

Trust, Transparency, and the Future of Artificial Intelligence in Marketing

Exploring Marketers' AI Investment and Internal Adoption Strategies



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	2	Conclusion: Despite Moderate Levels of Trust, Marketers Are Deeply Invested in AI	16
About the Respondents	3	Key Suggestions	18
Marketers’ Goals and Priorities Over the Next 12 Months.....	4	About the Authors	19
Current AI-Powered Marketing Tools and Capabilities.....	6		
Perspectives On AI Competence and Trustworthiness	10		
Building Marketers’ Confidence in Artificial Intelligence Tools	14		



Executive Summary

Marketing leaders are integrating artificial intelligence into their strategies and operations, with varying degrees of adoption, trust, and success. This report examines how marketing leaders are currently utilizing AI, what objectives brands have set for AI in the coming year, and what factors are influencing marketers’ confidence in AI-powered solutions.

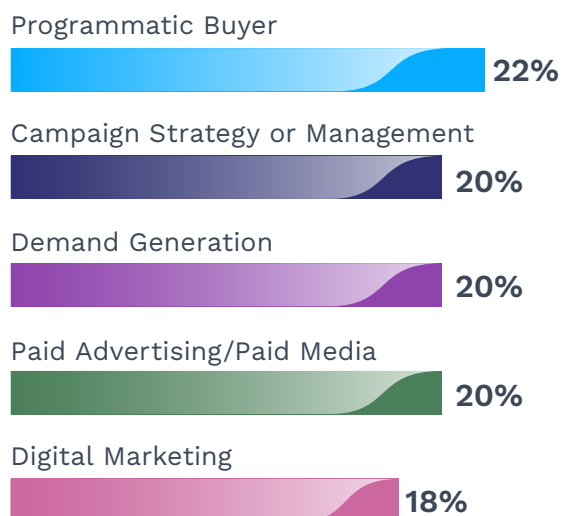
The findings reveal a marketing landscape in transition, where professionals recognize

AI’s potential benefits, yet maintain healthy skepticism about its impact on their work. Their main concerns revolve around transparency, accuracy, and ethical considerations. Nonetheless, leaders are prioritizing operational efficiency, customer loyalty, and campaign performance. They anticipate AI solutions will help them achieve these objectives.

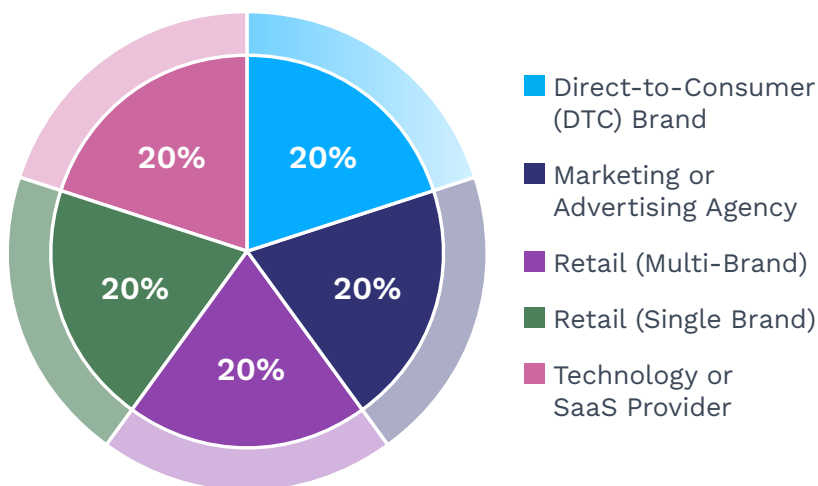
About the Respondents

The respondents are leaders from consumer-facing brands and retailers occupying roles in programmatic buying, demand generation, digital marketing, campaign strategy, and paid advertising.

What is your role?

