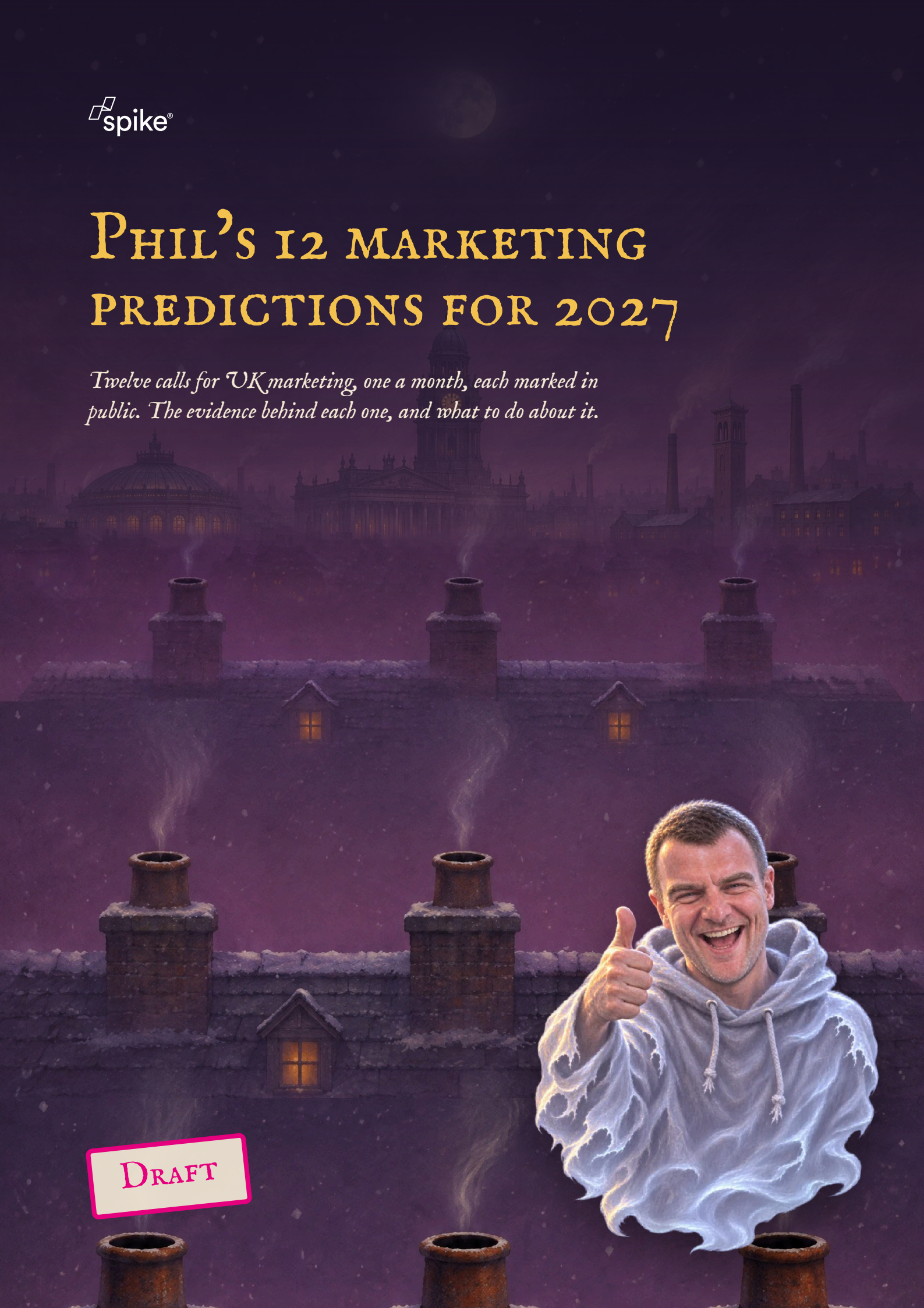
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Phil's 12 marketing predictions for 2027

Twelve calls for UK marketing, one a month, each marked in public. The evidence behind each one, and what to do about it.



Why 2027 is different

Most prediction lists are safe enough that nobody ever checks them. This one is built to be marked: twelve calls about UK marketing, one per month, each scored on the last day of that month.

