



2026 roadmap

December 2025

This roadmap reflects work done across multiple roundtables during 2025 and a dedicated planning session where all agreed-upon ideas were broken down, grouped, and aggregated into deliverable projects.

This is **not** a month-by-month plan. Instead, we are focusing on:

- **Clear delivery priorities for Q1 2026**, and
- A structured **rest-of-year roadmap**

Q1 is intentionally ambitious. The aim is to establish momentum, demonstrate delivery, and then refine pace and sequencing across the rest of the year.

Across 2026, APMA will focus on:

- Improving trust and clarity in the market
- Raising standards and capability
- Actively managing industry reputation
- Ensuring members feel connected, represented, and confident that the industry is moving forward

1. Standards, Compliance & Best Practice

Purpose:

Provide clarity and consistency where commercial incentives create risk.

2026 focus areas

- Attribution standards and guidance
- Compliance framework and escalation
- Codes of conduct and interpretation
- Transparency (including subnetworks)
- Independent audits and benchmarking
- Engagement with regulators and the ICO

Recommendations from workshop:

- Establish a unified compliance framework outlining acceptable behaviours, reporting obligations and enforcement pathways.
- Introduce a subnetwork transparency code requiring disclosure of identity, structure and traffic sources.
- Create an APMA Reputation Index/Blacklist to identify repeat offenders across the ecosystem.
- Launch accreditation or whitelisting for verified, compliant partners.
- Enhance network onboarding criteria for consistent quality control.
- Develop clear PPC/brand bidding rules and enforcement guidelines.
- Promote international regulatory alignment through advocacy.
- Deploy automated monitoring tools for offers, prices and landing page accuracy.

Working groups attached

- Attribution & Measurement Working Group
- Compliance & Transparency Working Group

Q1 projects

- **Create working group**
- **Appoint lead**
- **Working group agree the prioritisation list for 2026 and initiates at least one project in Q1 with clear deliverables.**
- **Launch compliance reporting function for industry to report bad actors.**
- **Deliver Payments Code of Conduct. Agree distribution and success measurement.**
- **Publish affiliate marketing in finance FCA compliance guide.**

2. Research & Industry Insight

Purpose:

Deliver authoritative, aggregated insight that no single organisation can produce.

2026 focus areas

- Industry surveys and benchmarking

Q1 projects

- **State of the Nation proposed launch date, 23rd or 30th April.**
- **Data collection, verification, report writing**
- **Launch event arranged: 145 people**
- **Webinar**
- **Content plan for delivering insights from SoftheN.**

3. Education & Capability

Purpose:

Raise the baseline across the industry and support practical application of standards.

2026 focus areas

- 101 training and onboarding
- Webinars and learning sessions
- Role- and theme-specific education
- Practical guidance on compliance, attribution, AI and measurement

Q1 projects

- **101 training delivered**
- **Training themes and cadence confirmed**
- **Second and third training modules 50% complete**

4. Representation, Reputation & Advocacy

Purpose:

Ensure affiliate and partner marketing is accurately understood, credibly represented, and not defined by isolated incidents.

2026 focus areas

- APMA as a single, authoritative industry voice
- Policy and regulatory engagement
- Proactive reputation management
- Industry narratives, messaging and framing
- Collaboration with aligned partners

Recommendations from workshop

- Develop a unified industry narrative and tagline that clearly defines affiliate marketing.
- Build a standardised case study library showcasing ROI, innovation and cross-sector success.
- Produce simple explainers for CFOs, CMOs, SMEs, procurement and junior marketers.
- Increase visibility through an APMA-led national roadshow and proactive participation in broader marketing events.
- Form a Reputation & Communications Working Group to coordinate messaging, governance, and speaking opportunities.
- Highlight benchmark programmes to set expectations for quality and professionalism.

Working groups attached

- **Industry Reputation & Narrative Working Group**

This group focuses on:

- Managing reputational risk
- Responding to incidents and misconceptions
- Developing agreed industry language
- Feeding into standards, education and external engagement

Q1 projects

- **Create working group**
- **Appoint lead**
- **Working group agree the prioritisation list for 2026 and delivers at least one project in Q1 with clear deliverables.**

5. Attribution

Purpose:

Establish clear, consistent and credible attribution standards that accurately reflect affiliate contribution and remain robust in an evolving era of MMM and AI.

