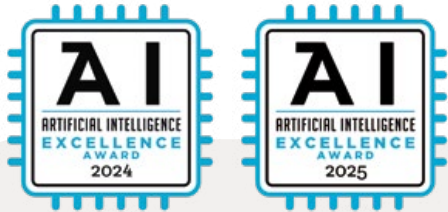


AI:
2023 wow!
2024 how?
2025 now...

Accelerating impact

AI has become a transformational force that moves us from the digital world to the era of Now in which unprecedented innovation and agility is required.



The Business Intelligence Group, which recognises organisations, products and people who bring AI to life and apply it to solve real problems, named both Monks and Monks.Flow as winners in its 2024 and 2025 Artificial Intelligence Excellence Awards.

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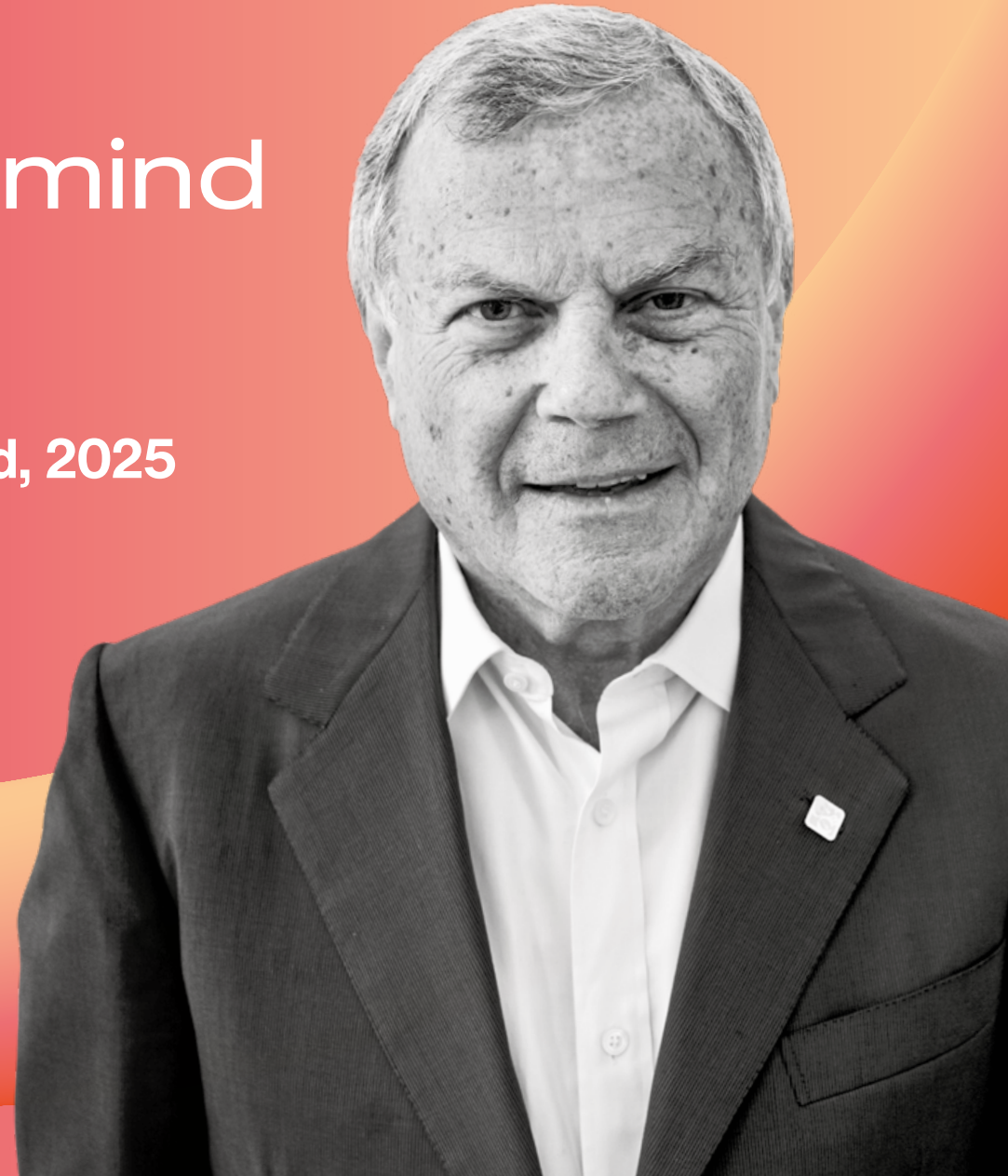
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An **agile** state of mind

by Sir Martin Sorrell

**“The world changed at 9pm on April 2nd, 2025
in the White House Rose Garden...”**



An agile state of mind

The return of US President Donald Trump is the central backdrop against which events were set to unfold at the beginning of 2025, re-framing conflicts from Ukraine to the Middle East, ushering in the next phase of the West's relationship with China and re-shaping the outlook for the world's biggest technology companies.

The US imposition of draconian import tariffs that are universal in scope has thrown the global economy into disarray and brought a definitive end to the era of globalisation. It marks the beginning of a new era where growth is going to be slower, inflation will be higher and interest rates will be higher than we were used to before.

In the more specific context of marketers and the companies that serve them, AI and associated technologies, like quantum computing, Blockchain and the much-maligned Metaverse (I'm with Buffett and Munger on crypto) have become transformational forces that moves us from the digital world to the era of Now and in which unprecedented innovation and agility is required. That spells unbridled opportunity for those who take the lead and ignominy for the laggards. We are entering new territory on several fronts and fortune will favour the brave.

A fragmenting world

The rapid collapse of the Assad regime in Syria before Christmas highlighted the extent to which political events have the power to surprise. Geopolitics continues to be dominated by three major issues: the continued stand-off between the US and China, the expansionist ambitions of Russia and the threat to world order posed by Iran.

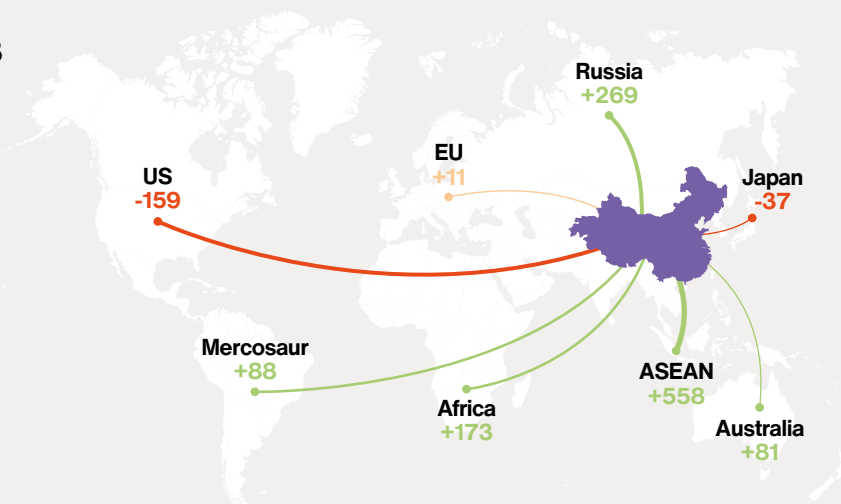
In Ukraine, the Trump administration has tried to live up to its promise to get a deal done and the likelihood is that, if and when that happens, Russia will retain much of the territory it has seized and that Ukraine's membership of NATO will be off the table. That means Putin, after re-grouping, will be emboldened and the Russian threat is going to be a growing one. The US administration has made it clear to Europe: if you want to defend Ukraine you are going to have to pay for it. The Poles, the Baltic States, the Scandinavian countries are all right to be worried about what will come next. Eastern Europe – especially Poland – is continuing to grow economically, but the cost of paying

more on defence may sap that growth. And there will be growing stresses and strains within NATO and the UN because of all this. It will certainly continue to disincentivise companies from investing in Europe compared to other parts of the world, unless the impact of Germany's fiscal flexibility and defence bazooka extends beyond its boundaries.

