

Events Food for thought

THE OTHER CHALLENGES FACING MARKETERS AND THEIR BUDGETS — why ruthless prioritization beats cost-cutting

persistent theme at Marketers and Money 2025 was the challenge of constrained budgets, with Gartner reporting that only 24% of marketers feel they have enough budget to execute their strategy. In a panel moderated by Darren Wooley (Trinity P3), Rebecca Darley (TPG) and Chris Allan (Lion) explored how smart decision-making and ruthless prioritization — not cost-cutting — are the keys to operational efficiency and sustained growth.



by **Josh Bryer** Dec 15, 2025

Redefining the Budget Conversation

For TPG Group CMO Rebecca Darley, the priority was not budget, but clarity. She noted that TPG, as the second-largest telco group in Australia with six brands, was at the stage where 70% of investment was needed for foundations. Darley asserted that marketers must flip the conversation away from budget and focus strictly on the language of the CEO and CFO: EBITDA and growth.

Darley noted that TPG's growth-focused approach was used to guide decisions on product and portfolio investment, based on what drives the longest tenure and highest customer value. This creates ruthless prioritization, where the marketing team can say "no" to hollow connection targets and high-churn activities, making the investment clear and focused.

Chris Allan, navigating the competitive alcohol landscape, agreed that ruthless prioritization was necessary but noted that for Lion, innovation was almost a must-do. Lion loosely followed a 70/20/10 split, ensuring they reserved investment for courageous, riskier initiatives alongside the big bets that drive category growth.

I don't even talk about budget in the organization. I'm talking about growth."

– Rebecca Darley, Group CMO, TPG

Killing the Working vs. Non-Working Divide

The panelists were scathing about the traditional concept of "working versus non-working" spend, often used by procurement to reduce costs.

Allan stated that working and non-working was an "outdated" way to cut a budget, as it strips out necessary elements like sponsorships that drive creativity and growth. He argued that the best way procurement can partner with marketing is to find efficiencies that allow for reinvestment back into the brands.

Darley was blunter, saying it was simply the wrong way to measure marketing success. She noted that the issue often starts with marketing itself, which needs to change the language and lead the finance team.

Darley described her simple framework for dealing with procurement: "Pay peanuts, get monkeys." Marketing requires "best-in-class thinkers, strategists, storytellers" who lead to a different outcome than those negotiating office tea bags and electricity.

If you've got a CFO that's talking working and non-working, you need a new CFO.

– Rebecca Darley, Group CMO, TPG

The New Waste: AI Slop and Bad Briefs

When asked to identify the biggest source of waste in the next 12 months, Darley called out a

broader industry trend: “AI slop”. She argued that the pressure to constantly deliver content, often driven by a commercial imperative, was misguided, and marketers should recognize that “less is more sometimes.”

Allan focused on internal efficiency, stating that waste often begins with bad briefs and weak feedback from marketers themselves. He emphasized that marketers need to look inwards and ask what they are getting wrong, rather than blaming agencies for fees. By driving better briefs, agencies can work more efficiently and dedicate more time to bigger, greater thinking.

Allan also defended “waste” when framed as risk or test-and-learn, particularly for iconic legacy brands. If the intent is positive — to move the brand forward — leaders must be willing to swing for the fence and have some things fail without it being a battle.

He summarized his view succinctly:

You've got to be willing to take the risks and potentially have something that doesn't work... it's an opportunity then to either learn for the future or optimize and do something different.

– Chris Allan, Connections Director, Lion

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