

Peer Forum Series

Construction Marketing Insights for 2026

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The Think Tank is an award-winning B2B marketing, digital and PR agency. For more than 30 years it has delivered integrated strategies that drive measurable results. Based in London, the agency has deep expertise in construction – working with manufacturers, contractors, specifiers, distributors, contech and trade bodies – alongside clients in software, energy, manufacturing and finance.



The Construction and Built Environment Marketing Network is a community that equips industry professionals with knowledge and insight into the latest ideas, trends and news. The network aims to elevate the role of marketing in the sector by providing a platform for learning, professional development and peer support.

Introduction

At the outset of 2026, nine senior marketing leaders from across the construction sector gathered for a roundtable discussion hosted by The Think Tank and the Construction and Built Environment Marketing Network. The conversation explored the challenges, pressures and opportunities shaping construction marketing in 2026.

The backdrop

The roundtable took place against a paradoxical backdrop. UK construction output is forecast to grow 3.7% in 2026, driven by infrastructure investment and retrofit opportunities. Yet the sector faces acute pressures: a projected workforce shortage of 240,000 by 2029, building costs up 15% in five years and a wave of new regulations reshaping how the industry operates.

What emerged from the conversation wasn't a neat consensus. It was a frank

acknowledgement that marketing's role in construction has fundamentally expanded.

These professionals are no longer simply communicators or brand custodians. They're technical experts, educators, compliance translators and strategic advisors. They're navigating regulatory complexity, filling knowledge gaps across supply chains, adapting to generational shifts in how buyers engage and wrestling with technology that promises efficiency but often fails to deliver.

3.7%

forecasted growth in 2026 (Glenigan)

240k

projected workforce shortage by 2029 (CITB)

15%

increase in building costs over last five years (Glenigan)

Core themes emerge

This report captures seven interconnected themes that defined the discussion: the strategic elevation of the marketing function, the compliance and quality challenges reshaping the market, a competency crisis accelerating skills shortages, the critical need for education at every level, evolving audience behaviours, persistent technology adoption gaps, and an age-old disconnect between sales and marketing that remains unresolved.

The insights offered by the expert panel are a snapshot of the pressures, frustrations and opportunities shaping how senior construction marketers approach their roles.

Meet the experts



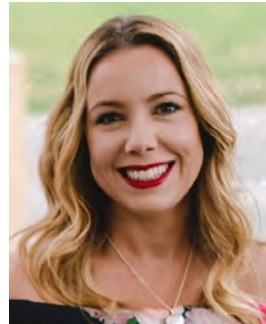
Helen Cooper
Head of Marketing

—
Altecnic



Emma Cox
Head of Marketing

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Watts Group



Charmaine Dean
Marketing Manager

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Catnic



Stuart Devoil
Group Head of Marketing

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Catherine Fyfe
Group Marketing Director

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Genuit Group



James Hulme
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Communications

—
Broadway Malyan



Amy Law
Senior Marketing Manager

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Elecosoft



Stacey Lucas
Commercial and Marketing
Director

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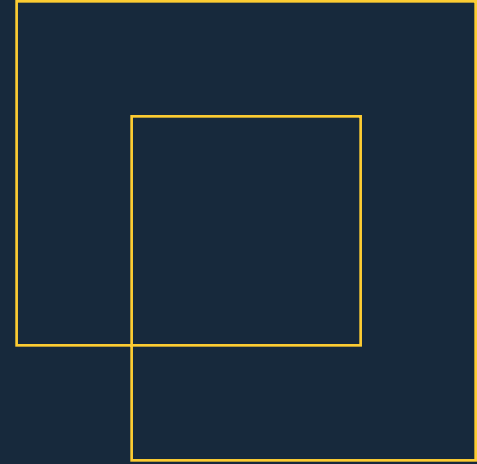
Gareth Osborne
Associate Marketing Director

—
Pick Everard



Liam Bateman
Managing Director

—
The Think Tank



01.

Marketing as a strategic discipline

Marketing in construction can no longer be seen purely as a communications or brand function. It's a strategic discipline requiring technical competence, compliance knowledge and risk awareness. Expectations and pressure have intensified. The stakes are higher.

The complexity of the modern construction landscape means that to be successful, marketers must be deeply informed. They can no longer get by without a firm grasp of the

technical, regulatory and commercial pressures affecting the sector. As one put it: "If you're in marketing and you're in construction, you're not a colouring-in department."

