Brightfield

The Rise Of AI Skills

How AI Is Transforming Jobs From The Inside Out

Market Insights

Fall 2026

Executive Summary

The AI workforce transformation is happening at multiple levels, and the biggest changes may not show up in jobs reports or hiring headlines.

Most workforce analyses focus on job titles: the rise of AI engineers, ML specialists, prompt engineers. That lens is important but misses a larger story happening within jobs. At the skill level, Brightfield's data reveals that AI capabilities are becoming a baseline expectation in roles far beyond information technology.

In 2026, the job category with the highest concentration of AI skill references per job description is not IT, but Marketing and Creative. Administrative roles saw AI references surge 330% in a single year. Fewer than 1.5% of all job descriptions contained AI language as recently as 2025; in the first half of 2026, that share has more than doubled.

For procurement and workforce leaders, the question isn't just how to source a limited pool of AI specialists. It's whether your job architectures, supplier relationships, and workforce strategies reflect a world where AI fluency is expected across nearly every function.

01 The Emergence of AI-Centered Roles

02 AI Skills Rapid Growth in Non-Technical Roles

03 Categories, Roles, and Markets at the Forefront

04 How Leaders can Respond and Prepare

01 The Emergence Of AI-Centered Roles

AI-specific workforce demand has grown substantially over the past five years. Organizations across industries are increasingly sourcing AI engineers, machine learning specialists, AI product managers, and other emerging AI-focused roles. While AI jobs remain a relatively small share of overall workforce demand, their growth has accelerated sharply since 2024.

