

Think Tank Summaries

July 23-24, 2026

AEO/GEO Optimization

Key Takeaways:

- **AEO measurement is still evolving**
There is no clear industry standard for measuring Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) performance, and organizations are actively testing approaches and tools.
- **Machine discovery is becoming increasingly important**
Brands should intentionally track and understand bot traffic, as AI systems and search agents play a growing role in how content is found and surfaced.
- **LLMs are emerging as key discovery channels**
AI-powered experiences are influencing how people discover products and information, though the path from discovery to purchase is still taking shape across fragmented customer journeys.

AI and Organizational Change Management

Key Takeaways:

- **Automation and Quality**

While AI can accelerate processes and deliverables, managing accuracy and brand guidelines at scale requires human oversight.

- **Roles and Capabilities**

While clarity and accountability are critical — particularly across business and technology — it's as important to focus on the outcome.

- **Skills and Traits**

While 87% of marketing execs say there are skill gaps with AI, natural tendencies like curiosity, collaboration, and higher-order thinking are critical.

AI-First Retail: Redesigning Leadership for the Agent- Enabled Enterprise

Key Takeaways:

- **The "Pilot Gridlock" and internal execution bottlenecks**
While generative AI technology is readily available and widely used, most enterprise initiatives remain trapped in endless proof-of-concept pilots that fail to deliver production-level impact. A significant trust gap spans the leadership ladder — CEOs struggle to see measurable return on investment, while 76% of CMOs report a lack of trust in traditional agencies to successfully deploy these tools. The true barrier to scaling is no longer content generation, but internal change management, unstructured corporate data and legacy approval matrices that stall execution speed.
- **Agentic commerce and the threat of disintermediation**
As AI agents increasingly handle product discovery, recommendations and transaction steps, retailers face a strategic crisis over customer ownership and data control. Industry leaders from major brands expressed deep concern that dominant LLM platforms will disassociate consumers from brands, reducing legacy retailers to mere back-end fulfillment centers while tech companies capture all customer insights. To counter this, brands are actively enriching their product catalogs with granular conversational data and advocating for standardized, interoperable protocols to retain control over how their products are recommended.
- **Regional and functional disparity in AI adoption**
AI execution and risk tolerance vary sharply based on geography and organizational function. Western markets like the U.S. move more cautiously due to brand preservation, legal scrutiny and traditional marketing structures, whereas regions like Latin America and China are aggressively scaling fully automated AI deployments, such as personalized generative AI influencers operating at scale. Consequently, most enterprise organizations choose to de-risk their initial deployment by starting internally — focusing on back-office operations, catalog enrichment, supply chain and asset localization — before rolling out direct-to-consumer AI experiences.

Benchmarking Agentic Commerce

Key Takeaways:

- **Agentic commerce is still in its early stages**
Most organizations are actively experimenting, with few established benchmarks or proven best practices.
- **Operating models are being redefined**
As AI agents take on more tasks, teams are reassessing roles, workflows and the skills needed to support emerging commerce experiences.
- **Adoption is progressing at different speeds**
While some organizations are accelerating AI-driven commerce initiatives, others are still evaluating governance, access and readiness, highlighting the uneven pace of market maturity.

Building an AI-Composable Tech Stack

Key Takeaways:

- **AI initiatives should start with a business problem, not a technology solution**
The strongest examples focused on growth, pricing, promotions, customer experience and operational efficiency, with IT enabling rather than leading the agenda. For retailers, the winners of this next chapter won't necessarily be the companies with the most AI. They'll be the ones that empower the business to lead the transformation — and build technology organizations capable of making it happen.
- **The AI era is shifting talent and team structures**
Organizations are moving toward smaller, cross-functional teams augmented by AI, increasing the importance of business acumen, data literacy, governance and cybersecurity expertise.
- **Governance is struggling to keep pace with adoption**
As "shadow AI" grows across organizations, companies are prioritizing guardrails and scalable architectures to capture business value without creating technology sprawl or risk.

