

2026

PROGRAMMATIC ADVERTISING TRENDS SNEAK PEEK

StackAdapt

→ What's next for digital advertising?

The State of Programmatic Advertising 2026—coming in January—has the answers. This infographic grades 2025's predictions and highlights three 2026 trends.

2025
Prediction

AI becomes “invisible but essential” in marketing workflows.

2025 Verdict: Strong evidence

68% of marketers use AI at work, and 51% are using AI agents ([General Assembly](#)).

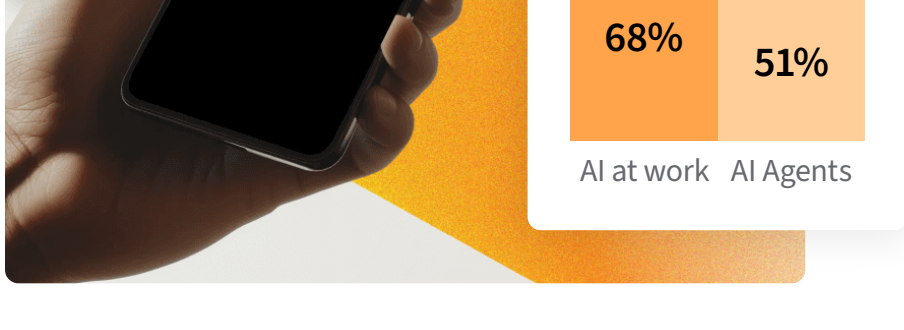
Reports show rapid adoption and deeper integration of AI across functions ([Marketing AI Institute](#)).

AI is currently used mostly for micro-tweaks, not full creative builds. (StackAdapt Creative Studio Data).



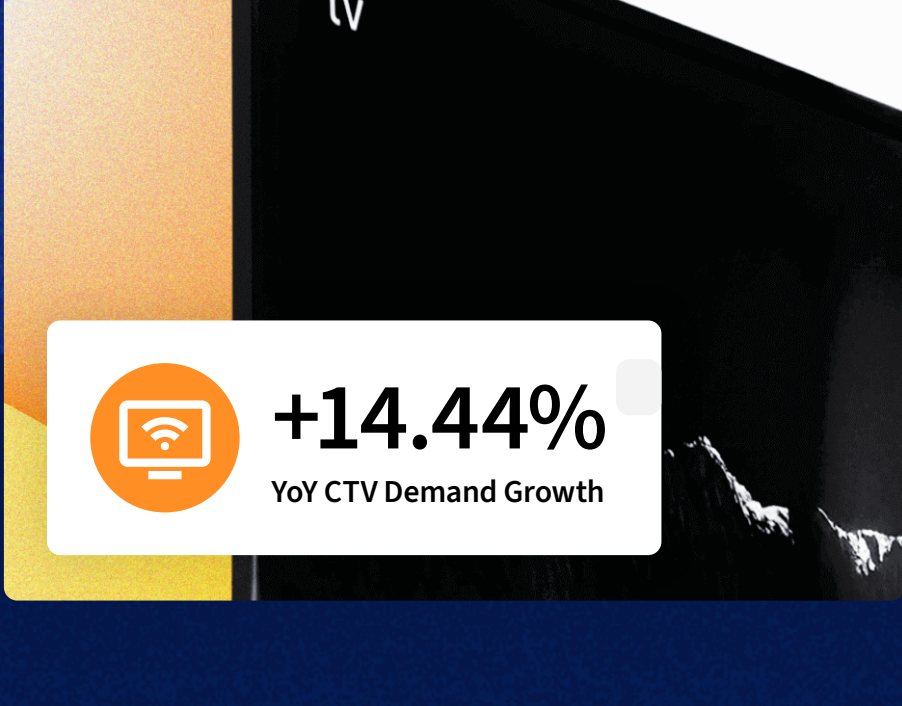
Why it Matters

AI has moved from novelty to infrastructure. The marketers who master AI will gain real efficiency and speed-to-market advantages.



2025
Prediction

Retail media spend grows and surpasses linear TV; CTV rises sharply.



2025 Verdict: Partially realized / trending

Advertisers around the world spent ~\$169B on retail media in 2025, up 15.6% from 2024 ([EMARKETER](#)), while TV advertising spending was \$143.9B ([WARC](#)).

There was a 14.44% YoY increase in demand for CTV and video creative assets (StackAdapt Creative Studio Data).



Why it Matters

The top of the funnel is going programmatic. As retail media and CTV budgets expand, marketers are rebalancing brand and performance investments, pushing toward measurable, full-funnel media.

2025
Prediction

Legacy metrics like click-through rate (CTR) will fade; more outcome-based and hybrid measurement will dominate.



