

Agentic Marketing and the Collapse of Traditional Funnels

Unlocking Speed, Scale, and Conversion
Across Every Stage of the Marketing Funnel



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Introduction: The Death of the Traditional Marketing Funnel

The marketing funnel, long the cornerstone of demand generation and sales strategy, is fundamentally broken. Designed for a slower, linear, human-led buyer journey, it relies on gated interactions, delayed handoffs, and manual follow-up—none of which align with the speed or expectations of modern buyers. Most inbound leads are never worked or are engaged far too late. Opportunities slip through the cracks, marketing loses visibility after the handoff, and revenue potential is left unrealized.

Despite advances in content, automation, and analytics, the core mechanics of the funnel have not evolved to meet today's business velocity. Sales Development Representatives (SDRs) struggle with bandwidth and inconsistent follow-up. Lead scoring remains a blunt instrument, often prioritizing the wrong prospects while allowing high-value leads to go cold. Marketing operates in the dark once a lead is passed to sales, unable to track progress or influence engagement. The impact is clear: pipeline efficiency suffers, and the gap between marketing-driven interest and sales-ready opportunities continues to widen.

The Emergence of Agentic Marketing

Enter Agentic Marketing—a transformative approach powered by AI agents that are not mere chatbots or passive automation tools, but intelligent, integrated systems capable of engaging, qualifying, and converting leads at scale.

These agents are designed to replace manual gating, accelerate speed-to-lead, and ensure no valuable prospect falls through the cracks. Unlike traditional handoffs, Agentic Marketing operates across every touchpoint—web forms, events, emails, and webinars—to deliver real-time, personalized engagement with zero lag.

This isn't just a shift in technology; it's a re-architecture of the entire marketing funnel. By eliminating delays, reducing human error, and providing full funnel visibility, Agentic Marketing enables a higher volume of qualified meetings, faster pipeline velocity, and stronger alignment between marketing and sales.

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Why the Funnel is Broken

The traditional marketing funnel, once a reliable architecture for guiding leads from awareness to conversion, is now showing deep structural flaws.

Designed for an era where buyers moved linearly through gated steps, it fails to account for the fluid, multi-touchpoint journey of the modern buyer.

Today's prospects research independently, engage across multiple channels, and expect instant responses.

Core problems include:

01

Lead Leakage: Up to 80% of inbound leads are never worked or engaged with.

02

Delayed Follow-Up: The average follow-up time for inbound leads is over 24 hours—an eternity in digital-first buying cycles.

03

SDR Cost, Capacity, Speed, Turnover and Bandwidth: SDRs can be expensive, hard to train, and are often stretched thin, leading to inconsistent follow-up and poor coverage.

04

Misaligned Handoffs: Marketing hands leads to sales, but the gap in expectations and execution creates friction and missed opportunities.

05

Visibility Blackout: Marketing loses visibility into lead status after handoff, making ROI attribution nearly impossible.

These challenges illustrate that the funnel is not just inefficient—it's actively costing companies revenue and growth opportunities. The solution lies in a complete rethinking of how leads are engaged, qualified, and converted in real-time, without manual gating and delay.

Agentic Marketing offers a breakthrough solution.

What is Agentic Marketing?

Agentic Marketing represents a fundamental shift in how leads are managed and engaged throughout the marketing funnel. Unlike traditional lead generation, which relies on manual follow-ups, SDR availability, and fragmented touchpoints, Agentic Marketing employs AI-powered agents to engage, qualify, and convert leads in real time—without human delay.

Key Characteristics of Agentic Marketing:



24/7 Follow-Up:

AI agents provide real-time engagement across time zones, ensuring no lead goes unworked.



Context-Aware Interactions:

Understands everything about every buyer—prior interactions, preferences, and firmographics.



Conversational Engagement:

Seamlessly interacts with prospects through chat, email, and form follow-up.



Learning & Optimization:

Continuously adapts based on data ingested, optimizing engagement strategies over time.



Integrated Systems Awareness:

AI agents connect with CRM, marketing automation, and website behavior to drive contextual conversations.



Team Augmentation:

Operates like a manager of multiple agents, executing the work of inbound and outbound SDRs at scale.



Intent Recognition:

Detects buyer signals from site visits, event attendance, and email clicks to prioritize follow-up.