With Iran and the Middle East, the outlook may be better. Iran's influence has been emasculated to some degree. by the defeats suffered by Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as by the collapse of the regime in Syria. Whether the return of hostages and a ceasefire in Gaza can be achieved remains to be seen. The Trump administration is likely to be more hardline over Iran than Biden and Obama and may back Israel to neutralise Tehran's nuclear threat. The role of Saudi Arabia will be pivotal. The Saudis may welcome an accommodation with Israel if a two-state solution for Palestine can be agreed. So there is a better prospect of some stability being restored. ►

How China's exports will shift from 2023 to 2033 \$bn

- Shrinking
- Growing below average
- Growing above average



Source: Boston Consulting Group

An agile state of mind continued

Relations between the US and China are likely to become even more fractured with Trump in the White House. At the heart of this stand-off is a belief on the American side that China is dumping cheap goods in the US, and also that China poses a cyber threat to the US and the West. Harvard Business School in conjunction with the Digital Data Design Institute, for example, has done some work on the cyber topic and they find that even cars could be used as software platforms for the Chinese Government. Other research has found that facial recognition technology from China is being distributed around the world, often to autocratic governments, with the clear inference that the technology is being used by the Chinese and by those governments to exercise control. That is a very disturbing prospect, even if not totally accurate. The launches of DeepSeek and Manus may have altered the AI calculus in China's favour. Trump's announcement of a total 54% tariff on goods from China no longer looks like a negotiation ploy, but what's interesting is how China will respond, after the initial Pavlovian reflex.

When I was in Beijing last year and met He Lifeng, the Vice Premier, he said that if there are going to be tariffs, China will look at more of its distribution being in that part of the world not directly controlled by the US and China. The world's economy is approximately \$106 trillion, of which the US is \$28 trillion and China is \$18 trillion. So that means \$60 trillion is outside the US and China. Huawei, for example, has already had its progress checked in the US and to some extent in Europe and so it has gone for Africa, for Latin America, for ASEAN countries and will seek to divide Europe. Chinese brands – especially in the auto, fashion and technology sectors – will put domestic manufacturers in Europe and elsewhere under huge pressure as they turn their focus to everywhere but America.

Chinese policy is going to be very much around the BRICS, Next 11 and the global south. The consequence is that many countries will face a difficult choice whether they should be in the China or the US camp. The Saudi deputy foreign minister said to me: our biggest ally from a defence ►

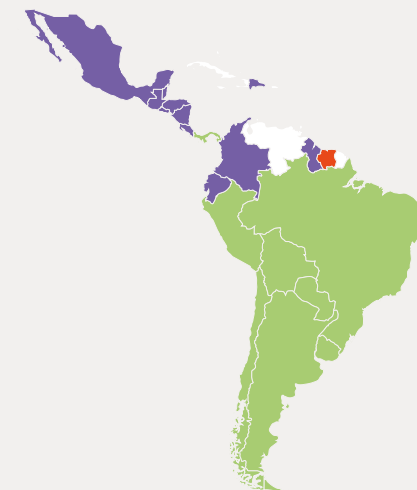
Latin America's largest extraregional trading partners, by total value of goods traded



2000



2023



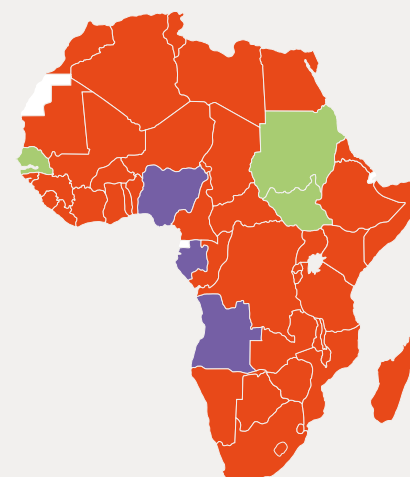
Note: No 2023 data for Venezuela.

Source: United Nations Comtrade database

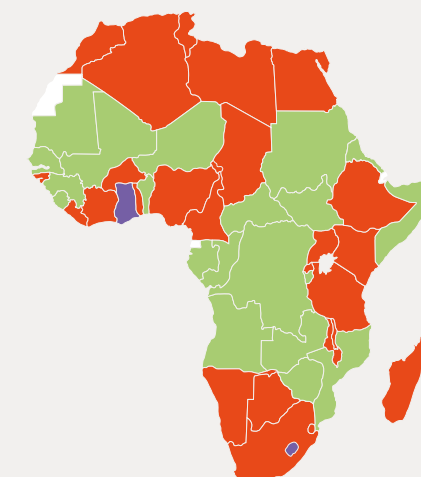
Africa's biggest trading partners



2002



2022



Source: Boston University

An agile state of mind continued

10 things we know now

- 1 The world is now changing from the 40 years since Professor Ted Levitt's 'Globalization of Markets' was published in the *Harvard Business Review* in May/June 1983.
- 2 GDP growth will be slower, inflation higher and interest rates higher than before.
- 3 US/China relations, Russia's ambitions in Ukraine and beyond, Iran's aspirations in the Middle East, along with North Korea's volatility, all mean increased instability.
- 4 In this new world, two trends are particularly important for our clients and us, accelerated and underlined by President Trump's tariff moves. First, pick your geographic markets more carefully, mainly in the Americas, the Middle East and Asia Pacific. Second, efficiency becomes more important. AI, the Metaverse, Blockchain and quantum computing will drive this efficiency gain everywhere, but particularly in lower-growth Europe.
- 5 In this new world, clients have to focus on three things: agility; taking back control of their marketing; and first-party data.
- 6 Digital will continue to dominate media spend from 65% now to more than 70% in 2025 and 80% by 2030.
- 7 The six major platforms – Alphabet, Meta, Amazon, Alibaba, Tencent and ByteDance – will continue to dominate digital media, also driven by the capital needs of AI. Apple, Microsoft, NVIDIA, Musk, Adobe, Salesforce and Oracle will increase their power and leverage in the AI dominated world – accelerating as a result of required capital expenditure.
- 8 Clients will continue to focus on short-term results, so activation, performance and measurement have become ever more important.
- 9 AI will drive major changes in visualisation and copywriting, in hyper-personalisation, in media planning and buying, in client efficiency and in the democratisation of knowledge. As a result, companies will have flatter organisational structures and become more efficient.
- 10 Connected TV: retail advertising will become more and more important as linear TV remains under pressure.

point of view is the US; our biggest trading partner is China. India, likewise, has China as its biggest trading partner but is talking to the US about defence because they don't trust China on that score. China is also trying to divide Europe over the issue of EVs; Germany and Spain, for example, have both said maybe we shouldn't have had tariffs on Chinese EVs, before Brussels intervened.

