

# SEPARATING SUBSTANCE FROM HYPE: THE NEXT AEC MARKETING FRONTIER



**IDA CHEINMAN, SUBSTANCE151**

@IdaCheinman @Substance151

## THE STATE OF AEC MARKETING AND BD

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- 1 Generational handoff
- 2 Changing buying behaviors, expectations and processes
- 3 Digital transformation and AI
- 4 Lack of brand trust
- 5 AI further homogenizing content marketing and brand messaging

## HUMAN

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- + Emotional Intelligence
- + Creativity
- + Expertise, Unique POV
- + Nuance, Discernment
- + Connection, Relationships
- + Life Experience

## AI

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- + Research, Analysis
- + Ideation, Experimentation
- + Hyper-Personalization
- + Audience Targeting
- + Optimization
- + Automation, Productivity
- + Speed, Scale

“ **WHEN EVERYBODY ZIGS, ZAG.**

**MARTY NEUMEIER**

*Zag: The Number One Strategy of High-Performance Brand*

# TRUST.

**TRUST. PEOPLE.**

# TRUST. PEOPLE. RELATIONSHIPS.

“ The great irony of 2025: As AI becomes ubiquitous in marketing, **human connection** has never been more valuable.

**ZACH CHMAEL** Head of Marketing, Averi

# **BRAND TRUST** – THE AUTHENTICITY GAP AI CAN'T CLOSE

## BRAND TRUST

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- + **Authenticity:** The alignment of corporate messages and actions
- + **Emotional Connection:** Distinctive POV, memorability and personality
- + **Confidence and Trust:** Credibility of expertise and experience



Male

Born in 1948

Grew up in England

Married for the second time

Vacations in the Alps

Wealthy

Likes Dogs

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**Charles III, King of England**

Male

Born in 1948

Grew up in England

Married for the second time

Vacations in the Alps

Wealthy

Likes Dogs

---

**Ozzy Osbourne, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame**

“ We all were so busy becoming data scientists, we forgot how to be interesting.

**GUSTAF WICK** Global Brand Strategist | B2B Marketing Innovator

People trust individuals more than corporate brands.

## **BRING HUMANS TO THE FOREFRONT OF YOUR BRAND**

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- + Showcase employees in corporate communications
- + Invest in building personal brands
- + Encourage and reward social media use, writing and speaking

“ When the CEO talks, people listen. It's not just another voice. **It's the voice that defines the brand.**

**ADAM ROBINSON** CEO, Retention.com and RB2B

84%

**CUSTOMERS BELIEVE A COMPANY'S  
REPUTATION IS INFLUENCED BY ITS  
EMPLOYEES' PERSONAL BRANDS**

Source: Forbes

# **THOUGHT LEADERSHIP – THE ANTIDOTE TO AI-GENERATED ‘SLOP’**

## WHY THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

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- ✓ Builds brand relevance, credibility and trust.
- ✓ Differentiates your firm with original insights and a unique POV.
- ✓ Brings people to the forefront and humanizes your brand.

69%

of all searches now return zero clicks

*Similarweb*

900M+

ChatGPT weekly users

*OpenAI, Feb 2026*

750M+

Gemini monthly users

*Alphabet Q4 2025*

44%

AI Search users prefer AI over traditional search

*McKinsey & Company*

ChatGPT ads went live Feb 9, 2026. \$60 CPM targeted by conversation topic. A brand new paid channel was just born inside AI.

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP CONTENT



**QUESTIONS?**

## HUMAN-FIRST MARKETING

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- + Emotional connection
- + Relevance
- + Customer centricity
- + Personalized experience

“ Despite all the technologies and all the charts showing endless metrics, **marketing is an emotions-first job**. Because **buying is an emotions-led activity**.

**JAY ACUNZO** Speaking & Storytelling Consultant

## EMOTION DRIVES BUSINESS DECISIONS

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**B2B = 50%**

**OF B2B COMPANIES HAVE  
EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS  
WITH CUSTOMERS**

**B2C < 40%**

**OF B2C COMPANIES HAVE  
EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS  
WITH CONSUMERS**

Source: CEB/Gartner, Google and Motista

“ Everyone has access, so AI can't set your brand apart. What will? Leaders brave enough to show empathy, share a point of view, and create human connections. Focus on customer value and telling emotional stories.

**MICHAEL BRENNER** VP, Customer Advocacy, Workday

## YOUR MARKETING ADVANTAGE

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- 1 Building a distinct, authentic, relevant brand that people like and trust.
- 2 Using thought leadership to outperform AI (and human competitors).
- 3 Humanizing your marketing through emotions and audience-focused storytelling.

