The Definitive Guide to Distributed Marketing Operations, Technology and Investments.

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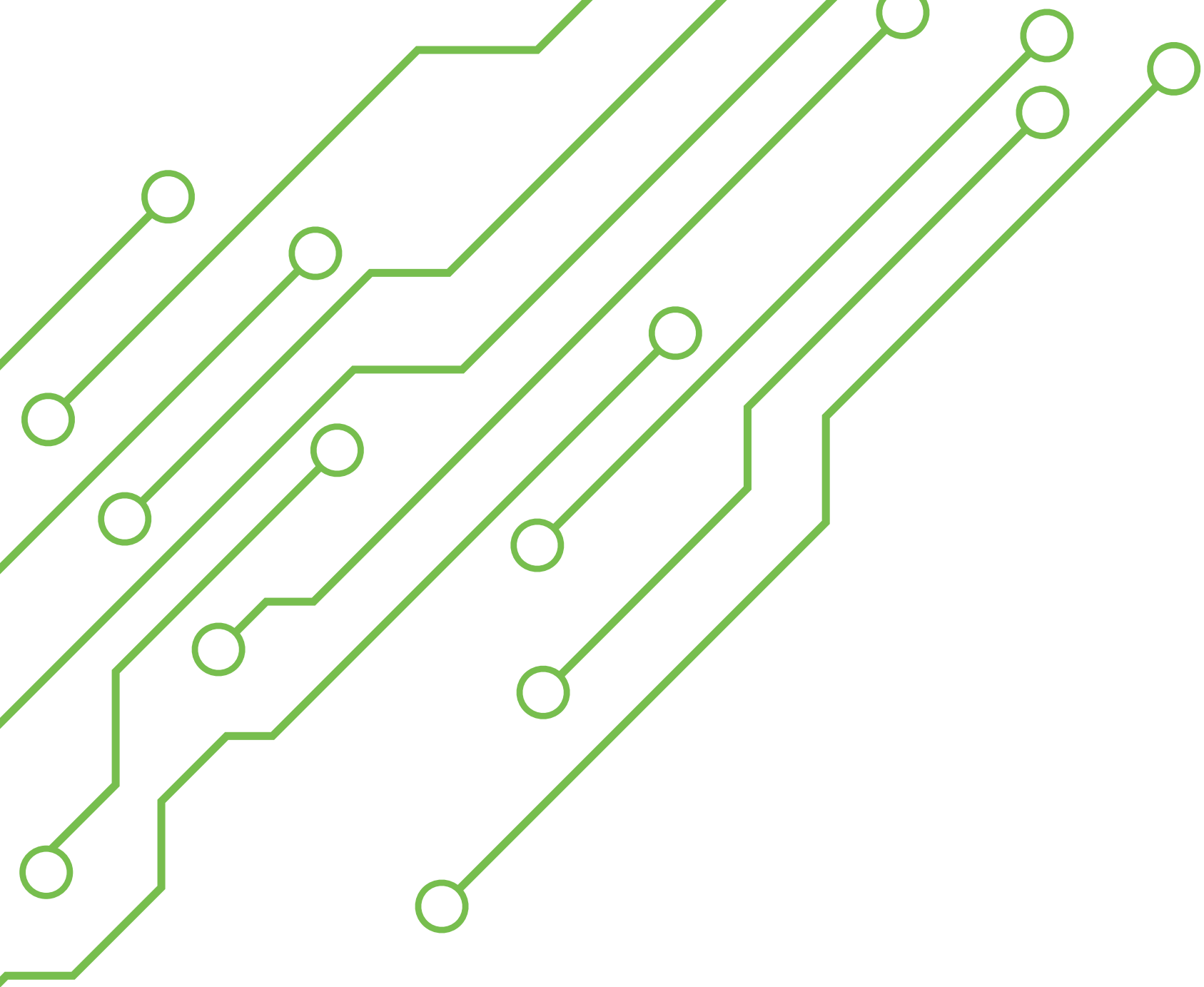
When enterprise companies make purchase decisions about distributed marketing technology, it directly impacts brand marketing operations, channel partners and the platform's end users. Unfortunately, integration capabilities are an often overlooked link to user adoption and success, even though it's more critical for distributed marketing use cases than any other MarTech investment in the market.[1] In an effort to future-proof their investment, marketing operations teams need to ensure that their distributed marketing platform doesn't get siloed from the rest of their MarTech stack. This is particularly relevant in light of the growing utilization of AI tools that require data interoperability.

