

AI changed the CMO job description.

When one executive can do far more work in far fewer hours, some full-time roles become fractional ones. Marketing is first.

A job description is really a list of where the time goes.

For 30 years, much of a senior leader's week went to work that existed because information moved slowly: collecting updates, reviewing reports, coordinating teams and waiting for analysis.

Liquid Death's media chief no longer waits for updates.

He checks the business himself, retail media is optimized daily instead of weekly, and his goal is to run a sizable media budget with two people in-house.

WHY THE CMO ROLE CHANGES FIRST

So much of a traditional CMO's week was coordination and production management.

37.9%

Marketers in an Optimizely survey of 227 professionals who describe their work as mainly coordination, not creative or strategic output.

61%

Marketers in the same survey who say AI is already saving them time.

15.3%

Average share of marketing budgets CMOs now put into AI
(Gartner 2026 CMO Spend Survey).

The job narrows to its core.

When AI and a small team handle reporting, analysis, first drafts and optimization, what remains still needs senior experience. It just doesn't need 50 hours a week at most \$10M to \$200M brands.

WHAT STILL NEEDS A SENIOR LEADER

AI makes marketing cheaper to produce. It doesn't decide what it should say.

Positioning and brand strategy

Choosing where the brand plays, what it stands for and what makes it different on a crowded shelf.

Deciding where the money goes

Allocating budget across channels, retailers and launches, and knowing which spend builds the brand and which is just activity.

Saying no

With AI, a team can produce almost anything. Leadership means choosing the few things that matter.

Connecting marketing to the business

Working with sales, operations and finance so a promotion doesn't outrun supply or a launch doesn't outrun margin.

Building and coaching the team

Setting up a small, capable group and the AI tools that make it productive.

Decisions and relationships, not a pile of tasks.

An experienced CMO who is hands-on, reads the data directly and works alongside a lean team can cover them in a fraction of a full-time schedule.

24 in 1,000

New executive postings that were fractional in 2026, up from 9 five years earlier. Marketing is the second-largest category, behind finance (Revelio Labs).

33.9%

Companies hiring fractional marketing leaders for senior expertise without a long-term commitment. Only 18.6% cite cost (The Slice Network and Robert Half).

WHEN A FRACTIONAL CMO IS ENOUGH

A fractional CMO is often the better fit when:

Revenue is roughly \$10M to \$200M.

The marketing team is small or still forming.

You need senior judgment, not a department manager.

A lean team, agencies and AI can handle execution.

You're at a turning point: a launch or a repositioning.

When full-time still makes sense.

A large, multi-team marketing organization, many brands or markets at once, or a business where the brand is the product and marketing decisions happen every hour.

The wrong question: “Do we need a CMO?”

Almost every growing consumer brand needs CMO-level thinking. The right question: how many hours of it do we need each week, now that AI handles so much of the rest?

The AI-era fractional CMO is hands-on.

Not an advisor who sends a deck and checks in once a month. A leader who joins the team, owns results, works in the data and often covers **both the CMO and COO seats**.

Size the role to the decisions, not the hours.

The CMO is the clearest example today. It won't be the last.

Full piece: marc-drucker.com