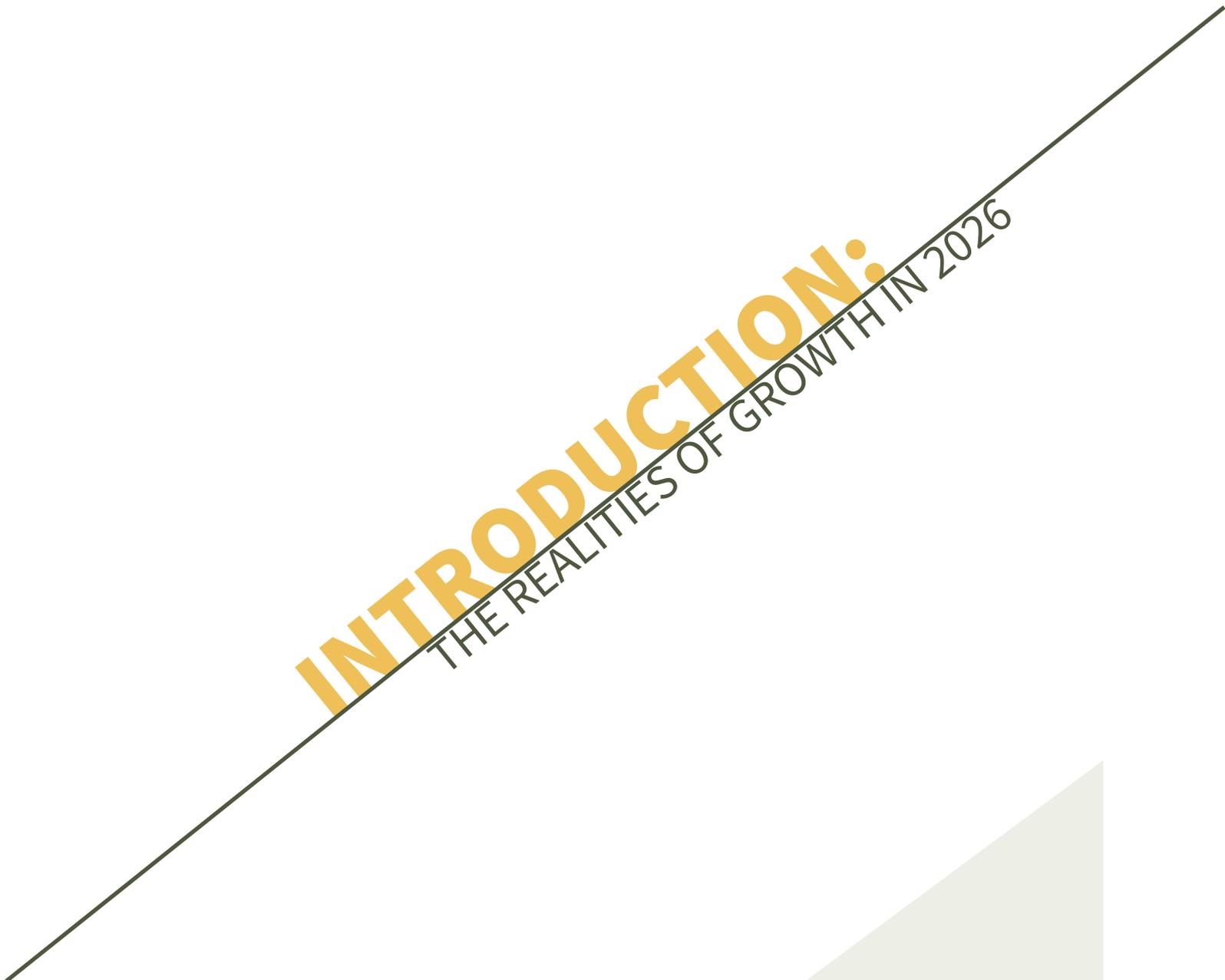


**EAST. FOCUSED. FEARLESS.**  
THE CHALLENGER'S GUIDE TO SCALING THROUGH MEDIA



**INTRODUCTION:**  
THE REALITIES OF GROWTH IN 2026

**Growing a business today is more complex than ever, with customer behaviour shifting, attention highly fragmented, competition fiercer than ever and budgets under greater scrutiny. Despite this, leadership teams still expect strong commercial outcomes, and they expect them quickly!**

Across all business stages, the challenges are clear:

- **Start-ups** face rising customer acquisition costs and a lack of foundational brand awareness.
- **Challenger brands** fight to differentiate against better-resourced incumbents.
- **Established organisations** struggle with internal fragmentation, diluted messaging and slowed momentum.

