some more labor-intensive, like video). Feeding the content beast may feel impossible, and many are hoping AI is the answer.

"Because we can do more with AI, people have more ideas, and that's definitely shown up in our pipeline. But often, they're not as simple to execute as they seem," says Julia Jaskólska, Brand Design Lead at Zapier.

These heightened expectations aren't always a bad thing—teams just need the capacity to match. Not only do they need to stay on top of the expanding pipeline, they're trying to keep up with the velocity of collaborating teams who may already be AI-enabled.

So, how to create that capacity wiggle room?

- Audit your backlog. Regularly review incoming requests and align them against business goals. (At Zapier, the creative team openly discusses which ideas are worth pursuing and aligned to business goals and which to park.)
- Pinpoint friction. Map your process and highlight the repetitive or low-value tasks slowing you down.
- Apply AI strategically. Use AI to clear team bottlenecks—think first drafts, resizing assets, or generating design variations.
- Align with stakeholders. Share where AI actually does add efficiency, so partner teams understand what's realistic and what isn't.

This way, AI isn't just a 'nice-to-have'—it's a capacity multiplier that helps creative teams focus on the high-impact work only humans can do, like brand storytelling, cultural interpretation and curation.

"As creatives, we're not only doing work for other teams, we're guiding how it gets done. What simple operational processes can we speed up? What's the visionary creative stuff that needs care and attention?" says Julia.

KNEE-DEEP IN CAPACITY ISSUES



AI WORKFLOWS: A HELPING HAND WHEN YOU'RE STUCK IN THE MUD

Zapier's team leans on AI to stay centered, productive, and ahead of deadline. Here are five workflows Julia recommends for creative teams.

- 01 Storyboards: Instead of manually sketching video or animation storyboards, ChatGPT can create a simple visual sequence from a text prompt.
- 02 Content planning: Refine content ideas, like workshops and handbooks, by sparring with LLM tools. Ask the tool to point out how the concept could be more specific, actionable, or relevant to the target audience.
- 03 LLM as knowledge base: Build a custom GPT or project loaded with all available information about a project or initiative. Team members can search for answers to their questions, in natural language, instead of chasing down colleagues or digging through documents.
- 04 Copy generation and editing: Stop text from becoming a bottleneck for team members who aren't comfortable with writing or need to generate text in their non-native language.
- 05 Image enhancement: AI enhances off-brand or low-quality images, like headshots for event speakers, to match brand guidelines and quality standards.

"AI is the amplifier. Start from a clear vision, then invest in building AI systems so your creative team can execute that vision at scale," says Julia.

Great work doesn't happen when teams are spread thin and stuck in survival mode. That's why the AI revolution has so much potential. If creative teams apply AI with a discerning eye, this is their moment to free up capacity for visionary work that elevates their entire organization.

SURVIVAL TIP #120:

STRUGGLE ISN'T A *STRATEGY*



THE SNOWBALL EFFECT OF MOVING WITH SPEED



In conversation with
Ayesha Mathews Wadhwa,
Head of Brand Experience



“It's not about rushing, it's about unblocking.”

Creative teams are under immense pressure to deliver not just variety and volume, but speed. 78% of creatives want to create bolder work, but are always racing against the clock. Daily work can feel like an endless cycle of ship, test, and iterate.

“You can move fast, but if your idea gets diluted or you struggle with execution, then speed doesn't actually serve you,” says Ayesha Mathews Wadhwa, leader of a global brand experience team.

AI accelerates creative work. Off-the-shelf tools generate images 50-90% faster than manual design processes, while custom AI models are 10x faster.

But speed for its own sake isn't helpful. The real question is: why do we want to move faster?

Over-optimizing for velocity, to the exclusion of everything else, can lead to creative work that doesn't support business goals.

For Ayesha, the goal is to use AI to free teams from distracting busywork that steals focus from deep creative thinking. But to handle even these simple tasks end-to-end, AI needs rich context and guidance. That means strong guardrails, like brand guidelines and quality control checklists, incorporated into every AI-enhanced workflow.

“It's not about rushing, it's about unblocking. AI can help creative leaders build the conditions for flow, and that's when we see truly compounding productivity gains,” she says.

It takes upfront work to build this foundation, but it's the only way for AI to support both speed and creativity. Teams go from idea to impact faster because they're not handling repetitive tasks and can trust that AI is well-trained enough to delegate to. This creates more space to experiment, refine, and ship worthwhile creative work faster.



01 Carve out frameworks for clarity

"Lack of clarity and alignment are the typical blockers to speed. Invest time in building rigorous frameworks that create shared understanding."

The fastest AI processes in the world won't help teams who aren't on the same page. Upfront alignment ensures that when AI comes in to speed things up, it's actually bringing teams towards the outcomes you want.

