Generative AI isn't the content creation engine that marketers anticipated—yet

Article

Generative AI is yet to have a profound impact on media plans and marketing workflow.

"The promise of genAI is to ultimately achieve a digital dream state of advertising...where the right message reaches the right consumer on the right platform at the right time," our analyst Max Willens said on an episode of the "Behind the Numbers" podcast. "But right now, the costs associated with those technological capabilities are not there, nor has the ROI been worked out ... We're a ways away."

Generative AI is experiencing an expectation-versus-reality discrepancy. In April 2023, 59% of marketing professionals worldwide believed that the greatest potential for generative AI was copywriting, according to a January 2024 report by Mediaocean. Seven months later, only 26% of the same respondents reported actually using generative AI for copywriting.

The discrepancy may be due to the technology's limitations. "Because of its tendency to hallucinate, its unresolved questions around copyright infringement, and its lingering concerns about brand suitability, there's a lot of friction," Willens said.

Generative AI's use for content creation doesn't live up—yet. It's difficult to say how many marketers are using generative AI's outputs as the final creative asset, Willens said. That's because all of the biggest advertising companies offer generative AI-powered features within their platforms, which generate creative variations.

Creative uses also differ between small, independent, or D2C brands and larger tradition-bound brands, Willens said. Legacy brands have several generations of dos and don'ts, brand guidelines, and multiple creative agencies, so they're much less likely to deploy generative AI content as is.

It's worth noting that image generation had roughly the same discrepancy as copywriting (a 23-percentage point difference) between planned generative AI use and actual use.

Reality check: "A lot of usage comes pretty early in the production process," Willens said.

- 39% of marketing professionals worldwide use generative AI for data analysis, per January 2024 report from Mediaocean.
- The second-most popular use among marketing professionals is market research, the same report found.

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