GILROY

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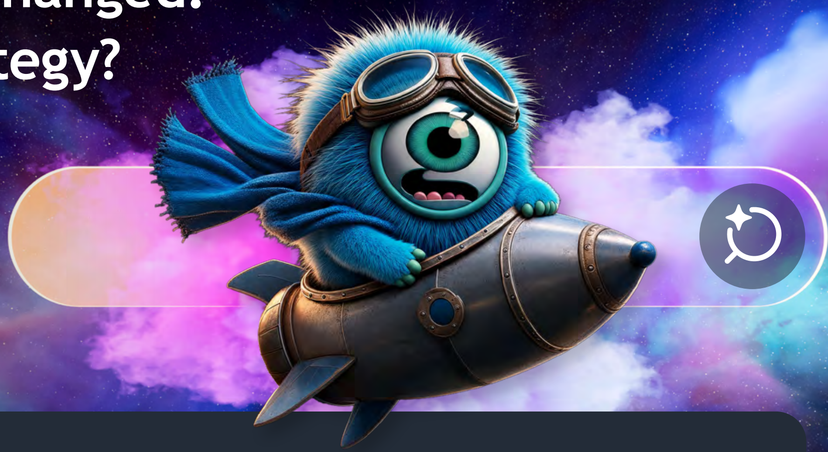
The AI buyer has changed. Has your GTM strategy?

Part 1: the AI-powered revenue series



Artificial intelligence is changing far more than productivity. It's reshaping how buyers discover suppliers, how organisations build trust and how sales and marketing teams generate revenue. This four-part series explores the strategic implications of AI for modern B2B organisations, moving beyond the hype to focus on the challenges and opportunities that matter most – from changing buyer behaviour and AI visibility to first-party buyer intelligence and the future of account-based growth.

Artificial intelligence is changing where and how B2B buyers research potential suppliers, with a growing proportion of the decision-making process taking place before a company appears in the buyer's visible journey.

Platforms such as ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Gemini and Perplexity allow buyers to explore unfamiliar markets, compare competing approaches and test supplier claims before visiting a company's website or speaking to sales. These interactions can shape which organisations buyers consider, which questions they ask and which providers make the initial shortlist, yet much of this activity remains beyond the reach of conventional marketing analytics.

For years, B2B sales and marketing teams have invested heavily in understanding how buyers move from awareness to purchase. CRM platforms, marketing automation, attribution models and intent data have all been designed to capture digital signals and use them to assess interest, measure performance and guide future activity.

A website visit can be recorded, a content download can be attributed and a webinar registration can be scored. An AI conversation can introduce a buyer to a category, compare several suppliers and shape their evaluation criteria without creating an equivalent signal in the supplier's systems.

This creates a less complete view of the buying journey. Search engines, websites and traditional digital channels continue to play an important role, while AI provides buyers with an additional environment in which to gather information, build confidence and narrow their options.

> **The evidence suggests that this behaviour is already influencing real purchasing decisions.**

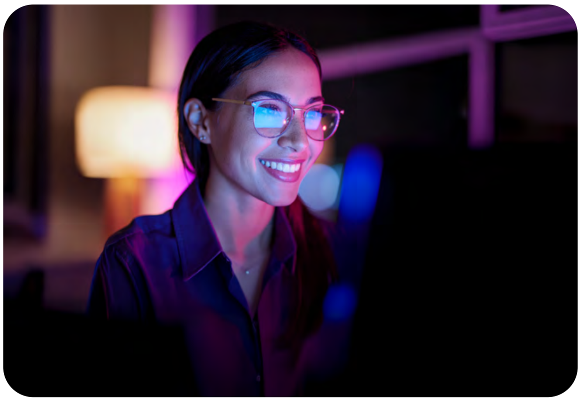
Gilroy's analysis of 856,522 opinions from UK marketing and revenue leaders found that **89% believe B2B audiences are using ChatGPT** as part of their online research process. Gartner's research among 645 B2B buyers found that **45% had used generative AI during a recent purchase**, primarily to gather information about vendors and products. Those buyers also reported consulting an average of seven information sources, placing AI within a broader and increasingly complex research process.

This development builds on an established pattern of self-directed B2B buying. Research from 6sense found that buyers were nearly **70% through the purchasing process before engaging with sellers and that buyers initiated the first contact in more than 80% of cases.**

Generative AI gives buyers another way to progress through that early research, allowing them to move quickly from an initial question to a working view of the market without necessarily interacting with the organisations under consideration.

As a result, revenue teams may first encounter buyers after they have already formed opinions, compared potential suppliers and established their own evaluation criteria. The signals captured through websites, campaigns and CRM systems remain valuable, although they may represent a later stage of the journey than organisations assume.

For sales and marketing leaders, this raises an important question: if the first measurable interaction takes place after the buyer has already shaped their view of the market, how much of the decision-making process are current go-to-market systems actually capturing?



The buying journey is becoming harder to measure

The B2B buying journey has never been linear. Purchasing decisions involve multiple stakeholders, independent research, peer recommendations and internal discussions long before a supplier is contacted. AI has added another layer to that process by making information easier to access, compare and interrogate.

For example, a technology leader evaluating cloud providers can use AI to compare vendors, explore technical differences and summarise implementation considerations within a single conversation.

> **By the time they arrive on a supplier's website, they may already have a provisional shortlist and a clear sense of the criteria that will shape their decision.**

This creates an important challenge for sales and marketing teams.

Website visits, content downloads and campaign engagement remain useful indicators of interest, but they may increasingly capture buyers after a significant proportion of research has already taken place elsewhere.

Why this matters for revenue teams

This shift has implications far beyond marketing measurement. Gartner found that **67% of B2B buyers prefer a rep-free buying experience**, reflecting the growing expectation that buyers should be able to educate themselves before speaking to sales.

At the same time, **69% said they preferred to validate AI-generated insights with a sales representative.**[3] This suggests that human interaction remains important, but it is taking place at a different stage and serving a different purpose.

Revenue teams are therefore likely to encounter prospects who arrive better informed, ask more specific questions and expect sales conversations to add interpretation, challenge and reassurance. Generic discovery calls and product-led presentations will be less effective with buyers who have already completed extensive research before making contact.

Looking beyond SEO

SEO remains a critical part of digital marketing, and high-quality content continues to support both search visibility and AI-generated responses. However, buyers now have a wider range of environments in which to discover and assess potential suppliers.

Understanding how an organisation appears in search results remains important, but revenue teams should also examine how AI platforms describe the business, which sources they reference and whether the organisation appears when buyers ask commercially relevant questions.

This broader view of visibility should include the consistency of the company's positioning, the strength of its supporting evidence and the extent to which credible third parties reinforce its expertise.

The next article explores why AI visibility is becoming a competitive advantage and why the strongest strategies are shaped by the questions buyers are already asking.