



The Science of Demand

Ads measurement in the AI Era

The traditional, linear marketing funnel has been replaced by a sprawling consumer web. Today's discovery-to-decision path is fluid, complex, and driven by a super-empowered shopper who streams, scrolls, and searches simultaneously. For modern leaders, the challenge has evolved from simply participating in the market to actively multiplying value through precision.

Many organizations currently operate with a foggy windshield, hindered by data gaps and dashboards that overindex on short-term credit. To break through, you must move beyond just capturing existing demand and start engineering it. This collection introduces **the science of demand**, a rigorous framework designed to transform marketing from a cost center into a reliable engine for long-term, profitable growth.

This system is anchored by a single, foundational equation. Combined, these variables provide a blueprint for mastering ROI:


$$\text{Data} + \text{Causality} + \text{Better Decisions} = \text{Profitable Growth}$$

Navigating the framework

Throughout this bundle, we'll show you how to move away from defensive reporting and toward a proactive growth governance model. Here's how.

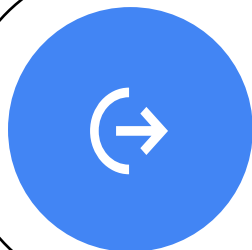


Data: The fuel

AI is only as good as its inputs. Learn to construct durable signal foundations that bypass browser limitations and unify your online and offline truths.

The ROI of strong data: Unlocking AI's full potential → [PAGE 8](#)

Enhance your measurement and ad performance with Google tag gateway → [PAGE 10](#)



Causality: The proof

Move past the renter mindset of buying cheap clicks. Explore how to uncover the true value of your media through incrementality testing and identifying the digital breadcrumbs that signal future conversions

How experimentation and incrementality testing reveal the true value of marketing → [PAGE 12](#)

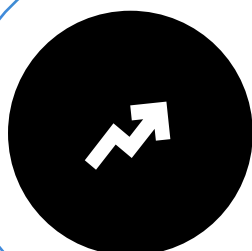
Addressing the growth gap: The hidden ROI of demand creation → [PAGE 14](#)



Better decisions: The answers

When your gauges disagree, stop triangulating and start calibrating. We look at how open-source marketing mix models like Meridian use the measurement trifecta (attribution + incrementality + MMM) to create a single source of truth that earns the trust of the CFO and the board.

Meridian: The future of marketing mix modeling is now → [PAGE 18](#)



Financial partnership: The path

Bridge the gap between marketing science and capital allocation. We share practical steps from Google leaders to help you align with your CFO and finance team, and turn fragmented signals into proven business outcomes.

Win over your CFO: 9 steps Google Marketing took to partner with finance → [PAGE 21](#)

The agency advantage: Rethinking ROI with a single source of truth → [PAGE 23](#)

The window to win is open. This collection of resources is designed to help you stop guessing, start knowing, and, ultimately, move from counting clicks to engineering growth. We begin this series with an in-depth Q&A with measurement architect Gaurav Bhaya who shares Google's measurement vision.

From post-mortem to pulse: Why measurement is the CMO's new growth engine

by Joshua Spanier, VP of AI and Marketing Strategy, Google



In this Q&A, Joshua Spanier, Google's VP of AI marketing and strategy, and host of the new Frontier CMO podcast, sat down with Gaurav Bhaya, VP and GM of buying, analytics, and measurement at Google. Drawing on his experience leading Google's AI marketing transformation, Josh talks with Gaurav about why sophisticated measurement is the modern CMO's secret weapon for growth and how to build a data-driven team that delivers.

The marketing brief has changed. Budgets are tighter, scrutiny is higher, and the cost of being wrong compounds fast in a market that learns at the speed of AI. The race keeps accelerating.

Measurement is where that pressure — and that opportunity — converge. New AI-powered marketing measurement tools are transforming the CMO's power to measure and plan, yet, somehow, they still suffer from an outdated, "back-office" reputation. It's time for a reset.

Josh Spanier: Let's dive right in. What's the biggest shift in measurement you see coming in 2026?

Gaurav Bhaya: The end of what I'd call the "dark spend" era. The whole media environment has changed, and the tolerance for guessing has collapsed. Volatility is higher, competition is faster, and budgets are under sharper scrutiny, which means every dollar has to do real work. CMOs today need an anchor. To borrow an expression from [Brené Brown's latest book](#)¹, measurement is quietly becoming that "strong ground." Something stable to stand on but dynamic enough to move with speed. No longer as a reporting ritual, but as a way to lead decisively, because you understand what's happening and can make moves with confidence.

The highest order challenge in media measurement today isn't where to invest. It's not understanding the cause of an effect.

Josh Spanier: When you say “every dollar has to do real work,” what does that mean in practice?

Gaurav Bhaya: It means every dollar should perform one of two jobs: You’re either converting existing demand to close a deal right now, or you’re creating new demand by building the familiarity required for a future sale. The highest order challenge in media measurement today isn’t where to invest. It’s not understanding the cause of an effect. The danger for most advertisers isn’t a lack of budget; it’s the visibility gap. If you can’t see which ads are building desire and which are just ringing the register, you’re operating in the dark.

Josh Spanier: Operating in the dark? How so?

Gaurav Bhaya: Because that’s how it can feel when signals are fragmented. Different platforms tell different stories and rally behind different behaviors. KPIs and outcomes coming out of Meta, Google, and Amazon rarely align neatly. And some numbers that look comforting at first glance don’t actually map to business outcomes. This is why it’s so critical for advertisers to look at performance across channels and platforms in a single view. It’s why marketing mix modeling (MMM) is going through a renaissance, fueled by innovations like Google’s Meridian. Using an open-source, Bayesian framework, Meridian allows advertisers to integrate cross-channel data and experiment into a single, transparent model that maps back to real business outcomes.

The cost of guessing

Josh Spanier: That makes sense. So if measurement is the light switch in the dark room, what happens if you don’t flip it?

Gaurav Bhaya: You might end up overpaying to get the results you need, usually without even noticing. We’ve come to understand that legacy measurement practices create a clarity gap, a fog that keeps you from seeing when parts of your budget have stopped working as hard as they should. So you keep spending “lazy dollars.” In 2026, that guessing comes with compounding costs.

Josh Spanier: Like what? Walk me through some of them.

