

Whitepaper

Databricks Marketing Transformation: From Data Chaos to AI-Driven Growth



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Introduction

The Databricks marketing organization has been on a journey. They saw firsthand how critical data and AI would be in transforming marketing operations. As a fast-growing B2B business operating in a resource-constrained environment, the team recognized the need for a catalyst to scale efforts while maximizing efficiency. Along with marketers across industries, Databricks sees that data and AI are no longer aspirational “nice-to-haves” — they’re the driving forces behind the company’s journey to overhaul and elevate marketing outcomes. In this case study, learn how Databricks harnessed the Data Intelligence Platform to solve their marketing challenges, moving from an organization with fragmented data systems to a unified, intelligent and agile marketing powerhouse. Liz Dobbs, Databricks AVP of Marketing Technology, Data and Growth, shares how her marketing organization evolved from firefighting disparate data silos to leading with data intelligence.

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Two years ago, Databricks marketing was in a very different place. The team grappled with outdated legacy systems, inconsistent data across platforms and repeated breakdowns in data pipelines. Reporting was backward-looking, reactive and unreliable, leaving little room for forward-thinking, data-driven strategies. “We were reporting the news,” Dobbs recalls. With fractured alignment between systems like Marketo, Tableau and Salesforce, the marketing data structure was more of a “Frankenstein architecture,” limiting efficiency, scalability and ultimately the impact of marketing campaigns.

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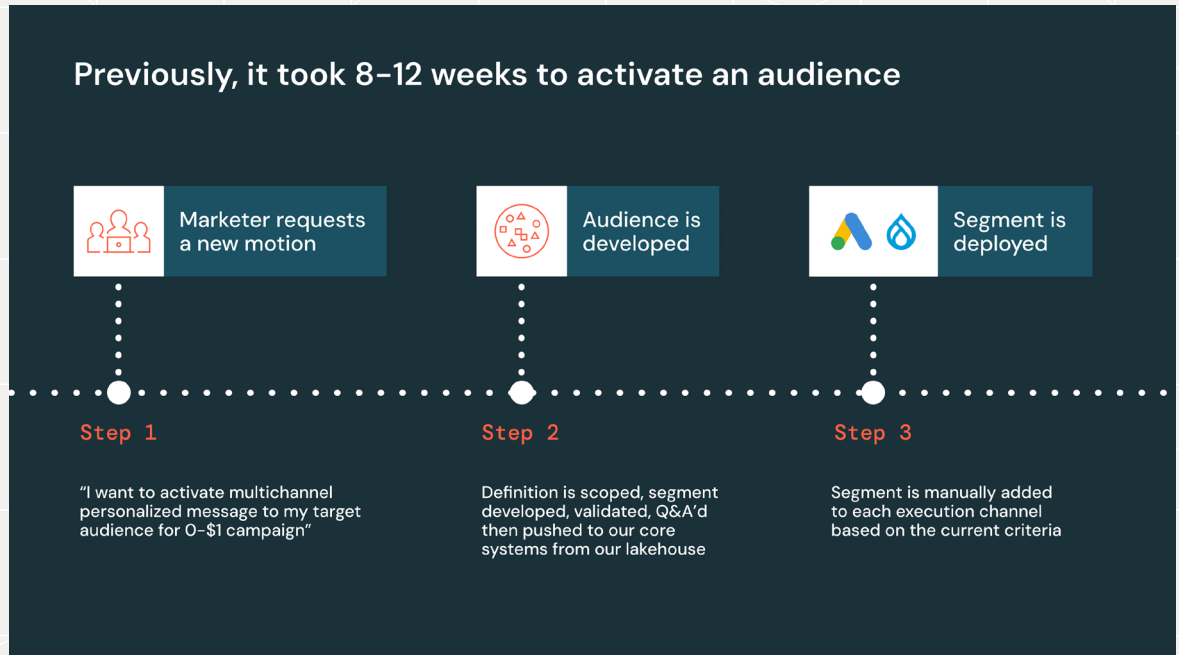
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“At that time, we were a laggard in the industry,” Dobbs reflects. “We were constantly fighting fires with broken systems. Our marketing data was inconsistent, and we lacked trust in the data, which significantly drained our productivity. It was clear that change was necessary.” Rick Schultz, Databricks CMO, provided a transformative mandate: scale marketing, drive efficiency and firmly ground data and AI at the heart of decision-making.

