Pinwheel

Weather Report: May 2026

All of your metrics are wrong

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For a long, long time, the primary job of B2B marketing was to be seen and remembered when the need arose.

The thinking went like this: If enough of the right people see your brand often enough, when they eventually need what you sell, they'll think of you first.

So marketers measured how many people saw their stuff (reach), how many clicked (traffic), how many filled out a form (leads), and how many of those leads turned into sales. Be visible, be memorable, sell stuff. Easy.

Something has changed

Today, when someone at a company needs to buy, they don't start by Googling and clicking all over your website. They don't even seek you out directly. They often ask AI. They post in a private Slack group. They read an analyst report. They ask three peers on LinkedIn. They get an AI summary that mentions four vendors, and they click on one of them.

In other words, you can show up in search results, run ads, and publish content and still never get into the conversation where the actual decision happens. And on the flip side, a brand can be barely visible in the traditional sense and still get chosen, because it showed up in the AI summary, or the analyst report, or the peer recommendation.

The link between visibility and "buyability" is much weaker now

LinkedIn's research arm (the B2B Institute) and a marketing science group at a place called the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute came up with the word **buyability** to name what visibility was supposed to deliver but no longer does: **being chosen when someone is ready to buy**.

Visibility asks, "Did people see us?" Buyability asks, "When a buyer is in the room making a decision, are we one of the names that comes up, and are we described in a way that makes us easy to choose?"

Visibility = "Did they see us?"

Buyability = "Did they pick us?"

You want both. But for 15 years, marketing measured the first one and assumed it produced the second. And it used to. But now it doesn't.

Note: The term "buyability" is new, and who knows if it's going to be the one people settle on to describe this, but that's what's being used right now.

Why marketers should care

If your job performance is measured by visibility metrics (reach, traffic, leads), you can hit every number on your dashboard and still have ho-hum sales. And CFOs and CEOs are starting to notice the gap. That's why CMOs are losing their jobs faster than they used to. Their report card looks good, but the revenue doesn't follow.

Thesis: This month, the weather is a slow-motion demolition of the metrics B2B CMOs have been reporting up to the board for 15 years: reach, traffic, MQLs, engagement, etc. And that's because the system that produced them was built on visibility, and visibility no longer guarantees your product gets purchased.

Why now?

- LinkedIn's B2B Institute and the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute put a name on it in late March, and it's the first time a Tier-1 research body has said out loud that the standard B2B "instrument panel" of reach, clicks, traffic, and engagement no longer ladders up to being bought (S1).
- Similarly, NIQ and Forrester both flag a CMO-tenure problem rooted in the C-suite no longer trusting the old numbers (S2, S3, S4).

Who it hits hardest

- **CMO:** Your board reporting deck describes a process that no longer matches the buying behavior. So the CFO is now asking hard questions about it.
- **VP marketing:** Your team's quarterly KPIs were set against channels that AI is siphoning. So you can hit every number on the sheet and still lose the quarter on bookings. That doesn't look great.
- **Content leader:** You're being asked to publish more, in more formats, for an audience that increasingly sees your brand inside an AI summary you didn't write, and your "successful" content can be cited without you ever knowing. (See the **Zero-Click Crisis** Weather Report Pinwheel put out recently.)

Signals worth watching now

Signal 1: "Buyability" enters the marketing lexicon

What's changing

Buyability is officially "a thing." LinkedIn's B2B Institute, working with the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute, is arguing that "being findable" now matters as much as "being memorable" and pointing out that the legacy KPI panel doesn't measure either one in the new funnel.

What marketers are doing about it

A small number are adding buyability-style metrics (e.g., share of voice inside their category, AI prompt coverage, unprompted recall in the buying group) to their reporting alongside the existing metrics panel.

Signal 2: Bottom-funnel gravity persists

What's changing

Even as the research consensus says brand matters more in the new funnel, the actual money keeps getting pulled toward the bottom of the funnel, where attribution still feels safe. The two facts are pulling marketing leaders in opposite directions at the same time.

What marketers are doing about it

Some are forcing a "trade-off" conversation in front of the CFO instead of behind closed doors.

Proof points

- **NIQ's CMO Outlook for 2026** names a "growing pressure for CMOs to allocate their budgets to the bottom of the funnel, risking long-term brand equity" (S3).
- **Forrester's Budget Planning Survey 2025** shows 83% of B2B marketing decision-makers expect increased investment in 2026, but Forrester is publicly warning that CMO tenure (especially B2B) in the Fortune 500 keeps falling, driven by "lingering questions about marketing's value within the C-suite" (S4).
- **CMI's 2026 B2B benchmark finds** 45% of B2B marketers plan to increase investment in AI tools – the largest single increase on the list – while brand investment goes unmentioned in the top tier of priorities (S5).

Signal 3: The C-suite trust gap

What's changing

The reason the old metrics are getting retired is they stopped predicting revenue. Reach, MQLs, traffic, and engagement used to correlate with pipeline well enough to defend a budget. But now there are new dynamics at play in the form of AI-mediated research, eight-person buying groups, and zero-click search. The result is that marketing's dashboards feel more tangential to revenue than causal. As a result, there's a degree of distrust of the CMO.

What marketers are doing about it

Rebuilding the QBR deck before the next planning cycle so the metrics line up with how the CFO already thinks about the business.