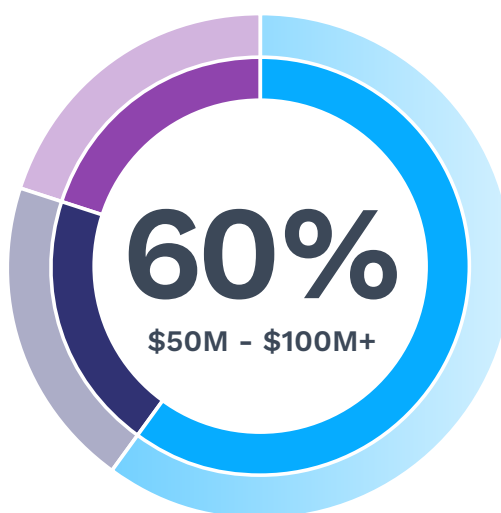


What type of company or vertical do you represent?



At 60%, most of the companies represented in the report make \$50 million to more than \$100 million in annual revenue.

What is your company's annual revenue?



Marketers' Goals and Priorities Over the Next 12 Months

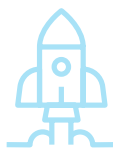
Marketing leaders are establishing clear priorities that focus on both operational improvements and customer-centered outcomes as they plan for the year ahead.

Organizational Priorities

Operational efficiency leads marketers' organizational priorities, with 60% of respondents identifying it as their top focus for the coming year. This is closely followed by improving customer retention and loyalty (51%), while increasing campaign performance and ROI and reducing marketing costs tie for third place (45% each).

60%

of companies want to improve operational efficiency.



These priorities reveal that marketing professionals are being asked to optimize operations while simultaneously delivering stronger business results and customer outcomes. Soon they'll be operating in an environment where AI tools can address several of these objectives.



What are your company's top marketing and advertising priorities for the next 12 months?

Improve operational efficiency

60%

Improve customer retention and loyalty

51%

Reduce marketing costs

45%

Increase campaign performance and ROI

45%

Enhance personalization and customer

42%

Increase sales and revenue

37%

Expand into new markets

19%

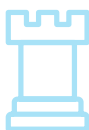
Personal Priorities

On a more personal level, marketers' individual career goals show a strong desire for greater organizational influence, with 68% prioritizing increased visibility and influence within their companies. Time-saving automation of repetitive tasks follows as a strong second priority (54%), while making more confident data-driven decisions ranks third (52%).

These personal objectives align well with AI's potential capabilities, particularly in automating routine processes and providing enhanced data analysis that can support more strategic decision-making.

68%

of marketers want to increase their influence in the organization.



Increasing AI Investments

The results also indicate that marketing departments are prioritizing AI integration. An overwhelming 92% of respondents expect their organizations to increase investments in AI-powered marketing tools over the next 12 months. The remaining 8% believe that investments will remain at current levels.

As AI investments escalate, marketers may feel significant pressure to expand their capabilities with the technology, even as they work through implementation challenges and skill development.

Nonetheless, marketers' priorities are mostly aligned with those of their organizations. AI solutions that can demonstrate clear connections to efficiency gains, customer retention improvements, and enhanced campaign performance will likely receive the most attention from marketing leaders in the year ahead.

What are your personal goals as a marketer for the next 12 months?

Increase visibility and influence in the organization

68%

Save time by automating repetitive tasks

54%

Make data-driven decisions with more confidence

52%

Scale research and analysis efforts

45%

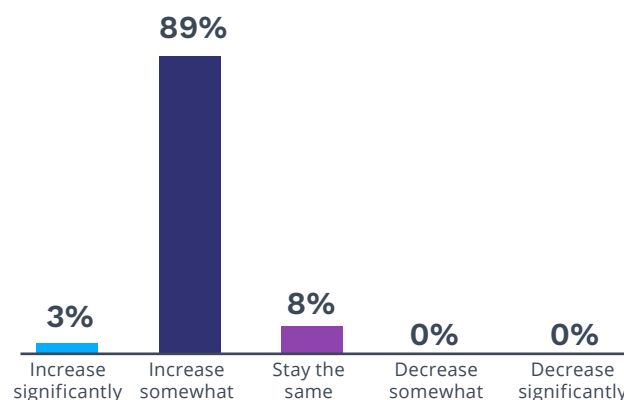
Improve collaboration across teams

44%

Keep up with industry trends and innovations

31%

How do you anticipate your organization's investment in AI-powered marketing tools will change over the next 12 months?