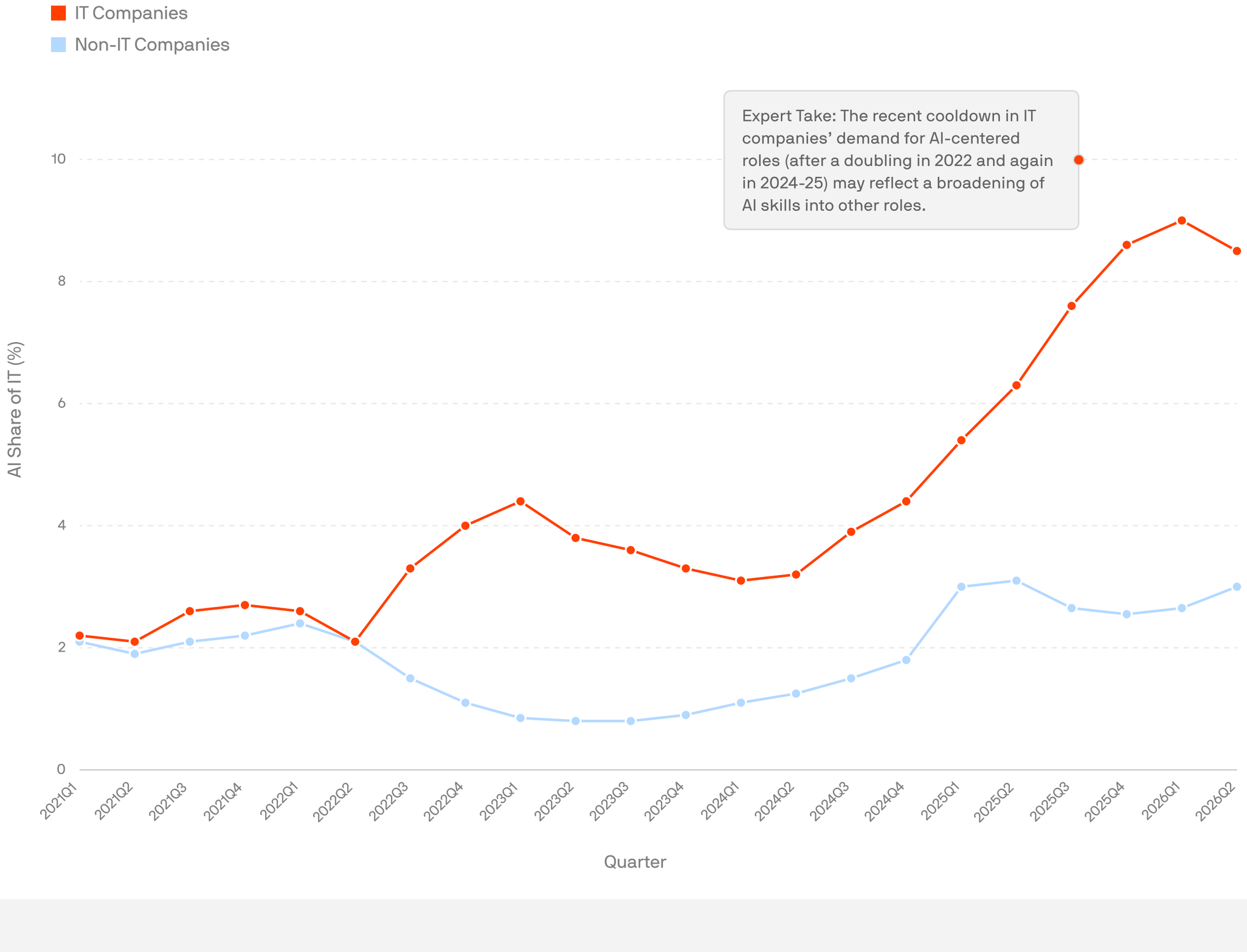
Top AI-Focused Roles

AI Engineer
Machine Learning (ML) Engineer
ML/AI Architect
Prompt Engineer

Key Findings

- AI role prevalence increased