Gaurav Bhaya: Sure. Right out of the gate, there’s wasted spend. If you’re not optimizing media mix, channel allocation, and creative fast enough, you’re overpaying for outcomes. Second, if your competitors are investing in modern measurement, you are losing ground to them. It may not seem

like it immediately, but it’s happening. Third, the longer you wait, the more momentum you’ll lose. Measurement is a flywheel. Every learning cycle makes the next cycle smarter. Skip cycles and the loss isn’t linear; it compounds. Lastly I would say that poor measurement habits can hurt your brand. If the wrong ads, stories, experiences hit the wrong people too often and in the wrong places, you create fatigue which can erode trust.

With AI, measurement is becoming less about describing performance and more about decoding demand mechanics.

The science of demand

Josh Spanier: I recently saw you speak at an event and talk about something you called, “the science of demand.” Can you explain what this is without making it sound like just another buzzword?

Gaurav Bhaya: I can try! It’s simply the ability to understand, at a system level, what creates demand, what captures it, and what converts it. For years, marketing teams have had lots of data but limited certainty. Now, with AI in the loop, we can collect a wider set of signals, connect them with more finesse to better understand performance, and translate complexity into CFO-grade guidance. It’s basically an equation: data plus causality plus better decisions equals profitable growth. This is why 2026 is going to be a massive turning point. With AI, measurement is becoming less about describing performance and more about decoding demand mechanics.

Josh Spanier: What mechanics? What are CMOs actually trying to master?

Gaurav Bhaya: Again, it’s really about three things. First, you create demand by sparking intent before a customer even knows what they’re looking for. Next, you capture it by showing up at the exact moment a decision is being made. And finally, you convert that demand by turning raw attention into action, using those insights to map out exactly where your future value will come from.

The mechanics of demand

1

Create demand

Spark intent before someone knows what they want.

2

Capture demand

Show up in the moment a decision is being made.

3

Convert demand

Turn attention into action and learn where future value will come from.

The “science” is also connecting and calibrating those phases instead of optimizing each in isolation, and understanding the time horizon of your category so you don’t make a mistake, like killing something that’s working just because the ROI doesn’t show up in a 30-day window.

Josh Spanier: Thanks for bringing up the 30-day window. Why do so many businesses still orient their strategies around short-term metrics like last click?

Gaurav Bhaya: Because it’s comforting. It’s clean. It feels like certainty. But it’s often a high-definition photo of the finish line, while the rest of the race is blurred. In long-cycle categories, demand is created upstream and harvested later. If you only reward the final click, you can end up killing the engine that generated the desire in the first place. That’s the “hidden half” of influence: touchpoints that don’t convert within 30 days but still do real work.

Growth governance

Josh Spanier: That makes a lot of sense. How can a clearer view of long-term versus short-term ROI change a CMOs perspective?

Gaurav Bhaya: The short answer is that marketing is capital, either misallocated or optimized, depending on what you know to be true and what you can credibly expect it to return. We’ve been talking a lot internally about the responsibility of marketing leaders to govern growth. Growth governance is the discipline of managing marketing like an investment portfolio: bets sized and timed with intent, guided by evidence, calibrated over time, and accountable to ROI. It’s less opex you justify and more capex you deploy, investment in future demand and brand equity that pays dividends.

Josh Spanier: So what does that mindset help unlock for organizations?

Gaurav Bhaya: Things like pacing the business. Measured marketing helps you plan out quarters with more confidence, understand the true cost of growth, see where profitability lives, learn what discounts do (and don’t do), and anticipate volume needs and capacity constraints. At that point, measurement stops being a marketing function and becomes an instrument for the whole company. This is how marketing leaders of the future earn more credit and grow their budget.

Growth governance is the discipline of managing marketing like an investment portfolio.

Better decisions

Josh Spanier: This sounds powerful. What is it going to take for brands to get to this point? Or better yet, if you were going to build something to do this, what exactly would you build?

Gaurav Bhaya: A high-fidelity AI-powered decision engine, built for the realities of 2026. Measurement is the hunt for a clean and detailed “because.”

Causality is the North Star. It teaches you not just what happened, but what made it happen. So marketing leaders can act more intentionally, fix what failed, and repeat what's winning.

Josh Spanier: What are the primary components of a decision engine?

Gaurav Bhaya: Exactly what you might expect. The trifecta. Attribution for speed and operational directionality. Incrementality experiments that validate what truly moved outcomes. MMM for strategy, a portfolio view that stitches channels, time horizons, and partial visibility into one allocation logic.

Individually all of these components may tell you different stories and lead you in different directions, but when brought together and used to calibrate each other, they can get you much closer to an accurate truth range. This is the power of AI; it's now robust enough to decipher all of the moving parts to discover the "why" behind the outcomes.

Josh Spanier: What concrete difference will it make for CMOs?

Gaurav Bhaya: It will help them make better decisions. Measurement should become more central to the CMO's day-to-day. We're moving toward a centralized, one-screen view that kills "toggle fatigue" and can monitor growth in real time. It'll act as a strategic co-pilot, letting you bypass complex charts to get direct answers and proactive assistance. This shift simplifies the data, making it easier to unlock unprecedented personalization. Now, audiences, measurement, creative, and media will connect in a near-real-time loop to predict and produce defined business outcomes, not just report that they happened.

Josh Spanier: Exciting stuff. OK, last question. If you bumped into a CMO on an elevator and had 30 seconds to help them rethink their measurement strategy, what would you advise them to do?

Gaurav Bhaya: Start now. Measurement compounds like interest, and the earlier you build, the more resilient you'll be. Stop treating measurement like a report card. It's your steering wheel. Govern your growth like an investor, because fragmented signals are just a tax on your revenue. When you calibrate with discipline, you turn measurement from a defensive autopsy into an offensive engine. In this race, the CMO who hits the light switch first doesn't just see the room, they own it while the competition is still grasping in the darkness.

Mandatories of a decision engine

1

Centralized

One screen, one unified view — less toggle tax, more coherence.

2

Real time

Measurement as a continuous health tracker, not a monthly autopsy.

3

Conversational

From charts and graphs to natural dialogue.

4

Personalized

Measurement, media, and creative synchronized in near real time.

Fuel for your AI engine

AI-powered marketing is only as effective as the inputs you provide. To win the race, you need high-fidelity signals that bypass browser degradation and unify your online and offline truths.

