



The CMO's Guide to AI in B2C Digital Marketing

2024-25 Research Report

Introduction

In a few short years, the AI priorities for marketing executives have shifted from encouraging experimentation to driving goal-oriented strategies. AI-powered tools are no longer viewed as a nice-to-have for marketing teams but as a requirement to stay ahead in ultra-competitive markets.

The consequences of ignoring the potential impact of AI on your business' performance are far-reaching, from reduced productivity to slowed revenue growth to direct impacts on future career prospects. For CMOs, the hype cycle has turned into an action cycle.

Our 2024-25 State of AI in B2C Digital Marketing Report shows that AI has dazzled marketers, exceeding expectations for ROI and usability. Plans to increase investment in new AI tech remain nearly universal, and now 90% report that they will have dedicated budgets for it next year. Most critical for CMOs is that the view of AI initiative ownership has become clear—and most see marketing executives at the helm of the strategy.

While the excitement surrounding AI grows, the barriers to adoption remain. Data security and a lack of knowledge (despite continued confidence in their expertise) are still concerns. With all of the enthusiasm and experimentation, more marketers also felt they invested too much in AI last year.

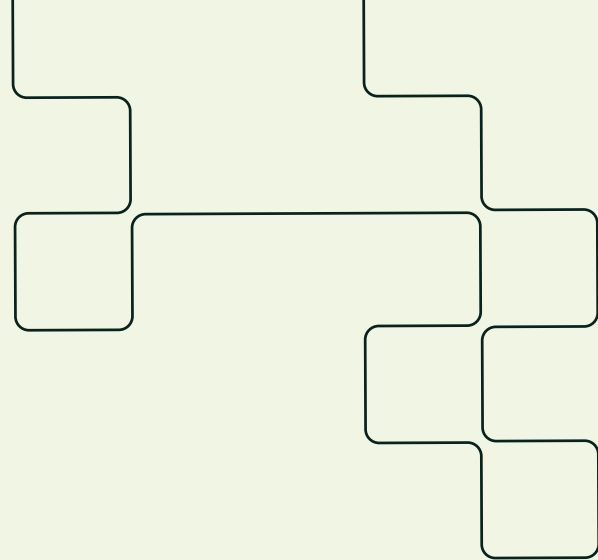
Overcoming these challenges and focusing AI on use cases that directly impact revenue growth and marketing effectiveness is now in the hands of the CMO and other marketing leaders.

In this guide, we'll dig into the data from our 2025 State of AI Report and reveal opportunities for you to drive meaningful impacts with AI in your organization.

Peter Isaacson
CMO, Invoca



Marketing executives must take charge of AI strategy



When ChatGPT and its ilk lit the fuse on the AI explosion two years ago, allowing your teams to run wild with the technology was the best option. Experiment with everything. See what novel use cases pop up. Just do something cool with it.

Last year’s survey reflected that free-wheeling innovation approach and no apparent owner of AI adoption was identified. This year, marketers think AI is solidly in the hands of CMOs and other executives, and only 1% said there is no clear owner in their organization.

To successfully shift from a “What can you do with it?” approach to AI to a “What results can we get?” strategy, marketing leadership must take a more directive approach to AI adoption and ensure that quantifiable goals are used to prove the effectiveness of every use case.

Who owns AI adoption in your organization?

CMO or other executive

37%

Marketing operations

26%

Departmental managers

16%

Departmental directors

14%

Procurement

6%

For AI initiatives to be successful, they need clear ownership

Facing a push from leadership to simply “do more with AI” can be incredibly overwhelming for individuals and teams. A careful approach must be taken to give clear direction and goals without micromanaging to the point of crushing the innovative spirit. AI is everywhere but still nascent in many use cases, so the ability to experiment—and fail—must continue.

However, to realize failure has occurred, a strategy and KPIs must exist to provide guardrails and exit ramps. Like any big project, AI strategy needs ownership, and the desire for it is clear, as over 91% of marketers say it’s important to have clear ownership of AI initiatives.

