



Benchmarks, ROI & Strategic
Foundations for Smarter Growth

Hybrid Marketing in the **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**



The built environment is at an inflection point. Rising costs, longer sales cycles, and new procurement pressures are colliding with the acceleration of digital channels and AI tools. Yet some firms are still operating with lean marketing budgets, fragmented agency setups, or underpowered in-house teams.



Representing **6% of national GDP** and employing over **2.5 million people**, when it comes to marketing, the sector often lags behind industries of comparable scale.

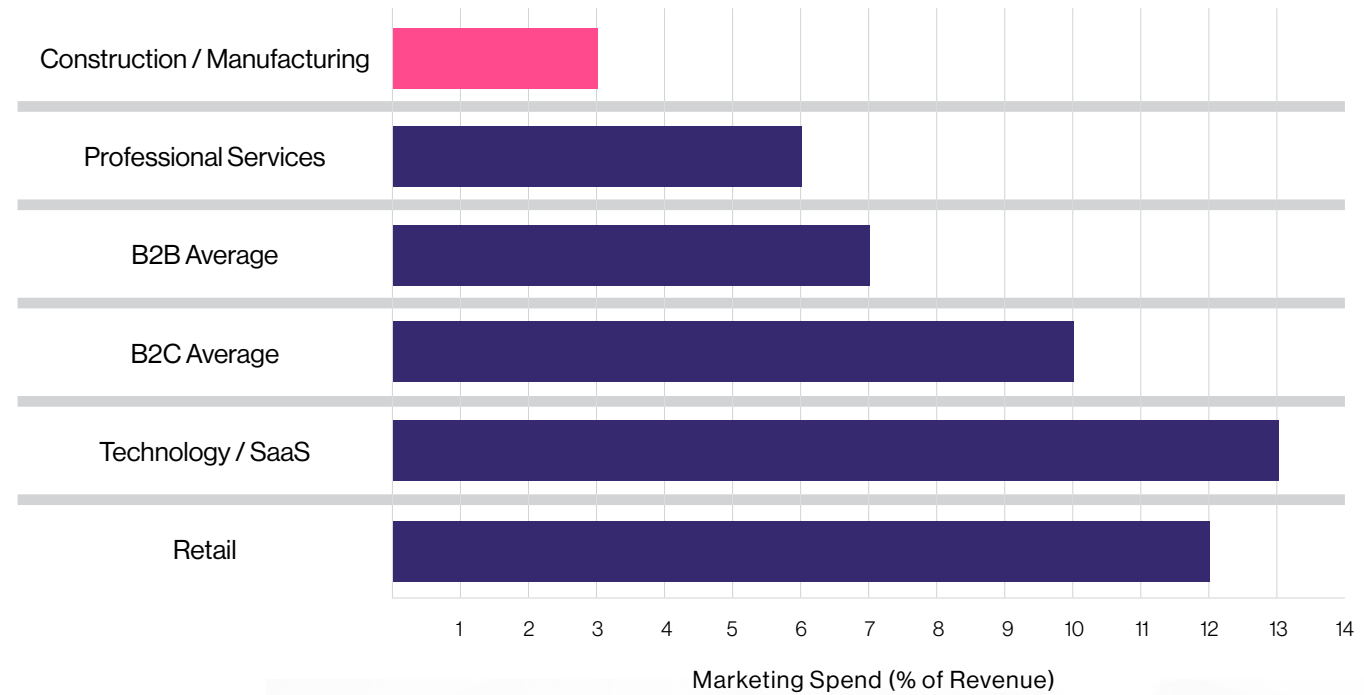
Budgets remain lean. Most manufacturers spend **less than 3% of turnover** on marketing, with many contractors

committing even less. This stands in sharp contrast to sectors like technology and retail, where marketing regularly accounts for **10% or more of revenue**. For built environment firms, marketing is too often treated as a discretionary spend - activated around a trade show or product launch, then scaled back in quieter periods.