Facing pervasive inefficiencies and an overwhelming amount of manual data reconciliation, Dobbs and her team needed a new approach. As a company built upon pioneering data lakehouse technology, the pressure to build a robust internal marketing analytics foundation was significant.

Dobbs recounts what it was like to migrate to the Data Intelligence Platform five years ago when it wasn’t fully optimized for modern marketing use cases. “We had to reimagine what Databricks could be for marketing teams. We didn’t really have a roadmap. Some people were using really interesting media mix modeling use cases with marketing data. Still, very few people saw Databricks as the data platform for all our customer data. But the potential was there. Through an iterative approach, we saw an opportunity to showcase the potential for Databricks in the marketing industry.”



Building Data Intelligence for Marketing

To tackle these data issues, Databricks embarked on a bold strategy to build a “marketing lakehouse” — a unified marketing data foundation, with AI-powered decision-making, grounded in robust privacy and data governance. The team began with Unity Catalog, which was the single most important prerequisite for scalable data integration, ETL and reporting solutions using AI/BI. Unity Catalog helped unlock AI/BI Genie (the Databricks AI-driven analytics assistant, affectionately dubbed “Marge” internally), campaign intelligence use cases and omnichannel automation. The team then followed the medallion architecture of organizing data into different access layers (Bronze, Silver and Gold), providing the right data schema to search and activate on marketing data more effectively.

This formed the foundation of the marketing lakehouse and became the team’s trusted source of truth — breaking down data silos and facilitating cross-functional alignment between marketing and sales teams. The transformation led to some spectacular outcomes:

- 1. Empowering marketers with self-serve analytics:** Through Genie, marketers got self-service access to data-driven insights with natural language queries. Adoption skyrocketed, with over 5,000 questions asked since its launch at the end of 2024. This empowers nontechnical users with self-service tools and helps reduce the burden on data engineers and analysts to create and pull reports.
- 2. Campaign intelligence drives revenue impact:** Dobbs and team developed an internal lead-scoring model using graph neural networks, replacing a legacy black box model, improving lead-to-opportunity conversion rates by 3x and unlocking \$15M in incremental pipeline.
- 3. Omnichannel activation with composable CDP:** By consolidating customer data, Databricks reduced their database update times from eight weeks to just two and one-half hours — an efficiency improvement of 94%. Testing and segmenting web audiences based on data-driven journeys led to a 20% increase in opportunity conversions.
- 4. AI-powered automation:** An AI bot made retagging 10+ years of legacy marketing content seamless, improving classification process efficiency by 94% and saving valuable time for the product marketing team.

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Data Democratization With Self-Serve Analytics

Databricks recognized that empowering their marketing organization with intuitive tools to access insights was essential for scale and efficiency. Genie laid the foundation for this transformation. By integrating this natural language query system with Unity Catalog, marketers could bypass traditional, time-consuming data extraction methods and directly query tables of marketing data using simple, familiar language.

Adoption of Genie has been incredible. In just five months since its launch, over 5,000 questions have been logged, and widespread use across the organization continues to skyrocket. One notable power user is Rick Schultz.

“By democratizing data to nontechnical marketers, Databricks can significantly reduce the burden on our limited data engineers and analysts, empowering our marketers to access and interpret data insights themselves. Thomas Russell, the architect behind Genie, ensured the system’s evolution by continuously analyzing user queries to fine-tune the assistant’s capabilities. This iterative process allowed Genie to grow smarter and more accurate, reinforcing stakeholder trust and adoption.”

— Rick Schultz, Chief Marketing Officer, Databricks

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Self-Serve Analytics

Marketing Genie

Launch Date
March 2024

Target Market
All Marketing

Contribution

- 200+ Users
- 4,700+ Questions Answered



Data Used

- Marketing Performance and Attribution
- DBU Consumption
- Account Firmographic
- Contact Demographic

Powered By

- AI/BI
- Databricks Logfood
- Unity Catalog
- Genie Spaces

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The self-serve analytics initiative underscored the Databricks commitment to removing barriers to insight-driven decision-making. It enabled faster turnaround from question to insight to action, fostered more directed strategy setting by leadership and paved the way for a deeper exploration of downstream use cases. By humanizing access to data, Genie symbolized the confluence of technology and usability, fueling how Databricks leverages insights to drive marketing success.