How important is it that there is clear ownership of AI adoption and budgets?

Very important

50%

Important

41%

Somewhat important

8%

Not very important

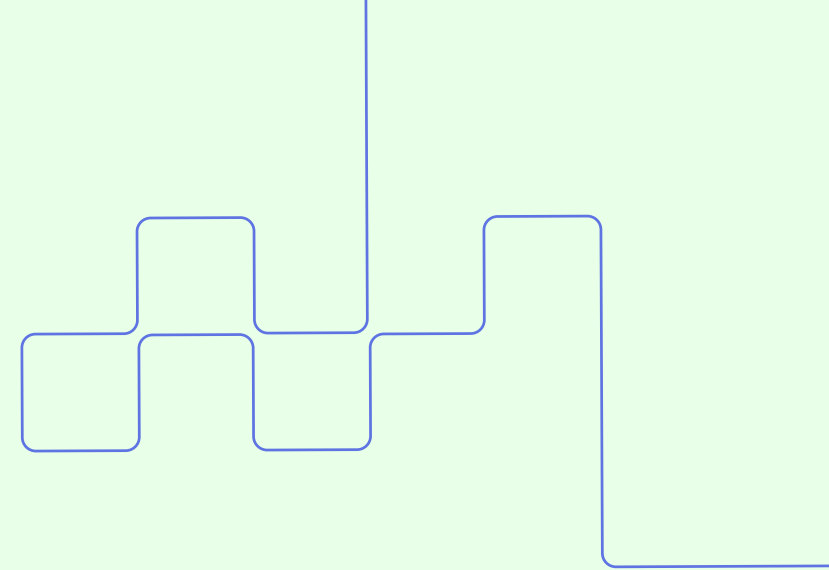
1%

Managers grow more confident in their AI skills

Managerial-level marketers' confidence in their AI skills has been girded by a year of experimentation and experience. It has also erased most of the appearance of executive AI hubris.

Executives and directors still report superior AI expertise than managers, but the gap is closing. Last year, only 32% of managers reported being AI experts, compared with 43% this year. The reported expertise of those with director and executive titles remains unchanged at 53%.

This is important to keep in mind when considering how you approach your leadership role in AI strategy. Most will feel unappreciated and demoralized if not treated as essential stakeholders in AI adoption decision-making. Given their wealth of hands-on experience with AI tools, they will also have valuable insights for you.

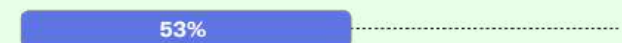


Marketers who say they have expert-level familiarity with AI are:

Managers



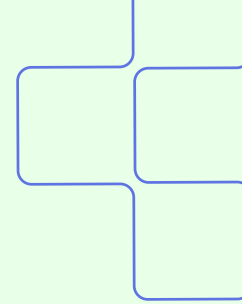
Executives and directors



Most still believe their use of AI is more advanced than other companies

Marketers continue to believe they're leaving the competition in the dust, with 82% saying that their use of AI is comparatively advanced or very advanced. That's 5% fewer than last year, with the balance humbly shifting to somewhat advanced. Which is still ahead.

Those with director and higher titles are 12% more likely to say they are "very advanced." If everyone says their AI use is the most advanced, it is a solid indication that it's not the time to let off the gas in moving your AI strategy forward.



My company's use of AI compared to competitors is:

Very advanced

41%

Advanced

41%

Somewhat advanced

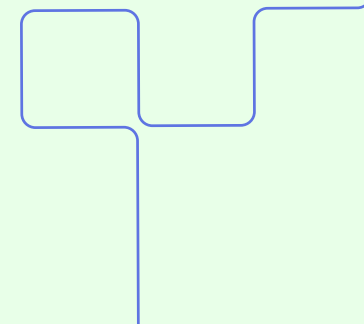
17%

Not very advanced

1%

Not advanced at all

0%





Investment in Marketing AI Tools to Increase Dramatically

B2C marketers will increase their investment in AI again in 2025, with nearly 90% of respondents saying they will increase their investment.

