The marketing audit: it’s a strategic tool, and it’s time to use it

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Henley Business School
AFRICA

CEMCS
Henley Africa
Centre for Emerging
Market Consumer Studies

Foreword

There is an old saying – 'if you can't beat them, join them' – that dates back to the 1930s; a time of tremendous global political and economic uncertainty. Not unlike today.

At Henley Business School Africa, we prefer our own take on this pragmatic view of adapting to change, rather than digging in your heels and resisting. Our variation goes: 'If you can't beat them, *lead* them.'

Right now, the game-changing ace in the pack is artificial intelligence (AI). From AI-supported biometric travel to automated workflows, data-driven marketing campaigns, streamlined recruitment practices, and the early detection of cancers, AI is reshaping our world in ways we are still imagining. In the months and years to come, more aspects of our lives will become interwoven by this exciting new technology, affecting – and improving – how we manage disease, how we work, and how we learn.

Higher education is not immune to this sea change. Used wisely and ethically, AI can deepen our research output, enhance how we teach, help us wade through impossibly large datasets in search of significant trends, and expand our impact beyond the classroom into the heart of Africa – and the world.

While many other institutions are reluctantly 'joining' the AI evolution, at Henley Business School Africa, we are actively and enthusiastically 'leading' Africa into the future. Rather than dragging our feet behind business leaders as they grapple with the ethical and operational complexities of AI adoption, we are right there in front, using our platform to role-model a proactive and deliberate way forward.

Our AI integration efforts span faculty opportunities and training, identifying areas where AI can be woven into our day-to-day operations, and upskilling students on safe and ethical ways to use AI as an academic tool. In addition, our popular series of white papers is undergoing an AI makeover. Specifically, we will increasingly prioritise the production of thought-provoking, AI-themed white papers and accompanying business school case studies. Penned by our faculty, these white papers will look at AI-related topics from multiple angles, considering systemic impacts and, as always, the human element.

In the months and years to come, more aspects of our lives will become interwoven by this exciting new technology, affecting – and improving – how we manage disease, how we work, and how we learn.

As you have come to expect from a Henley Business School Africa white paper, we will continue to find fresh, punchy, and unique ways to package novel concepts and share important information with busy executives, managers, and leaders in a manner that is easy to digest and accessible. We will continue to curate compelling insights that pose problems, outline the background and the context, discuss prevailing views, and share groundbreaking solutions or fresh perspectives. Only now, we will do it with a little extra help, as we incorporate the use of AI into our research ecosystem. This evolution will be in line with the overall Henley Business School Africa AI journey, which we will be meticulously documenting along the way so that, in time, we can share these learnings with other institutions in Africa and globally.

Harnessing AI as a researcher will enable us to conceptualise, research, and write white papers faster and with even more depth than was previously possible. Thanks to our wonderful team at Henley Explore, our research ecosystem is already undergoing AI enhancements that will transition their output beyond the ordinary, into something quite extraordinary.

Call it joining the club, call it leading from the front, or call it AI-enhanced insights, it is the same high-quality Henley Business School Africa perspective with just a touch of large language model pizzazz.

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White paper

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This document discusses marketing as a strategic resource for ensuring long-term competitive advantage under the resource-based view. To maximise its value, leadership must oversee marketing to the same governance and oversight as financial and operational functions. Regular marketing audits provide a structured mechanism for assessing capabilities, ensuring alignment, and driving ongoing improvement. Standardised audits enhance accountability, strengthen performance, and support sustained competitiveness in competitive markets.

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Disclaimer

NB

Aligned with our mission, 'we build the people who build the businesses that build Africa', we facilitate open, multi-perspective conversations and the generation of thought leadership pieces, such as this white paper. However, the views expressed in this white paper are held by the author and not necessarily held by Henley Business School Africa.

Abstract

This white paper examines the history of marketing audits, explores the key criticisms that have hindered their adoption, and highlights why these concerns no longer outweigh the strategic value of regular audits. By treating marketing with the same rigour as, for example, applied to finance, leadership can ensure greater accountability, stronger alignment with organisational goals, and more resilient market performance. To achieve this, companies should adopt annual marketing audits as standard practice, reinforcing marketing's role as a vital, well-managed organisational asset.

Keywords:

marketing audits; marketing performance systems; marketing accountability; marketing strategy

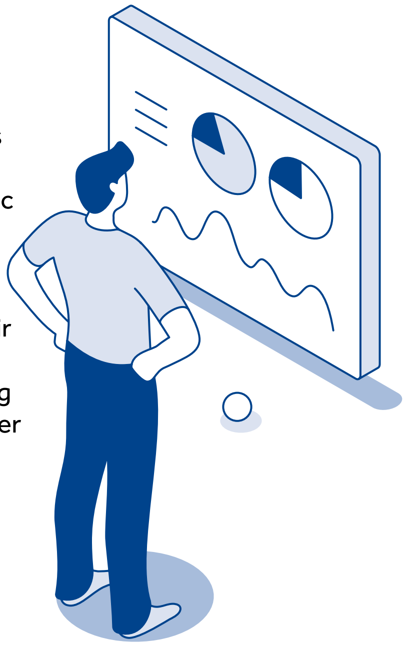

Estimated
Upscale
Revenue
25 : 1
Home
Graphs
Starred
Opportunities 2126
Leads 838
Negotiations 223
Proposal 291
Signed contracts 170
Sales department
IoT Graphicals
Business accelerator

5.

Introduction

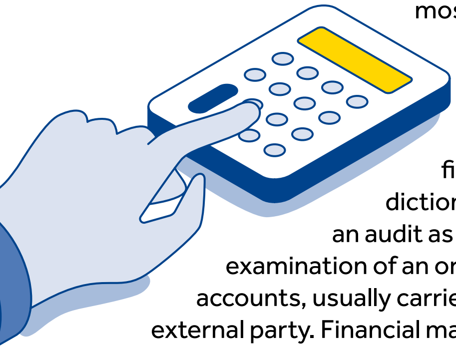
Marketing shapes customer perception, drives growth, and underpins long-term competitiveness, yet many companies still lack a structured approach to evaluating its effectiveness. Recent research from PwC (2025) reinforces this urgency. PwC's analysis of marketing in the artificial intelligence (AI) era highlights a growing tension between treating marketing as a cost centre to be optimised and recognising it as a strategic function that must 'matter more' by driving enterprise-wide value creation.

