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The Automotive Buyer Experience Report 2025

How automotive consumers value human connections and view AI in the modern buying journey

Many Automotive Consumers Are Open To AI, But They Won't Forsake Human Connections. Neither Can Your Business.

When we last published this report in 2022, inflation had started making a dent in consumers' wallets, and ChatGPT was about to take the world by storm. Since then, inflation has chilled out (a little) while the AI wars have heated up. AI has quickly become integrated into every part of our lives, from work to home to play—and our lives as consumers.

Automotive brands wasted no time hitching their wagons to AI, aspiring to increase buying journey efficiency and provide the experiences that digital-age buyers demand.

But has AI lived up to the hype for automotive consumers, or has it foisted frustration and impersonal service upon them for the sake of efficiency and corporate penny-pinching? Can AI replace human agents in the automotive buying process? Is it all too much, too soon? That's what this report is determined to uncover.

We've found a surprising level of acceptance of automotive companies using AI to assist their customers during the buying process, but there are also strong signals of resignation, indifference, and outright rejection of getting help from AI agents. Automotive consumers aren't quite ready for a full-on AI takeover, and more so, they still overwhelmingly prefer human assistance when they're making high-stakes purchases of vehicles, services, and parts.

The big takeaway is that automotive businesses must strike the perfect balance of digital, AI, and the human touch and invest in cohesive AI strategies across the entire buying journey. This includes using AI in the background to help human agents perform at their best and provide fast, highly personalized experiences at every turn. In the rush to utilize the latest AI tech, automotive brands must ensure that consumers are ready for it and that it's not used to put up roadblocks to getting the personal human connection that they desire.

Read on to get the stats and see where automotive consumers—and your business—stand in this brave new AI-powered world.

About The Survey

For this report, we surveyed 1,000 consumers from the US and UK who researched and made a "high-stakes" purchase in the last 12 months in the following categories: automotive, healthcare, home services, insurance, financial services, telecommunications, and travel. For this study, a "high-stakes purchase" is defined as one that requires time to weigh options, research, and/or devote more thought to before making a decision, due to the complexity and/or cost of the vehicle, service, or product. Only US data from **automotive industry respondents** is used in this report version, excluding generational data, which is from all respondents. Individual industry data by generation was not statistically significant. Results may not total to 100% due to rounding and multiple selection options. The field survey was performed by Sago Online Research.

Most Automotive Consumers Have Encountered A Brand's AI, And Many Didn't Care

When automotive consumers make high-stakes purchase decisions—whether buying a vehicle, scheduling service, or purchasing parts—they have a lot of questions, and there are many touchpoints along the way where they can get answers. That means there are also many opportunities for AI to step in and address their needs quickly. But are automotive consumers really ready to let AI do the talking?

Only 15% of automotive consumers surveyed reported never interacting with a brand's AI when making a high-stakes automotive purchase in the last year. The big question is, did they like it?

Forty-six percent of automotive respondents stated that interacting with a brand's AI tools improved their buying experience. However, the shrug is also strong, with 31% saying AI made no difference at all. Another 23% said that AI made the buying experience worse.

15%
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Have not interacted with a brand's AI

46%
INVOCA
AI made the buying experience better

31%
INVOCA
AI made no difference

23%
INVOCA
AI made the buying experience worse

Automotive Consumers Have Mixed Feelings About AI Assistants

Now for the mushy psychological bit—how does interacting with a brand's AI agents and tools make consumers feel? When asked to select words that describe how interacting with AI during a purchase made them feel, the results were mixed, with 24% selecting words with a negative connotation. About 24% selected words with positive connotations. The AI apathy is once again strong, with 22% selecting "indifferent".

Curious

Relieved

Skeptical

Frustrated

Confident

Indifferent

Confused

Many Automotive Consumers Feel Forced To Use Your AI

You always want to meet your customers where they are, and forcing them into an AI workflow to get questions answered or make a purchase is not the way to do it. 64% of automotive consumers report feeling forced to use a brand's AI most or all of the time, and many more report feeling forced to use it some of the time—not a good look for the CX enthusiasts among us.

Once they realize they're interacting with AI and not a human—whether that's via a text-based or voice-based agent—53% of automotive consumers report feeling positively about it. 25% were indifferent, 21% felt negatively, and only 1% said they couldn't tell if it was AI or not.

64%
INVOCA
Say they feel forced to use a brand's AI

53%
INVOCA
Feel positive about their AI interactions

25%
INVOCA
Are indifferent

21%
INVOCA
Have negative feelings

1%
INVOCA
Can't differentiate AI from human assistance

How Your Brand Uses AI Can Make Or Break Its Reputation

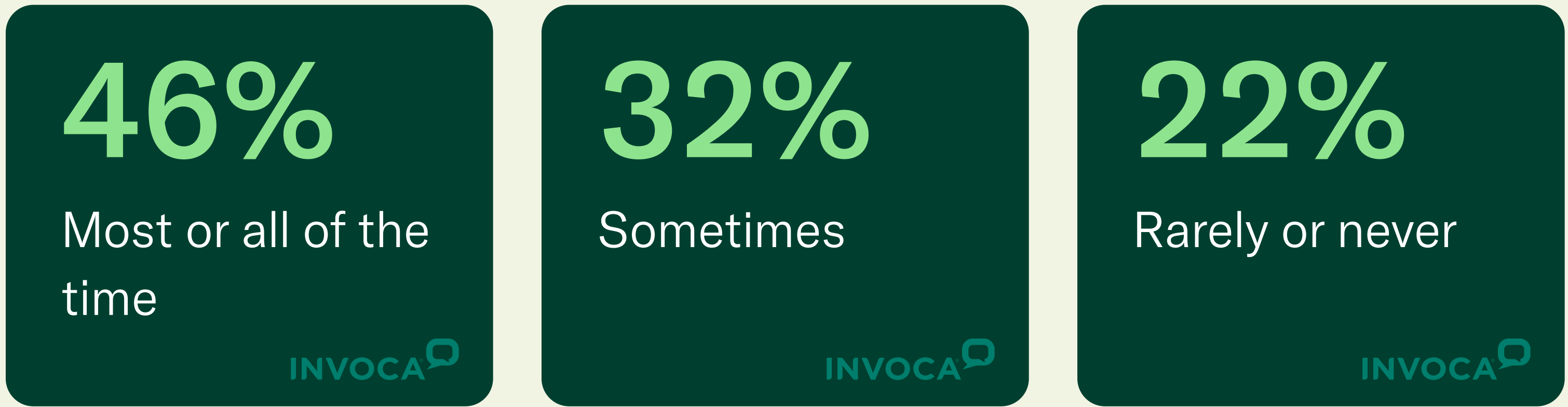More often than not, automotive consumers are satisfied with the help they receive from a brand's AI during the buying process. 46% of automotive consumers report feeling satisfied with AI assistance most or all of the time. However, nearly 36% of those surveyed report feeling less valued as a customer when an automotive brand interacts with them via AI. Though 39% feel more valued, and 25% weren't swayed either way by AI assistance.

