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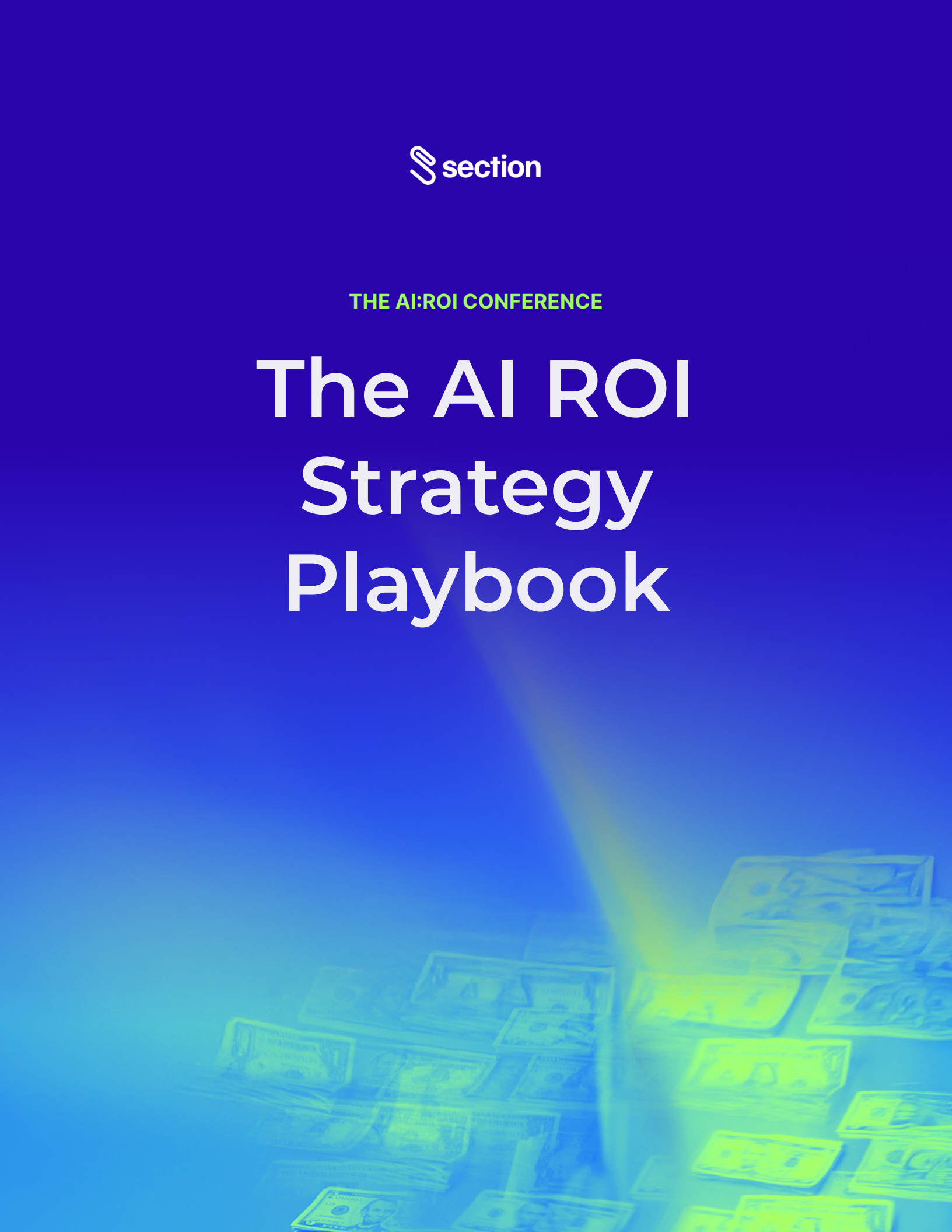
THE AI:ROI CONFERENCE

The AI ROI Strategy Playbook



Tactics from enterprise leaders getting ROI from AI

As a net new technology, the paths to success with AI – and what success even looks like – are still unpaved.

We gathered 11 enterprise leaders to share their strategies for achieving, measuring, and proving the ROI of their AI investments. In this working playbook, you'll learn from them directly – and gain strategies to take back to your own company.

TOP 9 Strategies for realizing AI ROI

FOR ENTERPRISES

1 **Stage your ROI expectations across three phases (Alicia Abella, Novo Nordisk)**

The flow goes: pilot ROI → scaled ROI → post-implementation ROI frameworks. Most AI projects can't predict returns accurately upfront, so build measurement discipline gradually rather than demanding immediate precision.

