



CLARITY

2030

GROWTH HAS A
REPUTATION PROBLEM

HOW MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS
CAN SOLVE IT TOGETHER

APAC RESEARCH

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 140 senior APAC marketing leaders across Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and India
August 24 - September 4, 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 RESHAPING GROWTH

1

REPUTATION IS BECOMING SHARED TERRITORY BUT INFLUENCE ISN'T

Reputation is no longer a communications issue alone. It is increasingly a business decision variable. But influence over reputation is not yet equally shared. Communications brings a broader field of vision—connecting trust, stakeholder response and business performance. Marketing often has the stronger CEO voice. Co-ownership means bringing both together.

- 90%** say reputation plays a larger role in growth decisions
- 71%** say communications manages a broader range of audiences, stakeholders and issues than marketing. **Yet...**
- 59%** say Marketing has more CEO influence on reputation-related issues

2

THE CMO MANDATE IS EXPANDING INTO SHARED TERRITORY

No single function controls all the levers of growth anymore. As the CMO mandate expands, transformation, reputation, influence and discoverability increasingly converge—creating a new opportunity for Communications to be a strategic growth partner.

WITH A GROWING FOCUS ON:

- 90%** expect the CMO role to broaden or be fundamentally redefined by 2030
- 71%** AI transformation
- 68%** Growth strategy
- 62%** Corporate reputation
- 62%** Discoverability / GEO / AEO

3

COMMS PERMISSION TO LEAD IS AHEAD OF THE OPERATING MODEL

Marketing values communications but it is not always seen as an ongoing strategic advisor. While there is a willingness to let communications lead, how the function is positioned and engaged has not fully caught up.

- 60%** highly willing to let comms/PR take the overall lead on a major campaign
- 39%** comms should shape campaign strategy from the start
- 44%** still view comms as a media relations function

4

AI SEARCH IS OPTIMIZED FOR DISCOVERY, NOT INTERPRETATION

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.

- 56%** say Marketing owns AI/search discoverability
- 66%** are investing in AI search optimization
- 50%** are *not* significantly concerned about AI misinterpreting their brand

5

CREDIBILITY MATTERS MORE BUT INVESTMENT STILL LAGS

Earned media and creators increasingly shape reach, commerce, culture and reputation. Both are becoming part of the infrastructure of credibility, yet organizations haven't caught up—earned remains underinvested, while creator strategy and risk remain siloed. The opportunity is to rethink both investment and ownership.

- 73%** say earned media is more influential than paid media in shaping AI-generated answers
- 39%** are investing in earned media to improve AI and search discoverability

CO-OWNERSHIP OF GROWTH

THE COMMS LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

THE RELATIONSHIP
SHIFTS FROM CAMPAIGN
COORDINATION TO A
SHARED OPERATION MODEL
FOR GROWTH, BELIEF AND
REPUTATION.

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 WAYS TO BUILD CO-OWNERSHIP

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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