[1]This is the case when local users of distributed marketing and sales systems are channel partners. When channel partners' MarTech decisions are not controlled by a centralized entity, such as in an enterprise, they widely vary, making the integration needs to a platform exponentially more complicated due to the heterogeneity in the MarTech stacks of the platform's user base.

Before investing in distributed marketing technology, consider your enterprise's requirements for integrations and data interoperability. Has your marketing operations team:
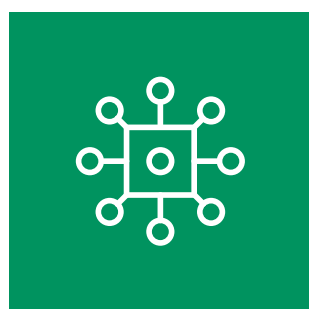
Documented the data flow needs of your existing marketing technology stack?
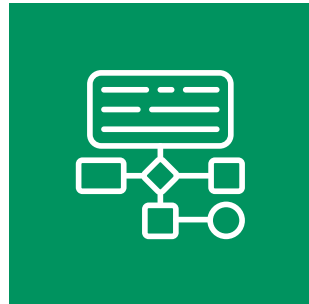
Outlined manual workflows to gather, analyze and manage data?

Surveyed the ultimate end users of your platform, including independent channel partners, to understand their data flow needs?

Evaluated and/or implemented the use of generative AI for content creation, image creation, and code generation based on natural language inputs?
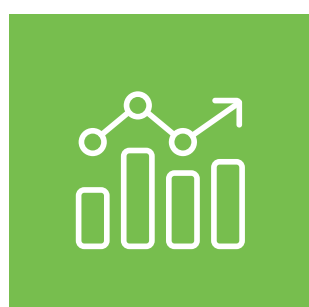
Explored how your organization might use advanced analytics to improve insights and data-driven decision making?

With this critical information, enterprise companies can ensure that their investment in new distributed marketing technology optimally integrates with their existing systems, teams and workflows to maximize value and outcomes. While it's not necessary to know how to design or build the integrations to make marketing technology decisions, it is helpful to understand the basics so you can avoid the pitfalls of an application silo while ensuring that your investment supports integrations for a cohesive infrastructure strategy.

This ebook serves as a guide to distributed marketing operations, technology and investments for enterprise companies that need better MarTech solutions. It provides actionable insights to help you find marketing software solutions that meet the needs of your brand, channel partners and end users.

Understanding Distributed Marketing

Distributed Marketing, also called *decentralized marketing,* refers to a brand-to-local marketing strategy, where a centralized marketing team provides brand guidelines, assets, and support to local or regional teams, subsidiaries, or partners to execute marketing activities in their respective markets.

In a distributed marketing model, the central marketing team retains control over the overall brand strategy, messaging, and creative direction to ensure consistency and alignment with the company's marketing objectives. However, the local teams or partners are empowered to adapt and execute marketing campaigns based on their specific market needs and local customer preferences. This decentralized approach acknowledges that different markets may require customized messaging, offers, or channels to effectively reach and engage target audiences. The key components of distributed marketing include:

Centralized Brand Control

The central marketing team establishes brand guidelines, visualassets, messaging frameworks, and other marketing resources to maintain a consistent brand identity across all markets. This helps preserve the brand image and core values while allowing for localized customization.

Localization

Local or regional teams have the flexibility to adapt marketing campaigns to suit their specific market requirements. This can include tailoring messaging, content, offers, and creative elements to resonate with the local audience and cultural nuances.

Coordinated Collaboration and Execution

Effective distributed marketing requires strong coordination and collaboration between the central marketing team and the local teams. This can involve streamlined workflows to ensure alignment with overall marketing objectives, including delivering marketing tactics into local markets through traditional, digital, and social media channels.

Reporting and Analytics

Distributed marketing models often involve leveraging technology platforms that provide visibility into the performance of marketing activities across markets. This allows the central marketing team to monitor key performance metrics, gather data, and analyze results to assess the effectiveness of campaigns, identify trends, and make data-driven decisions.

