MARKET RESEARCH

Lean Marketing.

Doing Far More With Far Less

Marketing postings are about 58% below early 2022, startups are raising more while hiring fewer people, and the marketer they do hire first is expected to do the work of a small team. At the far end sits a new role: the GTM Engineer.

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theexample.co/reports/lean-marketing

We have entered an era of lean marketing. It may be here to stay. Marketing postings are about 58% below where they were early in 2022. Compare this to software postings, which are starting to recover this year.

The US, and to a lesser extent the UK, and to an even lesser extent the EU, is producing more per hour worked, and startups are raising more money while hiring fewer people. The marketers who remain cover more ground and the one who gets hired first is expected to do the work of a small team.

At the very far end of that, we see a new role – the GTM Engineer, one person who is part marketer, part developer, building with AI systems to automate huge swathes of marketing, acting as orchestrator with taste and judgement.

This is lean marketing at its extreme, and we may not all be ready to become GTM engineers just yet. But it highlights how far we've come thanks to AI, and where the industry may land up – smaller, more productive, more impactful?

THE NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

Lean marketing in five figures

-58%
US marketing job postings vs early 2022

76%
of marketers cover more than one job

+8.8%
US output per hour worked since Q1 2023

3.2 yrs
median startup age at its first marketing hire

+205%
rise in GTM engineer postings, 2024 to 2025

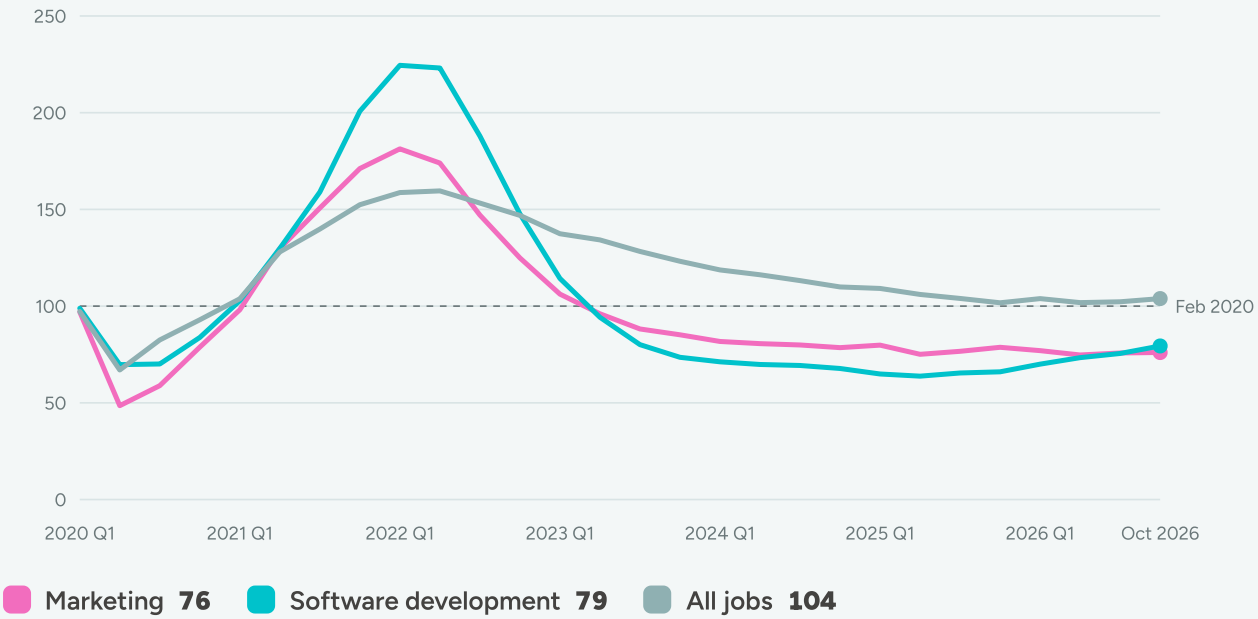
PART ONE

Marketing hiring on the wane

Marketing was cut harder than most of the jobs market, and it has stayed cut. The roles that remain are fewer and more senior. The following data is from the US – and the UK data below follows the same downward curve.