more than 7x from 2021 to 2026.

AI Share of IT Over Time: IT Industry vs Non-IT Industry



02

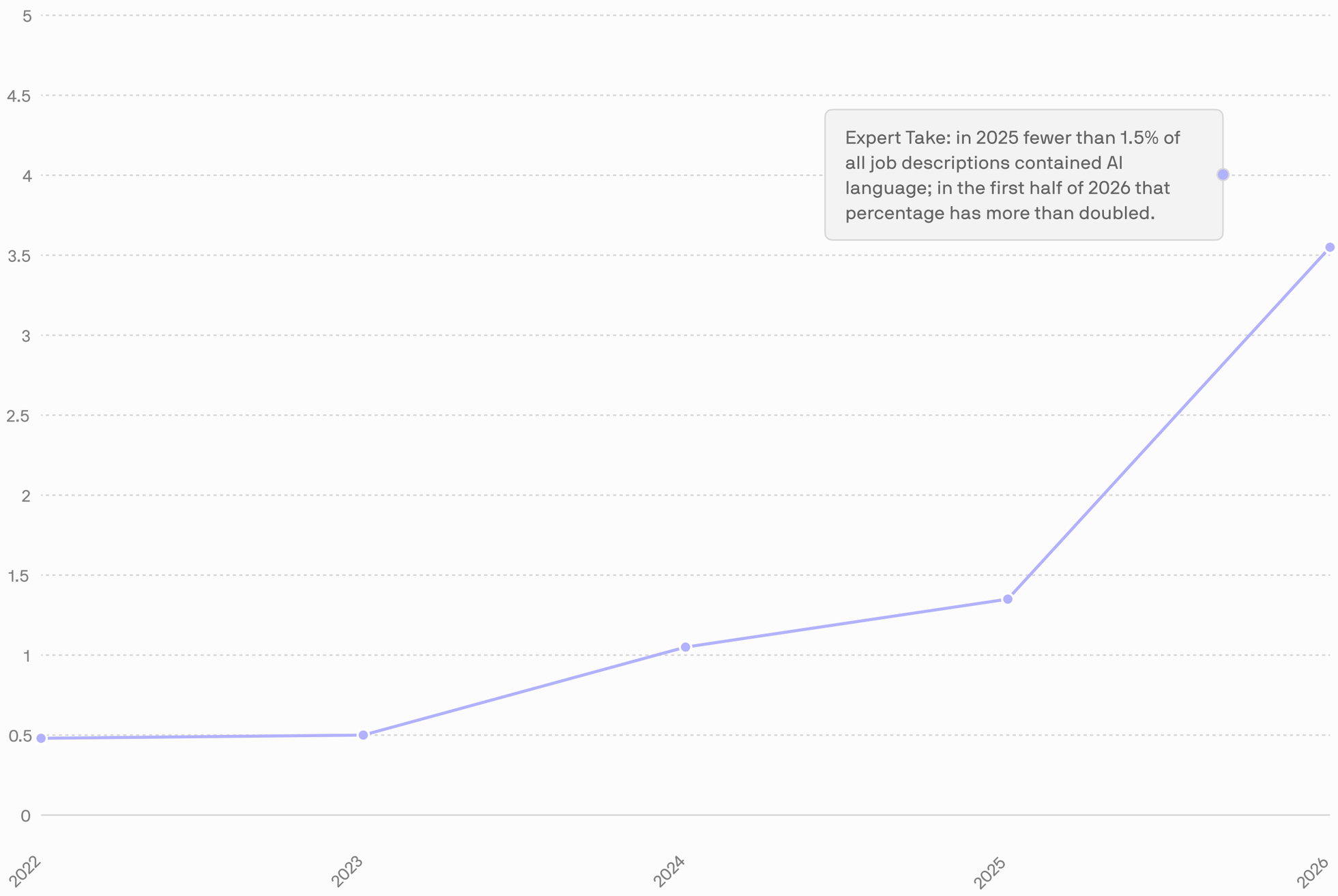
AI Skills Rapid Growth In Non-Technical Roles