As AI-enabled tools increase data availability and decision speed, marketing functions face heightened scrutiny. In this environment, the absence of structured evaluation mechanisms amplifies strategic risk. Marketing audits do not represent a traditional control exercise, but rather a forward-looking governance tool that enables organisations to determine if their marketing capabilities support long-term competitive advantage, such as 'unlocking new growth, higher profitability and greater enterprise value' (PwC, 2025).



The status quo and beyond

One definition, different applications



The word 'audit' leads most to visualise an accountant combing through a company's financials. Many dictionaries describe an audit as a formal examination of an organisation's accounts, usually carried out by an external party. Financial managers expect and endure annual audits, yet marketing – a revenue engine and business function directly responsible for bringing in customers – rarely, if ever, gets audited.

Why exclude marketing from scrutiny?

This paper reviews the history and the criticism of marketing audits, and calls on leadership to start requesting ***annual*** marketing audits. Marketing is a critical organisational resource and should be managed accordingly, underscoring the need for regular annual marketing audits.

The potential advantages of marketing audits

Marketing audits can serve as important management control systems (MCS) (Hadrian, 2020; Martin, 2020):

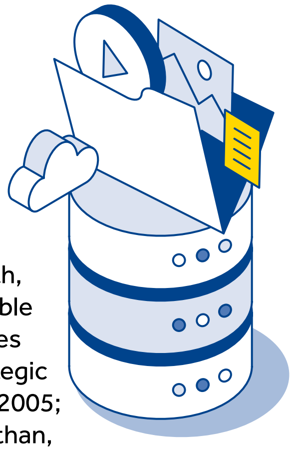
- ***Providing systematic insight into areas, such as resource utilisation*** (internal human capital and systems), brand equity, customer relationships, channel effectiveness, and market intelligence, ensuring that these intangible assets are not only preserved, but also enhanced over time.
- ***Creating organisational transparency*** by providing a clear, evidence-based reflection of how marketing resources are currently allocated and how effectively they are being used. Therefore, the benefits extend beyond compliance, ***highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of resource allocation*** as well as hidden inefficiencies.
- ***Guiding strategic decision-making***, enabling managers to reconfigure marketing capabilities dynamically to maintain competitive advantage.

Hereby, auditing serves as a governance mechanism that helps a firm manage marketing not simply as expenditure, but as a resource to be developed and leveraged for long-term value creation.

Arming managers with data, enabling them to reconfigure marketing capabilities in response to shifting market conditions, technological changes (e.g., AI integration), and evolving consumer expectations.

In this sense, auditing serves as a governance mechanism, holding a marketing team accountable for its stated objectives, while promoting agility and innovation.

Ultimately, treating marketing as a resource – rather than a mere expenditure – positions it as an asset that is linked directly to organisational growth, stakeholder trust, and sustainable competitiveness. Several studies concur that marketing is a strategic resource (Vorhies and Morgan, 2005; Nath, Nachiappan and Ramanathan, 2010; Kozlenkova, Samaha and Palmatier, 2014; Kamboj, 2015).



What does a marketing audit entail?

The origins

Having first appeared in literature in 1952, a marketing audit is not a new concept. The American Management Association published research on marketing audits in 1959. Shuchman (1959) first described it as ***a structured, objective, and comprehensive evaluation of an organisation's entire marketing activities***. It involved examining the underlying goals, strategies, and assumptions, as well as the methods, processes, personnel, and organisational structures used to implement policies and achieve marketing objectives.

In the 1960s, consulting firms began to treat marketing audits more as *a* ***service***. It was only in the 1970s that the idea of marketing audits began to penetrate management-level awareness, taking on ***a more comprehensive definition*** (Kotler, Gregor and Wagner, 1977). They refined the concept as:

> *a comprehensive systematic, independent, and periodic examination of a company's – or business unit's – marketing environment, objectives, strategies and activities with a view of determining problem areas and opportunities and recommending a plan of action to improve the company's marketing performance.*
>
> (Kotler, Gregor and Wagner, 1977, pp. 25)

According to Kotler, Gregor and Wagner (1977):

An audit entails three steps, namely:

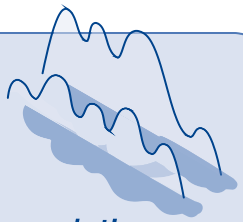
1 Agreement on objectives, scope, and approach

2 Data collection

3 Report preparation and presentation

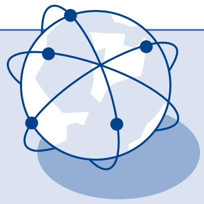
An audit, furthermore, consists of six sequential components:

1



The ***marketing environment*** audit examines both macro and micro factors that shape performance

2



A ***marketing strategy*** audit then evaluates how well an organisation's strategy aligns with environmental opportunities and threats

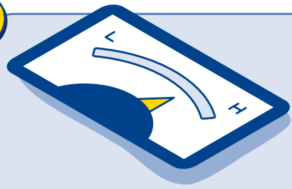
3

The ***marketing organisation*** audit considers the structure and interaction between marketing and sales teams

4

The ***marketing system*** audit reviews the procedures for gathering information, planning, and controlling activities

5



A ***marketing productivity*** audit analyses accounting data to identify profit sources and potential cost savings

6

The ***marketing function audit***, in conclusion, provides a detailed review of specific marketing activities, often informed by the findings of earlier stages

Scholarly critique worth noting

Despite clear definitions in earlier years, recent literature on marketing audits has been sparse. The few papers published in the last 25 years on marketing audits reveal that they have not been without critique. Table 1 summarises scholars' concerns, in terms of three themes: timing, application, and resources.