**QUESTIONS?**

## HOW AI CAN HELP YOU BE RELEVANT TO HUMANS

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- + Audience research/personas
- + Testing and optimization
- + Hyper-personalization
- + Predictive analytics
- + QA and gap analysis

To deliver the most value to someone,  
you need to know an awful lot about  
them!

# IDEAL CLIENT

## MOST LIKABLE

## MOST PROFITABLE

**ALIGNMENT  
OF VALUES**

**REWARDING  
WORK**

**LOYAL**



**GROWTH  
POTENTIAL**

**ADEQUATE  
BUDGET**

**LOW  
MAINTENANCE**

## AI-AIDED PERSONA DEVELOPMENT

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- + Upload existing ICPs/personas as a starting point
- + Upload LinkedIn profiles and analyze
- + Use AI to develop a persona
- + Save and reference in the future



“ Personalization is a **must-have strategy** in the future of B2B marketing.

**JESSICA COLLIER** Web Conversion Strategist, Citrix

## PERSONALIZATION

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- 1 Dynamic:** A prospect from California will see CA projects and local contacts.
- 2 Behavioral:** A prospect who's been browsing a healthcare portfolio will be shown a personalized landing page with the latest healthcare trends with relevant resources.
- 3 Predictive:** If a client downloads a K-12 trends report, AI can predict they may be interested in a K-12 case study.



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[Customers](#)

[Partners](#)

[Plans](#)

[Resources](#)

[Careers](#)

# Hello, Adidas! Let's optimize digital experiences for your athletes.

Optimizely makes it easy to test and personalize your website and mobile app.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TEST IT OUT](#)



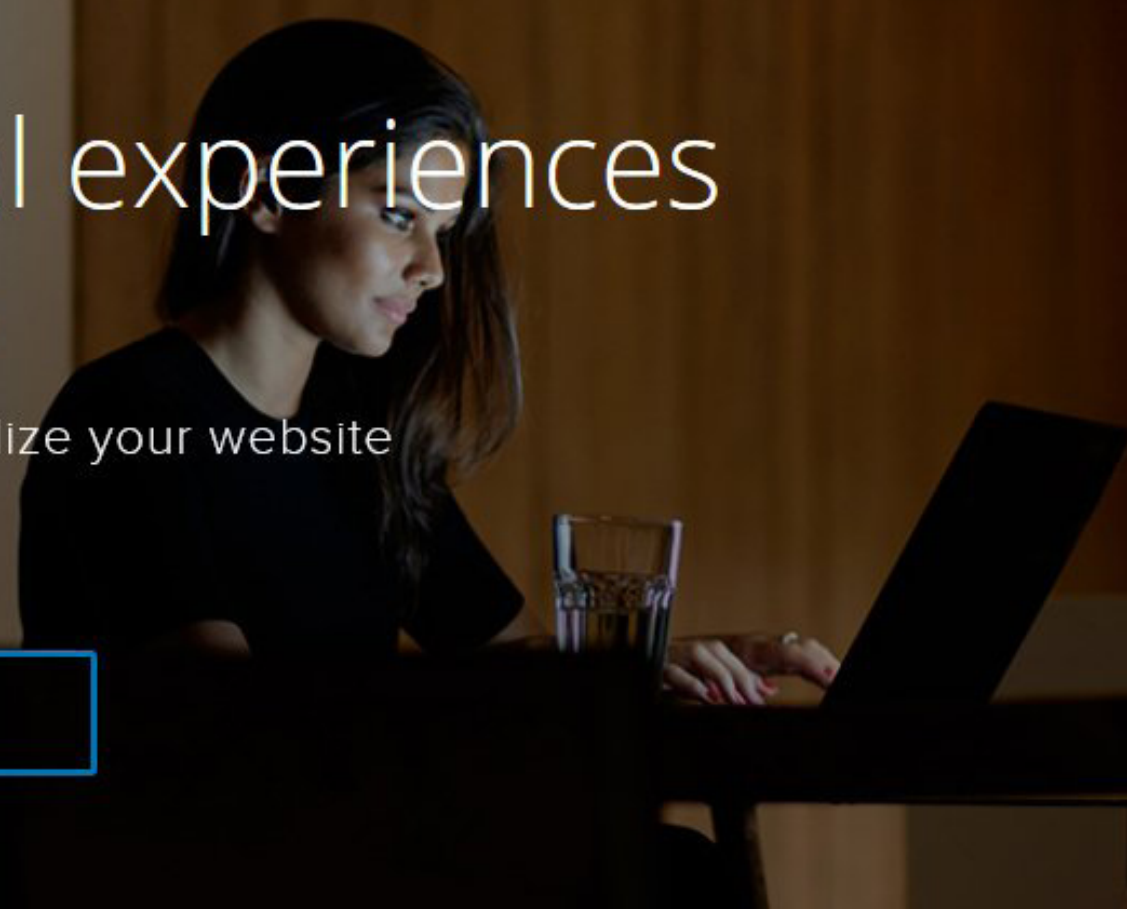


# Still awake? Let's optimize digital experiences for your customers.

Optimizely makes it easy to test and personalize your website and mobile app.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[TEST IT OUT](#)



80% of marketers who measure ROI say that **ABM initiatives outperform** other marketing investments.