When An Automotive Business Uses AI To Interact With Customers, They Feel

36%
Less valued

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39%
More valued

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25%
Makes no difference

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Automotive consumers are satisfied with the help they receive from a brand's AI:

46%
Most or all of the time

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32%
Sometimes

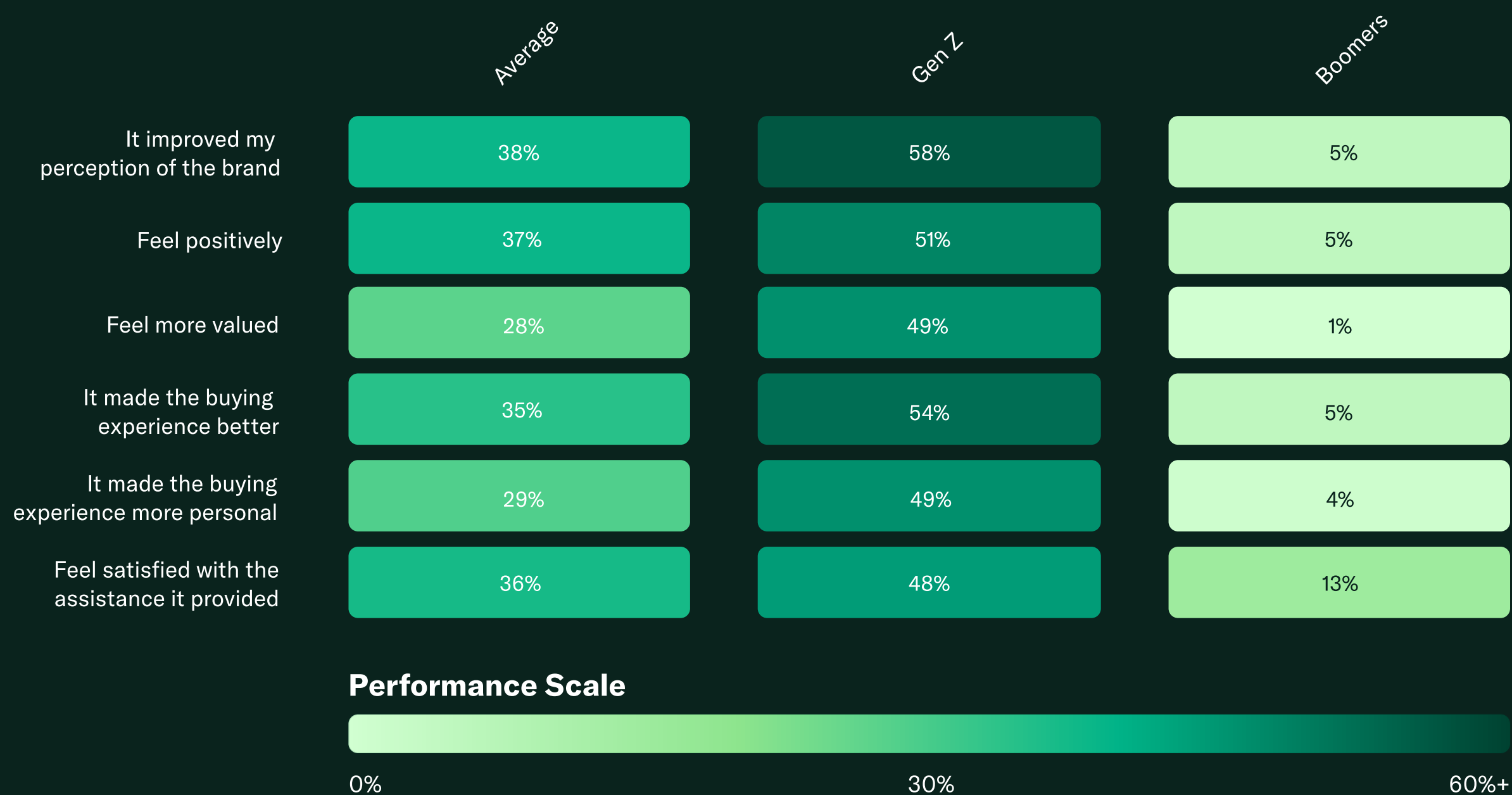INVOCA

22%
Rarely or never

INVOCA

Know Your Audience: Age Matters When It Comes To AI Acceptance

If your automotive customers tend to be on the older side, you need to be particularly thoughtful about your AI implementation. Across the board, Boomers hold a much more negative view of AI, and Gen Xers don't like it much more.

Gen Z, on the other hand, thinks AI is lit. Nearly 60% of Gen Z consumers report having had a memorable positive experience with a brand's AI when making a high-stakes purchase, compared to only 14% of Boomers.

When Interacting With A Brand's AI

	Average	Gen Z	Boomers
It improved my perception of the brand	38%	58%	5%
Feel positively	37%	51%	5%
Feel more valued	28%	49%	1%
It made the buying experience better	35%	54%	5%
It made the buying experience more personal	29%	49%	4%
Feel satisfied with the assistance it provided	36%	48%	13%

Performance Scale

0%   30%   60%+

Automotive Consumers Are Wary Of The Answers That AI Provides

If you've heard of AI, you've likely heard of and possibly encountered hallucinations—when an AI system generates false or misleading information that sounds correct but isn't based on real data or facts. The generational divide is not consistently stark here. Around 40% of both Gen Zers and Boomers think AI is likely to provide incorrect or misleading information. However, more Gen Zers are still willing to trust the answers it gets from AI, at least most of the time (42%), compared to 20% of Boomers.

Forty-two percent of automotive consumers believe AI is likely to provide incorrect or misleading information. However, 50% of automotive consumers are still willing to trust the answers they get from AI, at least most of the time. Forty-one percent of automotive consumers are confident that AI can help resolve a complex automotive issue. At the same time, 50% are likely to abandon a purchase if AI assistance were the only option available.

42% INVOCA
Think AI is likely to provide misleading or inaccurate information

50% INVOCA
Trust an AI assistant most or all of the time

41% INVOCA
Confident that AI can help resolve a complex issue

50% INVOCA
Likely to abandon a purchase if AI assistance were all that was available

When Do Automotive Consumers Want To Use AI?

There is obviously some trepidation around using a brand's AI assistance when making high-stakes automotive purchases. However, there are situations where automotive consumers are entirely comfortable with or even prefer using AI in the buying process.

Simplicity and speed are key here. When the task is simple or it's just plain faster than a person, many automotive consumers prefer AI. However, 50% think that solving complex automotive issues is one of the areas where AI is worst at. It's also worth noting that 82% of automotive consumers said they'd be more willing to use AI if it were clear how they could speak with a person instead.

Surprisingly, only 29% prefer AI when they don't want to talk to a person, which seems like the perfect use case! There is no significant difference in use case preference across age groups.