2 **Pick three workflows and measure impacts and ROI ruthlessly (Leo Casado, Autodesk)**

Pick three specific processes, redesign them using AI, establish clear KPIs (conversion rate, time to market), run for 6-8 weeks, then publish results broadly and loudly to build momentum across the organization.

3 **Treat platform costs as infrastructure, not ROI calculations (Brice Challamel, Moderna)**

At $30/month per person, basic AI access costs the same as lunch. The fundamental question isn't financial return but whether you trust and empower your people with tools that obviously provide value.

4 **Implement outtake forms to measure actual project results (Eric Porres, Logitech)**

While everyone uses intake templates for project approval, systematic post-completion measurement reveals actual impact. Projects must demonstrate alignment with company strategy plus quantifiable results: efficiency (90% time reduction), quality (fewer compliance errors), or revenue (uncovered pipeline dollars).

5 **Use federated governance to balance speed with safety (Lee Bogner, Mars)**

Centralize governance for safety and commercial leverage, but allow local business units to move fast with regional AI vendors. This hybrid approach prevents both bureaucratic slowdown and ungoverned experimentation.

6 **Partner with business units to measure impact, don't own it centrally (Michael Domanic, UserTesting)**

Work with teams implementing AI solutions to wrap arms around value measurement together. This creates buy-in while ensuring measurements reflect actual business context rather than theoretical projections.

FOR BUILDERS AND INVESTORS

7 **Use the "Stop, Easy, Stick" litmus test before building (Ritu Chakrawarty, AbbVie)**

Three questions: What will users stop doing when you bring this product? Are you making it easy for them to adopt? Will anyone use it after 15-30 days? If you don't get concrete yes answers, you're not ready to build.

8 **The application layer – not infrastructure – will determine winners (Eric Sheridan, Goldman Sachs)**

Historical patterns suggest outsized returns come from applications built on top of infrastructure, not the infrastructure itself. We're waiting for the "Uber and Airbnb" equivalents to emerge on AI platforms.

9 **For AI companies – convert POCs to contracts in under six months (Emily Fontaine, IBM)**

Speed indicates alignment, urgency, and clarity of value. Companies that can move from pilot to signed agreement quickly show the solution is adding real business value, not just technical capability.

Greg's advice

This is hard.
And it's worth it.

In every executive conversation, we hear that AI deployment is a grind and rife with failures. If you're struggling, you're not alone – but stick with it, because the benefits will be immense. (And if you need a partner, **call us**).

The four hidden barriers to AI ROI

Based on 10,000+ survey responses, 1,000+ employee interviews, and 100+ conversations with AI executives, we've identified four critical barriers preventing organizations from achieving AI ROI.

BARRIER 1: THERE'S NO "WHY OF AI"

The problem

Only 23% of employees report their company has a formal AI strategy. Most hear vague mandates like "we need to be AI first" without understanding what that means or why it matters.

The solution

Create an AI manifesto that reframes AI as imperative to your business mission. Move beyond "we need to be more efficient" to a mission-critical statement about how AI helps you compete.

BARRIER 2: YOU HAVEN'T ACHIEVED "TRUE AI ACCESS"

The problem

While 80%+ of companies claim to have piloted or deployed enterprise LLMs, only 29% of employees in AI-friendly companies actually have access to these tools. Companies either roll out hamstrung versions of AI to everyone or restrict access to pockets of the organization.

The solution

Get every knowledge worker access to enterprise LLMs with coaching, turn on the most advanced capabilities possible (like custom GPTs), and enable fast approval processes for functional tools.

BARRIER 3: YOUR AI POLICY IS HAMPERING EXPERIMENTATION

The problem

69% of employees are unsure about their organization's AI policy. The #1 reason employees limit AI use is "I'm worried about data security or privacy."

The solution

Publish simple, specific, and easy-to-find usage guardrails in plain language. Avoid vague guidance like "Don't upload sensitive information" and instead provide concrete examples.

BARRIER 4: EMPLOYEES LACK USE CASES

The problem

Even in advanced companies with AI access for 4-6 months, 45% of employees don't have specific AI use cases that significantly improve their work. Among those who do, the top use cases remain basic: rewriting emails, quick code fixes, using AI like Google, Excel formula help, and document summarization.

