



SHARON 🍷 TANTON

The Absolute State of Marketing and Promotion in 2025

What today's marketers fear, hope for, and really think

Research Results

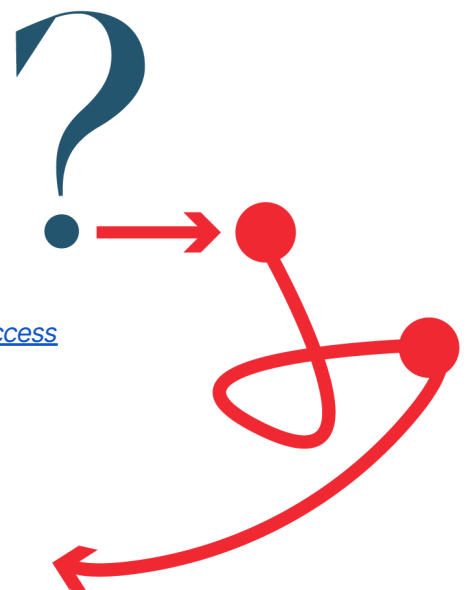
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1. Introduction: Marketing then vs. now

Back in 2015, we launched the second *Valuable Content Marketing* book into a very different world. Barack Obama was US President, David Cameron was UK PM.

In the business marketing landscape:

- Twitter was playful and fun (yes, really).
- Google+ was a thing.
- Facebook was rising, Instagram felt fresh, and LinkedIn felt corporate + old school.
- Periscope was set to revolutionise live video.

It was a more innocent time. We threw ourselves into this digital playground with optimism. Our mantra was “*help, don’t sell*”: share valuable content, build trust, and the right people would find you.

Fast forward a decade, and the mood has shifted. Search feels broken. Trust in social platforms and “tech bros” is through the floor. Many of us feel wary of putting ourselves out there. And yet, the fundamentals remain: we still want to connect, to spark conversations, to succeed in our work, and to grow communities.

So what’s changed? And what might come next?

This survey, completed by marketers in an array of businesses in summer 2025, is our first step in re-examining how marketing feels today, and how the Valuable Content marketing principles might evolve to meet the moment.

We asked people to tell us honestly how they see marketing right now. What feels hard, what feels hopeful, and what feels broken. We dug into how they feel about putting themselves out there, what’s working for them (and what really isn’t), tactics they’d love to bring back, and the skills or support they most want. And we gave space for people to share their own frustrations, fears, and hopes for where marketing goes next.

At a glance: the state of marketing in 2025

Marketing today is in a **crisis of confidence**:

- People are working harder for less return.
- Platforms feel broken, AI floods the web with sameness.
- Trust is fragile. Audiences crave authenticity, clarity, and connection.

And yet, the fundamentals endure.

5 lenses for Valuable Marketing today:

- Human > Algorithmic
- Clarity > Complexity
- Courage > Conformity
- Connection > Clicks
- Confidence > Confusion

Key takeaways from the research:

1. **Marketing feels ... emotional.** Marketers describe highs and lows. Confidence is the make-or-break factor.
2. **The landscape is fractured.** Noise and fragmentation make cut-through harder; word of mouth still rules.
3. **Trust is down, doubt is up.** Faith in platforms and AI polish is collapsing. Authenticity cuts through.
4. **The struggle runs deeper.** Challenges are strategic and personal: clarity, confidence, and being valued.
5. **Nostalgia.** Marketers want slower, more human, grounded ways of connecting.

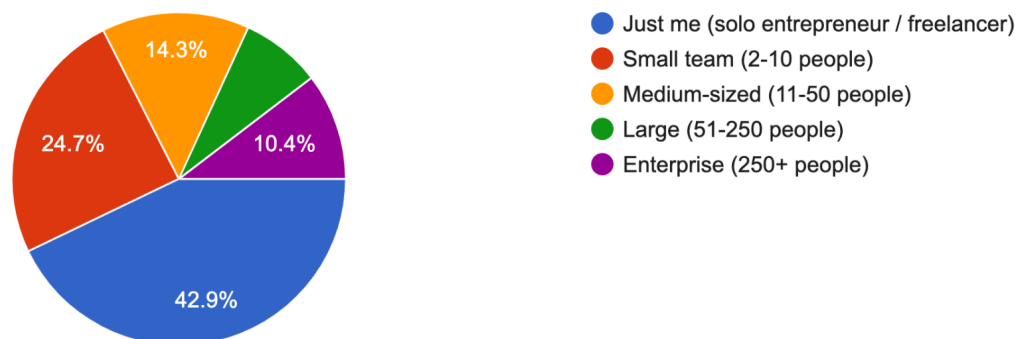
The bottom line: The playbook may feel broken, but the compass is clear. Simplify, trust yourself, and put care, creativity, joy, and fun back at the heart of your marketing.

