THE 2026 PLAYBOOK

In AdTech and MarTech, the *analyst briefing* is more valuable than the press release.

Six shifts, three case studies, an interactive readiness assessment, and a seven-step 90-day plan — for CEOs, CMOs, and heads of marketing at AdTech, MarTech, measurement, CDP, and data clean room companies building category position that converts to enterprise revenue.

PUBLISHED APRIL 2026 **READ** 13 MIN **BY** 5W B2B TECHNOLOGY PRACTICE

30–50% TYPICAL WIN-RATE LIFT FROM LEADER PLACEMENT IN MAGIC QUADRANT OR WAVE	12 mo MINIMUM LEAD TIME TO MOVE POSITION ON A MAGIC QUADRANT OR WAVE
$65B+	90 days

PROJECTED U.S. RETAIL MEDIA AD SPEND 2026 — INDUSTRY ESTIMATES

STANDARD ANALYST BRIEFING CADENCE FOR COMPANIES POSITIONING FOR MOVEMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AdTech and MarTech buyers do not read press. They read analyst reports. A favorable position on a Gartner Magic Quadrant, a Forrester Wave, or an IDC MarketScape is worth more to a vendor's enterprise win rate than a year of press hits — and yet most AdTech and MarTech communications functions still optimize for the press hits. The misallocation is severe, and in a category being restructured simultaneously by cookie deprecation, retail media consolidation, and AI-driven measurement, the vendors who adjust first hold a multi-year advantage.

This playbook is built for the AdTech or MarTech leader who wants to move analyst position, own a defensible category narrative, and convert that position into enterprise pipeline — with a realistic 90-day plan that starts with the analyst map, the category thesis, and the earned content program that feeds both at once.

§ 01 / TRENDS

Six shifts reshaping *AdTech and MarTech* competition in 2026.

01

Analyst position now gates enterprise evaluation before the buyer talks to a vendor.

Enterprise AdTech and MarTech buyers — CMOs, CIOs, heads of digital — use Gartner Magic Quadrants, Forrester Waves, IDC MarketScapes, and G2 category grids to shortlist vendors before any RFP. A favorable analyst position typically correlates with a **30 to 50% higher win rate** in enterprise evaluations. Vendors not on the shortlist rarely get a chance to pitch.

The implication is that analyst relations is not one external communications function among many. In AdTech and MarTech, **it is the critical path** to enterprise revenue.

> WHAT TO DO NOW
>
> Ask your head of sales what percentage of enterprise deals started from an analyst shortlist. If the number is high, reallocate communications budget accordingly.

02

The cookie's end has restructured category narratives industry-wide.

The long-delayed but now real deprecation of the third-party cookie through Chrome's Privacy Sandbox rollout has restructured the AdTech and MarTech category narrative. The vendors winning share are those whose communications credibly position them as the answer to a specific post-cookie question: **retail media, contextual targeting, data clean rooms, first-party data activation, or new measurement methodologies**. Vague "we do identity" positioning is losing to specific, well-defended category narratives.

The narrative restructure is as consequential as the technology restructure. A vendor that cannot explain its post-cookie position clearly in three sentences loses to one that can, regardless of underlying product strength.

WHAT TO DO NOW

Write your post-cookie position in three sentences. If you cannot, that is the narrative work the next 60 days need to do.

03

Retail media has redrawn the buyer map.

U.S. retail media ad spend is projected to exceed $65 billion in 2026, with Walmart Connect alone generating $6.4 billion in advertising revenue at 46% year-over-year growth. Three of the largest advertising networks are now retailers. The buyer for AdTech and MarTech now often sits in commerce and merchandising organizations, **not just marketing**, and the closed-loop attribution retail media provides has shifted the measurement conversation permanently.

Vendors still targeting only the CMO org are missing half the buyer. The communications program — analyst positioning, thought leadership, conference strategy — needs to speak to commerce as much as to marketing.

WHAT TO DO NOW

Audit your content for commerce-buyer resonance. If it all speaks only to marketing, half the buyer conversation is missing.

04

Cannes, ANA, and AdWeek are now private-meeting weeks, not launch platforms.

Launching product at Cannes Lions, ANA Masters of Marketing, or AdWeek has become the worst of both worlds — attention is fragmented across hundreds of competing announcements, and the follow-on moment is gone before clients act. The vendors extracting value from conference weeks use them as **concentrated executive-relationship moments**: 30 to 50 private CMO, CIO, and analyst meetings in hotel suites, with the actual product launches timed for separate news cycles that can carry the weight on their own.

