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VIEWPOINT
The billboard goes digital: How DOOH quietly took over the skyline

How AI is rewriting the rules of client confidentiality

Manas Gulati

The Digital Branding Architect

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FROM THE FOUNDERS' DESK

Ashish Srivastava (L) and Anupam Gupta (R), Founders, Bharat Network Group (BNG)

Trust in the age of the machine

Dear Prime Reader,

Advertising used to run on trust built between people. A brief, a handshake, a client who believed the agency had their back.'Now algorithms make some of those calls. Data moves through AI tools faster than any policy can track it. Faces on screen aren't always real people. And somewhere in this shift, brands are quietly handing over decisions that used to belong to humans. In this new edition of **The Founder Media**, we look at what that means. Who protects client confidentiality once information starts flowing into AI systems nobody fully controls?

What happens to authenticity when synthetic influencers can outperform real ones? Who's actually making the creative call when optimization runs in real time?

Billboards have gone digital, brands are leaning into 3D spectacle, and attention is replacing impressions as the metric that matters.

None of this is about AI taking over. It's about the people still asking hard questions while everyone else moves fast.

To those willing to slow down and ask first, that instinct matters more than ever. ■

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EDITOR'S CORNER

The confidentiality conversation everyone's avoiding

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the latest edition of **The Founder Media** where the industry is being rewritten faster than anyone can agree on the rules.

This issue asks a question the industry keeps avoiding: when AI makes the call, who's actually accountable? Client confidentiality is leaking into tools nobody fully controls. Deepfakes are showing up in campaigns. Synthetic influencers are starting to beat real people at their own game. And somewhere in the rush to optimise everything in real time, the human decision-maker is quietly stepping back. Outside, the shift looks different but the story rhymes. Billboards have gone digital. Brands are chasing 3D spectacle to earn a glance in a world that scrolls past everything. Attention, not impressions, is becoming the currency that actually counts.

This issue isn't about AI winning. It's about the people still pausing to ask, "Should we even be doing this?" before someone else answers that question for them.■

A candid look at the creative decisions AI is making in real time, and how few of them get a human sign-off

Aishwarya Saxena
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How AI is rewriting the rules of client confidentiality

Manas Gulati, Co-Founder and CEO, ARM Worldwide, shares his perspective on why responsible AI adoption in agencies must be built on review protocols, data confidentiality, and transparent client communication rather than unchecked automation

IN THE blink of an eye, AI became almost ubiquitous. Naturally, organisations began to move quickly to integrate it across almost every layer of work, transforming how teams create, analyse, and operate. But as adoption became faster and gave way to sensitive information entering these workflows, it became important to define how that information should be handled. However, it doesn't mean entirely limiting AI. Responsible adoption requires building the right guardrails around its use so its full potential can be realised without compromising trust and confidentiality.

Confidentiality has always meant keeping client information within the circle of consent.

AI changes that equation when your own team feeds a brief into cloud-hosted systems beyond the organization's direct control in the pursuit of speed and efficiency.

This is not a hypothetical situation but a reality already unfolding in today's times. Varonis, a data security and analytics platform, analysed data exposure across a thousand real organisations and found that 99 per cent of them had sensitive data exposed to AI tools in some form, and 98 per cent had unsanctioned "shadow AI" running inside their environment without leaders even

Responsible adoption means not limiting AI but building the right discipline around its use so its full potential can be realised without compromising trust, confidentiality or accountability

knowing it was there. Thomson Reuters, a global content and technology company, found something similar in professional services. According to their report, roughly one in three lawyers, accountants, and compliance professionals admit to turning to AI tools their own firms never approved. These findings show why the next phase of AI adoption needs to be more thoughtful, transparent and secure.

The real maturity of AI lies in how responsibly we put it to work.

As AI becomes a bigger part of marketing, we need to be more thoughtful about how we use it. That means someone actually reviews the output before it goes out. It means data gets handled with care and not convenience. It means not treating compliance as an afterthought. And most importantly, it means being transparent about where AI was involved, especially when it matters to the people on the other side. In no way it means to slow down on AI or box it in. If anything, it's what lets teams use it with greater confidence and discipline.

#Build a review protocol

The first discipline is a review protocol. It means building an actual checklist, verifying every claim an AI-assisted document makes about a campaign's performance or a client's market position, the same way we'd fact-check a media plan before it reaches a client's desk. AI writes persuasively, but persuasive and accurate are not the same thing, and the review layer is what keeps the two aligned.

#Keep curiosity and confidentiality apart

The second discipline falls around how we handle data itself. It requires genuine understanding of the retention and usage policies of every AI platform a team adopts, not just its output quality. Knowing whether a tool trains

on what's fed into it, how long it holds a prompt, and whether it meets the security standards a client relationship actually demands. It's important to keep the systems for general marketing experimentation and the ones holding real client data separate. This ensures curiosity and confidentiality are never forced to share the same workspace. That separation sounds like a technicality until you picture how easily it blurs in a fast-moving agency.

Confidentiality has always meant keeping client information within the circle of consent

#Make transparency a practice, not a policy

The third discipline is transparency, which, at its core, should be treated as a trust mechanism rather than a legal formality. That means being transparent about where AI has been used in the work. Highlighting the distinction between AI-assisted output and fully human-authored work, wherever the distinction matters to the client. Client consent should also be explicitly documented whenever their information is used in a marketing context, rather than assumed or implied. This costs nothing for an agency but builds trust that takes years of relationship-building to develop.

#Stay current on purpose

The fourth discipline is staying current, deliberately rather than passively. We learned that the hard way. A few months ago, a strategist on one of our BFSI client accounts spotted an error in an AI-generated product one-pager. It quoted an 18 per cent GST loading on a life insurance premium, a rate that had already gone to zero when GST 2.0 took effect in September 2025. The team corrected the error before it reached the client because they happened to read the GST Council notification that week. If they hadn't, an outdated number would have sat in a client-facing document until someone downstream noticed.

A generic AI assistant trained on last year's information has no way of knowing either happened. That contextual judgment has always been the agency's real value-add, long before AI arrived. Staying actively informed on evolving guidelines and comparing notes with peers navigating the same shifts has become more central to what separates a senior strategist from a junior.

Trust has always been at the heart of client confidentiality

It's the confidence clients place in an agency, knowing that what they share will be handled with the seriousness and responsibility their relationship deserves. AI hasn't changed that promise. It has just changed how that promise is upheld, with more data flows, new touchpoints and greater precision around how information is used.

AI will continue to change how trust is built and protected. The agencies that pair its capabilities with transparency and discipline will be the ones that turn that change into stronger client relationships.

How AI and real-time data are making rural DOOH smarter

Rajesh Radhakrishnan, Co-Founder and CMO, Vritti Solutions Limited, discusses with **Aishwarya Saxena** how Digital OOH is bridging rural and semi-urban India, and why the next decade of advertising growth will be built beyond the metros

Advertising budgets across India have been steadily reallocating from print and television towards digital and out-of-home formats. From Vritti's vantage point, how significant has this shift towards Digital OOH actually been, and which categories of advertisers are leading it?