Adding a budget line item dedicated to AI tools will help speed up onboarding new AI martech, so you don't have to scramble to find where novel AI tech fits into your budget. This is a popular tactic among marketing leaders—91% said they will have a dedicated budget for AI tools, a 5% increase over last year.

How will your marketing team's AI investment change in the next year?

Increase significantly

39%

Increase somewhat

50%

Stay the same

8%

Decrease significantly

2%

Decrease somewhat

1%

We are not planning on investing in AI

0%

Will your department have a budget dedicated to AI-driven tools in 2025?

Yes

91%

No

7%

Not sure

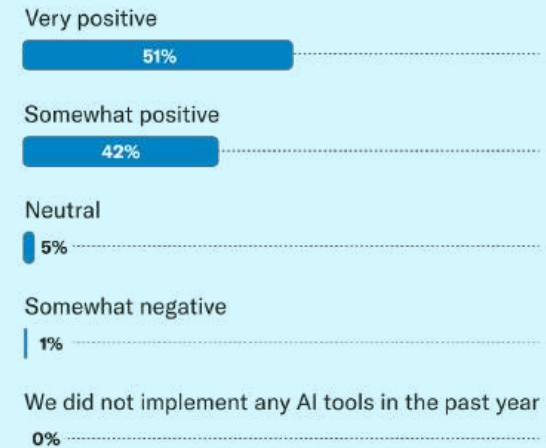
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Marketers' positive experience with AI will drive further investment

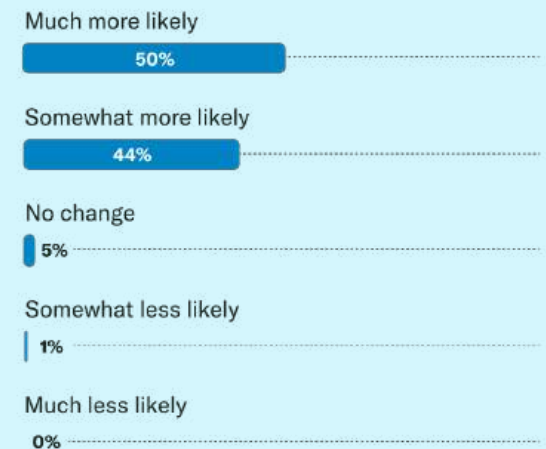
Nearly all marketers surveyed reported positive experiences with the tools they implemented. Almost none reported a negative experience, reduced likelihood of investment, or not implementing AI tools at all.

There is a clear indication that AI-powered tools are what marketers need to rapidly move the needle, as 95% also say that their experience has made them more likely to increase their AI investments.

Considering any AI tools you have implemented in the last year, what has your overall experience been?



Has your experience with AI tools in the last year made you more or less likely to increase your investment?



ROI of AI exceeds marketers' expectations

The big question on every marketing leader's mind is, what's the ROI of AI? New AI solutions for marketers that promise everything from increased productivity to faster revenue growth hit the street daily. But are they worth the cost? The answer is a resounding yes. AI tools exceeded ROI expectations for 80% of the survey respondents, with only 3% saying it missed the mark.

Considering any AI tools you implemented in the last year, has the return on investment (ROI) met your expectations?