Job titles tell part of the story, but the skills listed within a job description give a more thorough and reliable overview of the role.

Indeed, the interior view of job descriptions shows a deeper and broader transformation. AI terms and skills are appearing in job descriptions across many categories and growing rapidly.

Key Findings

- AI language prevalence increased from 0.5% to 3.6% of assignments.
- AI-related language in job descriptions increased 7.6x between 2022 and 2026.
- AI skills are spreading into traditional jobs far faster than AI-specific jobs are being created.

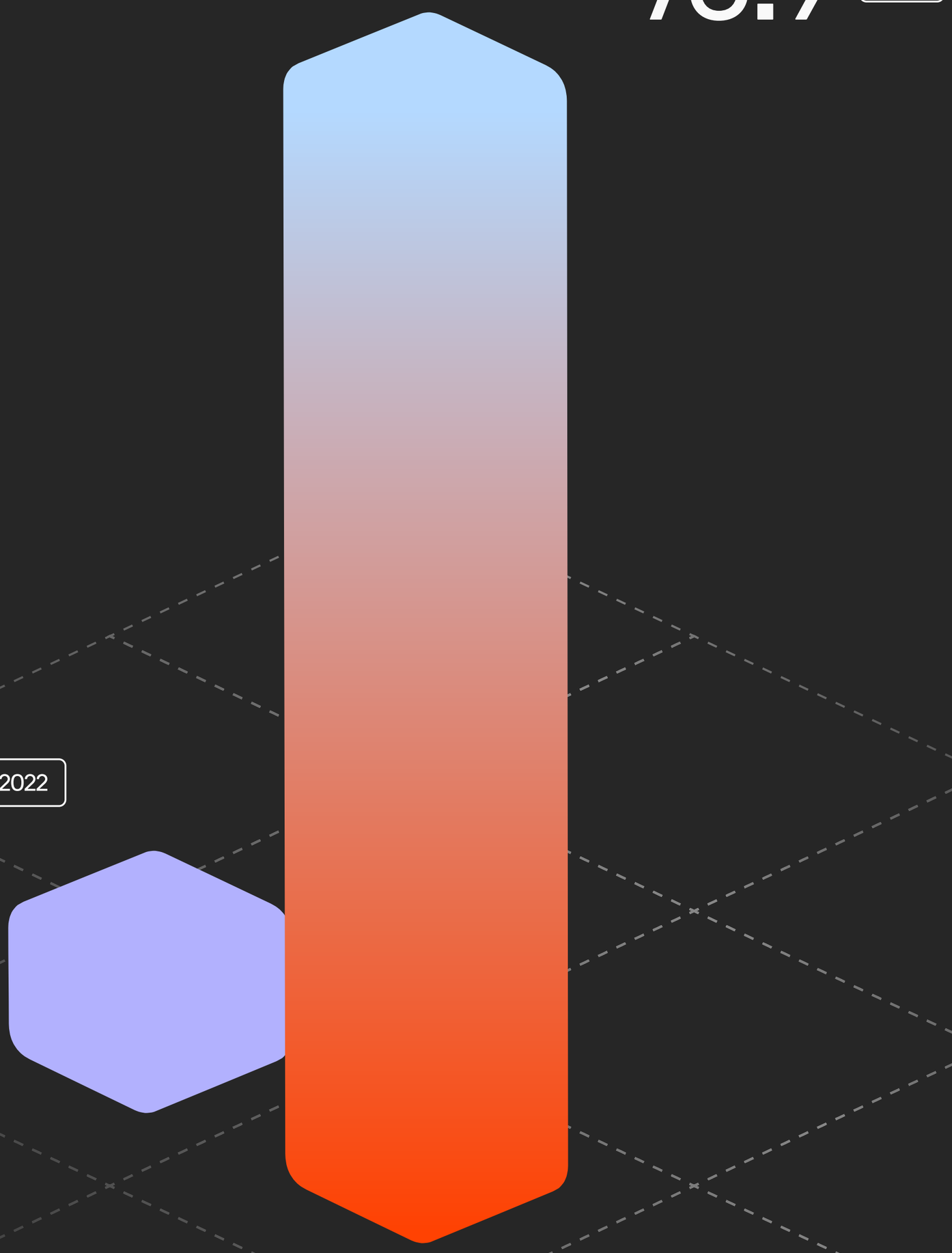


02 AI Is Not Just Spreading — It Is Deepening

Not only are more job descriptions mentioning AI, but the depth of AI-related language is increasing.

AI Keyword Density Increased From 9.1 References Per 1,000 Assignments In 2022 To 76.9 References Per 1,000 Assignments In 2026.

The increase suggests that AI is becoming a more central component of the jobs where it appears.