Two ideas run through all twelve. AI is flooding the market with cheap content and cheap decisions, so the things it can't fake get more valuable: trust, people, brand and time spent in a room. And AI often adds friction rather than removing it, by stretching buying cycles, breaking measurement and hollowing out the people who learn the job.

The twelve also double as the rounds of Phil Eaves Navidad, our Christmas game: every game you play unlocks the next.

Plus one unscored bonus to wrap up the year: Phil Eaves Navidad, where the fundamentals still win.

January	The Ones That Came Back	Retention is the new acquisition
February	Home Alone	Brands are bringing marketing back in-house
March	Payment on Delivery	The first AI ad product that pays per sale, not per click
April	Accept No Imitations	Brand is back, because AI slop made everything look the same
May	Silent Night for the Blue Links	Google's 10 blue links are dead
June	The Naughty or Nice List	What others say about you matters more than anything you say about yourself
July	Who Delivered the Present?	The CFO owns marketing measurement now
August	Elves Wanted	We're hollowing out the next generation of marketers
September	The Office Party	The webinar is dead. Long live the room
October	Too Many Wise Men	AI is making B2B buying slower, not faster
November	Black Friday's Last Orders	Black Friday is running out of road
December	All I Want for Christmas Is You	The most exclusive thing a brand can offer is a human

How we made this, and how it's scored

We read published research from sources including the IPA, Forrester, the CMA, the BRC, Adzuna, Marketing Week and OpenAI, mostly from 2025 and 2026. Every figure links to its source, listed at the end. Where the evidence was thin or pointed the other way, we say so.

The predictions and the reasoning behind them are Phil's view as a strategist who plans campaigns for UK brands every week. They are judgement, not data, and some of them are deliberately bold.

Each prediction scores 2 (right), 1 (partly right) or 0 (wrong), for a maximum of 24. Evidence counts if it's published by the last day of that month, even if it appeared earlier in the year. November is the exception, because the Black Friday data lands in early December.

Two baselines are locked in before 1 January 2027, so nobody can move the goalposts later: a watchlist of five UK subscription or DTC brands (January), and a count of UK job ads mentioning marketing mix modelling or incrementality (July).

2	1	0	24
Right	Partly right	Wrong	Maximum score

The Ones That Came Back

Retention is the new acquisition.

Why I think this

From 1 January, the new subscription rules make the cheap-first-box model far less profitable, and AI shopping agents will turn identical products into a pure price contest. The brands that grow will give customers a reason to stay, not just a reason to start.

The evidence

The UK's new subscription contracts regime takes effect on 1 January 2027 [1]. It requires clear information before sign-up and reminders before free trials or 12-month contracts auto-renew [2], with fines of up to 10% of global turnover [3]. On the agentic side, Google's AI checkout has been US-only since January 2026, with Canada and Australia next and the UK to follow [4]. Existing customers are already carrying more weight: across Klaviyo's brands, repeat-customer revenue grew 13.5% over Black Friday 2025, outpacing new buyers [5]. That is one platform's data.

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Replace deep first-order discounts with bundles, memberships or loyalty perks that reward the second and third order.
B2B	Give account managers a 90-day plan for every new client. Renewals are won or lost early.
Everyone	Report lifetime value and repeat rate next to cost per acquisition, so the board sees the full picture.

How it's scored · watchlist of five UK subscription or DTC brands, set before 1 January

- 2 three or more replace deep intro discounts with bundles, memberships or loyalty-led offers.
- 1 one or two do.
- 0 none do.

February Prediction 2 of 12

Home Alone

Brands are bringing marketing back in-house.

Why I think this

AI has made execution cheap enough that brands question paying agency margins for it. The money moves to in-house teams and specialist freelancers, and agencies only keep the work where they bring thinking a brand can't hire.

The evidence

Marketing Week's 2026 Career & Salary Survey found 14.2% of 2,350 marketers had cut agency spend because of AI in the past year, against 1.9% who increased it [6]. In the US, 32% of brands expect to bring nearly all creative in-house within 12 months, and another 23% at least half [7]. Agencies aren't going anywhere yet: 93% of B2B marketers still use one in some capacity [8].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Work out which tasks your agency does that AI and one good hire could cover, and which need outside thinking.
B2B	Build a bench of two or three trusted specialist freelancers for peaks, rather than a retainer for everything.
Everyone	Judge agencies on business outcomes and strategic input, not hours or asset volume.