92%

will increase AI investments in the next 12 months.



Current AI-Powered Marketing Tools and Capabilities

Marketing professionals are experiencing varying degrees of AI integration across their technology stacks, with most still in early to moderate stages of adoption. The findings show that while certain AI applications have achieved widespread adoption, others remain in earlier implementation phases.

Current AI Adoption Levels

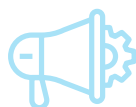
AI features are becoming common, but they are not yet dominant in all marketing technology stacks.

Specifically, 88% of the respondents report that 11-30% of their current marketing and advertising tools include AI-powered features. Only 1% of respondents have reached the threshold where half or more of their tools incorporate AI capabilities.

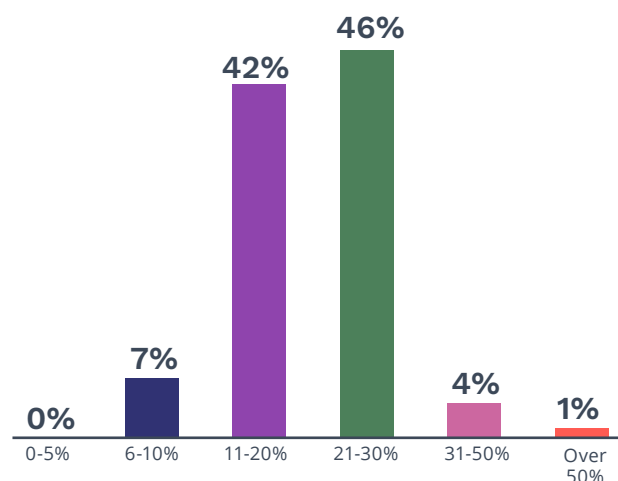
This suggests most marketing departments are in a transitional phase where AI is becoming increasingly familiar. However, it hasn't yet transformed most of their technology infrastructure.

88%

say 11-30% of their tools use AI.



To the best of your knowledge, what percentage of your current marketing and advertising tools include AI-powered features?



Generative AI has achieved remarkable penetration among marketing teams, with 93% of respondents' organizations currently using tools like ChatGPT for content, images, or data analysis. This is likely due to the widespread popularity of these types of tools, which have mass appeal among both businesses and consumers.

Notably, generative AI tools tend to require less technical expertise to use than more advanced AI products. That accessibility means they are ideal AI solutions for achieving "quick wins" in the marketing department.

79%

use AI-powered campaign automation tools



AI-powered campaign automation has also seen strong adoption, with 79% of organizations using solutions like Google Performance Max and Meta Advantage+. This result reflects marketers' willingness to embrace AI when it's embedded in established platforms. It's also a testament to how common the technology is becoming among long-standing marketing tools.

More specialized AI applications show lower adoption rates, with only 44% of respondents currently using AI-driven marketing assistance tools. Machine learning for ad bidding, optimization, and predictive modeling lags significantly at just 15% adoption.

Complex and more technical AI applications have yet to achieve mainstream use among marketing teams. However, adoption rates could increase as more marketers familiarize themselves with AI technology.

Which AI-powered marketing tools or technologies does your organization currently use?

Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, Gemini) for content, images, or data analysis

93%

AI-powered campaign automation (e.g., Google Performance Max, Meta Advantage+)

79%

AI-driven marketing assistants (e.g., HubSpot Breeze agents, Zeta Agents)

44%

Machine learning for ad bidding, optimization, or predictive modeling

15%

I'm not sure / We do not use AI in marketing
0%



AI-Powered Marketing Processes

Audience segmentation and targeting lead as the most common AI-powered marketing processes, with 55% of respondents currently applying AI in these areas.