Significantly exceeded expectations

38%

Somewhat exceeded expectations

42%

Met expectations

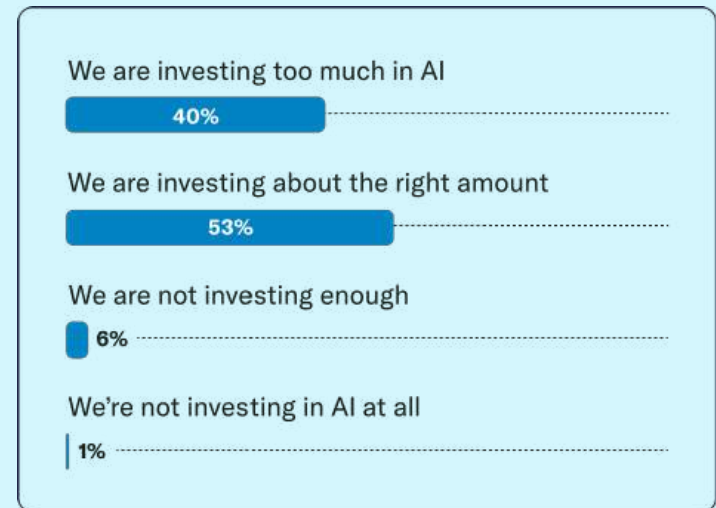
16%

Somewhat missed expectations

3%

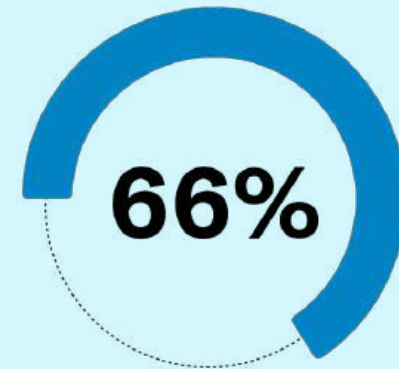
Some marketers feel they're over-investing in AI

After two years of exponential AI spending increases, more marketers feel that it's too much, too soon. This contradicts all the other responses about AI investment, but the number of those who think their companies are spending too much on AI has increased 11% since last year. This speaks to the importance of investing in the right AI tools, not all the AI tools. Moving your team from experimentation to strategic AI implementation will reduce the feeling of throwing money at the wall to see what sticks.

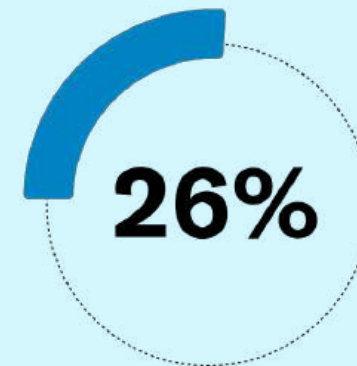


The more you invest in AI, the further you pull ahead

Those who reported significantly increasing their AI spending in the next year are even more confident that their organization's use of AI is very advanced. This gap has widened by 10% over the past year.



who report significant increases in AI spending in 2024 are very advanced compared to the competition



who report flat or decreased spending say they're very advanced

Marketers Are Optimistic About the Future of AI

Marketers' experience and AI ROI have been resoundingly positive. Their optimism and interest in AI continue to grow, which should make implementing your AI an easy sell across the organization.

How has your perception of AI changed over the last year?

I am much more optimistic about AI

42%

I am somewhat more optimistic about AI

50%

My optimism about AI has not changed

6%

I am less optimistic about AI

1%

Over the last year, how has your interest in using AI technology in your job changed?

I am much more interested

47%

I am somewhat more interested

43%

My level of interest hasn't changed

8%

I am somewhat less interested

1%

Marketers believe AI will have a positive impact on their careers—if they’re well-versed

The most critical piece of your AI strategy must be rigorous training. Marketers realize that knowledge about AI will positively impact their careers, making AI literacy essential.

Most believe that if they can’t prove their knowledge, they’re more likely to be impacted by layoffs, experience slowed career growth, and less likely to be respected by their peers. Without proper training, they’ll also be less likely to use and find value in the tools you implement.

What kind of impact do you think AI will have on your career?

Very positive impact

43%

Somewhat positive impact

48%

No impact

6%

Somewhat negative impact

3%

Very negative impact

0%

Both positive and negative impacts

1%

But they're increasingly aware that AI literacy is critical to remaining employed

Last year, 8% of marketers said AI literacy would not impact their future employability. That dropped to zero in this year's survey.