B. Who we heard from

We heard from 77 people working at the coalface of marketing and comms: founders, freelancers, small business owners, charity comms teams, and enterprise leads.

What size is your organisation?

77 responses




- A strong showing came from solo operators and small teams, alongside healthy representation from charities and larger organisations.
- Respondents spanned a mix of mainly B2B service providers (marketing & PR, tech, design, consultancy, coaching, education), charities tackling social issues, and niche providers (digital, learning, cybersecurity).


These are the voices of people wearing many hats, promoting their work while delivering it, juggling stretched budgets and shifting platforms.

What struck us most, though, was the quality of their contributions. People didn't hold back in their comments. They answered generously, thought deeply, and spoke with honesty. It felt less like reading a survey and more like a series of frank conversations with clued-up practitioners who care deeply about the world and their craft.

C. Key findings

1. The current mood: marketing feels emotional

 **Takeaway: Marketing in 2025 is as much about mindset as mechanics: wearying for some, energising for others, but deeply emotional for nearly everyone.**

 *"All the feelings! Sometimes I feel really positive and hopeful, other times I feel frustrated, weary and skeptical. Running a business and being visible is tough." — Small business owner*

We now create, publish, and distribute content at lightning speed. AI enables marketers to operate with breathtaking efficiency, but this has brought a cost: sameness. A glut of generic "how-to" content, created with little context or soul, threatens to undermine the role of strategic communicators and creatives.

This means that marketing in 2025 is not just tactical; it's deeply emotional, even psychological.

Not failing, not flying: We asked: *"How's business?"* Most respondents sit in the cautious middle ground: 28 "could do better," 23 "on the up," 21 "stable." Only a handful are truly soaring or struggling.

Emotional highs and lows: In answer to *"How do you feel about marketing today?"*, negative emotions (31) slightly outweighed positive ones (28), with many feeling both at once. Words like *weary*, *frustrated*, and *skeptical* sat alongside *hopeful* and *energised*.

One respondent even apologised mid-answer:

"Distinctiveness maybe. I'm not sure. Sorry, this has turned into a therapy session. Ha!" — Small business owner

And in truth, it often did feel like therapy. People answered with striking honesty and candour about what marketing means to them.

Mindset matters: We looked at what tactics are being used, and to what end. Respondents using similar tools reported completely different experiences. For some, showing up online feels energising and fruitful:

"I love the connection with my audience." — Freelancer

For others, the same activity feels like shouting into the void, or worse – weighed down by worry, self-doubt and shame.


Others pointed to confidence as the barrier:

"My own confidence, getting over the voices in my head." — Solo business owner

This shows that marketing is as much about how it feels to do as about what it delivers. Confidence, clarity, and self-belief make the difference between a draining experience and one that builds momentum. (We both feel this deeply from our own experience).

2. Fast and furious: the fractured landscape

 **Takeaway: Noise and fragmentation make cut-through harder; word of mouth still rules.**

 *"We're on every channel but not getting traction anywhere."* — Enterprise comms team leader

The marketing landscape feels busier, faster, and more fragmented than ever.

- **Old tools falter:** SEO, lead magnets, and generic social content are delivering diminishing returns.
 - **Noise and saturation:** Too many voices, too little cut-through.
 - **Word of mouth strongest:** The most effective calling card by far – trusted, human, and hard to fake.
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"Generally, everything is much more fragmented in terms of channels. Which makes it harder to reach certain groups. Our content is great and high quality, but it's more costly (time and ££) to produce now that so much is multimedia. There's a lot of noise, everyone is doing "content" and it's hard to stand out." — Marketer in a large business


"It's fragmenting and becoming inefficient, and feels a bit broken." — Marketer in enterprise organisation

"I think we've reached a major saturation point for any kind of proactive marketing, especially brand & social media. It's very noisy, everywhere, and customers / clients are desperately looking for authenticity and integrity that cuts through the constant bombardment." — Solo business owner

"It's shifting fast but also going nowhere quick." — Solo business owner

3. Trust is down, doubt is up

 **Takeaway: Faith in platforms and AI polish is collapsing — authenticity cuts through.**

 *"AI... erodes trust and authenticity. It does the job, but it doesn't touch people."* — Solo business owner

Faith in platforms and tactics seems to be collapsing.

