

The New SaaS CMO Archetype: What To Know & What To Look For in 2026

If you've spent any time on LinkedIn lately, you've seen the takes: "SaaS is dead."

We'd push back on that. SaaS isn't dead. Just shifting.

Think about what's actually changed: how buyers discover software, how they evaluate it, how they decide. The channels and motions that drove SaaS growth for the last decade are all shifting at once, and leaders still running narrow ICPs, enterprise-only GTMs, and siloed campaigns are now playing catch-up.

Here's the environment today, in four snapshots:

1

Distribution Is Fragmenting

AI, self-service, and evolving buyer behavior are accelerating audience expansion, and marketing now targets millions instead of thousands.

2

PLG and Self-Service Are No Longer Optional

Even enterprise-first SaaS companies are layering in self-service motions. Leaders must understand funnel math, systemized experimentation, and acquisition velocity.

3

Data > Narrative Alone

Growth literacy, experimentation, and systems thinking are as critical as storytelling. Leaders must be comfortable making decisions with imperfect data and iterating in real time.

4

Leadership Profiles Are Evolving

Previously unconventional, these profiles are now rational for modern SaaS growth models.

PROFILE 1

Chief Growth Officer Over Marketing

Growth operator first, with brand underneath

PROFILE 2

Hybrid Generalist Chief Marketing Officer

Spikes on growth, scales distribution

PROFILE 3

Marketplace-Native Leader Layered into Enterprise

Combines operational rigor with strategic oversight

The SaaS CMO role is changing along with it

As such, today's SaaS CMO is not just a marketing leader. Now, they are much closer to a revenue operator, accountable for pipeline quality, scalable distribution, and growth efficiency across multiple motions. This seat is at the center of the business: a misstep anywhere in the GTM engine, and the consequences ripple.

TLDR: The next generation of CMOs is not emerging from traditional enterprise SaaS environments. They are being forged in:

- Marketplaces, where network effects and distribution loops dominate
- Self-service / PLG models, where conversion velocity drives growth
- High-volume, data-rich ecosystems, where experimentation is constant and measurable

Marketing has moved a long way from shepherding a handful of key accounts to now having to move millions of users across channels in real time. **Everything simply happens faster now**, which means people expect more, and there's less room for error.

"The role has evolved from storyteller to Revenue Operator, owning how demand is created, captured, and converted across enterprise, PLG, and hybrid motions. The best CMOs build systems where data, distribution, and trust compound over time, not just pipelines that reset every quarter."

ALEXANDRA LONDON, CMO @ G2

Case in point: G2's CMO aligned to the new SaaS model

As SaaS becomes more AI-enabled and self-service, software discovery is faster, but more fragmented (let's not forget: harder to predict). Buyers rely heavily on AI summaries, peer reviews, and aggregated insights, while paid channels are increasingly competitive and traditional GTM levers alone no longer suffice.

G2's advantage—verified user reviews and structured buyer insights—created an opportunity, and the company needed a CMO who could turn that asset into scalable, measurable growth. But success today requires more than marketing muscle. It demands a leader who can connect brand, performance, and marketplace dynamics.

Alexandra London was that leader.

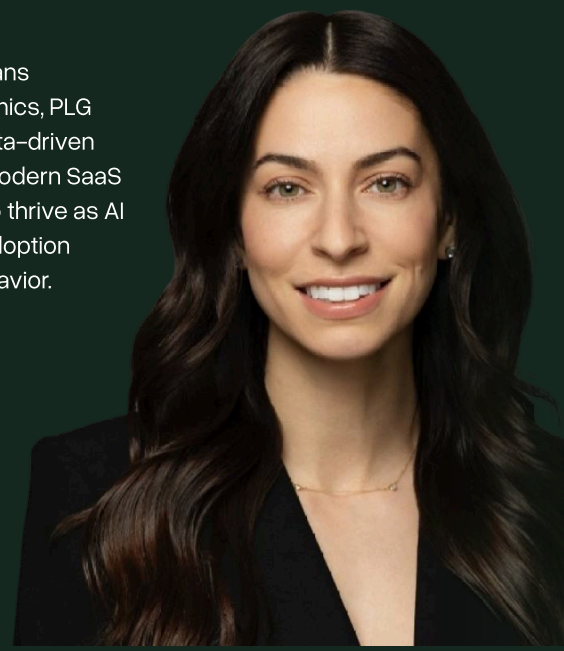
At **Zoom**, she ran full-funnel digital marketing across one of SaaS's largest user bases, focusing on structured experimentation, channel optimization, and performance measurement.

