

Using AI for SME marketing

A roadmap for customer-centric growth

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Our research finds that AI-enabled marketing is not just for tech giants. With the right planning and implementation, even small companies with limited resources can use AI tools to boost their marketing efficiency, personalise customer communication and strengthen their brand, without large IT investments.

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Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have found it challenging to adopt the latest marketing technologies due to limited resources. But the rise of open access and low-cost AI tools has significantly lowered the barrier to entry. Tools such as ChatGPT (content generation), Canva AI (automated graphic design), Lumen5 (AI-driven video creation) and HubSpot's AI features (customer engagement and email marketing), provide affordable and powerful options for SMEs.

Despite the accessibility of these tools, many SMEs see AI adoption as complex or beyond their capability. Our research shows otherwise: when strategically implemented, these tools enable SMEs to generate personalised marketing content, streamline campaigns and automate customer communication at scale – helping them to do more, with less.

Research overview

As part of a UK Research and Innovation-funded Accelerated Knowledge Transfer Partnership, we collaborated with [TTS Pharma](#), a company specialising in high-quality cannabidiol (CBD) food and supplements to explore how AI can enhance the firm's marketing. Using a combination of data audits, competitor benchmarking, AI tool piloting and performance measurement, we analysed AI's role in:

- Automating marketing processes and reducing manual workload
- Refining customer segmentation and delivering more targeted campaigns
- Addressing regulatory challenges in emerging industries where consumer trust is critical



Key recommendations for SME business leaders

1

Begin with small-scale feasibility studies and pilot projects (e.g., chatbots, automated email journeys) to improve efficiency and customer engagement

2

Invest in data readiness and upskilling your marketing staff, relatively small investments will have significant pay offs

3

Collect data through multiple channels, and integrate AI with your existing marketing systems

4

Close the loop and measure AI's effectiveness through real-time tracking and conversion rates



Key recommendations for policymakers

1

Support capability-building partnerships, such as Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, to bridge gaps in AI adoption

2

Develop sector-specific AI adoption frameworks to guide SMEs

3

Invest in education and training, and directly address ethical concerns around AI

4

Plan proactively for the transformative impact of AI on work, ensuring policies account for societal concerns about jobs and livelihoods



In our collaboration with TTS Pharma, we found that the company was able to use AI marketing innovations to enhance its competitiveness, strengthen customer relationships and drive sustainable long-term growth. These research insights are highly transferable: SMEs with diverse products, customer bases and geographical reach can adopt similar strategies to drive efficiency and impact.

Our key research findings highlight the potential applications of AI-enabled marketing



Understanding the market through AI-driven data analysis

AI enables businesses to process vast amounts of customer and market data, allowing them to refine their messaging and make more informed strategic decisions.

Key AI applications include:

- Predictive analytics: assessing consumer demand patterns and anticipating market trends
- Advanced customer segmentation based on behaviour, sentiment and engagement
- Advanced sentiment analysis and brand perception tracking



More personalised content and improved customer engagement

The more personalised your marketing content, the more likely it is to be successful. AI enables businesses to create hyper-personalised experiences at scale.

Key AI applications include:

- Dynamically tailored marketing content based on individual customer preferences and behaviours
- Enhanced product recommendations, using machine learning
- Providing real-time, personalised support through AI-powered chatbots, while reducing costs



Automating marketing processes for greater efficiency

AI-powered automation allows companies to scale marketing efforts while maintaining high precision and improving efficiency.

Key AI applications include:

- AI-generated content optimisation, ensuring messaging aligns with consumer interests
- Automated social media campaigns, dynamically adjusting audience targeting for impact



Measuring success: AI-powered performance analytics

The success of digital marketing strategies depends on real-time tracking, continuous optimisation and predictive modelling.

Key AI applications include:

- Tracking campaign effectiveness through real-time conversion rate analysis
- Using AI-powered forecasting to optimise marketing budgets and maximise returns
- Benchmarking digital marketing performance against competitors



CASE STUDY:

AI's role in the CBD market – overcoming challenges and maximising impact

The CBD food and supplements market faces strict regulations and evolving consumer perceptions, which can make consumer marketing challenging. AI-enabled marketing helps TTS Pharma to identify regulatory compliant, high-impact marketing strategies; build consumer trust through AI-driven sentiment analysis; and generate data-backed educational content, helping customers to make informed decisions. These AI-driven insights enable TTS Pharma to consolidate its market-leading position, improving its engagement with customers and generating value for the business.

Underpinning research

Hajiheydari, N. (2025) AI-driven digital marketing in SMEs: Strategies, tools, and insights for enhanced performance and customer engagement



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Nastaran has a PhD in Information Systems and specialises in digital platforms and technology-driven behaviour. Her research focuses on algorithmic management and AI applications, drawing on interdisciplinary approaches to explore how digital technologies shape work, enhance business performance, and inform decision-making in organisational and societal settings.



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Robert is a medical doctor with a doctorate in artificial intelligence applied to prescribing. After early clinical work and an MD in Oxford, he pursued stratified medicine and digital health. He has led global health genetics research in The Gambia and research focusing on personalised interventions for smoking cessation, advising on NICE, NIHR and European Union committees.

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