Social media as a necessary evil: Algorithm changes, ethical concerns, and fatigue dominate the comments. Social media once offered powerful reach and engagement, but the algorithms are no longer our friend. What was once organic is now paid, and even then, often ineffective. Meanwhile, the audience has changed too: fragmented, fatigued, and increasingly skeptical.

Crucially too, ten years ago social channels were a fun place to hang out. Using them for marketing felt easy. Provided you were generous with other people's content, and

were generally a nice person online, it was no hardship being on Twitter. But choosing to stay on Twitter after it became X felt like an endorsement of Elon Musk and his world view.

There's a greater understanding of the negative effects on mental health of social platforms. The phrase 'doom scrolling' took off in 2020 during the pandemic, and became embedded in the collective consciousness. These days, posting on social media feels problematic. Some of us have opted out altogether. We want ways of connecting with people that avoid the toxicity of social channels.

"Trust in social media is through the floor, yet the noise on the web is through the roof. Anything that looks like marketing is ignored." — Solo business owner

"People are questioning the channels they use and the ethics behind them. People have left platforms and boycotted providers. We're walking the tightrope between the 'necessary evil' of gaining reach while trying to maintain our integrity." — Solo business owner

AI disruption: AI speeds things up but also creates a monoculture of polished, shallow content and doubt about what is valuable. Instead of instilling confidence, this contrived gloss is starting to repel people. For many, slickness now signals inauthenticity.

Some respondents went further, describing a visceral reaction to what they see as "contrived" or "over-produced" marketing. The rise of AI-generated polish has accelerated this shift. Instead of reassuring audiences, there's a feeling that this hyper-slick content can now trigger distrust – an instinctive reaction that pushes people away.

"It's all getting very monoculture, very fast. AI is ruining standout campaigns."
— Small business marketer

"AI can do the donkey work, yes. But when used without vision or ethics, it erodes trust and authenticity. It does the job, but it doesn't touch people." — Solo business owner

"Quick wins and tactical thinking dominate – more copycat, shallow content than anything meaningful." — Solo business owner

Confidence shaken: Many admitted they don't know what works anymore. The pace of change and the sheer volume of competing voices leave people questioning whether anything cuts through. Some described marketing today as broken, saturated, or simply exhausting.

"Shifting fast. I don't know how to keep up." — Marketer in a large organisation

"Everything [is] stopping working and starting over." — Solo business owner

"Becoming even harder getting the messages out – the sheer volume of voices and content makes it impossible to stand out." — Enterprise comms lead

"Too many voices talking all at once. Hard to get anyone to listen." — Solo business owner

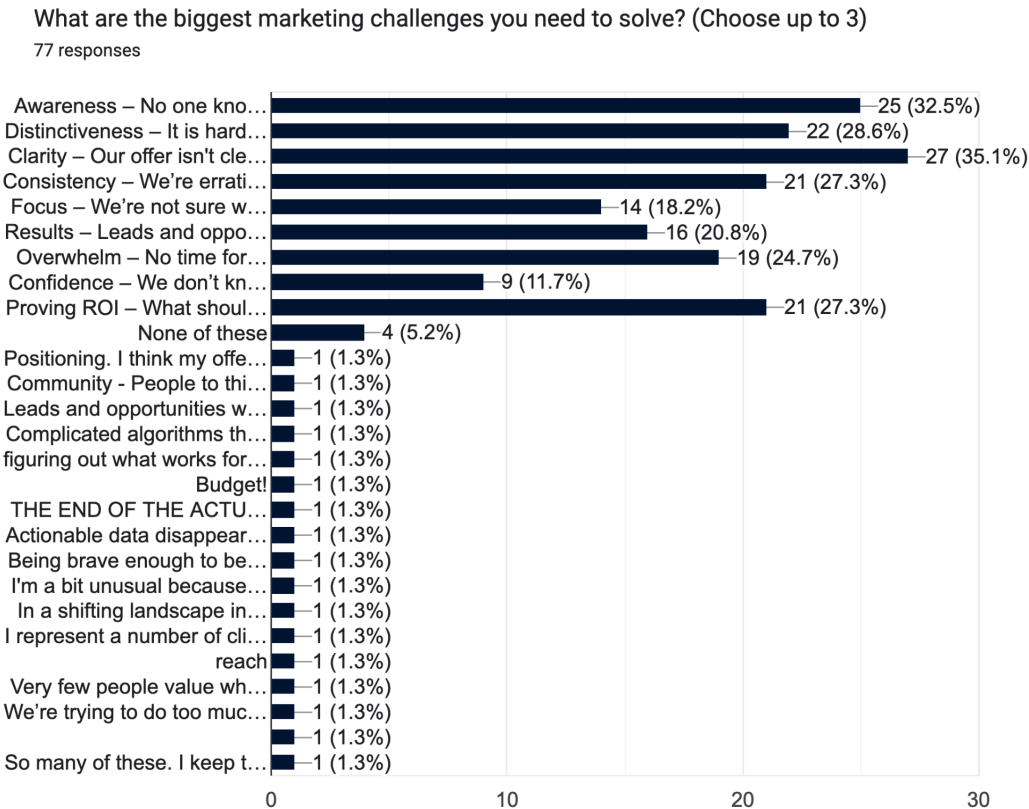
4. The struggle runs deeper than marketing