Benefits of distributed marketing include increased agility and responsiveness to local market needs, improved brand consistency, reduced time to market, and the ability to leverage local knowledge and expertise.

Central
Marketing Team

Local
Marketing Team

The Value of an Open Platform

The concept of an open platform revolves around the need for systems to talk to each other. Access to an open platform can provide immense value for marketing operations teams of enterprise companies that utilize a distributed marketing strategy. An open platform is a software platform that is designed to enable developers to build applications that can integrate and interact with other software applications, systems, and data sources. With an open platform, marketing operations teams can integrate and connect various marketing tools and systems, increasing their operations' efficiency and effectiveness. For enterprise companies, it is crucial to ensure that software and systems are compatible and interconnected for communication and data analysis.

Access to an open platform can also provide greater scalability and agility. With an open platform, marketing operations teams can quickly and easily scale their operations by adding new applications and services to their technology stack. This can help businesses stay ahead of the competition and adapt to changing market conditions.

Overall, an open platform can provide marketing operations teams with the ability to integrate and connect distributed marketing technology and systems, streamline workflows, and increase efficiency and effectiveness. As a result, marketing operations teams can gain greater insights into their operations and choose a technology that will increase adoption, eliminate manual processes and provide better value. Let's take a closer look at what this could look like with the implementation of four main types of integrations:

Solutions Integrations

Web Services and APIs

Webhooks

Embedded Connectors

1 Solutions Integrations
(Out of the Box)

The most robust integrations of any technology are Solutions Integrations — where the platform provider uses its own product and engineering resources to build an extension of the product to another technology and service offering.

Within distributed marketing, it's common to find two types of solutions integrations: technology integrations and marketing services integrations.

> Technology Integrations provide software extensions utilizing the web services of other platforms. They are often important in the user experience or workflow for end users to accomplish unique tasks in the platform.

> Marketing Services Integrations enable a seamless workflow for marketing execution. Marketing Service Provider (MSP) integrations power print, direct mail, email marketing, social media advertising, and more. Integrating with MSPs ensures that marketing materials produced by local teams or partners align with brand guidelines established by the central marketing team. This also helps streamline and simplify vendor management to ensure consistent quality, competitive pricing, and reliable service, rather than having distributed marketing users select their own vendors.

When evaluating solutions integrations, it is essential to understand the use cases these integrations support. In the case of marketing services integrations, determine whether the integrations meet a wide range of use cases or only a limited set. Regarding technology integrations, consider whether these use cases align with your specific needs or if you have unique scenarios that may not be possible or may be negatively impacted by the native integration. Assess whether the built-in integrations can be customized to support your requirements, including the ability to move all necessary data to and from the target system and perform required functions.

2 Web Services & APIs

When it comes to web services and APIs, often made available through a Developer Center, not all technology is created equal. Before delving into the intricacies of integration, it's important to understand key terminology and concepts.

Manual versus Automated Integration

Your teams may already manually download and upload data from system to system. Automated Integration replaces human involvement by enabling scheduled data syncs. This not only facilitates data transfer at scale, but also provides features such as storing field mappings and data transformation capabilities. By eliminating the reliance on manual processes, automated integration significantly reduces the risk of human error. The addition of new areas of technology investment provides opportunities to increase efficiency, even in cases where manual work is required. Ensure that you isolate such manual workflows and evaluate them under the web services lens.

Flat-file and Web Services Integration

Flat-file integration involves the utilization of flat files, typically in CSV or text format, to facilitate the transfer of data. Certain systems offer built-in functionality to automatically export flat files to a server, while others can import these files. It's important to note that this method solely supports data transfer and does not encompass any additional business logic. All business rules and processes are managed within the source and target systems. On the other hand, web services integration relies on the exposed functionality of a system on the internet, enabling other systems to interact with it. In addition to data transfer, web services have the capability to trigger actions within the system. For instance, one system can instruct another system to execute tasks or record data points without manual intervention. Web services present numerous possibilities for system interactions. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that capabilities offered by each vendor may impose limitations on customers.