In search of increments

What does all this mean for the global economy? For many, the quest for growth in 2025 was already much more challenging than a decade ago even before the arrival of Trump. Last year, the World Bank described the outlook as "subdued by historical standards" and forecast that in 2024–25, growth was set to underperform its 2010s

average in nearly 60% of economies, comprising over 80% of the global population. Following Trump's 'Liberation Day' tariff announcements, however, even the prospects for modest GDP growth this year have been jeopardised, and forecasters are set to rapidly revise their numbers and raising the probability of recession.

With the danger of a full-blown trade war, even the assumptions about which countries would lead the growth charge – with the US and South East Asian countries in the vanguard – have been thrown into doubt.

By imposing punitive import tariffs on almost every nation on Earth, the US has effectively ended the global trading system that has evolved over the last 100 years and left multinational companies wondering what to do with the complex international supply chains they have developed to maximise value and choice for consumers. All sectors are affected, with some including autos, steel and aluminium, disproportionately so. The long-term effects of this move are unpredictable and will be far-reaching and a major question is whether the rest of the world will pivot to counter-tariffs and protectionism, or will try to maintain a version of globalisation without the US.

In the short term, tariffs will result in sharp inflation for American consumers and are expected to shift the US economic outlook from a prognosis of healthy growth to a much greater likelihood of recession. Bullish sentiment among the US business community has been shattered and that is reflected in the rout of share prices. It will take some time to recover from this seismic shock, but restoring faith and trust in the US for its former allies will take much longer.

Prior to the roll-out of tariffs, the outlook for the American economy was good: 2024 was one of the best years ever for US stocks, and was seen as a predictor of what's going to happen, since it is a measure of the discounted value of future earnings. De-regulation is a top priority for business and was expected to be a key theme of the Trump administration. Goldman Sachs forecast that the S&P 500's earnings per share would rise by 11% in 2025, and 7% in 2026 – now subject to sharp revision to 4% and 4%. ►

An agile state of mind continued

In the big picture, the US has maintained its share of world GDP at around 30%, whereas Europe is shrinking. In my view, North and South America, the Middle East and Asia Pacific will be the growth spots. Africa remains, sadly, too volatile and therefore more about micro opportunities than macro. European growth is soft.

Where markets are not growing, in Europe and elsewhere, the US tariffs combined with the pressure to increase defence spending spell ever-more powerful headwinds. The main option for companies to achieve growth is to become more efficient. That will mean using technology – not just AI, but the Metaverse, quantum computing and Blockchain. There are other challenges facing mature economies. Inflation is stubborn and arguably more structural than for the last 30–40 years. Interest rates will remain higher for longer. It was previously forecast that that interest rates in the US would settle at a terminal rate of 3.0%; now the forecast according to JPMorgan is 3.5% and it will come later. That inevitably has some impact on investment by business and governments.

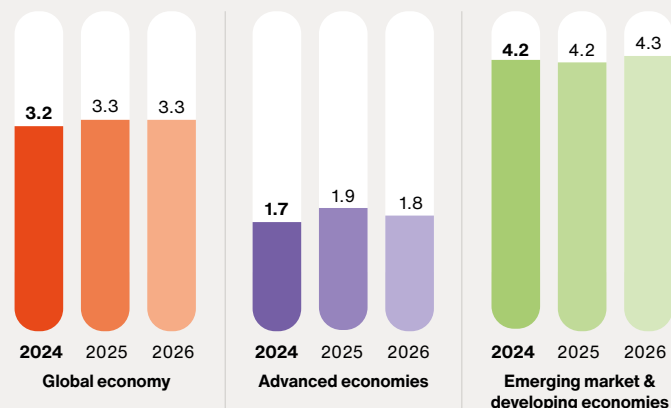
In the UK, the issue is more acute. With stagnant growth and persistent inflation, the Government faces the unwelcome spectre of stagflation. The UK Government has promised to bring forward the increase in defence spending, and it has ushered in a long-overdue crackdown on welfare spending, which has ballooned since the pandemic. The re-direction of resources is welcome, not least as it will give new impetus to Britain's defence sector, but the challenge of balancing the books will not be easy in the months ahead.

AI: marketing's superpower

If 2023 was the year of Wow! for AI, and 2024 was the year of How? then 2025 is quite simply the year of Now. We have moved rapidly from being awestruck by the incredible potential of this technology, when generative AI apps such as ChatGPT first burst onto the scene, to working out how AI could be harnessed in our own operations and on behalf of our clients, to a position where it is now incumbent to put all of this into action. AI is entirely re-shaping marketing ►

World economic outlook growth projections

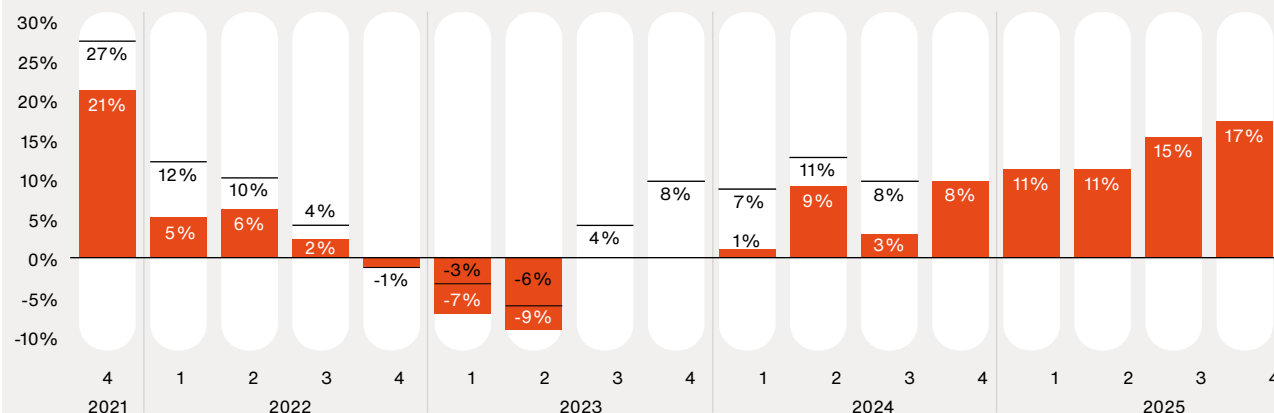
Real GDP% change



Source: IMF, January 2025

“With the danger of a full-blown trade war, even the assumptions about which countries would lead the growth charge – with the US and South East Asian countries in the vanguard – have been thrown into doubt”