Critique	Insights	Authors
	Timing	
1. A marketing audit should be conducted periodically	A periodic review removes a marketing audit from MCS.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002)
2. Lack of time	Not enough time is available/devoted to conduct an marketing audit.	Denisa and Jaroslav (2013); Talla *et al.* (2024)
3. Lack of focus on long-term competitiveness	As audits typically emphasise internal processes and compliance with established objectives, they can overlook more profound strategic questions about marketing's role in driving long-term competitiveness and value creation.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002)

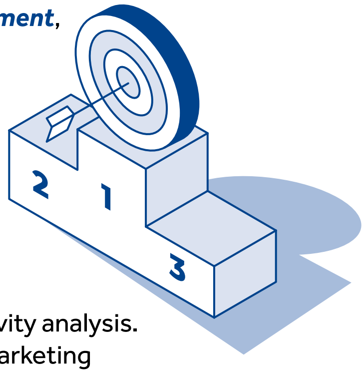
Critique	Insights	Authors
Application		
4. The universal application of a marketing audit	A marketing audit should be firm-specific, considering context, especially in a dynamic environment.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002)
5. A marketing audit is too theoretical	A marketing audit identifies problems and does not provide solutions.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002); Talla *et al.* (2024)
6. Lack of methodological soundness	A marketing audit often uses qualitative checklists, which are not empirically validated, and is not always methodologically sound.	Kotler, Gregor and Wagner (1977); Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002); da Gama (2012); Wu, Chen and Huang (2015)
7. Lack of qualified auditors to implement a marketing audit	A lack of auditors, as well as a lack of experience accompanying skills, and capabilities to implement marketing audits.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002); da Gama (2012); Denisa and Jaroslav (2013); Talla *et al.* (2024)
8. Companies' fear of change	Employees' fear of the audit results and reluctance to change in line with the recommendations.	Denisa and Jaroslav (2013); Talla *et al.* (2024)
9. Lacking the additional nuances required for service businesses	Reframe audits as knowledge-based inspection systems to better support the dynamic, knowledge-driven processes of knowledge-intensive business systems.	Bolisani and Scarso (2014)
Resources		
10. Lack of awareness of a marketing audit	Management's lack of cooperation to conduct marketing audits, due to a lack of general awareness of its value, potential contribution and benefits.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002); Denisa and Jaroslav (2013); Talla *et al.* (2024)
11. Lack of information needed to conduct a marketing audit	There is a significant lack of both available information and willingness to share it, hindering the successful initiation of the market analysis.	Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002); da Gama (2012); Denisa and Jaroslav (2013)
12. Lack of financial resources	A lack of the necessary financial resources to conduct the audit.	Denisa and Jaroslav (2013); Talla *et al.* (2024)

Table 1: Critique of marketing audits

Marketing productivity analysis

The essence...

Morgan, Clark and Gooner (2002) made an interesting conceptual contribution, specifically emphasising ***marketing performance assessment***, and distinguishing two areas of marketing performance, namely:

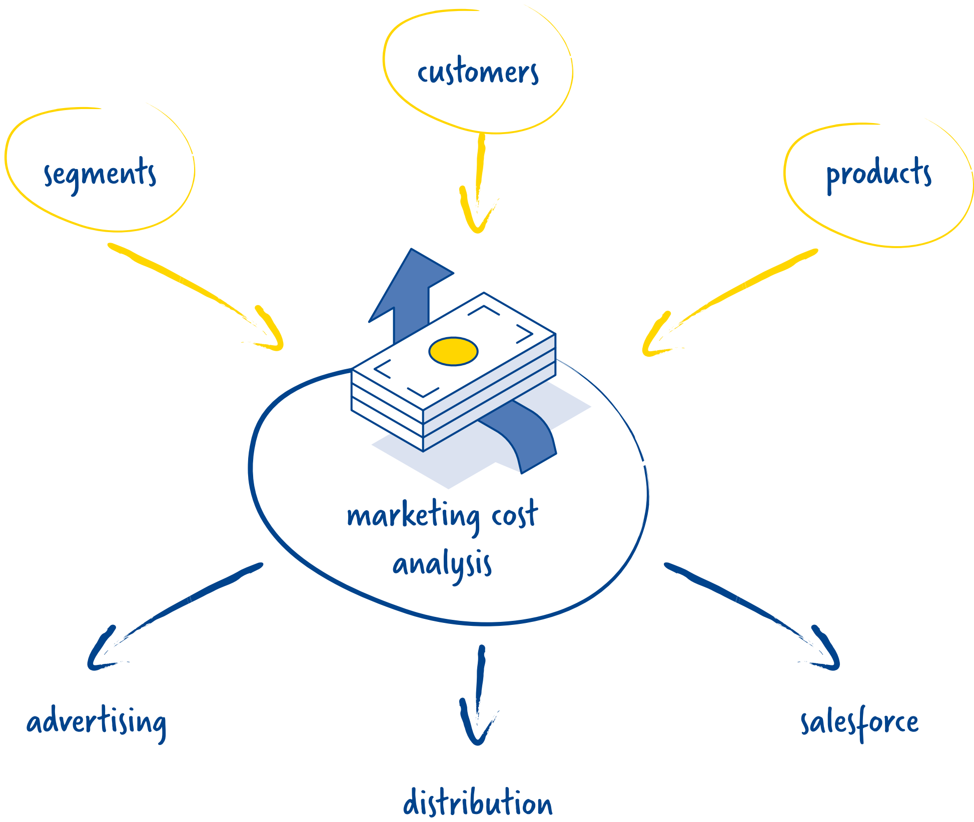


1. ***Marketing productivity analysis,*** focusing on efficiency (the optimal use and monitoring of resources); and
2. ***Marketing audits,*** focusing on effectiveness (monitoring and evaluating the desired goal or outcome).

Kotler, Gregor and Wagner's original 1977 definition refers to productivity analysis. Therefore, it also makes sense to consider the critique raised about marketing productivity analysis when contemplating marketing audits.

The origins

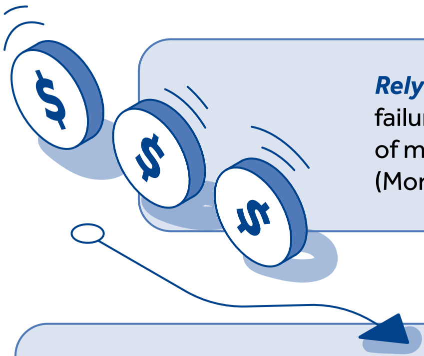
Around the same time that marketing audits emerged, there was increasing pressure on the marketing discipline to demonstrate their impact on profitability. Sevin (1965) was a pioneer in this area, being one of the first to quantify the productivity of marketing activities. He developed methods for conducting a marketing cost analysis by breaking down expenses into functions, such as advertising, distribution, and salesforce, subsequently linking these costs to profitability. This approach focused on profit contributions by segments, customers, and products, rather than simply on total sales. The insights gained from this analysis helped to identify the least profitable segments, customers, and products.



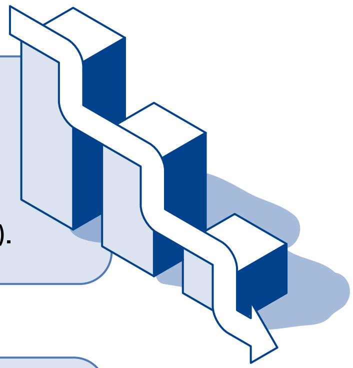
Sevin (1965) essentially defined marketing productivity as the link between marketing inputs (costs and resources) and outputs (sales, profits, and contribution margins).