The shift is no longer a future trend: it is the new reality of media planning. Brands today are looking beyond reach alone; they are investing in measurable attention, contextual relevance, and omnichannel visibility. That's precisely where Digital Out-of-Home has emerged as a strategic medium.

At Vritti iMedia, we have witnessed this transition first-hand. Over the last few years, we've seen a marked increase in brands integrating DOOH into their media mix, not merely as an awareness medium but as a critical touchpoint within the consumer journey and especially with our medium, Audiowala Bus Stand, brands have managed to touch rural, semi-rural and emerging metro audiences. The biggest drivers have been FMCG, BFSI, automotive, telecom, healthcare, consumer durables, cement, steel, paints and government awareness campaigns, categories that require scale, frequency, and trust simultaneously.

At Vritti, our philosophy has always been to combine infrastructure with technology

What makes our network unique is that we don't compete with print, television or digital, we complement them. Through Audiowala Bus Stand, India's largest Digital OOH network across more than 630 bus stands in eight states, we connect brands with 2 crore commuters every day, particularly in India's underserved rural and semi-urban markets where traditional digital penetration is inconsistent but physical mobility remains extremely high.

I believe the next phase of media planning will not be about choosing between digital and OOH. It will be about creating intelligent ecosystems where Digital OOH becomes the bridge between online engagement and real-world consumer behaviour.

Technology in the OOH space is moving quickly, from AI-driven content triggers to sensor-based audience measurement. What specific innovations are Vritti currently piloting or planning to make its Digital OOH network more intelligent and responsive to real-world audience behaviour?

The future of DOOH is not just digital—it is intelligent.

At Vritti, our philosophy has always been to combine infrastructure with technology. Audiowala Bus Stand already operates on a centrally managed digital platform that synchronises passenger announcements, advertising, and information dissemination across hundreds of locations. This enables real-time content scheduling,

remote campaign management, and consistent brand delivery across the network.

The next evolution is making the network increasingly data driven. We are actively exploring AI-enabled scheduling, contextual content delivery based on factors such as location, time of day, seasonal relevance, festivals, and commuter behaviour.

This year, we have integrated audience analytics, RFID-based transit data, and intelligent reporting dashboards that provide advertisers with deeper campaign insights rather than just proof of display.

For us, technology should not make advertising more complicated, it should make communication more relevant. The objective is to ensure that the right message reaches the right commuter at the right moment, while maintaining operational efficiency across a geographically diverse network.

Ultimately, we see Digital OOH evolving into a responsive communication platform, with the help of AI, rather than just another advertising screen. India's linguistic diversity means a message that works in one state may fall flat in another. What has Vritti learned about customising content by regional language and dialect, and how much of a difference has this made to actual campaign recall and engagement?

We've consistently observed that brands adopting regional creative experience stronger audience acceptance than those using generic national messaging

One of the biggest misconceptions in national advertising is assuming that one creative fit every market.

India is not a single consumer market but is hundreds of cultural markets coexisting together. Language is only one part of that equation; tone, pronunciation, local references, and cultural context are equally important.

Since Audiowala Bus Stand predominantly serves commuters across rural and semi-urban India, localisation has been central to our strategy from day one. Our announcements and campaigns are delivered in regional languages and, wherever possible, local dialects because passengers instinctively trust communication that sounds familiar and relevant.

We've consistently observed that brands adopting regional creative experience stronger audience acceptance than those using generic national messaging. While campaign objectives vary, the common outcome is improved attention because commuters naturally respond to communication that reflects their own linguistic identity.

Localisation is no longer an optional creative adaptation; it has become a business strategy. As India's consumption growth increasingly comes from Tier II, Tier III, and rural markets, brands that communicate in the consumer's language will build stronger and longer-lasting relationships.

Experiential and on-ground activations often run in parallel with Digital OOH placements for the same brand campaign. How does Vritti design these two elements to reinforce each other rather than function as separate, disconnected efforts?

The biggest mistake brands make is treating media and activation as separate disciplines. Consumers don't experience campaigns that way—they experience brands.

At Vritti, we design campaigns as integrated ecosystems. Digital OOH creates sustained awareness and repeated visibility, while on-ground activations convert that awareness into participation and experience. Together, they reinforce each other.

For example, during major pilgrimages, festivals, and rural events, commuters first encounter brand messaging through Audiowala Bus Stand announcements and digital displays before engaging with sampling, product demonstrations, or experiential zones at the venue. This sequential journey significantly improves message continuity and consumer recall. At the current festival Pandharpur, we have encouraged brands to create awareness on our audio network in Maharashtra as well as executed experiential marketing campaigns for them.

Because Vritti offers Digital OOH, BTL activations, experiential marketing, rural outreach, and digital marketing under one integrated ecosystem, brands benefit from unified planning rather than fragmented execution.

The future belongs to connected experiences, where every touchpoint contributes to one coherent brand story instead of functioning in isolation.

Competition in India's Digital OOH and programmatic advertising space has been intensifying, with new entrants and larger players scaling quickly. How is Vritti positioning itself to stay competitive, and what does the company see as its long-term moat in this market?

Competition validates the opportunity. The Digital OOH industry is expanding rapidly because brands increasingly recognise its effectiveness. However, scale alone does not create differentiation.

Our biggest competitive advantage is that we built a network others often overlook which is the vast rural and semi-urban transit ecosystem of India.

Audiowala Bus Stand is not simply a collection of digital screens. It is a public utility platform where nearly 70 per cent of the communication consists of passenger information and public announcements, while advertising is seamlessly integrated into that experience. This creates an environment where commuters actively pay

attention rather than avoid the message.

Our long-term moat rests on four pillars:

Unique infrastructure: Built over years through long-standing partnerships with State Transport authorities.

Deep rural and semi-urban market penetration: An audience that remains significantly under-served by conventional digital media.

Technology-led operations: Enabling centralised content management, scalable campaign execution, and continuous innovation.

Integrated marketing capabilities: Combining Digital OOH, rural activations, experiential marketing, transit media, and digital solutions within a single ecosystem. '

The next decade of Indian advertising will not be defined only by bigger cities but will be defined by deeper markets. Our vision is to ensure that brands can communicate with every Indian consumer, irrespective of geography, language, or digital access. That, in my view, is where sustainable leadership in Digital OOH will be built.

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The real story behind AI visibility, client trust and 3D billboards

Swati Nathani, Co-Founder, and Ranjeet Kumar, CEO & Co-Founder, Team Pumpkin, speak to **Aishwarya Saxena** about why client confidentiality now gets negotiated in the pitch room, how AI is reshaping brand discovery, and why outdoor advertising's biggest promises still to outpace its delivery

Client confidentiality is now being raised in pitch rooms, not just contracts as clients want to know which AI tools are used and where their data goes. What's behind this shift, and how should agencies handle data governance in this new environment?

