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From Experimentation to the Era of Execution

2026 Go-to-Market Predictions

Marketing Edition

Introduction

2026 is the year GTM teams finally capitalize on transformation.

The dust is settling. AI has moved from buzzword to business-critical. Automation has evolved from experimental to expected. And the go-to-market leaders who spent the last few years building foundations are now ready to scale with precision.

Successful GTM in 2026 is about more than having the most tools or the biggest budget. This year, teams are under pressure to start asking the harder question: "Does this actually drive revenue?"

We gathered insights from ZoomInfo executives, GTM experts, and industry leaders to identify the trends that will separate the leaders from the laggards in the year ahead. From the reinvestment in upmarket sales capacity to the rise of AEO, these predictions clearly spell out what you need to act on now.

The era of experimentation is over. Welcome to the era of execution.

PREDICTION #1

Closing the Execution Gap Becomes Marketing's Greatest Growth Lever

Adding more tools, channels, or AI experiments isn't enough for marketing teams to win anymore. The best teams will win by doing something far harder and far more valuable: closing the execution gap between strategy and action.

As inbound demand continues to decline, buyers are still researching, learning, and forming opinions. They're just not doing it in places marketers can easily track. That shift has exposed a hard truth. Most marketing teams already know *what* they should do. The real differentiator is *how fast* and *how well* they can act on it, in coordination with sales.

That gap typically shows up in three areas.

- **Data** is fragmented across dozens of systems, slowing teams down just as buying signals peak.
- **Alignment** breaks when marketing and sales pursue parallel but disconnected motions.
- **Speed** suffers when it takes weeks to turn insight into action.

The teams that close this gap will do it by simplifying instead of adding, unifying their data, workflows, and decision-making into a shared intelligence layer that both marketing and sales operate from. Instead of manually stitching together insights, teams can move directly from signal to coordinated action.

This year, leading GTM organizations will use AI as an execution accelerator, compressing signal-to-action timelines, enabling real personalization at scale, and continuously optimizing campaigns while they're live.

The payoff is significant. Marketing becomes proactive instead of reactive. Sales engages accounts with context and relevance. And revenue teams move faster than both buyers and competitors, turning execution itself into a lasting competitive advantage.

"In this era of marketing, it's not enough to just have better ideas. It's about **executing those ideas faster** and as a team. When GTM teams close the execution gap, marketing moves from a support function to a true revenue driver."

Tal Raz
Chief Marketing Officer
ZoomInfo

PREDICTION #2

GTM Will Evolve to a Unified Operating System

For years, we've talked about sales and marketing alignment like it's some aspirational end state. We've invested in RevOps roles, unified dashboards, and cross-functional meetings. But most companies are still running GTM like a collection of separate departments that occasionally talk to each other.

In 2026, that fragmented approach finally becomes unsustainable. The catalyst is AI's ability to expose dysfunction faster than any consultant ever could. When you deploy AI across your GTM motion, it reveals every broken handoff, every misaligned metric, and every gap in your customer journey with brutal clarity.

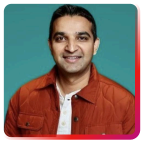
Think about what an operating system actually does. It manages resources, coordinates processes, and ensures different applications can work together seamlessly. That's exactly what modern GTM needs to become.

Here's what changes in practice:

- **Unified Data Architecture Becomes Non-Negotiable.** Companies can no longer afford to have marketing data in one system, sales data in another, and customer success operating in a third silo. AI models need consistent, interconnected data to function effectively. This forces organizations to finally build the unified data foundation they've been promising investors for years.
- **Shared Metrics Replace Departmental KPIs.** When AI starts optimizing for pipeline velocity or customer lifetime value, it doesn't care about marketing's MQL targets or sales' activity metrics. It exposes when those departmental goals actually work against each other. As a result, leadership teams are forced to align around true business outcomes, not
- **Process Gaps Become Impossible to Ignore.** AI-powered workflows break when there's no clear owner for a customer handoff or when different teams use conflicting definitions of "qualified." These friction points that used to slow deals down by days now cause visible system failures. The pain becomes acute enough that organizations actually fix the underlying process issues.
- **Trust Becomes the Limiting Factor.** AI can only accelerate what you allow it to see. Companies with siloed data and a culture of information hoarding will find their AI investments delivering minimal returns. Meanwhile, organizations that build cross-functional trust and transparency will see exponential gains

Having the most sophisticated AI tools won't be enough in 2026. Successful GTM teams will use AI as a forcing function to finally build the integrated, aligned GTM operating system that the market has demanded for years.

> "In 2026, AI becomes the truth teller of go-to-market. It won't optimize broken departments, but it will **surface broken problems faster**, forcing leaders to think of GTM as an operating system."