The result is inconsistency. In-house teams are overstretched, multi-agency setups lack cohesion, and AI tools are used in isolation without governance. Meanwhile, buyer behaviour has shifted. With **76% of B2B buyers starting their supplier search online**, firms that underinvest in brand and digital channels are falling behind before conversations even begin.

At the same time, the opportunity is clear. Where spend is strategic - rooted in strong brand foundations and balanced across the right mix of in-house, external, and AI support - ROI is proven to be strong. **Campaigns in this sector routinely deliver 5:1 returns** (that is, £5 returned for every £1 spent) , with some digital channels achieving far higher.

Average Marketing Spend by Sector (As % of Revenue)



Construction & Manufacturing (UK, 2022)

According to the Construction Manufacturers' Marketing Report 2022, firms report an average marketing budget equal to around 2.3% of revenue, with a wide range from under 1% to over 35%. The Association of Professional Builders endorses 3% of turnover as a benchmark.



The ROI Divide

We know that marketing in the built environment delivers results.

But the picture isn't consistent. Some channels drive exceptional value, whereas others struggle to justify their spend. The issue is not whether ROI exists, it's whether budgets are weighted towards the activities that compound over time.

Time Vs Return

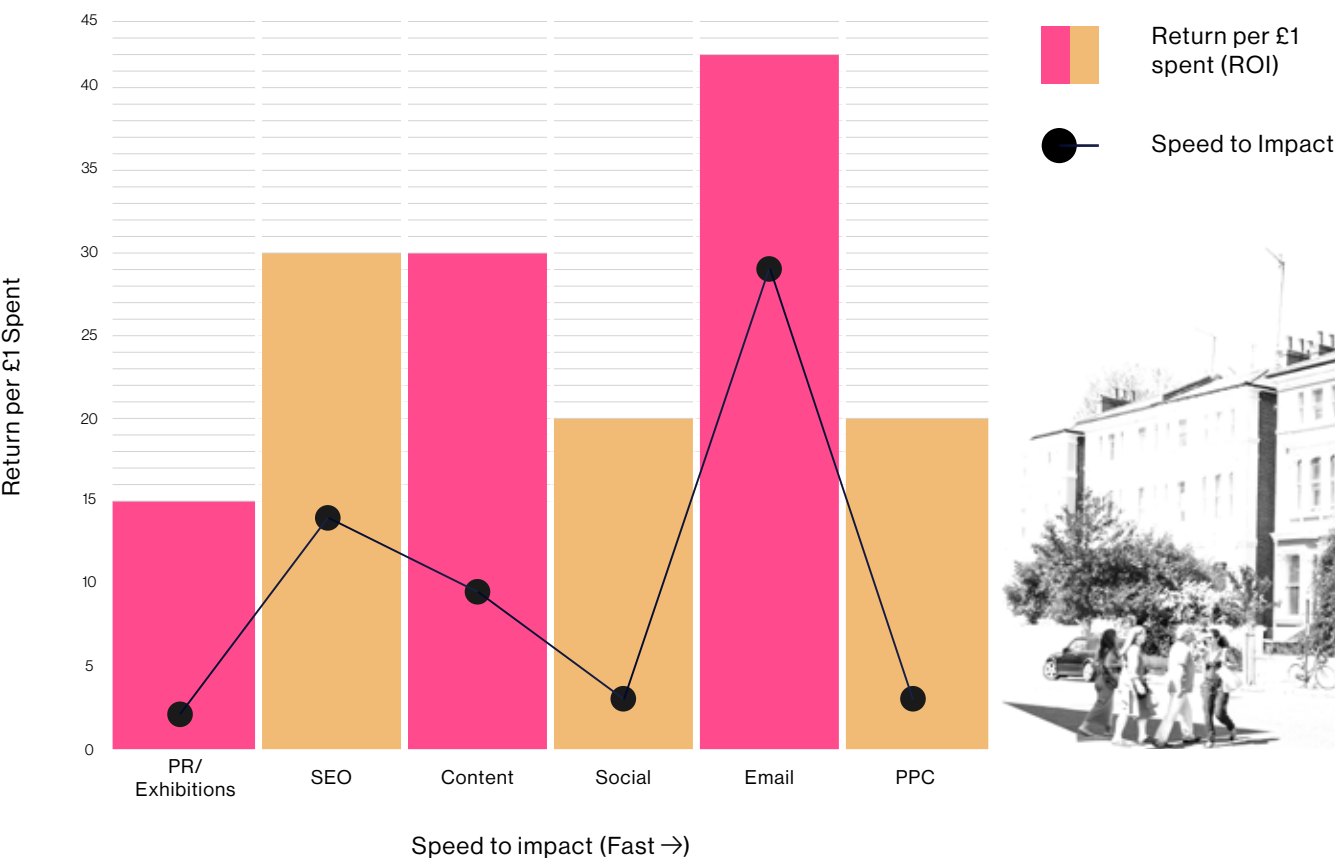
Immediate impact: Paid search (PPC) and paid social generate visibility almost instantly, but ROI sits low (around 200%). They work as tactical levers, but costs scale quickly, and returns level off without constant investment.