Proof points

- **Forrester's own analysis shows** representation and tenure of CMOs among Fortune 500 companies "continues to fall, driven by business volatility and lingering questions about marketing's value within the C-suite" (S4).
- **NIQ frames the 2026 CMO posture as** resilience under "vanity metrics and gut-driven decisions are no longer passable" pressure, with budgets hanging in the balance (S3).
- **The buyability research itself was framed by** Marketing Week as a response to AI compressing the discovery process and undermining the link between visibility metrics and revenue (S1).

Pinwheel POV

Don't let your dashboard lead you astray

The panel measuring reach, sessions, MQLs, clicks, and so on was built for a world where buyers came to your website, read your content, filled out your form, and entered your funnel (in roughly that order). That "visibility-leads-to-sales" world is gone-zo.

The new world is about buyability

Buyability is the state of being considered even before the buying process starts, and it signals a return to traditional brand metrics like unaided awareness and brand trust (an amalgamation of reputation, proof, social validation, analyst POVs, and peer recommendations). Would someone in the buyer's network name your brand, if asked? Buying groups now average 13 internal stakeholders, so the question isn't just whether the buyer thinks of you. It's whether anyone on the committee will say your name when the conversation starts.

The playbook

Stop: Reporting clicky metrics that no longer translate to "did this make us money?" In fact, B2B marketing leaders need a public teardown of the "reach, traffic, engagement, MQL" reporting deck and a clean replacement for an AI-mediated funnel.

Start: Giving your CFO a concrete tracking stack to replace the "funnel metrics" that have stopped predicting revenue. The new stack:

- Share of model voice (how often you appear in LLM answers to category prompts)
- Unaided brand recall in your ICP (quarterly 200-person panel, "name the first three vendors that come to mind")
- Branded search and direct traffic (the two signals AI can't easily distort)
- Share of voice in analyst and earned coverage
- A cleaned-up "how did you hear about us" field in the CRM

Continue: Prioritizing projects that improve buyability, particularly projects that improve brand consistency. The way an AI describes your brand IS your brand to that buyer, and it is partly a result of how consistently you've been describing it. LLMs learn brand descriptions from what's been written about you across the web including your site, third-party coverage, analyst reports, Reddit threads, review sites, podcast transcripts, etc. You can influence this by what you publish, what you get others to publish, and how consistent the language is across all of it. This puts extra emphasis on the importance of messaging guides, but it's also slow and partial (because AI pulls from sources you don't control).

5 high-ROI tactics for improving buyability

1. Do original research

One well-designed annual benchmark or category survey generates citations for years across analyst reports, trade press, podcasts, LinkedIn posts, and now LLM answers. It compounds across all three components: it builds SOV (everyone cites it), it builds trust (you're the source), and it gets named in buying groups (it becomes the data people reference). Most B2B brands underinvest here because it requires a multi-month commitment with no immediate pipeline attribution. That's also why it's a relatively affordable lever.

2. Create a program around customer evangelism

This operation produces customer talks at conferences, customer-led webinars, customer quotes in trade press, a community where customers post wins publicly, and a managed referral program. Peer recommendation is the single most reliable path into a buying group, and it's the one mechanism AI mediation hasn't disrupted (and arguably amplifies, because LLMs cite peer reviews and community posts heavily).

3. Create distinctive brand assets and stay consistent

You need a name, visual system, tone, and category POV that are different from competitors and don't get repainted every 18 months. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute's body of work points to this as the single biggest driver of unaided recall, and it's the cheapest of the five to maintain once you've made the initial investment. The hard part is organizational discipline (and resisting the new-CMO instinct to rebrand).

4. Generate executive thought leadership with a unique POV

Founder, CEO, and senior exec posting in long-form on LinkedIn and in podcasts/op-eds, taking actual positions on category questions. This works because it's the highest-trust format in B2B (humans speaking, not brands), it gets reshared into buying groups by name, and it feeds LLM training data and retrieval. It has to be genuinely the executive's voice – ghostwritten platitudes underperform silence.

5. Cultivate analyst relations as a discipline

Analysts are disproportionately weighted by both human buyers (the report shows up in the procurement process) and LLMs (analyst content gets cited heavily in AI answers). Create briefings, custom research, inclusion in Waves and Magic Quadrants, relationships with the three or four analysts who actually shape your category. It's a slow build, but the half-life of a strong analyst position is years.

The Buyability Test

- **Format:** A one-hour workshop guide plus a scoring rubric.
- **Core take-away:** A structured exercise that asks the team to write – in one sentence each – how they want their brand described, how it's described on its own website, and how it's described in its category's most-trafficked third-party surfaces. The gaps between the three sentences are the buyability problem, made visible.
- **How:** Reach out at todd@pinwheelagency.com, and we can set this up for you.

Pinwheel

Methodology: The Pinwheel Monthly Weather Report is always produced, edited, fact checked, and designed by real humans. But since we're super busy on client work, we sometimes prompt our AI robot friends to help us gather up the research. A note: The "buyability" language is new. Marketing Week's coverage of the LinkedIn B2B Institute / Ehrenberg-Bass Institute work landed in late March 2026, which means the term is still settling. Expect the vocabulary to keep shifting.

About Pinwheel: Pinwheel helps complex companies build the brand work that actually moves the needle in an AI-mediated market – original research that earns citations for years, executive thought leadership with a real point of view, distinctive brand systems built to hold over time, and the customer evangelism programs that get your name into buying groups. Working with exceptional brands like Stripe, Experian, BetterUp, and others, Pinwheel turns the marketing frenzy into a calm, focused, and extremely well-organized workstream, right-sized to human capacity and the brand's standard for quality.

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