What's driving this shift?

- **Post-Grenfell focus** on safety and accountability
- **Building Safety Act** introducing gateway systems and competency requirements
- **Supply chain issues** requiring verification of origin and compliance
- **Rise of CTOs and CIOs** in the buying committee, focused on data integration
- **Social value requirements** embedded in procurement

The idea that the modern construction marketer must possess impressive breadth of expertise was echoed around the table. "You don't realise it sometimes," said one participant, "but we're effectively doing six jobs."

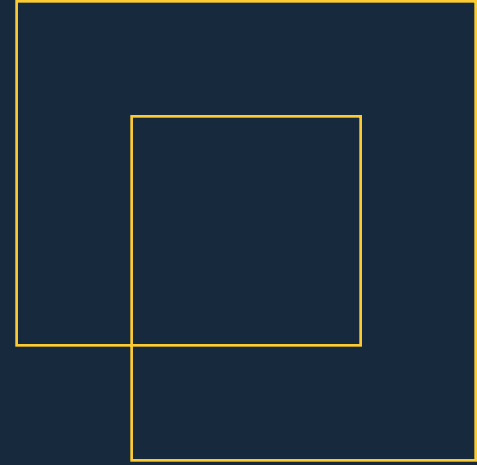
Marketing now sits at the intersection of product, compliance, sales and strategy. It's not about pretty campaigns. It's about credibility in a high-consequence sector.

One attendee described marketing's core function as "the translation of a highly complex and technically heavy environment into accessible channels."

This is the new reality: **marketers as translators, educators and strategic advisors.**



“You don't realise it sometimes but we're effectively doing six jobs.”



02.

The compliance and quality question



The sector is beset by compliance challenges. One participant suggested that as few as 30% of building materials have a corresponding technical standard. That implies 70% of products may be unregulated, fuelling a “race to the bottom” on price.

One distributor elaborated, describing how embargoed materials are entering the market, forcing their compliance team to verify product origin and communicate assurances to customers: a costly, time-consuming process. Not only must marketers be able to demonstrate compliance, but they

are also required to explain why it adds value and carries cost. The fact that new purchasing channels are emerging where compliance is harder to verify, only compounds the issue as enticing price tags often distract from technical specifications.

The regulatory landscape is shifting:

- **Building Safety Act** provisions continuing to roll out through 2026
- **Building Safety Levy** from 1 October 2026
- **Future Homes Standard** driving product innovation for energy efficiency
- **New product regulations** creating a dividing line between legitimate brands and those cutting corners



For compliant businesses, these regulations offer an opportunity to differentiate. But the conversation revealed a deeper cultural problem. As one participant put it: “There’s a cultural thing around building cheap.” Many end-users prioritise aesthetics over performance. A “pretty tap” often matters more than water-saving features, for example.

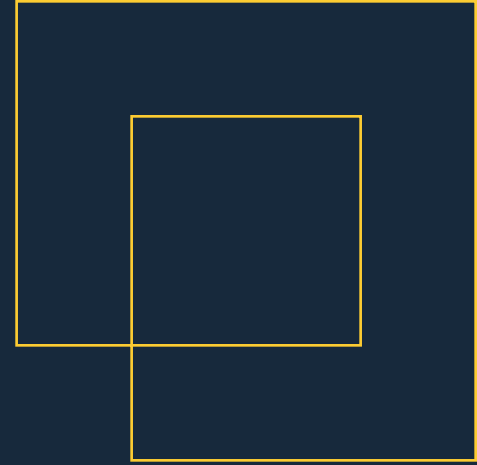
At the same time, procurement is adding new layers of complexity. Participants noted that tenders now routinely demand “five to ten per cent back in social value,” creating a pressure from

new stakeholders, such as social value managers. Marketers must now be able to evidence business impact in bids, adding another dimension of responsibility alongside price, quality and compliance.

If the marketer’s job is to hold the line on quality while the market pushes for cheaper, then education becomes critical. They must convince their audience of long-term value of compliance, while also communicating ethical material provenance and guarding against greenwashing. The compliance question isn’t just about regulation; it’s also about trust.



“Every time we go for a tender, it will want five to ten per cent back in social value. [...] They want to see that we’ve educated the local community for 100 hours.”