Australian data underscores the environment:

- 63% of start-ups say customer acquisition is their biggest barrier (Startup Muster).
- 72% of consumers are open to switching brands if presented with a better value proposition (NAB, 2024).
- 70% of established businesses report growth barriers tied to internal misalignment across marketing, sales and product (Deloitte CMO Survey, 2025).
- CMO budgets remain tight, averaging 9.1% of revenue (Gartner CMO Spend Survey).

In this climate, media is no longer a cost to justify, it needs to be a growth lever, capable of driving demand, improving revenue efficiency, and helping brands compete more effectively.

This guide presents a clear, practical and commercially grounded framework for using media as a growth accelerator, drawing on insights from our other guides and experience including:

**Sharp Strategy — A Practical Guide to Media That Means Business - [read more](#)**  
**Smart Tech — Where Marketing Meets AI - [read more](#)**

as well as Habitat M's work across fast-growth start-ups, emerging challenger brands and established organisations. Read more about who we're working with [here](#).

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# 01 UNDERSTANDING THE THREE GROWTH COHORTS:

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Growth looks different depending on the maturity of the business, so recognising these differences is essential for setting the right strategy, budget and expectations.

## Start-Ups: Building Traction and Credibility

### Key challenges

- Limited budgets
- Minimal brand awareness
- Pressure for fast validation
- Small or inconsistent audiences
- Lack of internal marketing structure

### What works

- Clear, simple brand positioning
- High-impact channels instead of broad mixes
- Behavioural audience insights to find early adopters
- Fast feedback loops to support rapid iteration
- Scalable creative using AI tools
- Flexible budgets tied to weekly performance

## Challenger Brands: Sharpening Distinction and Stealing Share

### Key challenges

- Larger competitors with stronger brand memory
- Split focus between brand and performance
- Difficulty maintaining distinction
- Tendency to spread budgets thin
- Over-reliance on short-term tactics/platforms

### What works

- Tighter, more differentiated positioning
- Campaign-based bursts instead of always-on noise
- A clearer role for each channel pegged to outcomes
- Sequenced storytelling aligned to the customer journey
- Using behavioural insight (e.g. SQREEM) to find untapped demand pools
- Creative that confidently breaks category norms
- Investing in opportunities that capture share-of-voice

## Established Businesses: Removing Complexity and Reigniting Relevance

### Key challenges

- Legacy processes
- Diluted messaging from years of incremental updates
- Internal misalignment on goals and metrics
- Multiple audiences and competing priorities
- Slow approvals and inconsistent execution

### What works

- Simplifying the message and creative expression
- Rebalancing brand and performance investment
- Consolidating channels to focus on highest impact
- Using modelling and attribution to support budget decisions
- Aligning internal teams around fewer, stronger campaigns
- Reintroducing creative and media experimentation to regain momentum

# 02 THE SIX GROWTH ACCELERATOR PILLARS:

Six practical foundations for building a media strategy that drives commercial outcomes.

Growth isn't driven by intuition or channel preference alone; it happens when strategy, creative, insight and alignment work together with clarity and consistency. The following pillars outline the essential components, and the practical steps to execute them.

### PILLAR 1 | Business Alignment

Growth happens faster when marketing and the wider business share the same targets, constraints and expectations.

How to put this into practice:

- ▷ **Align media to revenue and margin objectives.** Hold quarterly alignment sessions with Sales, Operations and Finance to gain clarity on revenue priorities, high-margin products and areas with capacity for growth.
- ▷ **Map the customer journey end-to-end.** Understand where customers discover, compare and convert. Media should support the real journey, not the idealised one.
- ▷ **Identify operational barriers early.** If supply, staffing or onboarding is constrained, the media plan must account for it. Growth stalls when channels push beyond operational limits.
- ▷ **Set shared definitions of success.** Ensure leadership agrees on what success looks like - revenue, margin, customer growth, market share or cost efficiency. Misalignment is the biggest cause of wasted budget.