Campaign Intelligence Drives Revenue Impact

The next pillar of the Databricks marketing transformation was deploying advanced campaign intelligence powered by data and AI. Before this shift, the team relied on a black box lead-scoring model provided by a third-party vendor to guide sales priorities. However, this model offered limited visibility, lacked customization options and left gaps in aligning marketing activity with actual outcomes. Recognizing the untapped potential in their own data, Databricks identified an opportunity to build a custom, high-performance lead-scoring solution.

Using the Databricks Data Intelligence Platform, the marketing team collaborated with Kumo, a graph neural network partner, to create a model to identify patterns of behavior leading to successful sales outcomes. They trained the model using a wide array of marketing data — every interaction on the website, campaign engagements and other touchpoints — uncovering predictive patterns that consistently corresponded to an opportunity created in the sales funnel. By shifting the emphasis to actionable, data-driven insights, the Databricks-built lead-scoring model was three times more effective than the legacy vendor solution.

The result was remarkable: a 3x improvement in converting marketing-qualified leads into sales opportunities and an additional \$15 million in incremental pipeline surfaced. For the Databricks team, this success wasn't just a technological triumph but a testament to the power of leveraging internal data intelligence over external point solutions. The high-performance lead-scoring system exemplified how the Databricks Platform could unlock tangible business value by bridging the gap between datasets and delivering actionable intelligence to the sales team.

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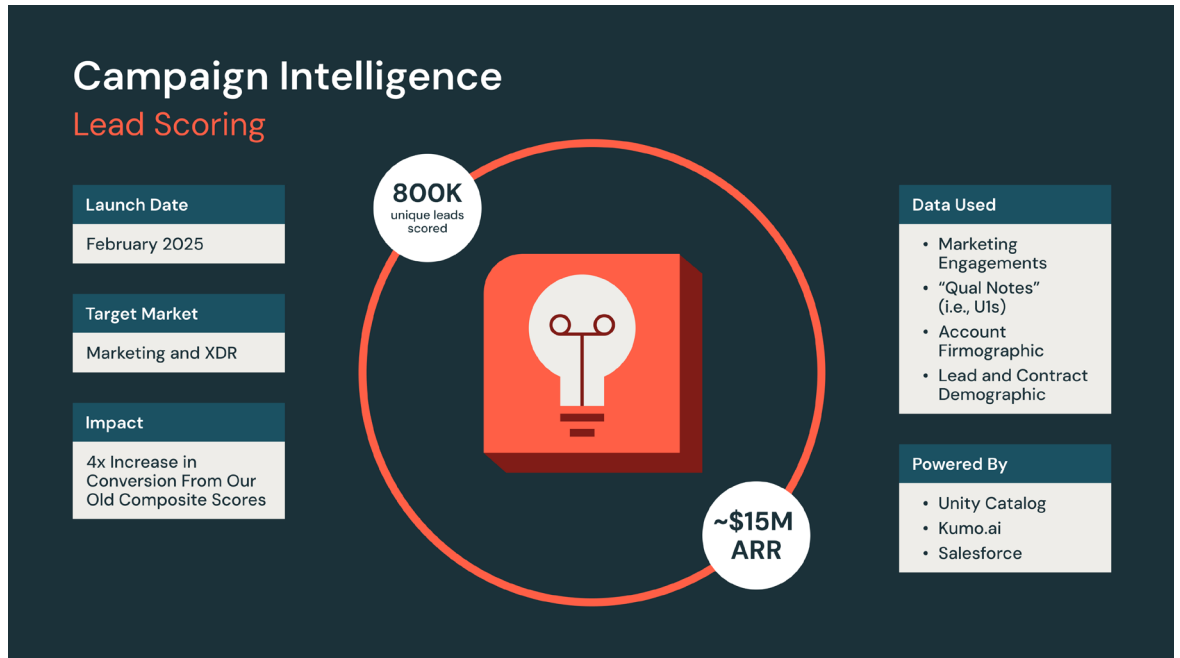
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A critical takeaway from the team's experience is the need to own and intimately understand first-party data. By moving away from opaque scoring systems to a bespoke, transparent solution, the team could iterate, refine and optimize the model to fit the specific needs of their business. The transformation of campaign intelligence not only improved the alignment between marketing and sales but also reinforced the organization's belief in the transformative power of their technology.