This section explores how to transition from reactive data repair to building a robust foundation for profitable growth. Here's what you'll learn.

How to unlock the full potential of AI by prioritizing a high-quality data strategy.

How Google Tag Gateway enhances measurement and ad performance to keep your signals sharp.

Dive in

The ROI of strong data: Unlocking AI's full potential → [PAGE 8](#)

Enhance your measurement and ad performance with Google tag gateway → [PAGE 10](#)

The ROI of strong data: Unlocking AI's full potential

by Kamal Janardhan, Senior Product Management Director, Buying, Analytics & Measurement, Google

A version of this article was previously published by Forbes.

There is no debate: AI is a proven game changer for businesses seeking a competitive advantage. And, while AI adoption rates have been defined as “unprecedented” by experts like famed technology analyst Mary Meeker, only the most forward-thinking leaders are focusing on what powers these systems. They recognize that while the AI model is the engine, the quality data fed into it is the high-octane fuel.

Fundamentally, AI's effectiveness is directly tied to the information it learns from. For many businesses, their most powerful asset is their first-party data, which serves as the essential bedrock for improving AI performance.² While first-party data has long been a key strategy for navigating digital landscape changes, the rise of AI reveals its true potential. When paired with AI, first-party data provides advertisers with unparalleled pattern recognition and predictive insights, all customized to meet a business's unique goals.

Utilizing this data effectively and securely requires leaders to break down organizational and intelligence silos to connect data sets, teams, and business outcomes. In this article, we'll provide a clear road map to unlock this potential and achieve new levels of data strength and ROI.

Defining data strength: The direct path to optimal ROI

Data strength isn't just a new buzzword; it's a fundamental shift in mindset. It's about viewing your data, not as a static asset to be defended but as a dynamic resource to be wielded strategically.

Data strength is a shift from an overreliance on online signals alone to a unified ecosystem of data sources — from CRM and cloud instances to web, app, and physical store interactions. It represents the creation of an always-on, comprehensive customer view that powers better performing AI-powered marketing. Research shows organizations that have a first-party data strategy in place to enable the use of AI marketing tools are 1.5X more likely to say their performance was stronger than their competitors who lack such a strategy.³

Organizations with a first-party data strategy in place to enable the use of AI are 1.5X more likely to say their performance was stronger than their competitors.⁴

The results are clear: the stronger your data, the more intelligent your AI, and the better your ROI. To help you unlock the full potential of your digital advertising, we've outlined four necessary steps to improve your data strength.

Four steps top advertisers take to improve their data strength

1. Connect your data sources

The first step of your journey is to establish a foundational link to your data sources. Think of this as a pipeline for your data to flow securely into your advertising technology. The objective is to simplify a traditionally fragmented landscape, where data from different touchpoints exists in silos, hindering performance.

Prioritize first-party data. Improve the accuracy and durability of your web data by using a first-party versus a third-party data strategy. We strongly recommend retrofitting legacy third-party tags using tag gateway.

Centralize all of your data. Connect and centralize all of your data sources in one place. Tools like Data Manager simplify this process by providing direct connection workflows for major data platforms you likely use already, as well as API capabilities, making it easier to manage and troubleshoot your data flow.

2. Maximize the quality of your data

Once the pipes are connected, the next step is to ensure you're collecting the most valuable data you have. This process helps Google AI provide you with more impactful insights and recommendations, allowing you to maximize the impact of your data. This is a crucial step that relies on your team's direct action, often through technical implementation on your site or by ingesting data into your own systems. We recommend prioritizing a variety of signal types.

Advertising signals. How your audience interacts with your ads, from where they click to what campaigns are driving the most interest. Customer signals. Privacy-safe information from your customers, such as emails and phone numbers, to better understand their behavior across different devices.

Transactional signals. Measure the true value of a purchase or other key actions, ensuring you can accurately track the impact of your marketing efforts and prevent counting the same conversion more than once.

Behavioral signals. Gain a deeper understanding of the customer journey, learning what actions users take on your website, and how they engage with your content.

By diligently collecting and sending these signals, you're not just providing data; you're providing high-quality, relevant information that powers more effective AI-driven advertising.

3. Activate your data with Google AI

With your robust, high-quality data in place, you're ready to activate it. This is where you should adopt AI-powered solutions to optimize your campaigns across all of Google's advertising platforms. A strong data set acts as a critical input for Google's AI, enabling more effective solutions for:

Audiences. Your first-party data is essential for identifying and engaging top customer segments and expanding your reach by finding similar audiences.

Bidding. AI-powered bidding strategies leverage your comprehensive data to find new search queries and channels, and to optimize your budget in real time to adapt to consumer trends.

In-channel optimization. Your data powers sophisticated attribution models, like data-driven attribution, which assigns fractional credit to each touchpoint on a user's conversion path, providing a more complete understanding of what drives sales within each channel.

This activation step is where the tangible value of your data strength is realized, transforming basic information into actionable performance improvements.

4. Demonstrate ROI

To demonstrate gains unlocked by your first-party data you should take a modern approach to ads measurement. A strong data foundation allows you to accurately measure the KPIs that matter most to your business, such as revenue and profit. This involves using a modern measurement tool kit to prove the effectiveness of your advertising efforts.

Cross-channel optimization. Beyond simply measuring clicks, advanced attribution models help you understand which media touchpoints provide the most value. This includes multitouch attribution, a cross-channel approach that interprets how much different channels influence the customer journey.

Incrementality experiments. Testing things like geo and conversion lift allow you to measure the true, incremental impact of your campaigns. These experiments use a test-and-control framework to determine whether an ad caused a conversion, rather than just being present in the user's journey.

Marketing mix modeling. These models use advanced statistics to correlate your marketing investments with sales, helping you optimize budgets across all your marketing channels and understand the overall contribution of different media.

By embracing these modern measurement practices, you can move beyond simple last-click metrics and gain a holistic view of your advertising's impact, proving the value of your data strength and strategy to the business.

From stronger data to improved ROI

Cultivating robust data strength is essential for driving demonstrable business outcomes in today's competitive landscape. It enables businesses to foster stronger customer relationships and significantly increase customer lifetime value.

AI anchored on rich first-party data fuels intelligent bidding optimization, ensuring your budget is deployed with maximum impact and efficiency. This isn't merely about refining current campaigns; it's about strategically empowering your organization for a future of growth. Forward-thinking business leaders must recognize superior data strength as an indispensable prerequisite for unlocking the full potential of advanced AI-powered solutions.