The solution

Build a culture of sustained AI use through a three-tier approach:

- **Good:** Empower champions to showcase their use cases
- **Better:** Recommend and show employees hyper-personalized use cases at scale
- **Best:** Create conditions for employees to tell you transformative AI use cases

Building The Internal Structure For ROI

With Dr. Alicia Abella, AI Product Lead at Novo Nordisk

When Alicia Abella, PhD, joined Novo Nordisk in November 2024, she inherited zero AI infrastructure. She also discovered something common to AI leaders: the biggest barrier wasn't technology, but psychology. Employees had the tools but were paralyzed by fear of regulatory violations.

> **Focus on the business problem and not the technology. Instead of asking, 'Where can we use AI?' It's about asking, 'What are our biggest business problems and can AI help us solve it?'"**

Her breakthrough insight: In highly regulated industries, adoption happens through influence networks, not mandates. Her AI Ambassador program exploded from 5 to 30+ people in one quarter because she fed them (literally). Here's her advice for using virality and influence to drive AI adoption and ROI.

5 steps to follow:

1. **Map the fear landscape first.** Spend a few months understanding psychological barriers, not just technical ones. Fear stems from uncertainty, not capability gaps.
2. **Build influence networks, not user bases.** Create ambassador programs that turn AI enthusiasts into internal evangelists who can address peer concerns authentically.
3. **Design governance for paranoia.** In regulated industries, your intake process must satisfy legal/compliance teams first, business value second.
4. **Stage your ROI expectations.** The flow goes: pilot ROI → scaled ROI → post-implementation ROI frameworks. Most AI projects can't predict returns accurately upfront.
5. **Market internally like a consumer product.** Create posters, videos, town hall presentations. "This is no different than if I was launching the iPhone."

Alicia's success came from recognizing that AI adoption in conservative industries requires the mindset of a consumer marketer – not an enterprise IT rollout.

The State of the AI Market

With Scott Galloway, Professor at NYU Stern and
Eric Sheridan, Managing Director at Goldman Sachs

Scott Galloway and Eric Sheridan delivered a sobering reality check on AI's current state. While consumer tools like ChatGPT have reached "exit velocity," the enterprise revenue gap remains stubbornly wide. Their analysis reveals market dynamics eerily reminiscent of the late 1990s dot-com bubble.

> **ROI is almost always an entry and exit point dynamic. If you bought Amazon in 1999, you are well in the green today. You did not feel good about that investment in 2001."**
>
> **- Eric Sheridan, Goldman Sachs**

The conversation exposed uncomfortable truths about AI valuations and market concentration. With 55% of market gains since 2021 driven by just 10 companies, and circular investment schemes emerging (NVIDIA investing $100B in OpenAI, who then buys $100B in Nvidia chips), the parallels to 1999's irrational exuberance are striking. Yet both experts agree we're likely in 1997-1998 territory – meaning more upside before the inevitable correction.

Key insights:

1. **The enterprise ROI gap remains massive.** Despite widespread AI deployment driving internal productivity gains, the revenue-generating, customer-facing applications that justify trillion-dollar valuations simply don't exist yet.

2. **AI success may democratize rather than concentrate value.** Unlike previous tech cycles, AI's technical differentiation is rapidly disappearing as models reach parity. This commoditization could mirror vaccines, aviation, and PCs: technologies that transformed society but never generated sustained trillion-dollar company valuations.

3. **The application layer - not infrastructure - will determine winners.** Historical patterns suggest outsized returns come from applications built on top of infrastructure, not the infrastructure itself. We're still in the "spectrum and towers" phase, waiting for the "Uber and Airbnb" equivalents to emerge on AI platforms.

> **Typically, the outsized ROI has never been made on the infrastructure layer. It's almost always made on the application layer. I don't think we know yet what the application layer entirely looks like for AI"**
>
> **- Eric Sheridan, Goldman Sachs**

The deeper warning: Either these stocks must fall dramatically, or the economy needs to eliminate roughly 10 million jobs in AI-vulnerable industries within 3-5 years to justify current valuations. Neither scenario suggests a soft landing for the AI economy.

Where Will the AI ROI be for Investors?

With Emily Fontaine, Global Head of Venture Capital at IBM

Emily Fontaine leads IBM's $500 million AI investment fund while overseeing the company's "Client Zero" approach (using their own AI tools internally before selling to customers).