### PILLAR 2 | Positioning and Proof

A clear, confident positioning helps customers understand why your brand matters. Proof reinforces that message and improves trust.

How to put this into practice:

- ▷ **Create a simple value proposition that everyone uses.** A single sentence that defines the customer, the problem and the advantage. This becomes the anchor for all creative and media.
- ▷ **Build and maintain distinctive brand assets.** Agree on a recognisable set of visual and verbal cues including colours, shapes, photography style, tone, audio and apply them consistently.
- ▷ **Use strong evidence in the right places.** Proof points should be visible in search, landing pages, retail media and social: reviews, ratings, demonstrations, comparisons or customer testimonials, i.e. every customer touch point.
- ▷ **Maintain message consistency for at least 12 months.** Frequent changes slow down recall and increase cost per acquisition. Consistency and duration compounds results.

## PILLAR 3 | Audience Insight

Insight reduces waste and improves effectiveness, helping you reach real customers at the right moment with the right message.

How to put this into practice:

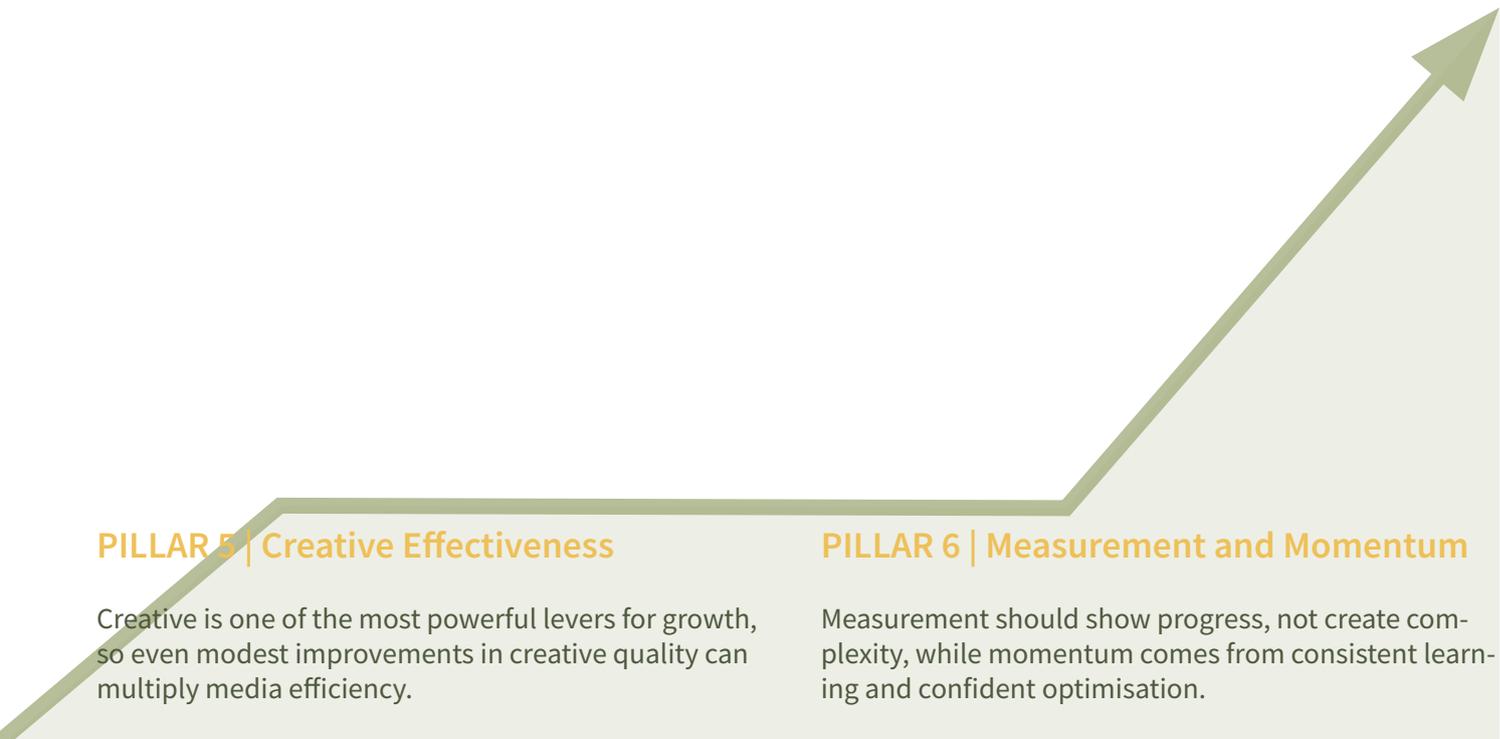
- ▷ **Base audiences on behaviour, not demographics.**  
Use platforms such as SQREEM to analyse real-time digital behaviour patterns and identify intent-rich micro-segments already showing signals of category interest, versus traditional, in-market segments you've always used.
- ▷ **Use AI to scale messaging efficiently.**  
Generative AI can quickly create message variations, creative formats and personalised content for testing and optimisation.
- ▷ **Group customers into 3-5 actionable segments.**  
Examples:
  - Competitor switchers
  - Heavy category buyers
  - Price-sensitive shoppers
  - New category entrantsEach segment requires specific messaging and channel roles.
- ▷ **Turn insights into decisions, not dashboards.**  
Ask:
  - Which segments deliver the fastest revenue lift?
  - Where are we losing customers?
  - Which messages resonate?
  - Which journeys convert with the least friction?