Marketers can achieve clear efficiency benefits through algorithmic approaches to audience management, and there is already an established history of the benefits of audience segmentation.

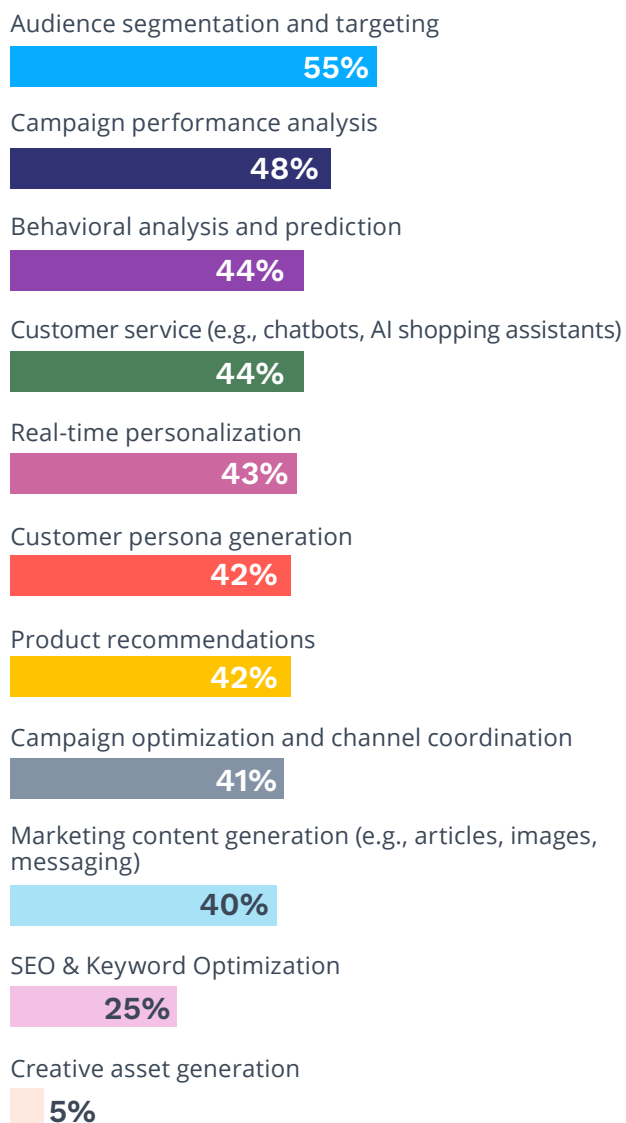
By contrast, search engine optimization shows the lowest AI application at just 25%. This is possibly due to concerns about changing algorithms or the specialized nature of SEO work.

Search engines have also indicated that they may penalize content that is clearly AI-generated. This doesn't necessarily mean that AI can't help in this area, but it means that marketers must be careful about how they use the technology to populate web pages with content.

Most other marketing processes show moderate AI adoption levels between 40-48%. Marketers have achieved only mid-range adoption across diverse functions because they may be selective in choosing AI use cases.

Most organizations are currently implementing AI based on specific needs rather than taking an all-or-nothing approach.

For which marketing and advertising processes does your company currently use AI?



Valued AI Improvements

When considering how AI enhances marketing platforms, respondents clearly prioritize interfaces that simplify complexity and reduce workload.

66%

cite automated reporting as a most valuable AI-driven improvement.



Automated reporting with summaries and visualizations ranks as the most valuable AI-driven improvement (66%), followed by smart recommendations for campaign optimization (47%) and reducing clicks and steps for task completion (46%). These preferences suggest that marketers value AI capabilities that help them manage information overload, streamline routine processes, and reduce manual work.

Overall, organizations are making strategic choices about where to implement AI first, typically favoring applications with lower barriers to entry and clearer efficiency benefits. As AI continues to evolve, marketers will be drawn to partners that prioritize the usability improvements and are prepared to address the adoption barriers of more specialized applications.

Which AI-driven usability improvements are most valuable to you in a marketing tool?