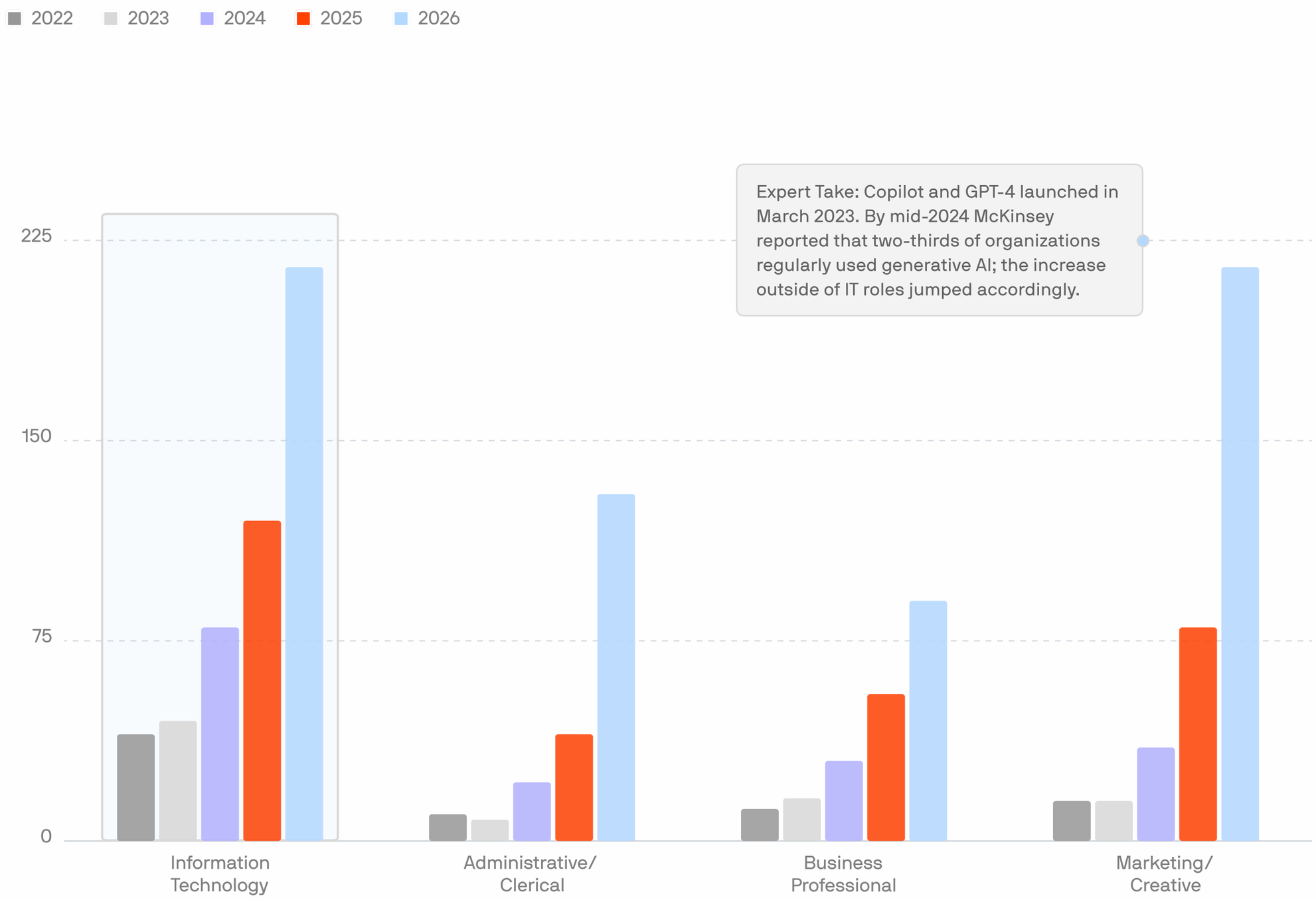
02 Non-Tech Roles Requiring AI Skills

AI skills are appearing in a wide variety of non-technical roles. In fact, the job category with the most AI references per job description in 2026 was not IT or engineering, but Marketing/Creative.

Key Findings

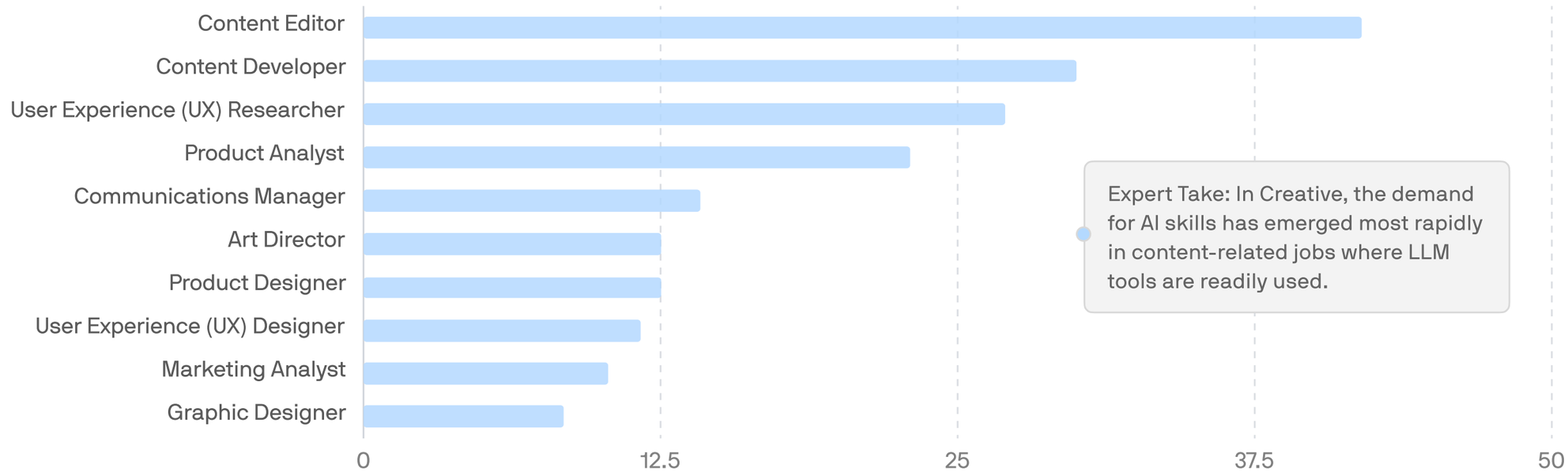
- Marketing/Creative now has a higher concentration of AI references than IT roles: over 210 per 1,000 job descriptions.
- Administrative/Clerical shows the most acceleration with AI references increasing over 330% from 2025 to 2026.
- Among these leading categories, IT has had the slowest relative growth since 2024.