Critique deserving attention

Over time, scholars have raised issues about marketing productivity analysis, suggesting:

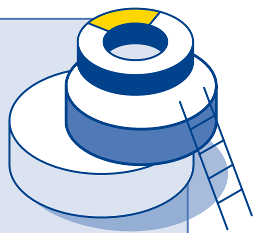


Relying too heavily on narrow financial metrics and failure to capture the broader, intangible contributions of marketing and marketing productivity analyses (Morgan, Clark and Gooner, 2002).



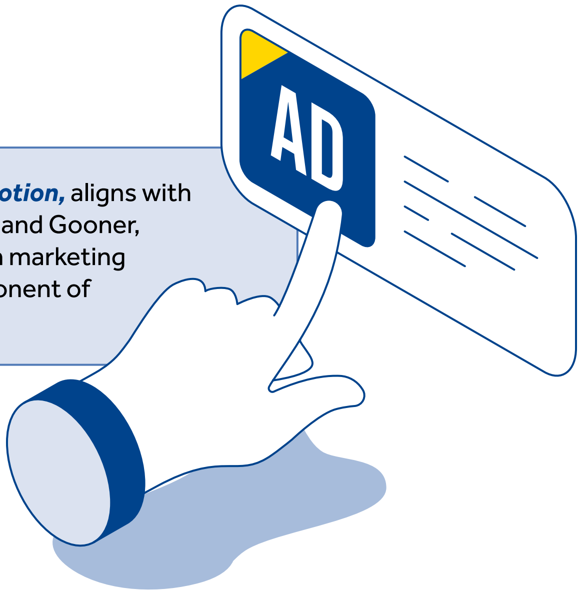
Reducing marketing's role to short-term efficiency, overlooking how marketing activities create long-term assets, including brand equity, customer relationships, and market knowledge, which build on early cost-profit approaches (Sevin, 1965; Morgan, Clark and Gooner, 2002).

Reducing marketing to only the action dimension (efficiency) (da Gama, 2012), which has become a trend in recent practice.



Solely focusing on productivity measures, implying an oversight of the external environment and strategic context, and underestimation of the interdependencies between marketing actions, firm strategy, and competitive dynamics (Morgan, Clark and Gooner, 2002).

In effect, conventional productivity analyses risk misrepresenting marketing's true value by privileging easily quantifiable outcomes over more complex, yet strategically vital performance dimensions.



Short-termism, relying on digital marketing/promotion, aligns with the notion of short-term efficiency (Morgan, Clark and Gooner, 2002; Binet and Field, 2017). While its crucial role in marketing cannot be contested, promotion is only one component of the phenomenon (Yudelson, 1999).

To explain: a simple Google Incognito search for marketing audit shows results for aspects like 'what is a marketing audit' or 'how to conduct a marketing audit', but a noticeable number of pages are indexed for what seems to be the latest trend: 'digital marketing audits'. Binet and Field (2017) argued that marketers focus too strongly on chasing sales (monitoring efficiency levels driven by promotional activities), resulting in short-term income spikes that fade quickly, while forgetting about the other aspects (product, price, and place) that are imperative to brand building.

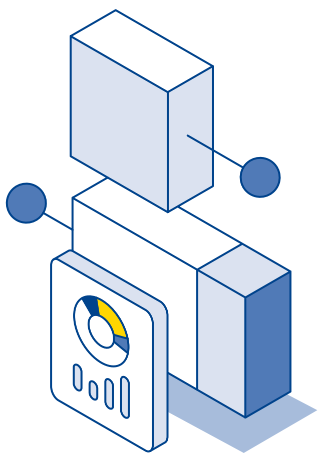
Recent developments support the prevailing critique. A recent large-scale study from the Becker Friedman Institute for Economics (He, Mostrom and Sufi, 2025) concluded performance systems that rely heavily on short-term, easily measurable metrics systematically distort managerial decision-making. Instead of optimising long-term organisational value, such systems commend behaviour that improves reported performance, while negating investment in intangible, capability-building activities. In a marketing context:

This evidence reinforces long-standing criticism that productivity-focused assessments can misrepresent marketing's true contribution by favouring short-term financial indicators over strategic outcomes, such as brand equity, customer loyalty, and network effects in demand.

Lessons learnt...

Many of the published studies on marketing audits were conducted at a time when digital marketing was less prevalent, which should be considered because digital marketing initiatives currently play a significant role in marketing (Spais, Haq and Vain, 2025).

However, the complex nature and varied media used in digital marketing likely require a separate audit and should remain integrated in the final audit results to ensure that the effectiveness of all channels is monitored.



Therefore, in summary, existing issues imply:

→ An ***over-focus on the marketing productivity analysis.*** Subsequently:

1. Intangible contributions of marketing may not be captured;
2. Short-term efficiency is overemphasised to the detriment of longer-term contributions, such as brand equity, customer relationships, and market knowledge; and
3. Reviewing the interdependencies of marketing actions with a firm's strategy and general competitive dynamics may be neglected.

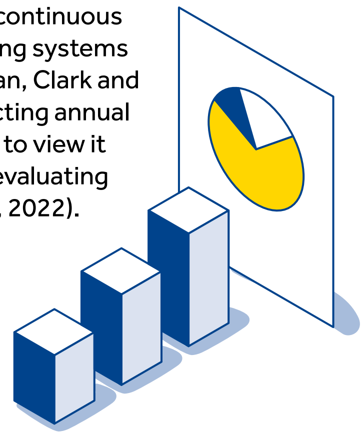
→ An ***over-reliance on monitoring the promotional aspect of marketing***, potentially restricting it to a short-term view of marketing's contribution.

→ ***Elevating digital audits*** instead of integrating them into the overall marketing effectiveness analysis.

Are marketing audits really necessary?

Taking a stand...

Recent literature on marketing audits is sparse, and existing publications mostly criticise the idea of a marketing audit. Consequently, one wonders whether marketing audits are still relevant. This paper argues in favour of marketing audits. In line with best-practice recommendations, it is proposed that businesses integrate marketing audits into continuous performance monitoring systems (Brownlie, 1993; Morgan, Clark and Gooner, 2002), conducting annual reviews and beginning to view it as a strategic tool for evaluating effectiveness (Guliyev, 2022).



Making amends first...

