

The Analytical CMO

Why truth, insights, and data are the real engines of modern growth-oriented CMOs

By Eric Berkman



A Foundation Built in Data

My career did not begin in brand, creative, or demand generation. It began in the data. And not the neatly packaged kind that shows up in dashboards today, but the messy, raw, frustrating kind that lives in CSV files, notepad, on paper (!) and legacy systems and requires days and weeks of cleaning before it tells you anything worth hearing. I was an analyst long before I was ever a marketer. I used to write code, pull data, build my own models, and run my own campaign evaluations. I learned to understand a business by studying the numbers that revealed what customer actually did, not what we believed they did. I was on the inside.

That experience shaped everything that came after it. It forced me to see marketing not as a series of tactics, but as a system of cause and effect. It showed me how quickly assumptions can be wrong, when the data is clear. It trained me to look for patterns that other people missed. And, mostly it created a level of discipline, curiosity, and healthy skepticism that has guided me through every leadership role I have had since.

As I grew, I began to notice something that would shape the rest of my perspective. Most companies had more data than they knew what to do with, and yet they struggled to answer the most basic questions about their customers, their performance, and their growth. It was not because they lacked information. It was because their data was fragmented, disconnected, inconsistent, or simply not interpreted in a way that supported decision making. Early in my career I would sit in rooms where teams talked about being data-driven, while systems contradicted each other and dashboards didn't reconcile. Messy.

This helped shaped my thinking that modern marketing has two major problems. The first is that organizations do not know how to connect their data well enough. The second is that they do not know how to interpret it. They don't know how to find the gold that can lead to hockey stick growth.

Leaders want to know what to do next. Sure, they care about what happened, but mostly they need to know what to do next.

A company can have endless dashboards, perfect looking reporting packages, and all the metrics they think matter. But if the data does not connect across systems, and if the storytelling around it is weak, biased, or hard to understand, company leaders will make decisions based on fragments rather than truth.

Why Today's CMO Must Be Deeply Analytical

This is why *"The Analytical CMO"* is so important today. Not because marketing has suddenly become more quantitative - it has always been quantitative - but because the speed of the market and the complexity of customer behavior require leaders who can see through noise and build clarity out of confusion. Leaders need to understand not only how to measure things, but how to make meaning out of them, and what they should do next.

And making meaning requires something that most people do not associate with analytics: curiosity.

Curiosity is the trait that separates the analysts who create value from the analysts who simply report numbers. Curiosity is what makes someone ask why the trend shifts slightly in week 7 vs. week 22. Curiosity is what pushes someone to pull a second dataset to confirm a hypothesis. Curiosity is what makes a person question a result that seems too convenient. It is the discipline of following threads, even when the thread leads to a place you did not expect. It requires going deep into rabbit holes. And it requires truly understanding the business, the customers, and the levers. The context.

None of this means the CMO must be performing the analytical tasks. But it does mean the CMO must be creating a culture of analytics that supports the ability to lead as an analytical CMO. Putting in the discipline, approach, and tools that allow the analysts to find the gold.

Curiosity and Creativity: The Engines of Insight

But curiosity alone is not enough.

To be truly effective, curiosity needs to be paired with creativity.

Creativity in analytics is not about aesthetics or the storytelling itself. It is about seeing possibilities that the data does not directly show you. It is about connecting dots across systems and time periods. It is about imagining alternate explanations and testing them. Pressure testing hypotheses. It is about wondering if there is a different way to slice the data, a different way to define the segment, a different way to interpret the customer's behavior.

Some of the biggest breakthroughs I have ever seen came from analysts who were both curious and creative enough to explore what others overlooked. They were not trying to prove a point. They were trying to understand the truth. They were willing to push deeper, stay curious longer, challenge their own thinking, and find something that can move the needle.

Modern marketing requires what I call *"Insights literacy."*

Insights literacy is the ability to interpret data honestly, even when the truth will bring bad news. It is the ability to tell a simple, clear story about what is happening and why it matters. It is the ability to make decisions based on evidence rather than assumption. And it is the ability to translate complexity into something the rest of the organization can act on.

Most companies never develop insights literacy because they mistake reporting for insight. They hire analysts to produce dashboards, when what they really need are analysts who can reveal the meaning behind the dashboards. *The Analytical CMO* understands this distinction instinctively because they have lived it or are willing to build it. They know the difference between a number and a pattern. They know the difference between information and understanding. And they know how to coach teams and create an environment that can produce insights literacy.

Building Teams That Think, Question, and Explore

As a leader, one of the most important responsibilities I have is to create an environment where curiosity and creativity are expected, not optional. I ask my teams to challenge assumptions. I ask them to interpret results, not just report them. I ask them to explore the moments where the data creates tension or discomfort, because those moments often reveal the most valuable insights.

A truly analytical marketing organization is not one where people memorize metrics. It is one where people get curious about why things are happening. It is one where people are encouraged to ask the second and third question. It is one where the story behind the numbers becomes more important than the numbers themselves.

And while we're on this topic, we need to acknowledge the role of AI. Not the hype-filled version, but the practical, grounded version that exists in the real world. AI can help clean data, connect systems, and find patterns faster than a human ever could. It can surface anomalies, detect correlations, and reveal interesting relationships worth exploring. It can accelerate the work in meaningful ways.

But AI cannot replace curiosity.

AI cannot replace judgment.

AI cannot replace interpretation.

AI cannot replace a leader who understands the context, the customer, the constraints, and the stakes.

Certainly not yet.

AI is a tool. A powerful one. But it is not a strategy.

It assists insight. It speeds up pattern recognition.

The Analytical CMO does not fear AI, and they do not overvalue it. They look to integrate it. They use it to expand their reach, free up their team's time, and accelerate discovery. But they never confuse AI's suggestions for truth. Truth still requires a human who can interpret the story and make the call.

Insight, Truth, and Leadership: What Actually Moves Companies Forward

At its core, analytical leadership is about embracing the reality that data alone does not move companies. **Insight does.** Organizations move when leaders are willing to look at the full picture, challenge their assumptions, and base decisions on what is true rather than what is comfortable. They move when teams feel free to explore, question, and think. They move when the marketing leader is not afraid to say, "The numbers are telling us something different than what we expected, and we need to follow that thread."

When I look back at the teams I have built and the work I am most proud of, it always comes back to the same idea. Insight unlocks growth. Curiosity unlocks insight. Creativity unlocks possibility. And data, when used honestly and connected across systems, has the power to unlock truth.

The Analytical CMO lives here, because it is necessary.

They lead with clarity.

They question with healthy skepticism.

They interpret with depth.

They coach with curiosity.

They decide with confidence.

And they build marketing engines that actually move companies forward.

Everything else in marketing, from the creative, the brand, the campaigns, the channels, is more effective when this analytical foundation is strong. Without it, you are guessing. With it, you are leading.

The companies and CMOs that understand this can win.