Enhance your conversion measurement and ad performance with Google tag gateway for advertisers

Understanding the impact of your advertising relies on accurate measurement. But the evolving digital landscape makes it challenging to capture the insights you need to effectively measure conversions, optimize your campaign performance, and fuel AI to keep pace with changing consumer behavior.

To steer AI to deliver the best performance, you need to build your data strength. This means getting a clear picture of customers as they move across all touchpoints — your website, your app, your physical store — and then seamlessly connecting this data to your ads platforms using Google Ads Data Manager to get more value from your first-party data.

That's why starting next week, we'll begin rolling out Google tag gateway for advertisers to help you navigate these changes and strengthen your first-party data strategy. This new feature enables you to run your Google tags, be it client-side or server-side through your own website infrastructure, such as a content delivery network (CDN), load balancer, or web server.

Though website tags have been a staple for years, they remain fundamental building blocks for capturing the first-party data essential to fueling AI and accurate measurement. By serving tags from your own domain, you can significantly improve the accuracy and resilience of your measurement signals. This is a vital action every marketer should take to improve performance. Advertisers who configured Google tag gateway for advertisers saw an 11% uplift in signals.⁵

Unlock stronger performance and privacy with more accurate measurement

Google tag gateway for advertisers is designed to help you improve the performance of your Google Ads campaigns and make the most of our latest AI-powered tools.

- **Improve conversion measurement accuracy.** Google tag gateway for advertisers enhances conversion data accuracy by routing it through your website's own server, improving bidding, campaign optimization, and ROAS.
- **Gain deeper campaign insights.** With richer insights into campaign performance and attribution, you get a better understanding of your customer journey, and can identify which strategies drive the strongest ROI.
- **Experience added privacy by default.** Tags set up with Google tag gateway for advertisers will soon get confidential computing by default, giving customers added security and transparency on how data is collected and processed.

Upgrade your tag to get more control over your data — no retagging required

Your data is already protected by robust security measures, but we are always looking to incorporate the latest technological advancements as they come available. As mentioned above, Google tag gateway for advertisers offers additional protections and control over how your first-party data is collected and processed before it's encrypted and sent to Google for measurement and analytics. In the coming months, this will include the added security and transparency guarantees of confidential computing, enhancing user privacy without any extra effort on your part. It's a privacy enhancing technology we announced last year which keeps your customer data with you — and only you.

Implementation is also simplified, as upgrading your tag requires no changes to the existing tag code on your pages. To make setup even easier, we've partnered with Cloudflare for a one-click integration, with additional CDN partners like Fastly, Google Cloud CDN, and more planned.

Proof of your performance

Stop being a renter of cheap clicks and start becoming an owner of future profit. This section explores how to move beyond correlation to understand the true impact of your marketing spend.

You'll learn how to value the steering assist of your brand media, using causal signals and long-term conversion metrics that reveal the hidden value in every interaction.

Discover how experimentation and incrementality testing reveal the true value of marketing by isolating the signals that actually drive growth.

Learn why traditional metrics often leave more than half of your value uncounted and how to measure the hidden ROI of demand creation.

Dive in

How experimentation and incrementality testing reveal the true value of marketing → [PAGE 12](#)
Addressing the growth gap: The hidden ROI of demand creation → [PAGE 14](#)

How experimentation and incrementality testing reveal the true value of marketing

by Kamal Janardhan, Senior Product Management Director, Buying, Analytics & Measurement, Google

A version of this article was previously published by Forbes.

When you are marketing a product, a successful advertising campaign is only half the battle. Without marketing experimentation, its true value is hard to prove. The true test comes when you meet with the CFO. For a C-suite leader, marketing metrics like clicks and impressions are a means to an end. What they look for are provable business results that drive revenue.

This disconnect with what is most important for a business exposes the core flaw of traditional, “last-click” thinking. If you only look at the last touchpoint prior to purchase, you are missing the full power of your user’s journeys, and your attribution model misses the full context of what is possible.

This is why we analyze the full customer path — from first exposure to final conversion — to create a more accurate and actionable marketing mix model (MMM). It’s the vehicle taking us from fragmented vanity metrics to holistic data-driven decisions.

John Joba, head of marketing data science at Rocket Mortgage, has witnessed firsthand how this approach transformed the dynamic between his team and the finance department. “We moved from reactive justification to proactive planning,” he says. “We have a common language with finance firmly grounded in business value first.”

Core to creating that common language is incrementality testing, a critical form of marketing experimentation. It reframes advertising from a required cost to a growth engine for value that allows a business like Rocket to level up its media planning strategy and marketing and business outcomes.

A new era of access to incrementality testing

Incrementality testing is a known quantity, but it’s been expensive and labor-intensive until recently. Running a single experiment could have cost upward

of \$100,000, making the research viable only to the largest enterprises.

Small-to-medium businesses had to rely on less sophisticated test models, which meant that marketers couldn’t tell whether an outcome was due to their own efforts or an organic side effect.

Today more businesses can expand where and how they experiment to understand where to put their next investment.

To ensure more advertisers have access to these critical tools, in 2025 Google Ads lowered the cost of an incrementality experiment from a previous high of \$100,000 to a minimum of \$5,000. This significant reduction democratized the tool, extending its benefits to a broader user base for new types of analysis.

Verify your impact on campaign performance

With incrementality testing now widely available, businesses can expand where and how they experiment to understand where to put their next investment and how to refine their MMMs. Here are three common testing examples that can directly inform and improve your campaign strategy.

1. You’re running an ad campaign on YouTube to drive new brand searches and conversions. There’s been a nice bump for both, but you need to prove your team’s work led to performance gains. By comparing results between shoppers who saw your ad and those who were eligible to see it but didn’t, you can pinpoint which decision led to the biggest difference. This allows you to properly assign

credit and understand how valuable YouTube is to your overall strategy.

2. The same goes for paid search campaigns. You (and your CFO) won't have to wonder whether a spike in attention came from your ad placement or organically occurring interest. Through incrementality testing, you can determine who responded to the search spend versus who sought out your brand directly, so you reach net-new customers instead of feeding on your own traffic.

3. Similarly, when you're launching a new product, you want to bring in fresh revenue instead of drawing dollars away from the products you already have. Incrementality testing can shed light on these situations as well, helping to distinguish new customers from regulars redirecting their purchases.

