MARKETING'S POWER PARTNERS:

# AI AND THE HUMAN ESSENCE

*How to Enable Success in The Age of AI*



CMO COUNCIL™ 25 YEARS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What transforms AI in marketing from promising technology into a true growth engine that reshapes performance and customer connection? Don't ask ChatGPT. The real answer comes from living, breathing marketers who partner with AI every day. Our study shows how human marketers play a critical role in achieving ROI and making emotional connections with customers.

Marketing performance doesn't just improve; it transforms.

## AI Accelerates, Marketers Connect

The most successful marketing organizations, which we're calling "Power Partners," understand the irreplaceable role of human marketers in an AI-powered environment. They marry the horsepower of AI with the strengths of human marketers, combining automation, insights and optimization with emotional context, cultural awareness and empathy.

"AI can tell us what's typical. Human creativity tells us what's possible," says Stephen Shultz, vice president of brand marketing at First American. "The difference between those two defines great marketing."

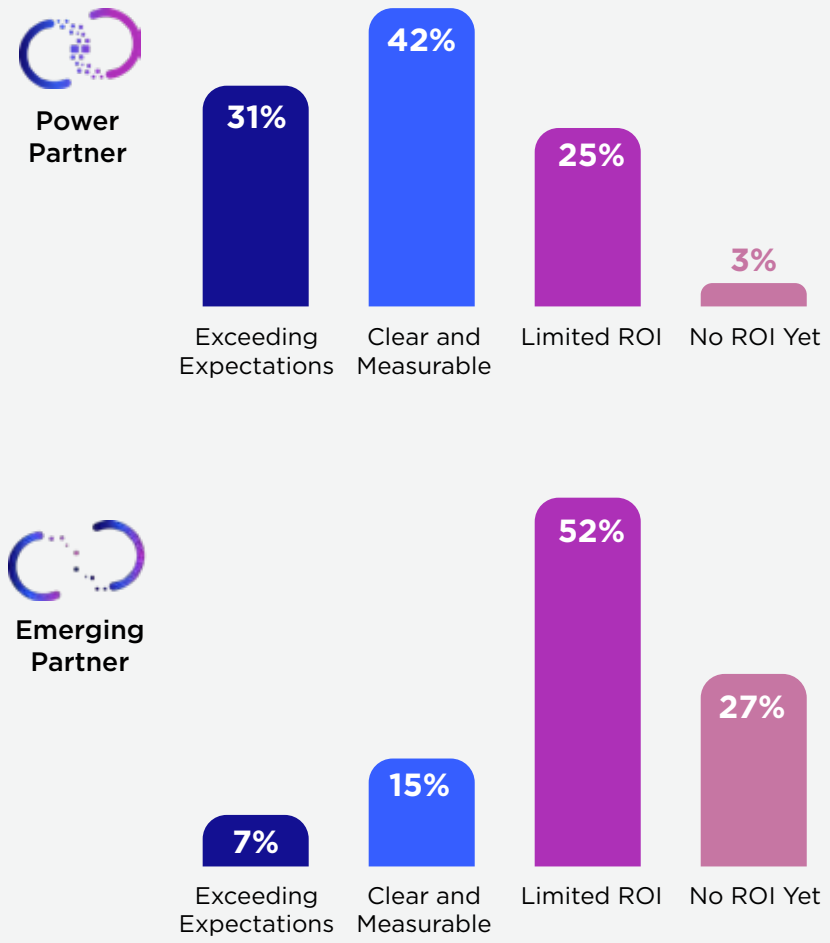
On the opposite side of the spectrum, "Emerging Partners" don't lean into this collaboration. They rarely, if ever, redesign marketing workflows so that AI and human marketers work seamlessly. As a result, their marketing performance lags behind their more progressive peers.

**Power Partners:** Understand the irreplaceable role of human marketers in an AI-powered environment. They marry the horsepower of AI with the strengths of human marketers, combining automation, insights and optimization with emotional context, cultural awareness and empathy.

**Emerging Partners:** Tend to treat AI like a productivity layer. They plug AI into content creation, test a few copilots, automate a handful of tasks and call it transformation. That is not transformation, that is digital duct tape.

**AI Delivers Stronger ROI When Humans and Technology Work in Tandem: "Power Partners" Are Far More Likely to Exceed Expectations and Generate Measurable Returns**

**Q: IS AI IN MARKETING ACHIEVING ROI?**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 7 in 10 "Power Partners" Excel at Emotional Customer Connections

Our study shows the performance gap is widening. With AI in marketing, 73% of Power Partners say they either exceed ROI expectations or have clear, measurable returns. Only 22% of Emerging Partners say the same. The divide is just as stark when it comes to customer connection. Nearly 70% of Power Partners report making good and frequent emotional connections with customers, compared to 40% of Emerging Partners.

These numbers paint an unmistakable picture: real marketing advantage lies in the collaboration.

Power Partners unlock outcomes that many brands still chase: richer personalization, higher customer lifetime value, more effective campaigns, distinct creative expression, and greater speed and adaptability in the face of shifting buyer behavior. This isn't theoretical — it's happening right now.




**Emotional Connection Remains a Human Advantage: "Power Partners" Are Far More Effective at Building Consistent, Meaningful Customer Relationships**

**Q: ARE YOU MAKING AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITH CUSTOMERS?**







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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Challenges: Roles, Skills & Data

Of course, becoming a Power Partner is not easy. Our research shows several obstacles, such as building AI skills among human marketers and preparing data for AI analysis. Leaders must also clearly define which tasks AI should own and which demand a human marketer's judgment and nuance.

The toughest challenge of all may be overcoming human marketers' resistance to change. AI is disrupting marketing roles and workflows faster than any technology before it, and with that disruption comes fear. Anxiety about job loss is widespread, from senior strategists to entry-level practitioners. While marketers have adapted to earlier waves of automation and data-driven decisioning, AI's potential feels bigger. That magnitude can be intimidating

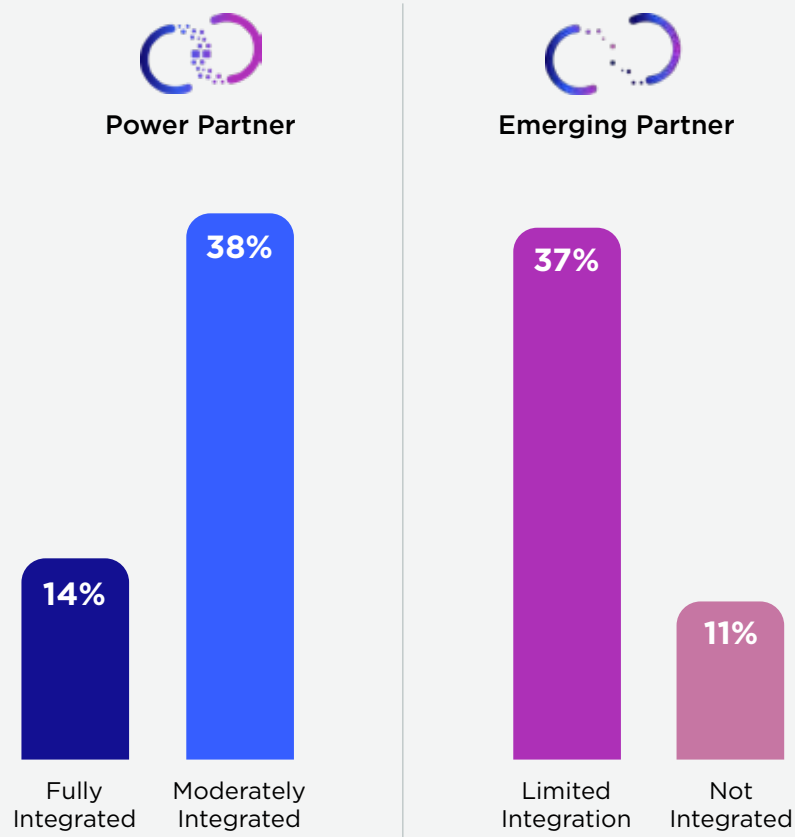
## Turning Risk Into Advantage

But it is also full of possibility. Our study looks at the opportunity for marketing organizations to redesign workflows in which AI amplifies human marketers' creativity, judgment and emotional intelligence.

Together, AI and human marketers can forge deeper customer relationships, achieve stronger brand differentiation, and realize measurable performance gains. Those who move decisively will build lasting advantage, while those who hesitate risk falling further behind as the gap continues to widen.