2026 focus areas

- Shared attribution definitions and decision logic across the ecosystem
- Incrementality-aware measurement that reflects real commercial impact
- Advertiser and senior stakeholder education and engagement
- Alignment between affiliate attribution and MMM methodologies
- Transparency and governance in validation and deduplication rules
- Future-proof attribution models for AI, zero-click and assisted journeys
- Improved data access and collaboration to strengthen modelling quality

Recommendations from workshop

- Publish a Unified Attribution Framework with clear lifecycle diagrams, definitions, red lines and decision logic.
- Position the APMA as the independent authority on attribution standards, governance and acceptable practice.
- Produce evidence-led white papers demonstrating the commercial and performance impact of attribution reform.
- Create targeted education programmes for advertisers, MMM providers, procurement teams and internal marketers.
- Launch an APMA-led Attribution & Measurement Working Group to align definitions, methodologies and implementation standards.

- Run vertical-specific pilots (e.g. retail, travel, finance) to generate comparable, credible datasets.
- Develop secure, anonymised data-sharing pipelines to improve modelling quality while respecting commercial and regulatory constraints.
- Promote benchmark attribution programmes to set clear expectations for transparency, fairness and professionalism.

Working groups attached

- Attribution & Measurement Working Group

This group focuses on:

- Set and maintain industry attribution standards
- Validate measurement approaches through data and pilots
- Drive adoption through evidence, education and benchmarks

Q1 projects

- **Create working group**
- **Appoint lead**
- **Working group agree the prioritisation list for 2026 and delivers at least one project in Q1 with clear deliverables.**

6. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Purpose:

Ensure the affiliate and partner marketing channel remains visible, fairly valued and responsibly represented in AI-driven discovery, search and decision-making environments.

2026 focus areas

- Understanding and responding to zero-click and AI-mediated customer journeys
- Measuring non-click influence and assisted value in AI discovery
- Protecting publisher visibility, brand integrity and content quality
- Addressing the risk of AI platforms becoming dominant intermediaries
- Advertiser education on AI-driven influence beyond traditional attribution
- Responsible use of AI-generated content within the channel
- Representation of affiliate marketing in AI policy and regulatory discussions

Recommendations from workshop

- Develop an AI-era Attribution Framework that captures influence, exposure and assistance without requiring a click.

- Commission independent research into brand visibility within AI-generated responses and the role of publisher partnerships in AI prominence.
- Publish Responsible AI Publisher Standards covering accuracy, disclosure, brand governance and content integrity.
- Run zero-click attribution pilots with networks, publishers and advertisers to test alternative measurement approaches.
- Establish collaboration channels with AI platforms to seek transparency, partnership and fair representation of the channel.
- Launch regular AI briefings to keep members informed on tools, risks, opportunities and regulatory developments.
- Appoint an independent AI expert advisor to support education, strategy and policy engagement.
- Track AI adoption, readiness and impact through the APMA State of the Nation report on an annual basis.

Working groups attached

- AI & Emerging Technology Working Group

This group focuses on:

- Defining industry positions on AI-driven discovery, influence and measurement
- Developing standards and guidance for responsible AI use across publishers and partners
- Building evidence and policy engagement to ensure the channel is represented in AI decision-making

Q1 projects

- **Create working group**
- **Appoint lead and independent AI advisor**
- **Run inaugural AI workshop to agree 2026 priorities and deliver at least one Q1 project with clear outputs**

7. Payments

Purpose:

Improve payment transparency, consistency and timeliness across affiliate and partner marketing, reducing cashflow risk for publishers and increasing trust, efficiency and professionalism across the ecosystem.

2026 focus areas:

- Predictable and transparent validation and decline processes
- Reduction of excessive payment cycles and cashflow risk
- Clear, standardised communication between advertisers, networks and publishers
- Consistency across markets, channels and global programmes
- Improved understanding of affiliate economics among procurement and finance teams
- Efficient, coordinated escalation and dispute resolution
- Visibility into real-world payment performance versus contractual terms
- Establishment of credible market benchmarks for payment standards

Recommendations from workshop

- Launch a public APMA Payments Directory and Status Board showing real-world payment behaviour, validation timelines and delay patterns.
- Introduce sector-specific payment benchmarks (e.g. standard validation windows such as 45 days).
- Extend the APMA Payments Code of Conduct with clearer, more detailed expectations for networks and advertisers.
- Deliver targeted education for procurement and finance teams on affiliate economics and commercial impact.
- Publish case studies demonstrating the commercial and ecosystem benefits of faster, more predictable payments.
- Provide webinars, guidance and resources to reduce disputes, miscommunication and repeated escalations.
- Create a unified, cross-network escalation pathway to reduce duplicated effort for publishers.
- Encourage standardisation of transparency tools, terminology and reporting across networks.

Q1 projects

- See '**Standards, Compliance & Best Practice**' (1)

Working Groups (New for 2026)

In 2026, APMA will use **topic-specific working groups**.

Working groups are:

- Time-bound

- Linked to defined output
- Attached to a strategic theme or taskforce

They exist to shape standards, guidance, education and industry positioning. They will own projects and deliver them with the admin and logistic support of the APMA.