Compounding channels: Email and SEO deliver exceptional ROI (3,900% and 2,200% respectively) while content sits at around 750%. These are slower to mature but continue to compound the longer they run, building efficiency into every future campaign..

Reputation drivers: PR and exhibitions deliver the weakest measurable ROI, around 150%, but remain essential in a sector built on trust. They underpin credibility and strengthen relationships, even if their impact doesn't show directly in the numbers.



ROI by Marketing Channel (UK Benchmarks)



Suggested Budget Allocation FOR FIRMS AIMING FOR GROWTH

Email Marketing (20–25%)

High ROI, cost-efficient, and compounding. Investment should cover list building, segmentation, and automation.

SEO & Content (30–35%)

SEO is slow burn but essential for discoverability. Pair with consistent content (case studies, thought leadership, sector reports) to build authority and feed other channels.

Paid Media (PPC & Paid Social) (15–20%)

Keep for visibility spikes, launches, or lead-

gen pushes. Useful for speed, but don't over-allocate, diminishing returns kick in quickly.

PR, Exhibitions & Sponsorships (10–15%)

Allocate for credibility and profile. ROI is harder to track, but visibility at the right events and in the right publications shapes long-term trust.

Brand, Strategy & Oversight (10%)

A dedicated slice for maintaining brand consistency, measuring performance, and ensuring every activity connects back to a coherent strategy.

Building A Smarter **MARKETING FUNCTION**

No single approach delivers everything. Rely solely on in-house teams and you stretch them too thin. Automate without oversight and you risk generic output. Outsource too much and you lose authenticity. The most effective firms operate a **hybrid model**: foundations in-house, efficiency through automation, and specialist expertise outsourced where it matters most.

In-House (Keep them Close)

Your foundations. Strategy, brand, and business knowledge must sit at the centre. These are the activities that shape direction, safeguard authenticity, and ensure marketing is aligned with business objectives.

Automate (Efficiency)

Automation turns repeatable processes into reliable systems. AI and digital tools reduce the burden on teams, free up capacity, and bring speed without compromising quality. Automate where efficiency matters:




Outsource

Specialist skills demand external expertise. These are the areas where knowledge moves quickly, tools are expensive, and the margin for error is slim. Trying to cover them in-house often leads to wasted spend, diluted impact, or missed opportunities. By outsourcing, firms gain access to proven

expertise, advanced technology, and creative firepower without carrying the overhead. This isn't about handing over control — it's about extending capability where returns depend on precision and scale.

Where Growth Really Comes From

The firms that thrive don't over-invest in one model. They blend the three. Strategy and authenticity stay in-house, efficiency comes from automation, and expertise is brought in when needed. This balance is what turns marketing from a cost centre into a growth driver.