**The Biggest Performance Divide Comes Down to Integration: Power Partners More Effectively Combine AI with Human Expertise, While Emerging Partners Struggle to Connect the Two**

**Q: ARE YOU INTEGRATING THE POWER OF AI WITH THE STRENGTHS OF A HUMAN MARKETER?**

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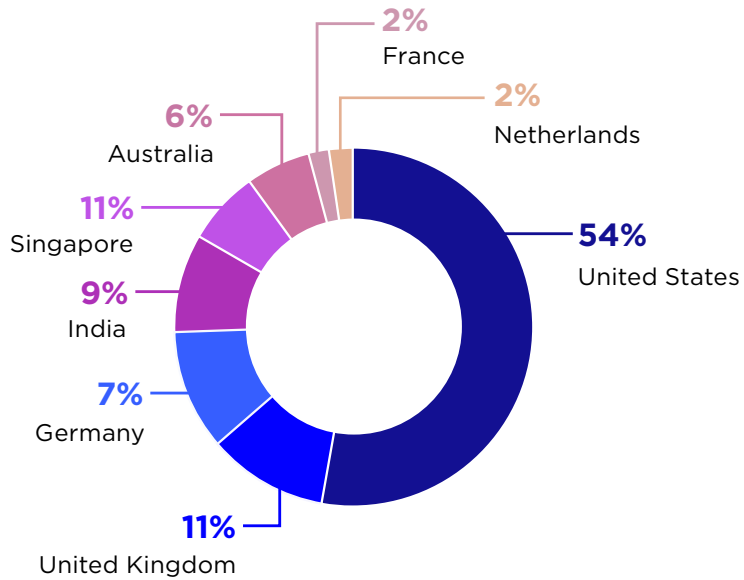
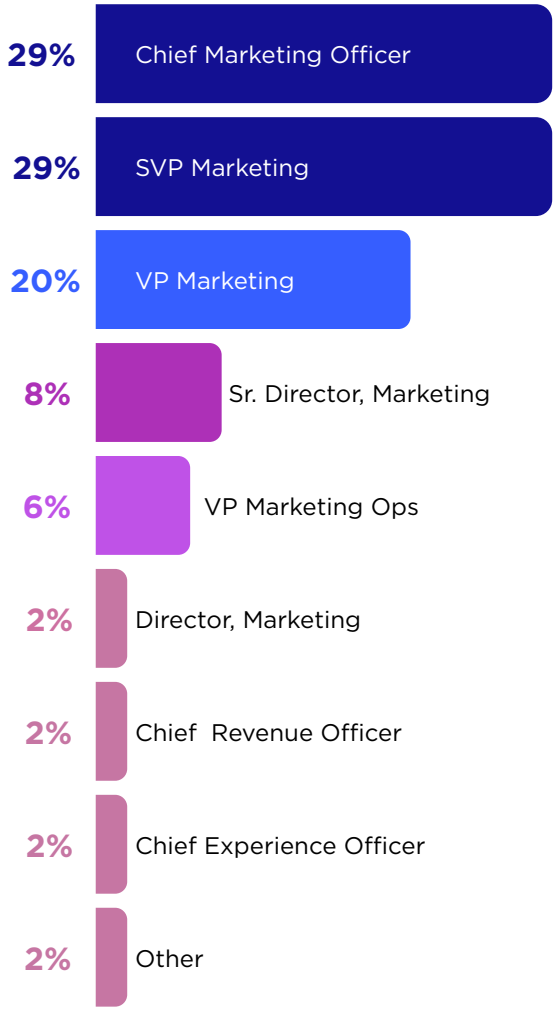
# METHODOLOGY & RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Our survey of **371 marketing leaders** reflects an enterprise-scale audience with broad global and industry representation. Nearly 9 in 10 respondents work at organizations generating more than $500 million in annual revenue, with a majority operating at the $1 billion-plus level. Respondents hold highly influential roles led by CMOs and senior marketing executives responsible for enterprise strategy, revenue growth and transformation initiatives.

## RESPONDENT REGION




## RESPONDENT TITLE

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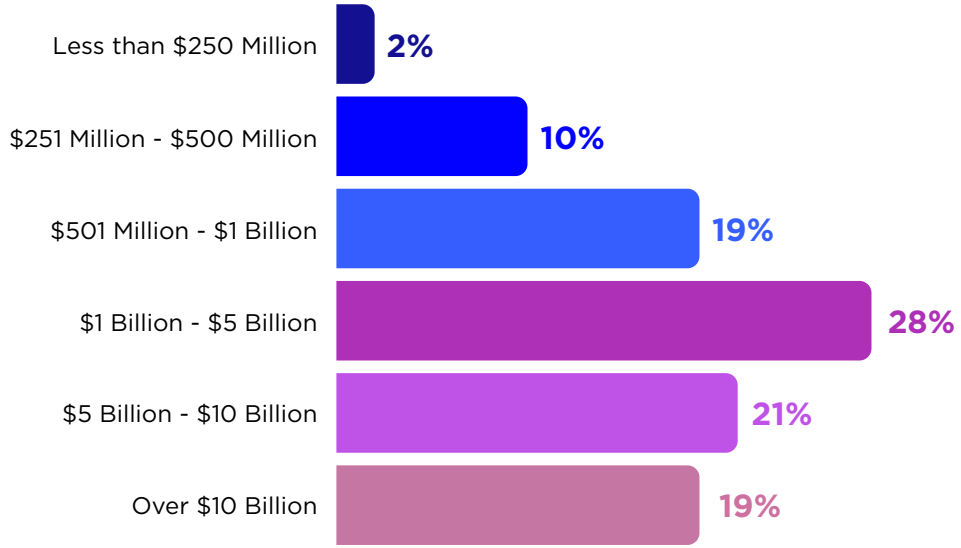
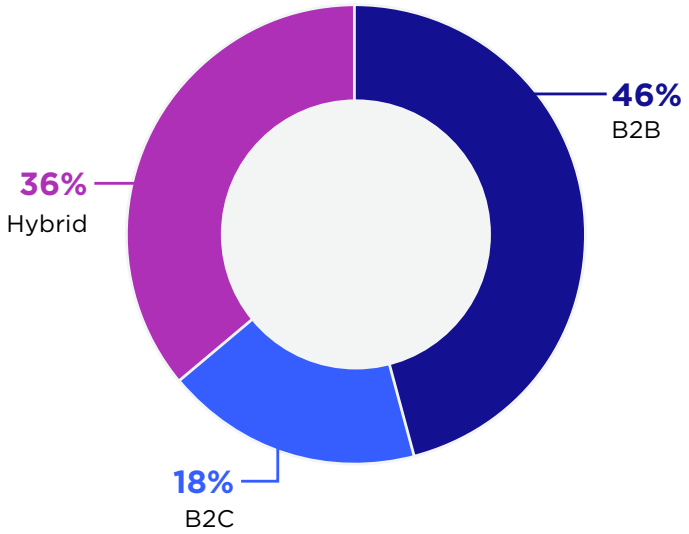
# METHODOLOGY & RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

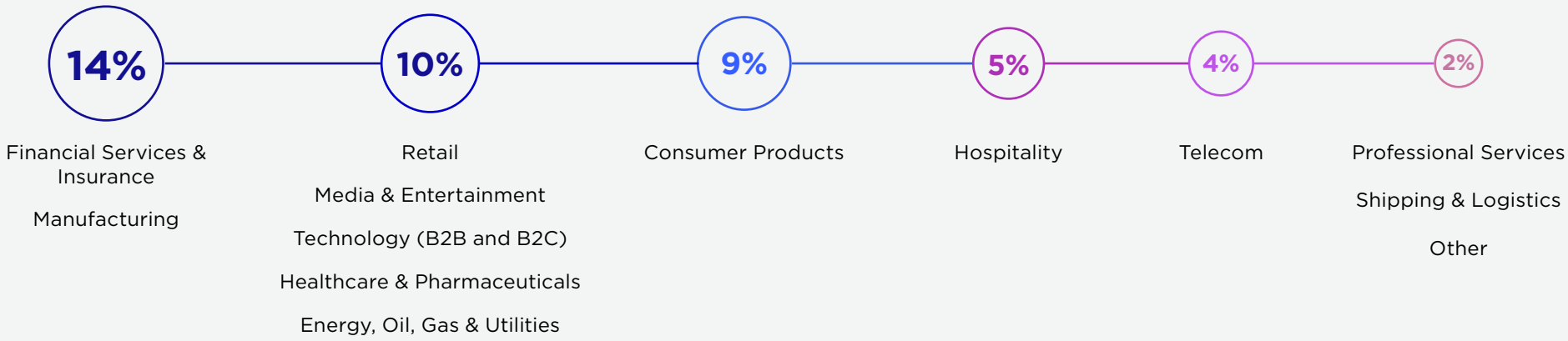
## RESPONDENT 2025 REVENUE (USD)




## RESPONDENT OPERATING BUSINESS MODEL




## RESPONDENT INDUSTRY

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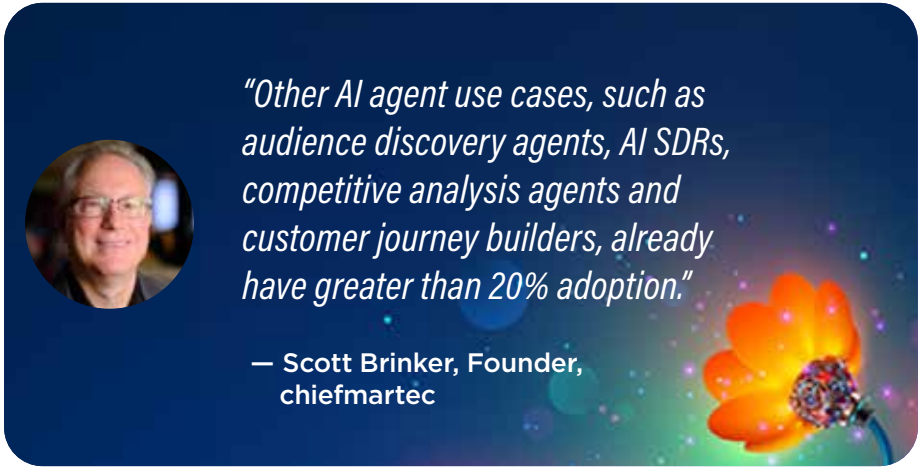
# POWER OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Content creation remains the largest AI use case, but marketing leaders are expanding beyond and deploying AI in a range of marketing functions. Our study finds that AI has made inroads into performance marketing, testing and experimentation, segmentation and targeting, social listening and sentiment analysis, campaign planning and media buying.

