

→ 5 ways you can use AI to improve your utility marketing, today

By Cord Silverstein, Integrate AI and Nancy Caplan, ICF

Only 36% of utilities use GenAI, compared to 65% in other industries¹

We're in an age of fast-paced, transformative innovation, and AI stands as one of the most promising tools for revolutionizing utility marketing. Every day, leaders are being challenged to understand how to use tools like ChatGPT and Copilot effectively for their marketing campaigns. There's a lot of opportunity for innovation and engagement, but the big question is always... how?

¹ Statista, a global data and business intelligence platform with an extensive collection of statistics, reports, 36% of companies in the energy and utility sector have adopted GenAI technologies.

As of early 2024, [65% of organizations report regularly using GenAI](#), nearly doubling the percentage from the previous year.



GenAI can transform how your utility marketing teams work--making processes better, smarter, and faster. By starting with small, actionable tasks, teams can naturally build AI-driven habits that enhance their workflows over time.

At ICF, we understand that applying generative AI (GenAI) effectively in utility marketing's unique business context can offer fresh insights and unprecedented efficiency in helping utilities reach their audiences. But, remember, even the best technology needs clean data and thoughtful prompts—"garbage in, garbage out" still applies. That's why human oversight and thoughtful AI training are essential to successful outcomes.

We're excited to share five actionable ways to get started with GenAI and make a difference in your marketing strategy.

What is GenAI?

GenAI, refers to AI systems designed to produce human-like responses, insights, and even content based on large language models (LLMs). From content creation to customer insights, GenAI can boost efficiency and personalize customer experiences when implemented with careful guidance and oversight.

The overall approach: Treat GenAI like a new team member. Onboarding AI to your marketing team is similar to training a new employee. By assessing output, providing feedback, and iterating, you'll shape the AI's contributions to match your standards and work style. As with any team member, clear communication, guidance, and support are key to reaping maximum benefits.

Now, let's get into the five ways (with prompt examples) you can start using GenAI today.



1. Research and analysis

Using GenAI for research and data analysis is a great, low-risk way to enter the AI space. Research often gets skipped when time and budgets are tight, yet it lays a vital foundation for any marketing campaign. GenAI can streamline market research, target analysis, testing, and more—saving time without cutting corners.

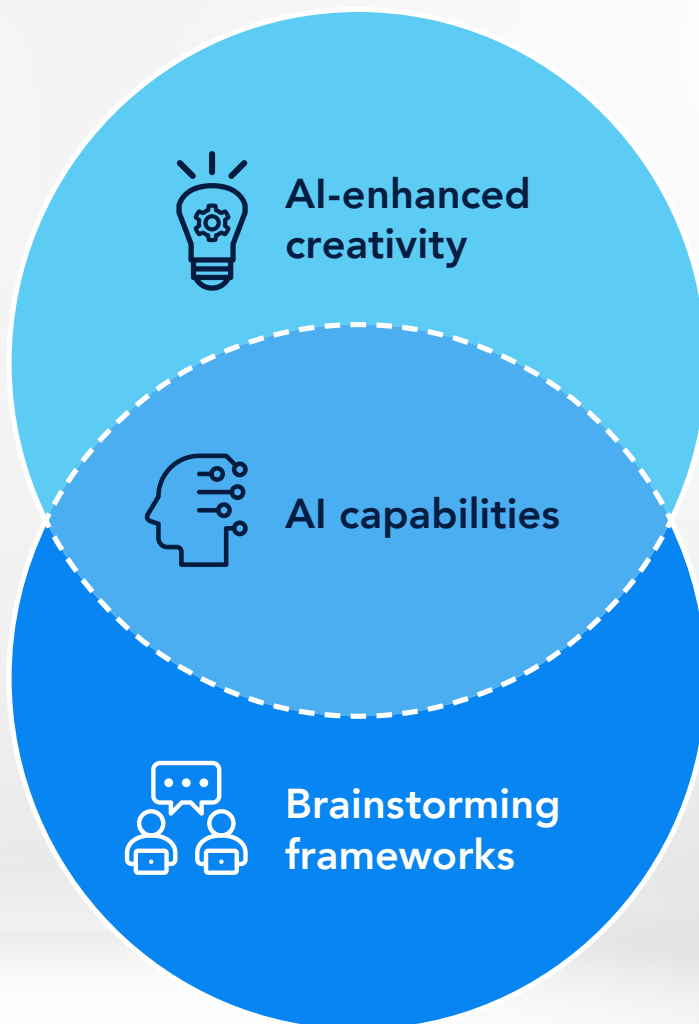
For example, GenAI can perform sentiment analysis on consumer feedback, social media, and customer reviews to uncover the emotions and concerns of your audience. This provides a deeper, more nuanced view of customer opinions, aiding in campaign development that resonates with customer expectations. GenAI's data insights also serve as a reliable starting point for campaign testing and optimization, ensuring each marketing effort is data-informed and strategically aligned with your utility's goals. Most importantly, since humans review and interpret the AI's insights, you maintain control over the process, minimizing risk.