At **Expedia**, she launched the company's first customer data platform, unifying fragmented data to drive coordinated marketing, smarter targeting, and better decision-making.

Her experience spans marketplace dynamics, PLG mechanics, and data-driven growth, the skills modern SaaS companies need to thrive as AI and self-service adoption reshape buyer behavior.

"G2 is in an incredibly exciting position because we already have what AI needs: deep, verified human insight. I'm excited to help G2 reach its next peak, while cementing our role as the trusted data layer for software decisions in the age of AI."

ALEXANDRA LONDON, CMO



A deeper look into the new SaaS CMO archetype

Growth Systems Thinking

What it is

The ability to design and manage the full growth engine across multiple motions—enterprise, PLG/self-service, and hybrid models. Growth is treated as a system, not a series of campaigns.

What it looks like in practice

- Maps the entire funnel: acquisition → activation → expansion → retention → referral
- Optimizes for LTV/CAC and pipeline efficiency, not just lead volume
- Builds rapid experimentation and iteration into marketing rhythms
- Uses data to inform tradeoffs in real time

According to Alexandra, this is the competency that most clearly defines the modern SaaS CMO. In fact, “CMOs now architect the company’s growth engine. Marketing is now the growth infrastructure of the company.”

Distribution & AI Instinct

What it is

A deep understanding that reach and attention are now a competitive advantage — but the channels that drive them have fundamentally changed with AI now being the primary discovery layer. Modern SaaS CMOs must engineer distribution across fragmented channels while also actively shaping the knowledge layer that AI learns from.

What it looks like in practice

- Designs multi-channel acquisition and retention loops
- Integrates product-led and sales-assisted motions for seamless GTM
- Treats messaging and positioning as conversion levers across every touchpoint
- Builds brand presence and authority in AI-generated responses, not just traditional search

Keep In Mind: The modern CMO is accountable for AI visibility, authority, and trust, not just share of voice.

Hybrid GTM Leadership

What it is

Comfort operating in blended go-to-market models where self-service and enterprise sales coexist. This leader aligns marketing, sales, and product without bias toward one motion.

What it looks like in practice

- Defines ICP, SQL, and “good lead” for multiple buying paths
- Ensures smooth handoffs between self-serve and sales-assisted journeys
- Builds enablement that helps sales close faster while respecting PLG autonomy
- Coordinates with product to optimize funnels and conversion loops

Capital Efficiency Discipline

What it is

A commitment to growing smartly, not just quickly. The modern CMO has a bias for keeping CAC in proportion to what they’re worth — and ensuring the customers you win actually stay.

What it looks like in practice

- Tracks CAC payback and segment-level profitability
- Shuts down channels that underperform and reallocates quickly
- Sequences investments based on ROI, not trends
- Balances short-term wins with long-term scalable infrastructure

Adaptive Leadership

What it is

The ability to operate in an environment of constant change. AI, distribution shifts, and evolving buyer behavior require leaders who embrace iteration and continuous evolution.

What it looks like in practice

- Can plan in short cycles with built-in iteration
- Makes confident decisions with imperfect data
- Hires versatile operators over narrowly specialized roles
- Protects long-term positioning while adjusting day-to-day tactics

Where companies get stuck

THE MISALIGNMENT PROBLEM

Hiring for an archetype that no longer exists

Despite the shift, many organizations are still hiring for the old archetype and for versions of SaaS that no longer exist.

THE INSTINCT PROBLEM

Tuning a funnel that no longer reflects reality

Most CMOs inherit a funnel and immediately start optimizing conversion rates and chasing quick wins. It's an understandable instinct. **It's also the wrong one.** Today's buyers discover through AI, validate through peers, and decide on trust, often before ever visiting a website.

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Don't optimize the funnel. Redesign the system.

Build to win three specific moments — and pipeline becomes a byproduct.

1

Be the answer when AI shapes the shortlist

Show up where buyers start — in the AI-generated results that determine who even makes the consideration set.

2

Be the most trusted signal in reviews, communities, and customer voice

Peer validation now happens before any sales conversation. Your reputation in the wild is your pipeline.

3

Be the easiest decision through product experience and proof

Remove friction. Let the product speak. Make the choice feel inevitable once a buyer arrives.

“If you get that right, **pipeline becomes a byproduct of trust and visibility.** If you don't, you'll spend your entire tenure trying to fix a funnel that no longer reflects reality.”

ALEXANDRA LONDON, CMO

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