Automotive Consumers Prefer AI When

78%

It **resolves their issue** faster than a human

42%

The task is **simple**

41%

They need **fast answers**

37%

It helps **avoid waiting** on hold

29%

Don't want to talk to a person

They Think AI Is The Worst At

50%

Solving complex issues

45%

Providing **empathy**

42%

Understanding context or nuance

40%

Personalizing communication

29%

Following through on requests
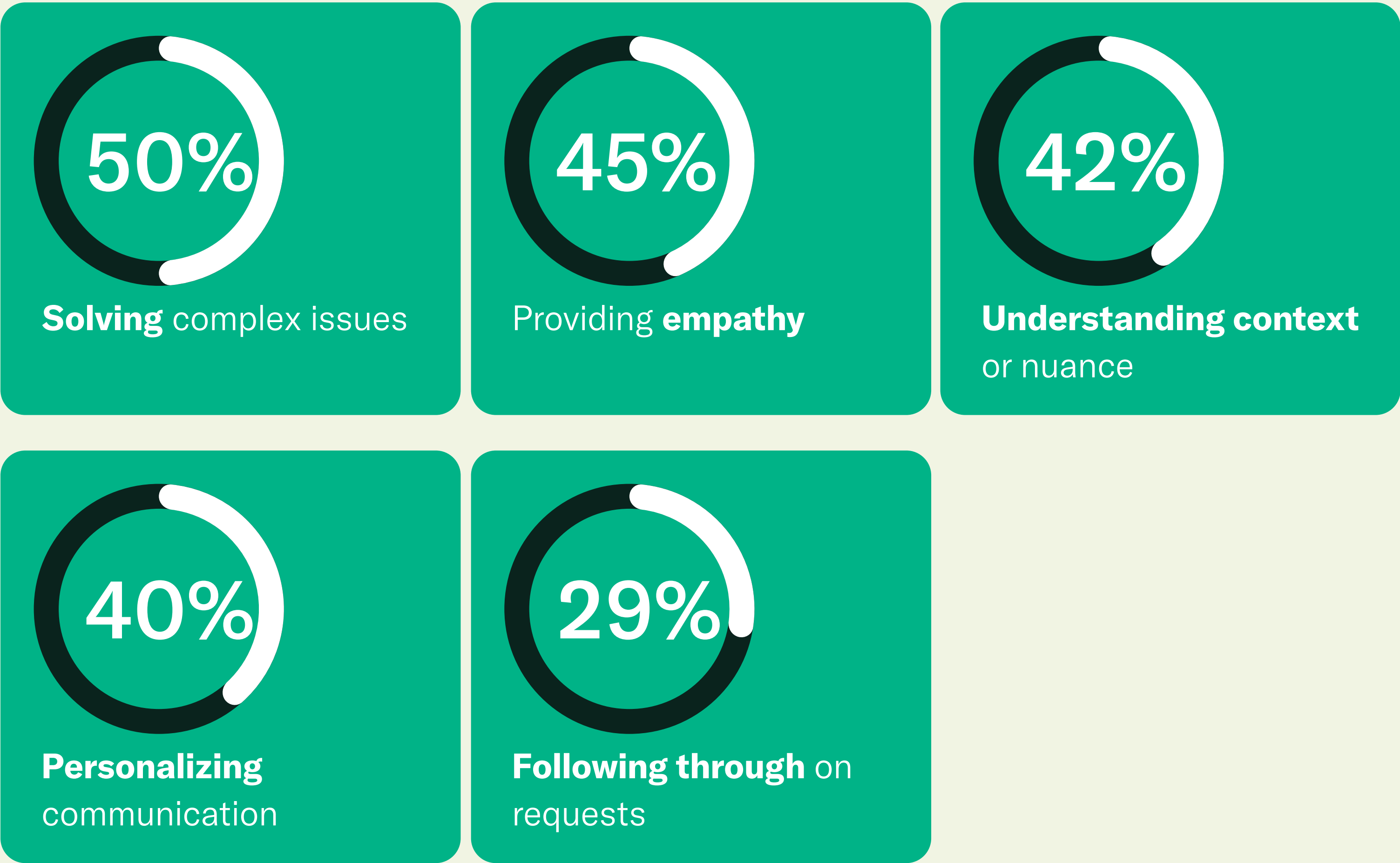
Automotive Consumers Are Optimistic About AI's Future—With A Few Changes

Not everybody is satisfied with the way AI works today, but 66% of automotive consumers are confident that it will become more helpful in the next three years. And 47% think AI will someday fully replace human assistance, though 24% of them won't be happy about it.

Survey respondents also shared their opinions on how to improve AI assistants. The top answer was "make getting human assistance faster," but many also want smarter responses and better personalization. Only 4% said they don't want to use AI at all.

66%
INVOCA

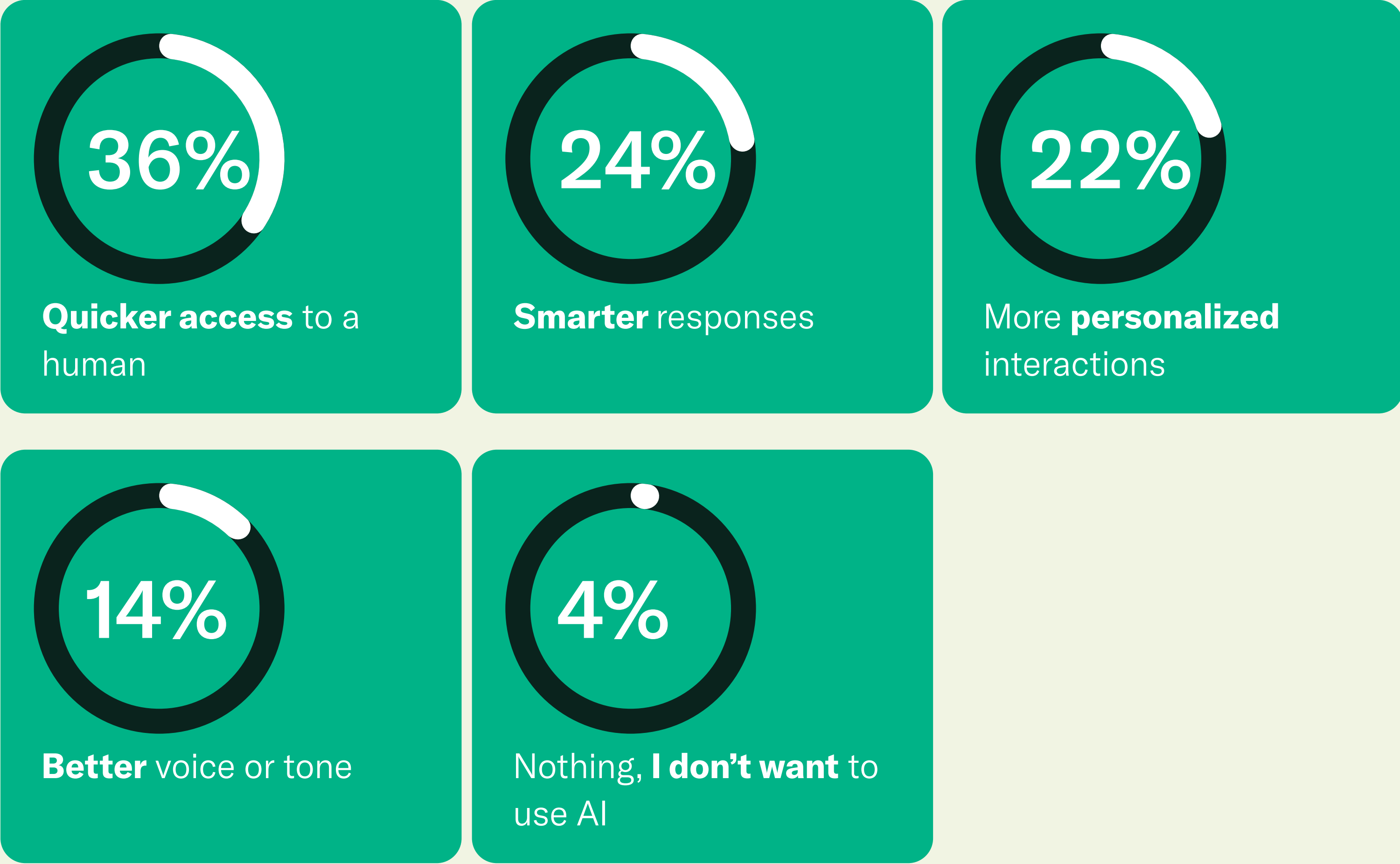AI will get more helpful in the next 3 years