S&P 500 quarterly year/year EPS growth relative to consensus expectations



Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research, January 2025

● Expected — Actual

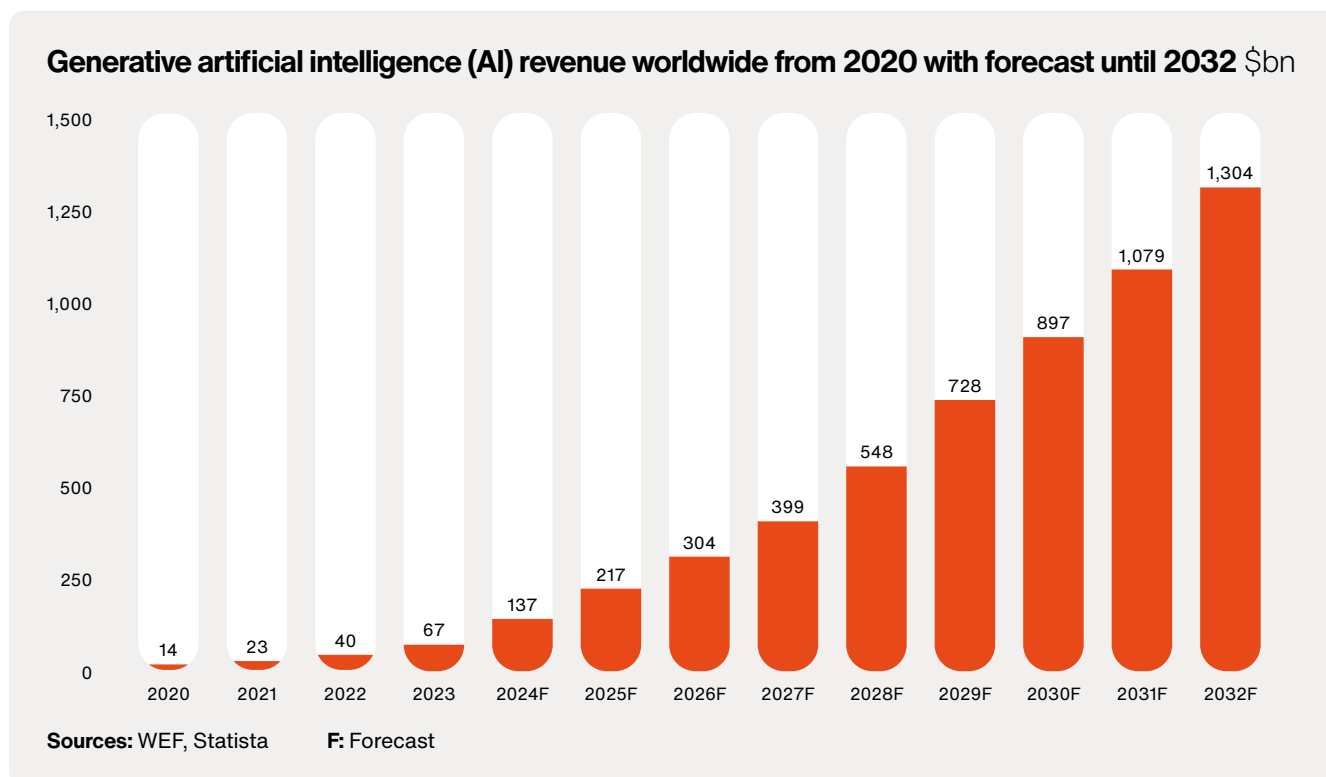
An agile state of mind continued

and creativity, it requires our clients as well as ourselves to re-think our workflows, our partnerships and our strategies. It is poised to re-invent the agency business itself, as the time and materials model becomes superseded by new forms of remuneration based on outputs and outcomes.

AI is, rarely, a technology where the capabilities available today are running ahead of the ability of agencies and clients to deliver them, and there is an overwhelming need for more strong use cases to demonstrate the powerful benefits that can be achieved. I was very struck at a meeting organised by Google last year where there were 15 to 20 important clients in the room, and when Sean Downey, who runs Google's advertising business in North and South America asked: "where are the use cases?" there was silence, and I had to jump in with our case studies.

From the start Monks has been a pioneer in identifying and developing the transformational potential of AI in the marketing space and that means we are at the forefront of this revolution, in a more advanced position than our clients, and well equipped to lead them on the journey. We are operating in a marketing world where clients expect more for less – the faster, better, cheaper model on which S⁴Capital was founded – and AI is the technology that enables that promise to be fulfilled. Early on we identified five areas where AI would be transformative in agencies: visualisation and copywriting; hyper-personalisation at scale; media planning and buying; general agency efficiency; and democratisation of knowledge. AI is delivering on each of these. We are seeing an enormous proliferation of advertising assets at very low cost.

More fundamentally, it has re-created workflows, replacing many of the mundane and repetitive tasks, and our own Monks.Flow is a unique and leading suite of tools that is drawing clients to our door. The democratisation of knowledge is very important: at Nvidia, Jensen Huang has 51 direct reports and sets objectives for each of them, with fewer one-on-ones. McKinsey has done some work that shows advertising and marketing is where AI has the



single biggest impact across the organisation. Next up is agentic AI: autonomous agents that will build and perform new processes without human input.

What CMOs want

One of the trends that we're seeing, especially in automotive and in financial services, is that CMOs are very worried about price competition. In the case of automobiles, that is obviously coming from China. In the case of financial services, it's coming from the fintechs. In each of those industries, they know that they're going to have price competition, and so in order to maintain the weight

of their media budgets, they're looking at what they call 'non-working' costs, (a description that irritates me for obvious reasons) which is essentially what we do, and is charged in agency fees. That means they are seeking to make their agency and production processes even more efficient. We can cut costs by at least 30% by using AI, so that has become a necessity. Clients want to use AI but they don't fully understand it as yet, so they need someone to hold their hand and to make it simple. That's why our new go-to-market solutions (GTMs) – Orchestration Partner, Real-Time Brands and Glass Box Media – are all designed to address specific problems that clients worry about. Read more about this on page 22. ►

An agile state of mind continued

The emerging landscape

Global advertising spend has reached the \$1 trillion mark – this year or last year, depending on your source. Around 70% of that is now digital, and in the last 12 months it grew by more than 10% with the big tech platforms continuing to consolidate their hold on the market. Analog media's share continued to decline by 5–10% last year, depending on the amount of live sport shown. US TV networks without sport declined at a sharper rate: 10–15%.

Of the four biggest platforms, Google now accounts for \$250 billion or 25% of the total market; Meta has \$150 billion or 15%; Amazon is \$60 billion or 6% and TikTok (outside Mainland China) accounts for \$40 billion or 4%. The fate of TikTok hangs in the balance as we wait to find out if President Trump will allow it to fall victim to the US-China standoff. All the big platforms are investing a huge proportion of their revenues in AI, on which at some point they will want to see a return.

The significant point is that, while ad agencies often portray the job of the CMO as getting harder with respect to media, in many ways it has become easier as the spend has concentrated within fewer outlets. What is true is that media mix measurement and performance analysis has become essential.

All of that said, clients are going to be hesitant to make decisions and cautious about spending in the short term as they try to claw back losses from the imposition of US import tariffs. At the same time they will spend on tech far more rapidly than before in the quest for 'faster, cheaper, better' to maintain their margins as they absorb some of the cost of doing business in America.