Source: ITSMA

## CONVERSATIONAL MARKETING

# Unlock Pipeline with the Right Conversation for Every Situation

Accelerating qualification and conversion comes down to having the right conversation. So that enterprise buyer who's been engaging with your marketing for weeks gets a very different experience from the small business CEO just browsing your homepage for the first time. It's the power of the right conversation, at the right time, every time.

LEARN MORE

The screenshot shows a chat interface with a blue header for 'Chelsea Ward'. The conversation starts with the 'Applinks Bot' asking if the user wants to become a customer success story. Chelsea Ward responds with 'This year' and 'You're funny'. The bot then says 'Mamabot always said so! Here's Chelsea who can help you get there.' Finally, Chelsea Ward says 'Hey Talia, I'm your account manager! How can I help?'. At the bottom, there is a text input field with 'Reply to Chelsea', a smiley face icon, a 'GIF' button, and a paperclip icon. The footer includes 'Chat ⚡ by Drift' and a link to 'View our privacy policy here'.

Chelsea Ward

Applinks Bot

It looks like you've checked out our customer success stories. Are you looking to become our next story this year or next year?

This year

You're funny

Applinks Bot

Mamabot always said so! Here's Chelsea who can help you get there.

Chelsea Ward

Hey Talia, I'm your account manager! How can I help?

Reply to Chelsea

Chat ⚡ by Drift [View our privacy policy here](#)



History



Discover



Spaces



Finance



More

your logo here



perplexity

Ask anything. Type @ for mentions and / for shortcuts.

🔍 🗑️ 🗃️ 🌐 📷 📄 🎤 🔊



 Search

 Contact

 Join Us

# Creating a more interconnected, livable world

What can we help you find?





Search

Home

My Network

Jobs

Messaging

Notifications

Me

Work

Retry Premium Free



### Ida Cheinman

Brand Strategist + Designer | Speaker + Educator | Substance151  
Principal and Creative Director

Talks about #design, #branding, #marketing, #branstrategy, and #professionalservices

Baltimore, Maryland, United States · [Contact info](#)

2,911 followers · 500+ connections

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### Analytics

Private to you



106 profile v

Discover who

### Featured

Link · 2yr

Link · 11mo



Ethan Beute, MBA



Ethan Beute, MBA (He/Him) · 3:16 PM

Thanks so much, Ida! A quick, personal intro ...

<http://vid.us/4bm41c>



Play 1 minute video

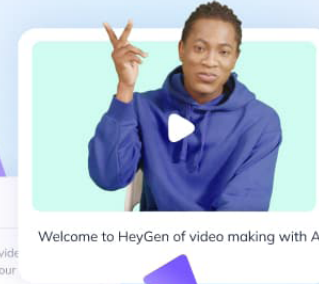
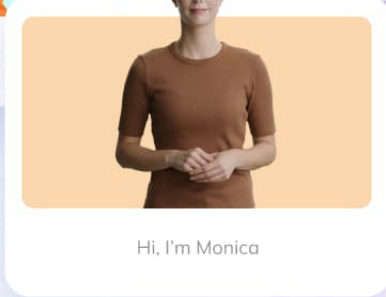
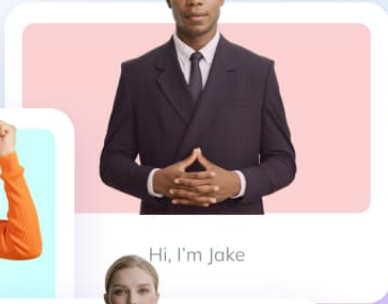
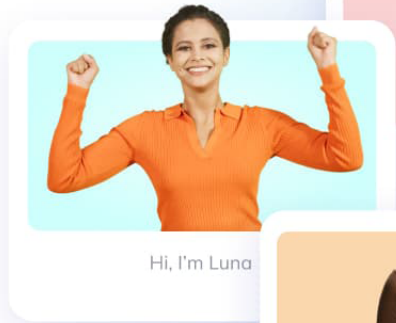
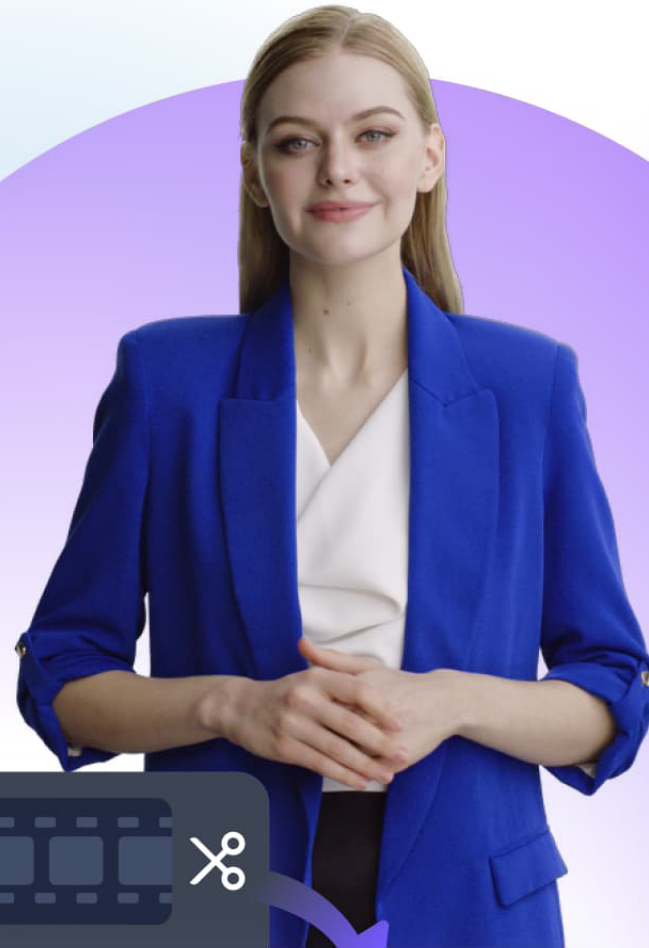
Thank you, Ida!