47%
INVOCA

Think AI will fully replace human agents someday

24%
INVOCA

Won't like it

The One Thing That Would Most Improve The Experience With AI Assistants Is

36%

Quicker access to a human

24%

Smarter responses

22%

More **personalized** interactions

14%

Better voice or tone

4%
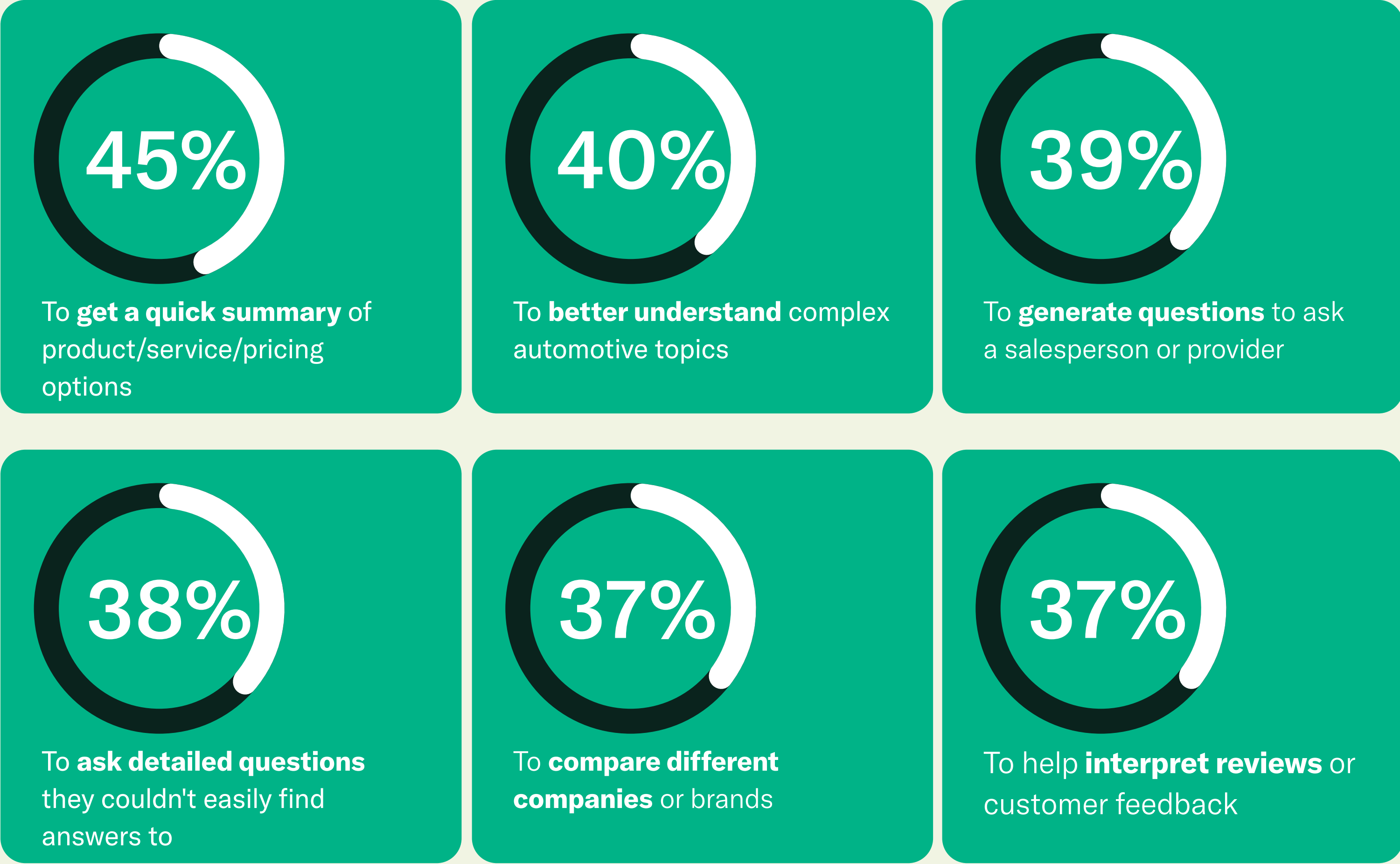
Nothing, **I don't want** to use AI

Many Automotive Consumers Are Using Generative AI To Research Their Purchases— Especially Younger Ones

We've covered how automotive consumers are using the AI assistants brands provide, but how are they using ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and other generative AI tools when researching their automotive purchase? 52% of automotive consumers report using gen AI when researching a high-stakes automotive purchase. There's a generation gap here, too, with 61% of Gen Zers and sizable proportions of Millennials and Gen Xers saying they've used gen AI when doing research, while only 11% of Boomers have.

Average	Gen Z	Millenials	Gen X	Boomers
41%	61%	57%	42%	11%

How Automotive Consumers Are Using Generative AI During The Buying Journey

45%

To **get a quick summary** of product/service/pricing options

40%

To **better understand** complex automotive topics

39%

To **generate questions** to ask a salesperson or provider

38%

To **ask detailed questions** they couldn't easily find answers to

37%

To **compare different companies** or brands

37%

To help **interpret reviews** or customer feedback

Is Generative AI Replacing Traditional Search For Automotive Consumers?

It's the question on every automotive marketer's mind, and the answer is no. Automotive consumers making high-stakes purchases are far more likely to supplement standard search engine use with generative AI research than replace it.

Only 11% of automotive consumers rely more on generative AI than search engines to inform their purchase decisions, and only 1% mostly rely upon it. Again, there is a generation gap in most areas except those that mostly rely on generative AI. Usage by Millennials and Gen Xers is similar to Gen Z's.

	Average	Gen Z	Boomers
I use only search engines	41%	34%	66%
I use both, but rely more on search engines	41%	41%	19%
I use both, but rely more on generative AI	11%	21%	2%
I mostly rely on generative AI tools	1%	1%	0%
I don't use either	6%	3%	13%

Performance Scale

0%　　　　　　30%　　　　　　60%+
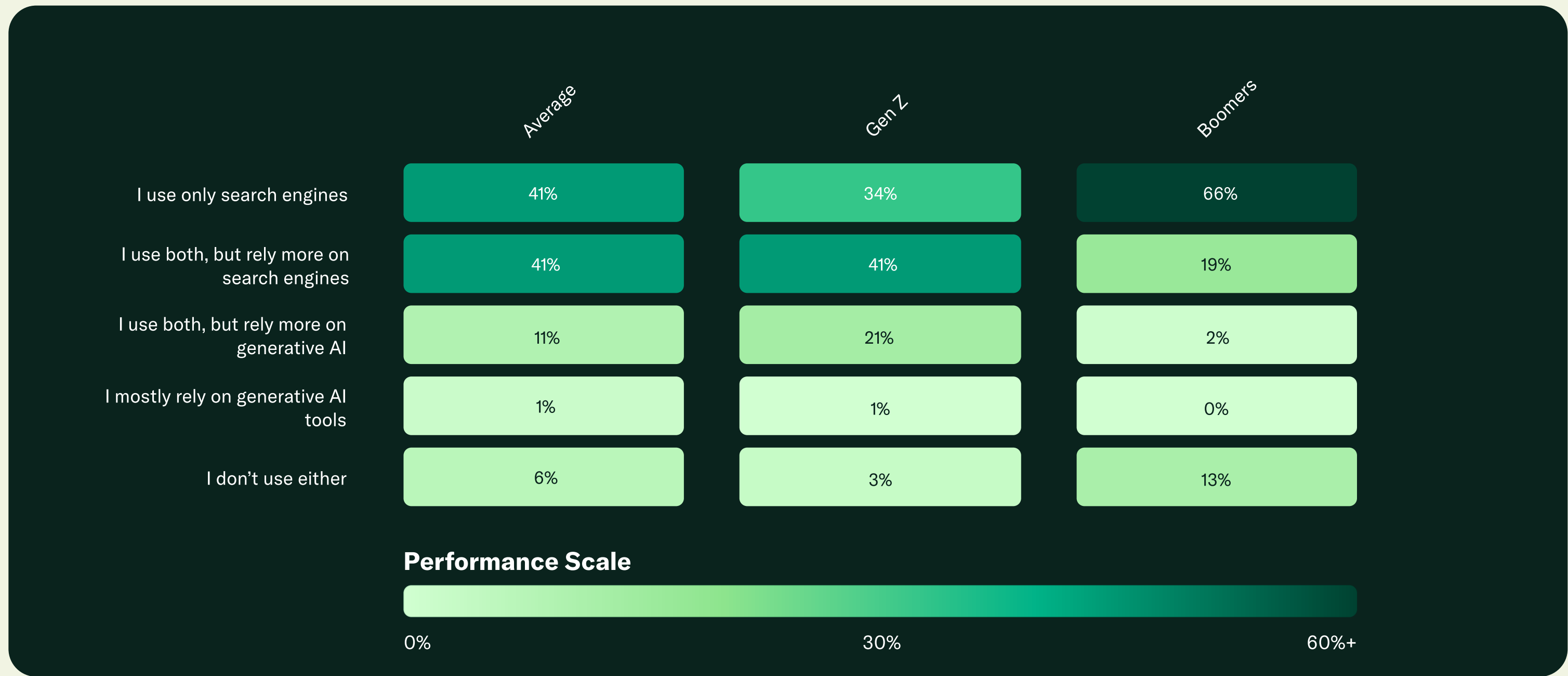
Human Connections Are Still Critical During High-Stakes Automotive Buying Journeys

Automotive consumers overwhelmingly value human connections while making a high-stakes purchase, and almost none feel that it's not important. They need expertise and reassurance when making these types of automotive purchases, and nothing can substitute for the empathy and understanding that a human can provide. There was no significant difference across generations in those who thought it was very important or important.