Simplifying reporting with automated summaries and visualizations

66%

Providing smart recommendations for campaign optimization

47%

Reducing the number of clicks/steps needed to complete tasks

46%

Auto-filling fields and reducing manual data entry

42%

Automating repetitive tasks (e.g., launching campaigns, pulling reports)

40%

Generating instant insights without manual data analysis

30%

Predicting what I need next and surfacing relevant tools or data

12%

Perspectives On AI Competence and Trustworthiness

Marketing leaders express cautious optimism about AI's capabilities while maintaining a healthy skepticism about complete automation without human oversight. Their perspectives reveal a nuanced view that acknowledges AI's potential while recognizing its current limitations.



Trust in AI-Driven Marketing

Trust in AI-driven marketing recommendations remains partial but encouraging, with 60% of respondents indicating they “mostly” trust these systems. Only 2% express complete trust, while 38% maintain they only “somewhat” trust AI recommendations and believe human oversight remains necessary.

This distribution suggests that while AI has established credibility with most marketers, significant reservations persist among marketing leaders. They are wary of fully delegating decision authority to systems powered by artificial intelligence.

38%

only trust AI-driven recommendations “somewhat.”



To what extent do you trust AI-driven recommendations in marketing decisions?

We fully trust them.

2%

We mostly trust them, but we verify key insights.

60%

We somewhat trust them, but they require human oversight.

38%

We rarely trust them without extensive validation.

0%

We do not trust them at all.

0%

Only 2%

fully trust AI-driven marketing recommendations.



Data privacy and security risks emerge as the leading concern preventing full trust in AI marketing tools (66%), followed closely by inconsistent or inaccurate recommendations (62%). Ethical concerns about AI's impact on marketing jobs also register as a significant worry (54%).

66%

say privacy and security are primary concerns with AI.



Based on these findings, technical performance issues remain a concern, but broader social and ethical considerations are also shaping marketers' perspectives on AI adoption.

Most respondents (78%) believe it is "somewhat important" to understand how AI functions, even when it delivers excellent results. The remaining 22% consider it "very important."

This preference for transparency suggests marketers are uncomfortable with "black box" AI systems where decision processes remain opaque, even when outcomes are positive. They want to understand how AI systems reach their results and why they generate specific outputs.

This is an important step in avoiding issues like AI-generated bias or prejudice, AI "hallucinations" (when an AI fabricates quotes, individuals, or even events), or the production of generally inaccurate information. An AI may introduce certain efficiencies in the marketing process, but its output must be accurate, useful, and unbiased to drive value.

What concerns, if any, prevent you from fully trusting AI-driven marketing tools?

Data privacy and security risks

66%

Inconsistent or inaccurate recommendations

62%

Ethical concerns over AI's impact on marketing jobs

54%

Lack of transparency in how AI generates results

43%

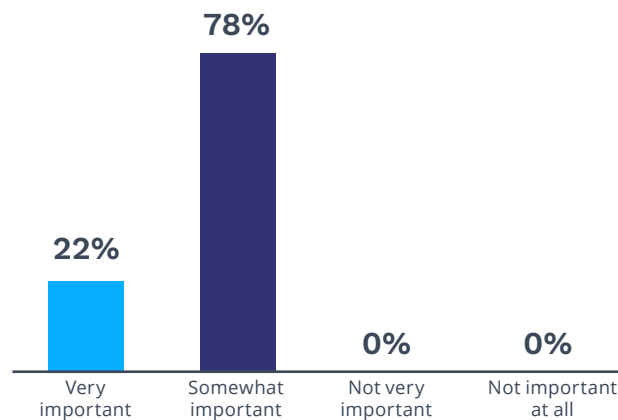
Bias in AI-driven decision-making

36%

Difficulty measuring AI's ROI

20%

How important is it to you that you understand how AI works if it is already delivering excellent results?



100%

say it's important they understand how AI works, even if its results are already excellent.



Using AI to Achieve Goals

When considering AI's ability to help achieve specific company goals, the respondents' levels of trust vary by objective.

