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50 Years

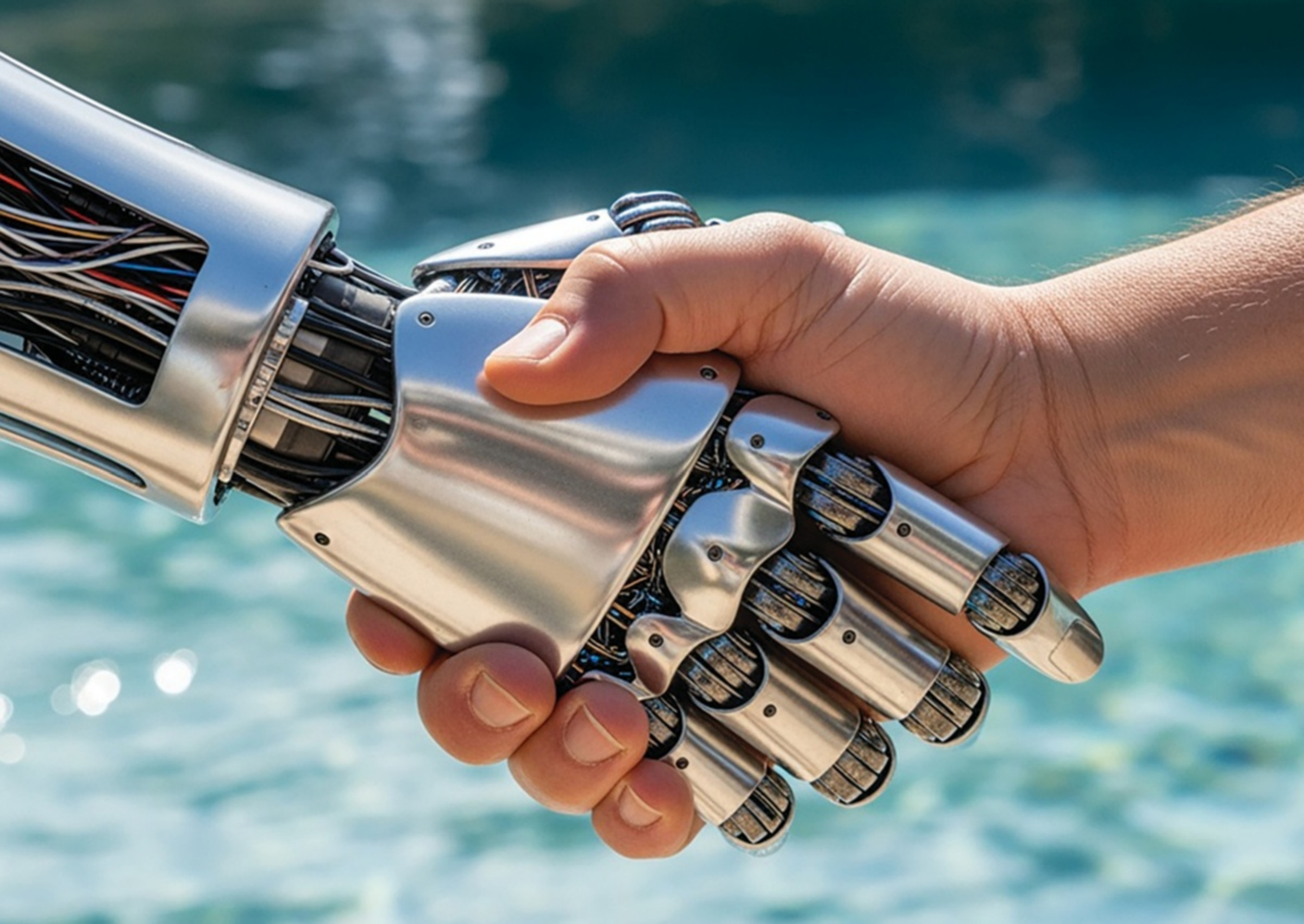
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JANUARY 2026

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How it was —
AQUA looks back on 50 years



MARKETING ADVICE FOR POOL COMPANIES IN 2026

Staying human in an AI-saturated world

By Brett Lloyd Abbott

IT'S TIME TO LOOK AT THE CHANGES AHEAD IN 2026, and make smarter decisions about how to promote your swimming pool business. My goal is to (1) help you avoid the shiny-object distractions of today, and (2) stay focused on the few crucial actions that will provide the biggest bang for the buck.

As always, the marketing fundamentals for a pool company remain the same:

- A modern website with great photos and a compelling story.
- A sophisticated marketing automation / sales CRM system that automatically nurtures your prospects while you're out building pools.
- And a business culture that wins hearts and minds, and drives plenty of referrals, so you don't have to do a lot of marketing and advertising.

While these marketing fundamentals have remained the same for many years, the marketplace itself has changed, in several ways.

First, the U.S. pool buyer market remains suppressed, still suffering from what I call the "post-COVID hangover" — i.e., homeowners who might have bought a pool in 2025 aren't buying, because they already bought their pool in a panic back in 2020 to 2022.

That means there just aren't as many new pool buyers today as there were a few years ago.