Segment-Specific Personalization:

Customizes conversations based on product lines, regions, or business units for higher relevance.; it fundamentally redefines the structure of the marketing funnel. Traditionally rigid stages become dynamic, always-on points of interaction, ensuring engagement at the right moment with greater precision. This shift accelerates the buyer journey, increases conversion rates, and delivers a more consistent, predictable pipeline.

The Agentic Marketing Funnel

Stage	Old Funnel	Agentic Funnel
Attract	Ads, SEO, content	Same tactics, but smarter segmentation
Capture	Gated content, form fills	Any signal (web, email, social, events)
Engage	Lead scoring SDR reviews	AI agent personalizes in real-time, books instantly
Convert	AE books meeting, eventually	Reps work higher-quality meetings
Optimize	Slow, manual	Agents continuously learn and improve

What Can Agentic Marketing Do?

Content Generation: write blog posts, email, ad, and web copy; test headlines and CTAs; produce digital content

Inbound: attract and convert demand by surfacing high-intent topics, optimizing SEO, and auto-recommending content offers based on visitor behavior and search signals

Outbound: write outbound copy from firmographic and behavioral data, create multi-step logic trees, adjust cadence based on engagement

Campaign Execution: draft briefs from goals and personas, schedule multi-channel rollouts, adjust based on early performance

Personalization: customize web, chat, and email experiences by persona, adapt tone and CTA in real time, serve one-to-one offers based on signals

Orchestration: trigger nurture and handoffs, route between teams, recommend journey next steps

GTM Intelligence: summarize GTM data, analyze digital patterns, propose segment strategies

MOPs Automation: integrate GTM cross-system workflows, automate and enrich key data sources, implement lead scoring or routing rules

Performance Analysis: auto-generate campaign, segment, and channel summaries; detect anomalies and gaps; recommend budget or creative optimizations

The Path to Agentic Marketing

The journey to adopting Agentic Marketing follows a maturity model that enables progressive scalability and integration:

Stage 1: Crawl – Reactive Marketing

At this stage, marketing and sales are operating with mostly manual processes. Marketing generates leads, but follow-up is inconsistent and often delayed. SDRs (usually reporting to sales) are responsible for qualifying and engaging those leads.

Characteristics:

- Basic lead capture (e.g., website forms)
- Manual routing to SDRs
- Limited marketing visibility after lead handoff
- Long lead response times
- Many leads fall through the cracks

Key Limitation: Low pipeline efficiency due to poor follow-up and lack of coordination.

Stage 2: Walk – Automated Inbound

Here, the team has adopted marketing automation and begun to operationalize inbound processes. Leads are scored and routed based on defined MQL criteria, but SDRs still handle most follow-up manually.

Characteristics:

- Use of a marketing automation platform (e.g., HubSpot, Marketo)
- Defined ICP and MQL scoring
- Automated email nurtures and routing rules
- Partial CRM and MAP integration
- Follow-up still dependent on human SDRs

Key Limitation: Lead engagement is still slow and inconsistent. Valuable leads may still be ignored, especially if they don't meet arbitrary score thresholds.

The Path to Agentic Marketing

Stage 3: Run – Agentic Assist

The marketing team begins to bring AI agents into the funnel. An AI SDR agent is deployed to engage qualified inbound leads, usually starting with high-intent sources like the website, webinars, or events. The AI handles initial outreach and qualification, while SDRs focus on more complex interactions.

Characteristics:

- AI SDR agents handle first-touch engagement for select inbound leads
- AI works across web chat and email
- CRM-aware follow-up with contextual routing
- Human SDRs still handle some handoffs or exceptions
- Marketing begins to reclaim ownership of the funnel

Key Limitation: Still in early adoption—AI covers only part of the funnel. Not all use cases are automated or integrated.

Stage 4: Fly – Fully Agentic Funnel

In this mature stage, the AI SDR agent is responsible for engaging all ICP-aligned inbound leads across all marketing channels. Follow-up is intelligent, instant, and always-on. Marketing owns the full funnel, and new roles emerge to manage and optimize agentic workflows.

Characteristics:

- AI SDR agents work 100% of inbound ICP leads in real time
- Fully integrated across CRM, MAP, ABM, and sales engagement tools
- Event leads, email clicks, and website visitors are all worked automatically
- AI agent managers are responsible for performance tuning
- Marketing gains full control over pipeline efficiency

Key Limitation: None within inbound. At this point, the organization can explore agentic models for outbound or post-sale workflows as next steps.