OUTSOURCE	Brand positioning, market analysis, competitive benchmarking, messaging frameworks.	Big-picture creative direction, multi-channel campaigns, launch assets.	Paid campaigns, creative campaigns, training, content governance.	Advanced SEO strategy, content optimisation, backlink building, UX & site architecture.	Strategic segmentation, high-stakes campaign design, copywriting	Campaign design, targeting, optimisation, A/B testing, budget efficiency.	Stand design, creative direction, event PR, logistics.	Editorial refinement, narrative shaping, design, distribution strategy.	Media strategy, journalist relationships, press office support.	Automated reporting, CRM dashboards, analytics tools.	Quarterly performance analysis, strategic insight, cross-channel ROI insights
AUTOMATE			Scheduling, templated graphics, AI-assisted drafting.	Monitoring rankings, technical audits, keyword tracking.	Automated nurture flows, triggered campaigns, personalisation, reporting	Automated bidding tools within ad platforms.	Event management tools (registration, follow-up).	AI-assisted drafting, templated design layouts.	Media monitoring tools, press release distribution lists.	Automated reporting, CRM dashboards, analytics tools.	Workflow automation (content drafts, scheduling, analytics).
IN-HOUSE	Ownership of vision and alignment with business goals.	Adaptation of assets, project updates, stakeholder comms.	Everyday posting, authentic updates, employee advocacy.	Providing technical input, case studies, on-site knowledge.	List management, newsletter drafting, project news.		Relationship-building on the ground, team presence.	First-draft input, technical knowledge, client/project stories.	Providing company news, quotes, and spokesperson access.	Daily/weekly KPI tracking, internal performance dashboards.	Team training, governance frameworks.
	Marketing Strategy & Brand	Campaign Creative	Organic Social	SEO & Website Optimisation	Email Campaigns	Paid Media (PPC / Socials)	Events & Exhibitions	Content Marketing	PR & Media Relations	Data & Reporting	AI Adoption

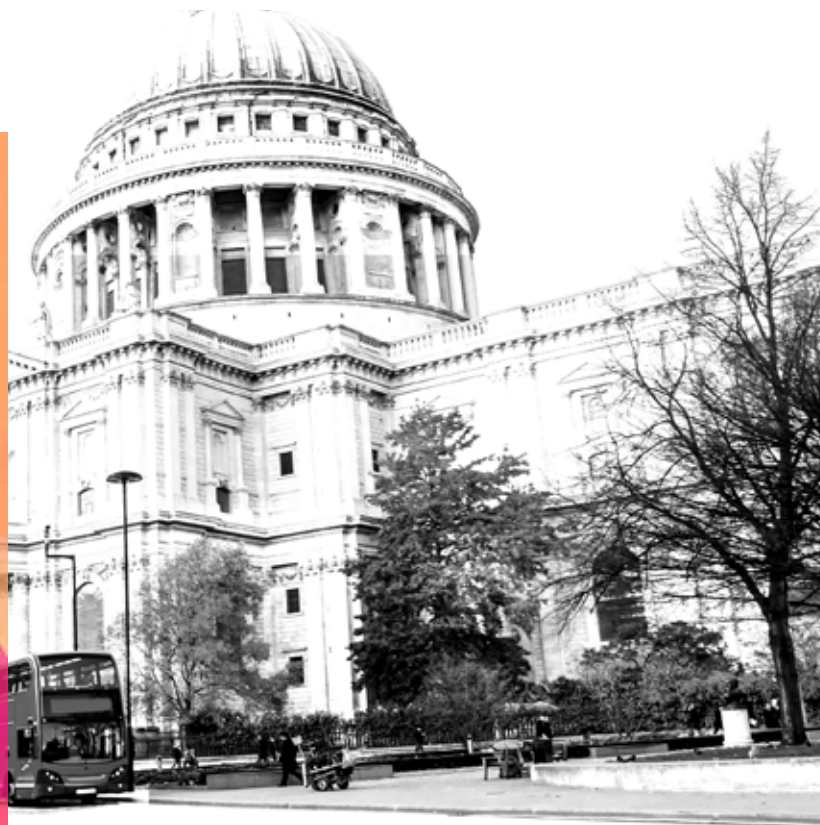
From Spend TO RETURN

A hybrid model isn't just operationally smoother, it delivers harder returns. By rebalancing budgets towards channels that compound value, while outsourcing precision work and automating repeatable tasks, firms see **stronger, more sustainable ROI**.