How Important Is Human Connection During A High-Stakes Purchase?

58%
Very important

27%
Important

13%
Somewhat important

2%
Not very important

0%
Not important at all

Automotive Consumers Increasingly Prefer To Call Businesses For Help With A Purchase

In addition to AI, there are numerous digital options for automotive consumers to communicate with and obtain information from brands when considering a high-stakes purchase, ranging from chatbots to email to websites. But when they need help, automotive consumers prefer to call.

Since 2022, the preference for calling among automotive consumers has increased by 7%, while email has dropped by over half, and the preference for AI assistance has risen slightly. The preference to call is rooted in reality, as 71% of automotive consumers reported calling when making a high-stakes purchase decision, up from 67% in 2022.

This goes to show that when automotive consumers need help in situations where knowledge, empathy, and understanding are paramount, they want a person to give them guidance. Despite improvements in automated assistance and live chat, the desire to pick up the phone has only increased.
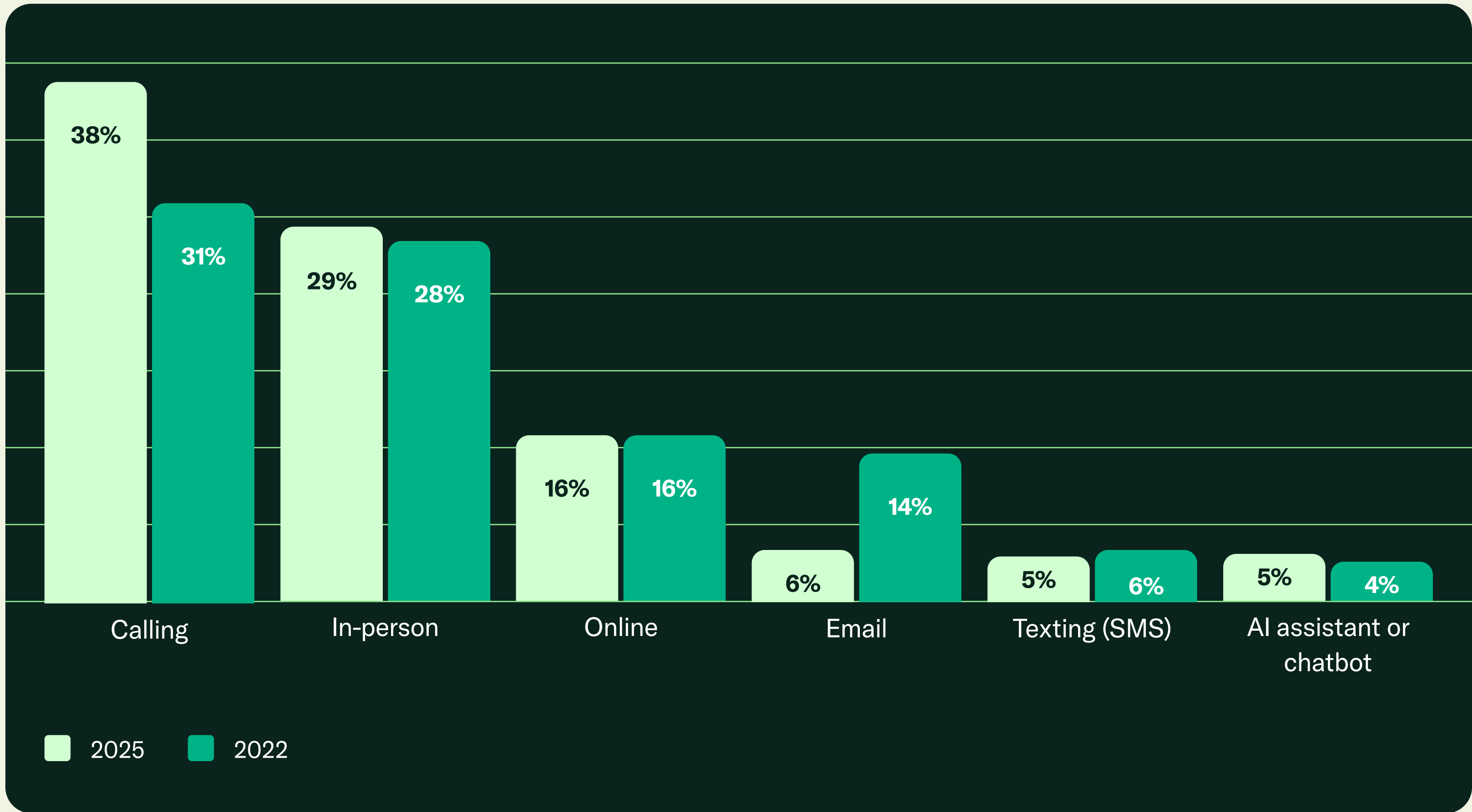
71%

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Called when making
a high-stakes purchase

Preferred Communication Method When Automotive Consumers Are Having A Problem And Need Help

Calling: 38% (2025), 31% (2022)
In-person: 29% (2025), 28% (2022)
Online: 16% (2025), 16% (2022)
Email: 6% (2025), 14% (2022)
Texting (SMS): 5% (2025), 6% (2022)
AI assistant or chatbot: 5% (2025), 4% (2022)

■ 2025   ■ 2022

A Seamless Omnichannel Experience Remains Critical

Automotive consumers prefer to call when they need assistance during a high-stakes purchase; however, in-person remains the preferred channel for completing the transaction. Your online-to-offline experience has to be seamless in both directions, and this means connecting data from the digital journey to phone calls is no longer a nice-to-have, but a requirement to optimize and personalize every touchpoint.