Cheat Sheet:

The Path to Agentic Marketing

Category	Crawl	Walk	Run	Fly
Qualification	None	Point-based lead scoring	AI agent qualification on select use cases	AI agents on all use cases
Lead Follow Up	Manual by SDRs	Automated workflows	AI-assisted	Fully AI-driven
Response Time	Hours to days	<24 hours	Seconds–minutes	“Instant, 24/7”
Cost Per Engagement	High	High	Medium	Low
Marketing Impact	Low	Medium	High	Fully-realized
AI Agent Usage	None	N/A	Select inbound use cases	All marketing use cases
Lead Coverage	~20–30%	~50–70%	~90%	~100%
Tech Stack Integration	Basic (CRM only)	CRM + MAP	CRM + MAP + chat	CRM + MAP + ABM + sales engagement
Risk	Low knowledge	Scaling training	High turnover	Misalignment with strategy
Scalability	Low	Medium	High	Unlimited

Strategic Use Cases for Agentic AI

Inbound Use Cases (Traditional Funnel Entry Points)

The agentic funnel is not a bolt-on tool for inbound—it's a new engagement system that extends across the full marketing journey, touching both new and existing contacts, across multiple channels, with unmatched speed and consistency.

Demo Requests: Instant engagement and meeting booking without waiting on SDR availability

Web Form Fills: Real-time qualification and contextual follow-up via chat, email, or SMS

Email Clicks and Replies: Intelligent re-engagement flows triggered by behavioral signals

Webinar Registrants and Attendees: Follow-up conversations referencing questions asked or content viewed

Content Downloads: Personalized outreach that reflects the topic or asset downloaded

Website Visitors: Live chat agents engage based on firmographic or behavioral fit (e.g., ICP detection)

Marketing Use Cases Beyond Inbound

Event Engagement: Pre-event, Automated follow-up for badge scans or session attendance, including tailored messaging based on session interest

Social Campaigns: Activation of leads who engage with paid or organic posts (clicks, comments, form fills)

Advertising Campaigns: Engagement with ad responders who don't convert onsite, using first-party data or retargeting triggers

Blog and Resource Center Visitors: Proactive chat or follow-up when high-value content is consumed

Recycled and Stale Leads in CRM/wake the dead: Re-engagement campaigns where agents initiate outreach to dormant but qualified leads

Customer Marketing: Expansion plays by engaging users who express interest in new features, upgrades, or add-ons

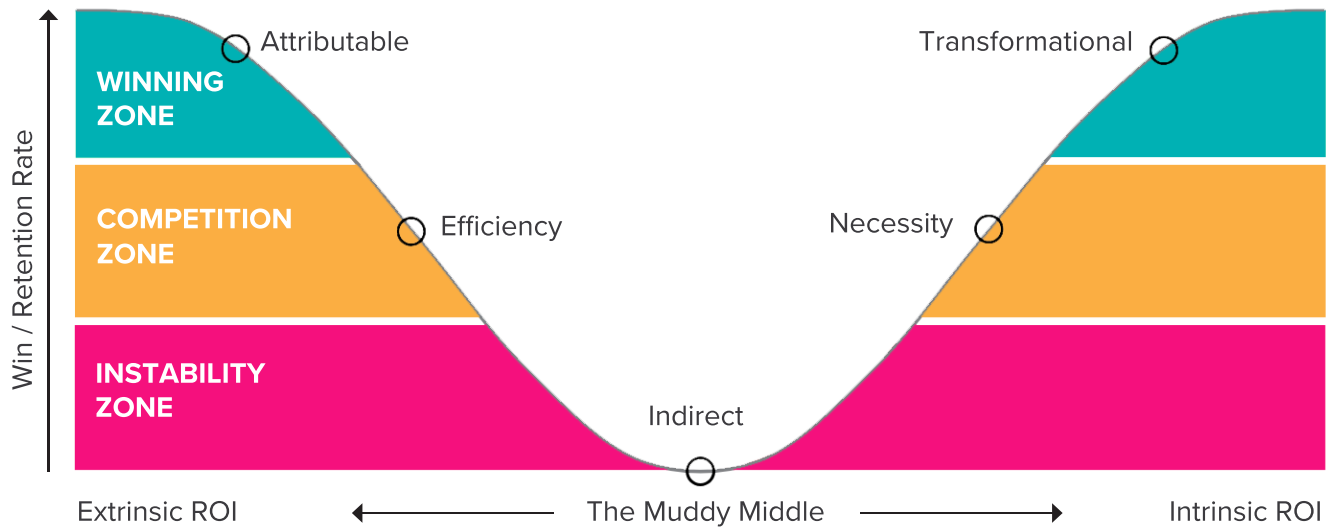
Direct Mail or Offline Triggers: QR or URL-driven agent engagement to bridge the gap between physical and digital campaigns