Swati Nathani: The real shift is in where this conversation now happens. Confidentiality used to live in clause fourteen of an agreement that nobody read again after signing. This year clients started asking us in the pitch room itself which tools we use, whether their data trains anything, and where it sits. Some of them ask sharper questions than our own legal team does. I think that is a healthy change, but it does mean confidentiality has become something you have to explain out loud in a meeting, and not just something you sign.

Ranjeet Kumar: As agencies become more AI-enabled, data governance has become a boardroom conversation rather

Every DOOH presentation I have sat through promises creative that changes with weather, location and time of day

than just an IT concern. Every AI tool needs to be evaluated through the lens of security, compliance and client confidentiality. Innovation is important, but protecting client information is what sustains long-term business relationships. Trust remains the most valuable asset any agency has.

As AI platforms become discovery engines shaping how consumers choose brands, most companies are still tracking only traditional SEO. Why does AI visibility now matter just as much, and what are brands risking by ignoring it?

Swati Nathani: I have been building a few AI agents on the side, and what I did not expect was how little these models care about your own website. They pull from what other people have written about you. So, all the PR you did without expecting any search value from it is doing search work now, and most brands are still budgeting for the two as if they have nothing to do with each other. My advice to founders is simpler than any dashboard. Open ChatGPT, ask it to recommend a brand in your category, and see whether you show up. Most people have never checked, and the answer usually stings.

Ranjeet Kumar: Search behaviour is changing faster than most businesses realise. AI platforms are becoming discovery engines, influencing how consumers evaluate products and services. Brands that continue measuring only traditional SEO may miss an important part of their digital presence. AI visibility will soon become another critical business metric alongside search rankings and share of voice.

"Search Engineering" is being used to describe content, PR and technical SEO teams working together for the first time. Is this a genuine new discipline, or is it easier to sell in a proposal than to actually implement?

Swati Nathani: I would be a little careful with the phrase. A lot of what is being sold as search engineering is content, PR and technical SEO being asked to sit in one room for the first time. Those teams were built separately, they report separately, they are measured on completely different things, and AI discovery does not care about any of that. I will admit that it is far easier for an agency, mine included, to add a new line to a proposal than to change how a team is staffed. That is the part nobody says on stage. The clients seeing real movement have bought a change in how the work gets done.

Ranjeet Kumar: Search engineering combines technology, structured information, content strategy and digital authority. It's no longer about optimising individual pages; it's about building an ecosystem that AI can understand and trust. Businesses that invest early in this transition will have a significant advantage as AI increasingly shapes online discovery.

Many 3D billboards today are designed to go viral as social media clips rather than be seen in person, and some are never even physically installed. How should the industry measure

real success for these campaigns, and where should the line be drawn between outdoor and digital creative?

Swati Nathani: Very few people actually stand at the junction and look up. They see it as a fifteen second video on their phone, usually shot by somebody else. So, when a client asks me whether a 3D billboard worked, I want to look at the video and the edit and how far it travelled, because that is the real deliverable. I will also say something that is not very popular. A fair number of the 3D executions doing the rounds in India were never installed anywhere. They were rendered and uploaded. As a creative call I have no problem with it, but we should stop filing it under outdoor.

Ranjeet Kumar: Technology has expanded what's possible in outdoor advertising, but effectiveness still depends on strategy. A 3D installation should create meaningful engagement rather than simply visual novelty. The brands seeing the greatest success are those integrating experiential outdoor formats into a broader omnichannel marketing journey.

DOOH has long promised dynamic, contextual creative, but most campaigns still run one static ad for weeks. What's really holding the medium back, is it the technology, production capacity, or how it's briefed and bought?

Swati Nathani: Every DOOH presentation I have sat through promises creative that changes with weather, location and time of day. Then the campaign goes live and one creative run for six weeks. The technology has been ready for years. What is missing is that no creative team is staffed to produce forty versions of an asset for a medium the client is still evaluating on impressions. Till the brief and the budget change, we will keep selling DOOH as a smart screen and buying it as a big poster.

Ranjeet Kumar: Digital Out-of-Home is becoming a performance-driven medium. The ability to update creatives instantly, optimise messaging and use real-time contextual triggers makes DOOH much smarter than traditional outdoor advertising. As data capabilities improve, brands will increasingly treat it as an agile digital channel rather than a static branding asset.

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The future of marketing lies in smarter storytelling and measurable business impact

In this exclusive interaction with **Jeevika Sriavstava**, **Rupinder Singh, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, ThinkROI**, shares its perspective on how evolving consumer behaviour, AI-driven marketing, and data-backed creativity are reshaping the advertising landscape

As consumer attention becomes increasingly fragmented across platforms, what emerging shifts in audience behaviour do you believe marketers are still underestimating?

Consumer attention is now fragmented across platforms and apps, and the underlying patterns of time spent are shifting faster than most marketers are planning for. Recent mobile app intelligence for India shows YouTube and Instagram command very high daily engagement and have grown strongly in usage since the TikTok ban, with major OTT apps steadily adding to this pool of video time. We've responded with heavy investment into YouTube and Instagram, but there's still a major blind spot: connected-TV and premium video platforms on larger screens remain under-leveraged for

A piece of creative that reduces acquisition cost or improves lifetime value is more valuable than one that only drives vanity metrics

top- and mid-funnel campaigns, despite evidence that CTV can drive brand lift, mid-funnel engagement, and even strong ROI. As audiences shift more of their "lean-back" viewing into these environments, marketers who restrict video budgets to mobile-only social risk missing both incremental reach and deeper storytelling opportunities.

In an era where agencies are often measured by impressions and reach, how do you define meaningful ROI, and has that definition evolved over the years?

For us at ThinkROI, meaningful ROI is the value we create for the client's business, not just the volume of impressions we deliver. In creative services, ROI is whether an idea consistently changes behaviour and perception in the right direction: higher conversion or lead quality, better engagement with priority segments, and stronger brand preference versus a clear baseline. A piece of creative that reduces acquisition cost or improves lifetime value is more valuable than one that only drives vanity metrics.

In media services, ROI is cost per outcome, qualified lead, incremental sale, app user who actually retains, or proven brand lift, not cost per impression. Earlier, we optimised primarily on CPMs and CPCs; today the lens is a contribution to profitable growth and compound value over time.

So my definition has evolved from "did the campaign reach enough people at a good price?" to "did creative

and media together improve the economics of demand and the strength of the brand, in a way we can measure and learn from?"

ThinkROI operates at the intersection of creativity, strategy, and business outcomes. How do you maintain the balance between bold storytelling and measurable impact for clients?

For us, storytelling and measurable impact are not competing ideas, they're two sides of the same coin.

We start by being very clear on the business problem and the numbers that matter: what "success" looks like in revenue, demand quality, or brand strength. Then we give the creative team room to push for distinctive, memorable ideas, but every idea must ladder back to a sharp strategic insight and a defined action we want the user to take.