The shift is visible in conference ROI measurement: the vendors reporting pipeline advances from conference weeks are not the ones with the biggest booths.

> WHAT TO DO NOW
>
> Rebuild your conference plan around 40 private meetings, not a keynote. Measure by pipeline advances, not impressions.

05

LinkedIn founder and executive voice is now where enterprise buyers pre-vet vendors.

Enterprise AdTech and MarTech buyers — the same CMOs and CIOs who rely on analyst reports — now actively vet the founder or CEO on LinkedIn before the first pitch meeting. A CEO publishing substantive category thesis, analyst-aligned POVs, and data-driven commentary three times per week **shortens the vetting portion of the enterprise sales cycle by weeks**.

A silent CEO LinkedIn is not neutral — it is a negative signal to the enterprise buyer. If the category is about category leadership and the leader doesn't talk in public, the evaluation concludes before the meeting.

> WHAT TO DO NOW
>
> Audit the CEO's last 90 days on LinkedIn. If category substance is absent, that is the immediate external communications priority.

06

AI-powered buyer research now surfaces vendor recommendations — or not.

CMOs and CIOs researching AdTech and MarTech vendors increasingly start on ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, or Claude. "Best CDP 2026," "best retail media platform," "best data clean room" queries now generate the **first-cut shortlist** before a single analyst report is read. The AI synthesis is built from analyst reports, AdExchanger and Digiday, G2 reviews, and LinkedIn thought leadership.

Vendors without a consistent published content footprint across those sources are absent from the AI answer — and therefore absent from the shortlist. GEO for AdTech and MarTech is the same work as analyst relations and thought leadership; the output formats just differ.

> WHAT TO DO NOW

Query the four major LLMs with "best [your category] 2026" today. Document what they say. That is your 2026 content priority.

§ 02 / CASE STUDIES

Three patterns *every AdTech and MarTech leader* should study.

INDEPENDENT ADTECH / ANALYST POSITION

TTD

The Trade Desk: category leadership through analyst alignment and CEO voice

The Trade Desk built its independent demand-side platform category position through sustained analyst relations, a CEO (Jeff Green) who has consistently published substantive category POVs in public, and a post-cookie narrative (Unified ID 2.0, OpenPath) that was well-defended across analyst briefings, earned media, and stage keynotes. The company's market value reflects the category position — and the category position reflects the communications discipline.

THE LESSON

In independent AdTech, analyst position and CEO voice are not marketing — they are the enterprise sales team's most valuable external assets. Treat them accordingly.

MARTECH / CATEGORY CREATION

HubSpot

HubSpot: defining a category before owning it

HubSpot built the inbound marketing category by publishing the vocabulary of the category years before competitors recognized it as a category. Co-founder Brian Halligan's public POV, the HubSpot Academy, the State of Inbound research series, and sustained analyst engagement together built a position where the category name and the company name became effectively synonymous. The category definition preceded the market leadership — and created it.

THE LESSON

In MarTech, the company that publishes the vocabulary of the category owns a disproportionate share of the category. Category creation is the highest-leverage form of marketing available to an emerging vendor.

CDP / PLATFORM POSITIONING

CDP

mParticle, Segment, and the CDP category's analyst contest

The Customer Data Platform category crystallized through a multi-year analyst contest among mParticle, Segment (acquired by Twilio), Tealium, and others — where Magic Quadrant and Wave positioning directly shaped enterprise vendor selection. Vendors that invested in sustained analyst briefings, reference-client programs, and category POV publication saw their win rates and acquisition outcomes reflect the analyst standing. Vendors that waited to brief analysts until an MQ was imminent consistently did not move.

THE LESSON

For platform categories, the analyst contest is a multi-year program, not a one-quarter push. Vendors that start early and stay consistent are the ones who hold durable enterprise win rates — and premium acquisition outcomes.

§ 03 / INTERACTIVE

Assess your analyst and category *readiness* in 2 minutes.

Eight yes/no diagnostics separating AdTech and MarTech companies with compounding category position from ones still optimizing for press hits. Answer honestly.

Q.01

Do you have a documented map of every Gartner MQ, Forrester Wave, IDC MarketScape, and G2 Grid covering your category?

YES | NO | NOT SURE

Q.02

Do you brief your top 5 to 8 analysts every 90 days on a standing cadence?

YES | NO | NOT SURE

Q.03

Can you state your defensible category thesis — your post-cookie or retail-media answer — in three sentences?

YES NO NOT SURE

Q.04

Do you publish long-form research or original data that analysts cite in their reports?

YES NO NOT SURE

Q.05

Do you run Cannes, ANA, and AdWeek as 30-to-50 private meeting weeks, not keynote platforms?