03.

The competency challenge

Trust and quality are, undeniably, critical pillars of construction marketing. But delivering on these pillars depends on highly skilled and experienced professionals. The problem is that the industry is struggling to hold onto these people of that profile.

The removal of “grandfather rights” for site access cards means experienced engineers must now pass exams and pay for recertification. The financial burden is significant.

Participants noted that some workers are being asked to pay “two grand to get their skills card” and many, particularly those towards the end of their careers, are choosing retirement instead.

Others are failing exams despite decades of experience. The Building Controls Industry Association is proposing recertification every three years, adding further friction.

With the sector already facing a 240,000 worker shortage by 2029, it can ill afford to lose valuable institutional knowledge because its experts won’t, or can’t, jump through the new hoops.

Right idea, wrong approach.

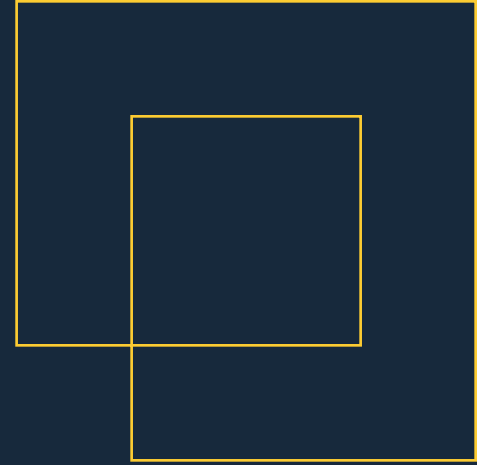
This is a well-intentioned competency push backfiring. The goal is to ensure workers are qualified and up to date. The reality is that experienced professionals feel undermined by a system that questions their extensive on-site expertise. For many, the cost and hassle of recertification simply isn’t worth it. They walk away.

The knock-on effect is significant.

These are the workers who know products, processes and standards intimately. Their departure creates knowledge gaps further down the supply chain. Gaps that marketing departments are having to fill through education and training.



“They’re near retirement, they’re not going to fork out two grand to get their skills card. So they say, well, I’ll just hang my hat now.”



04.

Education at every level



Education emerged as one of the most passionate themes of the discussion. One participant described an “awakening” when visiting colleges and seeing “how little resource they have, how little knowledge they have of products on the market”.

The knowledge gap isn’t uniquely encountered at entry level. Installers with 20 years’ experience are still fitting products incorrectly. One participant described finding their product installed upside down by seasoned professionals.

Equally, the knowledge gap isn’t just apparent on site. Participants described merchant branch staff not

understanding their product ranges; specifiers compromising quality through value engineering; and end-users prioritising aesthetics at the expense of performance.

One participant explicitly described their shift in thinking: marketing is no longer just about “features and benefits. Now it’s features, benefits *and* education.”

Who needs educating?

- **Colleges and apprentices:** Engaging future installers before they develop bad habits
- **Installers and trades:** Ensuring correct product use on site
- **Merchant branches:** Training staff to advise customers appropriately
- **Specifiers and contractors:** Influencing early decisions to firm up specifications and prevent performance being hindered through value engineering
- **End-users:** Increasing understanding around quality, compliance and long-term value

Marketing is using branch training sessions, college engagement and even TikTok to “break down those messages” and simplify learning for apprentices. The goal is knowledge retention from specification through to installation.

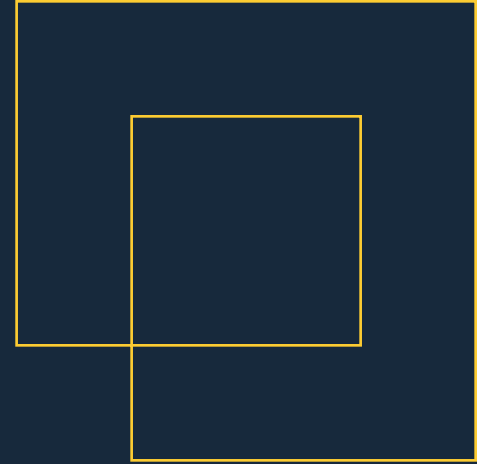
But education isn’t just technical. One participant noted: “We’re very good at talking technically about products and performance but people don’t always think about the ethics behind procurement.” This means explaining why certain sourcing is unacceptable; how to

spot credible sustainability claims from greenwashing; and the potential global impact of procurement decisions.