APIs — RESTful Versus SOAP

When Solutions Integrations (Out of the Box) don't cut it, you may consider building your own integration. But make sure the APIs you provide your developers are built correctly and have strong documentation.Otherwise, internal costs could skyrocket — which is often not a criterion considered in evaluating the cost of a platform. While SOAP APIs have their own strengths and are still prevalent in specific contexts, RESTful APIs have gained widespread popularity due to their simplicity, scalability, performance benefits, and compatibility with modern web development practices.

Here is why:

Simplicity and Ease of Use

RESTful APIs are designed with simplicity in mind. They utilize widely adopted web standards such as HTTP, URL, and JSON, making them easy to understand and work with. RESTful APIs follow a lightweight architectural style, focusing on resource-based interactions. This simplicity translates into faster development cycles, reduced complexity in code implementation, and ease of integration with various systems and programming languages. In contrast, SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol) APIs tend to be more complex, relying on XML-based messaging formats and extensive protocols, which can increase development time and complexity.

Scalability and Performance

RESTful APIs are known for their scalability and performance characteristics. They leverage the stateless nature of HTTP, allowing for better scalability as multiple requests can be processed simultaneously without the need to maintain session state on the server. RESTful APIs also promote a client-server architecture, enabling a clear separation of concerns and facilitating load balancing across multiple servers. Additionally, RESTful APIs support caching mechanisms, allowing clients to cache responses and reduce network overhead. SOAP APIs, on the other hand, tend to have higher overhead due to XML-based messaging and extensive protocol stacks, potentially impacting performance and scalability in certain scenarios.

Flexibility and Wide Adoption

RESTful APIs offer greater flexibility and interoperability compared to SOAP. RESTful APIs reliance on standard web protocols allows it to easily integrate with a wide range of technologies, including web browsers, mobile applications, and cloud-based services. By aligning with the principles of the web, RESTful APIs can be consumed by different platforms and devices. This flexibility promotes system interoperability, making it easier to integrate new and existing systems. SOAP APIs, although widely used in enterprise environments, may require additional effort and tooling for integration and can be less compatible with certain web-based or lightweight architectures.

3 Webhooks

Webhooks provide real-time and event-driven integration. Unlike other integration methods that rely on polling or scheduled checks, webhooks enable real-time communication between systems. With webhooks, the integrated system can instantly trigger actions or send data to other systems based on specific events or updates. This event-driven approach ensures that information is transmitted promptly and allows immediate actions to be taken, enhancing the overall efficiency and responsiveness of your integrations.

For example, let's assume a channel partner takes action in your distributed marketing platform, and you want to alert a regional manager of that action through Salesforce. Implementing webhooks simplifies the integration process by eliminating the need for complex polling mechanisms or extensive configurations. With webhooks, you can establish a direct connection between both systems, enabling seamless data transmission and reducing integration complexity. The simplicity of webhooks streamlines development efforts and minimizes the maintenance overhead associated with more intricate integration methods.

By leveraging webhooks, you gain flexibility and extensibility in your integrations. Webhooks provide a standardized way for systems to communicate, making it easier to connect a wide range of applications and services. Additionally, webhooks can be customized to fit specific business requirements, allowing you to define events, data payloads, and actions to be triggered. This flexibility empowers you to tailor integrations to meet your unique needs and adapt to evolving business processes.

A Connector Marketplace Brings It All Together

While webhooks and APIs can automate and simplify previously complex tasks and operations, they still require developer resources to support integrations and bring it all together — unless the software comes with a connector marketplace.

A connector marketplace links two systems using APIs and webhooks as a middleware layer between systems. These platforms provide pre-built connectors for various systems and APIs, which can be used to create seamless integrations. Pre-built connectors are designed to be bi-directional, allowing data to flow between the systems. These connectors handle necessary data transformations and mappings to ensure that data is properly formatted and transferred between the systems.

Additionally, integration connectors support the use of webhooks to trigger events between the systems. This allows for near real-time integration and ensures that data is always up to date in both systems.

4 Embedded Connectors

In evaluating a Through Channel Marketing Automation (TCMA) platform for integration and interoperability with respect to data, it is important to take a look at embedded connectors. Embedded connectors are connectors with workflows designed around pre-built integrations. They are exposed directly in the software, allowing an entire user base to reuse the same connector over and over.

