6 MIN READ

Data Has a Shelf Life

Thomas Bridge · May 5, 2026

Data has a shelf life. The moment campaign data becomes available, its value starts decaying. Not because the numbers change, but because the window for action closes.

Think about the last time your team caught a performance problem late. Maybe a campaign had been overspending for three days before anyone noticed. Maybe a ROAS drop was visible in the data on Tuesday but did not make it into a client conversation until Friday's weekly review.

The numbers were correct both days. The analysis was sound. But the cost of acting on Friday versus acting on Tuesday was real. Budgets had already shifted. The optimization moment had already passed.

This is the quiet tax that most marketing teams pay every week. Data is available. Insight is eventually assembled. Action is eventually taken. But between data available and action taken, value leaks out at a rate most teams have never stopped to measure.

The decay is structural, not accidental

The problem is not that people are slow or careless. The problem is that the process of turning raw data into an actionable insight takes time, and during that time the campaigns keep running, the bids keep adjusting, and the budget clock keeps moving.

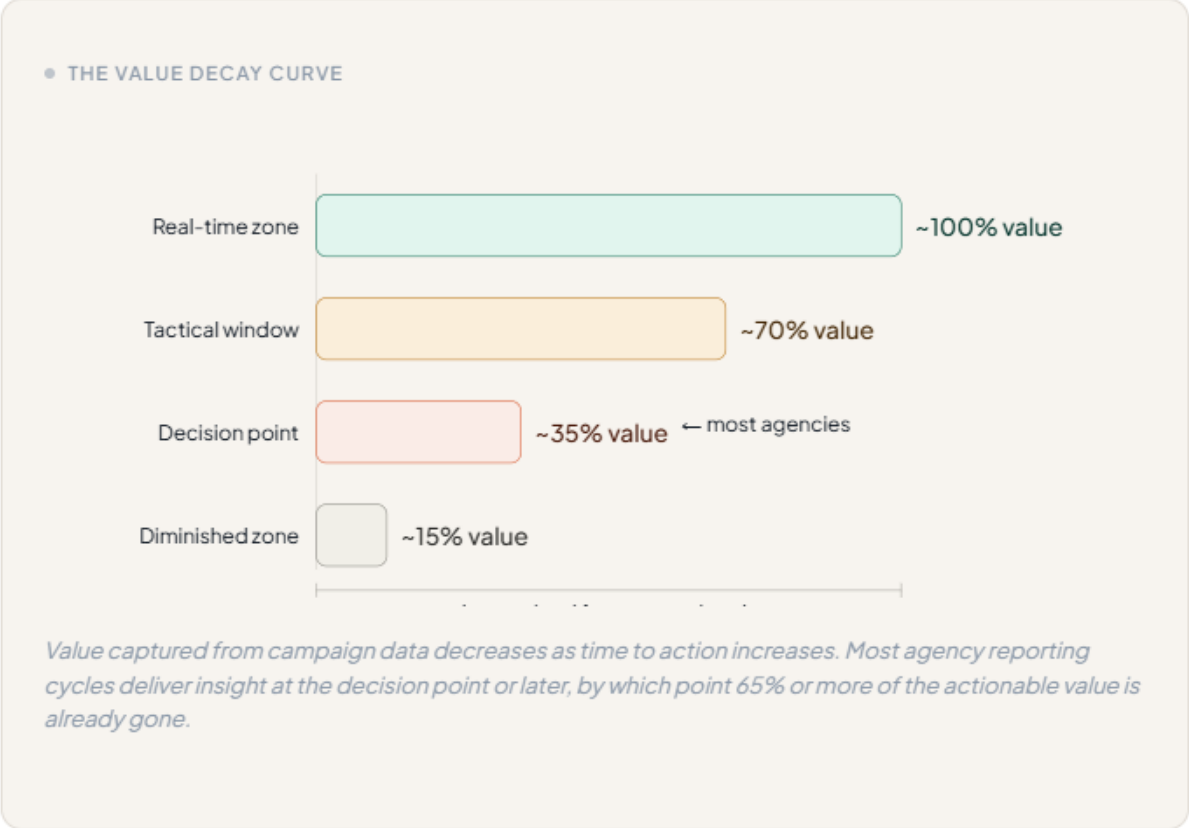
A manual reporting process typically works in four phases: collect the data from each platform, reconcile the numbers so they tell a coherent story, interpret what the numbers mean in context, and communicate the insight to whoever needs to act on it. Each of those steps is a place where time accumulates.

