

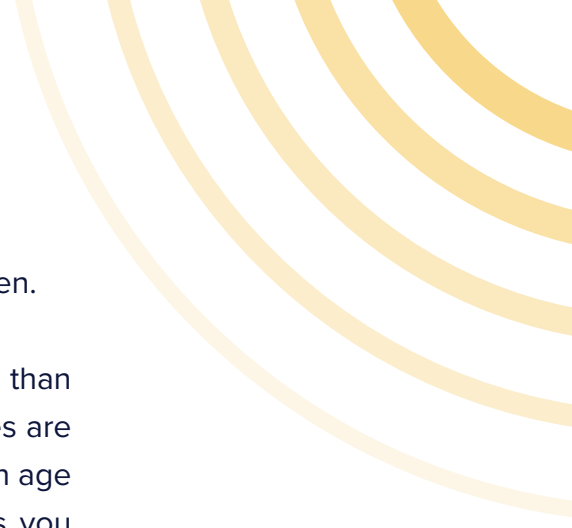


LEADERSHIP SIGNALS

Stop guessing, start knowing

How marketers can use fast feedback to break through to audiences on oversaturated channels





If you're a marketer today, let's be honest. Things feel very broken.

Almost every digital channel gives us results that are far worse than they were years ago. Ad clicks are plummeting, email open rates are in a free fall, and search traffic is flatlining. We're essentially in an age of marketing inflation, where the same amount of money gets you less.

That means most of us are stuck in a doom loop of plummeting engagement rates followed by budget cuts, which lead to even lower engagement rates. All the while, the calls to "do more with less" get louder and louder.

It really feels like we're in need of more than just better tactics or strategy, we need an entirely different way of thinking.



Today's marketers are spending more for less impact

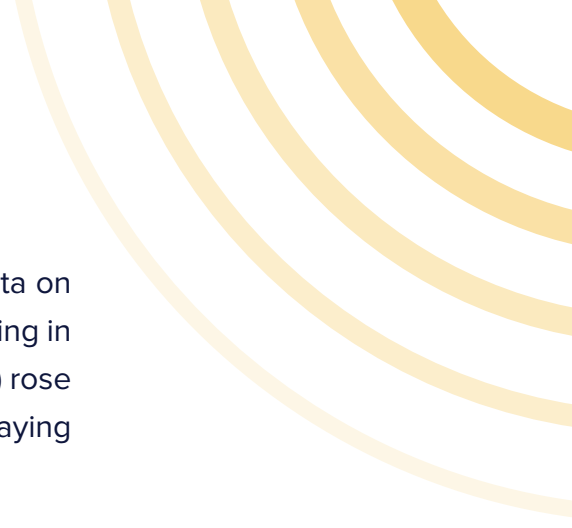
For years, marketers responded to falling engagement rates by playing the numbers game. The dominant strategy for so long could be described as, “all of the content, all of the time, on all of the channels, to all of the people”

We saturated the market by throwing more and more content at the wall like spaghetti, hoping something sticks. Unfortunately, everyone else did the same thing. And now no one wants to look at a wall covered in spaghetti. We've trained audiences to tune us out.

Of course, we could continue to play the numbers game, even if the costs are exponentially higher. AI could temporarily make content cheaper and easier to scale, but it'll do that for everyone, leading to even more market saturation and messaging fatigue.

The result? A glut of undifferentiated marketing that no one connects with, let alone remembers.

The numbers are sobering. According to Vogue Business' 2025 Index, luxury brand social media engagement is in freefall—Instagram interactions have dropped 19%, while YouTube views have plunged a staggering 93% year-over-year. Meanwhile, businesses are pouring more money into traffic acquisition, only to see conversion rates decline by over 6% according to Contentsquare's Digital Experience Benchmark report.



This isn't isolated to luxury brands or big tech. WordStream's data on Google Ads across industries shows cost-per-click (CPC) increasing in 87% of sectors, some by more than 40%. And cost-per-lead (CPL) rose in 13 of 23 sectors analyzed. The conclusion is clear: we are paying more and getting less.

It's not that marketers aren't working hard enough. It's that we're trying to play a 2025 game with a 2015 playbook, armed with backward-looking data, limited feedback loops, and little insight into the *why* behind audience behavior.

There's a better alternative to the numbers game, but it requires us to acknowledge a core truth.



We're too far from our audiences, and most of the time, we're just guessing

Feeding the content beast took marketers away from an integral part of their core function: listening to the customer. When we're continuously trying to pump out enough content on every channel out there, there isn't any time or space to pause, and listen to what our audiences actually want, or respond to.

The creation of communication tools that could move in real time (internet, social media, etc) outstripped our ability to listen. We adopted the tech startup philosophy of creating MVPs, shipping a high volume of content with the assumption that we could test and improve later.

Under the weight of aggressive KPIs and complex omnichannel ecosystems, many marketing teams are now flying blind. When engagement drops, teams scramble to react, often relying on gut instinct, internal opinions, or historical data to craft new messages. They guess.

While analytics and A/B tests can tell us what happened, they rarely tell us *why*. And social listening only captures the extreme voices, the superfans and the loud detractors. Everyone else is usually silent.