> **If a company can move from pilot to signed agreement in under six months, it shows alignment, urgency and clarity of value. Speed does not mean rushing. It means readiness."**

Emily's investment thesis centers on three transformative trends reshaping enterprise AI: Vibe coding is redefining software development, with 60% of developers now using AI coding tools. Multi-model strategies are becoming the backbone of enterprise AI, with 85% of enterprises using two or more models in production. Most importantly, reinforcement learning represents the next frontier – AI agents that learn from rewards and penalties to optimize specific business KPIs rather than generic tasks.

Key insights:

1. **Vertical AI applications are hitting hockey stick growth.** The application layer is where outsized returns emerge, not infrastructure. Specialized solutions tailored to specific industries and use cases are winning over generic tools, with successful startups converting POCs to contracts in under six months.
2. **Multi-model routing is the new competitive moat.** Enterprises are moving beyond single-model reliance to platforms that route requests to optimal models. This reduces vendor lock-in, improves resilience, and allows businesses to optimize for accuracy, speed, and cost simultaneously rather than accepting trade-offs.
3. **Reinforcement learning will personalize enterprise AI**. The next breakthrough involves AI systems that learn and adapt to individual company KPIs and business priorities.

The investment opportunity lies in startups that complement rather than compete with AI giants, filling major gaps that LLM providers aren't addressing while demonstrating clear paths from pilot to enterprise-wide deployment.

Scaling AI ROI Across The Enterprise

With Lee Bogner, Global Chief Gen AI Architect at Mars

Lee Bogner oversees AI deployment across Mars' global operations—spanning food, pet food, candy, and health businesses in 85 countries. His approach balances centralized governance with local freedom, allowing regions to move quickly while maintaining safety standards.

> **We will never reach full agentic autonomy. We will always have human in the loop. We will be highly autonomized, but humans have always got to be in there."**

Lee's experience reveals the messy reality of enterprise AI scaling. Companies are rushing to eliminate jobs based on AI hype, only to rehire workers months later when they discover "AI slop" – low-quality output that fails business standards. His framework emphasizes treating AI ROI differently from traditional IT investments, focusing on probabilistic outcomes and portfolio approaches rather than predictable cost savings.

Key insights:

1. **The federated model beats pure centralization or chaos.** Mars uses centralized governance for safety and commercial leverage, but allows local business units to move fast with regional AI vendors. This hybrid approach prevents both bureaucratic slowdown and ungoverned experimentation while maintaining quality standards.

2. **Prompt engineering is the new literacy requirement.** Writing for machines will become as fundamental as reading and arithmetic. Companies need systematic training in prompt writing and context engineering, not just AI tool access. The "curse of knowledge" problem – experts who can't communicate effectively with less technical stakeholders – is a major scaling barrier.

3. **AI slop forces human accountability back into focus.** The trend of layoffs followed by rehiring shows that AI amplifies human judgment rather than replacing it. Companies that outsource critical thinking to machines discover quality degradation.

AI ROI requires rethinking success metrics entirely, moving from traditional cost-savings calculations to portfolio-based, probabilistic outcome measurements that account for both tangible efficiency gains and intangible strategic value.

Building a Product Roadmap to ROI

With Ritu Chakrawarty, Gen AI Solutions Strategy at AbbVie

Ritu Chakrawarty works on AI solutions strategy at AbbVie, focusing on a brutal truth: 80% of enterprise AI pilots never reach production. Her approach centers on a simple litmus test before building anything: "Stop, Easy, Stick" – what will users stop doing, how easy is adoption, and will they use it after 30 days?

> **If I don't get these answers very concretely yes, then probably we are not ready. You need early ROI in team behavior—you want that pull, not push."**

Chakrawarty's framework addresses the core failure mode of AI projects: building solutions that look impressive in demos but fail to integrate into daily workflows.

Key insights:

1. **Stop cloning what already exists in the market.** Most internal AI projects fail because they build inferior versions of existing tools like ChatGPT. Instead, buy proven solutions off-the-shelf and focus innovation on domain-specific problems that require your unique data and expertise.
2. **Domain experts must be co-creators, not end users.** Success requires cross-functional teams where subject matter experts design evaluation criteria and define what "good" looks like. This creates buy-in while ensuring the AI system codifies actual expertise rather than generic capabilities.
3. **Workflow integration trumps feature richness.** AI tools must fit into existing daily workflows (Salesforce, Jira, SharePoint) rather than requiring new tabs or separate interfaces. If users need to change their behavior to access the tool, adoption will fail regardless of technical merit.