On the execution side, we design media and measurement around the story, not the other way around. That means: testing multiple creative territories, wiring journeys so we can see where the narrative is actually converting, and being ruthless about iterating or killing work that doesn't move the right metrics, even if we personally love it.

On the execution side, we design media and measurement around the story, not the other way around

In short: we protect creativity by anchoring it in a business context, and we protect performance by insisting that the work has a point of view, not just a CTA.

Indifeast marks a significant integrated launch for ThinkROI. When you approach building a brand from the ground up, what is the one strategic question you ask before any creative or media decisions are made?

The process doesn't start with a presentation deck; it starts with a collaborative huddle. Before we even touch creative or media, we sit down with key stakeholders to understand the core vision behind the brand, the values the team truly believes in, and what they ultimately want to achieve. Out of that conversation, one question anchors everything: 'What role must this brand play in people's lives to be truly viable and valuable?' Once we're clear on that, every creative and media decision is simply an execution of that role

Looking ahead, what capabilities or mindset shifts will distinguish the next generation of agencies from those that continue to rely on traditional models?

While the core principles of marketing and semiotics remain foundational, the next wave of successful agencies will be defined by their mastery of audience behaviour and content consumption, moving far beyond basic channels and formats. They will operate with radical agility to build, test, and scale ideas, embedding data directly into the creative process rather than treating it as an afterthought. Across this entire ecosystem, AI will serve as a powerful accelerator, decoding signals faster, prototyping sharper creatives, and optimising media in real time, all while preserving the critical human intuition required to build lasting brands. ■

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AI visibility is the new SEO metric, and most brands aren't tracking it

Senthil Kumar Hariram, Founder & Managing Director, FTA Global, breaks down why the real question for brands today isn't where they rank on Google, but whether AI platforms recommend them at all

FOR YEARS, SEO has been the benchmark for measuring digital visibility. Marketing teams have relied on keyword rankings, organic traffic, click-through rates, and impressions to understand whether their digital strategies are working. Those metrics remain valuable, but the way people discover brands is changing rapidly. As AI becomes a preferred starting point for research, marketers need to rethink how they define visibility.

Today, consumers are increasingly turning to AI platforms like ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and Microsoft Copilot to compare products, research services, and seek recommendations. Instead of browsing multiple websites, they ask a question and receive a direct answer in seconds.

This change raises an important question for every business. When customers ask AI for recommendations in your category, does your brand appear? For many organisations, the answer is unclear because traditional SEO dashboards were never designed to measure AI-generated recommendations.

Discovery has moved beyond search rankings

SEO has always been about helping websites

Marketing leaders should begin treating AI visibility as a core performance metric alongside website traffic and brand awareness

rank higher on search engine results pages. Better rankings meant greater visibility, more clicks, and higher traffic. AI platforms work differently. Rather than presenting a list of links, they analyse information from multiple trusted sources and generate a single response. In many cases, users find what they need without visiting a website.

That changes the definition of digital visibility. It is no longer only about ranking on Google. It is also about being one of the brands that AI platforms choose to mention when users ask relevant questions. If your competitors are consistently recommended while your brand is absent, you may be losing potential customers before they even begin comparing options.

Why traditional SEO metrics are no longer enough

Imagine your website ranks first for a valuable keyword. Your analytics dashboard shows strong organic traffic and healthy impressions.

Now imagine a potential customer asks an AI assistant, "Which companies provide the best digital marketing services?" If your competitors appear in the answer while your brand does not, your search rankings have little influence on that customer's decision.

This is the gap many organisations have yet to recognise. Traditional SEO measures how people reach your website, but it does not measure whether AI considers your brand relevant enough to recommend. As AI-driven discovery becomes more common, marketers need a broader way to evaluate digital visibility.

Understanding AI visibility

AI visibility refers to how often and how accurately a brand appears in responses generated by AI platforms. Unlike traditional SEO, which focuses on keywords, AI visibility reflects how well your brand performs across the questions customers naturally ask. For example:

- Which CRM is best for a growing business?
- What are the most trusted health insurance providers?
- Which cybersecurity companies should I consider?
- Who are the leading agencies for AI marketing?

If your brand consistently appears in relevant responses, it suggests that AI recognises your business as credible and authoritative. If competitors dominate those conversations, it may indicate gaps in your content, authority, or overall digital presence. In simple terms, AI visibility measures whether AI systems trust your brand enough to recommend it.

Why this matters

Consumer behaviour has shifted. People

increasingly expect quick, conversational answers instead of spending time comparing multiple websites. Whether someone is evaluating software, researching financial services, or looking for a marketing partner, AI is becoming an important part of the decision-making journey. That means brands are no longer competing only for search rankings. They are competing for a place inside AI-generated answers. Appearing in those responses can influence customer perception long before someone visits a website or speaks to a sales team.

Why most brands aren't measuring it

Despite the rapid adoption of AI, most organisations continue to rely on metrics built for traditional search. One reason is that AI visibility is still an emerging concept. Another is that AI responses are dynamic. They change based on the user's prompt, context, and the platform being used, making them harder to measure than keyword rankings.

There is also a common assumption that strong SEO automatically leads to strong AI visibility.

As AI platforms become a key channel for discovery, brands need to know whether they are being recognised, referenced, and recommended during customer conversations

While there is overlap, AI models evaluate far more than keywords. They consider content quality, topical authority, trusted citations, brand mentions, and the credibility of the information available across the web.

Preparing for the future

Marketing leaders should begin treating AI visibility as a core performance metric alongside website traffic and brand awareness. The first step is to understand how AI platforms currently describe your brand. Testing different customer queries can reveal whether your business appears in relevant responses and whether the information is accurate.

Businesses should also analyse competitor visibility, strengthen thought leadership, create content that answers customer questions, and maintain consistent messaging across owned and third-party platforms. These efforts improve the signals AI systems use when generating recommendations.

Looking ahead

SEO remains an essential part of digital marketing, but it is no longer the complete picture.

As AI platforms become a key channel for discovery, brands need to know whether they are being recognised, referenced, and recommended during customer conversations. Success will increasingly depend not only on where a website ranks but also on whether AI considers the brand credible enough to include in its answers.

The brands that begin measuring AI visibility today will be better positioned to earn trust, influence decisions, and remain competitive as AI reshapes how customers discover businesses. In the next phase of digital marketing, visibility will not be defined only by rankings. It will be defined by recommendations.

Beyond the flat poster: Brands bet big on 3D spectacle

Rishabh S. Mehta, Founder & CEO, LOCAD Media, breaks down why brands are betting big on 3D and anamorphic OOH beyond the metros

OUTDOOR ADVERTISING has entered a new era. Across premium streets, transit corridors and digital landmarks, the billboard is no longer merely carrying the creative — it has become the creative. Products appear to burst out of screens, façades behave like theatre, and city infrastructure starts telling brand stories in motion.