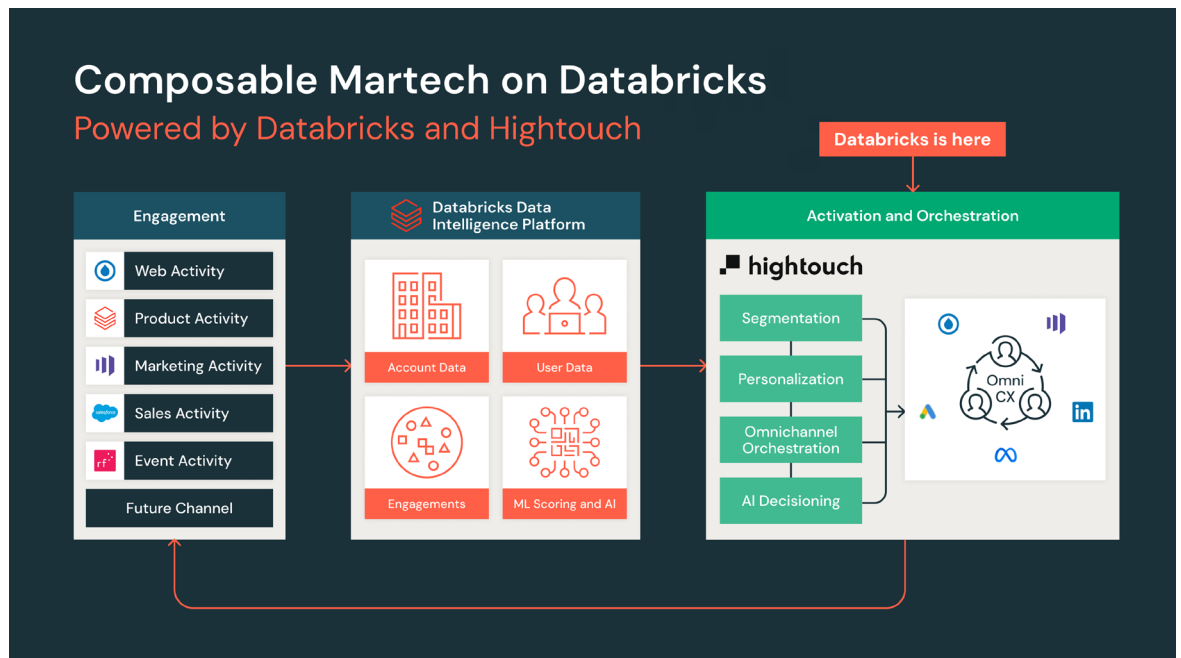
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Omnichannel Activation With Composable CDP

Throughout the process, Dobbs and team identified the need for greater agility and a holistic approach to customer data. The solution was to adopt a composable customer data platform (CDP) architecture. This pattern helped break down silos while also enabling the marketing team to move at the speed of business. Before implementing a composable CDP, the marketing organization faced significant delays in creating and activating segments using real-time signals across their 5.3 million records, with processes taking up to eight weeks due to reliance on various internal and external systems. This frustration became a catalyst for change.

Ultimately, the team looked to build their composable CDP to empower marketers to create and activate segments in real time based on the behavioral attributes of customers and prospects. This enabled updates to flow seamlessly across execution systems in just hours. The result was a dramatic reduction in database update processing time, from eight weeks to two and one-half hours — a 94% efficiency improvement. This transformation eliminated the tedious manual workflow of coordinating updates across multiple systems, empowering the team to quickly adapt to changing business priorities.

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Efficiency gains were only the beginning. The composable CDP unlocked marketers' ability to execute true omnichannel campaigns. By shifting from single-touch campaigns to integrated journey-based experiences, the marketing team could analyze and act on customer interactions across various touchpoints. A notable test conducted with the web team demonstrated the CDP's impact: creating tailored audience segments and guiding these audiences through personalized digital journeys increased opportunity conversions by 20% compared to standard methods.