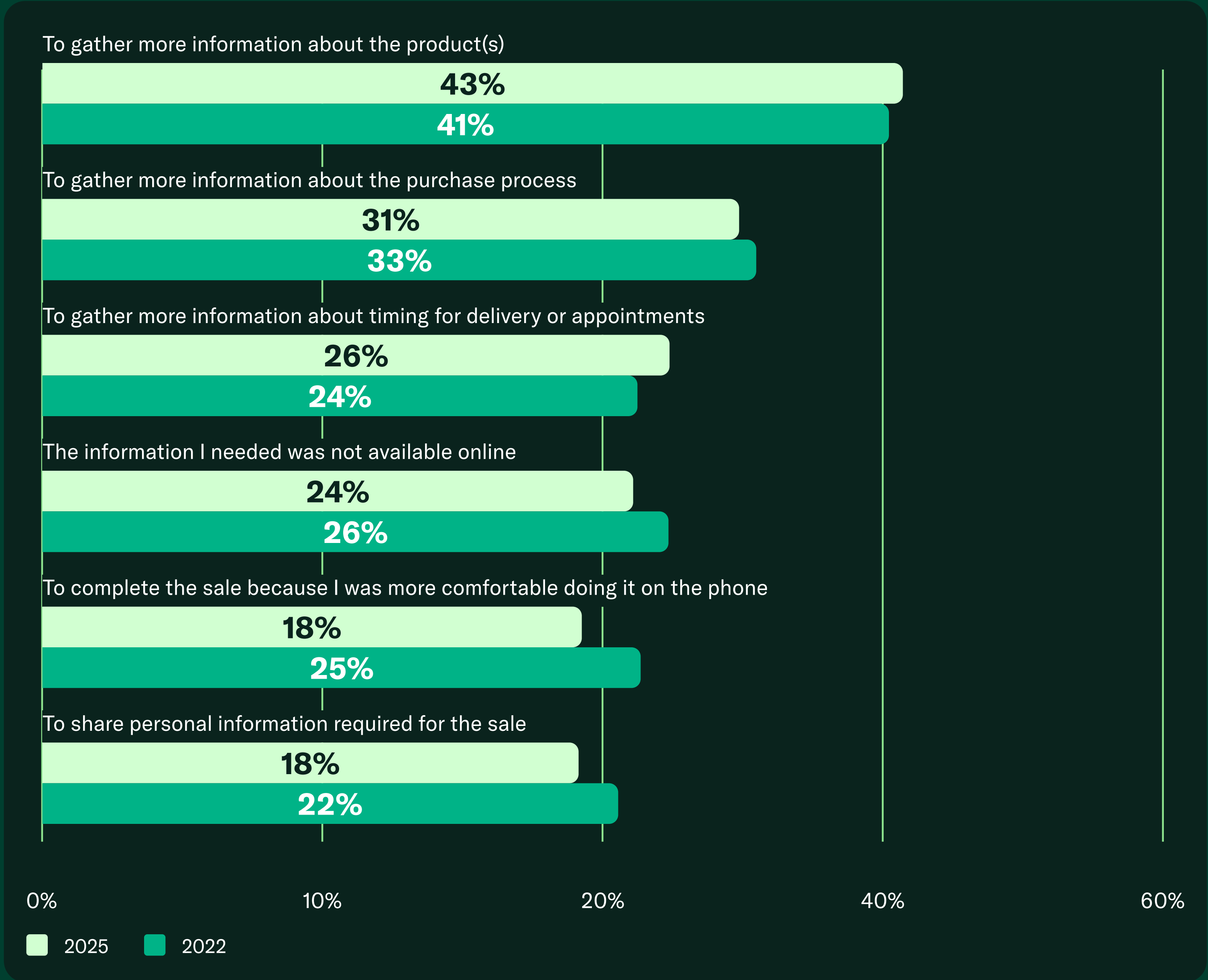## Preferred Channel To Complete Automotive Transactions

Channel	2025	2022
In-person	43%	37%
Online	24%	17%
Calling	20%	20%
Email	7%	15%
Texting	3%	5%
AI assistant or chatbot	3%	5%
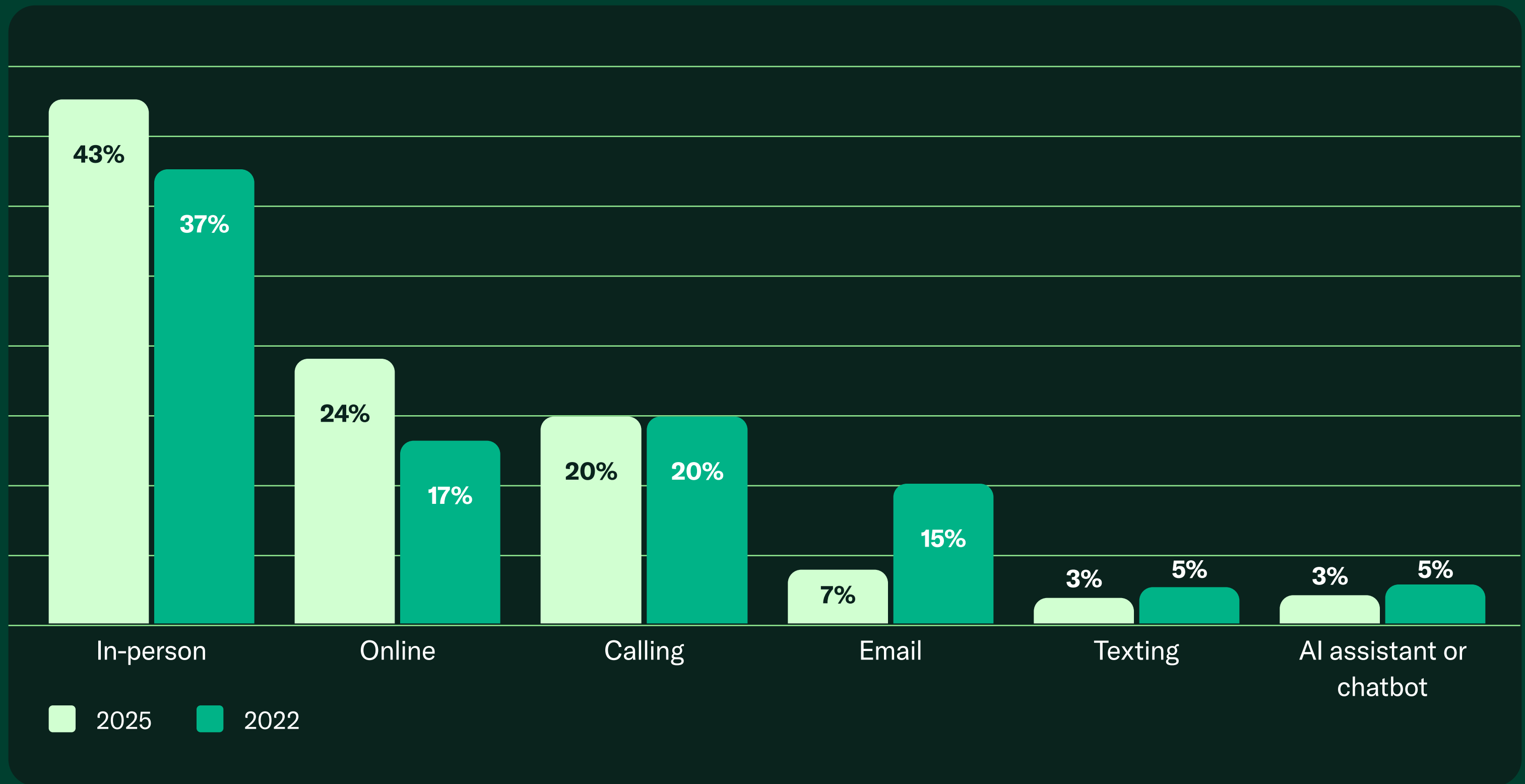
Why Are Automotive Consumers Calling?

When making a high-stakes automotive purchase, most consumers call because they want to get more information about the vehicle, service, or provider. Many also need to get more information about timing for delivery or appointments, which can be complex when you consider we're talking about things like buying a car, scheduling service appointments, or coordinating parts delivery.

Concerningly, the percentage of automotive consumers who are calling because the information they needed was not available online has remained relatively stable. This signals a continued need to improve online experiences and connect calls to the digital experience to determine the most effective optimizations.

To gather more information about the product(s)
- 43%
- 41%

To gather more information about the purchase process
- 31%
- 33%

To gather more information about timing for delivery or appointments
- 26%
- 24%

The information I needed was not available online
- 24%
- 26%

To complete the sale because I was more comfortable doing it on the phone
- 18%
- 25%

To share personal information required for the sale
- 18%
- 22%

0%   10%   20%   40%   60%

■ 2025   ■ 2022

Automotive Consumers Are Getting A Bit More Patient

We've found that while automotive consumers have become a bit more patient than they were during the frantic post-pandemic days, they still demand great experiences. Automotive consumers are increasingly willing to pay more for the best experiences despite the pressures of inflation. They're also prepared to jump ship to the competition at the drop of a hat if you do them wrong, so that newfound acquiescence can't be taken for granted.