Ritu says your first signal of ROI should be behavioral -- users demanding access rather than needing persuasion. This "pull versus push" dynamic indicates whether you're solving a real problem or just building an impressive demo that will eventually lose organizational support.

Building The Business Case For AI

With Leo Casado, Director of MarTech & AI at Autodesk

Leo Casado leads the MarTech and AI team at Autodesk, where he's transforming a 700-person global marketing organization into an AI-proficient workforce. He has a clear mandate from leadership – 100% of marketers using AI by fiscal year-end.

> **When you start moving people from being just an experimenter to actually being proficient with the tool, that at least doubles the productivity and quality of their work."**

Leo's framework operates across three distinct levels of AI integration. Individual proficiency focuses on prompting and simple agents, like standardizing QBR presentations. Team workflows involve manual AI-assisted processes, like using AI to clean and segment contact data from multiple countries. Enterprise orchestration requires engineering partnerships to automate complex processes, like converting sales call transcripts into CRM summaries.

5 steps to follow:

1. **Start with people metrics, not business metrics.** Leo launched through "Career Week" initiatives that reduced fear and built genuine engagement before measuring workflow improvements or business impact.
2. **Pick three workflows and measure impacts and ROI ruthlessly.** Pick three specific processes, redesign them using AI, establish clear KPIs (conversion rate, time to market), run for 6-8 weeks, then publish results broadly and loudly to build momentum across the organization.
3. **Establish clear platform policies to prevent shadow AI.** Declare your approved platforms (e.g., "we are a Copilot shop") and create straightforward guidance. Expert users will get frustrated with limitations and use risky external tools with company data if policies aren't clear.
4. **Embed champions within business units, not centrally.** Train 15 champions across different teams (brand, communications, field marketing) who understand specific business problems. Champions need facilitation skills, not just technical expertise, and should work part-time in this role.
5. **Create an AI manifesto through collaboration, not mandate.** Work with teams to write guiding principles that balance philosophical elements ("pairing human ingenuity with AI horsepower") with practical boundaries (approved platforms only, encourage reuse, self-organizing teams).

ROI from Widespread AI Adoption

With Eric Porres, Head of Global AI at Logitech

Eric Porres personally trained 824 people across 8 months at Logitech before becoming VP of Global AI. His grassroots approach evolved into systematic enterprise adoption, reducing "AI access" from 11 clicks to one while achieving 85% AI certification across 46 countries. Porres introduced a critical innovation missing from most AI programs: outtake forms that measure actual project results after completion.

> **AI pays for itself when it takes a day's worth of work and makes it like a coffee break task."**

Key insights:

1. **Use a 6-dimensional framework to measure AI adoption comprehensively.** Eric tracks consistency (daily AI sessions), intensity (messages per conversation), creation (building assistants), impact (sharing tools with others), breadth (cross-context usage), and certification (through **ProfAI**). This reveals who's building sustainable workflows versus occasional experimenting.

2. **Outtake forms are the missing ROI measurement piece.** Everyone focuses on intake templates for project approval, but outtake forms reveal actual impact. Projects must demonstrate alignment with company strategy plus quantifiable results: efficiency (90% time reduction), quality (fewer compliance errors), or revenue (uncovered pipeline dollars).

3. **Multi-model access drives deeper engagement, not confusion.** Offering multiple AI models (Gemini, GPT, Claude) through one interface increases usage intensity. People averaging 2.97 messages per conversation initially now engage in longer, iterative sessions as they discover different models' strengths for specific tasks.

4. **One-click access prevents shadow AI while enabling security.** Reducing friction from 11 clicks to one keeps users in secure environments. Complex authentication drives employees to external tools with company data, creating major security risks that outweigh any control benefits.

The deeper framework: AI ROI comes in three currencies – time savings, quality improvements, and revenue discovery – but only projects aligned with core company strategy justify continued investment and executive attention.

Is It Even Worth Tracking AI ROI?

With Brice Challamel, Head of AI at Moderna

Brice Challamel, Head of AI at Moderna, challenges the obsession with AI ROI measurement, arguing that focusing on users rather than financial metrics drives better outcomes. His framework distinguishes between “offloading” tasks (efficiency) and “onboarding” capabilities (growth), where AI enables humans to jump previous capability boundaries into new roles and economic opportunities

> **Focus on the user and everything else will follow. It’s a mantra of those tech companies. This is how we got out of the world of the Oracles and IBMs into the world of the Facebooks and Amazons and Googles.”**

Brice’s perspective stems from his Google experience, where ROI discussions were notably absent despite creating trillion-dollar value. He advocates for two-tiered thinking: treat basic AI platforms ($30/month per person) as infrastructure investments like internet access, while complex custom AI projects should be evaluated as part of broader business strategy.

