



The Insight Leader's Playbook for 2026

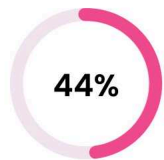
● CMI REPORT | 2026

How to boost your insight team's
credibility, influence, and impact
in an AI-driven organization

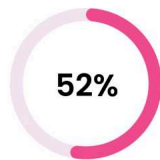
Overview: Creating insight impact in 2026

You might have the best market data in the world, but if your CMO can't act on it, you're burning budget and credibility. It's the paradox consumer- and market-insights teams are facing in 2026. You've got more data, tools, dashboards and AI than ever, yet it's increasingly difficult to influence your organization's decision-making.

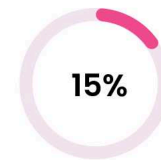
The numbers say it all:



44% of us can't access relevant insights when we need them (WFA & Stravito, 2025)



52% of us aren't confident our findings are actually used right (WFA & Stravito, 2025)



Only **15%** of CMOs say their teams truly act on what customers want (McKinsey, 2025)

The way **decision-makers move is changing faster than most insight teams can keep up with.**

If you're not seeing your analysis at the center of business decisions, it's not just you. The gap between insight and action has never been wider, and it's costing organizations real money and momentum.

This playbook dives straight into what today's best teams are doing to close that gap:

- 1 Getting in the room before strategy is set
- 2 Making insights impossible to miss, or misinterpret
- 3 Using AI to work faster, but not sloppier
- 4 Building trust, not just presentations

Over the next pages you'll find takeaways from many of the industry leaders who joined Stravito's podcast, The Insider's Club, to discuss how they're facing the challenges head on. It's designed for insight directors and senior managers who want insight to play a bigger role in their organizations decision-making.

If your insight isn't driving the agenda, it's just background noise.

Here's how to fix that, even with no budget to spare.

TAKEAWAY 1

Stop delivering insights. Start shaping decisions.



The challenge

Your team delivers high-quality work but still struggles to influence outcomes. Maybe your team is sharing insights too late, using unclear language, or avoiding a strong point of view. Decision-makers don't have time to decode findings or debate what the insight means.



What leading insight professionals do differently

They get involved early, help frame the problem, and focus on what matters.

Their outputs are short, sharp, and opinionated. They transform insight from facts into decision-making guides.



What to do

- Name the decision your work should inform in one sentence
- Replace long decks with decision briefs
- Share early thinking with decision-makers, before conclusions are final



Confident decisions in practice

Then: When the Insights team got a request for “some pricing analysis,” they spent weeks building a long, detailed deck, only to present it and find leaders had already made up their minds.

Now: The team joins pricing conversations from the start, helps frame the key decision, and delivers a short decision brief focused on the best trade-offs and a recommended path forward. So when leaders meet, they debate the options on the insight brief, and even follow the recommended strategy. (And Insight drives the decision instead of decorating it.)

How impact looks

✓ Working

Stakeholders ask for recommendations

✗ Not working

You're delivering insights after decisions have already been made

The best insights take a point of view.

"The best insights I see across any organization or category are those that don't just relay what the consumers say or do. They take a point of view. They tell the business what needs to happen as a result. So, we need to become more of a co-pilot to the business."



Nick Graham,
Founder, Vertimis



TAKEAWAY 2

When your insight is hidden, **your impact vanishes.**



The challenge

Insight fails when it's invisible. If it's spread out across folders, tools, and inboxes, stakeholders can't find it when they need it, or they don't trust what they find. Making your team look like an expensive hobby.



What leading insight professionals do differently

They create a single front door for insight, keep content relevant, and connect it to every issue and opportunity the organization faces, every day.



What to do

- Create a single access point for insight
- Curate insight to keep it current and useful
- Share links, not attachments



Confident decisions in practice

Then: When product managers were up against tight deadlines, needing evidence to support a new feature launch, they'd end up wasting whole afternoons rifling through email threads and outdated folders, wondering, "Is this slide even the latest?"

Now: They just head over to the team's central insight hub. Everything is there: the most recent, trusted research and exactly how it connects to their decision. That insight isn't just easy to find—it's confidently used, and avoids yet another unnecessary research request. Alignment happens in hours, not weeks.

How impact looks

✓ Working

Fewer duplicate studies

✗ Not working

"Can you resend that?" is common

Create formats that allow insights to travel.

"With remote and hybrid work becoming permanent, the teams that can create compelling, shareable content are the ones that maintain influence and actually drive impact.

It's not just about making prettier presentations. It's about creating formats that allow insights to travel effectively through organizations and maintain their impact across different contexts through and to different audiences."



Thor Olof Philogène,
CEO, Stravito



TAKEAWAY 3

If stakeholders don't understand your insight, they can't use it.



The challenge

Even if people have access to insight, it's no use if they can't understand it. If different teams draw different conclusions, you get inaction and misalignment. Which rarely drives revenue.



What leading insight professionals do differently

They lead with the "so-what," guide interpretation, and make implications explicit. You don't have to oversimplify insights to make them clear. What matters is what you say and what you leave out.



What to do

- One insight, one headline
- Say what it means, and what it does not
- Test understanding with non-experts



Confident decisions in practice

Then: Remember when Marketing interpreted an insight as a call for a bold campaign while Sales read it as a warning to stay cautious—leading to confusion and stalled action?