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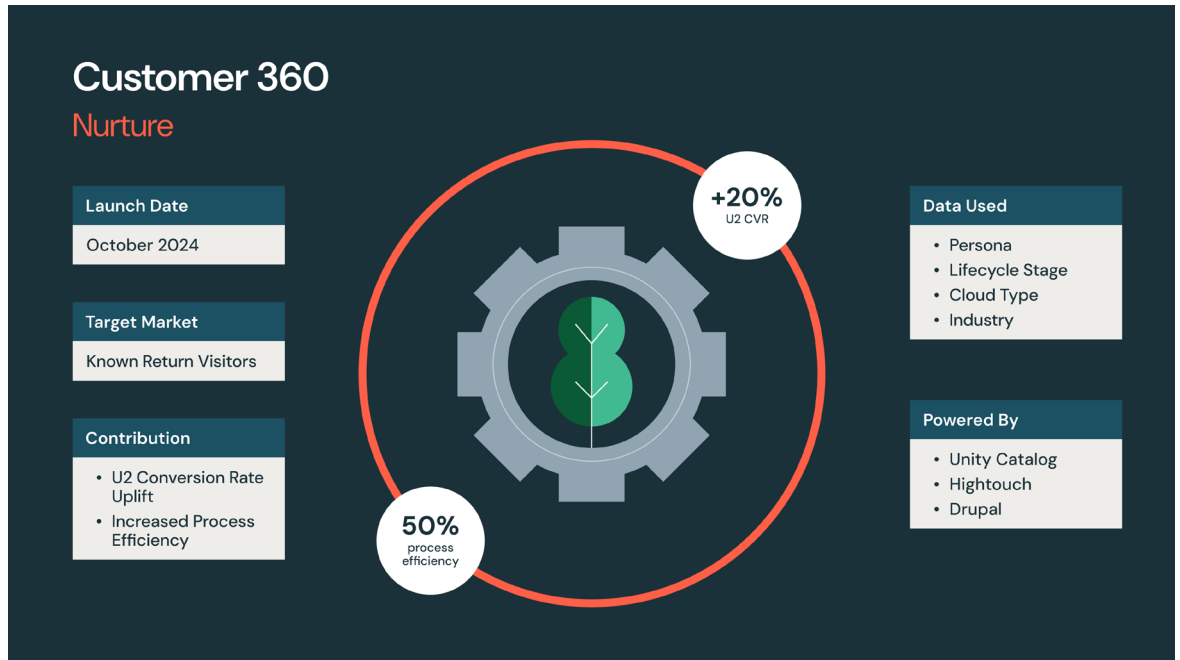
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The composable CDP represented a fundamental shift in marketing strategy. It empowered Databricks to be more agile, creative and precise in their campaigns, while fostering a culture of data-driven decision-making. From its efficiency improvements to its enablement of smarter, faster marketing execution, the composable CDP became a cornerstone of the Databricks marketing evolution, positioning the team to deliver impactful campaigns to make progress with must-win accounts.



AI-Powered Automation: Content Tagging

A killer early use case of AI in marketing is reducing the burden of manual tasks. As part of the broader marketing journey, Dobbs and team adopted an AI-powered tagging bot, affectionately named “TagUrlt-bot.” Dobbs and team had a 10-year backlog of marketing content, including blogs, eBooks and webinars. Her marketing ops team faced the daunting task of retagging legacy materials using newly established taxonomies. This traditionally manual process required significant input from product marketing, which often lacked familiarity with older materials, leading to slow progress and potential inconsistencies.

By focusing on this seemingly small yet critical process, an AI-driven solution helped significantly streamline this effort. Dobbs and team trained TagUrlt-bot on defined tagging values, empowering it to review and map themes across the content inventory efficiently. This process involved suggesting mapping relationships, receiving validation for accuracy and then applying the updated taxonomy. Generative AI helped the team improve process efficiency by 94%, freeing time for product marketers to focus on higher-value strategic work.

By delivering consistency and accuracy across tags, TagUrlt-bot significantly improved the quality of insights derived from content performance analytics. Additionally, the integration of this AI-driven process allowed for dynamic updates as new tags or changes were introduced, ensuring the taxonomy remained up-to-date without intensive human effort.