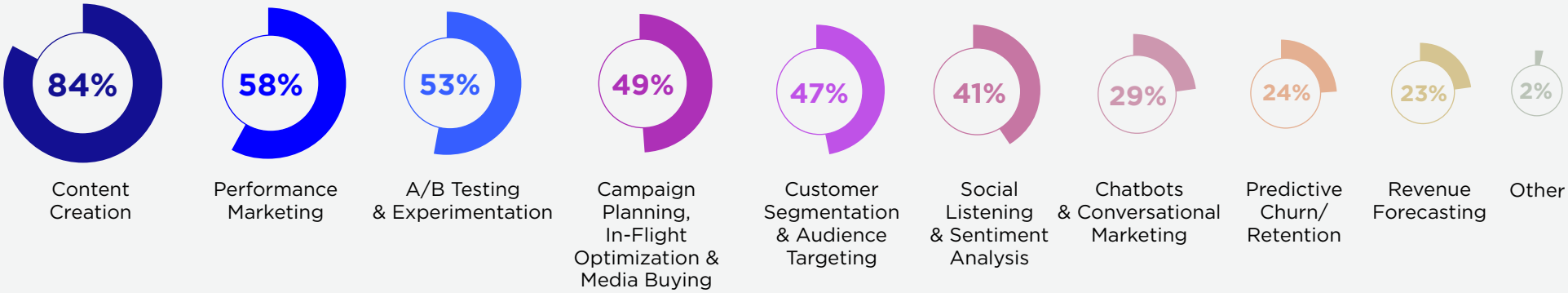
"Other AI agent use cases, such as audience discovery agents, AI SDRs, competitive analysis agents and customer journey builders, already have greater than 20% adoption," says Scott Brinker, co-author of the Martech for 2026 report. "Not surprising, right? The tide is rising fast."

As AI takes on a greater role, it's more important than ever to identify human marketers' strengths and craft workflows that are optimized for collaboration.




**AI's Primary Role Today: Content Creation Leads, While More Advanced Marketing Applications Continue to Emerge**

**Q: WHERE ARE YOU APPLYING AI IN MARKETING?**

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# POWER OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Our study finds that human creativity, intuition and essence should be leveraged in these top five areas:

**Insights & Campaign:** While AI lays the groundwork for customer journey mapping, campaign development and personalization, human marketers bring cultural nuances and empathy into the equation. This can lead to better and more frequent emotional connections with customers.

**Strategic Foundation:** Human marketers can factor in the human experience when analyzing customer insights, positioning the brand, understanding market context, and developing a product strategy. These areas require interpretation, judgment, creativity and cross-functional intuition.

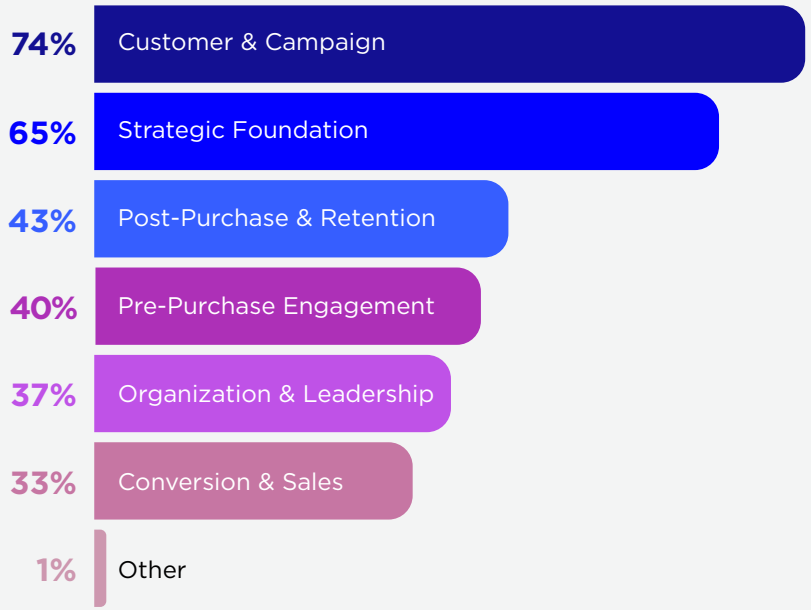
**Post-Purchase & Retention:** Human marketers matter profoundly in customer service, loyalty and crisis communication because they deliver what automation still cannot: judgment and contextual nuance. In moments of complaints and churn risk, human empathy is non-negotiable.

**Pre-Purchase Engagement:** AI can identify in-market signals, model intent and optimize media and messaging at scale. But human marketers shape relevance by interpreting buyer psychology, cultural context, trust barriers and emotional motivators.

**Organization & Leadership:** AI disrupts existing marketing processes and workflows, which means success or failure largely depends on human marketers accepting changes and adopting new tools. Marketing leaders have to lean into the human experience for change management, resource prioritization and vendor management.

**Human Strength Still Defines the Customer Experience: Creativity and Intuition Matter Most Where Brands Win or Lose**

**Q: WHERE ARE HUMAN CREATIVITY, INTUITION AND THE HUMAN ESSENCE IRREPLACEABLE?**




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

While AI tests market assumptions and refines ideas, a human marketer's intuition turns insights into something original and meaningful.

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# HUMAN IN THE LOOP

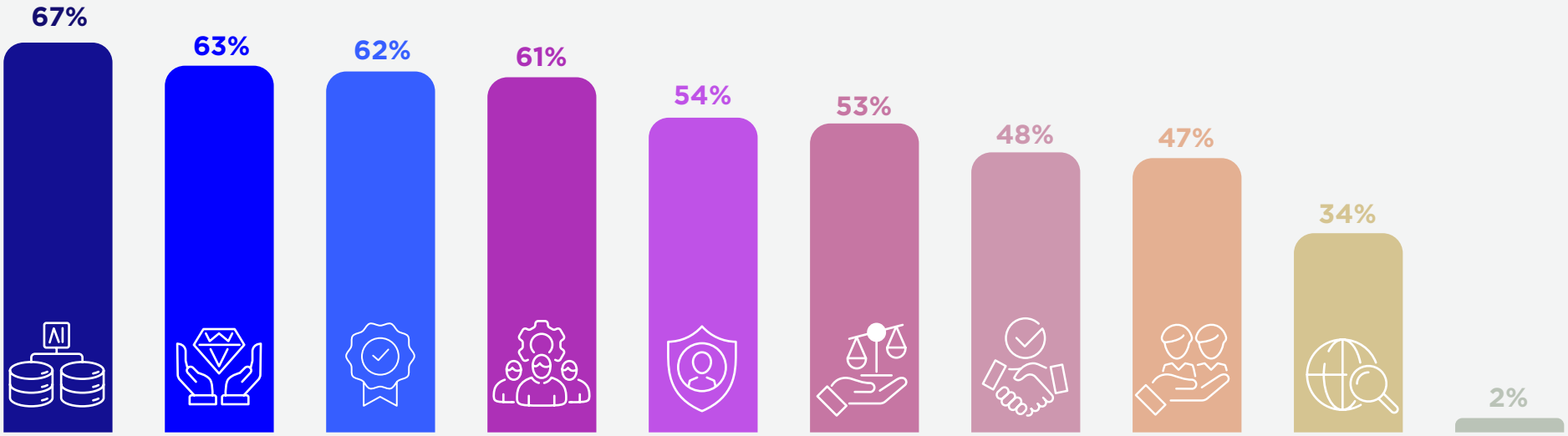
As AI becomes deeply embedded in marketing, the role of human marketers in maintaining consumer trust is more critical than ever. AI can automate decisions, personalize messages, and optimize interactions at scale, but it lacks an understanding of ethics, empathy and intent.

Human marketers decide how customer data is used, where personalization crosses the line from helpful to intrusive, and how transparent brands are about AI-driven interactions. Without a human marketer's oversight, even well-intentioned AI systems can erode confidence by appearing invasive, biased or tone-deaf.

"Marketers create value when they're focused on the questions AI can't answer: intent, relevance, and commercial impact," says Maria Samoilescu, marketing advisor and former director of brand content strategy at Prudential Financial. "On a product launch, that means identifying what will accelerate revenue. On a thought-leadership campaign, it means understanding what will drive brand value and influence decision makers."