In all of these use cases, the ability to trace cause and effect provides a clearer view of a business's financial operations, at any size. We're leaving behind the era of "we think" to "we know." This confidence can then become the foundation for marketing. And, for a perfect illustration of how much can be gained through testing, we can turn to Rocket Mortgage.

How Rocket Mortgage used testing to unlock insights and growth

Rocket Mortgage used Google Ads to test a demand generation campaign, revealing an insight that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Testing proved that the marketing team's campaign drove the desired outcome but also generated 23% more value than their model had originally estimated. From this single, clearly defined learning, they recalibrated their entire MMM. Instead of just upping their spending, the team used these insights to refine for more accurate modeling, which brought a higher degree of certainty to the entire investment strategy.

We're empowered to make bold moves, because we have a measurement system that we trust.

"We can confidently invest in brand building, knowing that we can demonstrate its contribution to the bottom line," Joba says. "And perhaps, most importantly, we're empowered to make bold moves, like our full brand restage, because we have a measurement system that we trust."

A critical component of ad measurement best practices

The closer a marketing team can get to certainty about their effectiveness, the better positioned they'll be for success. That's why incrementality testing is evolving into a fundamental part of an effective media planning strategy, allowing marketing to shift its perception of being a cost center to a proven driver of growth.

Addressing the growth gap: The hidden ROI of demand creation

by Harikesh Nair, Senior Director of Data Science and Engineering, Google

Harikesh Nair is a senior director of data science and engineering at Google, where he leads the Media Effectiveness Measurement Engineering team and the Analytics, Insights, and Measurement data science group. A former professor at Stanford University, Nair now focuses on developing products and strategies to help marketers understand and improve the effectiveness of their media investments, by driving innovation in the field of ads measurement.

As the saying goes, if you want to know the future, look at the past. It stands to reason then, if you want to look far into the future, you need the ability to look even farther into the past. This simple concept represents one of the biggest bets in media measurement today, and Gemini has unlocked our ability to win it.

Using models trained with historical data, marketers should soon be able to understand the impact of demand-creation campaigns in generating conversions over the long term. More impressively, they should also be able to use those signals to predict demand, conversions, and returns in the future.

These capabilities will help marketers pace and plan their businesses more strategically than ever before, differentiating them from their competitors and, ultimately, driving higher revenue by making smart optimizations early and often. Here's how my team is exploring and testing new approaches to accurately measure and predict the long-term value of advertising.

Playing the long game in demand creation

For years, a silent tension has existed between the marketing department's mandate for growth and the finance department's demand for immediate proof. Unfortunately, this has led to systemic "short-termism" in ad attribution, by restricting focus and credit to what happened right before the conversion. This practice has produced a system that is clean for accounting but catastrophic for growth marketing and demand creation.

When you evaluate demand-generating campaigns using short-term metrics, more than half the value being created is uncounted. It's invisible.

A typical attribution strategy (such as providing conversion credit to last-touched ads over a standard 30-day look-back window) continues to work well if you are attempting to convert existing demand. Our new research shows that 70% of conversions for a standard Google Ads campaign are captured within the 30-day click and 3-day engaged-view conversion look-back window.⁶ Great. Perfectly reasonable results.

But what if you are trying to create and convert new demand? Sales cycles for many products are considerably longer (for example, expensive and high-involvement products often involve consumer research and consideration time prior to purchase); and newly engaged consumers take time to engage with the brand, research the product, and eventually purchase.

That's why when we evaluated campaign types oriented toward demand creation, we saw a reduction in conversions occurring within the standard windows. We found that only 50% of conversions from Performance Max campaigns are captured within the 30-day click and 3-day engaged-view conversion look-back window.⁷ And just 40% of conversions for the Demand Gen campaigns are captured within the same time frames.⁸

This means that when you evaluate demand-generating campaigns using short-term metrics, more than half the value being created is uncounted. It's invisible. This is a problem my team of data scientists is working to solve.

Conversion times by campaign type

% of conversions captured in 30-day or 3-day engaged-view conversion look-back window.

50%
Performance Max

40%
Demand Gen

We need a clear trail of breadcrumbs that show the user has demonstrably engaged with the advertised brand and moved further along the path.

Examples of LUAs

- **Branded searches**, moving from searching for “best suvs” to searching for a specific brand or model.
- **Deep engagement**, interactions with advertiser-linked YouTube channels, such as “like,” “subscribe,” or “share.”
- **Micro-conversions**, shallow actions like adding a product to a cart or signing up for a trial.

The science of breadcrumbs

To better measure the long-term impact of Google Ads campaigns and improve overall advertising effectiveness, my team has focused on methodologies that emphasize transparency, auditability, and explainability. The long-term impact of such campaigns involves attributing conversions to ad interactions that happened over many previous months. To be credible, we need a clear trail of breadcrumbs that show the user has demonstrably engaged with the advertised brand and moved further along the path to conversion after being exposed to the ads.

To do this, we use what we call leading user actions (LUA) as mile markers. LUAs are qualified, intermediate steps that occur between an initial ad engagement and a conversion. LUAs are observable and verifiable, forming a consistent and repeatable way of knowing the advertising induced movement along the purchase journey prior to the conversion.

To use the attribution for optimization, we leverage sophisticated AI algorithms to predict future long-term conversions, leveraging observed LUAs and other signals. Using these AI predictions allows bidding algorithms to accurately value users on their likelihood to purchase, optimizing for long-term growth without waiting months for the conversion to hit the books.

A tested and proven approach

While Google is still in the testing stages of developing new products oriented around this thinking, our measurement partners have already begun publishing findings from similar experiments.

As an example, a 2025 Fospha report notes that relying on traditional last-click attribution for YouTube and Demand Gen campaigns often leads to undervaluing returns by an average of 14X. This highlights an industrywide shift as advertisers move beyond last-observable touchpoints to better account for the impact of awareness and consideration focused ads.

Relying on traditional last-click attribution for YouTube and Demand Gen campaigns often leads to undervaluing returns by an average of 14X.¹⁰

When you look at the gains from long-term signals, it's clear that advertisers are leaving money on the table — or at least not reporting it accurately to their financial stakeholders. The performance of the ads hasn't changed. It's just been hidden by a systemic bias toward short-term wins. It's time to shift the focus to the full picture.