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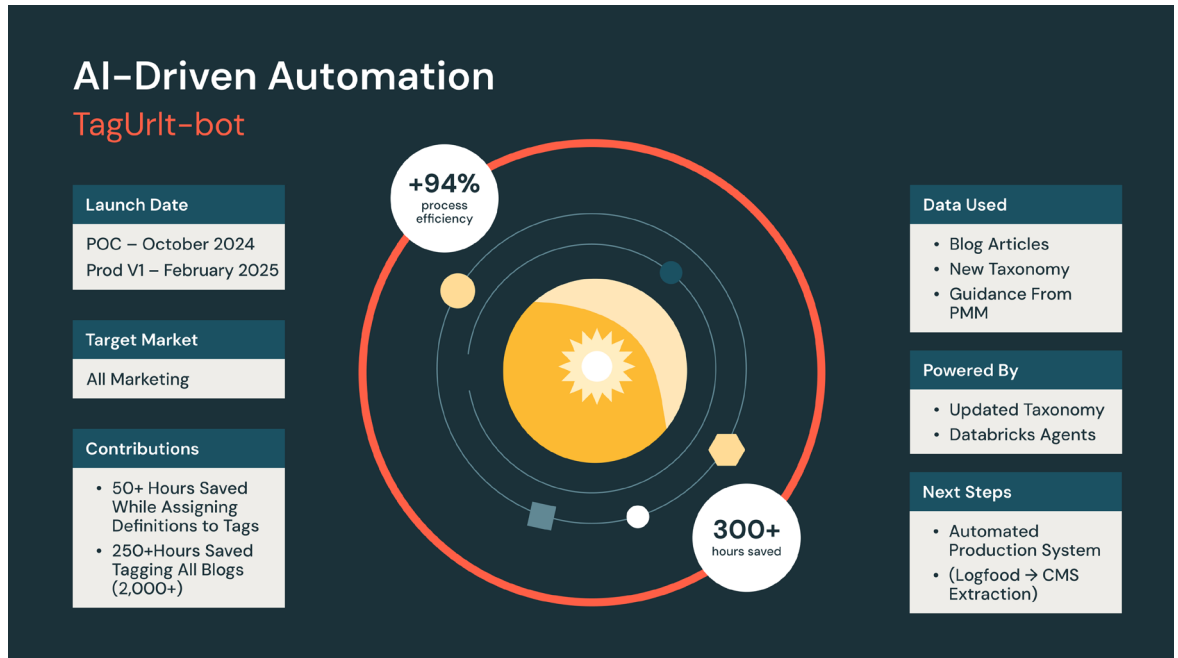
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The implementation demonstrated to Dobbs and team that not all AI projects need to be extensive to deliver results. By targeting a specific, repetitive process like content tagging, Databricks showcased how small, focused investments in AI technology can provide enormous value. Automation reduced operational overhead and highlighted the Databricks commitment to leveraging data and AI to optimize workflows, empowering their team to scale strategically and focus on innovation.

“We decided early on that we couldn’t wait for perfection. Trying small projects, validating results and iterating quickly became our mantra,” Dobbs explains. From testing lead-scoring frameworks to automating taxonomy updates, the team embraced an iterative, agile framework.

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Impact teams can measure

The data and AI-led pivot delivered demonstrable business outcomes:

- **Efficiency and scalability:** Time for data updates dropped from months to hours, enabling greater campaign adaptability
- **Enhanced marketing-sales alignment:** Improved lead-to-opportunity visibility ensured informed decisions and alignment across the customer journey lifecycle
- **Incremental revenue impact:** The AI-powered lead-scoring solution uncovered an additional \$15M in pipeline
- **Stronger adoption:** Self-serve analytics democratized data usage, empowering marketers at all levels to make data-driven decisions without requiring technical expertise

Dobbs highlights, “When our CMO and practitioners alike embraced tools like Genie, it validated our approach to democratize data across the organization.” The ability to respond quickly to new data requirements — from adding new attributes to launching hypertargeted campaign segments — bolstered agility across the marketing team. This responsiveness, combined with democratizing access to insights, showcased how data collaboration enables teamwork. The Databricks marketing evolution offers a vital lesson for organizations looking to balance rapid scaling with operational excellence.

“When we embarked on this journey, we weren’t just building tools for today’s challenges but creating a foundation for the future of marketing at Databricks,” Dobbs emphasizes. The key to success was a mindset rooted in iteration, partnership with product developers and trust in the transformative potential of data intelligence.

For companies contemplating their own transformative journey, Dobbs advises: “Don’t let perfect be the enemy of good enough. Start small, build momentum with quick wins and show value incrementally. We learned that we must iterate, adapt and align efforts with leadership’s vision. This was how we sustained support and ultimately saw real impact.”



Turn marketing data into business growth

Visit the Databricks [page on data intelligence for marketing](#) to learn more about how Databricks empowers teams to accelerate marketer outcomes and drive business growth.

Are you ready to explore how Databricks can power your own data-driven marketing transformation? Connect with their experts to get started today.

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About Databricks

Databricks is the data and AI company. More than 10,000 organizations worldwide — including Block, Comcast, Condé Nast, Rivian, Shell and over 60% of the Fortune 500 — rely on the Databricks Data Intelligence Platform to take control of their data and put it to work with AI. Databricks is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices around the globe, and was founded by the original creators of Lakehouse, Apache Spark™, Delta Lake and MLflow. To learn more, follow Databricks on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#) and [Facebook](#).