2. Brainstorming and ideation

Brainstorming can be a time-consuming process, but AI can help generate creative ideas that spark inspiration. Using brainstorming frameworks like the “Six Thinking Hats” or the “SCAMPER” method, GenAI can provide fresh, unbiased perspectives. AI allows your team to start with new angles and ideas, but you’re always in the driver’s seat, steering the output and training it on techniques that work best for your team. You can even train AI to use your organization’s specific brainstorming methods for even better results.

Enhance brainstorming with AI



The SCAMPER

method is a creative problem-solving and brainstorming technique that helps generate innovative ideas by encouraging users to Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, and Reverse elements of a product or process.

The “Six Thinking Hats”

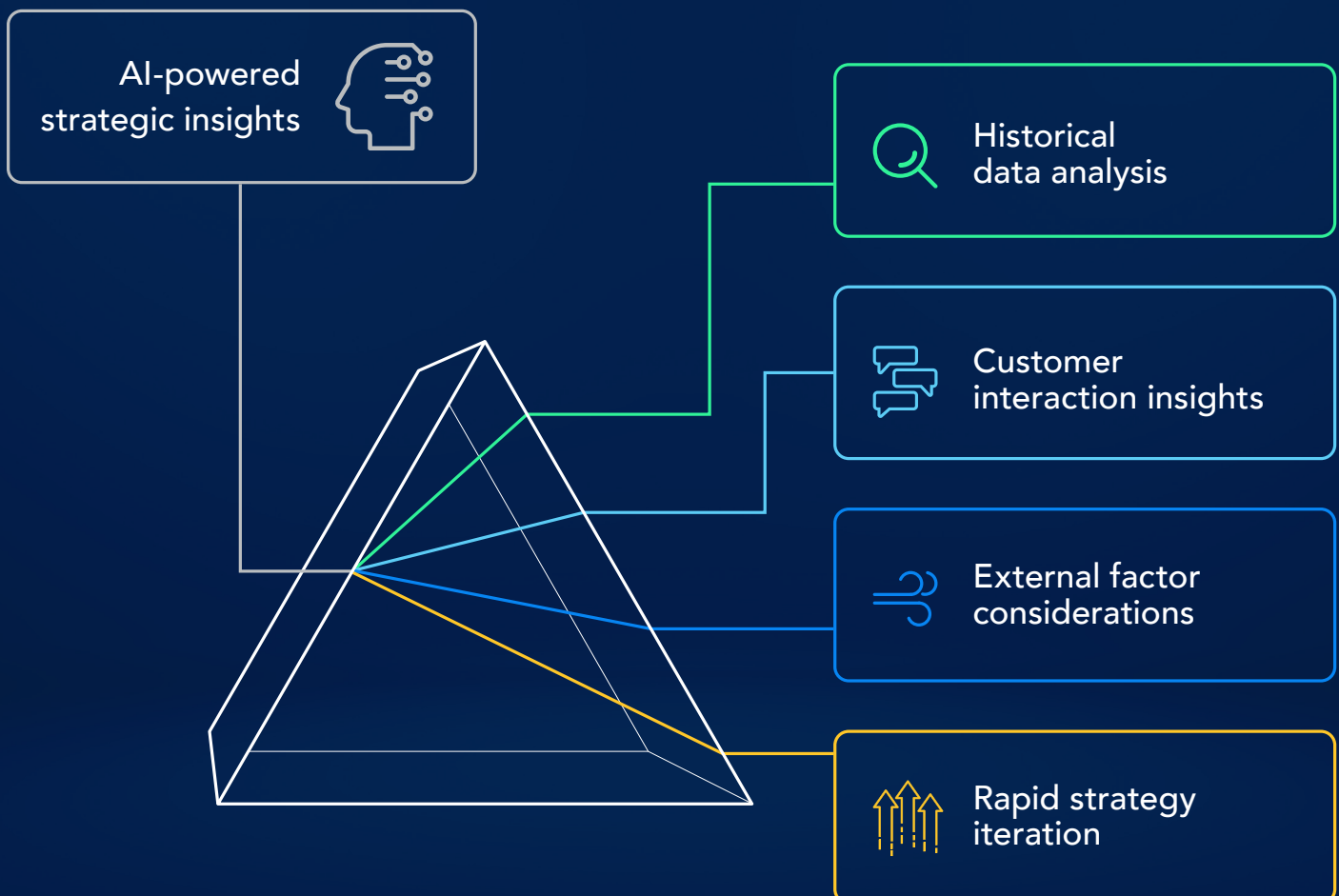
method is a brainstorming tool where participants “wear” different metaphorical hats, each representing a specific perspective or thinking style (facts, feelings, caution, optimism, creativity, and management), to encourage comprehensive and balanced decision-making.