Now: These days the Insights team shares a concise headline and one clear recommended move, making it explicit what the finding does and does not suggest. Teams stop debating what "it really means" and start echoing the same message in meetings and briefs. That means Marketing and Sales show up with a unified strategy, and execution picks up speed.

How impact looks

✓ Working

Different teams start sharing the same language

✗ Not working

Different teams use the same insight to take opposite actions

Share everything? You'll lose people.

"If you share everything, you'll lose people.
The best insights are the ones that make people
stop and go, 'Oh wow, we need to act on this.'"



Matt Roberts,
VP of Business Intelligence, Formula E



TAKEAWAY 4

Bring insights in early **and often**.



The challenge

Business teams follow fixed planning timelines. They can't wait for late input. If your insight team shares insight after planning and budgeting discussions are already over, you lose the chance to influence decisions. (And those decisions lose out, too.)



What leading insight professionals do differently

They work directly with decision-makers by taking part in planning sessions, following business timelines, and sharing insight while teams discuss options.

Put simply, they make sure that insights show up before the decision, not after.



What to do

- Identify who makes decisions and when they make them
- Join planning meetings instead of just presenting finished slides
- Share insight in time to influence choices, not after plans are set



Confident decisions in practice

Then: The Insights team used to drop polished slides right before launch, usually as a formality after core choices were set. Impact: minimal.

Now: The Insights lead maps out key decision points and joins working sessions early, surfacing directional research when teams are still open to options. When it comes to final choices, leaders are already referencing insight in real time, ensuring the business moves faster, with fewer missteps and costly reversals.

How impact looks

✓ Working

Decision-makers reference insights when making choices

✗ Not working

"This would have been useful earlier"

INSIGHTER'S PERSPECTIVE

Insights at every meeting.

"We want to integrate insights into the organization at every meeting, every decision, so we can be more data-driven and make better decisions."



Lisa Payne,
Global Director of Product & Design UX Research,
Condé Nast



TAKEAWAY 5

Use AI to work faster (but hold on to the human judgement).



The challenge

AI speeds everything up, including mistakes. If your team forwards AI-generated content without verifying its accuracy or sources, stakeholders will quickly lose trust, and patience.



What leading insight professionals do differently

They vet AI results, confirm sources, and decide what the results mean for the business. They align AI use with company strategy. They benefit from Insights industry expertise and never work in isolation. They always keep human judgment and emotional intelligence in the loop.



What to do

- Use AI in proven use cases to speed things up
- Check all sources in AI output
- Use the time you save to make clearer recommendations



Confident decisions in practice

Then: The team tried AI to shortcut research, but once shared an auto-generated summary that missed a key context, leading to confusion and raised eyebrows from leadership.

Now: The Insights team uses a trusted AI resource with verified sources to speed research and spot patterns, but always sanity-checks the data before sharing findings—with a crystal-clear recommendation. Leadership sees the impact: faster briefs, smarter calls, and zero surprises around source credibility.

How impact looks

✓ Working

Faster insight, same trust

✗ Not working

Errors reach decision-makers

Learn to be synthesizers.

"We need to learn to be synthesizers.
We need to be the people at that pivot point
that bring the evidence streams together."



Jane Frost,
CBE, CEO, Market Research Society



The future is a hybrid model.

The future isn't AI replacing human insight. It's a hybrid model where AI enhances data analysis and operational efficiency while humans focus on long-term vision, ethics and adaptability. The key question teams should ask isn't whether to adopt AI, but how to integrate it strategically.”



Thor Olof Philogène,
CEO, Stravito



TAKEAWAY 6

Teach decision-makers to use insight on their own.



The challenge

If your insight team has to explain every finding, your influence remains limited. Other teams, including C-suite decision makers, wait for your answers instead of using insight on their own. Vastly limiting the impact of insights on your organization, and revenue.



What leading insight professionals do differently

They show stakeholders how to find insight and use it in their work. They clearly define key concepts, explain how to interpret results, and show examples of good and bad use. The insight team enables knowledge literacy instead of controlling access to knowledge.



What to do

- Agree on clear, consistent definitions
- Show teams how to use insight tools themselves
- Teach stakeholders how to ask better questions



Confident decisions in practice

Before: Business teams waited days (or longer) for the insights team to find the right slide or interpret jargon-heavy reports. Sometimes, they went ahead with flawed assumptions rather than wait.

Now: The insights team hosts short trainings, shares cheat sheets with key definitions, and builds quick video walk-throughs of the insight platform. Suddenly, marketers and product leads start answering many questions on their own—asking sharper follow-ups, digging deeper, and acting faster. The impact: more decisions shaped by evidence, with less hand-holding and fewer bottlenecks.

How impact looks

✓ Working

Teams use insight on their own to make decisions

✗ Not working

Teams wait for you before they can move forward

The speed of actionability.

"Part of the challenge for insight teams is that speed of insight and of actionability. What is on the mind of the business at the moment? What can I tell the business today that will change its decision-making? How do we build insight into all of those tasks so it's front of mind all of the time?"



Alfred Wahlforss,
Co-founder, Listen Labs



**Take the quick readiness quiz
—how many of these can your
team check TODAY?**

Use the Insight Readiness Checklist to
pinpoint where influence breaks down.

[Take the readiness checklist](#)

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