How it's scored · by 28 February

2	an industry survey shows in-house or freelance share rising, and at least one notable UK brand announces an in-housing move.
1	only one of those happens.
0	neither happens.

March Prediction 3 of 12

Payment on Delivery

The first AI ad product that pays per sale, not per click.

Why I think this

Search ads were built for a list of links. When an AI recommends one product and can complete the purchase, the natural pricing model is a commission on the sale, and that's affiliate, not search.

The evidence

OpenAI has already tested the model. From January 2026, Shopify merchants paid OpenAI a 4% fee on sales made through ChatGPT's checkout [9]. It didn't stick: the feature was error-prone, the fee put merchants off, and OpenAI retired it in March 2026 [10]. Meanwhile ChatGPT ads went live in the UK in 2026 [11], and OpenAI has forecast ad revenue rising from $2.5bn in 2026 to $102bn by 2030 [12]. That's a lot of pressure to find formats that work.

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Get your product feed clean and complete now. Whatever the pricing model, AI agents can only sell what they can read.
B2B	Know your true cost per acquired customer, so you can judge a commission rate the day one is offered.
Everyone	Treat AI ad platforms as tests with a fixed budget and a clear success measure, not a new always-on channel.

How it's scored · by 31 March

2	ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot, Perplexity or Meta AI launches a commission or pay-per-sale ad product open to UK advertisers.
1	one launches outside the UK only, or is announced but not yet live.
0	none does.

Accept No Imitations

Brand is back, because AI slop made everything look the same.

Why I think this

When anyone can produce infinite content for free, cheap content stops signalling anything. Costly signals like real production, real media and real people become how brands prove they're here to stay.

The evidence

In the Q3 2026 IPA Bellwether, the main media net balance jumped from +1.5% to +9.8%, a nine-year high [13]. The IPA's Scotland chair noted the recovery isn't limited to short-term, performance-led activity [14]. That fits the IPA's long-running work by Les Binet and Peter Field, which found effectiveness fell as campaigns became more short-term [15]. The Q1 2027 Bellwether lands in mid-April, as the Q1 2026 report did [16].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Ring-fence a fixed share of budget for reach to people who aren't shopping yet. Judge it on branded search and new-customer growth, not next-day ROAS.
B2B	Spend on being known before buyers need you: useful content, events and steady paid reach to target accounts.
Everyone	Put something in your creative that AI can't fake cheaply: real people, real places, real production.

How it's scored · IPA Bellwether Q1 2027 report, published in April

- 2 main media budgets are revised up and outpace direct marketing and sales promotion.
- 1 main media is up but not leading.
- 0 main media is cut.

Silent Night for the Blue Links

Google's 10 blue links are dead.

Why I think this

AI Mode is where Google is putting its product focus and its ads. Running two search experiences side by side is a transition, not a destination. It's a bold call, which is exactly why it's here.

The evidence

At I/O 2026, Google said AI Mode passed 1 billion monthly users in its first year [17]. SparkToro found 68% of US Google searches ended without a click in early 2026 [18]. Google plans to bring ads in AI Mode to the UK in Q4 2026 [19]. The case against: AI Overviews still appear on only around a fifth of searches [18]. And when a field experiment forced users into AI Mode only, clicks to publishers fell by 18.8 percentage points [17], which shows why Google may not rush a full switch.

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Make every product page answer the questions an AI will be asked: specs, sizes, prices, stock and who it's for.
B2B	Publish clear pages on who you serve, roughly what you cost and how you compare. AI tools quote what they can find.
Everyone	Once a month, ask Google's AI Mode the questions your customers ask. Note whether you appear and what it gets wrong.

How it's scored · by 31 May, with Google I/O in the month

2 Google makes AI Mode the default search experience for UK users.

1 it becomes the default for some users or query types, or is announced for later in the year.

0 the blue links are still the default.

June Prediction 6 of 12

The Naughty or Nice List

What others say about you matters more than anything you say about yourself.

Why I think this

AI made content free and fakes easy, so trust is now the scarce asset. AI tools decide who to recommend from third-party mentions, and regulators are going after fake reviews. The value moves to earned proof: PR, verified reviews and real endorsement.