Within the advertising agency landscape, we are also seeing a process of rationalisation continue among the big players. The mooted merger between Omnicom and IPG – which could yet be subject to concerns about media buying concentration – is indicative of this. Having a unitary offer has become top priority because that's what clients demand; Marion Harper's ground-breaking work at McCann-Erickson in the 1950s to establish multiple

agencies without client conflict under the same corporate umbrella, which led to the founding of Interpublic Group, has finally been overtaken. Agencies face the real prospect of disintermediation if they cannot become the close partner of their clients, for example in helping them to harness AI and in becoming the validator of their media spend in an increasingly algorithmic world. Nobody wanted to just hand over their media spend to Rupert Murdoch and say "get on with it", so why should that be different with Google? Clients need independent verification.

Sharpening our focus

From an organisational perspective, our most important step in the last 12 months has been the re-naming of our unitary operating brand to Monks. This marks a milestone in our evolution as a business and reflects the extension of our services well beyond media. The change of name is accompanied by a new focus on just two offerings: Marketing Services and Technology Services, which between them embrace our nine distinct capabilities. Following this simplification, we have introduced our three new GTMs: Orchestration Partner, Real-Time Brands and Glass Box Media, all supported by our industry-leading Monks.Flow AI workflow solution. These propositions will focus on the areas that clients face challenges and where we are strongest.

Financially, our revenues suffered last year principally because our tech clients – which comprise half the business – diverted a significant proportion of their marketing spend to capital expenditure on AI. There are signs that the fall in their marketing spend has bottomed out and stabilised and meanwhile, our significant new business wins will kick in this year. We do have to make further improvements to our margins, with our staff costs to revenue ratio at around 75%, against industry averages of 60–65%. That will be addressed by recent organisational changes.

Our geographic breakdown is around 80% North America, 15% Europe and 5% Asia and I'd like that to become 60/20/20 over time to reflect the stronger growth in Asia. Equally, our breakdown of services is around 65% content, 25% data and digital media, and 10% tech services, and that needs to move towards 50/25/25 because tech services will have a stronger growth rate.

The way ahead

Our standout win in the last 12 months was the appointment of Monks to the General Motors roster alongside agencies including Preacher, Mother, 72andSunny and Anomaly. It's much more than just another big client win: this is a new model, in which the four General Motors brands Cadillac, Chevrolet, GMC and Buick no longer have an agency of record, but standout ideas are sourced from everywhere and brought to market at speed.

Monks becomes the foundational agency, harnessing Monks.Flow to take those content ideas from the creative agencies and convert them into assets at scale across all four brands. General Motors represents a re-think of how giant advertisers can harness the power of AI whilst overcoming its complexity to face the challenges in the rapidly evolving auto market. It's a model in which Monks truly is the orchestration partner – and an approach that others are sure to follow, particularly as President Trump upends the world order. Choosing your geographic markets carefully for growth opportunities and using the latest technologies to become more efficient in a slower growth, higher inflation and interest rate world are the orders of the day. ■

From the frontier

by Wesley ter Haar
Chief AI and
Revenue Officer



The role of AI in our industry is truly transformational, and it is quite different. Normally in our business you see something new which is overhyped, and you then have to get through a massive gap to catch up. This is the first time I've seen where the technology – AI – is ahead of what people think it can do. The challenge is the ability for teams, talents and the enterprise to ingest the technology and use it effectively. ►

From the frontier continued

We've already done a lot on enabling, empowering, training and teaching our own talent to use AI in their day to day. Our Monks.Flow offering evolves or revolutionises our ways of working at three levels. The first level is where our people use the tools to make their own work better – not just more efficient or productive. Second, we use Monks.Flow to redefine how work actually gets done, which means different workflows, different talent, the ability to do something in a day that normally takes a week. And the third level is truly agentic, where digital workers actually take over parts of the workflow – where the computer actually does the work. We're excited about the early-stage versions of the final stage that we have up and running; next year I think it will normalise pretty quickly.

In terms of the benefits of AI, we talk a lot about speed, scale and spend. For the global marketing organisation, that is the bulk of their challenge: they need to be faster for cultural relevance; they need a lot more output to deliver on the challenge of digital advertising; and they need to do it all for less money. But the reality is that in many spaces where AI has become a player, it has become the best player – think about gaming or healthcare for example. While AI can take out a lot of the grunt work and let us do more of the creative and strategic thinking, and make us perform better as individuals, people sometimes enjoy it less and perceive less value in the work they do. So that is a challenge for us.

Monks has been a leader in AI technology since the very beginning. We were the first agency to talk about it in our earnings calls, the first to show work, the first to win awards at Cannes, and to launch our own platform at CES. Our technology partners tell us we are still six to 12 months ahead of the competition. In the bigger picture, our industry has been stuck in a negative cycle where clients want to get more for less, and the only lever we have had is cost, which means cheaper people or more stretched people. AI is the only way our clients can get what they want and still have high-quality people. Clients can get more for less and agencies can run higher margins – so it really is the saving grace for the industry. ■

Burger King

Million Dollar Whopper Contest

We teamed up with the home of the flame-grilled Whopper® sandwich to design an AI-powered experience crafted for flame-grilled fanatics, culinary creators and AI aficionados. After fans submitted their Whopper® ingredients as their contest entry to the AI Whopper® generator, they watched their flame-grilled creation come to life with AI, complete with a personalised AI-generated ad and thematic background. The winner took away \$1,000,000 and saw their creation on the menu for a limited time.



Watch Monks CCO Jouke Vuurmans on creating an interactive and dynamic brand experience



Serving a **wider purpose**

by Regina Romeijn
Global Head of ESG

We have said from early on that technology and creativity can be used as forces for good. Clearly in our industry, we primarily serve the needs of our clients, but it should also be a consideration whether the technology and creativity we develop can also be used in a different environment where the outcome is beneficial for the planet or for people. ►

Serving a wider purpose continued

When a client comes to us with a brief, we always ask them how it helps to meet their own ESG targets, for example on social or people. We are not a purpose-driven company as such, but if we produce a useful innovation we should consider whether it could be more widely accessible.

Like earlier transformation such as NFT, Blockchain and Web 3.0, AI poses some difficult questions for ESG. We are not the prime movers since we work and innovate with the tools that are provided to us by third parties, but we do need to understand the impact of our suppliers. Clearly those big tech companies have their own targets for net zero and face challenges cutting emissions amid surging AI demand. Nevertheless, AI could potentially be part of the solution to reduce climate change. And AI brings new opportunities to collaborate on inspiring and innovative projects for good, as we are currently putting into practice together with our clients and partners such as AWS, Google and Nvidia.

In our own business, we are investigating how AI can be used to automate the thousands of ESG data points we have to report each year, but also to create a repository of data history that could also be used in other environments. AI can also potentially help us identify where around the world, and in our operations, we can improve our impacts. ■



Regina Romeijn
Global Head of ESG

B Corp Now a B Corp company

In 2024, Monks achieved B Corp status, which measures our entire social and environmental impact. We garnered 91 points, way above the threshold, and had every office around the world certified simultaneously.