Respondents have the highest confidence in AI's ability to increase sales and revenue, where 68% at least "mostly" trust AI capabilities. Enhancing personalization and customer experience also receives relatively strong confidence, as 58% at least "mostly" trust AI's ability to achieve these goals.

However, for increasing campaign performance and improving customer retention and loyalty, a majority (54% in both cases) only "somewhat" trust in AI's abilities.

For personal marketing goals, automation of repetitive tasks receives a significant level of confidence, with 63% of respondents at least "mostly" trusting AI in this area. Keeping up with industry trends and innovations also receives relatively strong confidence (53% at least "mostly" trust).

However, improving cross-team collaboration and making more confident data-driven decisions show lower trust levels, with nearly half of respondents (48% and 46% respectively) indicating only "somewhat" trusting in AI's capabilities in these areas.

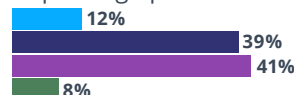
AI Challenges in Marketing

Some of the respondents' lack of trust in AI likely stems from the challenges they've experienced while using it for marketing purposes. The respondents rated challenges 1-5 with 1 representing "not a challenge" and 5 representing "major challenge."

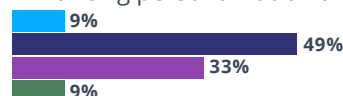
How much do you trust AI to help achieve your company's marketing goals?

■ Fully ■ Mostly ■ Somewhat ■ Rarely ■ Not at all

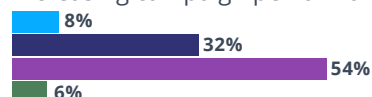
Improving operational efficiency



Enhancing personalization and customer experience



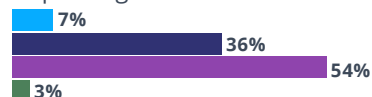
Increasing campaign performance and ROI



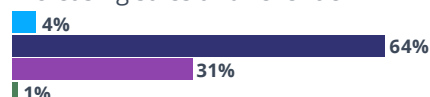
Reducing marketing costs



Improving customer retention and loyalty



Increasing sales and revenue



54%

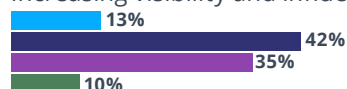
trust AI only "somewhat" to improve campaign performance and customer loyalty.



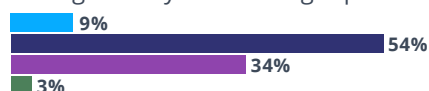
How much do you trust AI to help achieve your own personal marketing goals?

■ Fully ■ Mostly ■ Somewhat ■ Rarely ■ Not at all

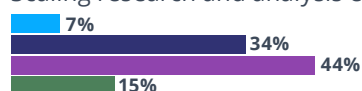
Increasing visibility and influence in the organization



Saving time by automating repetitive tasks



Scaling research and analysis efforts



Keeping up with industry trends and innovations



Making data-driven decisions with more confidence



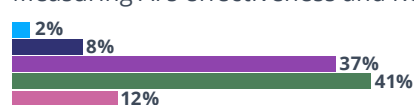
Improving collaboration across teams



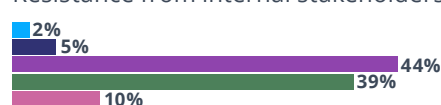
How significant are the following challenges when using AI in marketing? Rate each on a scale of 1-5: 1 = Not a challenge, 5 = Major challenge.