bbemaildelivery.com




Ida Cheinman · 3:18 PM

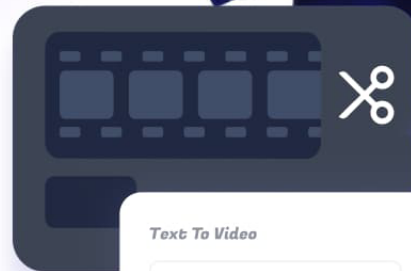
Of course – a video message! :) Wouldn't expect anything less! Only have positive things to say about the podcast – keep them coming.



**Text To Video**


Welcome to Moivo of video making with AI. Simply type your scripts to get started.


 England






**Text To Video**

Welcome to Moivo of video making with AI. Simply type your scripts to get started.







“ Email has an ability other channels don't – creating highly valuable personal touches, at scale.

**DAVID NEWMAN** Founder, Do It! Marketing

“ For years, we optimized for **deliverability**, how to get in. Now we need to optimize for **selection**, how to be chosen.

**ANN HANDLEY** MarketingProfs

Marketers who segment their campaigns notice as much as a **760%** increase in ROI.

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## TRUST

- + Purpose-driven, values-based brand.
- + Human-centered, authentic communications.

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## PEOPLE

- + Personal brands over corporate brands.
- + CEO/leadership-led marketing.

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## RELATIONSHIPS

- + Customer centricity, personalization, relevance.
- + Emotions, storytelling.

“ We must prioritize remaining human.

**GERD LEONHARD** Futurist

# GROUP ACTIVITY

### **Team 1**

Kris Lepel  
Molly Rose  
Hadley Knapp  
Chloe Jeffords  
Jamie LePore

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### **Team 4**

Jill Sawyer  
Carly Farr  
Rosemarie Melville  
Kim Mura  
McKenzie Henry  
Alyssa Deming

### **Team 2**

Andrea Kelly  
Tracy Anderson  
Nate Mundt  
Brooke Macica  
Brittany McFee

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### **Team 5**

Christine Zweier  
Melissa Smith  
Lauren Exley  
Nicole Bybel  
Brian Sullivan

### **Team 3**

Chelsey Barry  
Anna Dollar  
Mattison Fleming  
Ivy Foster  
Andrea Sauers

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### **Team 6**

Laura Corbett  
Adele Lemm  
Andrew Guerrein  
Kelsey McCarthy  
Sara Shaw

# **Marketing Groups**

## SAMPLE IDEAS TO EXPLORE

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- + Navigating digital-first marketing/BD/relationships.
- + Humanizing brand and communications.
- + Changes in search/AIO, demand for personalized experiences.
- + Differentiation (through brand, creativity, expertise, thought leadership, etc.).
- + Showcasing/engaging SMEs; employee brand and marketing education; employee advocacy.
- + Exploring AI beyond productivity.



# QUESTIONS?

**SLIDES AND RESOURCES**

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