Automotive Consumers Who Are Likely To Stop Doing Business With A Brand After One Bad Experience

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2025

71%

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2022

76%
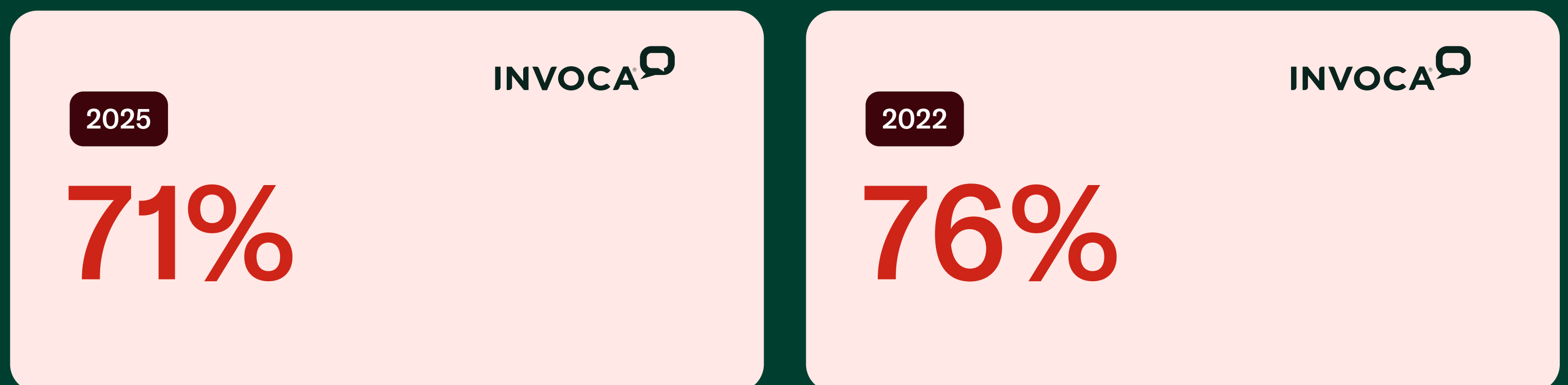
Will Pay More For The Best Customer Service

INVOCA

2025

75%

INVOCA

2022
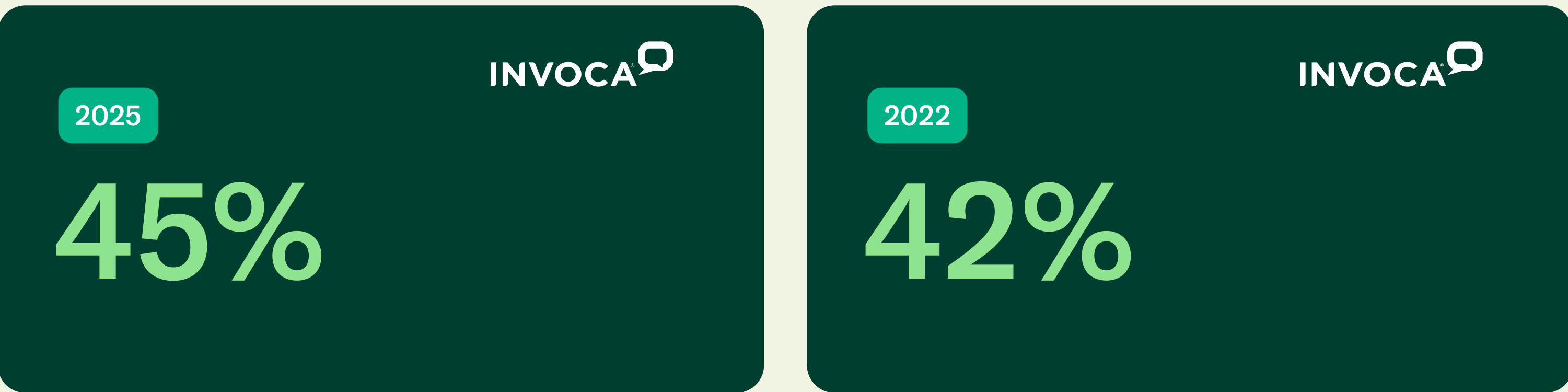
63%
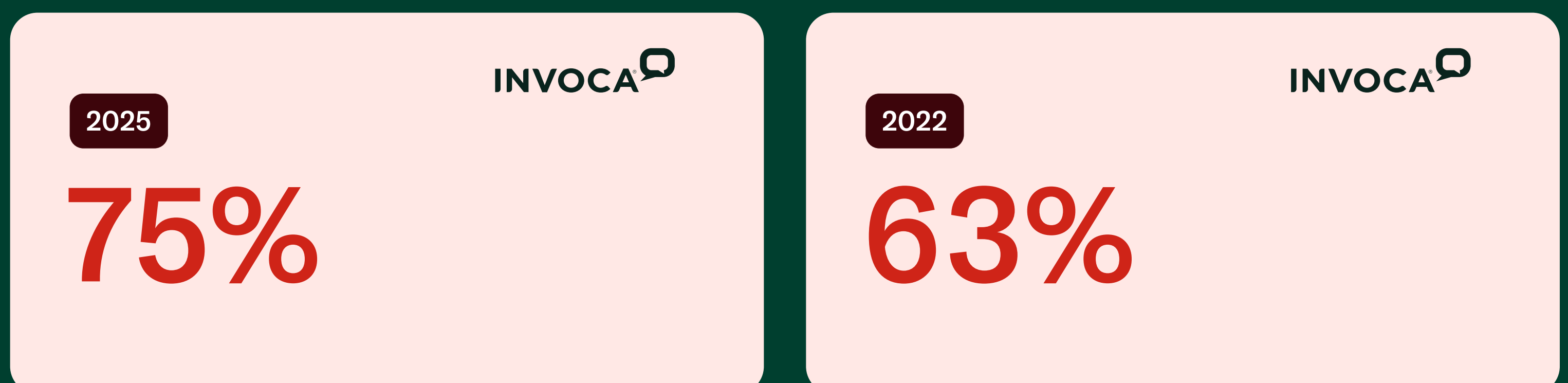
They'll Wait A Little Longer On Hold

While automotive consumers will stay on hold a bit longer before hanging up than in 2022, 41% still report hanging up after being placed on hold. Although most automotive consumers expect to wait on hold for 2-5 minutes, 36% will still hang up after being on hold for 5 minutes or less, and 9% will only wait for less than two minutes.

Forty-seven percent of automotive consumers report hanging up after hearing everyone's favorite message about "unexpected high call volumes causing longer than usual wait times," so let's just get rid of that one already. Please? The automated callback option continues to grow in popularity among automotive consumers, and only 8% will call another business instead of using it.
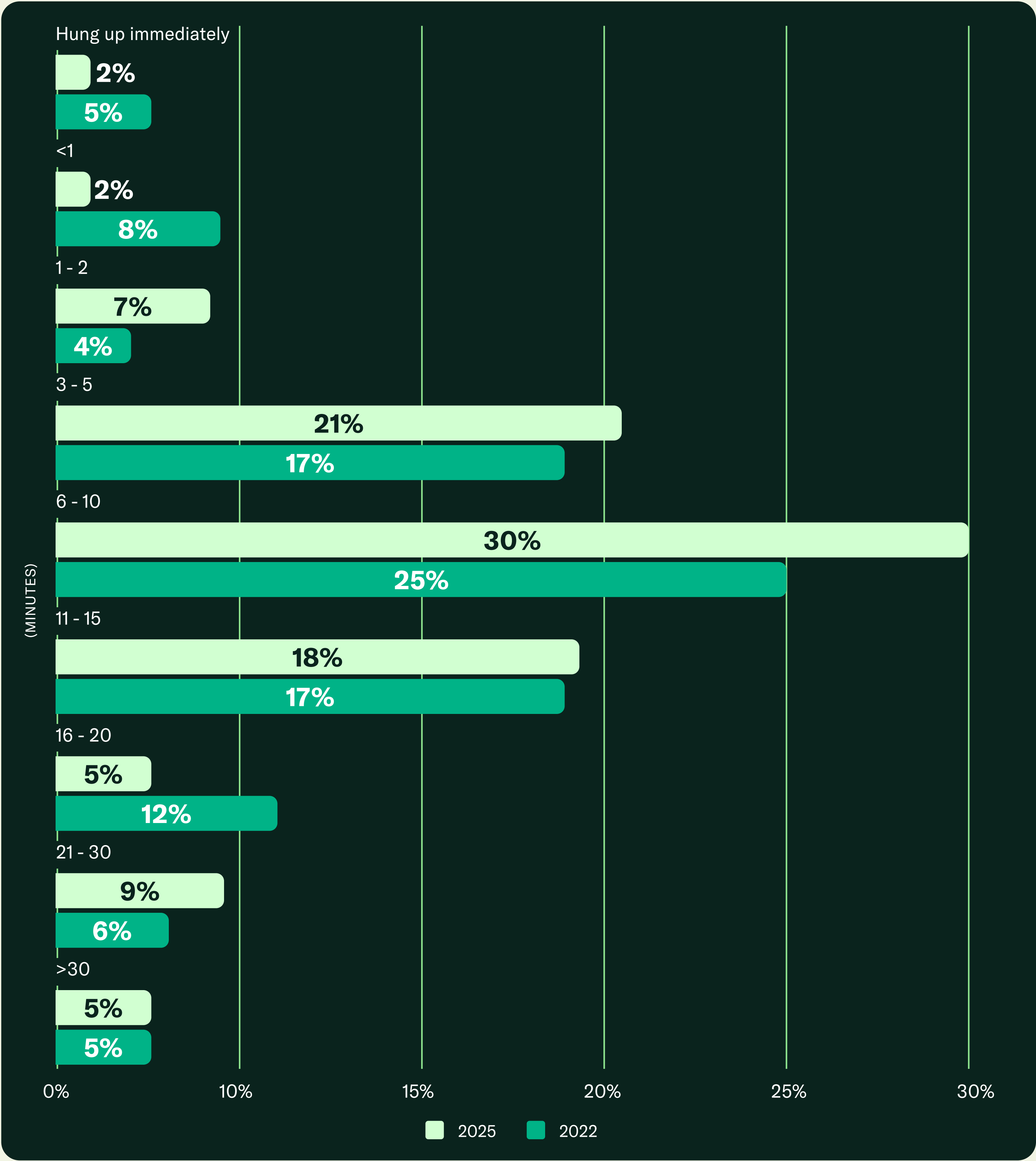
Have Hung Up After Being Placed On Hold