Start preparing now

We are entering a new era of digital marketing where the linear funnel is a relic and the ability to measure demand creation is going to be the new mandate. Take action today to stay ahead of the curve. To ensure success with long-term marketing ROI metrics in the near future, we recommend advertisers start by taking the following three steps:

- **Renegotiate short-termism:** Start conversations with your finance counterparts to align on the critical role of demand creation. Educate your CFO on how traditional last-click attribution can undervalue YouTube and Demand Gen returns by up to 14X.¹¹
- **Audit your time-to-conversion windows:** Using Google Analytics 4, marketers can analyze the time lag between a user's first interaction and their final conversion. Key methods include using path exploration to trace user journeys and analyzing path length reports to understand conversion latency.
- **Apply for the reporting pilot:** In the first half of 2026, we plan to broaden our testing cohort for long-term demand reporting and bidding in Performance Max. Interested Google clients should talk to their account teams about enrolling in the pilot. Seats are limited and participants will be selected on a case-by-case basis.

Answers to your growth questions

When your gauges disagree, stop triangulating and start calibrating. This section explores how to use the measurement trifecta — attribution, incrementality, and marketing mix modeling — to create a single source of truth that earns the trust of the CFO and the board.

You will learn how modern modeling techniques allow you to move from reactive repair to proactive engineering, ensuring every marketing dollar is accounted for and optimized.

Discover how Meridian, Google's open-source MMM, helps you move with velocity to redefine brand performance and quantify the impact of demand-generating dollars.

Dive in

Meridian: The future of marketing mix modeling is now → [PAGE 18](#)

Meridian: The future of marketing mix modeling is now

by Kate Adams, Specialist Director in Northern Europe, Google and Biren Kalaria, Managing Director, Data, Measurement and Analytics, Google U.K.

It may be 2025 but 1970s fashion is back with a bang — from bell-bottom jeans to platform shoes.

And they're not the only 70s classics reborn with a modern twist. Marketing mix modeling (MMM) is experiencing a powerful comeback, upgraded with new technology and insights for today's complex landscape.

Global Google Trends data from the past decade shows, regardless of spelling, interest for “marketing mix modelling” and “marketing mix modeling” is on the rise.

At the start of 2025, Google launched Meridian, an open-source MMM for today's measurement needs. But this isn't just another model; it's a significant leap forward.

Built on years of Google's research and innovation, it offers unprecedented transparency, actionable insights, and privacy-safe capabilities that empower advertisers to optimize their budget allocation with confidence.

Introducing Meridian: Your tool for tomorrow's marketing

Meridian is designed to help marketers understand the true, incremental impact of their campaigns, across online and offline channels. It brings together disparate data into one unified view, like many MMMs.

But its unique value proposition is the advanced modeling techniques it offers, including calibration, reach, and frequency modeling. Traditional MMMs, built for offline media and branding, have historically been unable to fully measure performance media, like Search ads, or user searches (the volume of searches in Google). They may not update assumptions based on incrementality experiments or provide granular insights, such as optimal frequency or regional nuances.

Incorporating a modern MMM, such as Meridian, into your measurement toolbox helps drive more efficient and better business outcomes.

[Meridian] offers unprecedented transparency, actionable insights, and privacy-safe capabilities

Understanding how Meridian works

It's a powerful tool, but in essence it works like this:

Marketers or analysts begin by defining their key performance indicators (KPIs) and business questions within Meridian. They then feed it as much historical sales and marketing data from across various channels and regions as they have. The system needs at least two-years worth of data.

Meridian measures marketing effectiveness using aggregate data and Bayesian methods. This means it uses statistical inference that updates the probability of a hypothesis as new data becomes available. Put simply, it gets smarter the more information it gets, and learns from the results it receives.

And Meridian doesn't need individual identifiers or cookies, making it privacy-safe.

It produces actionable results like budget optimization recommendations, guiding users towards specific actions to take. As you add more data, these recommendations refresh, making the system more responsive to your needs.

This powerful functionality allows Meridian to help marketers tackle the hottest questions in marketing right now. Questions such as:

Q: How can I bring together experiment results and MMM results for media channels?

Meridian blends your prior data with real-world data (for example, user search data) to reveal the true incremental impact of your marketing.

You decide on the KPIs that make sense for your business, from incrementality test results, to sales, website visits, TV ad performance, or Search. It can then run optimization scenarios and suggest the best use of your budget. The more results you input from every media channel, the more the model can show you what channels are and aren't working for you.

Q: What is the optimal level of weekly reach and frequency for my campaigns, beyond just impressions?

Meridian accounts for reach and frequency — not just impressions — to maximize effectiveness on channels like YouTube. These metrics reflect how many unique viewers see your ads and how often they see them, respectively.

MMMs have historically measured video in impressions, but impressions only tell part of the story. Ten impressions could mean 10 people reached, or one person reached 10 times.

Q: How can we get a more accurate view of our search effectiveness, reflecting local consumer interest and intent?

Meridian integrates user search data — which estimates the number of searches for a particular keyword or query on Google — including organic search queries to reflect category demand.

It also allows use of geo-level marketing data, so that you can examine the effectiveness of marketing efforts at a local or regional level.

And you don't have to take our word for it. Pandora is one of the world's largest jewelry brands, present in more than 70 countries. They were one of the first teams to get their hands on Meridian. Here's what Kristina Kaste, Pandora's media planning specialist, had to say.

See how Meridian sparkles with Pandora

We began using Meridian to gain a clearer understanding of our overall media mix and to better compare return on investment (ROI) across channels," says Kaste.

"To start, that meant using Meridian in markets where we did not have another measurement solution in place — usually smaller markets or markets with potential.

"The tool has provided us with a holistic view that allows us to make more KPI-driven decisions. For us, a huge benefit was the model's ability to learn from real-world experiment results, giving us confidence in optimizing our budgets based on the model's recommendations.

"Meridian has helped us gain clearer visibility into the performance of different channels, such as paid social versus paid search, which has been particularly valuable for us.

"It has become a strong foundation for our planning, moving us away from relying solely on gut feeling. Since we started using Meridian, we've seen that our media mix aligns well with the tool's recommendations, giving us confidence that we're heading in the right direction.

"Our marketing team also appreciates Meridian's user-friendly graphic output as it makes it easy for them to use results in planning."