To better understand the importance of embedded connectors, let's take a look at an example of a brand that provides an email marketing system or direct marketing system to its channel partner network. This enables the brand to leverage customer data from its channel partner network, for use in targeted brand campaigns. To ensure that the local customer data gathered by channel partners is useful to the brand, the data would have to be continuously downloaded, edited and managed from pre-existing CRM systems. If channel partners were required to do this, the process would inevitably be too time-consuming and fraught with human error. Ultimately, it would be too heavy of a lift for channel partners to handle on their own.
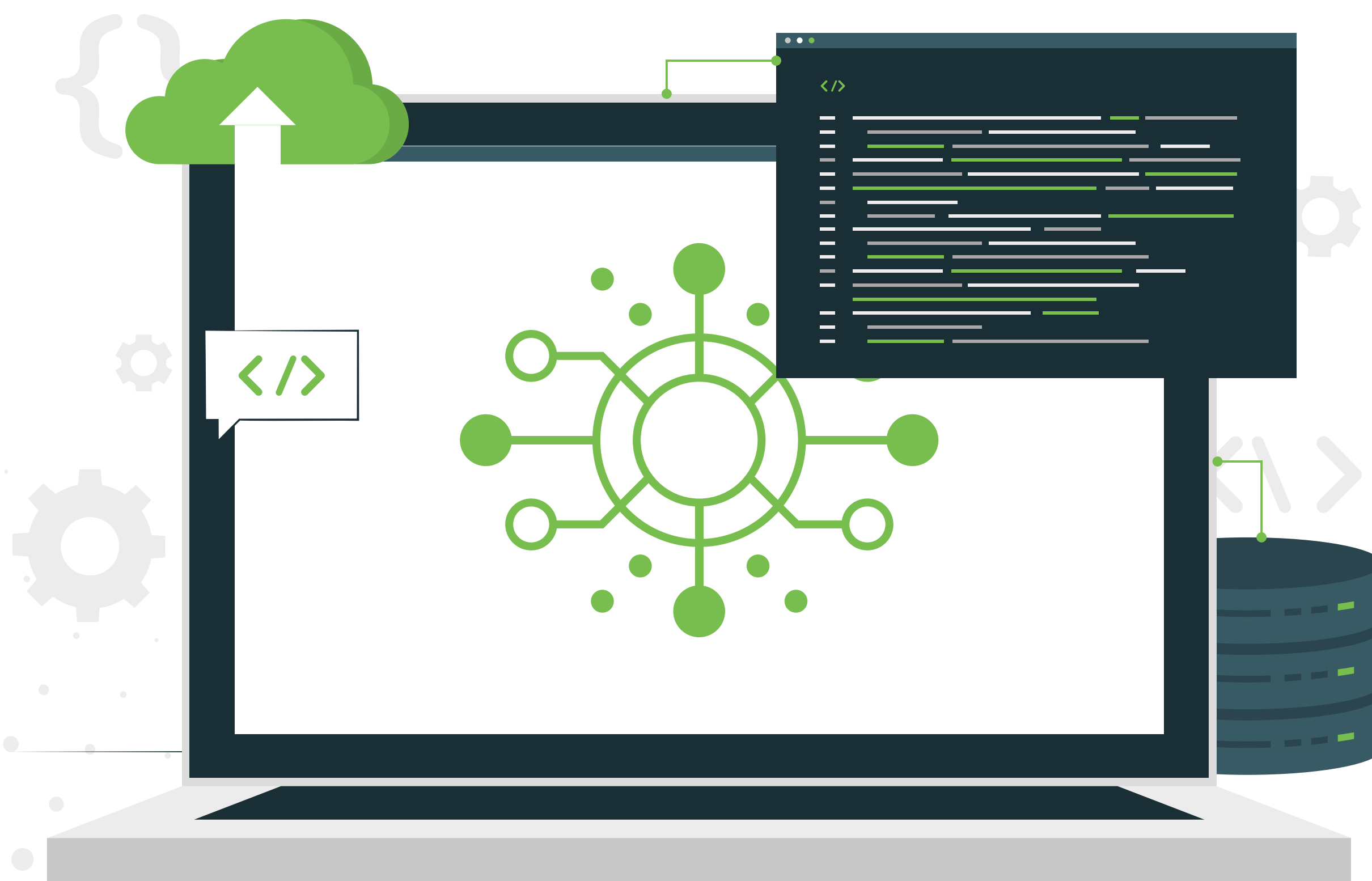
Embedded connectors for distributed marketing technologies solve this problem in key ways:

Seamless Integration

Embedded connectors simplify the integration process by providing ready-made solutions that can be easily configured and connected to an Office Management System or CRM system of choice, making it as easy as connecting to Facebook.