Attention is advertising's new battleground

Why does this matter? Because attention is now advertising's scarcest currency. Consumers are surrounded by content. To be remembered, brands must do more than be visible; they must create a moment of surprise powerful enough to interrupt routine and trigger memory.

From media placement to urban theatre

This is where 3D spectacle wins. It transforms an ordinary site into a talking point. It elevates OOH from media placement to urban theatre. And when executed well, it creates two audiences at once: the people who see it in the real world and the much larger audience who discover it through reels, creator content, social shares, digital and PR.

Spectacle must serve strategy

The smartest brands understand that 3D is not about size alone. Spectacle without strategy is just expensive decoration. The strongest executions are rooted in a clear product truth, a sharp location insight and a creative idea that feels native to the brand.

Raipur: Emerging as a new hero market for 3D & anamorphic OOH

One of the most exciting signals of this shift is coming from Raipur. As brands look beyond the metros for high-impact storytelling, Raipur is emerging as a powerful proving ground for next-generation OOH.

LOCAD Media along with JK Motions has recently expanded its digital footprint in Raipur with two standout assets — a premium L-shaped 3D LED screen at Turning Point, Shankar Nagar, and a premium anamorphic LED screen at Jaistambh Chowk.

For advertisers, this means more than screen presence. It means landmark presence. These assets allow brands to build memorable visual moments that trigger curiosity, conversation and social amplification.

The billboard is no longer merely carrying the creative. The billboard has become the creative

Premium L-Shaped LED Screen | Turning Point, Shankar Nagar, Raipur | Size: 50x15 ft

Premium Anamorphic LED Screen | Jaistambh Chowk, Raipur | Size: 35x20 ft

The future of OOH belongs to ideas that are location-first, culturally relevant and inherently shareable. The strongest campaigns will blend OOH, pDOOH, transit media and influencer amplification into one connected brand journey.

Why brands are betting big

- Attention & memorability
- Social shareability
- Earned media value
- Premium brand impact ■

The rise of synthetic influencers and what they mean for authenticity

Mrinal Lunia, Founder and CEO, Digitale India, discusses how AI is separating expertise from performance, letting more voices reach audiences without needing to be camera-ready, and why that shift matters for marketers

EVERY FEW years, our industry finds itself asking the same question differently. Is this new technology going to change marketing forever?

I've heard that question when social media took over. Then again when smartphones became the first screen, short videos, creators, livestream shopping and virtual reality, every wave arrived with predictions that everything we knew was about to become irrelevant. Today, the conversation has moved to AI-generated influencers. They look realistic, are available around the clock, free from personal controversies and capable of producing content at incredible speed. Naturally, they've sparked a debate around one-word marketers have always cared about: authenticity.

But I believe we're asking the wrong question. Instead of asking whether AI influencers are authentic, perhaps we should ask what authenticity really means. Over the last decade, we've worked with brands across industries and audiences. Markets have changed. Platforms have changed. Consumer behaviour has changed. But one thing hasn't.

People don't stay because something is new. They stay because

As AI-generated content becomes harder to distinguish from reality, transparency can no longer be optional

it gives them a reason to come back.

That reason could be trust, entertainment, usefulness or simply consistency. Whatever it is, it has very little to do with whether the face delivering the message is human or AI-generated.

Technology has always changed how brands communicate. It has rarely changed why people choose to listen.

That's why we don't see AI influencers as a threat to authenticity. We see them as a test of our understanding of it.

If an AI influencer is upfront about what it is, creates content people genuinely enjoy and consistently delivers value, audiences will decide whether it deserves their attention. If it doesn't, they'll move on just as quickly.

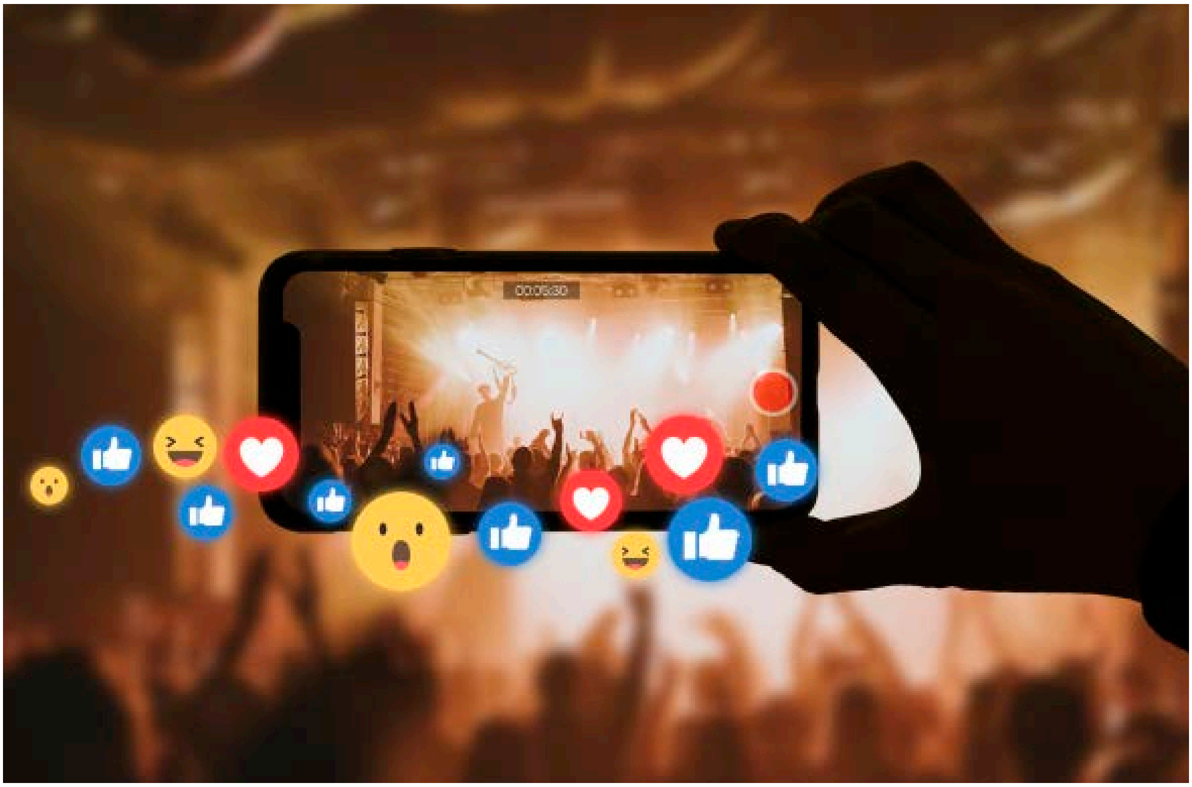
At the same time, every technology that expands opportunity also expands responsibility.