AWS

Reducing the carbon footprint of a broadcast

The remote broadcast workflow running on AWS allowed Monks to reduce its number of on-site employees by 75%, which resulted in avoided carbon emissions related to air and ground travel. The distributed workflow also means that directors, producers, video engineers, audio engineers, replay operators, graphics operators, video editors and even the announcers are able to support the event remotely, often from the comfort of their homes. An added benefit to Monks is the ability to now hire based on talent rather than geography.

75%

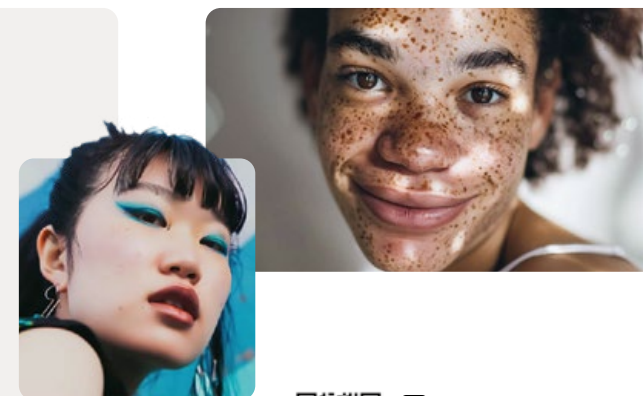
reduction in carbon emissions



Dove Keeping beauty real

As part of the 20th anniversary of Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty, Monks joined forces with Dove and launched the Real Beauty Prompt Playbook: a public resource to help creators fight the ingrained bias in AI's depiction of beauty.

This first-of-its-kind playbook equips people to better define beauty for themselves through prompting techniques and a glossary of inclusive vocabulary. With 90% of the content we engage with predicted to be AI-generated very soon, Dove saw a need to help steer AI-image generation in a more inclusive direction. This playbook is a step towards awareness to #keepbeautyreal.

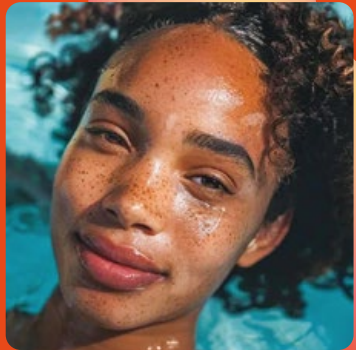


 See our full
ESG report



Proactive AI partners

by Deborah Heslip
Global Chief Client Officer



The game-changing impact of AI and the increasing demand for operational efficiency mean that agencies are becoming more proactive partners to our clients in managing that transformation. We can help them implement AI workflows and processes faster, better and cheaper than they can likely do within their own organisations. ►



Proactive AI partners continued

That's partly down to the nature of matrix organisation, but also because they have a much wider range of things to focus on. It is not a case of us selling them our intellectual property; it must be done in a way that builds up their processes and integrates into their organisation. So, we're seeing more opportunities to come in on a consultancy basis, which may be to provide a complete workflow of how they operate, from strategy and insights all the way to media execution and delivery. Clients also want more content, at better quality, but at the same cost or less. We've been talking about 'faster, better, cheaper' for years now, and with AI and related technologies, including Monks. Flow, we are truly able to deliver that promise.

Leveraging AI also means adopting new commercial models. We've recently started talking to clients about the value of adopting an outcome and output-based remuneration model, and this does present challenges. Instead of telling them how many hours we worked, we explain, "this is the outcome you're going to get for this dollar amount." The onus is on us to show that it is more cost effective for their operation; in other words to demonstrate the value that is delivered. Our objective is to help them transform the economics of their business. And that requires a degree of transparency on our part, at least to the extent that they understand how we operate.

Many clients have been consolidating their agency rosters because there is the expectation that AI will deliver faster, better, cheaper, which in turn often leads to pressure from the CEO or the CFO for the marketing budget to be cut. So marketing departments are cutting down on rosters of multiple agencies in order to work with the most cost-effective partners that are truly delivering value.

Above all, clients are looking to us to support them and to keep them up to speed on everything that is happening with AI. For clients pulling their advertising back in-house, we need to be involved in their change management process and the internal transformation required to make this happen.

It's critical that we are a thought leader and an industry leader on AI, and that we can explain what the latest advancements mean for marketing and for their business.

It's in our interest that they're as knowledgeable and educated and advanced in AI as we are – because if your clients don't understand it, then they're less likely to align to it. ■

“Clients are looking to us to support them and to keep them up to speed on everything that is happening with AI”

General Motors

Evolving the agency and client relationship

We're delivering AI-driven, technology-driven (Adobe), hyper-personalized content at scale – optimizing speed, precision, and cost-efficiency. This reflects our strength as an Orchestration Partner, seamlessly connecting ideas, technology and talent to simplify modern marketing.

“Monks will bring a tech-savvy, AI-powered approach to creating personalized, real-time content – taking the way we do business to the next level”

Molly Peck
General Motors Executive
Director Global Marketing Excellence



SNCF

Fast-tracking generative AI transformation

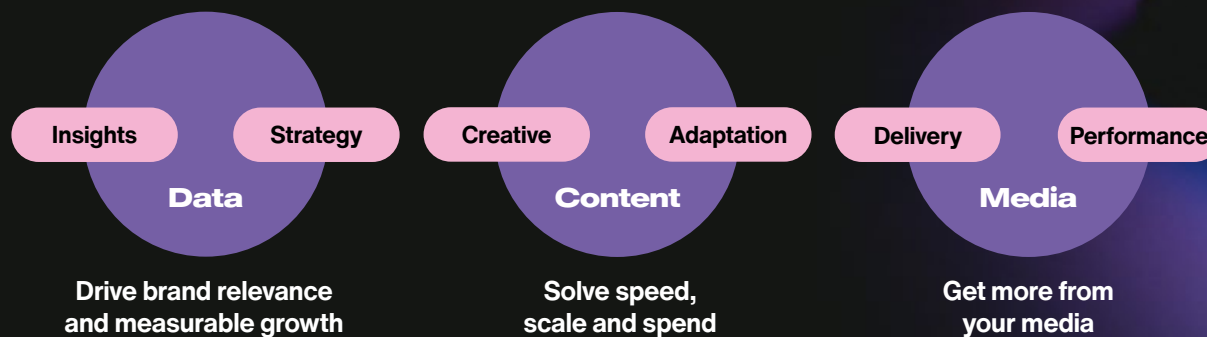
French passenger rail company SNCF Voyageurs sought a means of producing high-volume hygiene content for web and social. Monks partnered with the brand to fast-track the creation of 230 visual assets, accelerated with the use of generative AI and strategically automated AI workflows. By harnessing the power of AI-generated creative, we were able to enhance productivity and refine the artistic process, all while staying true to the essence of the brand.



Injecting AI end to end

by Bruno Lambertini
CEO, Marketing Services
and Dave Carey
Global EVP Studio and
Embedded Solutions

Monks.Flow: changing how work gets done with AI and automation at scale



Injecting AI end to end continued

We are pushing AI heavily in all the pitches we take part in, especially those involving large scale consolidations or production at scale. Monks.Flow is the tool that really enables us to orchestrate that AI. What's helping us win the pitches is that we're showing practical uses of AI where a lot of others still show it theoretically.