US job postings, by type of job

Indeed postings index, 1 February 2020 = 100. Quarterly averages; hover to read each line.

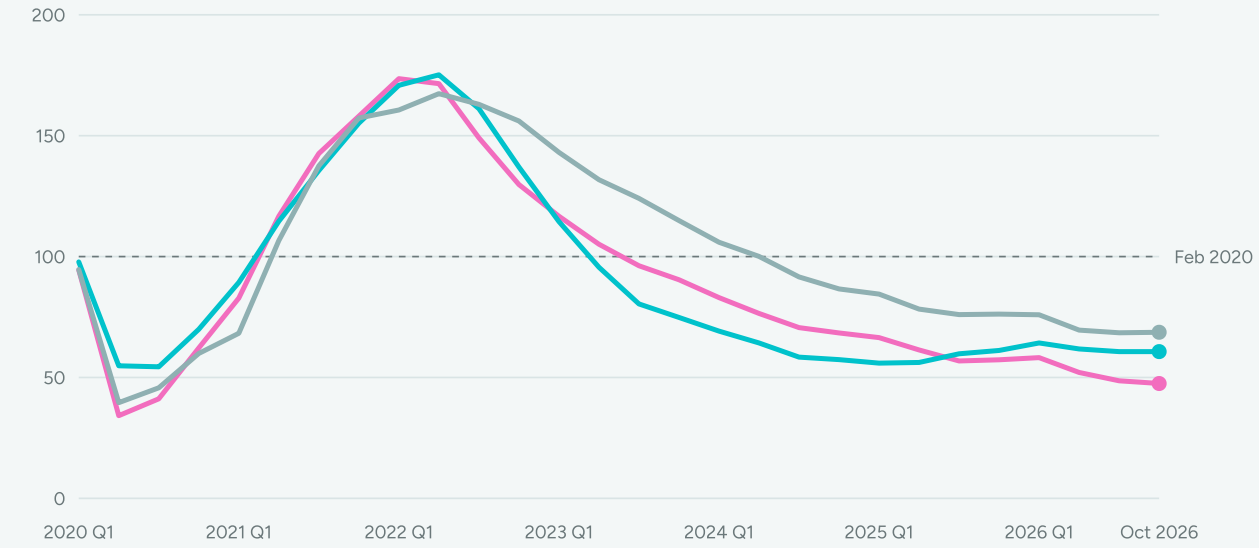


Source: Indeed Hiring Lab, via FRED: marketing, software development, all postings. Quarterly averages are Example's calculation; the last point is October 2026 only.

Software development postings have recovered in 2026, after a fall to 64 in Q2 2025, to 79 in October 2026, while Marketing has hovered between 75 and 82 since the start of 2024.

UK job postings, by type of job

Indeed postings index, 1 February 2020 = 100. Quarterly averages.



Source: Indeed Hiring Lab, via FRED: marketing, software development, all postings. Quarterly averages are Example's calculation; the last point is October 2026 only.

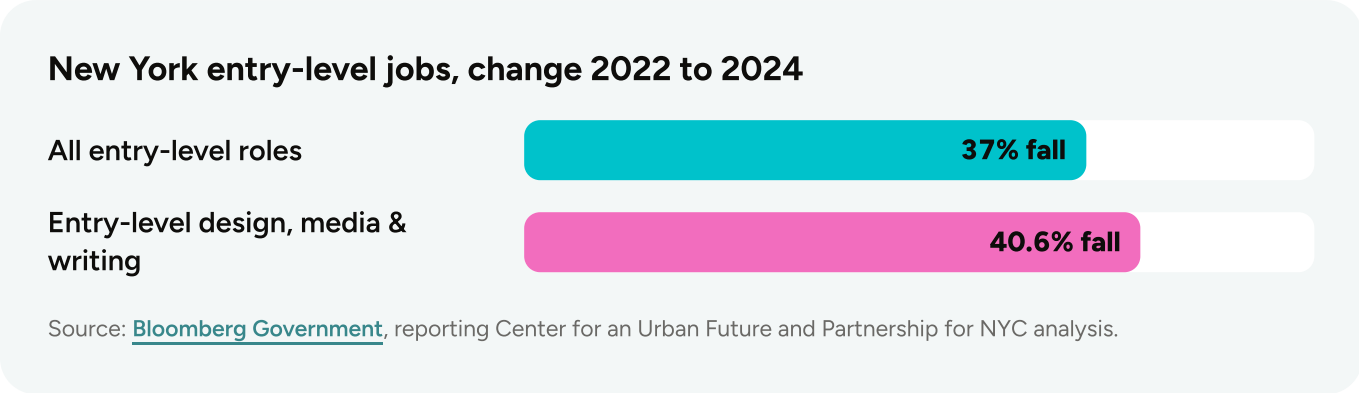
What we've seen is a rise in senior postings and a decline in junior postings. A study of 241,749 active in-house US marketing listings in 2025 (Taligence, via Allwork) showed that listings were down 8.2% but the number of different employers posting rose 5%.