Current State

Most built environment firms still direct the bulk of their budget into low-efficiency activities: exhibitions, ad hoc social, and short-term paid campaigns. ROI averages around 5:1 which is respectable, but far below what's possible.



The Hybrid Rebalance

Reweightings towards high-yield, compounding channels (email, SEO, content) while outsourcing technical depth and automating admin creates a step-change in performance.

Email: highest ROI (~3,900%), fuelled by segmentation, automation, and content pipelines.

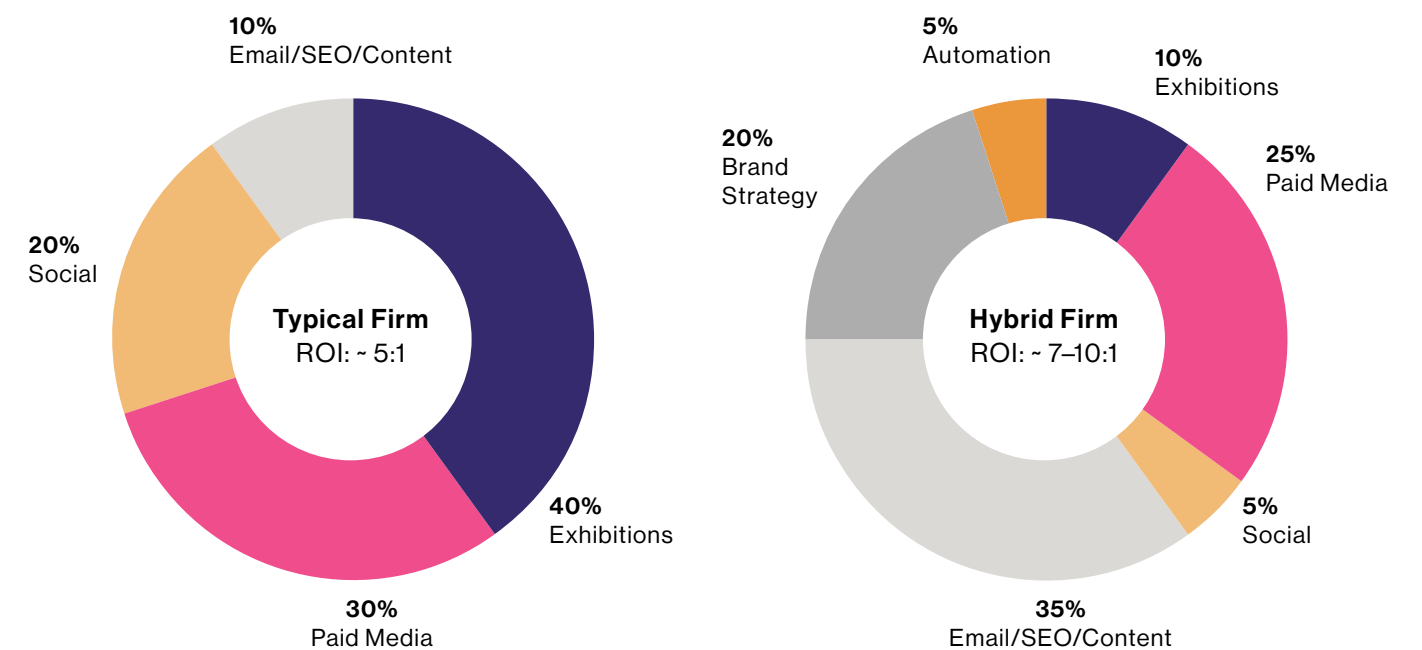
SEO & Content: sustainable discovery and authority; ROI ~2,200% and 750%.

Paid Media: focused, optimised spend delivers speed without spiralling costs.

PR & Exhibitions: smaller slice, but sharpened with strategic external support.