Bruno Lambertini
CEO, Marketing Services



Dave Carey
Global EVP Studio and
Embedded Solutions

On the generative side, we work with the likes of Firefly and Gemini to produce AI at scale for creation. But the bigger thing is the automation needed within organisations, and how to simplify their workflows with AI and to build new workflows with AI automation tools. That's where Monks.Flow comes in. It is an end-to-end and content solution pipeline that, from briefing to delivery, is injected with AI throughout the entire process to make it faster, cheaper and more effective.

We have an intake process whereby work coming into Monks is looked at by an AI specialist to see where AI can be injected – whether that's by creation or by automation – with a view to decreasing our costs or our client's costs. Monks.Flow really works when assets at scale are required. For example, if we have a campaign with General Motors that has to produce 700 assets, we will use Monks.Flow to create templates, place those in the system and generate the required sizes and translations where needed. For Puma we had to generate around 20,000 assets in two weeks, and there is no way that manual labour could have done that.

Right now, Monks.Flow is a managed service, but we are working on a version that clients will be able to use themselves under licence, whether that's for their briefing portal or for production.

Some clients have built in-house production models; others are consolidating down to one or two partners to produce all their content, and we are one of the few players who can really do that. That does mean our business model has to change, away from time and materials towards remuneration that is based on outcomes and output. On the one hand that means building an asset-based rate card, but the next step is to have a performance-related element, where we put KPIs against the assets, and so we get extra margin if we hit those targets. ■

Hatch

Managing the cost of consumer education

Operating in a unique product category, sleep wellness company Hatch needed its ads to balance consumer education with performance. It opted for an audience-first approach to advertising that helps users envision an unfamiliar product slotting into their lifestyle. However, digital ad platforms require more creative assets to perform effectively, but photoshoots, customised ad ideation and design for multiple personas can be both expensive and time-consuming. To tackle this, we partnered with Hatch to leverage AI to strategise, concept, produce and launch personalised ad creative across diverse audience segments in a matter of weeks.

+80%
click-through rate

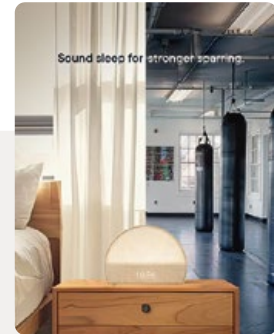
+46%
more engaged site visitors

50%
fewer design & production hours

31%
better cost-per-purchase



Read the Hatch story



Everyone, everywhere, **all at once**

by James Kinney
Global Chief People Officer

AI has become a key focus across all our people-centred activities: recruitment, retention and development.

Half our job descriptions for new hires feature AI in some form, we hire specialists with a specialist programming background like Python or generative skills, and we've made some key hires of senior people with AI in their job title. But much more than that, we have an internal AI task force of upwards of 150 people that is driving things, and in the last 12 months we started training all our Monks in AI basics. ►



Everyone, everywhere, all at once continued



James Kinney
Global Chief People Officer

In terms of personality, what we're increasingly looking for is a level of agility and flexibility; we are developing our own bespoke and custom solutions, so individual Monks need to have a builder mindset. In the past, the industry has been very siloed, but that is changing fast. You'll have these hybrid, agile, creative professionals who understand technology, creativity, business and can apply that to solve a specific business need creatively. As a graduate from MIT with a certificate in AI, I'm one of few global CPOs certified to help embed the right AI skill sets into our business.

What individuals are looking for from us is also changing. We see it as like a teaching hospital where you can add to your skill set and it can take you to a different place. The most common feedback I get is that 'Monks really has this technology thing figured out' – we're actually doing it and implementing it, unlike some of our competition.

We have our technology services division, where we build enterprise grade software, including our martech stack, alongside our marketing services division that covers all the table stakes you'd expect in advertising. The nexus of those two things makes us a powerful player.

AI is not going to alleviate the need for people; but it aids the productivity process – we've proven that with our General Motors win. Show me 75 headlines and we can produce copy in seconds, but that doesn't mean all 75 of them are going to be right for the client. There's a symbiotic relationship between the AI technology and the human that makes decisions on how it works.

Our approach to diversity has always been about having a globally decentralised workforce, which makes us pretty unique. It's about diversity of skill, thought, experience, which spells an award-winning culture. AI hasn't changed that and I don't think it will. ■



Boosting female leadership

We have recently welcomed our fourth global cohort of the S4 Women in Leadership programme, which is designed to support talented women in the Group and help develop the next generation of leaders. Run in conjunction with the University of California, Berkeley and the Haas Business School, 32 Monks attended the week-long programme in 2024, which included modules on finance, negotiating skills and AI.

Rising stars

In the world of advertising, diversity in leadership and creative innovation is essential for shaping the experiences and narratives that resonate across society. However, this diversity has often been lacking, particularly in the voices driving groundbreaking campaigns and initiatives. To address this, our S4 Fellowship Program aims to enhance Black representation within the industry.

Now in its fifth year, the S4 Fellowship Program is a prestigious two-year rotational experience that provides a hands-on, career-building journey in the advertising and marketing services industry with Monks. Fellows have the unique opportunity to work closely with, and learn from, esteemed executives, managers and colleagues across various teams within the business.

Our goal is to cultivate a pipeline of exceptionally talented and ambitious early-career professionals, empowering them to become visionary industry leaders.



[Read some of our Fellows' stories](#)



Paige Davis



Aaliyah Hall



Thaddaeus Moore

Lean, impactful and **fast**

by **Nikki Gifford**
Chief Operating Officer, Technology Services
and **Karan Chetal**
Chief Growth Officer, Technology Services

Our Technology Services are driven by bold AI-aware creativity and goal-oriented partnerships, with people at the centre. One example of how we innovate and deliver for our clients is through our tool, Monks.Flow, which directly meets their need for efficient, reliable and sustainable solutions. ►

Lean, impactful and fast continued

Through our expansion of Monks.Flow into a broader technology application, we combine smaller language models with knowledge graphs, significantly reducing computational and energy costs. This approach ensures accuracy by grounding AI responses in verifiable data, reducing exposure to misinformation risks. By focusing on quick deployment and high relevance, the expansion of Monks.Flow exemplifies the trend toward lean, impactful investments in AI technology.

Speed has become key. We have practised a blend of lean software development and design thinking long before the latest wave of AI. Our combination of methodology, process, and deep talent can drastically reduce the time to build and deliver the solution beginning on day one of an engagement. Ongoing support through implementing and training our reusable tools creates longevity by allowing them to manage their solutions and avoid vendor lock-in.

With any technology transformation, a shift in skill sets and focus is required – and AI is no exception. The message for all workers in the technology field is to continue to evolve their craft from task-based work to innovative design thinking that allows for continual growth and creates a high-level design of system behaviour and heuristics. Our goal is to support our clients to adapt their current workforce to the technology of now – and for future opportunities. ■



Nikki Gifford
Chief Operating Officer,
Technology Services



Karan Chetal
Chief Growth Officer,
Technology Services

Tech success stories

Google

Automating Google's marketing operations

For Google, we've developed a powerful AI-based data foundation that connects several high-volume third-party APIs, ingests the raw data, extracts high-level insights, and generates actions to automate their marketing operations for Google.