Elevate your measurement strategy

The enduring value of marketing mix modeling, much like the timeless appeal of certain 70s designs, has been radically enhanced by modern technology. Implementing an effective MMM strategy with Meridian means using a classic approach that's aged like fine wine and is now more powerful and relevant than ever.

Whether you're considering a fully in-house approach with Meridian or a hybrid model, it's essential to understand the resource requirements. Most teams will need a data scientist to help them get the most out of Meridian, or work with a third-party partner, for example.

Google is here to help. Our goal is to empower your teams to take meaningful action, driving truly robust, actionable, and measurable marketing results.

Ready to learn how Meridian can transform your marketing measurement? Download our comprehensive playbook¹² to find out more and start seeing more measurement success today.

The path to growth governance

Moving from reactive reporting to active growth engineering requires a strategic shift in how brands and agencies collaborate and how marketing aligns with finance. This final section provides the practical steps to get started today.

You will learn how to turn fragmented signals into proven growth by leveraging expert partnerships and building a bulletproof process that earns the trust of the C-suite.

Explore the nine essential steps Google marketing took to stop speaking the language of clicks and start speaking the language of capital allocation.

Discover how agencies are acting as essential partners to bridge the signal fog and help brands find a single source of truth through unified measurement.

Dive in

Win over your CFO: 9 steps Google Marketing took to partner with finance → [PAGE 21](#)
The agency advantage: Rethinking ROI with a single source of truth → [PAGE 23](#)

Win over your CFO: 9 steps Google Marketing took to partner with finance

by Elissa Lee, Senior Director, Media Measurement and Optimization, Google

Elissa Lee is the senior director of measurement and optimization for Google Marketing's global media. Elissa and her data science team focus on incrementality and measurement solutions to understand the impact of advertising and marketing, from reach and awareness across channels to sales and ROI. She earned her Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and doctorate degrees from Stanford and joined Google in 2011.

For many marketing leaders, discussing results feels like a defensive crouch. You present a 20% lift in “brand sentiment” as the CFO looks at their watch, mentally scanning the marketing budget for a line item to raid to cover a Q4 margin shortfall.

I've sat in enough of those rooms to know the feeling. At Google, we realized that if we wanted to stop being the piggy bank for EBITDA gaps, we had to stop speaking the language of clicks and start speaking the language of capital allocation. We don't just use a measurement strategy to get a number. We use it to build a process so bulletproof that finance stops checking our math and starts to co-author growth plans.

Here is the behind-the-curtain look at the nine steps we at Google take to strengthen marketing and finance alignment — and how other high-spend marketing and media leaders can do the same.

1. Stop throwing reports over the fence

Traditional reporting often feels like a client-service model. Marketing works in a silo for 90 days, then tosses a report over the fence to finance. We broke this cycle by partnering closely with global marketing finance. We co-author plans to hit our targets, navigating uncertainty together to drive real growth.

2. Focus on outcomes, not budgets

If you are debating about the budget, you've already conceded. Our collaborations with finance are founded on outcome-based plans, not just spend. To do this, we reframe marketing as a capital investment portfolio with risk-adjusted returns. This moves the conversation from “How much can we spend?” to “How much growth can we drive with marketing?”

3. Align on incrementality

Each party needs complete trust in the numbers. If you're still talking about which numbers are “real” or accurate, you have a systemic issue. We advocate for pre approved tools, like our open-source marketing mix model Meridian with experimental priors, to create a shared foundation of truth.

4. Frame AI as efficiency, not innovation

CFOs are naturally skeptical of shiny objects. Instead of pitching AI as an abstract innovation, we frame AI-powered tools as mechanisms for improved decision making, cost transformation and operational efficiency. By showing how building data strength makes growth more predictable and accountable, AI becomes a tool for governance.

5. Focus on a ‘sweet spot’

Volume for the sake of volume rarely works for us. Instead, we use lifetime value curves to identify the zone where acquisition costs and net profit intersect. This creates a “sweet spot,” allowing us to pivot strategically and choose between long-term value or maximizing short-term cash based on the macro environment.

6. Prioritize always-on experimentation

Stop asking for test budgets on a case-by-case basis. By aligning on an annual incrementality plan at the start of the year, finance is in the boat with us from Day One

7. Be brave enough to share lower numbers

The blended ROAS trap is tempting, because it makes your numbers look massive. But finance sees right through it. We prioritize incremental and marginal views, even if the reported numbers look lower than traditional attribution. Accuracy builds the trust you need to survive a transition, whereas vanity metrics only erode it. It also allows for optimization to higher performing strategies and channels and clear reinvestment cases.

8. Stress-test your windows

Measurement is only useful if it changes your behavior. We recently used conversion lift studies to prove that the vast majority of incremental conversions happened within days of a click, not weeks. We immediately used that data to shift our windows and cut out the noise, proving to finance that we are disciplined enough to self-correct.

9. Prove and scale through pilots

Not every media buy is a guaranteed win, and we don't pretend it is. We start with focused pilots, agreeing on specific testing windows and incrementality plans up front to ensure the data is well powered. This gives finance the confidence to fund the initial learning phase without demanding immediate efficiency, providing a clear road map to scale once success is proven.

The path forward: Growth governance

The ultimate goal of this partnership isn't just a bigger budget; it's what Gaurav Bhaya called "growth governance" in his recent interview with Joshua Spanier. It's the discipline of managing marketing like an investment portfolio — bets sized with intent, guided by evidence, and calibrated over time.

When marketing leaders stop treating measurement like a defensive report card and start using it as an offensive engine, they change the fundamental chemistry of the C-suite. By aligning with finance on causality and capital, CMOs can earn a reputation as growth experts and drivers. People who can accurately predict future returns based on smart investing.

The agency advantage: Rethinking ROI with a single source of truth

by Think with Google Editorial Team

In an era of the super-empowered consumer, the path from discovery to purchase has never been more fluid. For modern marketers, this shift has turned the traditional Monday morning reporting session into a complex puzzle. With fragmented signals across searching, streaming, scrolling, and shopping, brands face an attribution paradox. Every platform claims credit for the same sale, but those claims rarely match the actual revenue in the bank.

Agencies are 35% more advanced than advertisers across key marketing use cases, including measurement.