2025 Verdict: Emerging but not fully realized

Many industry reports warn of the limits of legacy metrics and push for hybrid/incrementality measurement models ([AdExchanger](#)). But CTR has not been abandoned in practice across the board, 40% of the industry still uses it as the primary campaign KPI.



Why it Matters

Measurement is lagging behind innovation. Marketers want to prove impact beyond clicks, but inertia and comparability still tether them to outdated KPIs, signaling a major opportunity for better attribution tools.

2025
Prediction

New AI-native ad channels (e.g., conversational AI ads, smart glasses) emerge.

2025 Verdict: Minimal evidence so far

While smart glasses and conversational-AI ad channels are emerging, public evidence of large-scale commercial rollouts remains limited.

Perplexity took a step back from its advertising initiatives, failing to monetize AI search ([EMARKETER](#)).



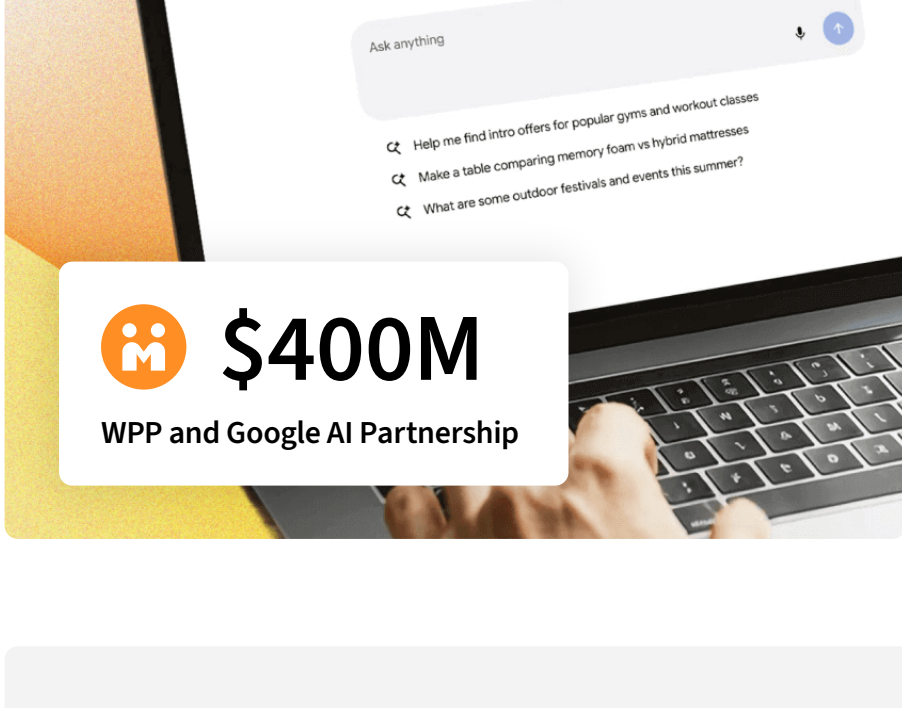
Why it Matters

AI is transforming operations, but not media yet. Innovation remains focused on optimizing existing channels, slower to create new ones.



2025
Prediction

Agencies will face layoffs, consolidation, and shift toward outcome-based models.



2025 Verdict: Partial evidence

Agencies are under pressure—WPP struck a \$400M AI partnership with Google to reorganize service offerings ([Financial Times](#)).

Some firms are rebranding as “AI-native” (e.g., Pepper) to compete with legacy models ([The Economic Times](#)).

But there's no consistent, public data confirming widespread layoffs or a full transition to outcome-based compensation.



Why it Matters

Agency models are being rewritten. As AI automates execution, agencies are redefining their value around strategy, data, and outcomes—a shift that could reshape the client-partner dynamic in 2026.

2026 Trends Sneak Peek

Comparing the predictions with what actually happened in 2025 reveals three clear lessons:



Momentum ≠ Maturity

AI adoption is accelerating, but scale and consistency lag behind. Early pilots don't equal seamless integration.

→ In 2026, watch for

AI orchestration layers to take centre stage—unifying planning, buying, and optimization—and for [AI assistants](#) to increasingly help manage campaigns.



Infrastructure Is The Bottleneck

Innovation stalls without solid data, measurement, and interoperability. The tech exists, but readiness determines results.

→ In 2026, watch for

Incrementality models, attention-based metrics, and cross-channel [ROI frameworks](#) becoming mainstream in 2026.



CTV & DOOH: From Test to Scale

As maturity signals stack up, budgets shift from experimentation to the core media mix.

→ In 2026, watch for

Standardized inventory, unified measurement, and proven incremental full-funnel impact to become table stakes.

The trends here are just the first frame of a much bigger picture.

Join us on January 28th, 2026 for our annual trends webinar to explore what's shifting, what's converging, and what will define the advertising landscape in 2026. Keep an eye on your inbox to register in December.