■ 1 Not a challenge ■ 2 ■ 3 ■ 4 ■ 5 Major challenge

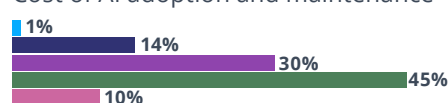
Measuring AI's effectiveness and ROI



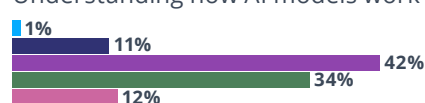
Resistance from internal stakeholders



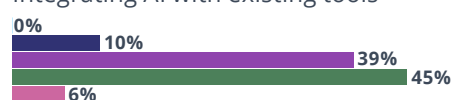
Cost of AI adoption and maintenance



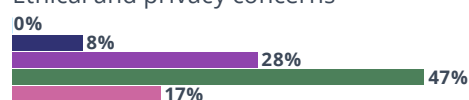
Understanding how AI models work



Integrating AI with existing tools



Ethical and privacy concerns



The most significant challenges when using AI in marketing are ethical and privacy concerns, which are rated 4 or 5 by 64% of respondents. Cost of adoption and maintenance (55%), measuring AI's effectiveness and ROI (53%), and integration with existing tools (51%) all represent challenges rated either a 4 or a 5 for a majority of respondents as well.

These ratings suggest that while ethical and privacy concerns are top of mind, implementation hurdles remain substantial even for marketers who see AI's potential value. Marketers still struggle to use AI with their existing tools and gain the skills they need to use it competently. Furthermore, some are having trouble justifying the cost of new AI tools in their marketing programs.

Building Marketers' Confidence in Artificial Intelligence Tools

Despite growing familiarity with AI-driven marketing tools, the study indicates marketers maintain significant reservations about their implementation, particularly regarding ethical considerations.



System Transparency

Marketers would be significantly more trusting of AI if they had full transparency into how each AI tool operates. In conversations, many of the respondents emphasize the need for clear explanations of how AI systems generate their recommendations and decisions.

This desire for visibility into AI processes reflects a reluctance to rely on AI simply because its results appear positive.

"If AI explained the reasoning behind its recommendations, I would feel more confident," notes one respondent, articulating a common sentiment among marketing professionals.

"If AI explained the reasoning behind its recommendations, I would feel more confident."



Another respondent reinforces this view: "Clear explanations of how decisions are made would help me trust AI more."

Marketers prefer systems that provide insight into their analytical processes and the factors influencing their outputs.

Accuracy and Reliability

The reliability of AI-generated content and recommendations represents another major concern for marketing professionals. They require consistent, high-quality outputs that they can confidently implement in customer-facing contexts.

Given the potential reputational risks of inaccurate marketing communications, respondents place particular emphasis on AI systems' ability to deliver dependable and truthful results.

“Flagging outdated or incorrect information would help me trust AI,” explains one respondent, suggesting that built-in verification features would enhance confidence.

Another respondent indicates they want additional assurance mechanisms for AI-generated results.

These comments reflect awareness of high-profile incidents where AI tools have produced inaccurate information with significant consequences. They also reinforce the importance of reliability in marketing applications where brand reputation is constantly at stake.

Human-Centric Implementations

Lastly, marketers must be able to integrate new AI tools with existing workflows and human expertise. This represents the third

major theme in building confidence.

Respondents expressed clear preferences for AI systems that enhance rather than disrupt human input in marketing decisions. They want to position AI as a collaborative partner rather than a replacement for human judgment.

“If AI could complement our current processes and not add complexity, I’d be more confident,” states one respondent, highlighting concerns about implementation friction.

A different respondent emphasizes the collaborative aspect: “Having AI tools that support, rather than replace our team would make me trust it more.”

These perspectives indicate that successful AI marketing tools should be designed with workflow integration in mind. They should enhance team capabilities while respecting the continuing value of human expertise and oversight.

Marketers’ reservations about AI are not merely resistance to change but reflect legitimate concerns about how these technologies will integrate into existing marketing operations. Addressing these concerns through improved system designs that emphasizes transparency, accuracy, and human-centered implementation will be essential for building greater confidence in AI marketing applications.



Conclusion: Despite Moderate Levels of Trust, Marketers Are Deeply Invested in AI

Some of the results of the research, such as the fact that most marketers already use generative AI, are to be expected. However, there is a striking contrast between organizations' planned investments in AI tools and marketers' trust in them.

Few Doubt That AI Will Be a Competitive Differentiator for Marketers

An overwhelming 92% of the respondents plan to increase AI investment over the next 12 months. Marketers are already using AI for tasks like audience segmentation, campaign performance analysis, and customer service.