**Trust in AI Doesn't Happen Automatically: Marketers Safeguard It Through Ethics, Privacy, Human Oversight and Brand Stewardship**

**Q: HOW DO MARKETERS ENSURE CONSUMER TRUST AND CONTEXTUAL AWARENESS IN AI?**

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# HUMAN IN THE LOOP

## Stewards of Good AI Governance

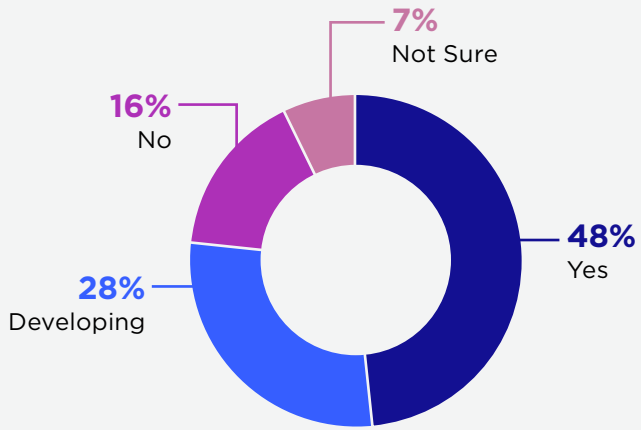
A majority of marketing leaders don't have formal governance around the ethical use of AI in marketing. Even those who do may still be falling short. According to SAS, only 8% are completely ready from an AI governance perspective.

The challenge is the depth and breadth of AI governance. It encompasses data privacy and security, ethical use of AI, transparency and explainability, bias detection and mitigation, regulatory compliance and risk management. Legal departments, compliance teams, and risk management frameworks all need to be satisfied before deploying AI at scale.




**AI Governance Remains a Work in Progress: Fewer Than Half of Marketing Teams Have Formal Ethical Guidelines in Place**

**Q: DO YOU HAVE FORMAL GUIDELINES/GOVERNANCE AROUND THE ETHICAL USE OF AI IN MARKETING?**




## Trust Depends on People

With AI governance, human marketers are a necessary counterpart. Our study finds that the top role for human marketers pertaining to consumer trust and contextual awareness in AI marketing is ensuring ethical use of data. While AI governance protects the company, human marketers in the loop protect the relationship.

Even strong AI governance frameworks often miss real-world nuance. Human marketers can sense shifts in customer sentiment, such as picking up subtle cues in customer conversations, before governance controls detect risk. They catch poor AI outputs with ethical intuition before reaching the customer or manage the narrative if AI failures become public.

**KEY TAKEAWAY**

While AI governance protects the company, human marketers protect the relationship.

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# REDESIGNING WORKFLOWS

Marketing leaders can't simply add AI to existing processes; they need to reconsider entire marketing processes and workflows that span everything from customer journeys to customer touchpoints. AI has the potential to inject a massive amount of speed and scale into workflows.

Our study shows just how important redesigned workflows are for AI and human marketer collaboration. Seventy percent of Power Partners are prepared to redesign workflows compared to only 7% of Emerging Partners. Even in content creation models, where AI has been adopted most widely, we find that 94% of Power Partners have some clear processes for AI and human marketer collaboration compared to only 42% of Emerging Partners.

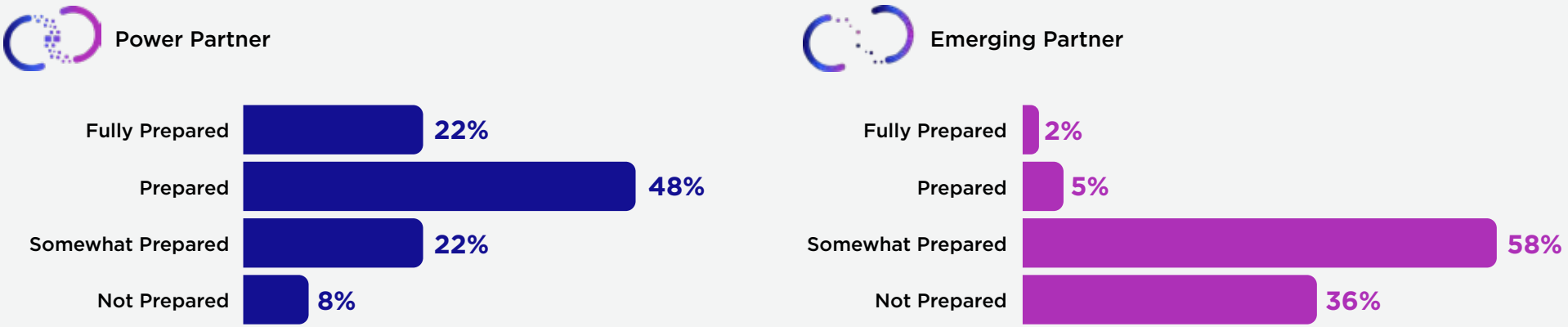
The most exciting trait of a redesigned workflow is the granularity, efficiency and speed of the AI feedback loop. For instance, AI generates insights to inform a campaign; human marketers reframe the insights; AI creates options based on the reframing; human marketers select from the options; AI personalizes and deploys the campaign and reports on performance; human marketers interpret the results; and the feedback loop restarts for optimization.

## "Sounds like an easy decision, but it's not"

Before rushing to redesign workflows, marketing leaders must account for its impact on human marketers. They need to factor in the skills required, behavioral change demanded, and the cognitive load introduced. An AI-enabled process that looks twice as valuable on paper can still be the wrong move if it overwhelms teams, erodes accountability, or collapses in real-world execution.

**Readiness Separates Leaders from Laggards: "Power Partners" Are Far More Prepared to Redesign Marketing Around Human–AI Collaboration Than Emerging Partners**

**Q: HOW PREPARED IS YOUR MARKETING ORGANIZATION TO REDESIGN WORKFLOWS FOR AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION?**

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# REDESIGNING WORKFLOWS

"Sounds like an easy decision, but it's not," says Laurent Hren, director of events at Orange Business. "Changing a process is complex and requires people to accept it or else you won't get the results you're after. There's also no baseline to compare because the new AI process you're evaluating didn't exist six months ago."

## AI Exposes Weak Workflows

Another critical step is identifying AI and human marketers' roles in a workflow. Generally speaking, human marketers should own areas involving judgment, nuance and emotional intelligence. AI should own tasks requiring volume, speed and pattern analysis.

Crucially, this is not simply automating existing workflows. Shoma Narayanan, managing director of group strategic marketing and communications at DBS Bank, emphasizes the need to rethink processes entirely, because automating a broken process only accelerates failure.

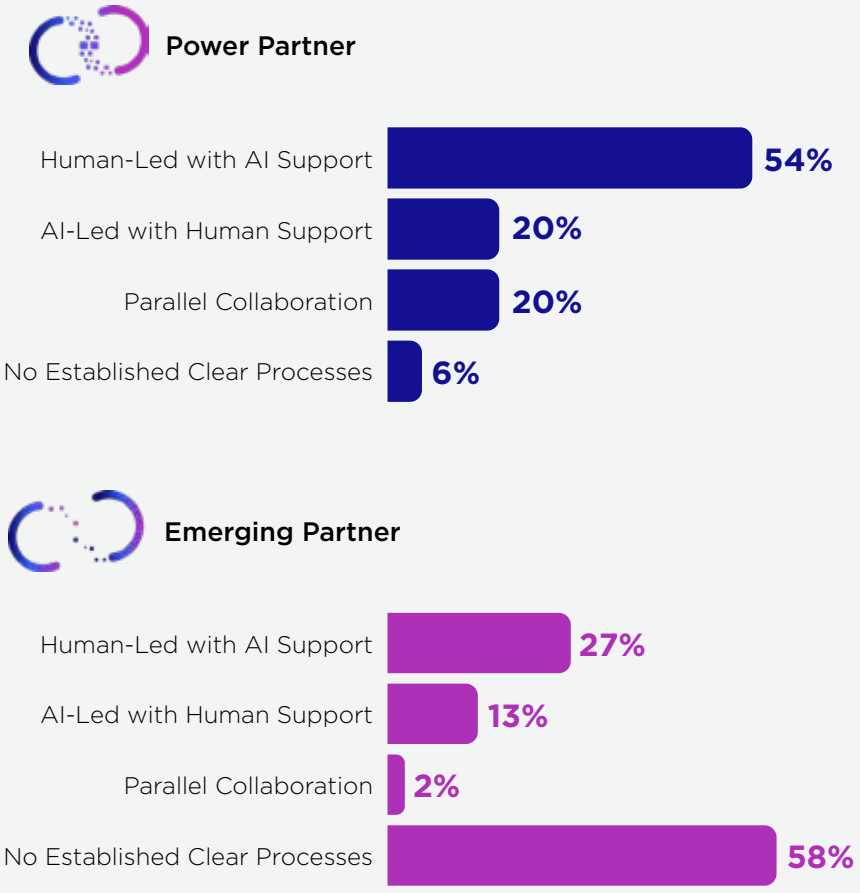
"It's better to future-cast and see what we need to do going forward rather than get an agent to do the human being's job because that is doomed for failure," she says.