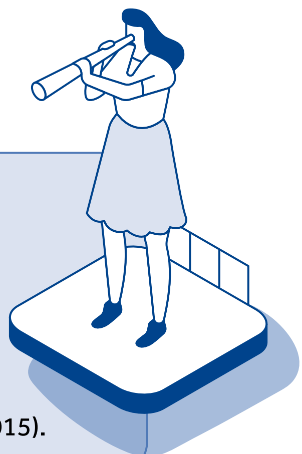
Nevertheless, several areas of concern and critique need to be addressed first. These are discussed next.

Marketers need to adopt a holistic view

As a first step, marketers need to remain cognisant of the holistic picture (i.e., all the Ps) and their long-term impact (particularly using all Ps for building brands). It is here (long term) that marketing audits can be effective, because they assess marketing effectiveness (outcomes), not just short-term activities related to efficiency (processes and activities). Marketers should avoid short-termism (often associated with a high promotional aspect focus), which marketing audits can help with.

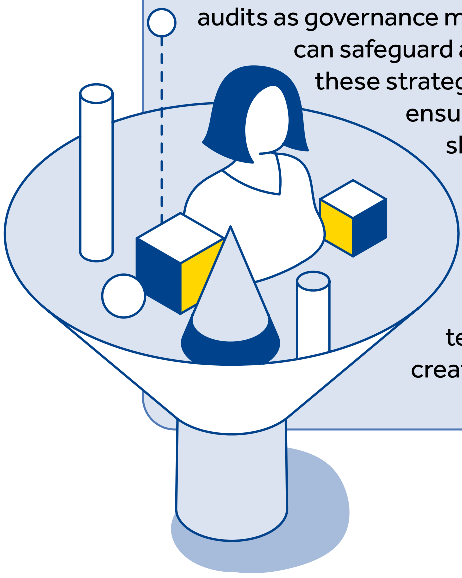
Marketing must be positioned as a strategic function

This entails a revision of existing practices:



Top management needs a new perspective, acknowledging that marketing functions are a strategic resource central to organisational success (Kozlenkova, Samaha and Palmatier, 2014; Kamboj, 2015).

From a resource-based view, marketing capabilities like brand equity, customer insight, and adaptive strategy are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, making them key sources of sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Kozlenkova, Samaha and Palmatier, 2014; Oduro and Mensah-Williams, 2023). A strong emphasis on efficiency risks eroding precisely those marketing capabilities that are difficult to imitate, such as customer insight, brand meaning, and adaptive decision-making, which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. Marketing audits as governance mechanisms can safeguard and develop these strategic assets, ensuring that short-term efficiency initiatives do not undermine long-term value creation.



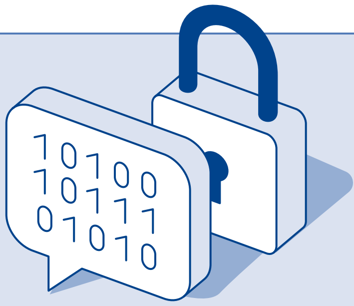
Representing a strategic hub, leaders must acknowledge that marketing integrates knowledge from across departments – research and development, operations, finance, and human resources, to name a few – translating organisational resources into market value (Morgan, 2011; Kamboj, 2015). PwC (2025) echoed this strategic view, arguing that in the AI era, organisations must make a choice about marketing's role, namely: to use AI to reduce costs and increase efficiency; or to optimise it. The argument is that cuts made for the sake of productivity seldom produce the expected benefits. Marketers must take charge and demonstrate how AI can enhance marketing's impact on a company's overall value (PwC, 2025).

Marketing and sales are the only two functions in a business directly responsible for attracting customers and thus money. If marketing is viewed and managed as a strategic resource, it should be subject to the same evaluation and scrutiny as the financial function is.

Comparing financial versus marketing audits

While financial audits safeguard a company's financial assets by providing transparency and accountability, marketing audits play a parallel role by examining how effectively a company's brand, campaigns, and customer engagement strategies are managed. Just as financial audits protect the bottom line, marketing audits protect the long-term health of an organisation's most powerful intangible resource – its market presence.

→ ***Financial audits*** are imperative for several reasons:

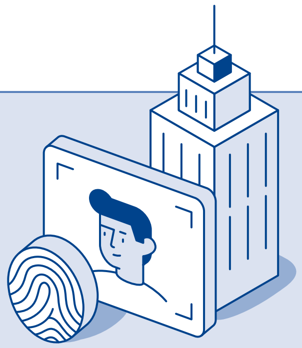


The regulatory role of financial audits is vital. Being a key enforcement tool within audit regulatory frameworks, they ensure firms comply with accounting standards, securities laws, and governance codes, and provide regulators with measurable audit quality indicators to monitor firms and audit providers (Akinniny, 2025).

Securing investor and stakeholder confidence. For investors and other stakeholders, audited financial statements signify credibility. Engaging reputable auditors and achieving high audit quality reduces information asymmetry as well as reassures markets that earnings and book values are trustworthy (Visedsun *et al.*, 2025).

Accountability and transparency are non-negotiable. Systematic reviews and empirical studies link higher audit quality to more transparent financial reporting and stronger accountability in financial institutions and listed firms. It is argued that stakeholders can rely on audited numbers, rather than management's claims alone (King and McKennie, 2023).

Ensuring fraud detection and risk management. Auditors are more effective at detecting fraud when they have a clear fraud risk assessment and maintain a questioning mindset. Studies show that including fraud risk in the planning process helps auditors better identify high-risk areas. Recently, it has been emphasised that using technology, such as data analytics, can greatly improve how auditors detect fraud and manage risks overall (Tümmler and Quick, 2026).

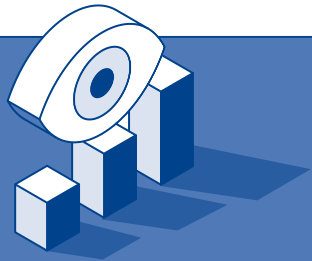


To honour corporate reputation. Audit quality and auditor reputation are positively associated with firms' market value, implying that markets reward companies perceived as well audited (Judijanto and Iskandar, 2024).

To facilitate strategic decision-making. Managers, boards, and other stakeholders rely on audited financial information for strategic planning, investment decisions, and innovation choices; if the underlying numbers are unreliable, the strategy will be flawed (Capraș *et al.*, 2025).