Account-Based Campaigns (ABM): AI agents execute personalized outreach at the account level, tracking buying signals across contacts

The ROI of Agentic Marketing

We have identified five clear types of ROI. CMOs need to understand how to evaluate ROI when considering various products, or perhaps when making the case for why a new tool is needed to a CFO or CEO.

Agentic Marketing delivers value across all five dimensions of ROI:



- 01 **Attributable ROI:** Direct revenue impact tracked back to Agentic Funnel activities—immediate follow-up, contextual conversations, and seamless handoffs.
- 02 **Transformational ROI:** Reshapes how marketing and sales collaborate, fundamentally changing how leads are engaged and converted.
- 03 **Efficiency ROI:** Removes bottlenecks, shortens time-to-lead, and maximizes SDR and AE productivity without additional headcount.
- 04 **Necessity ROI:** Becomes a critical function for real-time engagement in high-velocity markets where manual follow-up is too slow.
- 05 **Indirect ROI:** Boosts brand perception, increases buyer trust through immediate engagement, and reduces lead decay.

The ROI of Agentic Marketing: Real-World Success Stories



1. The Transformation of Demandbase's Inbound Pipeline

Demandbase, a leader in account-based GTM strategies, needed to optimize its website for high-quality lead generation. After struggling with subpar lead quality and inefficient SDR workflows.

With agentic AI, Demandbase achieved:

- 2× increase in pipeline sourced.
- 2× increase in meetings booked from target accounts.
- 100+ hours saved per month for SDRs.
- \$80,000 saved in headcount costs.



2. The Acceleration of Greenhouse's Lead Conversion

Greenhouse, a leading hiring software company, needed to improve inbound lead conversion and pipeline growth.

Agentic AI created:

- 91% increase in meetings booked.
- \$4.2M pipeline influenced.
- 130% QoQ increase in meetings booked.
- 60% conversion rate on inbound chats, tripling human SDR performance.



3. Streamlining High Volume Inbound for Crunchbase

Crunchbase, a leading prospecting data platform, previously relied on their lean SDR team to handle an extremely high volume of inbound leads.

With Agentic AI, Crunchbase transformed their marketing funnel and scaled their SDR team capacity:

- 67,000 conversations handled by their AI SDR Agent
- 3X increase in meetings booked
- 2X increase in MQLs (leads) generated

Are You Ready for the Agentic Marketing Funnel?

FUNNEL VISIBILITY AND OWNERSHIP

Do you currently generate a consistent volume of marketing leads?	Yes/No
Do you have a clear ICP and know which leads to prioritize?	Yes/No
Does your marketing team feel frustrated by a lack of control once leads are handed to sales?	Yes/No
Are leads sometimes ignored or delayed?	Yes/No

PROCESS MATURITY

Do you already have a working CRM and MAP?	Yes/No
Do you have basic automation workflows in place (e.g., lead capture, routing)?	Yes/No
Do you have visibility into how long it takes to respond to new inbound leads?	Yes/No

ROI FOCUS

Are you under pressure to improve pipeline efficiency without increasing headcount?	Yes/No
Would it be valuable to get more pipeline out of your existing programs (events, paid ads, webinars)?	Yes/No
Do you struggle to prove the ROI of your marketing spend because leads get dropped or delayed?	Yes/No
Are leads sometimes ignored or delayed?	Yes/No

OPENNESS TO INNOVATION

Are you open to replacing or augmenting human SDRs with AI agents, especially for initial follow-up?	Yes/No
Is your team already using or experimenting with AI tools in other areas of the business?	Yes/No
Would a 24/7, always-on SDR that works every lead help you scale without burning out your team?	Yes/No

Next Steps

Agentic Marketing isn't just a futuristic idea—it's a present-day lever for growth, efficiency, and strategic advantage. This section offers a clear starting point for organizations ready to modernize their funnel architecture.

1. Start With a Funnel Audit

Before deploying AI agents, organizations should assess the performance of their current funnel.