👉 **Challenges are strategic and personal: clarity, confidence, and being valued.**

💬 "We're still seen as the colouring-in department." — PR/Comms specialist

The biggest barriers for anyone in marketing aren't just tactical questions of *which channel to use* or *what content to post*. The struggle runs deeper. These are challenges of strategy, positioning, confidence, and identity, made harder by a world that feels like it's shifting under our feet.

We asked: "*What are the biggest challenges you need to solve*", and the results were enlightening.



Clarity tops the list. 27 people said they struggle to explain their offer in a way that lands. When the world feels so volatile, it's no surprise that sharpening your story and positioning is hard. When everything around you is changing, nailing down who you are and what you stand for becomes both more difficult and more important.

"I think my offer is good but people may not know what I stand for. It feels like it's time to become Ms. Something. Not sure what that is yet." — Solo consultant

Awareness and distinctiveness were also big issues: 25 say no one knows who they are; 22 struggle to stand out.

"Daunted – how do I take all the experience I have and distill it into something short, concise and digestible, and yet punchy enough to make myself stand apart from the crowd?" — Marketer in medium-sized business

Confidence (9) and **control** (over algorithms, budgets, or leadership) were other recurring themes.

"I feel more depressed every day on this. I have so much competition now and people who post on LinkedIn constantly seem to get all the work. I compare myself a lot and always feel inadequate. I feel like I lose ground every day." — Freelancer

Another recurring frustration was internal: getting colleagues and leadership to see the value of marketing. Several respondents said marketing is still pigeonholed as "the lead gen and colouring-in department," rather than understood as a strategic driver of growth.

"I'd like more people in the business understanding how good marketing can support goals and growth." — Enterprise marketer

"More time and trust given to strategic marketing (rather than tactical)." — Marketing specialist, large charity

These aren't just tactical challenges, they're internal and external positioning and mindset challenges. They reveal more about the landscape people are navigating in 2025, where questions of identity, confidence, and even survival sit alongside the day-to-day demands of marketing.

And beyond the personal, some respondents zoomed out to the bigger picture. They linked their struggles to wider shifts in society and the planet itself: questions of ethics, integrity, and even survival.

"Every day, I see brilliant, talented people begging for work on LinkedIn. It seems everyone wants to do business as usual, when the whole world is on fire." — Solo business owner

"Worried about the end of the actual world." — Solo business owner

"Capitalism." — Solo business owner

The marketing struggle runs deeper because worries run deeper: for many of our respondents the problems of navigating a fractured digital landscape are caught up in a web of bigger existential concerns. Against that backdrop, it's no wonder people are craving clarity, and a better, kinder way to connect.

5. Nostalgia for old school fundamentals

👉 **Marketers want slower, more human, grounded ways of connecting.**

💬 *"The tools are changing. The principles are not."* — Solo business owner

Against that uncertainty, it's telling that many respondents are reaching back for the fundamentals: slower, more human, more grounded ways of connecting. If the present feels unstable, the past feels reassuring.

As songwriter David Byrne said, *"There are people, there is art, there is love: talk about that."*

The appetite for authentic, meaningful communication has never been greater..

Nostalgia for "old school" methods is strong: print, zines, in-person events, long-form writing, smaller private networks. Alongside this sits a belief that fundamentals still work: clarity, storytelling, trust, real relationships. And there's a call for bravery and creativity in a sea of sameness.