What are the biggest career impacts AI-illiterate marketers face in the coming year?

Appearing behind the times

26%

Slowed career advancement

23%

More likely to be impacted by layoffs?

21%

Less likely to be seen as a thought leader

16%

Less likely to be hired

15%

No significant impact

0%

Not increasing AI use has wide-ranging business impacts

While some are concerned about overspending on AI, the myriad impacts of being an AI laggard should encourage you to make smarter investments.

What do you think is the biggest issue your business will face if you don't increase your use of AI?



Why invest in AI? Because it helps marketers spend their budget more efficiently.

The old saying goes “You gotta spend money to make money. The new adage is, “You gotta spend money on AI to save money.” Nearly 95% of surveyed marketers said AI helps them spend their budgets more efficiently.

Most marketing leaders who saw increased paid media budgets last year would be wise to pay attention—if they want to make the most of that bigger budget in 2025.

AI helps marketers spend budgets:

Much more efficiently

45%

Somewhat more efficiently

49%

It won't change budget efficiency

4%

Somewhat less efficiently

1%

How has your paid media budget (e.g., paid search) changed in the past year?

Increased significantly

47%

Increased somewhat

44%

Stayed about the same

7%

Decreased somewhat

2%






Decreased significantly

1%

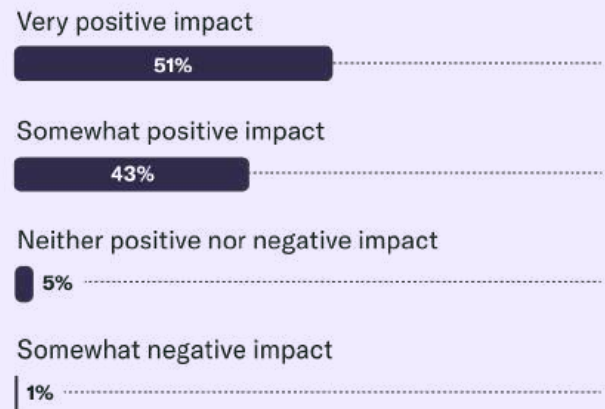
Marketers are using AI to drive more revenue

Marketers are all about measurable results, and measuring money is always better. Most of the top 5 results marketers want to realize from investing in AI in 2025 can be tied to revenue. And for good reason—94% reported AI positively impacted revenue growth last year.

The most important reasons to increase AI investment in the coming year are:

-  Increase productivity
-  Analyze data
-  Automate processes
-  Revenue acceleration
-  Improve customer experiences

What impact have AI tools had on your ability to grow revenue in the last year?








Data Security and Lack of Strategy for AI Initiatives are Big Adoption Blockers

What's stopping marketing leaders from adopting AI?

The biggie is still data security concerns. Companies don't want to train someone else's AI model on their proprietary data, and the black-box nature of many AI tools does not inspire confidence. Lack of knowledge of AI remains the #2 reason—surprising given that 92% of marketers still report being AI experts! Again, training needs to be an essential part of your AI strategy.

This year, lack of clear ROI dropped out of the top 5 blockers down to #8, with only 9% reporting it as a blocker. This tracks given the positive returns markers have seen from AI in the last year.

The most important reasons to increase AI investment in the coming year are:

-  Data security concerns
-  Lack of knowledge of AI solutions
-  Lack of AI strategy
-  Lack of training resources
-  Implementation costs

Methodology and Demographics

Survey methodology

An online survey was conducted to a panel of potential respondents between October 4, 2024 and October 15, 2024.