## Greater Sophistication Into Marketing Operations

Ultimately, redesigning workflows for better collaboration between AI and human marketers is less about adding tools and more about rethinking how marketing work gets done. The most successful teams replace linear processes with adaptive feedback loops that let AI and human marketers amplify each other's strengths. But this shift requires careful change management.

**The Best Content Models Blend Human Direction with AI Support: "Power Partners" Have Defined Collaborative Processes, While Most Emerging Partners Lack a Clear Approach**

**Q: WHAT COLLABORATIVE CONTENT CREATION MODEL DO YOU USE?**

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# REDESIGNING WORKFLOWS

The ground is shifting beneath marketing, and the old operating assumptions no longer hold. Looking at today's landscape through yesterday's lens is a liability, not a strategy. AI is changing how decisions are made, how campaigns move, how risk scales. The more power AI introduces, the more a human marketer's oversight becomes non-negotiable.

## Orchestration Beats Automation

Historically, marketing operations were managed almost entirely by human teams. Tools and automation were added incrementally, often without rethinking the underlying workflows. Over time, what started as efficiency gains turned into sprawling, fragile systems. Workflows became opaque. What was meant to streamline marketing instead became a rat's nest.

"In the software world, we call it 'technical debt,' and there's a lot of technical debt in the old marketing workflows," Brinker says. "It's a really good time to have a reset around how you want to organize."

Human marketers who develop the skills to oversee and orchestrate AI-driven automations are able to introduce greater sophistication into marketing operations while maintaining clarity and usability at the management level. This approach enables a higher-level, more holistic view of marketing performance and operations.




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

AI delivers growth only when workflows are rebuilt around human marketers' judgment — not bolted onto broken processes.

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# PERSONALIZATION & LOYALTY

Personalization at scale is no longer a marketing ambition; it is the battleground on which growth is won or lost. Brands that fail to meet it shorten relationships. At the same time, customer lifetime value (CLV) has become the ultimate measure of marketing effectiveness, shaping decisions far beyond the marketing function.

Together, personalization and CLV represent the sweepstakes for AI in marketing. Everything else is table stakes.

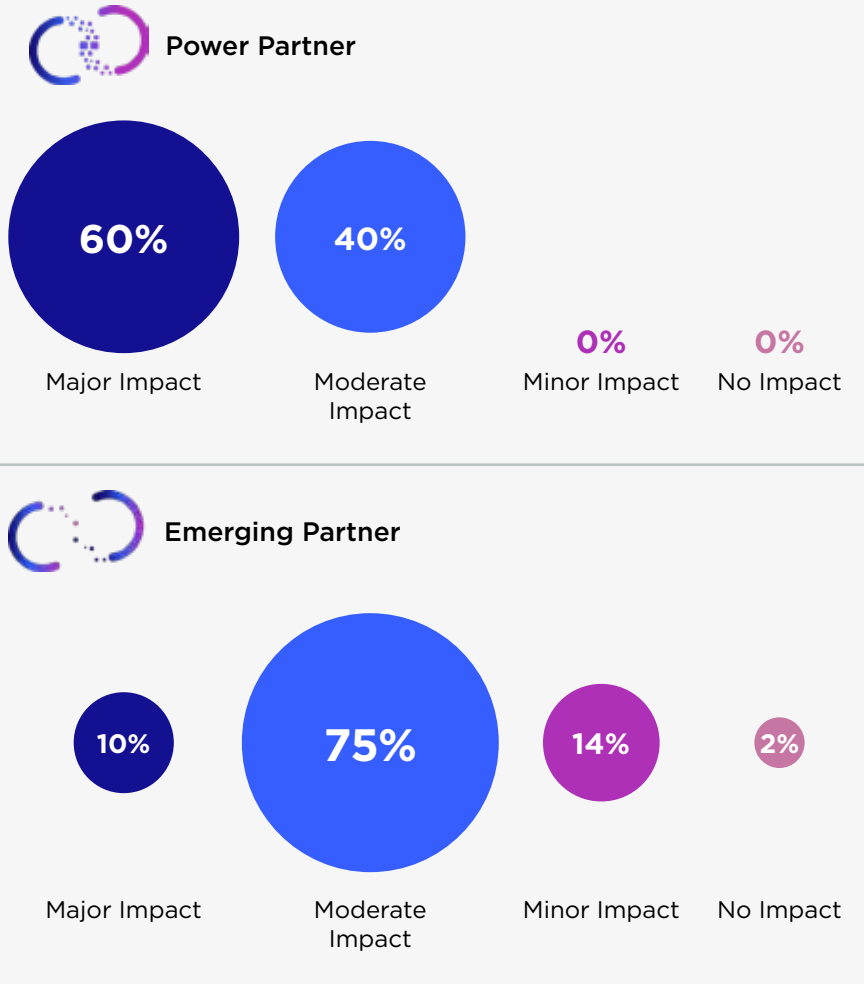
## Where Collaboration Pays Off

When we examine AI's influence on personalization and CLV specifically, the performance gap between Power Partners and Emerging Partners is impossible to ignore. In personalization, 60% of Power Partners report that collaboration has a major impact compared to only 10% of Emerging Partners. For CLV, the difference is also dramatic: 26% versus 7%.

These disparities foreshadow a future where marketing teams that embrace AI and human marketer collaboration build richer personalization and longer, more profitable customer relationships. Emerging Partners do not, and the cost is measured not in missed efficiencies but in lost lifetime value.

**AI-Human Collaboration Supercharges Personalization: "Power Partners" Are Six Times More Likely to See a Major Impact Than Emerging Partners**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON PERSONALIZATION?**

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# PERSONALIZATION & LOYALTY

## AI-Driven Personalization

AI's promise in personalization is rooted in its ability to combine deep customer understanding, predictive insights, and automated content generation. AI can analyze millions of data points in real time, identify micro-patterns humans can't see, and take action without human intervention.

Personalization has shifted from a rules-based exercise to continuous decisioning. AI now determines the message for each individual in real time, while autonomous journey agents sense signals, predict next-best actions, and respond instantly. The result is always-on personalization operating at machine speed and scale.

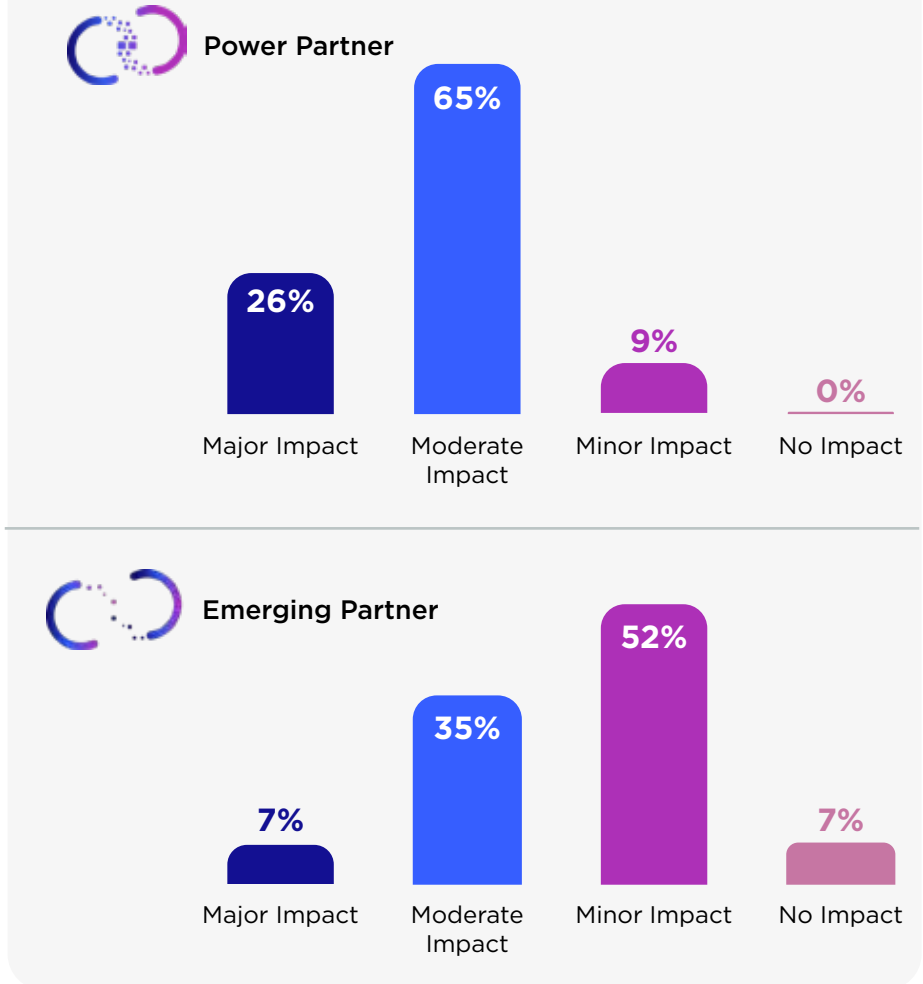
## Relevance, Right Now

At DBS Bank, AI can now assess where a customer is in their journey, compare that behavior to similar customers, and determine which product, message and offer is most relevant in that moment. Hyper-personalization also includes the ability to generate far more creative variations, particularly across digital channels.