And this is leaving people stretched. As people leave, their roles are left unfilled. It's not that employees are being replaced by AI, it's simply that they're not being replaced at all. A survey of 600+ marketers by the Content Marketing Institute this year showed that 76% of marketers are covering the work of more than one job, and 50% took on new duties without a promotion or a pay rise.



of marketers are covering the work of **more than one job**. Half took on new duties with no promotion or pay rise. (Content Marketing Institute, 2026)

Entry-level roles fell in NYC 37% between 2022 and 2024, while design, media & writing roles fell 40.6% (Bloomberg Government).



Source: Bloomberg Government, reporting Center for an Urban Future and Partnership for NYC analysis.

PART TWO

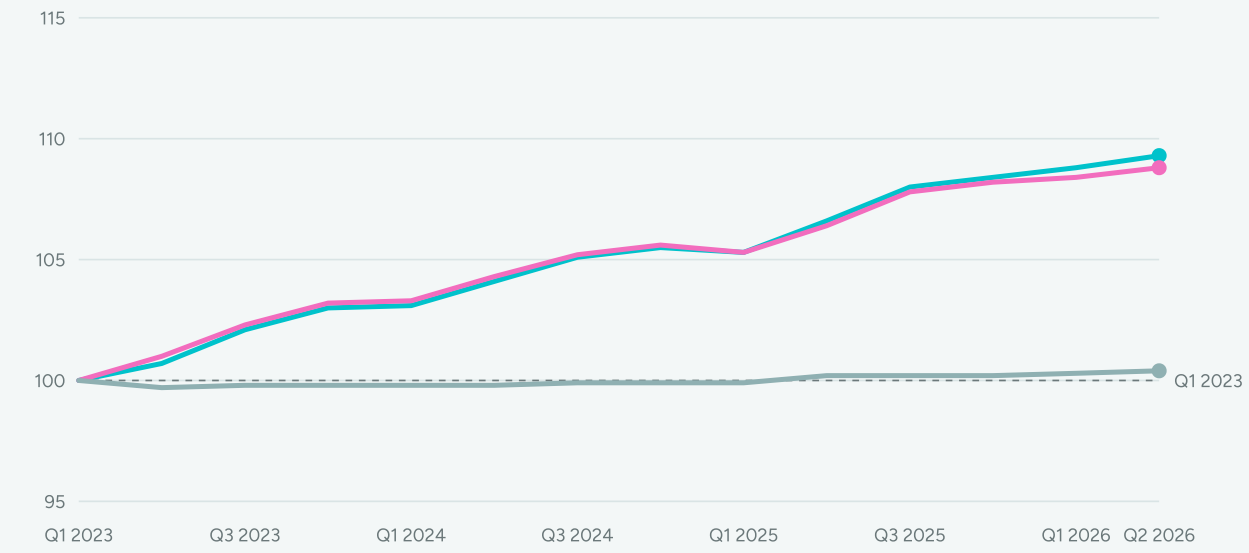
More output from fewer people

The whole US economy is producing more without working more. Tech payrolls are shrinking, startups are raising more while hiring less (Carta), and marketing is one of the functions absorbing that.

Output per hour worked has gone up 8.8% since Q1 2023 (BLS, via FRED), and total hours worked are up just 0.4% (hours).