As another participant put it, marketing must consider “the bigger picture,” translating complex ethical considerations into accessible messages that resonate with each audience. Education has become as much about building trust and demonstrating values as it is about product specifications. It’s how credibility is established across the supply chain.



“We’re very good at talking technically about products and performance but people don’t always think about the ethics behind procurement.”



05.

Evolving audiences and engagement

Generational shifts are forcing a rethink of how marketing connects with buyers and influencers. Younger professionals are less interested in traditional networking and more drawn to purposeful, experience-based events.

And it's not just relationships that are evolving. As one participant put it: "They're not looking at our product brochures, they're not trawling through our websites in the way a previous generation would have."

Instead, they prefer to conduct research via independent digital channels and seek endorsements from peers or on social media. The implication is clear: traditional

marketing assets and relationship-building tactics alone are no longer enough.

Strict compliance rules on gifts and corporate entertainment, combined with a desire for work-life balance, mean attendance at major events is declining. One participant's company gave up their stadium box after 10 years because it had become too difficult to get customers to attend.

New engagement models are emerging:

- **Young Engineers Network** (for under-35s) organising site visits and peer discussion
- **Smaller, more intimate events with clear value** from learning opportunities and access to expertise
- **Digital-first** research and engagement
- **Webinars and online content** to build confidence in the next generation



It all comes down to adaptability

The challenge extends beyond generational differences. Marketing strategies that work in the UK don't necessarily translate to other regional markets.

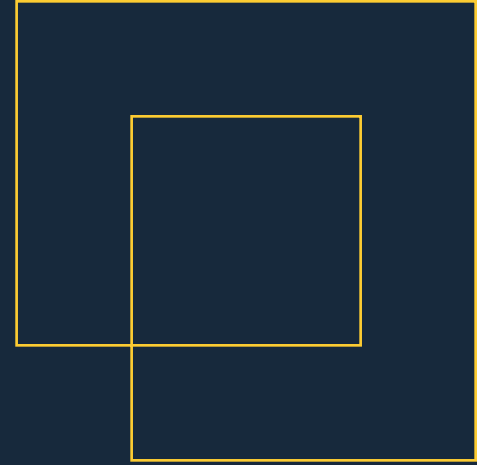
Participants noted that successful international expansion requires deep cultural understanding and localised messaging, not just translation of existing materials. Different regulatory environments, buying behaviours and

market dynamics often mean starting from scratch.

The mode of engagement is also evolving. Relationships still matter, but they're built differently now. Marketing must meet audiences where they are – whether that's on TikTok explaining installation to apprentices; in small peer forums discussing technical challenges; or developing entirely new approaches for different cultural contexts.



“**Younger audiences are not looking at our product brochures, they're not trawling through our websites in the way a previous generation would have.**”



06.

The technology adoption gap



There's a growing gap between technology investment and the value it can unlock. One participant described an 18-month project involving "thousands of hours" to implement a Product Information Management (PIM) system, only to find "it is still not being adopted."

This captures a core frustration: manufacturers invest heavily in structured product data and systems that the market isn't ready for or won't use.

The pattern repeats across technologies:

- CRM implementations that stall due to limited internal resources
- Data quality issues: "rubbish in, rubbish out"
- EPD spreadsheets not designed for certain product types, resulting in meaningless calculations
- Manufacturers reluctant to adopt centralised data platforms

Data decisions

Real-time data

One participant identified a fundamental problem with how the industry uses data:

"We spend so long compiling data that then we're looking backwards." The need, they argued, is for data that supports decisions proactively or predictively, rather than retrospectively.