Consumer Trends & Insights 2026 and Beyond

Key Takeaways:

- **Consumer influence is shifting across generations**
While Gen Z and Gen Alpha are redefining discovery and loyalty, near-term growth opportunities may lie with affluent older consumers as wealth transfer and evolving spending behaviors reshape the market.
- **GLP-1 adoption will drive one of the largest consumer product shifts in our lifetime**
The growing use of weight-loss medications is expected to drive broad shifts across consumer categories, creating new opportunities and challenges for brands.
- **Agentic commerce is reshaping the path to purchase**
AI-powered assistants are transforming how consumers discover, evaluate and purchase products, positioning AI as a critical new channel for brand visibility and growth.

Content Strategy of the Future

Key Takeaways:

- **The future of content strategy is still being defined**
Organizations are actively exploring how AI should support content creation, personalization and marketing execution.
- **Authenticity remains a competitive advantage**
As AI-generated content becomes more common, human-centered, relevant and trustworthy content will be increasingly important.
- **Success will come from balancing AI efficiency with human creativity**
The strongest content strategies combine the scale of AI with the insight, perspective and connection that people bring.

Evolving Roles of Executive Leaders

Key Takeaways:

- **Start with the “why”**
Successful transformation begins with a clear business purpose that aligns teams and guides decision-making.
- **Organizations must become more iterative**
AI is accelerating the pace of experimentation, requiring teams to move from linear processes to continuous testing and learning.
- **Customer ownership is becoming a shared responsibility**
As roles evolve, leading organizations are organizing around capabilities and customer outcomes rather than silos.

Implementing Agentic Commerce

Key Takeaways:

- **Agentic commerce is moving from exploration to preparation**
While most organizations are still in the pilot phase, the focus is shifting to what it will take to scale AI-driven shopping experiences.
- **Visibility in AI experiences starts with connected product data**
Ensuring product information, inventory and pricing are accessible to AI platforms is becoming a critical priority for brand discovery and commerce.
- **Trust, security and measurement remain key barriers to adoption**
Organizations are working through how to measure success, enable secure transactions and build consumer confidence in agent-assisted purchasing.

New Requirements for the Digital & Marketing Workforce

Key Takeaways:

- **Governance is becoming a prerequisite for AI adoption**
Strong data security, governance and risk management are foundational to scaling AI responsibly across the enterprise.
- **Success requires more than technology**
Organizations need clear processes and operating models to turn AI use cases into measurable business outcomes.
- **Leadership must drive AI readiness**
Executives play a critical role in building the culture, skills and change management capabilities needed to integrate AI into everyday ways of working.

Taming Transformation Monsters

Key Takeaways:

- **Winning retailers will be the best change managers**
Rapid shifts in consumer expectations, AI adoption and regulation are making continuous change a business imperative.
- **People are the key to overcoming barriers to change**
Creating space for open dialogue and shared experiences helps teams identify challenges, build alignment and accelerate transformation.
- **Many transformation challenges are shared, but solutions must be tailored**
Retailers face common obstacles, yet successful change strategies must account for each organization's unique structure, culture and goals.

The People Side of AI Ambitions: Managing Strain

Key Takeaways:

- **People, not technology, determine AI adoption**
Creating a safe environment for experimentation helps reduce fear and builds confidence in new ways of working.
- **AI works best when it amplifies human strengths**
Leading organizations are helping employees identify and apply their unique skills while using AI to increase impact and productivity.
- **Shared ownership accelerates change**
Empowering team members to lead individual aspects of transformation creates buy-in, builds capability and drives early momentum.

Translating AI Investment into Enterprise Value

Key Takeaways:

- **Retailers are still defining what AI value looks like**
Companies continue to test different approaches to innovation, measurement and scaling AI investments.
- **Supply chain and inventory management stand out as high-impact opportunities**
Many leaders see the greatest near-term business value from applying AI to forecasting, inventory optimization and operational efficiency.
- **Enterprise-wide value requires both leadership and grassroots innovation**
The most successful AI strategies balance top-down direction with bottom-up experimentation to identify and scale high-value use cases.

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