AI References per 1000 Job Descriptions, by Category and Year

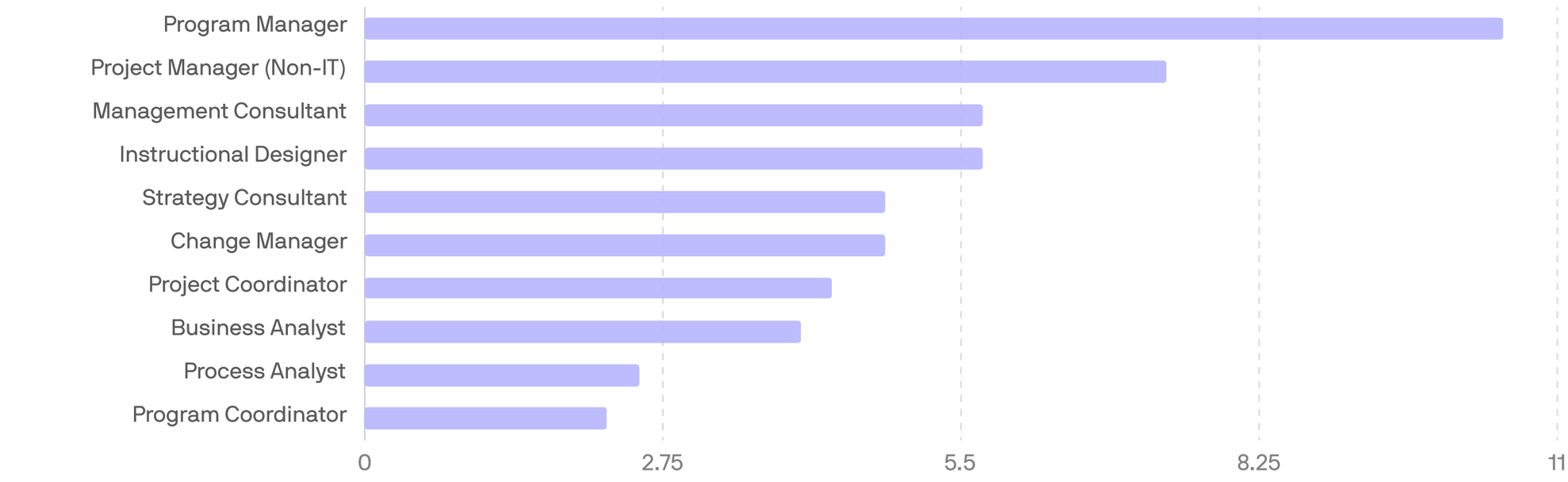


03 Categories, Roles, And Markets At The Forefront

Top Marketing/Creative Roles Requiring AI Skills, by %



Top Business Professional Roles Requiring AI Skills, by %



Most Widely Used AI Skill Categories

Categories	Activities
Core ML / Modeling	Designs and trains machine learning models and algorithms.
GenAI / LLM	Builds or integrates applications using large language models; responsible for how the system uses and controls model outputs.
Computer Vision	Develops or applies models for image or video understanding (e.g., detection, classification, processing).
AI Engineering	Builds and maintains systems that deploy, scale, and integrate AI models into production environments.
AI Tools Applied	Uses AI tools to assist with tasks; no responsibility for system design or behavior.
AI Strategy / Awareness	Understands or evaluates AI concepts, trends, or business applications without hands-on development.