To solve this, the industry is moving past vanity metrics toward the science of demand, decoding the real drivers of behavior through high-quality data and scientific proof. Agencies are essential partners in this journey. Data shows that agencies are 35% more advanced than advertisers across key marketing use cases,¹³ including measurement. By working side by side with brands to connect fragmented signals, agencies can help rethink measurement ROI with a single source of truth in three key ways: building data strength, fostering a culture of experimentation, and achieving unified measurement.

1. Building data strength

High-performance AI requires high-quality information. If the data fed into the system is disconnected, the results will be too. Agencies can partner with brands to move away from messy data by building a unified intelligence layer. By implementing tools like Google tag gateway (GTG),

they connect online actions to real-world results, like customer relationship management (CRM) data or store visits. This clears the signal fog and can lead to an average observed conversion uplift of 14%.¹⁴

Forward-thinking partnerships are moving beyond basic setup to building durable data pipelines that protect a brand's ability to measure performance in a privacy-first world.

- **TRKKN:** Faced with data collection gaps due to privacy restrictions, online travel agency DoYouSpain partnered with TRKKN to implement GTG via server-side Google Tag Manager. This technical collaboration streamlined its tagging infrastructure and allowed the brand to observe 11.7% more conversions in Google Ads.
- **Kepler:** Data gaps often create a “growth tax” — budget wasted because AI tools cannot see the full customer journey. Kepler resolved this for a U.S. B2B software client by integrating the Kepler Intelligence Platform with Meridian, Google's marketing mix model (MMM), ensuring every data point was standardized for AI. The cross-channel results from the model turned guesswork into statistical certainty for every dollar spent, driving an 8% increase in conversions from the previous year.

2. Encouraging experimentation

Data shows what happened, but brands need to know why. Agencies bridge this gap by proving which marketing actions drive new, incremental value. They work with clients to design scientific tests like geography-based testing to isolate real sales lift. They also use signals like attributed brand searches to show how brand awareness today creates customer intent tomorrow.

By treating the media plan as a continuous laboratory, brands and agencies can move past last-click credit and focus on the strategies that generate real demand.

- **Jellyfish:** Marketing efficiency often plateaus when a brand overinvests in any one media channel, that is ads shown to people already looking for them. Using its Now-Next-Soon platform powered by the Meridian modeling framework, Jellyfish diagnosed exactly where spending had hit diminishing returns. By reallocating that budget into new growth drivers and verifying the path through geo-lift experiments, the agency delivered a 34% lift in return on ad spend (ROAS) and doubled its client's reach.
- **Dentsu:** Last-click reporting often creates an attribution paradox for Display, suggesting minimal value and reinforcing doubts about investment. To bridge this gap, Dentsu designed a geography-based incrementality test in the U.K., balancing regions with CRM and behavioral data. This strategy drove a 5.5% revenue uplift and approximately 9X ROAS for a leading retail client. By reconciling these results with the brand's MMM, they aligned two independent sources of truth, providing the statistical certainty to continue investing in Display as a proven driver of incremental growth.

3. Unifying measurement

Individual experiments explain the “why” behind a sale, but, to manage an entire business, these insights must come together as one unified strategy. This is how agencies solve the friction of conflicting platform reports. By using open-source frameworks like Meridian, they can reconcile disparate models into a single, verified source of truth.

Rather than looking at each channel in a vacuum, agencies build holistic frameworks with their clients to reveal what is truly driving profit.

- **Power Digital:** Power Digital worked closely with a brand to get a clear read on why its performance had stagnated and to understand the true impact of media. Leadership was ready to overhaul how media was measured, bought, and optimized. Power Digital led a several month transformation, building a custom MMM based on Google's Meridian, developing a strategic testing road map, and implementing rigorous incrementality experiments. Armed with clear insights, the brand reallocated its budget toward high-impact tactics, resulting in a significant lift in incremental marketing revenue and a double-digit-percent increase in total YOY revenue.
- **Hakuhodo DY Group:** To help brands reconcile disparate data into a unified strategy, Hakuhodo DY Group executed a vertical launch of Google's

Meridian across APAC. By integrating Meridian into its analytics agent as a service platform, it enhanced reporting consistency and shifted measurement to dynamic ROI simulations. The agency applied this across clients. For a beverage manufacturer, optimal frequency analysis across YouTube TV suggested approximately 10% ROI improvement. For a health-food brand, offline-to-digital reallocation could achieve a 6% to 11% order increase and 5% to 10% cost per acquisition improvement.

- **Level Agency:** To help brands align all signals into a single source of truth, Level Agency developed Level Signal, a tool that couples Google Cloud with predictive search signals. By moving beyond static reporting toward active future navigation, it achieved a 48% increase in applications for a client, while simultaneously reducing the cost per application by 30%.

The new standard of agency partnership

Moving from reactive reporting to active growth requires a strategic shift in how brands and agencies collaborate. To gauge your partner's readiness, ask these three questions today.

Explore these questions and more to dive deeper into vetting your measurement strategy. To find an agency partner to help you implement these next-generation methodologies, you can find qualified experts through the Google Partners directory.

3 key measurement questions to ask your agency today

Solving for signal fog: Are we moving to first-party solutions like GTG to give our AI the highest quality data?

Isolating true lift: Are we using scientific geography-based testing to prove which investments drive real incremental growth?

Reconciling reports: Do we have a process to settle double-counting via transparent frameworks like Meridian?

Turn your measurement strategy into a competitive advantage

The era of AI offers a clear path to victory for those who clear the foggy windshield of legacy measurement practices. By applying the science of demand, you can evolve from counting surface-level vanity metrics to driving engineered business outcomes. Here's a recap of how you should take action today.

1

Audit your data signals.

Build high-fidelity data foundations that bypass browser degradation using [Google Tag Gateway](#), [enhanced conversions for leads](#), and [Data Manager](#).

2

Prove your impact.

Use [incrementality experiments](#) and [branded Search data](#) to reveal the hidden ROI of demand.

3

Answer complicated questions.

Use Google's open-source marketing mix model [Meridian](#) to create a single source of truth that earns the trust of the CFO and the board.

4

Align with finance.

Stop the "methodology food fights" by using shared tools like Meridian to co-author growth plans with your CFO.

5

Partner for velocity.

Partner with agency experts to turn fragmented signals into a single, verified source of truth.

Continue your learning journey

For more product guidance, educational events, and certification opportunities, explore [Accelerate with Google](#).

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