→ Unfortunately, ***marketing audits*** lack similar regulatory requirements from an auditing perspective, although a marketing audit can create significant value for the organisation in several ways, including:

A marketing audit ***ensures accountability,*** confirming that marketing leaders and the team take responsibility for marketing results achieved relative to goals and organisational investment.



Corporate reputation is enhanced, showcasing responsible and sustainable marketing practices, which are essential for stakeholder relations and consumer trust. Most importantly, a marketing audit provides a strong basis for strategic decision-making.

Investor and stakeholder confidence is ensured, demonstrating that current and future market demand is adequately stimulated, and that long-term brand equity is built.

Fact-based decisions are facilitated due to evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of marketing activities, impacting future budget allocations, identifying growth areas, hidden inefficiencies, and market opportunities, along with evaluating long-term prospects.

Therefore, a marketing audit is not only a tool of control, but also a driver of strategic agility and sustainable competitive advantage.

The vital issue: lack of standardisation

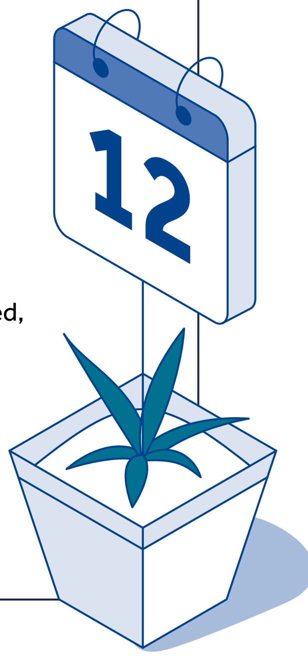
The financial sector must adhere to generally accepted accounting standards, which facilitates the potential for standardisation (Paton and Littleton, 1940; Financial Accounting Standards Board, 2023). In contrast, the marketing function lacks such standardisation, as lamented by many (da Gama, 2012; Broberg, Umans and Gerlofstig, 2013; Morgan *et al.*, 2022), which is an issue that warrants serious discussions within the marketing industry.
While industries and company sizes may differ, the marketing field has significantly evolved as a discipline, suggesting that achieving at least a degree of standardised evaluation should be feasible.

Although literature on marketing audits is not all recent, a wealth of critique and inquiries can be leveraged to develop standardised approaches. However, what is lacking is the market-driven demand necessary to propel this development forward.

Considering making marketing audits an annual exercise

The idea of an annual audit differs from the seminal definition of the marketing audit, which suggests it should be conducted periodically (Kotler, Gregor and Wagner, 1977). When marketing audits are performed annually, many of the current concerns can be solved, in that:

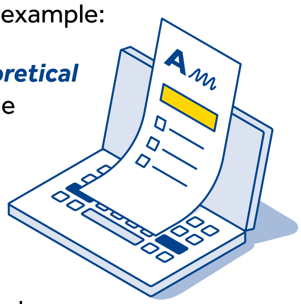
- Budgeting for these audits ***will become a good habit***;
- ***Preparing audit documents and insights in advance*** will become common practice, reducing and addressing reluctance to provide information;
- ***More expert marketing auditors*** will be developed;
- The auditing process will be ***standardised and professionalised***;
- ***Methodological soundness*** of the marketing audit process can be achieved, promoting the development of marketing auditing qualifications or certifications (take note, chartered marketing institutions); and
- ***Effective (and objective) identification and allocation of resources*** to stay on top of emerging and potential game-changing trends, optimising AI and other emerging technologies during times of constant change.



Annual marketing audits can become a reality if their importance and usefulness are understood and managers provide the resources and MCS to facilitate the process.

Possible practical solutions

In a world where five-year strategies are increasingly unrealistic and where markets evolve on a near-daily basis, marketers would benefit most from regular, annual reviews of their initiatives. However, these reviews must go beyond surface-level evaluation and should deliver actionable recommendations instead, for example:

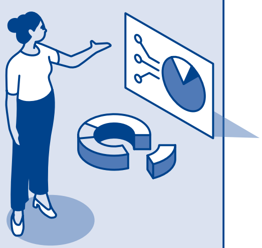


- ***Guarding against marketing audits becoming too theoretical*** (Talla *et al.*, 2024), standardised theoretical tools can be used, supplemented by value-enhancing suggestions and practical solutions, rather than merely criticising.

- ***A degree of variety in the audit is compulsory*** to accommodate varying industries, company sizes, and cultures. Agreeing on focus areas with management in advance of the audit ensures relevance. Shared across departments, they can also act as a mechanism for learning and cross-functional collaboration, positioning marketing audits as tools of strategic renewal, rather than simply evaluation.

Credibility is key!

As with financial audits, it is recommended that external companies conduct audits to enhance objectivity and credibility, reduce potential bias, and identify blind spots. External companies have access to comparative industry data, which can help an audited company assess its position relative to competitors and identify potential credibility gaps to address. Preconditions include:

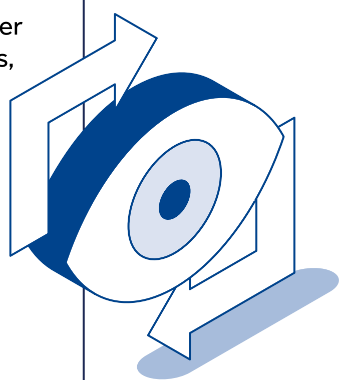


- The auditing company should have some industry experience to offer tailored recommendations and a thorough, rapid analysis.
- Marketing audit results should also be reported in the annual reports of large companies to support stakeholder and investor confidence and to promote corporate reputation.

Long-term versus short-term approach

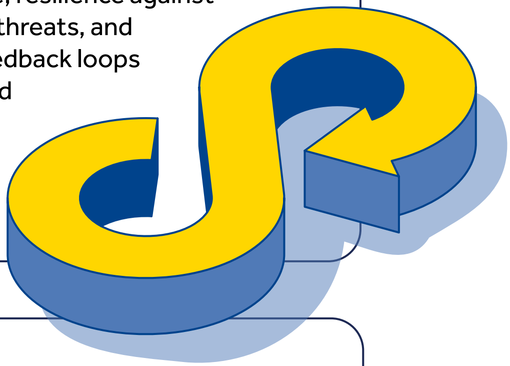
More than meets the eye...