03 Geography And Entry-Level Jobs

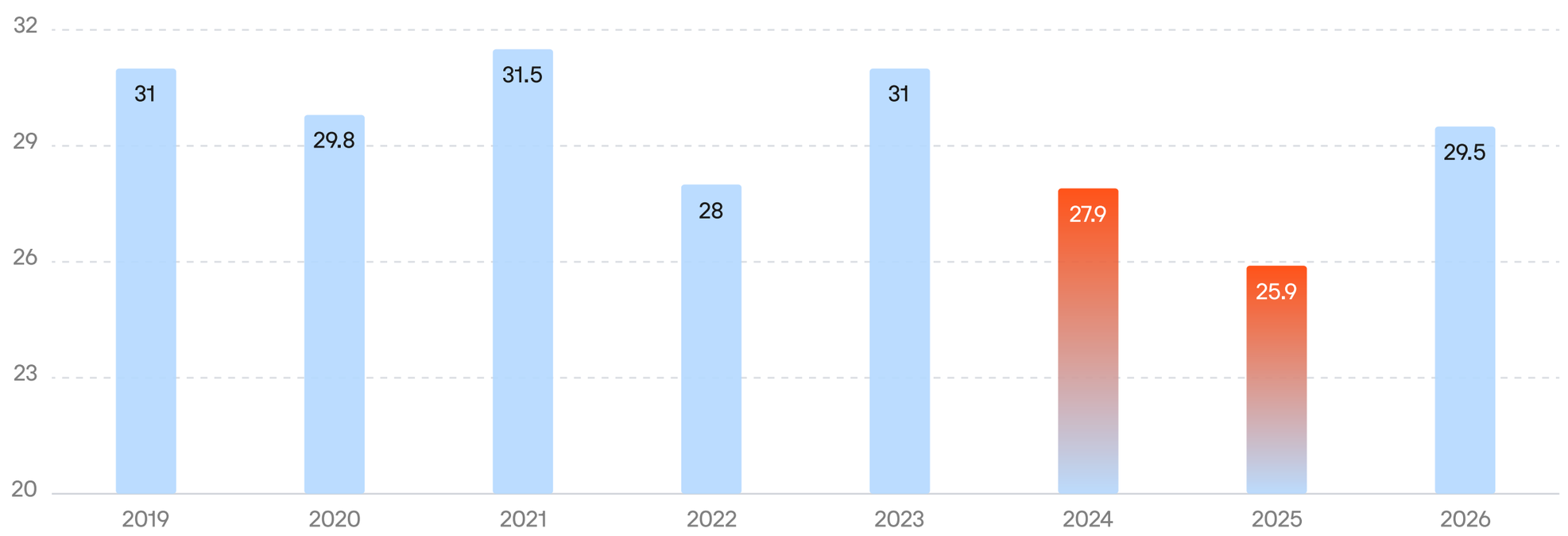
Entry-Level Jobs Drop, Then Recover

During 2024 and 2025, data about role seniority and leveling supported the theory that AI was reducing the demand for entry-level jobs. In 2026, however, the percentage of entry-level roles returned to a pre-AI level.

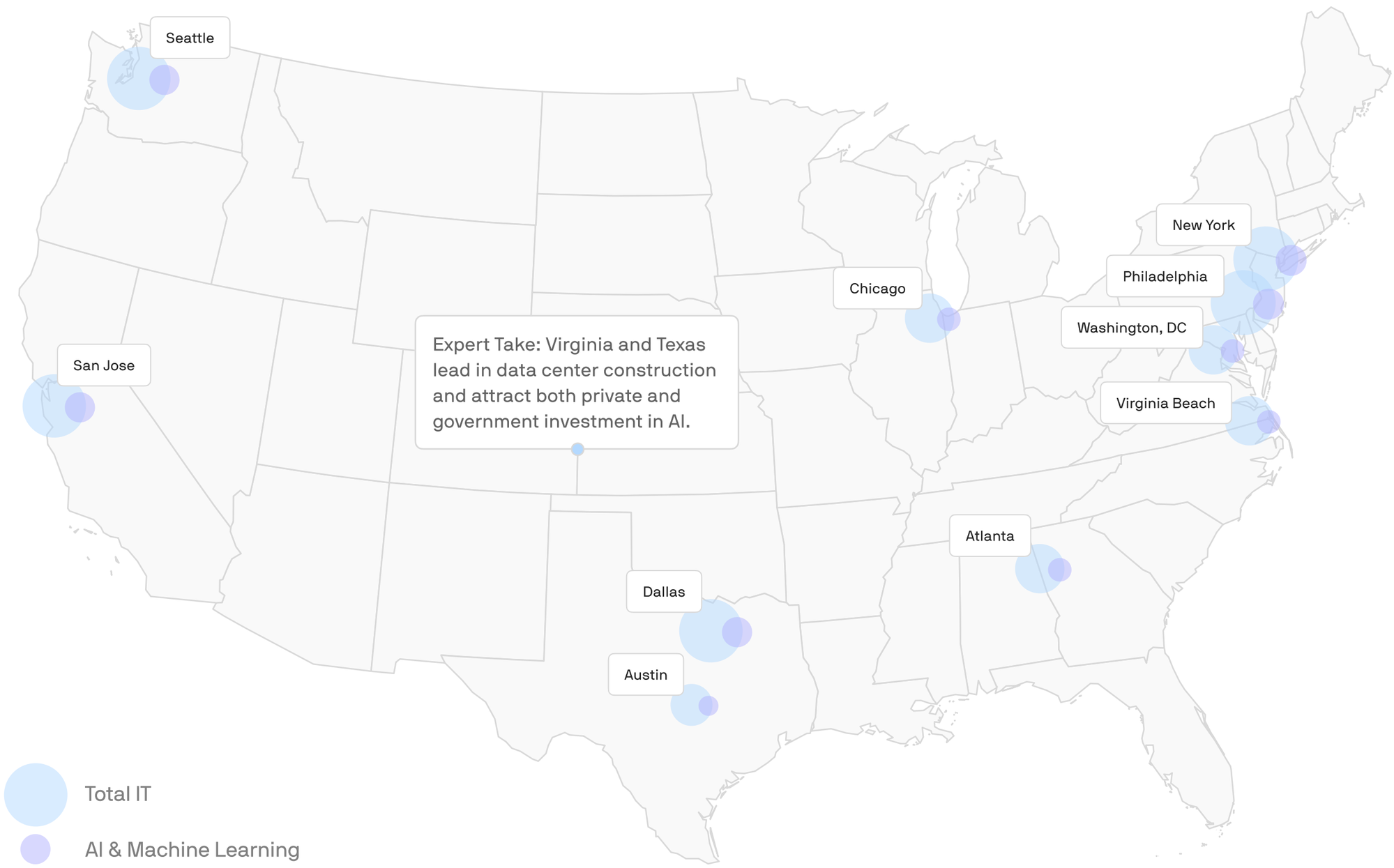
AI-Focused Roles Emerge Near Other IT Roles

