# Marketers’ reliance on generative AI threatens net zero ambitions by 2030



The marketing sector, traditionally a keen advocate for progressive practices, now finds itself at a crossroads as it grapples with an uncomfortable truth: the very tools designed to propel it into a sustainable future may be undermining its climate commitments. As reported by climate tech firm 51toCarbonZero, while a striking 90% of marketers envision achieving net zero by 2030, an alarming 42% recognise their dependency on generative AI as the primary barrier to this goal. This contradiction highlights a critical blind spot within an industry that professes commitment to ecological stewardship but often fails to align its practices with its pledges.

Generative AI, a tool that has been rapidly adopted by marketers for tasks ranging from automated copywriting to the creation of synthetic influencers, offers significant creative opportunities. However, this innovation comes with considerable energy demands, raising serious questions about its environmental impact. Richard Davis, CEO and co-founder of 51toCarbonZero, underscores the dual nature of this technology. He articulates that while GenAI is energy-intensive, it can also contribute positively to sustainability initiatives when employed judiciously. “With the right knowledge and approach, it can be used more sustainably,” he asserts.

Davis suggests that exploring smaller language models (SLMs) could alleviate some of the ecological burden associated with traditional, large-scale AI models. These leaner, more efficient models require substantially less energy and can effectively meet many marketing needs without the carbon footprint associated with their larger counterparts. Furthermore, when used strategically, generative AI could enhance marketing efficacy—not just by optimising media buys to eliminate unnecessary impressions but also by fostering the design of low-carbon creative assets.

Despite these potential benefits, a significant oversight persists: marketing's emissions are often not integrated into broader corporate climate strategies. Nearly half of UK-based marketers surveyed by 51toCarbonZero indicate that decarbonisation is not considered within their departmental objectives. This fragmented approach poses a risk, particularly as digital marketing emissions have ballooned to match those of the aviation sector, attributed to the proliferation of programmatic advertising and the escalating use of generative AI.

Amidst these challenges, shifting attitudes regarding budget constraints are beginning to pave the way for sustainable innovation. Increasingly, procurement teams are demanding transparency around carbon credentials from agencies and tech providers. The stakes are escalating; vendors are now facing exclusion from requests for proposals (RFPs) if they cannot demonstrate efforts towards net zero. Davis notes, “Sustainability is no longer a nice-to-have. It’s a requirement to win and keep business.”

More than two-thirds of senior marketers affirm that sustainability considerations are critical in their selection of partners and platforms. The tension between ambition and execution highlights a mixed landscape, where some brands are leading the charge by investing in carbon intelligence platforms and pushing for accountability, while others linger in a state of awareness without concrete action plans.

Regulatory pressures, particularly emerging from the EU and UK, further compound this urgency. Investors, regulatory bodies, consumers, and employees are increasingly calling for accountability in corporate emissions. “Decarbonisation isn’t just the right thing to do,” Davis stresses, “it’s smart business. It builds trust, improves efficiency, and provides a competitive edge.”

In this regard, marketing occupies a pivotal role. Situated at the nexus of reputation, influence, and innovation, it possesses the unique ability to drive both consumer engagement and corporate change. If the sector can effectively align its operational practices with its climate promises, it could catalyse broader transformations within the business landscape, helping to establish a future that genuinely marries marketing creativity with sustainability ambitions.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/19/marketers-want-go-green-genai-locking-them-carbon-trap)
2. Paragraphs 3-4: [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/19/marketers-want-go-green-genai-locking-them-carbon-trap)
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5. Paragraph 8: [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/19/marketers-want-go-green-genai-locking-them-carbon-trap)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/19/marketers-want-go-green-genai-locking-them-carbon-trap> - Please view link - unable to able to access data