Firms that rebalance into high-yield channels (email, SEO, content) regularly see ROI above the sector average of 5:1, with blended returns closer to 7:1 or more, and channel-level results far higher. More importantly, ROI compounds year on year as the balance shifts towards owned channels and automation.

Budget Allocation Comparison



Leading firms don't just rebalance budgets, they embed hybrid models. Spending smarter, not more, by **shifting 10-15% into high-performing channels can double ROI**. The next step is seeing how this framework adapts to pressures like AI adoption and ESG requirements.



Adapting to AI AND ESG PRESSURES

Rebalancing budgets and embedding hybrid models creates immediate ROI gains. But the bigger prize is resilience. The firms that will lead the built environment over the next decade are those who can adapt their marketing function to two unstoppable forces: **AI adoption** and **ESG accountability**.

AI Adoption

AI is reshaping marketing workflows, from content drafting to predictive analytics. Used well, it accelerates delivery and improves decision-making. Used poorly, it risks brand dilution, compliance breaches, and generic output.

Short-term: AI can streamline reporting, campaign management, and content drafts.

Long-term: It needs governance frameworks and external expertise to ensure strategic alignment.

Hybrid advantage: Core brand voice stays in-house, automation handles repeatables, and outsourced partners bring strategic AI integration.



ESG Requirements

ESG has shifted from marketing narrative to procurement necessity. Clients and investors now expect measurable action on sustainability, social responsibility, and governance. For firms in the built environment, this has become a decisive factor in winning contracts.

Near-term: Stakeholders demand evidence, not vague pledges, of reduced emissions, ethical supply chains, and community impact.

Longer-term: Marketing becomes the channel for proving ESG credibility, ensuring firms are not only compliant but also differentiated.

Hybrid advantage: In-house knowledge ensures authenticity, automation supports data capture and reporting, and specialist agencies shape ESG messaging that withstands scrutiny.

“As AI agents reshape the ESG arena, the journey from compliance to strategic differentiation is not just possible—it’s essential.”

KPMG, on AI-driven ESG transformation



Using AI to Your ESG Advantage

ESG is only as strong as the evidence behind it. AI makes that evidence easier to find, harder to dispute, and faster to communicate. In-house teams keep ownership of the facts, automation handles the heavy lifting, and external partners ensure the story lands with the people who matter.

Evidence, not claims: AI turns operational data into hard numbers procurement teams can trust.