Embracing AI

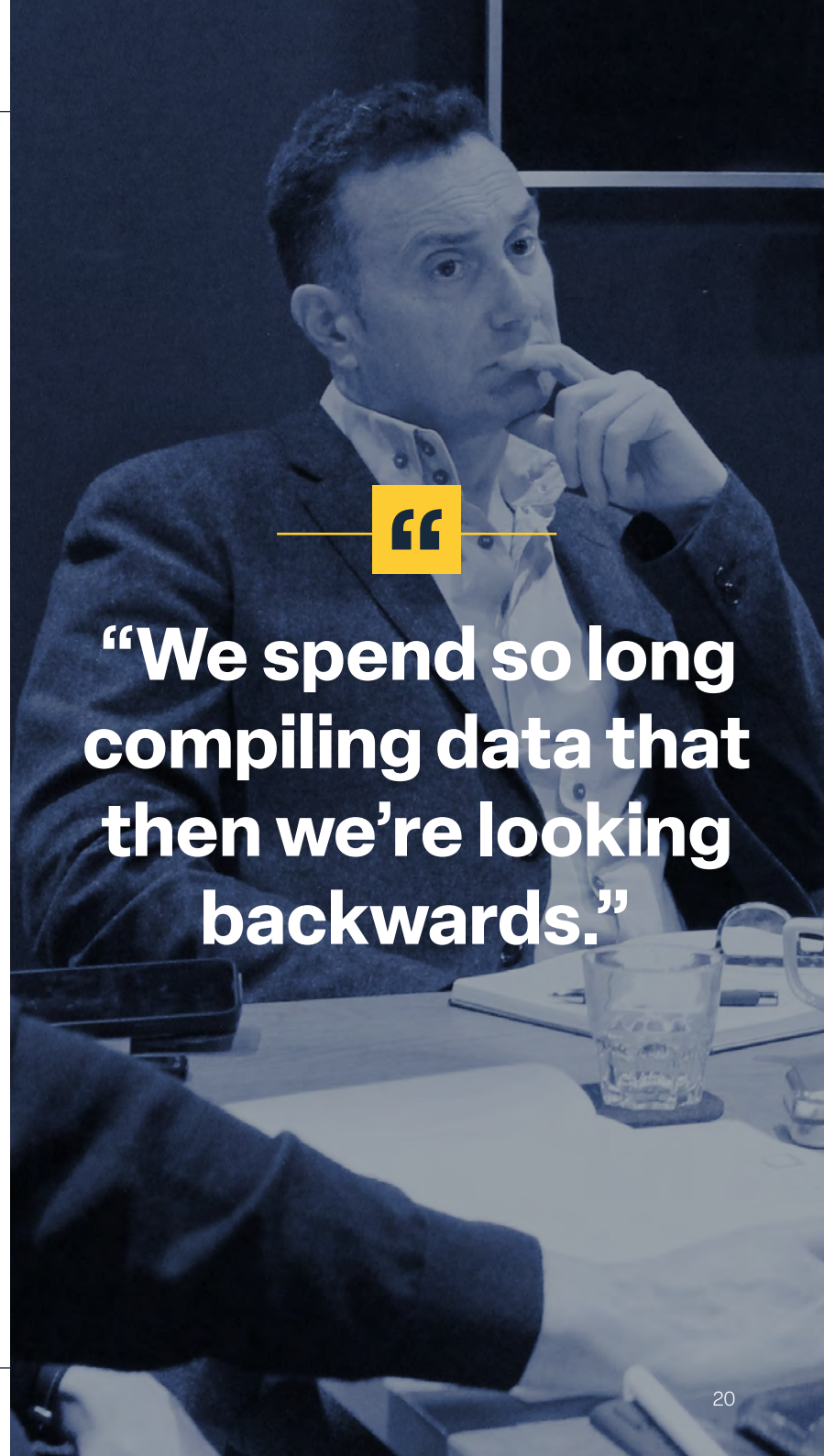
Artificial intelligence is viewed pragmatically. Some see value for specific tasks such as data segmentation, analysing email engagement, content extraction or routine automation. But there are clear concerns. Liability issues led one MD to become wary, with outsourced IT recommending that certain LLMs be blocked entirely. Others worry about AI-generated jargon and lack of authenticity.

The consensus: AI is a practical tool for specific jobs, but human oversight is essential.

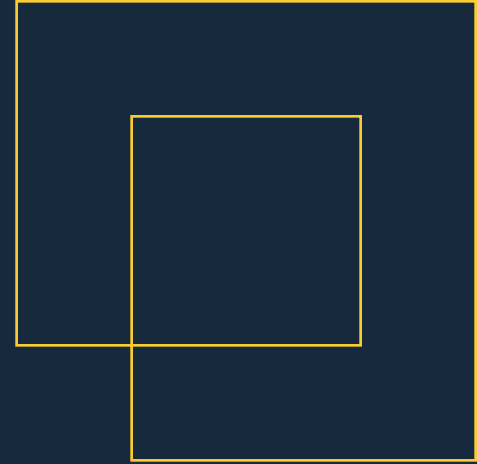
New influencers

At the same time, the rise of CTOs and CIOs as key influencers in contractor firms is changing the game. Buying decisions now hinge on data integration and system compatibility, not just product features. Marketing must demonstrate how their solutions fit into clients' technology stacks.