"With the creative piece, we're trying to figure out what creative an individual customer is most likely to respond to," says Shoma Narayanan, managing director of group strategic marketing and communications at DBS Bank. "We're not fully there yet, but we're doing a lot of testing and experimentation."

**AI-Human Collaboration Is a Loyalty Multiplier: Power Partners Are Significantly More Likely to See Major Gains in Loyalty and Customer Lifetime Value**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON LOYALTY AND CLV?**

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# PERSONALIZATION & LOYALTY

## The Human Difference in Experience

But this alone doesn't create meaningful customer experiences. That's where human marketers come in. They define the relationship a brand should build, something no algorithm can intuit. They determine the emotional tone of an experience, what "good" personalization looks like, and where the line sits between helpful and intrusive.

While AI delivers automated nudges, human marketers enable higher-value interactions, such as arming relationship managers with "next best conversation" insights so they know exactly what to lead with when speaking to a customer.

This is why collaboration matters so profoundly. When AI and human marketers work together as a true Power Partner, the impact on personalization and the customer experience is immediate. When customer experience improves, CLV follows.




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Human marketers define the relationship a brand should build.

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# CAMPAIGN & CREATIVITY

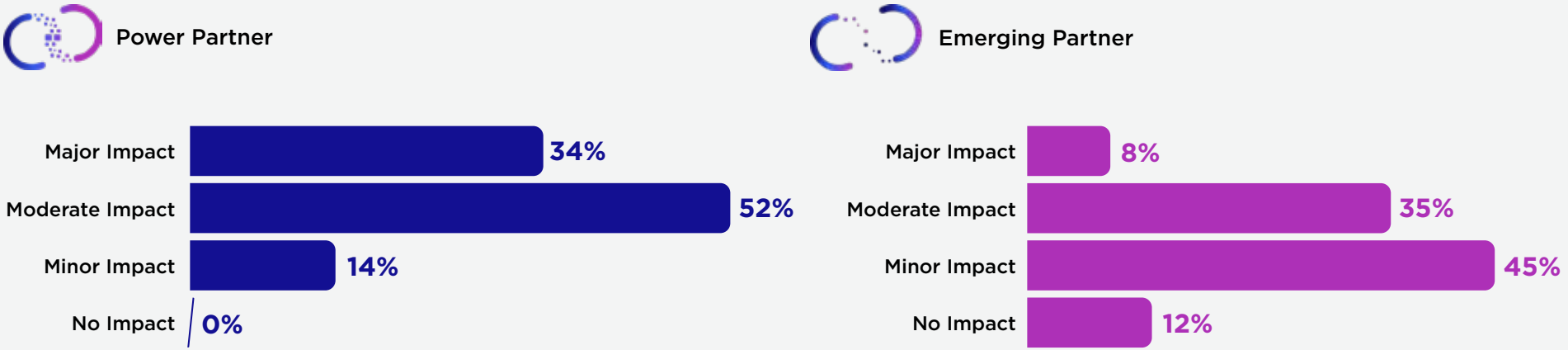
The data is blunt: When AI and human marketers work together, marketing campaigns perform better and creativity gets a boost.

In our study, 86% of Power Partners say AI and human marketer collaboration has a moderate to major impact on campaign ROI. This drops to 43% among Emerging Partners. With creativity, 66% of Power Partners believe AI collaboration has a major impact compared to just 20% of Emerging Partners. This is not a marginal gap, rather a structural advantage.

**The difference lies in how AI functions as a digital partner. AI processes ideas at scale, explores possibilities quickly, and takes on the deep research and analytical "homework" that human marketers rarely have time to do. When machines handle the grind, human marketers regain the mental space required for strategy, storytelling and creative risk-taking.**

**Power Partners Are Far More Likely to Turn Collaboration Into Measurable Performance Gains and ROI**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON CAMPAIGN ROI?**

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# CAMPAIGN & CREATIVITY

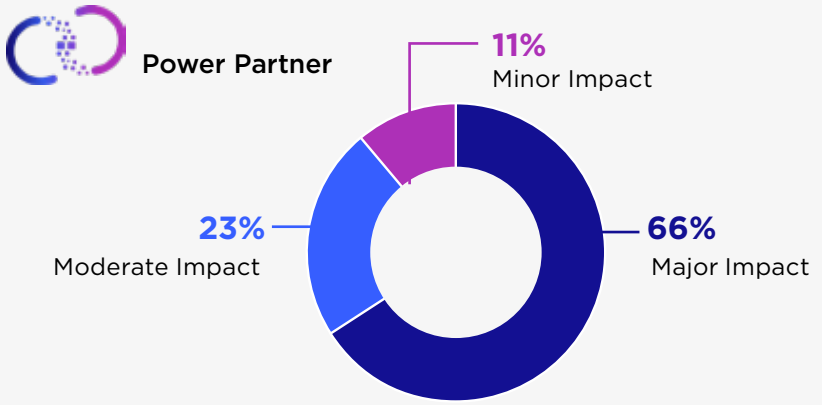
## Campaigns in Concert

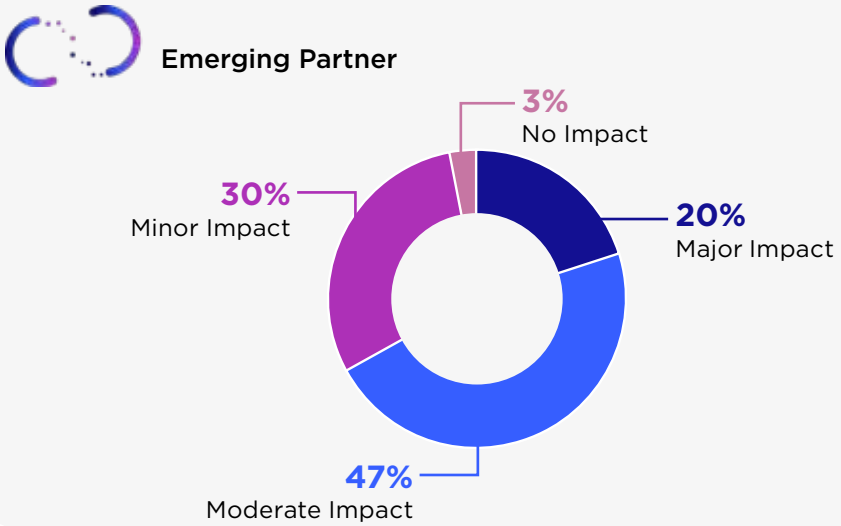
Campaign execution has shifted from periodic optimization to continuous adaptation. Autonomous optimization agents now monitor campaigns across channels, process performance history, detect behavioral patterns, test creative variations, adjust targeting and timing, and dynamically reallocate spend as conditions change.

Human marketers provide the judgment AI lacks. They decide which insights actually matter, how those insights align with business objectives, and when optimization should give way to experimentation. They apply context in market conditions, competitive pressure and brand risk tolerance that AI cannot infer reliably on its own. The result is campaigns that are not only faster and cheaper to execute, but measurably stronger in engagement and conversion.

**AI-Human Collaboration Fuels Creativity: Top-Performing Teams Are More Than Twice as Likely to See a Major Creative Impact**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON BOOSTING CREATIVITY?**

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# CAMPAIGN & CREATIVITY

## "Iteration no longer carries a heavy price tag"

The same partnership unlocks a meaningful boost in creativity. AI can generate endless message variations, surface trends and accelerate ideation through a speed of iteration marketers have never had before. Concepts that once took weeks to explore can now be tested, refined and reimagined in hours or minutes, dramatically expanding the creative option set.

**Just as importantly, the cost dynamics have fundamentally changed. Iteration no longer carries a heavy price tag.** Marketers can explore more ideas, push creative boundaries, and discard what doesn't work without budgetary friction.

## Brand Belongs to Humans

But the overarching narrative — the brand promise, value proposition, emotional hook — must come from human marketers. Brand differentiation takes cultural awareness, emotional intelligence and narrative instinct.

"AI is great at pattern recognition and surfacing what is common, but in brand marketing we want to break from that," First American's Shultz says. "It takes our creative people to figure out the right disruption to that pattern."




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Human marketers provide the judgment AI lacks, such as which insights actually matter, how those insights align with business objectives, and when optimization should give way to experimentation.

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# SPEED, EFFICIENCY & ADAPTABILITY

Marketing Power Partners dramatically outperform Emerging Partners across operational speed, efficiency and adaptability. While speed and efficiency fundamentally collapse marketing timelines, the ability to adapt quickly is fast becoming the most important competitive advantage in marketing.