Improved Efficiency and Productivity

Embedded connectors enhance efficiency and productivity by automating data exchange and enabling streamlined workflows so channel partners don't have to do anything once the connectors are in place. With embedded connectors, data can be synchronized automatically between systems, eliminating the need for manual data entry or file transfers. This improves data accuracy, reduces human errors, and saves time by eliminating redundant tasks. This has a significant impact on adoption.

Scalable Third-Party Application Coverage

Embedded connectors allow a brand to support the systems of channel partners. This is critical, because channel partners' MarTech decisions are not controlled by a centralized entity, as is the case with an enterprise company. Therefore, the MarTech solutions that local channel partners may (or may not) have in place can vary widely in terms of functionality and compatibility with other systems. Supporting various use cases, in the context of multiple CRM systems, is important to leveraging data in a consistent, usable and reliable way.

Enhanced Scalability

Embedded connectors provide a standardized and scalable approach to integration. As a software system grows and additional functionalities or services are required, embedded connectors allow for easy expansion and integration with new systems or services. Such scalability ensures that software systems can adapt to evolving business needs and accommodate future growth without significant disruption or rework.

Evaluating the Utilization of AI-powered Technologies

As the business uses of AI continue to develop, it is likely that open platforms and integration initiatives will become even more important in distributed marketing. To function effectively, AI-powered technologies will require access to data from different sources, as well as crucial human oversight to maintain standards of accuracy, relevance, and quality.

By building upon a strong foundation of open platforms and integration initiatives, marketing operations teams can ensure that their businesses are ready for current and future applications of AI in marketing.