## PILLAR 4 | Channel Roles and Mix

Channels work best when they have clear jobs, meaning that a disciplined channel mix increases efficiency and strengthens measurement.

How to put this into practice:

- ▷ **Assign each channel one primary role.**  
Examples:
  - BVOD/YouTube: reach and awareness
  - Social/search: intent capture
  - Display/retail media: reinforcement
  - Email/CRM: loyalty and repeat purchase.
- ▷ **Start with a simple, structured mix.**  
Most high-performing plans contain:
  - One or two broad-reach channels
  - One or two intent channels
  - One retention or CRM channel.
- ▷ **Use sequential storytelling.**  
Deliver messages in a sequence:
  - Introduce the core idea
  - Reinforce message or benefit
  - Provide proof
  - Drive action.
- ▷ **Adapt creative to environment and consumption.**  
Shorter formats for social, longer for BVOD, functional for search, conversational for email. Same idea, different formats!



## PILLAR 5 | Creative Effectiveness

Creative is one of the most powerful levers for growth, so even modest improvements in creative quality can multiply media efficiency.

How to put this into practice:

- ▷ **Keep each campaign focused on one main idea.**  
Simple beats complex. Customers absorb clarity.
- ▷ **Apply distinctive brand cues consistently.**  
Recognisable assets improve ad recall and reduce media waste.
- ▷ **Test variations using real audience behaviour.**  
Different segments value different things i.e. innovation, price, security, convenience. Organic social is a great testing environment from where any out-performing content (relative to 'normal' metrics) should then warrant a paid campaign. AI tools can help scale message testing.
- ▷ **Fit creative to channel context.**  
Creative should match how people consume the platform (and when): e.g., quick hits on TikTok, longer formats on BVOD, functional messaging in retail media.

## PILLAR 6 | Measurement and Momentum

Measurement should show progress, not create complexity, while momentum comes from consistent learning and confident optimisation.

How to put this into practice:

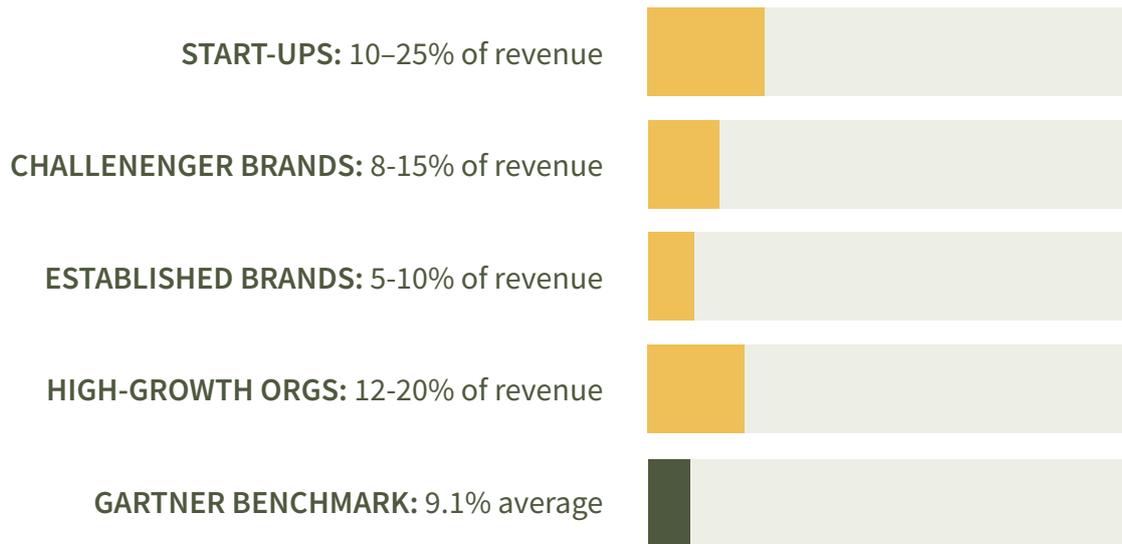
- ▷ **Separate leading and lagging indicators.**
  - Leading: reach, engagement quality, search lift
  - Lagging: revenue, acquisition cost, margin, market share. This prevents premature optimisation.
- ▷ **Build simple dashboards for different audiences.**
  - Executives need commercial outcomes.
  - Marketing teams need channel detail.
  - Avoid overwhelming either group.
- ▷ **Use controlled tests to prove impact.**  
Examples: geo-splits, holdouts, creative A/B tests, attribution modelling. This builds confidence and reduces risk.
- ▷ **Present results in commercial terms.**  
Replace channel metrics with commercial ones: revenue contribution, incremental margin, market share lift, cost per incremental acquisition.

# 03 BUDGET: SETTING, DEFENDING & COMMUNICATING

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Budget conversations are often the hardest part of growth planning, so this section sets clear expectations and gives structure to defend investment..

We recommend setting investment by business stage, enabling the conversation with stakeholders to shift from “How much are we spending?” to “What outcomes will this unlock?”



**Defending your budget** internally is a test of your resolve and accountability and we believe the key to success includes:

- ▷ **Defining the growth goal.**  
Be clear on revenue, customer growth, market share or margin.
- ▷ **Quantify the commercial gap.**  
Show what must change to hit the target.
- ▷ **Explain the role of media.**  
Link media investment to business impact using real data.
- ▷ **Provide evidence.**  
Use predictive modelling, scenario analysis, attribution and competitor data.
- ▷ **Set expectations.**  
Define timeframes, KPIs and what success looks like.

When you are **communicating your budget** it needs to align to business imperatives and reflect the internal and external factors that need to be managed. These include:

- ▷ Revenue targets
- ▷ Competitive intensity
- ▷ Growth urgency
- ▷ Brand strength
- ▷ Sales cycle
- ▷ Customer lifetime value
- ▷ Operational capacity.

# 04 THE GROWTH ACCELERATOR SYSTEM

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**Habitat M brings together strategy, creativity and AI-enabled insight to help businesses grow fast, efficiently and confidently.**

<b>FAST</b>		<b>Rapid execution through AI-assisted creative, iterative testing and lean processes.</b>
<b>FOCUSED</b>		<b>Clear strategy, behavioural insight and precise channel selection.</b>
<b>FEARLESS</b>		<b>Distinctive creative and confident decision-making supported by evidence.</b>

Growth doesn't come from one big move, it comes from clarity, consistency and disciplined execution. Media accelerates growth when it is aligned to business goals, supported by strong creative, fuelled by insight and measured against outcomes that matter.

Whether your business is building early traction, sharpening its competitive edge or reigniting relevance, the fundamentals remain the same. When strategy is clear, creative is distinctive and decisions are evidence-led, media becomes one of the most powerful levers for unlocking growth.