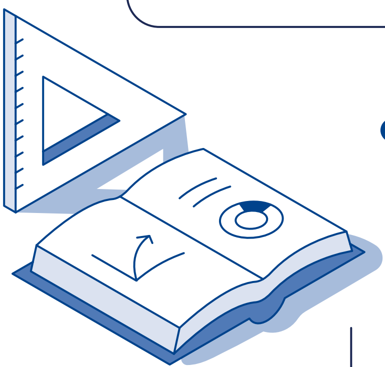
Marketing can produce numerical (performance metrics) and financial results (sales) but, unlike finance, it has an ***intangible, long-term component*** – including reputation and corporate image, brand equity, customer relationships and loyalty, employee brand alignment (internal branding), and market insights. Managing brand reputation is essential for maximising long-term value. A strong reputation or corporate image ensures that stakeholders (e.g., customers, suppliers, investors, employees, and regulators) hold the organisation in high esteem. Over time, this can lead to several benefits, including a lower cost of capital, as investors perceive reduced risk; greater resilience during economic downturns, as stakeholders are more inclined to support a trusted brand; improved access to partnerships and more favourable terms; and the ability



to attract and retain top talent, as the company is viewed as reputable. Furthermore, when a crisis occurs, firms with a solid reputation can recover more quickly due to the trust they have cultivated (Brand Finance, 2020).

A systematic review of brand experience and brand equity indicates that positive customer experiences contribute to brand equity, which fosters long-term outcomes. Additionally, strong brand equity creates sustainable competitive advantages and establishes barriers against competitors (Coudounaris *et al.*, 2024; Madeira *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, a bibliometric analysis of brand loyalty highlights that nurturing emotional and attitudinal loyalty is crucial for a brand's long-term sustainability. Establishing loyal customer relationships leads to repeat purchases, word-of-mouth advocacy, increased customer lifetime value, resilience against competitive threats, and beneficial feedback loops from engaged customers (Yazdi *et al.*, 2024).



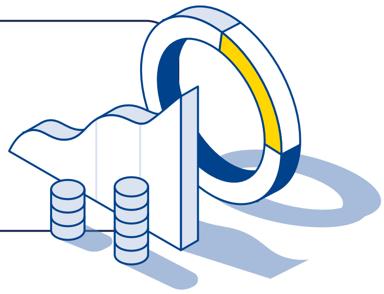


Detail matters...

An annual marketing audit should consider these components and measure these long-term, intangible assets accordingly, which is especially important in response to critiques of a lack of methodological soundness. Intangible assets should be measured using appropriate quantitative and qualitative techniques, suggesting that a market research component is needed in the analysis.

Surmountable implications

Cost implications are undeniable. However, they can be cleverly packaged for inclusion in annual market research initiatives and used to inform market insights and strategy formulation.

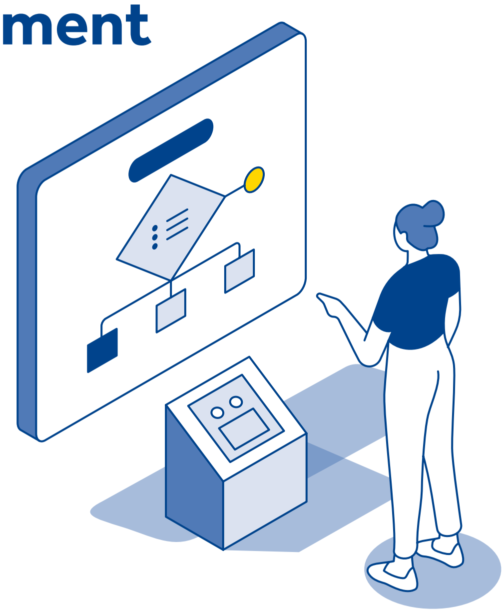


The need for a digital audit

As AI increasingly shapes how marketing decisions are generated and executed, AI-enabled marketing should not be treated as a stand-alone technical capability, but as an integrated strategic lever influencing resource allocation, customer engagement, and organisational learning (PwC, 2025). This reinforces the argument that digital audits must be embedded within the broader marketing audit framework, ensuring that technological sophistication translates into strategic effectiveness, rather than isolated operational efficiency.

A marketing audit is essential and should be thorough, inherently encompassing a digital audit. A challenge that some marketing departments may encounter is creating a separate digital division or outsourcing their digital efforts. The metrics associated with digital marketing often require specialised tools and expertise, leading to the perception that a digital audit should be a stand-alone process. However, regardless of how digital marketing is organised within a company, it should not be treated as isolated or disconnected from the overall marketing strategy. Although necessary, a digital audit should serve as a focused sub-component conducted by relevant specialist auditors, ultimately contributing to the marketing audit report. By doing so, digital insights can transition from mere 'technical details' to strategic levers for gaining a competitive advantage.

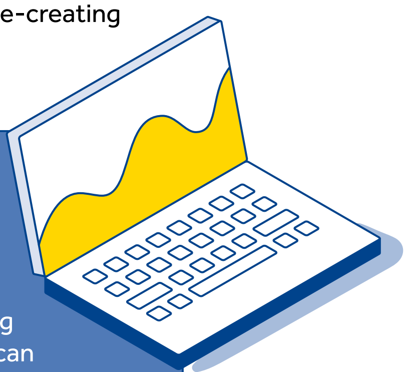
Implications for management (or the C-suite)



The study's findings carry various practical implications. First, marketing audits should be reframed from discretionary diagnostic tools into a formal governance mechanism. Leadership teams should expect regular and structured evaluations of marketing effectiveness comparable in scope and seriousness to financial audits, particularly given marketing's role in driving demand and shaping organisational reputation.

Second, organisations should ensure marketing audits explicitly assess long-term capability development alongside short-term performance outcomes. Metrics related to brand equity, customer trust, market learning, and strategic adaptability should be incorporated into audit frameworks to counterbalance the focus on efficiency.

Finally, as AI-enabled tools become embedded in marketing decision-making, executives must resist the temptation to view these technologies solely through the lens of cost-reduction or speed. Marketing audits provide a means of assessing whether AI applications enhance strategic judgement and sustainable value creation. For managers, marketing audits are not administrative burdens, but strategic tools that enable marketing to fulfil its role as a disciplined, accountable, and value-creating organisational function.



Conclusion

Company leadership must recognise marketing as a crucial strategic asset. A firm's resource-based view emphasises its importance beyond merely being a cost centre; it is a key driver of long-term competitive advantage. When managed effectively, marketing warrants the same level of scrutiny and oversight as financial or operational assets, requiring thorough evaluations and regular audits. Adopting this mindset will amplify marketing's overall impact on organisational success.