3 steps to follow:

1. **AI enables four personas that "offload" and "onboard" differently.** The assistant offloads repetitive tasks, the expert offloads complexity while onboarding new capabilities, the coach purely onboards growth through reflection and guidance, and the creative partner onboards expanded thinking with 10 ideas instead of one.

2. **Roles evolve dramatically while staying essential.** Tasks disappear but roles persist and upgrade. An executive assistant using AI for deep research becomes a campaign manager and chief of staff within 20 minutes, elevated rather than replaced. The role remains vital but the skill bundle transforms completely.

2. **Platform costs are too low to justify ROI tracking.** At $30/month per person, basic AI access costs the same as lunch. The fundamental question isn’t financial return but whether you trust and empower your people with great tools. Complex AI projects should be evaluated within broader business strategy, not as isolated technology investments.

Brice’s philosophical framework: Every automation cycle in history has created job transformation within full employment. Trust your people, create safe playgrounds for experimentation, and focus on user value rather than obsessing over immediate ROI calculations.

Measuring and Reporting on AI ROI

With Michael Domanic, Head of AI at UserTesting

Michael Domanic leads AI transformation at UserTesting, an 800-person SaaS company where he's built a culture of AI experimentation and use. Unlike leaders who avoid ROI measurement, Domanic meticulously tracks before-and-after metrics on specific deployments, focusing on three core business outcomes: growing revenue, retaining customers, and increasing product velocity.

> **"We have a CEO that we report to. We have boards that we need to justify our expenses to. And there are legitimate questions being asked around: is this driving value? If so, where is it driving value?"**

Key insights:

1. **Focus on before-and-after measurements of specific deployments.** Rather than calculating holistic company ROI, measure individual AI implementations against baseline metrics. Track conversion rates, productivity gains, and business outcomes that can be valued in dollars through existing business data.
2. **Democratize experimentation while spotlighting meaningful results.** Allow employees to build hundreds of custom GPTs without gatekeeping, accepting the messiness. Most won't drive business value, but the experimentation builds engagement and leads to breakthrough use cases that can be scaled organizationally.
2. **Partner with business units to measure impact, don't own it centrally.** Work with teams implementing AI solutions to wrap arms around value measurement together. This creates buy-in while ensuring measurements reflect actual business context rather than theoretical projections.

Michael says: Use internal surveys to understand time savings and identify where AI has the biggest impact, but always take the next step to connect time savings to business outcomes. Survey data helps design better programs and identify both champions and conscientious objectors who need different approaches.

AI and Agencies: Threat or Opportunity?

With Bob Lord, President at Horizon Media

Bob Lord reframes agency AI transformation around collaboration rather than cost-cutting, developing client-facing platforms that democratize data access and media planning.

Lord's transformation strategy stems from recognizing that marketing complexity has outpaced technological solutions. While other industries advanced with AI and better data structures, marketing became a "free for all" with thousands of vendors creating confusion rather than clarity.

> **"The marketers have to get there, so whether they're ready or not doesn't matter because the consumer's already there. If I search for the best SUV on Perplexity and Jeep doesn't show up, that's a problem."**

Key insights:

1. **With AI, jobs transform rather than disappear.** Bob sees AI enabling role evolution - media planners move from Excel spreadsheet management to strategic thinking and presentation. Entry-level workers arrive already AI-native, using tools like Notebook LM for research and podcast generation that surpass traditional methods.

2. **Performance-based partnerships replace traditional models.** Bob advocates moving from FTE-based pricing to outcome metrics – e.g., getting paid when clients sell more cars rather than billing for seat time. This aligns incentives and restores the "agency of record" partnership model where agencies succeed when clients succeed.

3. **Bob's philosophical shift:** Treat AI as a "thought partner" rather than a replacement tool. When stuck, the machine provides unsticking ideas. This collaborative approach to both internal tools and client platforms positions agencies as essential business partners rather than replaceable service providers.

Want to make your team AI-powered?

Section can help you get the most value, productivity, and ROI from your AI investment. Book a meeting to learn more.

BOOK A MEETING