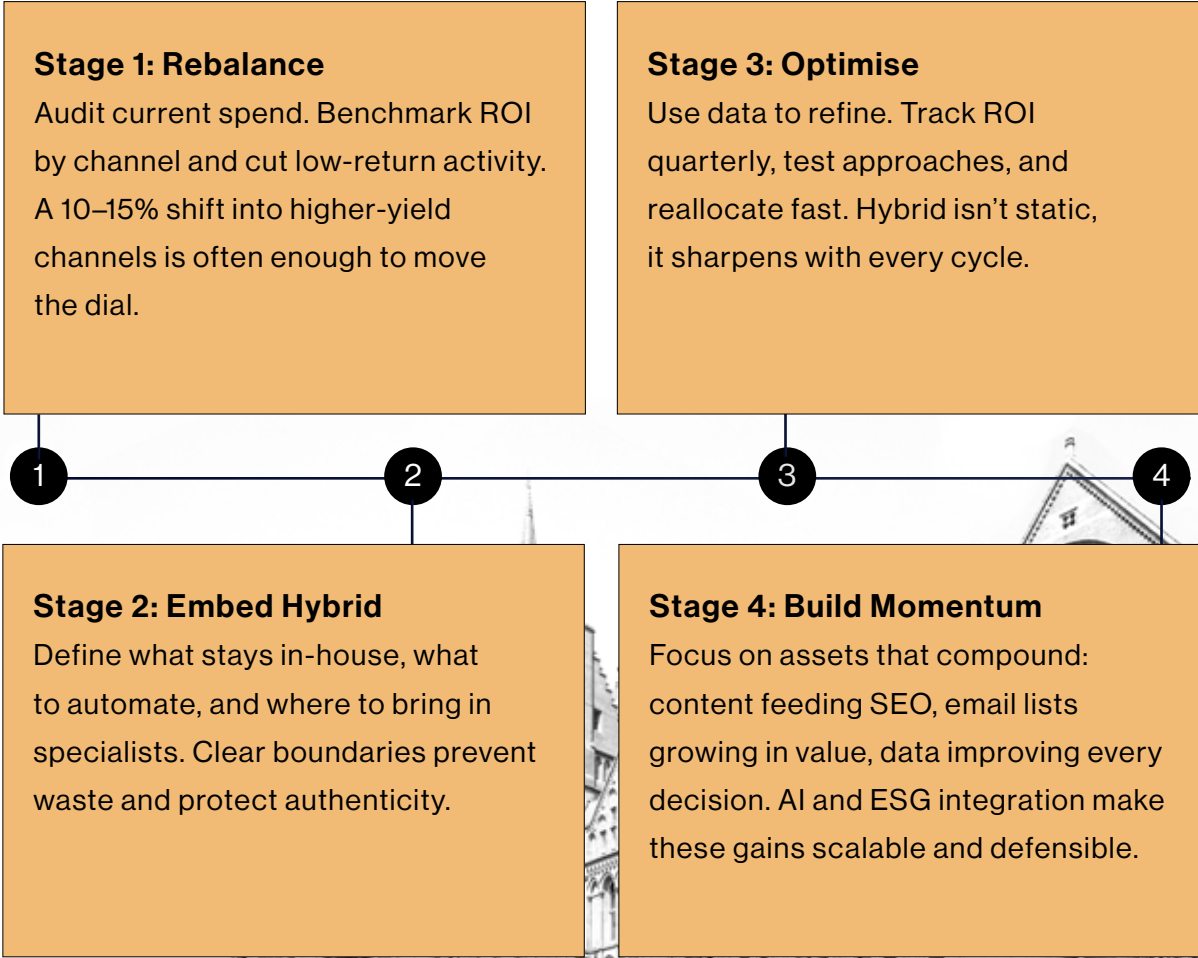
Spot the gaps: It highlights where targets are slipping or reporting won’t withstand scrutiny.

Consistency at scale: Automation keeps ESG metrics tracked and reported in line with procurement and investor expectations.

Sharper narratives: With data handled, ESG messaging can focus on impact.

From Insight TO IMPLEMENTATION

The data is clear: firms in the built environment underinvest in marketing, misallocate spend, and risk falling behind on ESG and AI. The hybrid model offers a way forward. The question now is how to move from recognition to execution. This roadmap sets out the stages leaders should follow to build a marketing function that delivers today and adapts for tomorrow.



Is Your Marketing FIT FOR GROWTH?

A quick diagnostic for senior leaders in the built environment. If you can't tick these boxes, your marketing is leaving value on the table.

Budget & ROI

- ☐ Do you know your marketing spend as a % of revenue, and how it compares to sector benchmarks?
- ☐ Can you track ROI by channel, not just overall spend?
- ☐ Have you reallocated budget into high-yield channels (email, SEO, content)?