More output, no more hours

US nonfarm business sector, indexed so Q1 2023 = 100



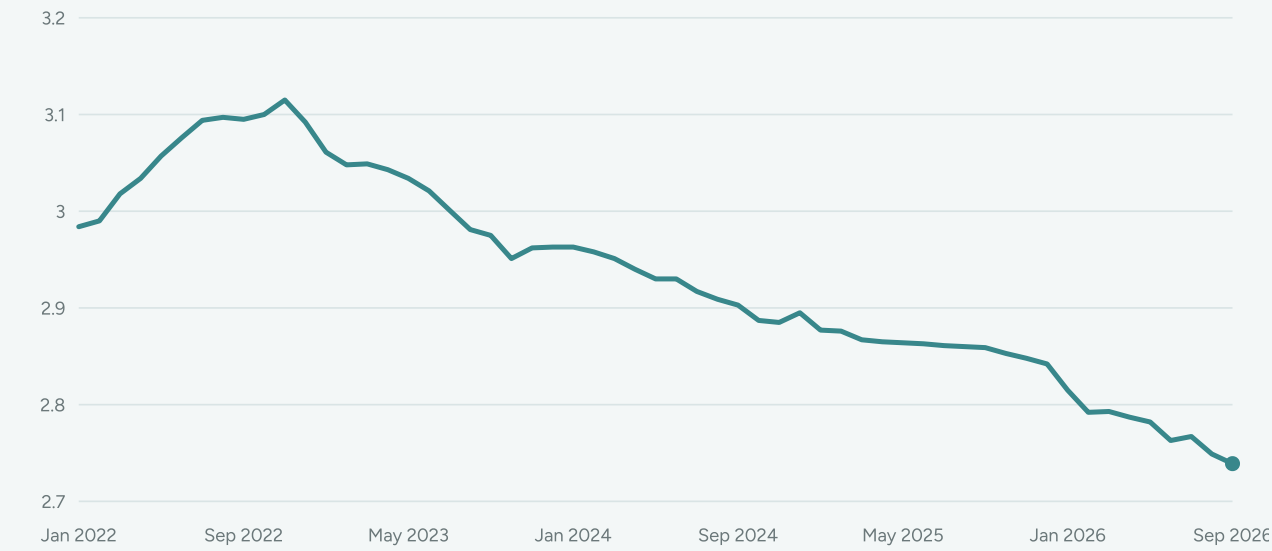
Output **109.3** Output per hour **108.8** Hours worked **100.4**

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, via FRED: output per hour, real output, hours worked. Indexing is Example's calculation; data to Q2 2026.

Looking at tech-related payrolls, the data shows that the Information sector fell from just over 3.1m to 2.7m in September 2026 – down 12.1% (BLS, via FRED).

US Information-sector employment

Millions of jobs, monthly



Information sector **2.74m**

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, via FRED: All Employees, Information (USINFO). Peak 3.115m in November 2022; 2.739m in September 2026.

+64%

US startup funding over three years

−10%

US startup hiring over the same period

+46%

New York startup funding, Q2 2026 – from only 2% more deals

Sources for the row above: Carta (funding up, hiring down) and AlleyWatch (New York, Q2 2026).

So what is behind this? Undeniably, it is AI. Not in replacing individuals wholesale but by not replacing people who leave and then introducing AI to carry out the work of juniors (writing, editing, researching, etc.). We are going through The Great Redesign – where work is being redesigned wholesale, while the plane is flying.

PART THREE

Startup marketing roles are broader

This is our space – and we foresee implications for the wider marketing industry down the line. The first marketer in a startup is often brought in to do what a small team used to do, including content, design and building AI workflows. People being hired into these roles are not entry level, but they are not Directors, either. They are often two to seven years into their careers.

Across our last 22 founding marketing briefs, 9 required the hire to create content or landing pages personally. 11 required daily AI use and 7 required both.