We are already living in a world where AI can recreate faces, voices and expressions with remarkable accuracy. For most people, the challenge isn't understanding AI. It's knowing when they're interacting with it. When the line between real and artificial begins to blur, the real risk isn't the technology itself. It's the erosion of trust.

That is why the conversation shouldn't be about embracing or resisting AI. It should be about using it responsibly.

AI is already helping creative teams move faster by accelerating research, uncovering insights and automating repetitive work. More importantly, it is giving a voice to people who have valuable ideas but may never have been comfortable standing in front of a camera.

Today, we're seeing educators and subject matter experts use AI avatars to teach and share knowledge at scale while the thinking



remains entirely their own. The technology isn't replacing expertise. It's helping expertise reach more people.

That's an important shift.

For years, we assumed the best ideas had to come from the best presenters. AI is beginning to separate the two. It allows knowledge to travel further without demanding that every expert become a performer.

But no matter how capable the technology becomes, it can never compensate for a weak idea.

An average message produced faster is still an average message.

A meaningful idea, communicated with honesty and relevance, will always travel further than technology alone.

We've seen versions of this before. Long before AI entered the conversation, brands were building relationships through memorable fictional personalities.

From the Amul Girl and the Air India Maharaja to the Michelin Man and Ronald McDonald, brands have long understood the value of a consistent personality. More recently, characters like the Duolingo owl and the M&M's mascots have shown that audiences are perfectly willing to build familiarity, affection and even trust with personalities that aren't real people.

AI is already helping creative teams move faster by accelerating research, uncovering insights and automating repetitive work

AI influencers are simply the next evolution of that idea. The difference is that today's technology makes those personalities more interactive, adaptive and scalable than ever before.

And that makes responsibility even more important.

As AI-generated content becomes harder to distinguish from reality, transparency can no longer be optional. Audiences deserve to know when they're interacting with AI. Clear disclosure, reliable authentication and thoughtful governance will be just as important as the technology itself.

Businesses should spend less time debating whether AI influencers are the future and more time asking a much simpler question: Does this help us build a stronger relationship with the people we want to serve?

If it does, AI becomes a meaningful business tool. If it doesn't, it's simply another novelty.

The excitement around AI influencers will eventually settle, just as it has with every major shift before it. What will remain are the fundamentals that have always defined successful communication.

People reward brands that understand them. They remember brands that solve problems.

They return to brands that keep their promises. The real opportunity isn't in creating the most convincing digital personality.

It's in creating communication that people continue to believe, regardless of who, or what, delivers it.

AI will continue to reshape marketing.

How we choose to use it will shape something even more important. The future of trust.

AI won't replace agencies, it will replace average thinking

Maddiee Amrutkar, Founder & CEO, Glad U Came, argues that as AI takes over execution, human judgement and client trust become the real competitive edge

OVER THE last year, one question has followed me into almost every client meeting, conference and industry panel: "Is AI going to replace agencies?" My answer has remained the same every single time—no. But I do believe AI will replace agencies and marketers who refuse to evolve.

At Glad U Came, AI isn't a buzzword we add to client presentations. It's embedded into our everyday operations. We use it to analyse influencer data, accelerate research, draft first versions of content, identify trends and automate repetitive tasks. What used to take our team several hours can now be done in a fraction of the time, allowing us to focus on strategy, creativity and client relationships.

However, AI hasn't convinced a journalist to cover a story because the timing was right. It hasn't calmed an unhappy client after a campaign didn't deliver expected results. It hasn't negotiated a celebrity collaboration or understood the emotions behind a brand's vision.

That's still human territory—and I believe it always will be.

AI should make us smarter, not lazier

One of the biggest misconceptions surrounding AI is that it's here to replace jobs.

I don't see it that way. I believe AI is replacing inefficiency, not people. Every industry eventually reaches a point where repetitive work gets automated. Marketing and PR have now reached that point.

The opportunity for agencies is enormous. Instead of spending hours on manual reporting, research and repetitive documentation, teams can now invest that time in strategic thinking, stronger storytelling and building deeper relationships with clients. Ironically, the more AI handles execution, the more valuable human judgement becomes.

The agencies that succeed over the next decade won't necessarily be those using the most AI tools. They'll be the ones making the smartest decisions.

Client confidentiality is the conversation we're avoiding

While everyone is discussing AI-generated images and viral videos, very few are talking about what concerns me the most—client confidentiality. Every day, marketing teams work with confidential product launches, pricing strategies, celebrity partnerships and business plans. Yet many professionals are unknowingly pasting sensitive information into AI tools without understanding where that data goes or how it's stored. Just as companies introduced social media policies years ago, they now need clear AI governance policies. Teams should understand what information can be shared with AI platforms and what must remain strictly confidential. In our industry, trust is our biggest asset. AI should strengthen that trust, never compromise it. ■

Why long-term agency partnerships are making a strong comeback

Ankur Chaturvedi, Co-founder, Wife, reflects on the evolution of the agency model, arguing that brands today need integrated partners rather than fragmented service providers

A DECADE ago, the advertising industry was fragmented into a spectrum of specialists, and if a brand wanted to be part of one whole story instead of one slide of it, there was no way in. So we built the way in ourselves. We called the agency Wife, a brand's better half, because the ambition was never proximity to a brand. It was partnership with one.

The mechanics were simple and expensive. A brand would hire one agency for the campaign idea, another for content, a third for social, a fourth for the website, all reporting into the same marketing lead, who was no longer managing a brand but four account relationships and four tellings of what was supposed to be one story. Every agency also had an unspoken job beyond the brief, prove it deserved its seat next to the other three, energy spent protecting a slice instead of serving the brand. Multiply that by four specialists and you do not get four aligned perspectives. You get four different brands wearing the same logo.

A brand's better half

That is why we built Wife as an integrated agency instead of growing into one later, and later built Husband on the same principle for the MSMEs the industry usually prices out of having any agency at all. Strategy, design, content and

Every agency also had an unspoken job beyond the brief: prove it deserved its seat next to the other three; energy spent protecting a slice instead of serving the brand

film sat under one roof, so ownership had nowhere to hide. If the work was good, it was us. If it fell short, it was also us. There was no adjacent agency to blame, because there wasn't another agency in the room. A brand's better half, if the name means anything, does not audition for its own renewal every fiscal year.

Insight, integration, impact

Over time we gave that instinct a name, because a company needs a shorthand for what it believes. We call it insight, integration and impact, in that order, and the order is not decorative. Insight, because no idea is worth aligning four disciplines around unless it starts from something true about the brand, not a template borrowed from someone else's campaign. Integration, because a true insight dies the moment it splinters across executions that were never in the same room together. Impact, because none of it matters if it does not move something real for the business, a number, not a mood board.