Companies that utilize open platforms and integration initiatives will be able to evaluate and seamlessly integrate new MarTech systems and evolving AI-powered tools. Decision-makers that recognize the value of being ready for what comes next can empower their marketing operations teams to enhance distributed marketing, while improving efficiency, effectiveness and scalability.
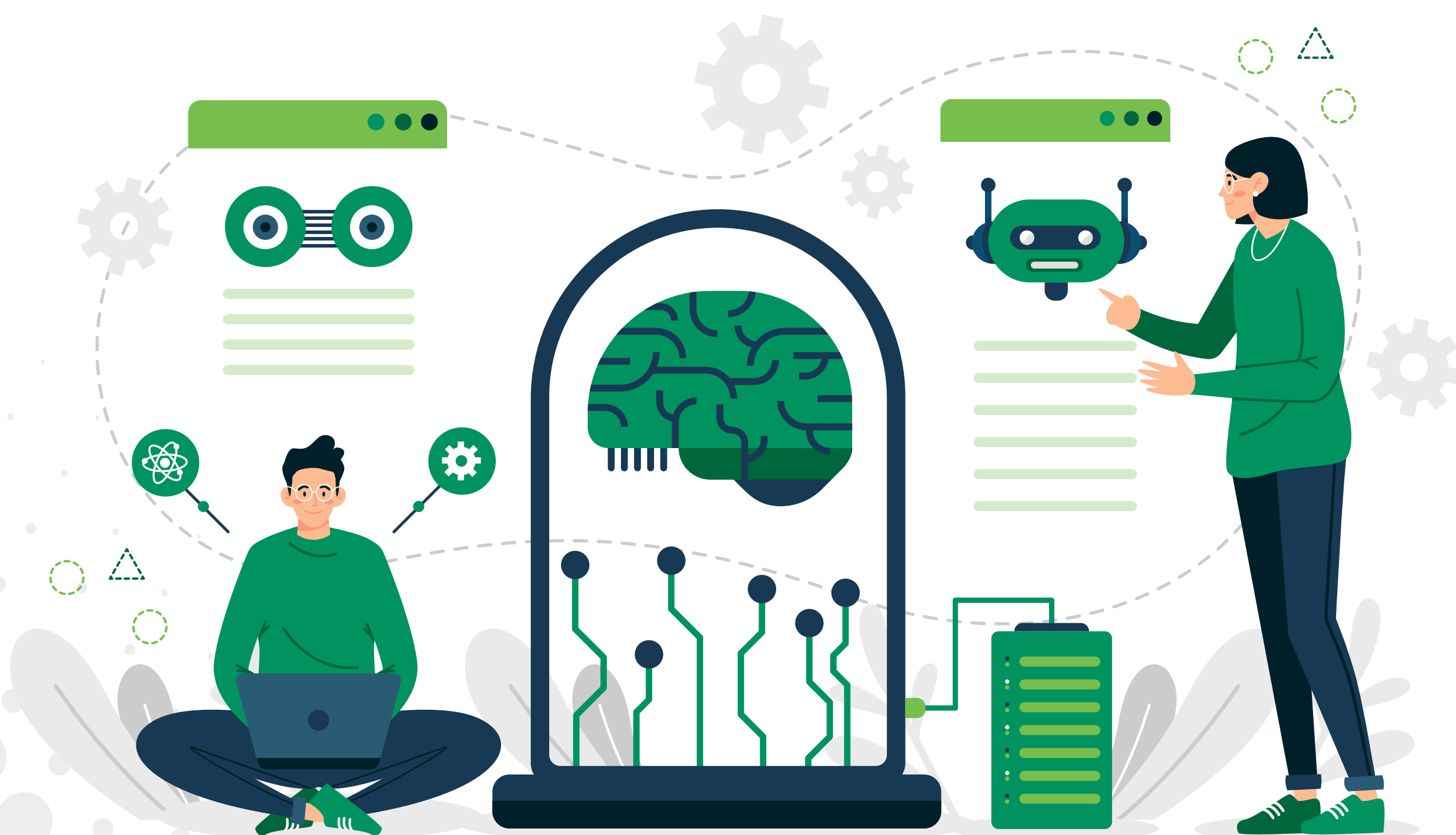
5 Key Takeaways

With a better understanding of AI-powered technologies, distributed marketing technology, open platform capabilities, integrations, APIs, webhooks, and embedded connectors, enterprise companies are better positioned to evaluate and invest in marketing software solutions that bring value and deliver measurable results. Here are 5 key takeaways that can help guide your next MarTech purchase decision:

1 Before making a purchase decision on the latest MarTech solution, consider how it will integrate with your existing systems, teams and workflows. It is important to consider the requirements for integrations and data interoperability in order to maximize the software platform's value for your brand teams, your channel partners and end users.

2 Does this new marketing technology investment offer open platform functionality and capabilities? Is it flexible, developer-friendly and focused on providing connectivity needed for data exchange? Can it be seamlessly integrated with evolving AI-powered technologies?

3 Consider specific use cases both for your brand and your channel partners. How will your company's unique scenarios and challenges be impacted by a new distributed marketing technology platform? Assess whether the built-in integrations can be customized to support your requirements, including the ability to move all necessary data to and from the target system and perform required functions.

4 Ensure that you understand how the distributed marketing software will optimize brand-to-local marketing campaigns, improve customer engagement and loyalty, and drive revenue growth. Does it have channel marketing automation capabilities in place for marketing analytics and dashboards to track marketing performance metrics, measure results, and help determine ROI?

5 Scalability is crucial. Your next distributed marketing software solution should be equipped to grow as the business needs of your brand and your channel partners evolve.

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SproutLoud is a leading distributed marketing technology company serving enterprise companies that utilize complex distribution models and multi-tier channel partner networks. We understand that enterprise companies need systems that talk to each other. That's the premise of our Open Initiative: SproutLoud is committed to building the most open, flexible and developer-friendly technology that provides connectivity for data exchange. With SproutLoud, clients can utilize connectors, developer tools and native Marketing Service Provider integrations to create a distributed marketing and sales enablement platform that empowers its distributed users.

Ready to see what SproutLoud can do for you?

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