What our last 22 founding-marketer briefs ask for

Number of briefs, out of 22



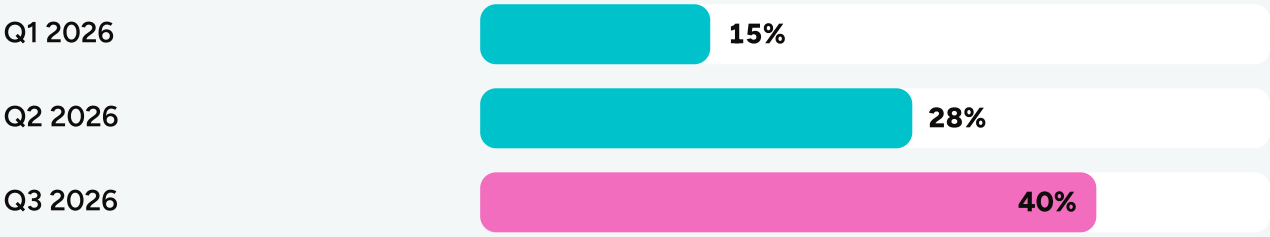
Source: Example Recruitment research, 22 founding / first-marketer briefs, July to October 2026. A sample of our own briefs, not the whole market.

79% of startups in our database hired a generalist, growth or product marketer first, and they are increasingly asking for greater depth in AI usage. The share of US marketing job descriptions requiring AI went from 15% in Q1 to 28% in Q2 and 40% in Q3. Growth roles stand at 54%, and often explicitly name tools like Claude Code, Codex, Cursor, n8n and Clay (CXL, 878 LinkedIn postings).



of the 123 New York startups in our database hired a **generalist, growth or product marketer** first.

US marketing job descriptions that require AI



Source: CXL, Q3 2026 marketing jobs analysis (878 LinkedIn postings).

For any young marketer now, the barrier to entry is high, simply because startups are demanding experience in all disciplines as well as industry experience – thinning the field significantly. But it demonstrates that the broader your early years experience, and the deeper your usage of AI, the better your chances will be of landing a plum startup role within 2-3 years.

PART FOUR

When do startups hire their first marketer?

From our internal database, we see that startups bring in their first marketer about three years after founding. During this period, we often see founder-led marketing, or a fractional marketer acting as advisor, and the trigger is often pulled within 9 months of a Series A round closing (MarketerHire).