“The expansion of Monks.Flow exemplifies the trend toward lean, impactful investments in AI technology”

OpenPlay

Driving efficiency for OpenPlay

OpenPlay is the music industry's leading asset management platform that bridges the gap between content creation, metadata management, assets, rights and delivery. Under the OpenPlay Signature partnership, OpenPlay is working with Monks to enable rapid deployment of cutting-edge technologies across the media, entertainment, games and sports industries. Such tech deployments include AI-driven workflows, fan engagement experiences, ecommerce and Web3 integration, thereby streamlining operations for clients and cutting implementation times from years to months for new and custom solutions. This will enable OpenPlay clients to drive efficiency, unlock new revenue streams, and further improve the accuracy of content and rights data, ensuring that artists, creators and rights-holders receive the credit and payments they deserve, while maximising the exploitation of their IP globally.



Going to market

now

We talked to clients to find out the problems that keep them awake at night and then worked out the solutions that we can offer. ►



by Scott Spirit
Chief Growth Officer, S⁴Capital

Going to market now continued

In terms of our competitive landscape, Monks sits in the middle between massive holding companies who operate at scale, and smaller specialists.

The main benefit of being in the middle is that we can have the attitude of specialism without all the legacy costs of the large companies. But that means finding a ‘Goldilocks zone’ – areas of focus where we can be number one or number two in the market. These are combinations of our capabilities that give us a right to win, a right to grow.

So our three go-to-market offerings now directly address our clients’ challenges. They are:

- 1 **Orchestration Partner**
- 2 **Real-Time Brands**
- 3 **Glass Box Media**

Challenge 1: Complexity

“It’s all just too complex. When my agency model is unwieldy and fragmented it increases cost, reduces speed and quality and distracts my team”

Orchestration Partner is the most valuable skill for an agency in the AI-at-scale world. The problem facing clients is complexity: an agency model that is too often unwieldy and fragmented, which increases cost, reduces speed and quality, and proves a distraction. When General Motors came to us last summer, they said “we want better ideas, but they come from smaller places, and we can’t trust those agencies to make the work and to run it properly.” General Motors appointed us to provide the orchestration and make everything work, and it’s liberated them to bring ideas from anywhere they want. They’ve switched from a vertical model to a horizontal one.

Challenge 2: Brand relevance

“It’s a cluttered world, so how do I keep my brand relevant and build its power in the market?”

Our **Real-Time Brands** model is designed to help clients keep their brands relevant and current in a cluttered market. The marginal cost of a new piece of content is virtually zero, so cutting through that and ensuring your brand means something is much harder.

When you have insights about what is working or not working, or what are competitors doing, Real-Time Brands is about crunching the speed that your creativity adapts to those learnings. What used to take three months must now happen in real time, and that means listening to consumers, and then constantly adapting brand messaging in social media and other rapid channels to leverage and contribute to culture through a live conversation. Soon that will include connected TV – we are already seeing ads generated almost in real time on Amazon Prime and ad-funded Netflix.

Challenge 3: Media efficiency

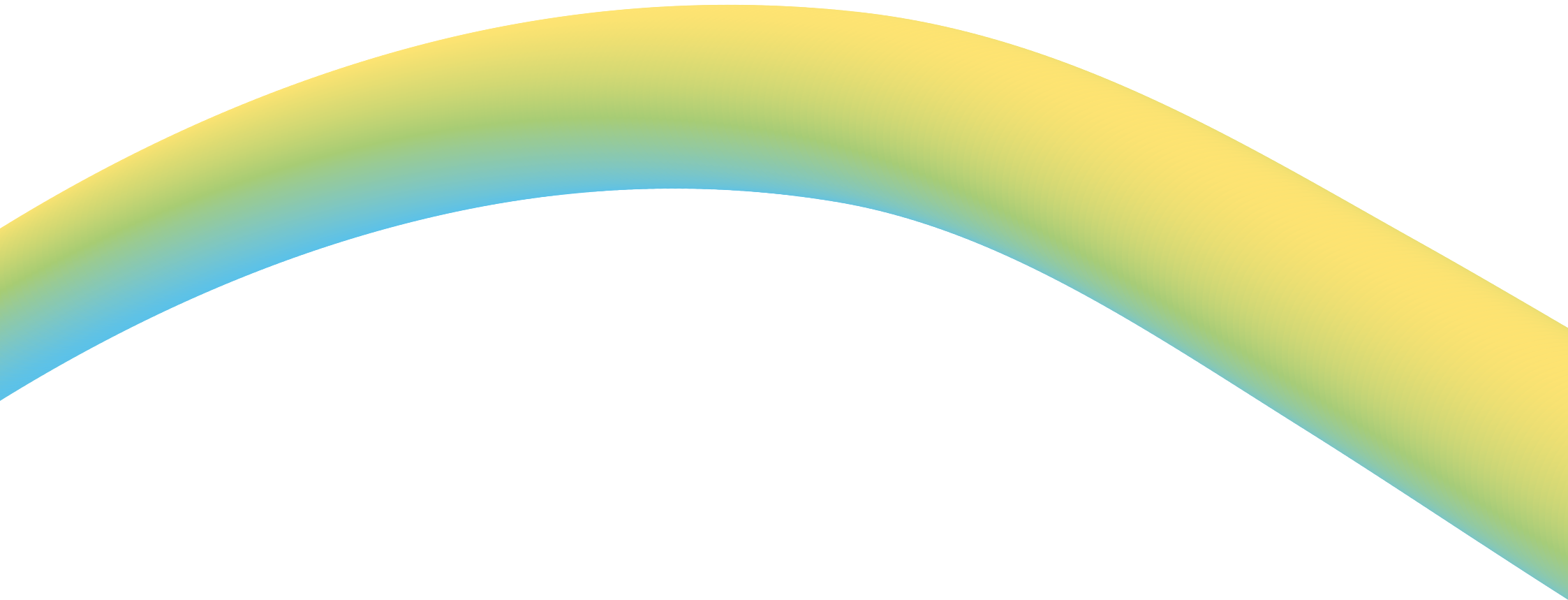
“I need to best manage marketing costs and the number one line item is media. I’m concerned that I’m wasting spend and that my agency is not recommending what is best for me but what is also best for them”

Glass Box Media is the antithesis of the black box approach to buying media that clients have been subjected to, and is all about transparency. There are three black boxes that clients currently experience:

- Where did my media run and why?
- What have I learned about my customers? (Or does that knowledge remain captured by Google and Meta?)
- How does my media agency make money, and can I trust that they are acting in my interest if they make money in ways that aren’t always in my interest?

Monks addresses each of these. We have systems that mean every decision can be seen. We have partnerships with Meta and Google that help clients collect knowledge about their consumers. And lastly, we don’t take rebates in any form – we don’t do any principal media buying.

AI is already helping us compete in pitches. We have an RFP response tool in beta, which helps us to respond quickly to any RFP, by building the deck and identifying the 80% that can be taken from other pitches so that the other 20% can be built by humans. We are constantly selling AI tools to our clients, and this is enabling us to lead by example, lighten the load and go beyond what clients expect of us. ■



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