Hybrid Model

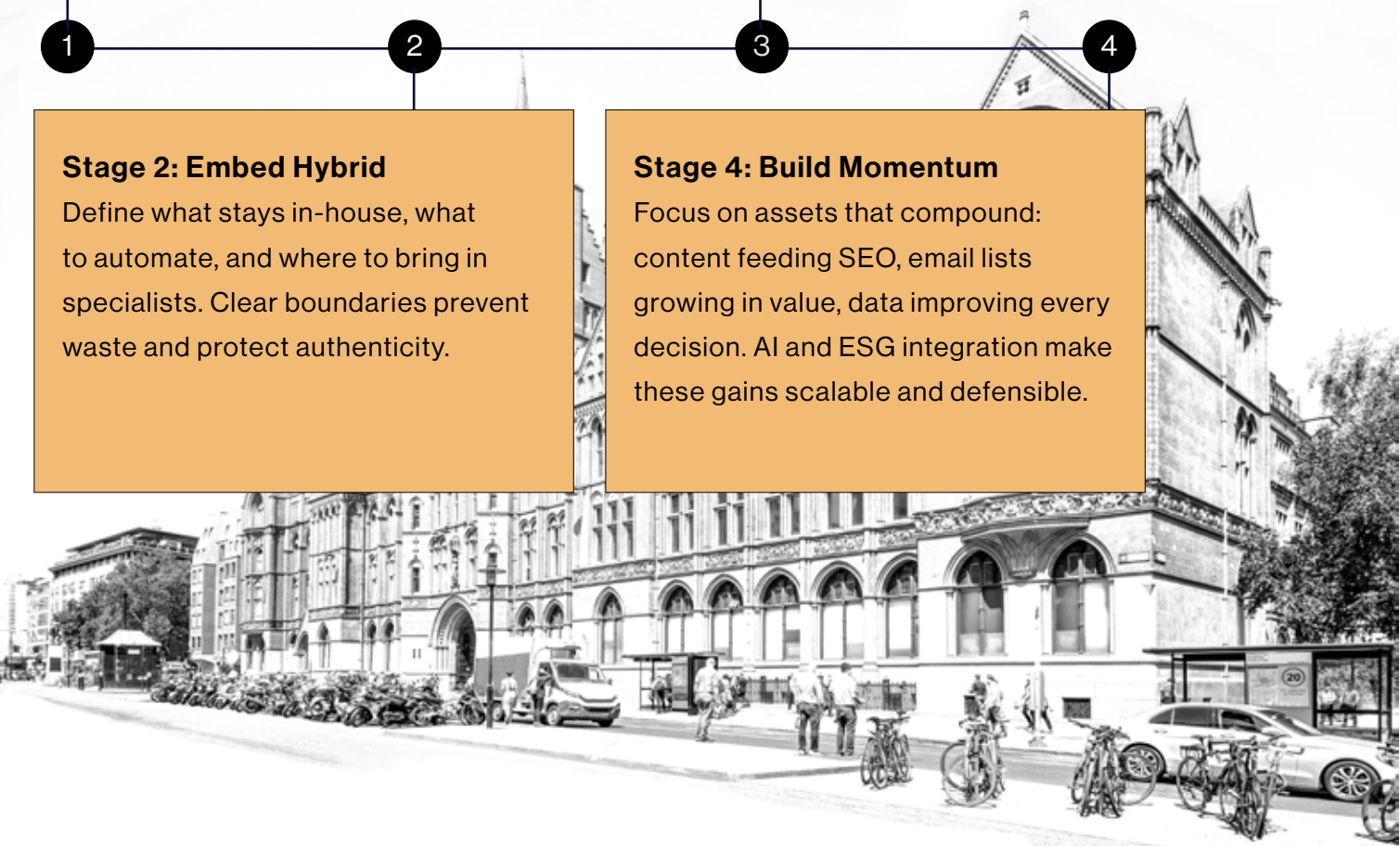
- ☐ Are strategy and brand firmly owned in-house?
- ☐ Do you have clarity on what's automated, outsourced, or managed internally?
- ☐ Is automation delivering measurable efficiency gains?

Performance & Optimisation

- ☐ Do you review ROI quarterly and adjust spend accordingly?
- ☐ Is your reporting structured and consistent across channels?
- ☐ Do you have at least one channel that compounds (content, SEO, email)?

Future Proofing

- ☐ Do you have governance in place for AI use?
- ☐ Are ESG metrics embedded into your marketing, not just your annual report?
- ☐ Can your ESG story withstand procurement-level scrutiny?





The Standard is Shifting **WHAT'S YOUR NEXT MOVE?**



We help firms take that first step.

Whether it's auditing current spend, reworking channel strategy, or building ESG credibility into marketing communications, our role is to give you a framework that compounds value, not just campaigns.

If your marketing still feels like a cost, now is the time to turn it into a growth engine.

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