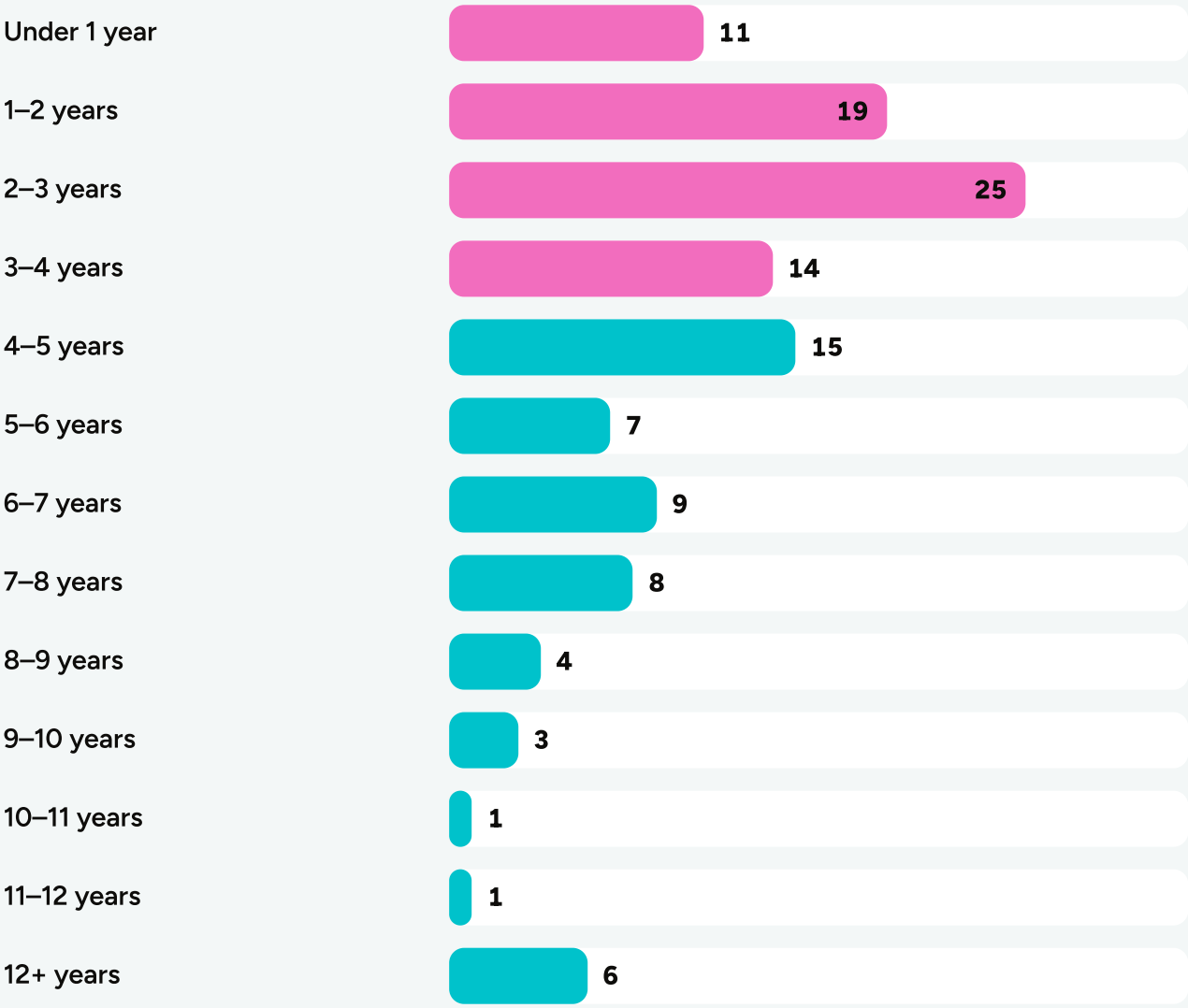
3.2 years

The median age of a New York startup when its first marketer joined. **56% hired before the company turned four.**

56% Under four years | **44% Four years or more**

How old was the startup when its first marketer joined?

Number of companies, by company age at the hire (123 New York startups)



Source: Example Recruitment research, 123 New York startups in our database with a known founding year, including earlier marketers found through public profiles. Not the whole market.

That puts the marketer at around employee number 17, the average US SaaS headcount when a company raises its Series A (Carta) – although we're seeing instances today of marketers being brought in far sooner, with higher expectations of growth in a shorter timeframe.

Again – do more with less, get more revenue from fewer people.

In addition to this, those that are competing for founding marketers are positioning themselves as either profitable or successful already, meaning that there is a platform for a single marketer to come in, take a channel and scale it significantly. Of the founding marketing briefs that we have taken on this year, we see comments such as:

- Paying customers in 6 states
- $500k ARR in our first three months
- Contracts worth $150k to $400k each
- Multi-eight figure run rate
- We already have 100,000+ users

Marketing to your future marketers is vital when competing for small pools of founding marketers – and founders are often very good at this.

PART FIVE

The rise of the GTM Engineer

Lean Marketing's potential end point is the birth of the GTM Engineer – one person who builds the systems that used to need a team, with AI and code. The role is new, scaling fast and paid at the same level as an engineer.

GTM engineer postings grew 205% between 2024 and 2025 according to a Bloomberry analysis of 1,000 listings (eMarketer), and in March 2026 there were more than 3,000 open roles (GTM Engineering Pulse).

+205%

growth in GTM engineer postings, 2024 to 2025 (Bloomberry, 1,000+ listings)

3,000+

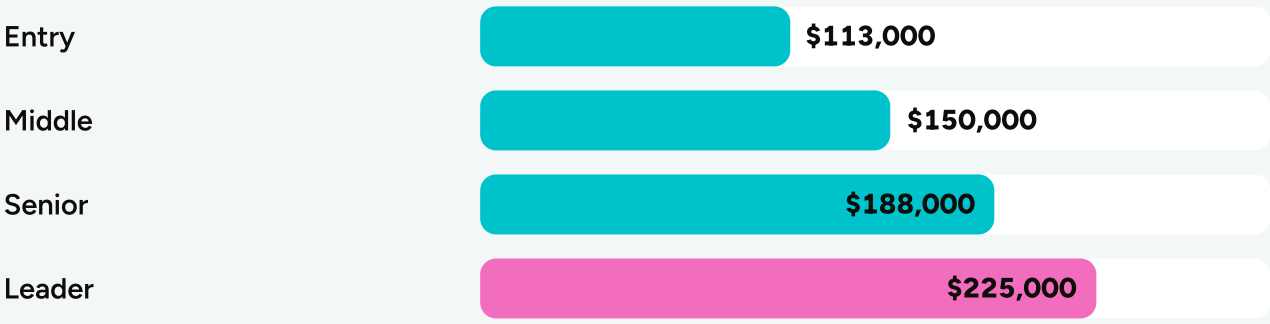
open GTM engineer roles in March 2026 (GTM Engineering Pulse)