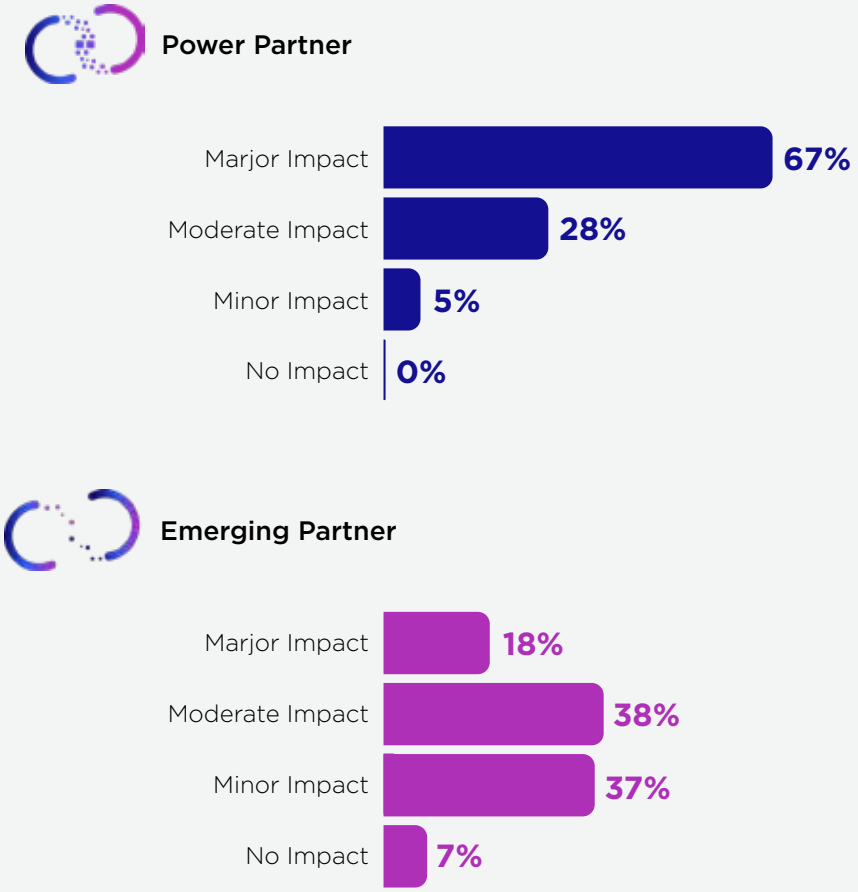
## Compressing Time-to-Market

When asked to what extent AI and human marketer collaboration increases marketing speed and efficiency, 95% of Power Partners report a moderate to major impact. More than two-thirds say the impact is major. Among Emerging Partners, only 18% report a major impact, while 44% say AI barely moved the needle or did nothing at all.

Tasks that once took months, such as audience analysis, segmentation, targeting, content variation and optimization, now happen in days or hours. AI enables faster targeting, real-time content deployment, continuous testing, and always-on optimization.

**Speed and Efficiency Surge When AI and Humans Work Together: Power Partners Are Dramatically More Likely to Realize Major Operational Gains**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON SPEED AND EFFICIENCY?**

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# SPEED, EFFICIENCY & ADAPTABILITY

## When Speed Becomes Strategic

Power Partners pair AI's velocity with human prioritization. Human marketers decide where speed matters, which insights are actionable, and when automation should stop short of brand risk. This is how efficiency becomes strategic, not chaotic.

"The data I've seen so far shows AI-driven workflows increase marketing speed by roughly 40%, with more creative shipped and less operational drag," marketing advisor Samoilescu says. "That lift has strengthened marketing's credibility, with marketing at the forefront of shaping enterprise AI strategy."

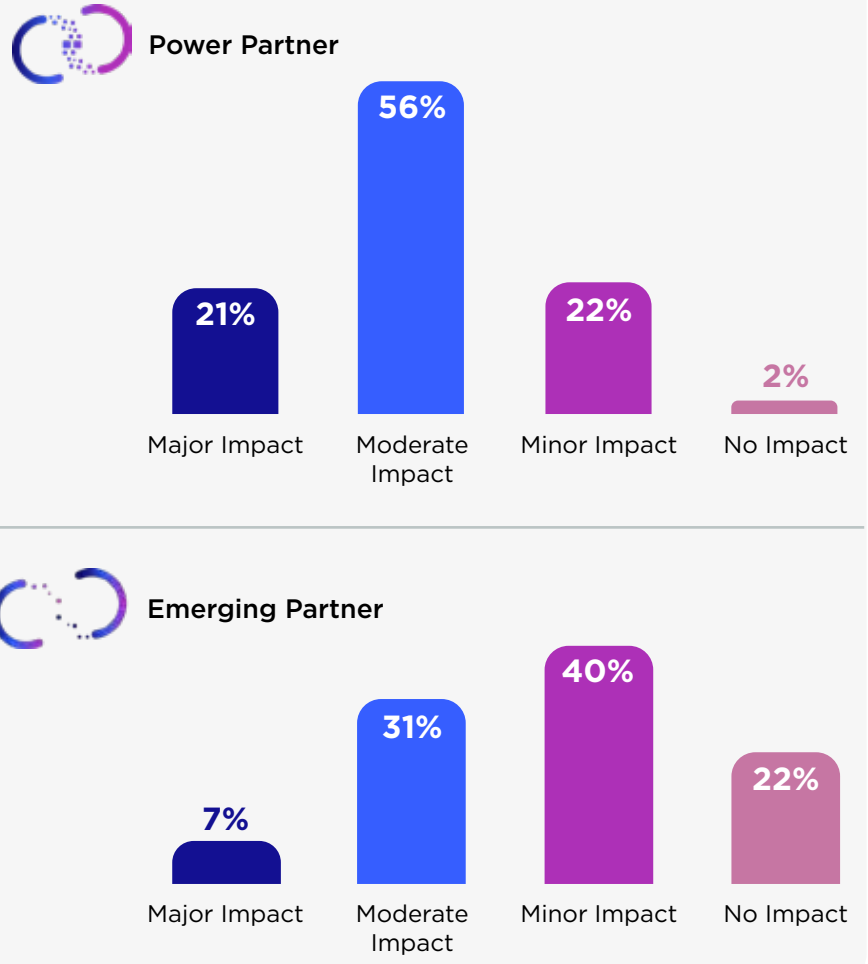
## Adaptability in a Volatile Market

Speed and efficiency are toothless without adaptability. Markets, buyer behavior and channels are in constant flux, and Power Partners are far better equipped to respond. AI can detect shifts in behavior faster than human marketers, but human marketers must interpret what those shifts mean for positioning, messaging and trust.

Seventy-seven percent of Power Partners say AI and human marketer collaboration has a moderate to major impact on their ability to adapt to buyer behavior. By contrast, only 7% of Emerging Partners report a major impact, and 22% say AI delivers no impact at all.

**Impacting Agility: Power Partners Are Three Times More Likely to See a Major Impact on Adapting to Market and Buyer Behavior**

**Q: HOW MUCH IMPACT DOES AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION HAVE ON ADAPTABILITY TO MARKET AND BUYER BEHAVIOR?**

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# SPEED, EFFICIENCY & ADAPTABILITY

## Human Marketer Are Marketing to Machines

Adaptability is extremely important because buyer behavior itself is changing. Consumers are increasingly discovering brands through conversational queries with AI agents such as ChatGPT, agentic browsers and email tools. B2B buying groups now include an AI persona. Human marketers are no longer just marketing to people, they're marketing to machines to make sure the brand is present in those AI conversations.

"The nature of how customers are engaging, the channels in which they're doing that, feels like real disruption," Brinker says. "It's not done changing, either. If you can adapt faster than your competitor, you can take advantage of this change. It's very Darwinian."




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Markets, buyer behavior and channels are in constant flux, and marketing leaders leveraging AI and human marketers' intuition are far better equipped to track changes and respond.

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# COLLABORATION CHALLENGES

AI and human marketer collaboration promises higher ROI and CLV, stronger and more frequent emotional connections, deeper personalization, faster execution, and greater adaptability. Yet for many marketing organizations, this promise remains frustratingly out of reach.

Our research shows the barriers to be operational, cultural and deeply human. The three biggest barriers to effective AI and human marketer collaboration are training and AI skills, trust in AI outputs, and brand authenticity with AI. All require a human marketer's judgment, confidence and accountability to turn AI into a trusted partner.

## The Data Problem

When marketing leaders are asked to identify the most difficult barrier to overcome, AI-ready data tops the list — for good reason.