3. Strategy development

With a clear marketing strategy, campaigns can execute more smoothly and precisely, maximizing impact. GenAI can help you develop, create, and refine personas; optimize targeting; and craft messaging tailored to specific customer needs, from energy-conscious households to commercial users looking to reduce consumption costs.

With AI-powered tools, you can analyze historical data, customer interactions, and external factors like energy usage trends or weather impacts, enabling you to build more responsive, seasonally relevant strategies. GenAI also allows your team to iterate on strategies quickly and effectively, meaning you can adapt to changing trends or consumer needs faster than ever. With a human touch guiding the insights, AI becomes a strategic enabler rather than an executor.

Unleashing AI's strategic potential



4. Content generation at scale

One of the biggest benefits of GenAI is scaling content production. Instead of manually planning and creating every post, GenAI can, for example, help generate a 60-day content calendar based on your content pillars, with everything from social posts to article drafts. You'll still review and refine content before publication to ensure quality, but GenAI significantly speeds up the process, freeing your team to focus on high-level tasks and consistent engagement.

Enhancing content with GenAI



Team focus

Allowing teams to concentrate on strategic tasks



Review process

Ensuring quality through human oversight



Content types

Diverse formats including social posts and articles



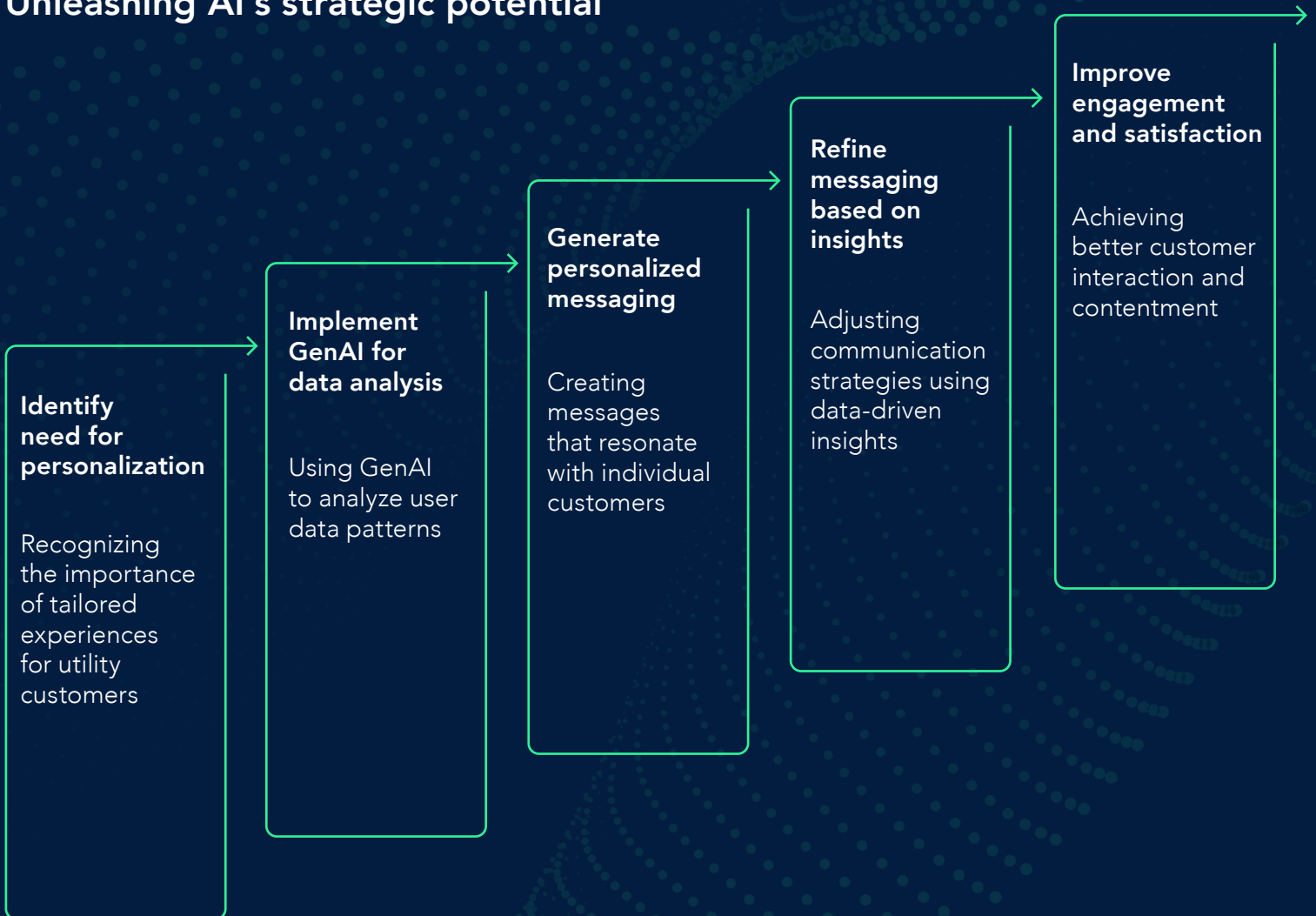
Content calendar generation

Automating the planning of content schedules

5. Data-driven personalization

Data-backed personalization has become essential to reaching utility customers effectively. And with GenAI, you can transition from manual data sifting and guesswork to get you there. GenAI can help you build personalized customer experiences by analyzing patterns in user data, allowing you to create messaging that resonates on an individual level. With data-driven insights, utility marketers can now move beyond traditional assumptions, refining messaging for improved engagement and customer satisfaction—and improving with every iteration.