However, few trust AI-driven recommendations implicitly. Specifically, 60% "mostly" trust them, while 38% only "somewhat" trust them. The former group intends to verify key insights generated by AI before acting on them, while the latter group insists on having significant human oversight over AI-influenced decisions.

The high rate of investment is likely a product of competition, as 97% of marketers trust AI to at least "somewhat" help them keep up with industry trends and innovations. Furthermore, most industries are already implementing artificial intelligence and achieving results, and the pace of investment is only likely to increase.

Leaders Must Balance AI Investment with Trust and Adoption

Marketing teams that don't invest in AI-driven solutions now will need to catch up with their competitors later, but they must be careful about how they use the technology, and they must implement solutions that are proven to be trustworthy. In their own words, the respondents say they want AI to "support, rather than replace" their teams, and they expect solutions to provide "clear explanations of how decisions are made" before they will trust them.

The key challenges for marketing leaders will be achieving buy-in from decision-makers, encouraging adoption among users, and ensuring any efficiencies created by AI implementation are trustworthy, compliant, and reliable. Most marketers are aware of the damage a poorly implemented AI-driven campaign can cause to a brand, so it must be clear that an AI-driven solution will help rather than harm the organization before it is to be trusted.

Specific AI-Driven Capabilities Will Drive Adoption and Maturity

The data exposes three distinct phases of AI maturity among retail and eCommerce companies. The vast majority (88%) remain concentrated in the early adoption phase, with only 11-30% of their marketing tools incorporating AI features. Only 1% of organizations have crossed the threshold where AI powers more than half their marketing technology stack.

For retail and eCommerce marketing leaders, the window for gaining a strategic advantage lies in moving beyond the 11-30% AI integration plateau that currently defines the market. Organizations that can successfully navigate the trust-building process while scaling AI capabilities across their marketing operations will gain an edge.

To achieve this, leaders should identify specific use cases for AI tools in their marketing strategies, work directly with end-users to define governance and ethical parameters for AI use, and choose solutions that are transparent about how they arrive at each decision.



Key Suggestions:

Demand explainable AI interfaces from vendors:

Insist on marketing tools that provide clear reasoning trails for AI-generated recommendations to address transparency concerns and reduce “black box” anxiety.

Integrate AI verification checkpoints into workflows:

Implement mandatory human review protocols for AI-generated content and targeting parameters to prevent factual errors and brand safety issues.

Launch phased pilot programs for new AI tools:

Test AI solutions through controlled campaigns before enterprise-wide deployment, allowing teams to measure impact while maintaining operational stability.

Prioritize API-first AI solutions:

Select tools with robust integration capabilities to connect with existing martech stacks, avoiding siloed systems that create workflow fragmentation.

Establish ethical AI governance committees and guidelines:

Form cross-functional teams to audit algorithms for bias, ensure compliance with privacy regulations, and maintain human oversight thresholds for sensitive decisions.

Develop AI literacy programs:

Create structured training curriculums that combine technical tool mastery with ethical implementation frameworks for all marketing team members.

About the Authors



AdRoll is an advertising platform that helps businesses run, measure, and optimize multi-channel, full funnel campaigns. Powered by industry-leading AI and automation, the AdRoll platform leverages data foundations to design, deliver, and optimize campaigns that drive customer engagement, boost website traffic, and increase revenue.

AdRoll helps customers generate more than \$246 billion in revenue annually and has been used by over 120,000 brands since 2006. AdRoll is headquartered in San Francisco and is a division of NextRoll, Inc.

For more information, please visit **[AdRoll.com](https://adroll.com)**.



WBR Insights is the custom research division of Worldwide Business Research (WBR), the world leader in industry-driven thought-leadership conferences. Our mission is to help inform and educate key stakeholders with research-based whitepapers, webinars, digital summits, and other thought-leadership assets while achieving our clients' strategic goals.

For more information, please visit **wbrinsights.com**.