When marketing is acknowledged and managed as a valuable resource, demand for marketing audits is likely to rise. This increased demand will effectively address many of the existing criticisms surrounding the marketing audit process. In turn, the skills and methodologies for conducting these audits will evolve, enhancing efficiency. Additionally, the audit can develop into a robust, standardised framework. Consequently, any hesitation towards audits will fade as they become integral to 'business as usual'.

Marketing audits serve as a vital mechanism for organisations to monitor, assess, and refine their marketing capabilities, ensuring alignment with strategic objectives and identifying opportunities for improvement. By embedding marketing audits in governance and control processes, management not only protects the value of marketing investments, but also harnesses marketing as a dynamic strategic tool that sustains differentiation and performance in competitive markets.

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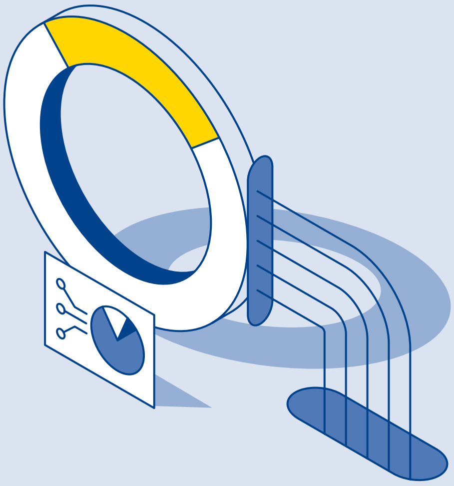

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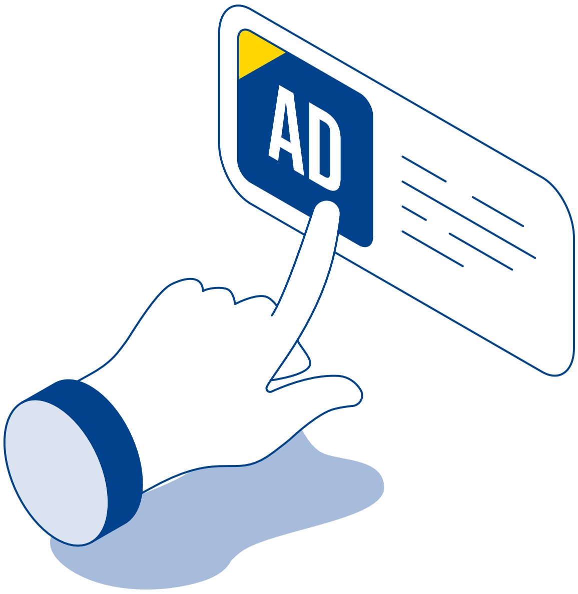

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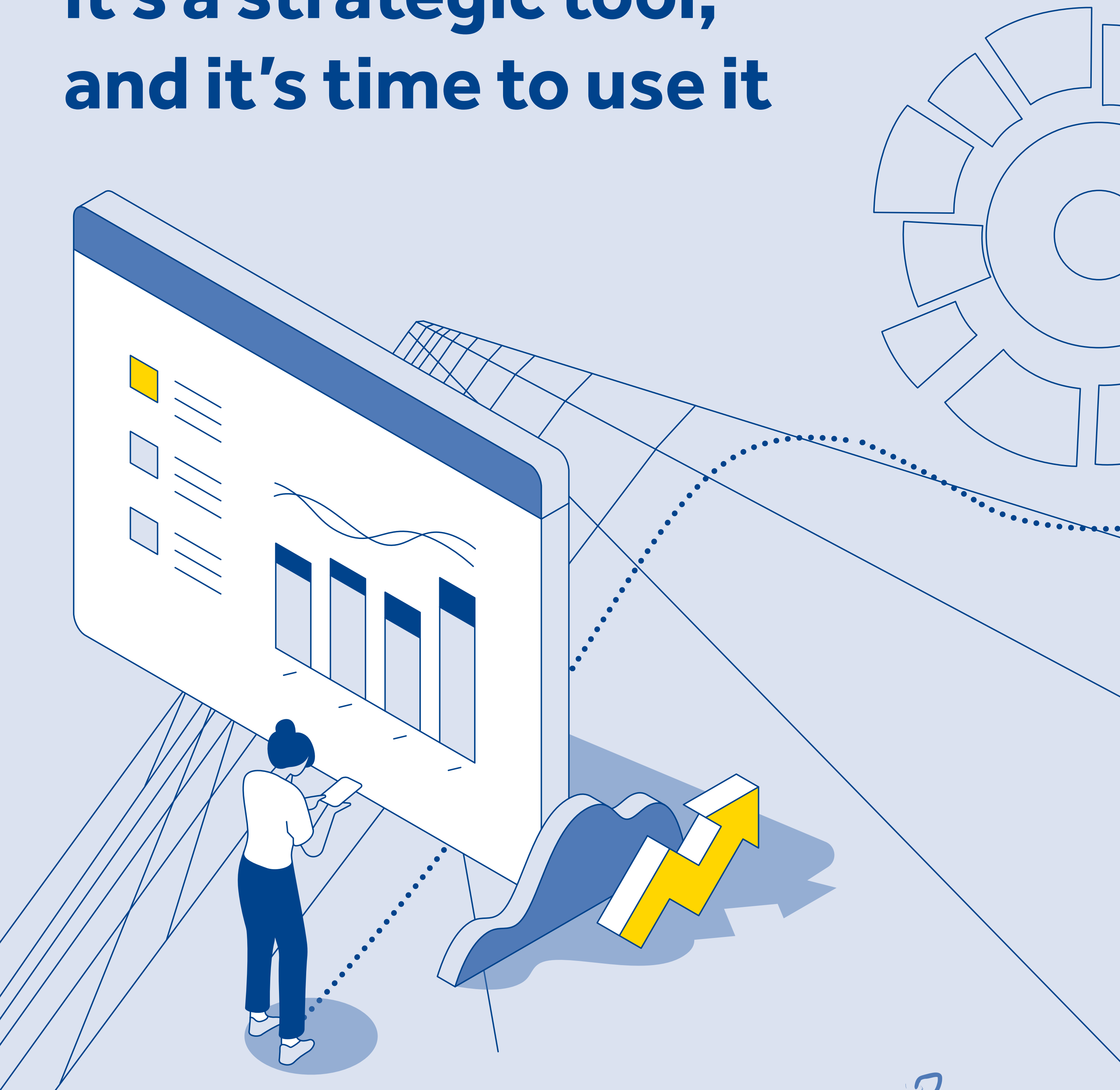
The marketing audit: it's a strategic tool, and it's time to use it



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