Sources differ on the exact size of the market – counts of open roles range widely depending on who is counting and where – so the direction is the reliable part: sharply up.

Pay tends to be higher than most marketing roles at the same level of seniority.

GTM engineer median base pay, by level

US annual base salary, USD (71 postings with disclosed pay)

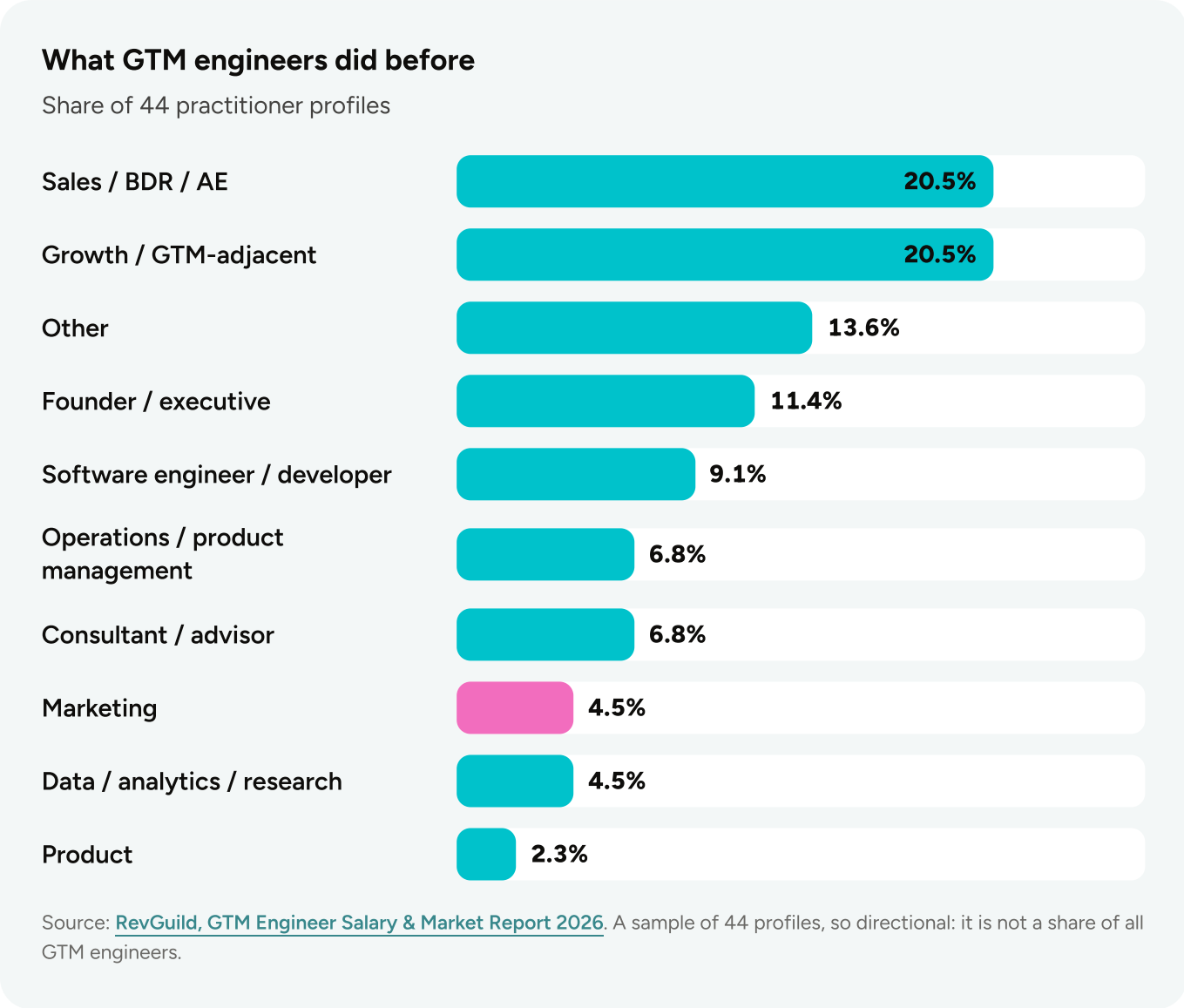


Source: RevGuild, GTM Engineer Salary & Market Report 2026, using Glozo job-posting data.

Responsibilities are mostly marketing, but with developer-led inputs. For instance, a recent GTM Engineer role that we took on involved reviving the blog and changelog, implementing SEO changes and using GitHub for content – but all would be automated using Typescript, Python, Claude Code/Codex and LLMs.

70% of that role is **building automations**. Another 20% to 30% is analytics. The GTM engineer ships the automations, orchestrates the agents end-to-end, and sits in judgement over the output.

The GTM Engineers in RevGuild's sample of 44 practitioner profiles are generally not originally traditional marketers:



Source: RevGuild, GTM Engineer Salary & Market Report 2026. A sample of 44 profiles, so directional: it is not a share of all GTM engineers.

PART SIX

What Lean Marketing Means For You

We've spoken about smaller marketing teams, and we've discussed the dip in hiring for marketing roles and the impact of AI with the result of a whole new role, the GTM Engineer.

But the underlying data suggests that more companies are hiring, they're just hiring fewer people. There could be a future of many smaller organisations with just one or two multi-functional marketers who specialise in growth, product or field marketing with differing balances of automation.

There may be a future for a team that employs a GTM Engineer principally for automation, and a small team of specialists who employ their experience and judgement to deploy the production – content, SEO, ABM campaigns, paid social assets, organic social media campaigns, and so on, spreading this out to field marketing and experiential.



The shape our data points to for startups: fewer people, broader seats, more automation.