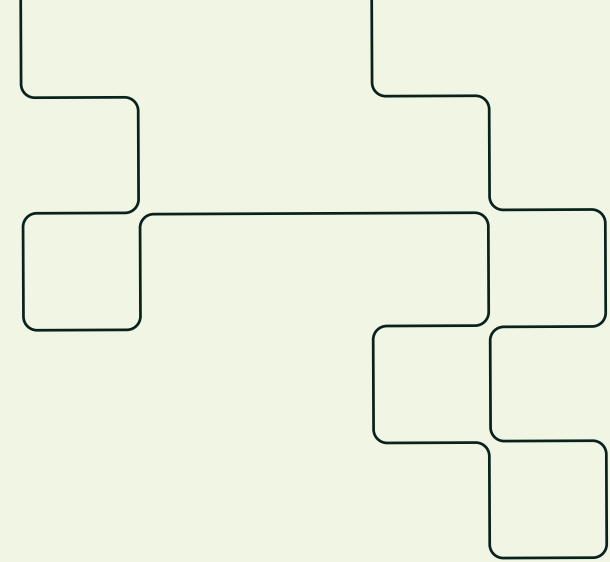
600 US and UK panel respondents completed the survey, excluding terminates and abandonments. These were evenly split between respondents from the US and UK.

There were seven screeners for the survey to determine eligibility.

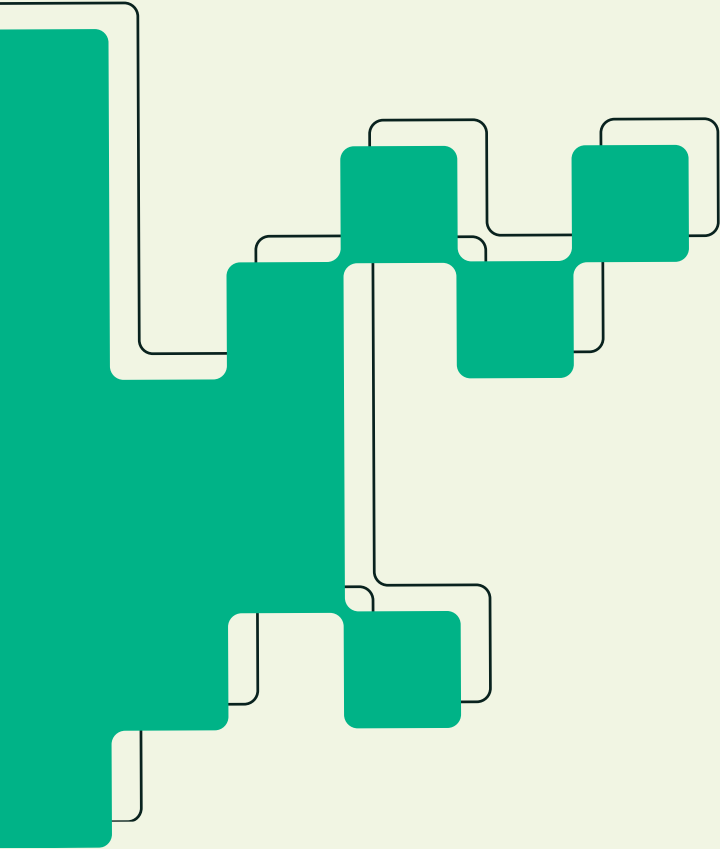
All respondents were:

- 18 years of age or older
- Full-time employees
- Work at a company with 100 or more employees
- In the marketing department
- Serve B2C or both B2C and B2B markets
- Manager and above
- Decision maker, influencer, champion, or end user related to software/technology vendor selection

Sago, a research panel company, provided the sample.



Demographics



Age

- 13%** Gen Z
- 52%** Millennials
- 27%** Gen X
- 8%** Boomers

Company Size

- 35%** 100 - 499
- 28%** 500 - 999
- 31%** 1,000 - 4,999
- 6%** 5,000 or more

Role in Vendor Selection

- 79%** Decision maker
- 16%** Influencer
- 4%** Champion
- 1%** End-user

Title

- 57%** Manager
- 10%** Director
- 7%** Vice President
- 2%** President
- 25%** C-level

Gender

- 69%** Male
- 31%** Female
- 0%** Non-binary
- 0%** Agender
- 0%** Gender-fluid
- 0%** Other (please specify)

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