Unleashing AI's strategic potential



"58% of marketers whose companies use generative AI reported increased performance as the top benefit."

-Hootsuite, AI Statistics

While the five applications mentioned above can get you started with AI, the true potential lies in leveraging advanced generative AI for large-scale marketing campaigns. This approach can revolutionize customer engagement by accelerating deployment, enhancing personalization, and automating processes, ultimately making your marketing efforts more impactful.

However, success requires more than just implementing individual tactics. To fully harness AI's transformative power, it's essential to adopt a holistic strategy that aligns these tools with your overarching objectives. A comprehensive understanding of how these elements interconnect will ensure they effectively support your broader goals and drive meaningful outcomes.

You may sense a recurring theme. GenAI is a tool, not a replacement. And, you can get started right now. At ICF, we prioritize a human-centric approach to AI, understanding that while GenAI is powerful, its true value comes from balanced, thoughtful integration.

Our expertise positions us uniquely to not only harness AI's potential but also critically validate the data it provides. This dual capability of utilizing and scrutinizing ensures that our strategies are both innovative and reliable. We leverage AI to enhance our processes, from campaign management to data analysis, ensuring that each step is boosted by technology yet grounded in our deep understanding of the digital advertising domain. Our proficiency enables us to seamlessly integrate AI into our operations, transforming these advanced technologies into practical, everyday tools that drive efficiency, accuracy, and success in our campaigns. This expert approach solidifies our position as leaders in the field, consistently delivering optimized and impactful advertising solutions.