The evidence

Muck Rack's analysis of over a million AI prompts found 85.5% of citations point to earned media [20]. The data isn't settled: Profound found brand websites make up 57% of AI citations globally [21]. On enforcement, the CMA has five businesses under investigation for fake and misleading reviews. It also warns that AI now makes fake reviews fluent and convincing [22]. Fake reviews have been banned outright since April 2025, with fines of up to 10% of global turnover [23].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Ask every happy customer for a verified review, and check your review policy against the CMA's guidance.
B2B	Put digital PR budget behind your own data and opinions, so trade press and analysts cite you.
Everyone	Track how often you're mentioned by sources you don't control, not just what you publish yourself.

How it's scored · by 30 June

2	the CMA announces a fake-review enforcement action under the DMCC Act, and UK brands or agencies publicly reframe PR as an AI-visibility investment.
1	only one of those happens.
0	neither happens.

July Prediction 7 of 12

Who Delivered the Present?

The CFO owns marketing measurement now.

Why I think this

AI-mediated journeys are breaking platform attribution, and finance has stopped trusting a ROAS that every platform grades for itself. Measurement moves to margin, incrementality and modelling, signed off by finance.

The evidence

WFA and Ebiquity found eight in 10 advertisers already run marketing mix modelling. Yet only 15% say effectiveness outputs primarily drive budget decisions, and just 14% say marketing and finance fully agree on what effectiveness means [24]. In the US, 60% of senior decision-makers trust incrementality testing most, against 37% for in-platform reporting [25].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Track contribution margin and MER (total revenue divided by total marketing spend) weekly, alongside platform ROAS.
B2B	Agree one definition of a qualified opportunity with finance and sales, then report against it.
Everyone	Run at least one incrementality test a quarter, and invite finance to help design it.

How it's scored · job-ad baseline counted in January, recounted in July

- **2** UK job ads mentioning marketing mix modelling or incrementality are up 25% or more.
- **1** they're up by less than 25%.
- **0** they're flat or down.

August Prediction 8 of 12

Elves Wanted

We're hollowing out the next generation of marketers.

Why I think this

AI is absorbing the execution work that juniors used to learn on. Fewer entry-level roles this year means fewer senior strategists in five years, and the industry will start to notice.

The evidence

Adzuna recorded 8,383 UK graduate vacancies in July 2026, down 45.6% on a year earlier and the lowest since it began tracking in 2016 [26]. In marketing specifically, 13.9% of B2C marketers believe AI has reduced the need for junior staff [6]. The counterpoint: the Institute of Student Employers warns a fall in job ads isn't the same as a fall in hiring [27]. Its survey of larger employers put graduate vacancies down only 7% [28]. Adzuna's figures land in late August, so the timing works.

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Keep at least one junior role, and design it around judgement tasks AI can't do alone, not admin.
B2B	Pair juniors with seniors on client work, so they learn the thinking, not just the tools.
Everyone	Write down how a junior becomes a strategist in your team. If you can't, nobody will.

How it's scored · by 31 August

2	published data (ISE, Adzuna or Indeed) shows UK graduate or entry-level marketing vacancies down year on year, and trade press links the fall to AI.
1	only one of those happens.
0	neither happens.

September Prediction 9 of 12

The Office Party

The webinar is dead. Long live the room.

Why I think this

Every inbox is full of AI-written invitations to watch a deck. Getting buyers into a room is expensive, and that's exactly why it works.

The evidence

The Q3 2026 IPA Bellwether saw every budget category revised up, with PR and events leading [29]. Forrester's 2026 buying research found that because AI answers are often incomplete or unreliable, buyers lean on trusted people to check them. It says that raises the value of human contact in the buying process [30].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Test small in-person moments for your best customers: tastings, launches, members' evenings.
B2B	Swap one webinar a quarter for a roundtable or dinner with ten target accounts.
Everyone	Turn every event into short clips and written takeaways, so the room's value travels further.

How it's scored · by 30 September

- 2 the latest IPA Bellwether shows events budgets revised up, and a major UK B2B event reports record or growing attendance this autumn.
- 1 only one of those happens.
- 0 neither happens.

