



HOW TO BE A HIGHLY VALUED MARKETER IN THE AGE OF AI

*The Most Highly Valued **AI Edge**: Knowing Which Answer to Trust.*

PART 2 OF 3 · THE DOWNSTREAM SKILL SET

By **Aperture** · The omni-commerce growth advisory · aperture.biz



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Part 2: The Downstream Skill Set

In the last edition, I shared the Upstream (before-the-prompt) skills of a highly valued marketer. Now it is time for the Downstream skill set.

AI will never leave marketers with too few answers. It will leave them with too many.

Too many options, interpretations, target audiences, messages, and measurement plans. The challenge is not getting AI to produce something that looks like help. The challenge will be knowing what deserves action.

That is why the next highly valued AI skill for marketers is downstream judgment.

After the prompt, after the output, after the first impressive answer, the marketer has to make the harder calls: How useful is it? Is it true enough to act on? Is it specific to the shopper, retailer, category, and brand? Does it reveal a purchase barrier, or just dress up obvious data? Does the idea have energy? Could it change behavior? Could it drive profitable growth?

This is where human advantage matters most.

The highly valued marketer is not just skilled at prompting. They are skilled at choosing. It is the discernment to separate signal from noise, the taste to recognize ideas with energy and emotional truth, the test-and-learn discipline, and the commercial judgment to decide what is worth acting on.

The marketer's edge is knowing which AI answers are worth believing, which ideas are worth caring about, which assumptions are worth testing, and which opportunities are worth scaling.

The Downstream Skill Set

01

Discernment

Recognizing deep insight versus generic AI output or noisy data.

02

Taste

Knowing whether an AI output has relevance, human truth, and enough distinctiveness to matter.

03

Test-and-Learn Discipline

Knowing when to act, what to test, how to measure, and when to scale.

04

Commercial Judgment

Knowing whether an AI recommendation is powerful and profitable enough to act on.

SKILL 1

Discernment

Recognizing deep insight versus generic AI output or noisy data.

Discernment is the ability to tell whether an AI answer is genuinely useful or simply well-written. I call it the 'fool's gold' syndrome. That's when an AI answer seems amazing, but upon further review and time, we find it wasn't as helpful as we initially thought.

How to not be fooled? Consider that an actionable output should be specific, behavior-based, commercially meaningful, connected to a barrier or opportunity, actionable, and supported by evidence or testable assumptions.

JUDGMENT QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Is this specific to the shopper, retailer, category, and brand?
- Does it explain behavior, or just describe performance?
- Is it actionable?
- Is it commercially realistic?
- Does it connect to a purchase barrier?
- What assumption could make this wrong?

WHY IT MATTERS IN AI

AI is very good at producing answers that sound confident, strategic, and polished. But polished is not the same as relevant. Without discernment, marketers can mistake generic category language for insight, descriptive performance summaries for behavioral understanding, or plausible recommendations for commercially useful direction.

The more AI generates, the more valuable discernment becomes. The marketer has to know which answers are useful enough to influence action.

Importantly, if the answer seems off, the problem could be in the prompt. Check whether the prompt provides enough context to generate a relevant answer.

A good answer is not one that sounds polished. A good answer changes what you would do.

SKILL 2

Taste

Knowing whether an AI output has relevance, human truth, and enough distinctiveness to matter.

Taste is the ability to recognize when an AI-generated output has human pull. It is not just whether the output is strategically correct or analytically sound. It is whether it feels relevant, ownable, and capable of making someone care or act.

WHY IT MATTERS IN AI

AI can generate many outputs that are logical, acceptable, and on-brief. But many of those outputs will feel flat. They may be clear but not compelling, relevant but not distinctive, technically correct but emotionally empty, or polished without being persuasive.

Taste matters because marketing is as much an art form as it is a science. It does not succeed by logic alone. The best outputs connect to a real shopper tension, fit the brand, make sense in the retailer environment, and have enough distinctiveness to be ownable.

