CMO Forum / Second Edition / July 2026

From Reaction to Readiness

A CMO perspective from the ABG Forum

EDITION

Second Edition

FORMAT

Closed-Door Roundtables

REGION

Middle East

Overview

The Central Question

How to keep delivering growth while proving marketing's value and staying human, as AI, boardroom pressure and constant uncertainty reshape the role.

Across four closed-door roundtables, senior marketing leaders worked through three questions shaped by the ABG CMO Pulse Survey: what to keep, what to stop, and where to invest. The discussion centred on AI, brand resilience, and proving impact to the board.

TOPIC 1
AI & DECISION-MAKING

TOPIC 2
BRAND RESILIENCE

TOPIC 3
PROVING IMPACT

By invitation
27 SENIOR LEADERS

~10
INDUSTRIES

4
ROUNDTABLES

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Keep the Human in the Loop

AI accelerates the work, but judgment, emotion and cultural read must stay human.

Anticipation stays human

AI works from historical data. Reading your specific situation and predicting what comes next is a human call, not a machine output. Don't switch off your own judgment.

EQ over IQ

You can brainstorm with AI, but linking ideas to the emotion that drives shopper behaviour is human work. Emotional intelligence is the part to protect.

Cultural sensitivity

AI may not grasp what is sensitive in a given market. Local and cultural judgment has to stay with the marketer who knows the room.

Speed is not quality

AI made teams faster at generating ideas and content. But speed does not guarantee quality - the human role is to deliver meaning and impact.

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Protecting the Long Game

Everyone agrees long-term matters, but budgets and regional pace reward the short term.

Reset the timelines

Stop asking for next-day ROAS on repeat. Set realistic timelines for when results should appear and judge each channel by its proper turnaround time.

Marketing owns the fight

Brand-building spend is mostly protected by marketing, which has to champion it continuously. 'Brand love' from the top exists in some brands, but it is not common.

If performance paused

Without performance marketing for a year, the table would rebuild brand awareness, invest in content and storytelling, and track brand health - with a caveat that NPS is a biased measure.

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From Cost Centre to Investment

The shared thread: reframe marketing as an investment, and measure what actually matters.

One metric does not fit all

The right metric depends on the company. Large, established brands care most about staying relevant, so winning new customers is the signal to watch. Smaller, younger businesses need fast returns, so ROI stays essential.

Lead with brand equity

Move the board off short-term ROI alone. Show how brand equity feeds and keeps growing ROI, so the conversation is not only about the bottom line.

Marketing is a profit driver

Keep educating boards, CEOs and CFOs to stop seeing marketing as a cost centre. Marketers must own accountability for spend and measurement to make that case.

Measure What Matters

Where the room felt marketing over-claims, under-sells, and how to shift the CFO conversation.

Isolating impact is hard

Store reformats, stock changes and seasonality confound campaign results. The room suggested control groups in wider campaigns to understand true impact.

Stop under-selling brand

Frame the reverse: what share or capability would be lost if the activity did not run. Brand's role in cutting through clutter is consistently under-sold.

Shift the CFO conversation

Tie marketing to the five-year plan - you cannot stay relevant or keep innovating without it. Talk customer lifetime value, not just ROI, to show ongoing value.

The shift underway

One Defining Direction

FROM

Proving cost

→

TO

Proving value

This requires

- Longer, realistic timelines
- Metrics beyond short-term ROI
- Marketing owning the boardroom case

The priority remains

Growth.

What is changing is the discipline required to deliver it - balancing speed with judgment, and short-term performance with long-term brand strength.

The direction is clear:

Keep it human | **Protect the long game** | **Prove the value**

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The Evolving CMO Role

Greater responsibility for aligning growth, brand and long-term value creation across the organization.

To learn more about the ABG, visit: abg-me.com

Or email us at secretariat@abg-me.com

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