October Prediction 10 of 12

Too Many Wise Men

AI is making B2B buying slower, not faster.

Why I think this

Every member of a buying committee now arrives with their own AI's answer, and those answers don't agree. More information means more debate, and more debate means longer cycles.

The evidence

Forrester found that purchases involving generative AI features double the size of the buying group and extend decision timelines by 30% [31]. One in five buyers felt less confident in a decision because they hit unreliable or inaccurate AI information [32]. The case against: 6sense found average B2B sales cycles fell from 11.3 months in 2024 to 10.1 months in 2025 [33]. That's the trend this prediction bets on reversing.

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	If you sell to trade buyers, publish the facts an AI tends to get wrong: terms, bulk pricing, delivery promises.
B2B	Write a one-pager for each role in a typical deal, so every stakeholder, and every stakeholder's AI, gets the same answer.
Everyone	Ask lost and stalled deals what held them up. Then answer that question on your website.

How it's scored · by 31 October

2 a major B2B buying study published in 2027 (Gartner, Forrester, LinkedIn or 6sense) reports longer cycles and cites AI or conflicting information as a cause.

1 it reports longer cycles without the AI link.

0 cycles are flat or shorter.

Black Friday's Last Orders

Black Friday is running out of road.

Why I think this

Years of training customers to wait for discounts has bought revenue, not customers. Shoppers are stretched, and the brands that understand their margins are quietly stepping back.

The evidence

In November 2025, UK retail sales grew just 1.4%, the weakest in six months despite elevated inflation. Non-food sales grew only 0.1% [34]. Barclays card spending fell 1.1% year on year that month, the steepest drop since February 2021 [35].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Model the margin on every Black Friday offer before you run it, including the returns and the customers who never come back.
B2B	Skip the discount. Use the week to remind clients of the value you've delivered this year.
Everyone	Judge the week on new customers who buy again by March, not on the week's revenue.

How it's scored · first IMRG or Barclays figures for Black Friday to Cyber Monday, judged by 7 December

2	year-on-year spend growth is below CPI inflation, so spend is down in real terms.
1	growth is no more than one percentage point above CPI.
0	growth is more than one point above CPI.

December Prediction 12 of 12

All I Want for Christmas Is You

The most exclusive thing a brand can offer is a human.

Why I think this

When personalisation is automated for everyone, it stops feeling personal. Time with real people, through appointments, members' evenings and early access, becomes the loyalty perk AI can't fake.

The evidence

A Braze survey of 2,000 UK consumers found UK shoppers the most resistant to AI of the five markets surveyed. Yet 70% still want brands to understand their preferences [36]. 81% of UK shoppers prefer a human store associate over a digital assistant for returns [37]. Only 40% of UK consumers trust companies to use their data responsibly [38].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Give your best customers something only a person can deliver: a fitting, a tasting, a call from the founder.
B2B	Make sure your biggest clients can always reach a named senior person, not a ticket queue.
Everyone	Use AI to free your people up for customers, not to replace the moments customers remember.

How it's scored · by 31 December

- 2 two or more major UK retailers launch members-only or loyalty-tier in-store experiences for Christmas.
- 1 one does.
- 0 none do.

Bonus Not scored

Phil Eaves Navidad

The boring stuff wins: a clear offer, a known audience and a consistent message. 2027 rewards the fundamentals.

Not scored. It's the one prediction that comes true every year, which is exactly the point.

Why I think this

Every prediction above comes back to the same thing. AI, agents and new ad formats change the channels, but not why people buy.

The evidence

Budgets are tight. Gartner's 2025 survey found marketing budgets flat at 7.7% of company revenue for a second year, with half of CMOs on 6% or less [39]. LinkedIn's B2B Institute says 95% of potential buyers aren't ready to buy today [40], so being known before they are is what counts. And the IPA found effectiveness fell as campaigns became more short-term [15].

What to do in 2027

Ecommerce	Write your offer in one sentence a customer would repeat. If you can't, fix that before the next campaign.
B2B	Choose the two or three types of customer you serve best and say so on your homepage. Saying no to the rest is part of the message.
Everyone	Keep your core message and look the same for the whole year. You'll be bored of it long before your customers notice it.

Phil's take

There's no shortcut in 2027, just the basics done well and done for longer than feels comfortable.

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