TASTE DIMENSIONS

TASTE DIMENSION	QUESTION
Energy	<i>Does the output feel alive, or does it feel like a deck phrase?</i>
Human truth	<i>Does it connect to a real shopper tension, desire, or behavior?</i>
Distinctiveness	<i>Could another brand say the same thing?</i>
Simplicity	<i>Can someone understand it quickly?</i>
Brand voice	<i>Does it feel like us?</i>
Retail fit	<i>Would it make sense in this retailer environment?</i>

SKILL 3

Test-and-Learn Discipline

Knowing when to act, what to test, how to measure, and when to scale.

Test-and-learn discipline is the ability to turn an AI recommendation into a clear strategy, a practical test, and a meaningful KPI. It helps marketers avoid two common traps: acting too quickly on a plausible AI answer or overanalyzing a recommendation that could be tested, validated, or refined in-market.

WHY IT MATTERS IN AI

AI can make recommendations sound more certain than they are. Many AI outputs are built on assumptions about what has happened, what matters, and what is likely to work. Those assumptions still need to be validated.

This is what makes AI more commercially useful. The goal is not to debate every answer endlessly. The goal is to identify which recommendations are promising enough to test, what evidence would prove them right or wrong, and what result would justify scaling.

One way to apply this discipline is to translate the AI output into a test plan.

AI RECOMMENDATION	HYPOTHESIS	TEST DESIGN	KPI	DECISION RULE
Increase sponsored search on top keywords	<i>Search visibility is limiting conversion</i>	A/B keyword investment across two SKU groups	ROAS, conversion, share of search	Scale only if conversion and incrementality improve
Refresh PDP content	<i>Content clarity is limiting purchase confidence</i>	Test revised title, bullets, imagery	Conversion rate, add-to-cart	Scale if conversion lift exceeds threshold
Run value message creative	<i>Value perception is barrier</i>	Compare value-led vs benefit-led creative	CTR, conversion, basket impact	Scale if value message drives profitable growth

SKILL 4

Commercial Judgment

Knowing whether an AI recommendation is powerful and profitable enough to act on.

Commercial judgment is the ability to evaluate an AI recommendation in the real world of retailer priorities, brand strategy, budget, timing, operational constraints, and growth potential. It is where the marketer decides whether an idea should be scaled, sharpened, tested further, or stopped.

WHY IT MATTERS IN AI

AI can recommend ideas without fully understanding the commercial system they have to live inside. It may not account for retailer dynamics, inventory realities, promotional calendars, margin structure, sales team priorities, brand guardrails, or execution constraints.

Commercial judgment protects the business from chasing shiny-object ideas that are interesting but impractical, or exciting but not profitable. It is the skill that turns AI output into better business decisions.

Commercial judgment is the difference between an AI recommendation that sounds good and a business decision that can actually create growth.

SCALE

The idea is commercially viable, fits the retailer's priorities, and the evidence supports action.

TEST FURTHER

Promising but unproven — design a pilot before committing budget or resource.

SHARPEN

The idea has potential but needs more specificity, context, or constraint-checking before acting.

STOP

Interesting but impractical, not aligned with brand guardrails or retailer reality, or not profitable.

THE REAL PROMISE

The real promise of the downstream skill set

The promise of mastering the downstream skill set is that you can assess AI answers more skillfully and determine which are worth believing, acting on, and scaling.

The promise is that you will be better able to:

- Know when a recommended idea taps into an emotional truth with enough distinctiveness to matter
- Recognize if the answer is missing context to form a more relevant output
- Apply objective judgment to help identify the right solution or idea
- Use a test-and-learn discipline to identify which recommendations are worth a pilot

That is the higher-value marketer role that will make you invaluable.

PART 1 · UPSTREAM

Curiosity. Context. Problem Framing.

Before the prompt — asking the right question.

PART 2 · DOWNSTREAM

Discernment. Taste. Test-and-Learn. Commercial Judgment.

After the prompt — knowing which answer to trust.

NEXT TIME

Part 3: *The Leader Skill Set.*

A WORKSHOP FROM APERTURE

At Aperture, we have developed a workshop to help commerce, shopper, and trade marketers build these upstream and downstream AI skills. The goal is not just to use AI to be faster, but to use it to generate better performance.

If your team is trying to figure out how to get more value from AI without losing the commercial thinking that drives growth, I'd be happy to share more.



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