YES NO NOT SURE

Q.06

Does your CEO post category-substantive content on LinkedIn at least three times per week?

YES NO NOT SURE

Q.07

Have you queried ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and Claude for "best [your category] 2026" in the last 90 days?

YES NO NOT SURE

Q.08

Do you measure Gartner/Forrester trajectory, G2 ranking, and inbound enterprise pipeline citing category leadership — not just impressions?

YES NO NOT SURE

§ 04 / PLAYBOOK

The seven-step *90-day plan* to build analyst-led category position.

01

Map the analyst landscape for your category.

Document every Gartner Magic Quadrant, Forrester Wave, IDC MarketScape, and G2 Grid covering your category. Name the analysts. Pull 24 months of published research. Most AdTech companies have a rough sense; build a real map.

02

Install a 90-day analyst briefing cadence.

Standing schedule of briefings every 90 days across the top 5 to 8 analysts. Pre-brief, update meeting, reference-client introductions, post-briefing follow-up. This cadence moves position; one-time pre-MQ briefings do not.

03

Define your defensible category narrative.

Pick the single category thesis you own — post-cookie answer, retail media angle, measurement methodology, AI-driven attribution model. Every briefing, pitch, content piece, and keynote reinforces it. Specific wins over vague, every time.

04

Produce earned content that analysts cite.

Research reports, original data, benchmark studies, POV essays — published on your domain and in AdExchanger, Digiday, AdAge, Marketing Dive. This content feeds analyst research, earned media, and LLM answers at once.

05

Run Cannes, ANA, and AdWeek as private relationship moments.

30 to 50 pre-scheduled private meetings per conference — CMO, CIO, and analyst in hotel suites. Measure by pipeline advances, not booth traffic. The big-keynote model is no longer the efficient one.

06

Build founder and executive LinkedIn voice on category substance.

CEO, CMO, and head of product at 3-posts-per-week cadence on category thesis, analyst citations, data-driven POV. LinkedIn is where the enterprise buyer already reads. The voice earns them before the sales call.

07

Measure category position, not impressions.

Report: Gartner/Forrester placement and trajectory, G2 ranking, share of voice vs. named competitors, inbound enterprise interest citing category leadership, LLM answer share. Tie each to enterprise pipeline the CRO already tracks.

§ 05 / FAQ

Questions AdTech and MarTech *leaders* are asking in 2026.

Why are industry analysts more important than press for AdTech and MarTech companies? +

How far in advance should an AdTech or MarTech company brief analysts before a Magic Quadrant or Wave evaluation? +

How does AdTech and MarTech communications change with third-party cookie deprecation? +

How does retail media change the AdTech and MarTech competitive landscape? +

Does Cannes Lions and ANA still matter for AdTech and MarTech in 2026? +

What is the GEO opportunity for AdTech and MarTech companies in 2026? +

WORK WITH US

Ready to build category position *that converts to pipeline?*

5W's B2B Technology Practice builds and runs analyst relations, category-creation programs, and earned-media strategy for AdTech, MarTech, CDP, measurement, retail media, and data clean room companies — integrated with CEO LinkedIn voice, conference strategy, and GEO. The motion that makes analyst reports and enterprise procurement reinforce each other.

TALK TO THE B2B TECHNOLOGY TEAM

EXPLORE 5W RESEARCH

CONTINUE READING ON THE 5W BLOG

SISTER PLAYBOOK

The Developer-Led Growth Playbook for AI & Robotics 2026

SISTER PLAYBOOK

The LinkedIn Founder Voice Playbook for Health Tech 2026

PRACTICE AREA

5W B2B Technology Practice

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

01 Gartner — Magic Quadrant and Critical Capabilities research methodology.

02 Forrester — Forrester Wave evaluation methodology.

03 IDC — MarketScape research methodology.

04 G2 — Grid reports and buyer review methodology.

05 Google Chrome / Privacy Sandbox — third-party cookie deprecation timeline and Privacy Sandbox APIs documentation.

06 eMarketer / Insider Intelligence — U.S. retail media ad spend projections 2026 ($65B+); Walmart Connect ad revenue FY26 ($6.4B, +46% YoY).

07 The Trade Desk — public filings, Unified ID 2.0 and OpenPath positioning documentation.

08 HubSpot — State of Inbound research series and category-creation coverage, 2010–2026.

09 AdExchanger, Digiday, AdAge, Marketing Dive — tier-one AdTech and MarTech trade coverage.

10 5W — B2B Technology Practice client engagements and research.

5WPR.COM