"We are desperate for information, always. We have a lot of sources, but some voices are louder than others and you have to be careful about listening to those because they may not be right," said a VP of marketing at a major B2B equipment manufacturer.



When asked about how she tries to get meaningful customer insights, one VP at a leading fashion brand said she scrolls comments on the company's Instagram feed whenever she has a few minutes. Again, that over indexes on a tiny, very vocal section of the population, whose opinions don't reflect the majority.

The gap between *what we think* our customers want and what they actually want is growing, and we're filling it by guessing.

But guesswork in today's environment is costly. The risk is multidimensional:

- **Cost:** When campaigns miss the mark, budgets are wasted not just on poor performance, but on rework and reactive pivots.
- **Morale:** Creative teams burn out, producing asset after asset with little clarity on what's working and why.
- **Brand:** Misaligned messaging erodes trust and credibility. Over time, the brand itself begins to blur in the eyes of consumers.
- **Revenue:** Opportunities are lost when campaigns fail to resonate. Timing is missed. Growth stalls.

"We're sitting on a mountain of analytics," a Director of Digital Experience at a major enterprise software company told us, "but we still can't answer the simple question: *Why did people drop off here?*"

Data shows us what happened—but not why. Without the "why," we're designing in the dark.

Talk to your audience instead of just tracking them

There is a better way forward, one that more and more leading brands are embracing: real-time customer insight through fast feedback.

Getting feedback from your audience used to mean weeks of survey design, expensive research panels, and delayed results. But today's tools offer rich, real-time insights from real prospects within hours, not weeks.

You don't have to guess anymore. You can *know*.

A few minutes of live conversation or a single video interview can illuminate what no analytics dashboard ever could. As one brand strategist in the beverage industry put it, "There's something about seeing someone's face as they read your copy. You catch things no metric would show you."

And the impact is real:



"One insight from a 15-minute test helped us avoid an expensive creative rework."

— **VP of Marketing, DTC Retail**

"If I can get quick input on a headline or a landing page before launch, I sleep a lot better."

— **Product Marketer, EdTech**



Fast feedback doesn't just prevent misfires. It makes the entire creative process more collaborative, aligned, and confidence-driven.



Modern insights tools are faster, simpler and smarter

There's no single way to gather fast feedback, and that's the point. Today's tools offer a spectrum of options tailored to different stages of the creative process:

- **Quick Surveys:** Ideal for validating patterns or gathering quantitative input. Fast, scalable, and great for A/B decisions like headline preference or visual selection.
- **Video feedback:** Participants narrate their experience as they interact with content. You get to see confusion, delight, and decision-making in real time.
- **Live Interviews:** Nothing beats a one-on-one conversation for uncovering deep motivations and unspoken hesitations. These are invaluable for brand positioning, naming, and new product messaging.
- Each method serves a different purpose—but all bring you closer to the one thing that matters most: your customer's perspective.



Building the business case for fast insights

Many marketing leaders understand the value of insight but struggle to get buy-in from senior stakeholders who are more focused on short-term metrics.

To position insight as a revenue driver, focus on what fast feedback prevents:

- **Wasted spend** on underperforming creative
- **Expensive rework** of campaigns post-launch
- **Delayed time-to-market** due to misalignment and revision cycles

Frame insight as a lever for ROI protection and brand resilience, not just creative validation. Show how feedback fuels smarter decisions and safer bets.

Tesco's marketing team, for example, used rapid feedback to validate communications before launch, reducing ambiguity and increasing message clarity. Similarly, NRG Energy used mascot testing with real users to ensure their character design aligned with brand values—before investing in rollout.

The result? Fewer surprises, faster approvals, and campaigns that connect.

How to get started with fast feedback

Making the leap to fast feedback doesn't require an overhaul. It starts with a mindset shift. As a leader, it's up to you to create an environment where your team has the time, space and resources to test first. That might mean slowing down initially, and prioritizing a few places where a testing phase can be piloted. A few ways to start:

- 1. Identify the gaps:** Where in your content or campaign process are you relying on gut instinct or internal debates? That's where feedback can add the most value.
- 2. Choose the right platform:** Look for tools that offer direct, reliable access to your target audiences, not just panels or proxies. Real voices yield real insight.
- 3. Embed feedback into your workflow:** Don't treat it as a separate step. Use insight to shape your brief, validate early ideas, and fine-tune execution.
- 4. Start small, then scale:** You don't need to test everything. Start with a high-stakes landing page or an upcoming ad concept. Success will build momentum.

As one B2B Brand Director shared, "We've gone from debating headlines in a vacuum to testing with real people. It's saved us time and tension."



The future belongs to the **customer-Led**

The hard truth is this: marketing as we knew it isn't coming back. Engagement will remain elusive for brands that cling to the old ways, producing more noise, more guesswork, and more risk.

But for marketers willing to shift from assumption to insight, the opportunity is enormous. Fast feedback doesn't just improve performance. It re-centers your strategy around the only stakeholder who really matters: your customer. And more than anything, it gives your marketing team the confidence to know that whatever they put out in the world, they did their best to ensure it would resonate.

It's time to stop guessing. And start knowing.