2025

41%

INVOCA

2022

51%

INVOCA

Automotive Consumers Who Will Use The Automated Callback Option Instead Of Holding

2025

45%

INVOCA

2022

42%

INVOCA

How Long Will Automotive Consumers Wait On Hold Before Hanging Up?

Hung up immediately
2%
5%

<1
2%
8%

1 - 2
7%
4%

3 - 5
21%
17%

6 - 10
30%
25%

11 - 15
18%
17%

16 - 20
5%
12%

21 - 30
9%
6%

>30
5%
5%

(MINUTES)

0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30%

■ 2025 ■ 2022

When It Comes To Humans Vs AI Assistance, Automotive Consumer Preference Is Clear

While AI can make a huge difference in your automotive company's ability to handle customer inquiries—especially when used on the back-end to analyze and orchestrate data—automotive consumers still overwhelmingly prefer to call and talk to someone to get help.

When Both AI And Human Help Are Equally Available, Automotive Consumers Prefer

	Average	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
A human representative	67%	54%	51%	68%	92%
A combination of AI and human assistance	15%	25%	23%	10%	1%
An AI assistant	14%	19%	20%	18%	5%
No preference	4%	3%	6%	5%	2%

Performance Scale

0%　　　　　　　　50%　　　　　　　　100%
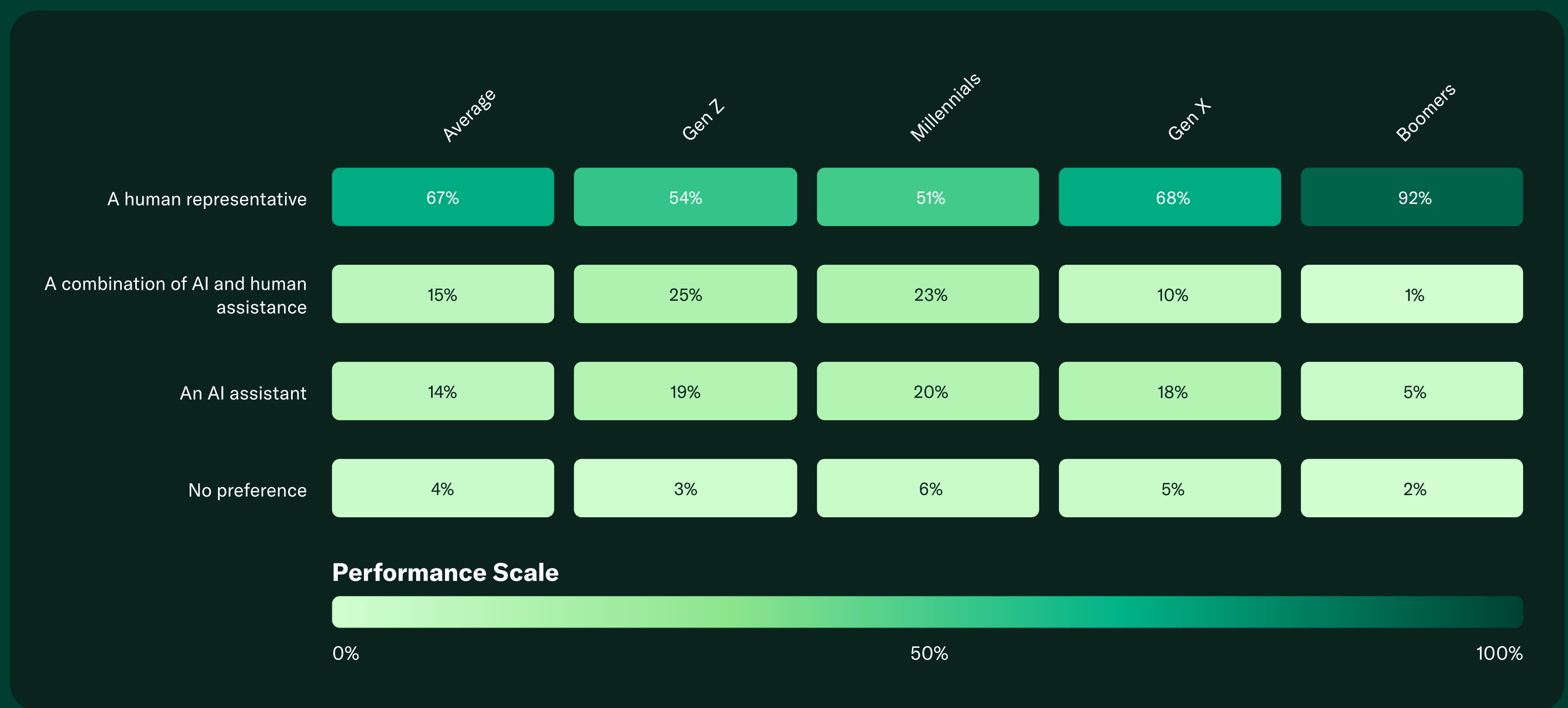
Again, this is about using AI at the right place and the right time, and ensuring you can meet your automotive customers where they are, regardless of their preferred communication method.

Demographic Information

*Demographic data includes data from all respondents.

GENDER

Male	Female	Non-binary	Other	Prefer not to answer
51%	**48%**	**0%**	**0%**	**0%**

AGE/GENERATION

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
16%	**29%**	**29%**	**26%**

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Less than high school	High school graduate	Some college/university
39%	**24%**	**14%**

College/university graduate	Post graduate
20%	**4%**

RESPONSES BY INDUSTRY (RESPONDENTS COULD SELECT MULTIPLE)

Travel	Telecommunications	Financial services	Insurance
48%	**45%**	**36%**	**44%**

Home services	Healthcare	Automotive
35%	**39%**	**36%**

ANNUAL GROSS INCOME

Less than $50,000	$50,000 - $74,999	$75,000 - $99,999	$100,000 - $199,999	$200,000+
39%	**24%**	**14%**	**20%**	**4%**

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