02 Take strategic risks

"The right structure gives teams the confidence to move fast and to take risks. AI needs guardrails to support quality at a fast pace."

Embedded into AI workflows, checklists and guidelines make sure creative lives up to brand standards even when teams are moving fast. These include basic quality assurance checklists, brand voice and tone guidelines, and custom projects or GPTs built for different types of creative output.

"When we're deep into work, we sometimes forget to step back and look at it with a fresh pair of eyes," says Ayesha. Moving quickly, and using AI tools, can make it even harder to pause and get that objectivity because teams are so focused on the final outcome. Guardrails help make sure quality standards are baked into every creative workflow.

03 Let your team steer

"AI is great for scale, but not for soul. With creative work, sometimes the magic is in the mess." The #1 way AI makes teams faster is by eliminating repetitive busywork. Ayesha's team relies on AI tools for tasks like prototyping layouts, generating moodboards, and early revisions of voiceover scripts.

That gives human creatives more time for what they do best—brand voice development, early stage ideation, and big-picture creative thinking. "True creativity requires instinct, intuition, and connection to culture," says Ayesha. "These are areas where I'd rather tap the team's lived experience."

"AI's best use is to give us back the white space to be strategic, bold, and insightful."

- Ayesha Mathews Wadhwa | Head of Brand Experience



HOW AYESHA USES AI TO CREATE COMPOUNDING EFFICIENCY GAINS

Ayesha's team used custom AI models to create a new icon library fast. Now, the library itself creates velocity by helping internal and external teams create content faster.

- 01 After a company-wide brand evolution, there was a need for a new library of 300-500 icons. However, with limited capacity, the brand experience team needed a more scalable approach than manual creation.
- 02 The team decided to train a custom Adobe Firefly model on their icon style, then used it to generate icons that needed only light revision to be ready for use.
- 03 Now, both external partners like agencies, and in-house creative teams, can use the icons for easy self-serve collateral creation in as little as 24 hours.

In the AI era, speed is the new baseline. But brands that win don't just move fast, they move meaningfully. Their edge becomes clarity and coherence under pressure—rising to the challenge with content that speaks to customers' thoughts, feelings, and pain points.

"It's not just about shipping faster, it's about unlocking flow."

SURVIVAL TIP #92:

ZIG WHERE *OTHERS ZAG*



CONCLUSION: A SHIFT IN TIME SAVES NINE

If these creative leaders are any indication, the AI era is one of optimism, promise, and a bold experimental spirit.

There's nothing to be afraid of—in fact, creative teams can reach unimaginable new heights. We just need to dream big about what AI is capable of, while staying grounded in what our teams need right now.

OUR 5 FAVORITE SURVIVAL TIPS SHARED BY CREATIVE LEADERS IN THIS GUIDE:

01 Experiment

To discover AI use cases that actually drive value, allocate time out of your teams' workloads specifically for AI experimentation.

02 Identity

Rock-solid brand identity and audience knowledge is key to great content, whether generated by AI or not.

03 Productivity

Identify friction points and bottlenecks, and apply AI there first to help boost team productivity.

04 Goals

Everyone wants to work faster but using AI to over-optimize for speed can lead to creative work that doesn't support business goals.

05 Workflow

Rather than trying to be an expert in everything, go narrow when planning AI adoption and identify workflows that most urgently need support.

Just like any good project, it took a team of very talented marketers and creatives working together to make this guide happen.

EDITORS

Melissa McFarlane, Jen Rapp, Josh Mendelsohn

CREATIVE DIRECTION

Kae Neskovic, Graeme McCree, Piotr Smietana, Joshua Roscoe

WEB DESIGN

Camila Giannini, Pedro Carmo, Vladislav Balabanovich, Ameen Aburayya

DESIGN

Devin Terrey, Nathalie Jourdan

CONTENT

Genevieve Michaels, Tessa Reid, Sam Newdigate, Ashleigh Robyn

CONTRIBUTORS

Cassandra Gill, Helen Lee, Kira Klaas, Drew Brucker, Gah-Yee Won, Júlio Aymoré, Jessica Rosenberg, Gareth Morgan, Julia Jaskólska, Ayesha Mathews Wadhwa

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Sofia Bittolo, Iliada Karamintziou

THE TEAM BEHIND THIS GUIDE

YOUR TEAM DESERVES MORE THAN *SURVIVAL MODE*



Book a call

Superside is your creative team's creative team. We expand your capabilities, scale, speed, and ideas by plugging top global creative talent directly into your workflow.

Fully managed. No hiring headaches. And we're already trusted by 500+ top brands for everything from ad campaigns to video.

If your creative team could use a partner who knows the terrain (survival tip #77), get in touch.

Superside