> The insight is correct. The moment has passed.

By the time the insight arrives at the person who can act on it, the situation may have already moved. The campaign that needed a budget reallocation on Monday is halfway through Tuesday. The creative that was underperforming on Wednesday has already spent another day of budget by Friday morning.

The data did not go stale. The opportunity did.

The value decay curve



Value captured from campaign data decreases as time to action increases. Most agency reporting cycles deliver insight at the decision point or later, by which point 65% or more of the actionable value is already gone.

Four zones describe where teams typically land.

Real-time zone. Insight delivered while conditions are still in play. Near-full value captured. The campaign is still running, the budget is still adjustable, and any optimization will have the most time to compound. This is the goal state, and it requires data collection, analysis, and delivery in minutes, not hours.

Tactical window. Still actionable, but roughly 30% of the value has already leaked. This is where most analytics teams operate today. The insight is good. The context has shifted slightly. An optimization made here will help, but it missed the best moment by a few hours.

Decision point. By the time a formal decision is made, often 65% or more of the value is gone. The data is accurate. The analysis is correct. But campaigns have run for two or three more days on the prior course. The insight is now playing catch-up rather than getting ahead.

Diminished zone. The data no longer primarily triggers action. It serves historical context: understanding what happened, documenting performance, informing future planning. Valuable, but a different kind of value. Most manual weekly reporting cycles live here without realizing it.

The insight gap marks the distance between data ready and decision made. Shrinking that gap is where the real leverage lives.

Most teams are operating in the diminished zone

The uncomfortable reality is that most marketing teams, particularly agencies managing multiple clients, are operating well into the right side of this curve without knowing it. The weekly reporting rhythm feels like a reasonable cadence. Structurally, it is a diminished-zone process.

A campaign event that happens Monday reaches the account manager on Wednesday during data assembly, makes it into a summary on Thursday, and gets discussed in a client call on Friday. By then, the data is four days old. Any action taken based on that insight is playing defense against something that happened at the start of the week.

Multiply that across twelve clients and you have an agency that is constantly reacting to last week’s performance rather than shaping this week’s.

The gap is a process problem, not a staffing one

The instinctive response is to hire more people. More analysts, more account managers, more hands to pull data and build reports faster. But headcount does not solve a structural

problem. It adds more humans to a process that should not require human hands at all for its first three phases.

Data collection does not require a human. Every ad platform exposes an API. The data can move automatically the moment it is available. Reconciliation across platforms does not require a human either. The logic for normalizing cross-platform numbers is consistent and can be applied automatically. Even the first layer of interpretation — identifying what is notable and what the numbers suggest — does not require human judgment. It requires pattern recognition applied to data that has already been cleaned.

What requires human judgment is the decision itself. The account manager who understands a client's seasonality, their risk tolerance, their competitive context: that person's judgment cannot be automated. It should not be. But it should be applied to an insight that has already been assembled, not to raw data that still needs an hour of work before it says anything useful.

enso is built to close this gap. It connects to Google Ads, Meta, Snapchat and TikTok, pulls performance data automatically, and delivers AI-generated analysis every morning before the account manager opens their laptop. The Learnings feature, built on Claude by Anthropic, reads the campaign data and writes the kind of plain-English analysis a skilled analyst would produce: specific observations, benchmarked against targets, with a concrete recommended action. Collection is eliminated. Reconciliation is automated. Initial interpretation is handled. What remains is the part that matters most: the judgment call.

The question worth asking

When a campaign performance issue surfaced in your account last month, how many days passed between when the data showed it and when someone acted on it? If the answer is more than one, the decay curve is already doing its work.

The data was right. The analysis was sound. The only thing that cost money was the gap between when the insight was ready and when someone was ready to act on it.

That gap is the problem worth solving.