GenAI offers a new path for utility marketers to innovate, streamline processes, and deepen audience engagement. By harnessing AI for tasks ranging from research to personalization, you can boost productivity and enhance campaign impact. With careful implementation, GenAI becomes a valuable team member, supporting your marketing goals and enriching customer experiences. ICF can help.

Appendix

What's next: Your first steps into AI-powered utility marketing

Making the transition to AI-enhanced marketing doesn't have to be overwhelming. Start small, build confidence, and scale gradually. Begin by identifying a single, low-risk project—perhaps a monthly energy-saving tips newsletter or social media content calendar—where AI can augment your existing process rather than replace it entirely.

First steps for your team

1. Establish your AI governance framework before launching any initiatives. Designate specific team members as AI leads who will oversee content quality and compliance. Create clear workflows that specify when and how AI tools should be used, and which tasks must remain fully human-controlled.
2. Build your prompt library gradually. Start with basic prompts for common tasks, then refine them based on results. For example, begin with prompts for analyzing customer feedback or generating initial draft copy for bill inserts. Document successful prompts and share them across your team to maintain consistency.

Avoiding common pitfalls

The most frequent stumbling blocks for utility marketers implementing AI include:

- Over-reliance on AI-generated content without proper validation
- Insufficient context in prompts leading to generic or irrelevant outputs
- Lack of clear processes for reviewing AI-generated content
- Inconsistent voice across AI and human-generated materials

To avoid these pitfalls, implement a “three-checkpoint” system: initial prompt review, output validation, and compliance check. Each piece of AI-generated content should pass through all three stages before publication.

Quality control guidelines

To maintain high standards in AI-generated communications:

1. Develop a utility-specific style guide for AI prompts that includes:
 - Approved terminology and phrasing
 - Tone and voice guidelines
 - Required disclaimers and legal language
 - Brand compliance requirements
2. Implement a multi-layer review process:
 - Technical accuracy check by subject-matter experts
 - Regulatory compliance review
 - Brand voice and tone validation
 - Final human editorial review
3. Maintain an audit trail of AI-generated content, including:
 - Original prompts used
 - Review history and approvals
 - Publication dates and channels
 - Performance metrics and customer feedback

Remember: AI is a powerful tool, but it's most effective when integrated thoughtfully into your existing marketing processes. Start with clear guidelines, robust review procedures, and a commitment to maintaining the high standards your customers expect from their utility provider.

About the authors



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Imagine a world where marketing and artificial intelligence dance in perfect harmony. That's the world Cord Silverstein is creating, one innovative strategy at a time.

With over 20 years of digital marketing prowess under his belt, Cord isn't just riding the AI wave – he's surfing it with style. As the visionary CEO of Integrate AI, he's on a mission to turn teams into AI-powered superheroes, capable of outmaneuvering the competition with unprecedented speed and creativity.

Cord's secret weapon? A rare blend of client-side insight and agency-honed tactics that reads like a marketing mastermind's playbook. It's this unique perspective that's helped him propel Fortune 500 brands from good to great, and from great to downright extraordinary.



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Nancy Caplan has more than 25 years of strategic communications and marketing experience in the energy industry with expertise in strategic planning and implementation, brand development and campaign management, executive consulting and writing; crisis communications and issues management, employee communications and media relations; event planning and production; and publication editing and design.

Nancy leads the ICF marketing team focused on promoting numerous energy efficiency outreach programs for utilities and other organizations



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ICF is a global consulting services company, but we are not your typical consultants. We help clients navigate change and better prepare for the future.

Our experts have been embedded in every corner of the energy industry for over 40 years, working at the intersection of policy and practice. We work with the top global utilities, plus all major federal agencies and relevant energy NGOs, to devise effective strategies, implement efficient programs, and build strong relationships with their customers. From creating roadmaps to meet net zero carbon goals to advising on regulatory compliance, we provide deep industry expertise, advanced data modeling, and innovative technology solutions, so the right decisions can be made when the stakes are high.