Technology should enable, but it often just adds complexity. Marketing is left justifying investments internally and driving adoption externally: another expanding responsibility in an already stretched role.



“We spend so long compiling data that then we’re looking backwards.”



07.

The sales and marketing disconnect

The disconnect between sales and marketing is an age-old issue. In construction marketing, it remains a problem that desperately requires a solution. These are two functions evolving at different speeds, with organisational structures that haven't caught up.

For example, gaps are evident in the understanding of digital buyer behaviours and the approach these necessitate. Meanwhile, it seems that all too often there are no shared KPIs, no clear definitions around what constitutes a lead and no feedback loops between teams.

The result is frustration on both sides. Marketing can't answer questions

about how their activity links to revenue because they have no visibility after handoff. Sales feels the quality or timing of leads doesn't match their process. Neither has full visibility of the other's constraints or pressures.


At its root, this is not a performance issue but a structural problem.

Bridging the gap: Proposed solutions

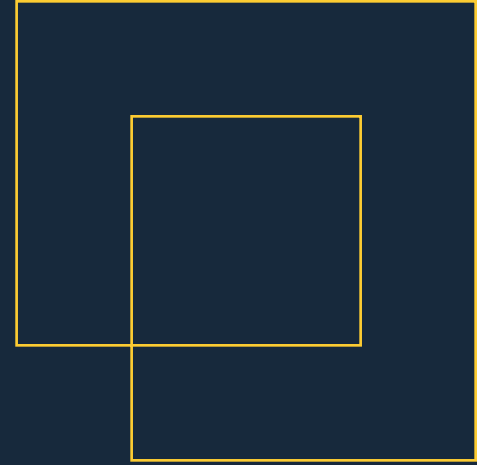
- **Sales Development Representative (SDR) role** to sit between the teams and qualify leads properly before handoff
- **Category Managers** responsible for product P&L, creating accountability that bridges both functions
- **Shared metrics and regular reviews** so both sides understand performance and constraints
- **Marketing taking on more qualification** to ease sales burden

Both sales and marketing teams are being asked to deliver more – marketing to prove ROI, sales to close faster – but without the integration that's needed

for success. The answer isn't blame. It's building the processes, roles and shared accountability that allow both functions to work together effectively.



“The problem is a complete misalignment between marketing and sales. There's just not that connection”



Conclusion: a role redefined

Marketing in construction has fundamentally evolved. It's no longer a support function. It's a strategic discipline that sits at the intersection of product, compliance, sales, strategy and education.

The professionals around the table are translating complex regulations into commercial value propositions, educating audiences from apprentices to specifiers, navigating generational shifts in engagement, justifying technology investments that don't always deliver and bridging gaps between marketing and sales that remain structurally unresolved.

They're being asked to do more with fewer resources in a higher-stakes environment. The regulatory landscape, workforce shortages, compliance challenges and cultural habits of "building cheap" create a context where trust and credibility must become the primary currency. Marketing is responsible for establishing both.

Adapt and thrive

But there are clear opportunities for those who adapt. The brands that will differentiate in 2026 and beyond are

those that can demonstrate genuine quality, communicate the value of compliance, educate their markets and meet audiences where they are.

Many experts are focusing on consolidation over expansion, deepening customer relationships, using education as a strategic tool and deploying technology pragmatically for measurable outcomes.

The reality is that marketing in construction is now polymathic, technical, ethical and strategic. Not only must marketers create value, they must also protect it from being value engineered out.

The issues are real. But, for those who understand the landscape, so are the opportunities. Alongside more traditional duties, professionals who can drive credibility, trust and understanding in the sector are well placed to succeed.



Join the conversation

This roundtable was part of The Think Tank's ongoing series of peer forums for senior marketing professionals and was organised in conjunction with the Construction and Built Environment Marketing Network.

If you'd like to participate in future discussions or pose a question about your own marketing needs, get in touch.

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