Generalists are their own kind of specialist

None of this argues against specialists. You do not send a heart complaint to a neurosurgeon, and no single agency is the sharpest in the world at media buying, data science and a regional production house's market knowledge, all at once. Being integrated does not mean being every specialist under one roof, it means being the one point of view responsible for making all of them sound like they work for the same brand. That is its own specialization, not the absence of one.
In practice it is three relationships, not one, the client, who knows the brand's truth best, the specialist, brought in deliberately for expertise we do not claim to own ourselves, and

the integrated partner holding the throughline across all of it, so the client is not the one stitching disconnected opinions into a single voice. We do not compete with specialists. We make their work count for more.

The market is catching up

The complaint I hear from CMOs today has stopped being about creative quality. It is about coordination, the exact fatigue the name was built to solve. Brands want an agency that can hold everything together, strategy, creative, content, technology and business thinking, under a single point of view, so an idea can travel through a hundred touchpoints without losing its shape. The old AOR was measured in departments and headcount. The one being invited back today is measured in throughline, whether the same idea survives the journey from a keynote deck to a WhatsApp message to a piece of outdoor.

The economics have to catch up too

Most agencies that have integrated their own departments are still pricing the relationship the way their fragmented predecessors did, a scope, a retainer, a cost centre trimmed at every renewal. That does not survive contact with what an integrated agency actually does. Work that used to be a separate line item, a strategy consultancy, a research partner for a quarter, now happens inside one team as a matter of course. That cost does not vanish because it is no longer billed as its own vendor. The economics have to catch up with what is actually being delivered under one roof.

Real partnership needs an agency willing to be judged over years, not a campaign cycle, and a brand willing to let one team own the outcome instead of auditioning a new one every renewal

Partnership, not a rotation

The other thing brands are quietly asking for is time. For years the fashionable move was to test an agency for a year, get bored, and rotate, exactly the seriousness you would expect from a relationship both sides know is temporary. Nobody renews a marriage annually and expects it to mean anything. Real partnership needs an agency willing to be judged over years, not a campaign cycle, and a brand willing to let one team own the outcome instead of auditioning a new one every renewal. It shows up less in the pitch and more in the flat quarter where the agency stays anyway, the review where the honest answer is that something underperformed before the client has to ask.

That is the difference between hiring an agency and choosing a partner, and it is, I suspect, the real reason the agency of record is making a comeback. Brands were never tired of agencies. They were tired of vendors pretending to be partners. We built a company on that distinction a decade ago and named it after a marriage, on the theory that nobody renews their better half every fiscal year. The market has finally caught up to what the name always meant.

The billboard goes digital: How DOOH quietly took over the skyline

Fahim Batliwala, Chairman, MD and Promoter, Simca Advertising Ltd., shares his perspective on how Digital Out-of-Home is evolving from static signage into an intelligent, data-driven media ecosystem reshaping outdoor advertising in India

THERE WAS a time when billboards simply occupied space. Today, they command attention, respond to audiences, deliver data, and increasingly form part of an intelligent media ecosystem. The humble hoarding has undergone one of the most significant transformations in advertising, and yet, unlike the rapid rise of social media or artificial intelligence, this revolution has happened almost quietly.

Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) has fundamentally changed the role of outdoor advertising. What was once perceived as a static branding medium has evolved into a dynamic, measurable and technology-driven communication platform that is reshaping urban landscapes and redefining how brands engage consumers in the physical world.

As cities become smarter and consumers become increasingly difficult to reach through traditional channels, DOOH is emerging as one of the few media formats capable of delivering both scale and relevance.

The shift has been driven by changing

consumer behaviour. People today spend more time outside their homes than ever before—commuting, shopping, dining, travelling and attending events. At the same time, digital fatigue has become a genuine challenge. Consumers actively skip ads, install ad blockers and scroll past sponsored content. Yet, they cannot simply "skip" a strategically placed digital screen positioned along a high-traffic corridor or inside a premium retail environment.

This is where DOOH creates its greatest advantage. It captures attention without interrupting the consumer experience.

But capturing attention is only the beginning. The real transformation lies in what brands can do once they have it.

Unlike traditional outdoor media, digital screens allow brands to communicate with unprecedented flexibility and speed. Campaigns are no longer constrained by production timelines, printing schedules or media replacement cycles. If market conditions change, a creative underperforms, or a brand wants to respond to a competitor's move or a breaking event, DOOH enables immediate course correction.

Advertisers can update creatives, refine messaging or optimise media deployment in real time across multiple locations, ensuring campaigns remain relevant, effective and responsive throughout their lifecycle. This ability to adapt instantly transforms outdoor

advertising from a static medium into a dynamic marketing platform.

This agility is further amplified by advances in advertising technology. Programmatic DOOH is steadily gaining traction, enabling advertisers to purchase inventory dynamically, optimise campaigns in real time and integrate outdoor media into broader omnichannel marketing strategies. This convergence allows brands to synchronise messaging across mobile devices, connected television, digital platforms and physical screens, creating seamless consumer journeys rather than isolated touchpoints.

The result is that outdoor advertising is no longer operating in isolation. It has become an integral part of the digital marketing ecosystem.

Measurement—once considered outdoor advertising's biggest limitation—has evolved dramatically. Advances in mobility analytics, location intelligence, audience modelling and AI-driven attribution now allow advertisers to estimate impressions, understand audience movement patterns and evaluate campaign performance with far greater confidence.

While DOOH will never replicate the precision of individual digital targeting, it offers something equally valuable: high-quality visibility combined with measurable audience intelligence, all while maintaining consumer privacy.

Importantly, DOOH has also become a powerful storytelling medium. High-definition LED displays, anamorphic 3D creatives, interactive installations, projection mapping and immersive digital experiences are transforming public spaces into living brand canvases. Consumers increasingly stop, record and share remarkable outdoor executions on social media, creating earned media that extends campaign reach far beyond the physical location itself. The most successful DOOH campaigns today are designed not merely to be viewed, but to become cultural moments.

This creative evolution has elevated outdoor advertising from a support medium to a primary brand-building platform. India presents one of the most exciting growth opportunities in this space. Rapid urbanisation, expanding infrastructure, smart city initiatives, metro rail networks, airports, premium retail developments and the increasing adoption of digital infrastructure are creating unprecedented opportunities for digital outdoor media. Major metropolitan cities are witnessing steady growth in premium digital inventory, while Tier II and emerging cities are beginning to embrace digital formats as part of broader urban development.

The timing could not be more favourable. As brands seek greater accountability for marketing investments, DOOH offers an attractive combination of premium visibility, contextual relevance, creative flexibility and improving measurement standards. It bridges the gap between mass awareness and digital precision in ways few traditional media can.

However, the future of DOOH will not be defined simply by installing more LED screens. Its real success will depend on building intelligent ecosystems. Artificial intelligence will increasingly optimise creative delivery. Computer vision may anonymously understand audience density without compromising privacy.

The most successful DOOH campaigns today are designed not merely to be viewed, but to become cultural moments

Dynamic content engines will personalise messaging based on environmental signals. Data partnerships will improve audience planning. Sustainability will influence infrastructure through energy-efficient displays and responsible operations.

