

The background features several thin, wavy green lines that sweep across the frame. Small, glowing green dots are placed at various points along these lines, creating a sense of motion and depth.

CLARITY

2030

GROWTH HAS A
REPUTATION PROBLEM
HOW MARKETING AND COMMS
CAN SOLVE IT TOGETHER

ZENO

CLARITY 2030

**ARE ORGANIZATIONS
READY FOR WHAT GROWTH
REQUIRES RIGHT NOW?**

REPUTATION AS AN UNREALIZED GROWTH DRIVER

Growth no longer happens inside a marketing funnel alone. Reputation, credibility, earned influence, executive visibility, stakeholder trust, and AI-driven discovery now shape business outcomes alongside traditional marketing. Yet many organizations continue to manage these forces through different functions. The result is a growing disconnect between the realities of growth and the structures designed to deliver it.

Our research reveals a new opportunity for CMOs and CCOs: not simply alignment, but co-ownership of growth as reputation becomes core to business strategy. The organizations that succeed will be those that can shape perception as effectively as they generate demand.

While marketing and communications were built for different eras, growth now requires them to operate as one.



THE BIG SHIFT FROM ALIGNMENT TO CO-OWNERSHIP OF GROWTH

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Zeno's ongoing research exploring the forces shaping the future of marketing, communications, reputation and business growth.

Survey of 100 senior U.S. marketing leaders | May 2026

FOR DECADES, THE DIVISION OF LABOR WAS **RELATIVELY CLEAR.**

Marketing built awareness, generated demand and drove growth, while communications protected reputation, managed stakeholders and safeguarded trust.

The lines were always imperfect, but they were clear enough for how organizations were built.

TODAY, THOSE LINES **ARE DISAPPEARING.**

Growth now requires marketing and communications to operate as one.

Alignment coordinates work. Co-ownership shares accountability for business outcomes, shaping demand and belief with reputation as a driver of growth.

5 REALITIES IMPACTING GROWTH

1 MARKETING SEES REPUTATION THROUGH A **NARROW LENS**

Marketing increasingly recognizes reputation as a growth driver. But revenue is only one downstream expression of reputation—not the entire reputational system. Communications brings a broader field of vision by integrating stakeholder intelligence, credibility, and trust into growth decisions before they're made.

82% say reputation plays a larger role in growth decisions.

56% evaluate reputation primarily through sales or revenue impact.

2 CMO MANDATES ARE EXPANDING FASTER THAN READINESS

CMOs are increasingly accountable for outcomes shaped by trust, reputation, and enterprise influence—areas they don't fully control. That creates a new opportunity for communications to become a strategic growth partner.

92% expect the CMO role to broaden or be fundamentally redefined by 2030, yet...

11% feel fully ready.

3 CROSS-FUNCTIONAL INFLUENCE IS THE **NEW GROWTH ADVANTAGE**

The next growth advantage isn't control. It's orchestration—aligning people, priorities, and decisions across organizations that were not built for today's complexity. Influence is the skill. Co-ownership is the model.

73% identify cross-functional influence as the most important capability for future leaders.

4 AI SEARCH HAS A **REPUTATION BLIND SPOT**

Brands no longer compete simply to be found. They compete to be correctly understood. Discoverability has become a reputation challenge—and communications has a central role in shaping the credibility and trust signals that influence AI interpretation.

77% say marketing owns AI discoverability.

More than half are *not* significantly concerned about AI misinterpreting their brand.

5 MARKETERS TRUST EARNED **MORE THAN THEY FUND IT**

Earned influence is becoming part of the infrastructure of credibility. The opportunity is to fund earned media as a growth capability—not simply campaign support.

83% say earned media is more influential than paid media in shaping AI-generated answers.

47% are investing in earned media to improve AI and search discoverability.

IS CO-OWNERSHIP ACHIEVABLE?

**THE DOOR IS ALREADY OPENING —
MOVING TOWARD A MODEL WHERE
MARKETING AND COMMS SHAPE
GROWTH DECISIONS TOGETHER.**

Communications is in the room, but not always
at the center of the decision.

46%

say comms is involved regularly but plays more of a
supporting role.

43%

say comms is an ongoing strategic partner.

**THE CONVERGENCE IS
NOT THEORETICAL.
IT IS ALREADY HAPPENING.**

CMOs

are moving closer to reputation,
AI interpretation, and trust.

CCOs

are moving closer to business strategy,
growth, and performance.

THE OPPORTUNITY

is to stop treating that convergence
as overlap. It should be treated as
a shared advantage.

5 MOVES TO MAKE CO-OWNERSHIP REAL

1 BUILD A SHARED GROWTH AGENDA

One narrative linking demand, reputation and business strategy.

2 EXPAND STAKEHOLDER INTELLIGENCE

Bring customer, employee, investor, media, policy and AI signals into one view.

3 CHANGE THE PLANNING RHYTHM

Bring communications into growth decisions before they harden.

4 INVEST IN EARNED AS INFRASTRUCTURE

Fund earned influence as a driver of credibility—not simply campaign support.

5 MEASURE WHAT MATTERS TOGETHER

Build a shared scorecard that measures commercial impact, belief, interpretation and risk.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION,
CONTACT:

CLARITY2030@ZENOGROUP.COM

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