The Great Redesign isn't over – it has only just begun – and it's almost impossible to say where we're ending up. What's certain is that the marketing function is far more lean than it ever was, and you could argue (although there is no data to support this) that marketing is more productive than it ever was.

If you are a marketer right now – increasing the depth of your AI usage is the most important thing you can do. That's not about getting certificates or prompting more, it's about building stuff, demonstrating efficiencies and – most importantly – showcasing the impact of what you've built. Your future will not be in huge marketing teams of 12 to 20 people – it will most likely be in cross-functional revenue teams with 2-3 marketers alongside engineers.

If you are a founder, the question you have to ask yourself is – what activities will 10x my business, and what combination of people and agents will get me there? You don't need a marketing team of 10 to achieve the tenfold growth any more – it could be a team of one, and that naturally raises the bar for the one you hire.

Founders If you are hiring your first marketer, read our guide: The Founder's Guide To Hiring Your First Marketer.

SOURCES

Sources and notes

- Job postings: Indeed Hiring Lab, US marketing (FRED); US software development; US all postings; UK marketing; UK software development; UK all postings. Quarterly averages calculated by Example.
- In-house marketing listings, 2025: Taligence study, via Allwork.
- Marketers covering more than one job: Content Marketing Institute, 2026 career and salary outlook.
- New York entry-level jobs: Bloomberg Government.
- US productivity, output and hours: US Bureau of Labor Statistics via FRED – OPHNFB, OUTNFB, HOANBS. Information-sector employment: USINFO.
- Startup funding and hiring: Carta, funding up and hiring down; Carta, Series A companies and smaller teams; AlleyWatch, New York Q2 2026.
- AI in marketing job descriptions: CXL, Q3 2026.
- When founding marketers are hired: MarketerHire.
- GTM engineer market: eMarketer, citing Bloomberry; GTM Engineering Pulse; RevGuild.
- Example Recruitment research: 22 founding-marketer briefs (July to October 2026) and 123 New York startups with a known founding year, both drawn from our own database. These describe our sample, not the whole market.

Example Recruitment — marketing-led headhunters for SaaS and FinTech startups and scaleups in New York and London.
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