In fact, anyone who has been paying attention has seen an undeniable drop-off in new pool leads. While this trend first became noticeable in the Sunbelt states, it has now expanded to cover essentially all of the United States. This is most glaringly obvious when you look at the number of local Google searches for "new pool" or "pool builder near me."



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MARKETING ADVICE FOR POOL COMPANIES IN 2026

Ask any pool builder who ran Google ads in 2025, and they'll most likely tell you they were disappointed in the results.

There's a second market trend that exacerbates this problem even further. It's what I've called "the bifurcation of the pool buyer market." I'm referring to the growing chasm between wealthy buyers who have the cash and want something nice, and the budget-buyers who need financing, and are stretching to buy a pool they can barely afford.

Digital marketing agencies cringe when I say this, but the cold hard truth is that most wealthy people paying cash for a mid-six-figure backyard project don't search on Google to find a pool builder. Most of them ask their architect or home builder or interior designer for a referral. Or they get recommendations from their circle of friends who own multi-million dollar homes like theirs.

That means most of the people who are searching on Google are NOT the affluent buyers. They are mostly the cash-strapped, budget-sensitive homeowners who are shocked to hear that an inground pool might cost more than \$50,000.

Just like when there are too many

lions, and not enough antelope to eat, I consider advertising your pool construction services on Google ads to be fighting for survival, deep in the jungle. Probably not the best place to be right now, unless you've got a really big budget, and are planning to fight to win.

My advice? If I were a pool builder, I would be focusing on the people with money who want to spend \$250,000 or more to transform their backyard. Focus on networks and relationships, and go out of your way to win the hearts and minds of your wealthy clients and friends. Let the other builders fight over the scraps on Google.

Well, now that I've got all the digital marketing agencies mad at me, let me move to the third marketing shift steamrolling towards us in 2026: Artificial Intelligence 3.0.

In 2025, many pool companies tinkered and experimented with AI, and/or hired outside agencies who could leverage AI on their behalf.

As a result, we began to see blogs, videos, social media posts, and complex e-mail nurture campaigns showing up in all kinds of places. Some

humorous (like the Yetis and Sasquatch videos, talking like regular humans), but mostly standard, generic stuff, such as "Top Tips for Maintaining Your Pool..." Mildly interesting, but mostly only because of its novelty.

Now, with so much power in the hands of your competitors, 2026 will be the year we all get saturated with mediocre AI-generated content.

That's because AI content looks really cool at first, but when everyone uses AI for the same thing, then all of the messages start to look and sound the same. Especially when we start seeing 1,000 to 10,000 times more examples of the same thing. (I don't know about you, but I can still sniff out AI-content versus real-people content, and I find it to be a turn off.)

Of course, when everyone looks and sounds the same — even if it's nice, polished content from AI — it makes it harder than ever for a homeowner to know who to choose. Because if you can't differentiate yourself, then buying choice comes down to price: The cheapest builder wins.

That is NOT the market I want you

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to be in. You need to stand out from the competition, and be recognized as the superior choice. But standing out in this cacophony of messages will be harder than ever, especially if you are relying on AI.

Homeowners are increasingly numb to messages that feel generic, polished, or manufactured. The market wants to see your human side.

It's time to inject your personality, your story, your quirks, your voice. AI can help you improve clarity and eliminate fluff, so you might start with AI as a first draft. But you must aggressively strive to move yourself away from that AI-center as fast as possible. Talk about things that AI wouldn't think of, or would be afraid to offer.

Show us the emotional truths that drive your company. Show us behind-the-scenes humanity. Not the perfectly posed team photos, but the messy team, covered in mud, working in the rain, anything to make you stand out from the boring ordinary.

In 2026, a year saturated with AI-generated content, people will be desperately craving authenticity. Do

what AI can't do. Be real.

Now, let me point out the places where AI is going to be highly tempting, but may hurt you if it's obvious in any of these places:

- Your website.
- Your e-mail messages.
- Your advertisements.
- Your social media posts.
- Your mission, your values, your process.

Not because the words or content are bad. It's because everything feels too smooth, too generic, too interchangeable. And that leads us right into the same trap: If you look and sound like everyone else, then everyone will assume you are just like everyone else.

To prove you are not AI, you need to use real photos (not stock or AI-generated), and tell real stories, and share real opinions and experiences. Talk like the human you are.

I cannot count the number of times I've repeated this cautionary phrase: **"People tell the truth with specifics, and lie with generalities."** That's the secret to proving you are real, and not an AI-fake.

The most effective content this upcoming year will be that which sounds like it was written by a real human with specific experience in the industry.

TO SUMMARIZE:

1. Be aware of the softness in the market, which is expected to last another 12 to 18 months.
2. Decide which market you should go after: the rich people, or the budget-buyers, and speak to their priorities.
3. Embrace and leverage AI, but don't let it replace you. Let the world see the real you.

Here's to your success! ~

Brett Lloyd Abbott is the founder and CEO of Pool Builder Marketing LLC (www.PoolBuilderMarketing.com), a marketing consulting agency that works exclusively with swimming pool builders, pool service companies and high-end landscape professionals throughout the world. He is a frequent keynote speaker and leader of workshops and seminars.

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