"Human stories matter. No robot will ever replicate that." — Charity comms lead

"I think we'll move back from social media and focus on reaching audiences directly. I think email is massively underrated, but physical items have potential again." — Large charity comms lead

But this nostalgia is not only about reviving old channels. It's also rebellion, a craving for realness and imperfection, for the human, messy, lo-fi content that stands apart from algorithmically polished sameness.

"Most of it is shit. Which I suppose is an opportunity." — Small business marketer

"Such a big question. I think people are finding honesty and humanity refreshing again." — Solo business owner

The response to AI-generated content may well be a new wave of rough and ready, anti-polish creativity: simple, handmade, personal marketing that works precisely because it feels real, and could only have been created by someone you know.

D. What does this all mean?

Marketing in 2025 is in a crisis of confidence.

- People are working harder for less return.
- AI and platform shifts have fuelled fatigue and doubt.
- The old certainties – trusted channels, reliable metrics, accepted 'best practices' – no longer hold."

And yet, a path forward is emerging. The fundamentals endure: clarity, connection, creativity, courage, confidence. These aren't abstract ideals, they are the compass points that help us navigate complexity, rebuild trust, and create valuable work that matters.

For many, positioning is the starting point. In a noisy and shifting environment, the hardest – and most essential – task is being able to say with confidence: *this is who we are, this is what we stand for, this is the value we bring*. Without that clarity, no amount of tactical brilliance will cut through.

What people want most is marketing that feels real and raw and human and meaningful again, both for creators and audiences. It's about work that is sustainable and energising to do, not draining and performative.

"Personalised, tailored and stand-out." — Solo business owner

All this sits against a bigger backdrop: an unsettled world where questions of ethics, integrity, and even survival loom large. If marketing feels shaky, it's because the ground beneath us is shaking too.

Where do we go from here?

This survey is step one. Our next step is to revisit the original set of Valuable Content principles, to see if we need to reframe them for the world we find ourselves in today.

And this isn't just about tactics, channels, or even strategy. It's about *mindset*. If marketing feels confusing, draining, or performative, it won't be sustainable. If it feels clear, confident, and connected, it will build resilience as well as results.

We will design our refreshed Valuable Content marketing principles to support both, but what this research / your feedback shows us is that we need to aim for:

- **Human > algorithmic**
- **Clarity > complexity**
- **Courage > conformity**
- **Connection > clicks**
- **Confidence > confusion**

These five lenses point us back to fundamentals: human, helpful, courageous marketing that works better because it feels better to do.

And at the heart of it all is **intention**: not just what we do or how it feels, but why we do it. If our intention is simply to extract, audiences will sense it. If our intention is to care, to contribute, to be of service, then our marketing will not only connect better, it will feel better to do.

And underpinning all of this is something that came through strongly in the responses: the desire for **joy**. Oh my god, marketing has felt heavy, fractured, and fatiguing for too long! What people are asking for isn't superficial cheerfulness, but a return to the spark that makes this work worth doing.

Yes, even in a world that feels uncertain (perhaps *especially* in a world like this) joy matters. Joy doesn't mean ignoring the difficulties; it means approaching the work with love, creativity, playfulness, and meaning, despite everything. If doing the work feels good, the results will follow.

And let's say it out loud: marketing should be **fun** too. Let's find ways to put the playfulness back in – to experiment, to laugh, to enjoy the process again.

Communication that cuts through and connects is harder to produce – good marketing takes time, thought, nuance, and empathy. It is interesting to us that these qualities are displayed in abundance in our respondents' answers. They're an honest, smart and funny

set of responses. And they're qualities that are not easily scaled or automated. Collectively, we have the skills and the desire to meet these new marketing challenges.

We'll share our full set of principles soon, but for now, the path forward is clear: simplify, trust yourself, and put care, creativity, joy and fun back at the heart of your marketing.

Stay tuned

Thank you to everyone who shared so openly. Your honesty and insight will shape the next chapter of *Valuable Content Marketing*.

This first report has focused on the backdrop: how marketing feels today, and the context in which we're all working. Alongside this, we also uncovered a wealth of evidence on what people are actually doing day-to-day: the tactics they're using, what's working, and what they want to learn next. We'll be sharing that companion piece soon.

This is just the beginning of the conversation. Let's work together to bring more joy, bravery, humanity and fun back into marketing and comms. Because this work matters.

Sonja and Sharon



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