In other words, the industry is moving from digital displays to intelligent communication networks. This evolution also demands a shift in mindset from advertisers and media owners alike. Success can no longer be measured purely by the number of sites or screen sizes. The focus must move towards audience quality, contextual relevance, operational excellence, content innovation and measurable business outcomes. Investments in technology, analytics and premium locations will matter far more than inventory volume alone.

For marketers, this means rethinking the role of outdoor media within integrated campaigns. Instead of treating DOOH as the final extension of a media plan, it should increasingly become one of its central pillars—capable of amplifying digital campaigns, driving retail action, supporting product launches and delivering memorable brand experiences at scale.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this transformation is that it has unfolded without fanfare. While much of the advertising industry's attention has centred on artificial intelligence, retail media and creator economies, digital outdoor advertising has quietly reinvented itself.

Today's billboard is no longer simply a structure standing beside the road. It is connected. It is intelligent. It is measurable. And increasingly, it is becoming one of the most influential media platforms shaping the future of modern advertising.

The skyline hasn't merely become more digital—it has become significantly more meaningful.

The hidden balance sheet: Why the C-suite still fails employer branding

Vaasu Gavarasana, CEO, Redmatter breaks down why companies pouring millions into brand campaigns while ignoring their own workplace reputation are setting themselves up for a talent exodus

INSIDE THE glass tower of a Fortune 500 tech firm, a quarterly strategy review is underway. Millions of dollars are allocated to a sleek rebrand: a refined logo, an emotional television campaign, and an aggressive performance-marketing budget designed to win customer hearts and market share.

Yet, three floors down, the talent acquisition team is quietly haemorrhaging top candidates. Key positions sit open for 90 days. Offer acceptance rates are plunging, and Glassdoor reviews describe a culture adrift.

This scenario plays out daily across corporate America, Europe, and emerging global markets. Organisations spend fortunes telling the world what they sell, while entirely ignoring who they are to the people who build, sell, and support it. Employer branding—the intentional curation of a company's reputation as a workplace—remains one of the most vital, yet consistently overlooked, levers of modern enterprise value.

The fatal misunderstanding: Brand vs. Perks

The core reason employer branding is so regularly neglected lies in a fundamental misunderstanding of what it actually is.

For decades,

Candidates no longer buy what you say you are; they buy what your current and former employees say you are when the management team leaves the room

leadership teams have conflated "employer brand" with surface-level perks. Cold-brew taps, ping-pong tables, catered lunches, and glossy recruitment brochures were treated as a proxy for culture. When budget cuts arrived, these initiatives were the first to be slashed, framed as non-essential fluff.

However, genuine employer branding is not a perk package; it is the authentic Employer Value Proposition (EVP)—the unwritten contract between what an organisation expects from its people and what it offers in return. It encompasses leadership integrity, psychological safety, career architecture, autonomy, and purpose. When companies reduce employer branding to a marketing gimmick, candidates see right through it. In an age of unprecedented workplace transparency, where platforms like Glassdoor, LinkedIn, and Reddit offer unfiltered window-views into company culture, a disconnect between the glossy career site and actual day-to-day reality is disastrous.

The hidden cost of neglect

Why does this oversight persist? Primarily because traditional accounting does not feature a line item for "Brand Decay in Talent Markets." Yet the financial penalties of ignoring your employer brand are staggering.

The Talent Premium: Research consistently shows that companies with poor reputations must pay a "talent tax"—often offering 10 per cent to 20 per cent higher salaries to convince candidate to join a compromised culture.

Cost-per-Hire Escalation: When a brand fails to attract organic inbound interest, talent acquisition teams rely heavily on external recruiters, paid placements, and aggressive outbound sourcing, driving cost-per-hire through the roof.

Retention Leaks: A misleading employer brand creates a mismatch between candidate expectations and workplace reality. This directly fuels early turnover—employees quitting within their first 90 to 180 days—forcing the organisation into an expensive cycle of backfilling.

When a consumer brand fails, product sales slump. When an employer brand fails, the organization's capacity to execute its entire business strategy shrinks. Innovation slows, operational friction increases, and customer-facing quality drops. "Candidates no longer buy what you say you are; they buy what your current and former employees say you are when the management team leaves the room."

The ownership dilemma: Nobody's job, everybody's problem

Another reason employer branding remains neglected is an internal tug-of-war over ownership. Where does employer brand live?

Human Resources: often views it as a transactional recruiting tool, focusing on job postings and applicant tracking systems rather than narrative-building.

Corporate Marketing: prioritises consumer revenue, treating talent initiatives as a secondary distraction.

The C-Suite views it as a soft HR responsibility, failing to connect employee sentiment with market valuation and shareholder returns.

Because employer branding sits squarely at the intersection of culture, marketing, and strategy, it frequently drops into the cracks between departments. Without explicit C-suite backing and dedicated cross-functional resources, it devolves into sporadic, reactive campaigns triggered only when hiring spikes or crisis strikes.

Organisations that proactively build a resilient, honest employer brand create a cushion of trust

The transparency paradigm shift

Historically, executive teams could control their employer narrative through press releases and orchestrated executive profiles. That era is over.

Today's workforce evaluates prospective employers with the same rigor consumers use when booking a hotel. Candidates cross-reference leadership claims against real employee sentiment, modern workplace flexibility standards, and corporate governance practices.

When a company experiences a lay-off, a culture pivot, or a shift in policy, the market learns about it in real time. Organisations that proactively build a resilient, honest employer brand create a cushion of trust. Those that ignore it find themselves exposed at the first sign of friction.

Reclaiming the narrative: How leaders must adapt

For organizations ready

to treat employer brand as a strategic asset rather than an HR afterthought, the path forward requires a fundamental mindset shift.

1. Elevate Ownership to the C-Suite: Employer branding must be treated as a core component of overall corporate strategy, co-owned by the Chief HR Officer, Chief Marketing Officer, and Chief Executive Officer.

2. Align Internal Reality with External Narrative: An employer brand cannot fix a toxic culture; it can only reflect a healthy one. Organisations must invest in employee experience (EX) before crafting talent campaigns.

3. Turn Employees into Brand Advocates: Modern candidates trust peers far more than corporate copy. Empowering employees to share authentic stories, project outcomes, and day-to-day experiences on social platforms is exponentially more powerful than any sponsored recruitment ad.

4. Measure Employer Brand as Enterprise Value: Track metrics like inbound candidate quality, offer acceptance rates, time-to-fill, employee net promoter scores (eNPS), and early turnover rates to demonstrate ROI directly to board members.

The bottom line

In a knowledge-driven economy, every enterprise advantage—product design, customer service, technological innovation, and operational agility—stems directly from talent.

Companies do not build products; people do. Ignoring the employer brand means ignoring the single mechanism that brings high-calibre talent through the door. The organizations that win the coming decade will not just be those with the best consumer messaging, but those that treat their workplace identity with the exact same strategic discipline, investment, and rigor.■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