Key areas to evaluate:

Speed-to-Lead: How long does it take to respond to form fills, demo requests, and other inbound signals?

Lead Coverage: What percentage of marketing-qualified leads are actually followed up on?

Conversion Drop-off: Where do most leads stall—between capture and contact, contact and qualification, or qualification and meeting?

Sales Handoff: How consistent is the experience when leads move from marketing to sales? Are leads getting ignored, delayed, or mishandled?

Marketing Visibility: Does your marketing team know what happens after a lead is passed to sales? Can they measure impact beyond MQLs?

The audit should help identify where the funnel is leaking value—and where an AI agent could plug the gaps most effectively.

2. Define an Agentic Pilot

Once audit insights are clear, choose one or two segments of the funnel to pilot with an AI agent. Prioritize areas where delays, drop-off, or bandwidth issues are costing you pipeline.

Recommended Pilot Use Cases:

Website Engagement: Use AI agents to engage site visitors in real time, qualify them, and book meetings instantly.

Webinar Follow-Up: Automate personalized outreach to registrants or attendees with contextual references to their activity or questions.

Email Click Engagement: Deploy agents to follow up with leads who click on key campaign links but don't convert.

Set clear KPIs for your pilot (e.g., time to first touch, lead coverage rate, meetings booked, conversion to pipeline), and monitor results over a 30–60 day period.

3. Evaluate, Iterate, and Expand

After a successful pilot:

Expand into additional funnel touchpoints (e.g., events, ad campaigns, content downloads).

Integrate with your CRM and marketing automation systems for real-time intelligence.

Begin to replace manual SDR follow-up in areas where the agent consistently outperforms.

The goal isn't to rip and replace—it's to layer in AI where it drives the most value.



Conclusion

The traditional funnel is outdated. Waiting days for follow-up, relying on manual lead scoring, and hoping SDRs will engage every lead is a model that no longer scales. Agentic Marketing is not a tactic—it's a new system of engagement, purpose-built for modern buyers and modern teams.

The companies that move first will gain the most: more pipeline, less waste, better buyer experiences, and greater control over growth. Now is the time to audit, pilot, and evolve.

ABOUT GTM PARTNERS

GTM Partners, a data-driven Go-to-Market Analyst firm, helps organizations achieve efficient growth by transforming their GTM strategy. We work with high-growth companies to help them unify their GTM teams and to provide them with lasting strategies and frameworks. GTM Partners, with a mission to make Go-to-Market simple, aims to be the voice of the industry for all things GTM.

We do this by offering:

1. Data and benchmarks collected from data providers, including G2 and Bombora, as well as our community of the world's fastest-growing companies.
2. Research, best practices and design frameworks to provide guidance on the best-in-class approaches to strategizing, executing and tooling your Go-to-Market approach.
3. Personalized advice and support from experienced leaders and practitioners that help you address business challenges in a manner that is authentic and specific to you. Our consulting work focuses on areas such as Go-to-Market strategy, creating a Point of View and Go-to-Market project execution strategy across the 8 pillars of GTM.
4. Events and networking with industry leaders looking to define the category of Go-to-Market and revolutionize the way we create value for our organizations.

THE ANALYSTS



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Bryan is a SaaS pioneer and thought leader in the marketing and sales tech industry. He has both created and brought to market innovative software products and ideas while helping thousands of companies in their effort to grow revenue more efficiently. Bryan is a co-founder with multiple exits (Vtrenz), has led strategy teams in Fortune 100 Companies (IBM) and has helped multiple organizations scale their products and Go-to-Market approaches from point solutions to platforms (Silverpop, Terminus).



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Sarah brings more than 20 years of experience of B2B marketing and sales leadership to her role as a GTM analyst. She's worked in technology, nonprofit, government, and higher education, with a specialty in B2B SaaS. She excels at taking the skills and experience she developed working with Fortune 500's and billion-dollar companies and helping startups and scaleups apply those lessons in practical, agile ways. Sarah specializes in combining strategic and tactical approaches for maximum impact.



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Sangram is a three-time best-selling author and co-founder of several organizations, including Terminus, The Peak Community and most recently, GTM Partners. Sangram has been at the forefront of B2B marketing trends, the Flip-myFunnel movement, and defining the Account-Based Marketing category ushering in a new generation of marketers. He has previously held CMO roles at Pardot, a Salesforce company and Terminus.