The geographic location of AI roles aligns with technology hubs in the US, with more jobs appearing in Texas than California, and the largest concentration in the mid-Atlantic corridor.

Entry-Level Roles as Percentage of all Roles



Total IT vs AI Demand by Metro Area (2025)
Relative Scale (Largest Bubble = 100)



04 Suggested Actions For Workforce Leaders

Brightfield's market data shows that AI's greatest impact will be in transforming job descriptions and required skills on a broad scale across many job categories. To navigate this change, leaders can help their teams focus on acquiring and building the most relevant skills with these action steps.

We're here to help on the journey. Email info@Brightfield.com.

Audit job architectures at the skill level, not the title level.

The gap between your posted job descriptions and current market expectations is widening fast. If your standard Marketing Manager or Content Editor JD doesn't reflect AI tool proficiency, you're already behind over 40% of comparable postings.

Benchmark your highest-volume non-technical categories first.

Administrative, marketing, and business professional roles are seeing the fastest AI skill adoption — and they represent a far larger share of most extended workforces than IT does. Start there, not with your AI specialist pipeline.

Revisit supplier qualifications in the categories moving fastest.

If preferred suppliers are sourcing from the same talent pools they were in 2024, their candidates may not reflect 2026 skill expectations. The acceleration in Marketing and Admin AI references means the gap is recent and may not yet be priced in.

Don't treat AI fluency as a specialist credential.

The data suggests AI is becoming a baseline expectation across functions. The strategic challenge isn't sourcing more AI engineers — it's deciding what baseline AI fluency looks like for your broader workforce and building that into how you source and evaluate talent.

Conclusion

The workforce story of AI is often told through the rise of AI engineers, prompt engineers, and machine learning specialists. Brightfield's data suggests a broader and potentially more significant transformation. AI skills are rapidly spreading throughout the workforce, changing expectations within existing jobs and reshaping how work gets done.

Organizations that recognize this shift early will be better positioned to recruit, develop, and manage the workforce of the future.

About This Research

This report draws on anonymized workforce demand data from Brightfield's TDX platform, reflecting enterprise workforce activity across industries, functions, and geographies. The analysis provides a data-driven perspective on how AI is reshaping workforce demand and skill requirements.

About Brightfield

Brightfield delivers AI-powered workforce and services spend intelligence, combining proprietary market data, advanced analytics, and deep domain expertise to help enterprises make more informed, defensible decisions. Through its TDX platform, Brightfield brings greater transparency to workforce pricing, skills, and spend.

Learn more at brightfield.com.