Sangram Vajre
Cofounder and CEO,
GTM Partners

PREDICTION #3

Programmatic Content Distribution is the Bridge to Early Buyer Intent

In 2026, a growing share of pipeline will be influenced before a buyer ever shows up in channels you own. Buyers are learning more and more in third-party environments, from editorial and newsletters to communities, Reddit, YouTube, and AI answers. And they're consuming a lot before they have to talk to sales.

That means the signals many teams still use to prioritize accounts, like site activity, chat interactions, demo requests, are becoming less reliable and increasingly late, usually arriving after opinions have already formed and shortlists have taken shape.

Practically, this means more teams will treat programmatic content distribution as a primary way to earn early consideration and create observable demand. Not just "running ads," but placing useful offers alongside the content buyers are already consuming, turning that attention into opted-in leads you can follow up with. Programmatic becomes the bridge between off-site learning and on-site conversion. You stay present upstream, capture consent, and bring those people back into nurture and sales follow-up while interest is fresh and verified.

Teams that execute this well will connect early discovery and engagement back to real people inside target accounts and make that actionable across marketing and sales. That's also where sales outreach works best, when it's driven by credible, person-level signals that help teams understand who is leaning in, what they're trying to solve, and when momentum is building.

AI will play a part in this shift, but mostly as a multiplier. It will help teams move faster once they've built a solid foundation — verified identity, strong data hygiene, and operational handoffs that don't break between marketing, RevOps, and sales — so automation amplifies good inputs instead of scaling bad ones. This next era of GTM will be defined by those who built the best system for turning fragmented, often invisible buyer behavior into confident, opted-in action.

"

When sellers trust the signal, prioritization changes, and spend follows. Organizations stop over-investing in noisy activity and reinvest in high-impact sales capacity that's pointed at real buyers, not opaque account signals."

Josh Baez
Sr. Manager, Demand Generation, NetLine

PREDICTION #4

AEO Becomes Non-Negotiable

GTM will still center on product, sales, and marketing. What changes in 2026 is how AI reshapes all three.

We're entering an era where AI agents are doing the initial research, evaluation, and shortlisting for buyers. If your value proposition isn't structured in a way that AI can parse, summarize, and recommend, you're invisible before the conversation even starts.

That means GTM can't be designed only for people. It must also be designed for AI comprehension.

Your messaging needs to be crystal clear:

- Why do you go to market?
- Who the product is for?
- What problem it solve?
- What outcome it deliver?

If AI can't clearly understand your value, your GTM outreach will suffer.

That's why answer engine optimization (AEO) must be part of GTM planning and execution, not a marketing afterthought. Companies need to structure content, messaging, and data so that AI systems can interpret and surface their solutions.

The real work is modifying GTM processes and systems so AEO is built in from the start.

In 2026, winning GTM teams design for humans *and* AI, without confusing either.

> AI won't just optimize processes or speed up content creation. The bigger shift is this: Your first GTM touchpoint is likely AI recommending your product before a human ever engages.
>
> That means GTM can't be designed only for people. **It must also be designed for AI comprehension.**

Pam Didner
B2B Marketing Consultant,
Speaker, and Author

PREDICTION #5

Connection Beats Attention as the GTM Goal

Top GTM teams in 2026 will intentionally connect experience, emotion, and intelligence.

Attention alone is no longer a growth strategy. Buyers are overwhelmed by content, channels, and AI-generated noise, which means showing up everywhere matters far less than what happens once a buyer engages. The real value isn't created when someone attends an event, downloads a resource, or joins a webinar, but when teams understand why they did, how it made them feel, and what that behavior signals about intent. GTM leaders will shift their focus from volume-based engagement to designing authentic experiences that make buyers feel seen, respected, and confident that their time mattered.

Those experiences, in turn, produce far better signals. In 2026, sophisticated GTM teams will move beyond surface-level metrics like attendance, form fills, or MQLs and instead prioritize behavioral and emotional indicators of intent. How deeply did someone engage? Did they return? Did they explore related content, involve peers, or move directly into high-intent actions? These signals, often hidden inside experiences, are more predictive than traditional lead scoring models. Teams that can capture and connect these signals across in-person and digital touchpoints will close the long-standing gap between strategy and execution.

AI will accelerate this shift, but not in the way many expect. AI will commoditize content creation and production, making average experiences forgettable. Its real power will be helping GTM teams interpret signals, personalize journeys, and respond in real time when intent appears. AI will amplify the moments that already matter, rather than replacing human creativity or connection. In a budget-conscious environment, this approach also concentrates spend into fewer, higher-impact experiences that fuel pipeline, shorten sales cycles, and build durable trust. The defining advantage in 2026 will go to teams that create experiences worth committing to and use intelligence to turn those relationships into revenue.

> “**In 2026, attention isn't the goal — connection is.** Revenue follows the experiences buyers actually care about.”

Allie Smith
Head of Demand Generation,
Sequel