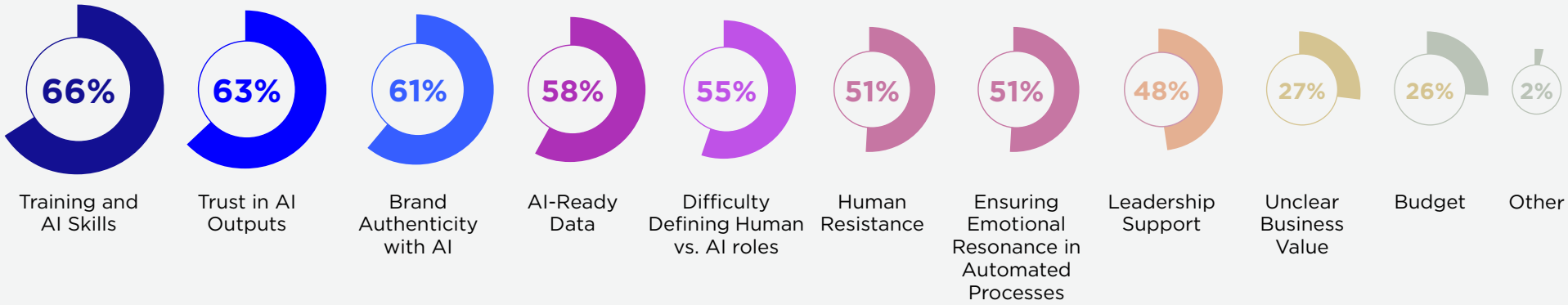
You cannot collaborate with a partner you do not trust. Human marketers cannot redesign workflows, act on AI insights or delegate decisions to AI systems fed by incomplete, stale or inconsistent data.

It's the data potential no one can ignore. In our study, more than half of respondents cite poor data quality as a significant challenge. The BPI Network's Pathway to GenAI Competitive Advantage report finds that 60% of business leaders lack confidence in their data-AI readiness to achieve business value. Gartner reports companies have an 85% failure rate for AI projects, primarily due to data issues.

The industry's emerging term for this challenge is "context engineering," which means ensuring the right data with the right meaning reaches the right AI system at the right moment. This reflects a broader evolution of the martech stack.

**The Biggest Obstacles to AI-Human Collaboration Aren't Technology—They're Skills, Trust, Data Readiness and Defining the Right Human Role**

**Q: WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION?**

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# COLLABORATION CHALLENGES

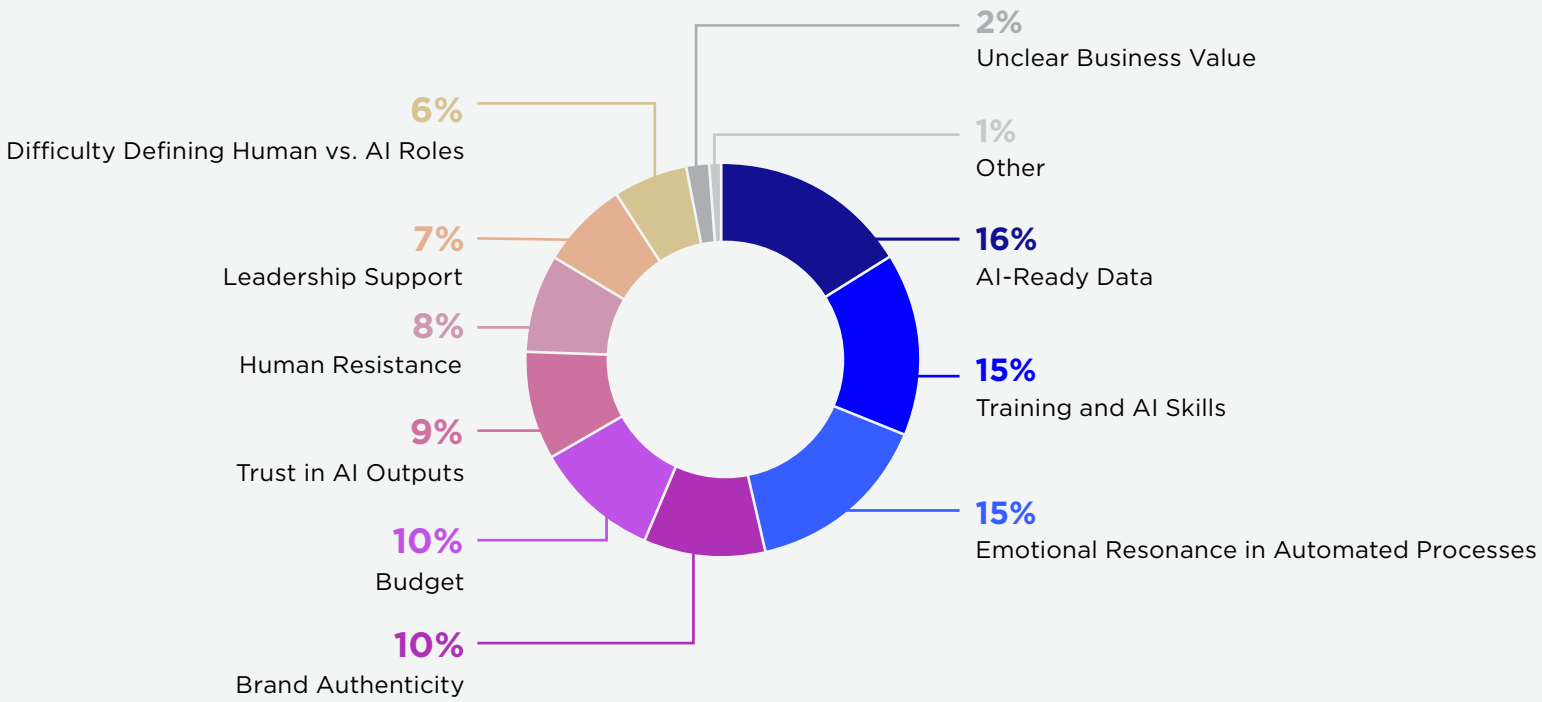
## Skills Gap and the Human Response

Training and AI skills are the second most common difficult barrier to overcome, and they are inseparable from human marketers' anxiety. As AI reshapes the marketing function, uncertainty about relevance, job security and future career paths creates friction.

The challenge is not simply learning new platforms or tools, rather it is confronting a fundamental shift in where a human marketer's value fits in an AI-enabled workflow. Power Partners recognize this and resist forcing adoption from the top down. Instead, they cultivate internal evangelists who demonstrate through real results how AI and human marketer collaboration creates tangible value and accelerates impact.

**The Toughest Barriers Span Data Readiness, Skills Gaps and Preserving Human Connection in an AI-Driven World**

**Q: WHAT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT BARRIER TO OVERCOME?**

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# COLLABORATION CHALLENGES

## Authenticity Still Wins

When Maz Jamasbi, former marketing director at Gap Inc. and co-host of Who Moved My Marketing?, mentors marketing students at San Jose State University and Santa Clara University, he hears their questions about human marketers' future in the era of AI-powered marketing. His answer is deliberately grounded.

"It's a major transformation of the marketing function, and they need to partner with AI where it makes sense, and then lean into their human authenticity to differentiate their brand's personality," Jamasbi says.




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Power Partners don't force adoption from the top down. They cultivate internal evangelists who demonstrate the tangible value of AI and human marketer workflows.

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# WHAT'S AHEAD

As AI reshapes marketing at an unprecedented pace, the most valuable human-marketer skills of the next three years are not about doing more work. They are about knowing where AI falls short and stepping decisively into that gap.

"Somewhere along the way our industry seems to have forgotten that as marketers, our starting and ending point must always be the consumer," says Ajay Kakar, head of corporate branding at Adani Group. "We're not in the AI business; we're in the business of influencing consumers; we are in the 'experience' business."

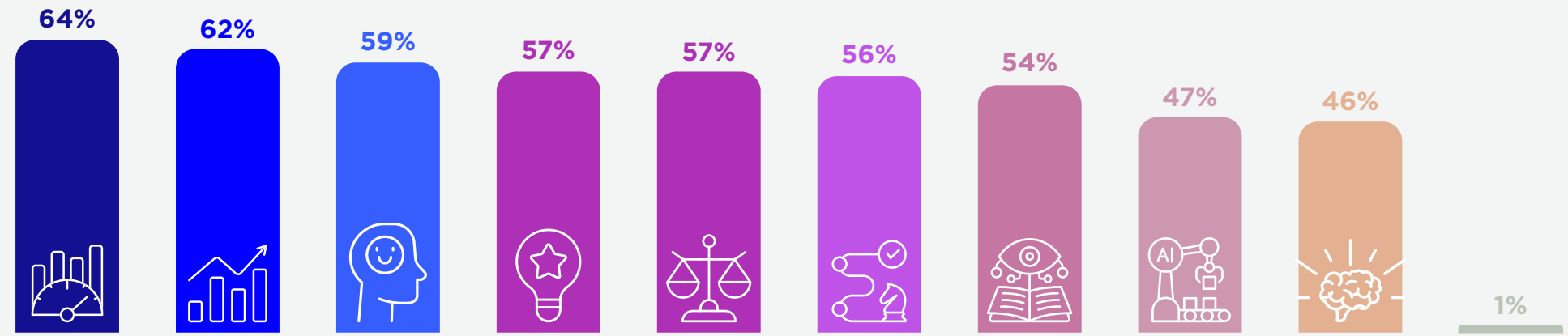
When asked which skills human marketers should prioritize, three rise to the top: performance measurement, data storytelling, and emotional intelligence. These skills translate signals into meaning. They turn data, outputs and interactions into decisions that drive trust, relevance and real business impact.

## Where Marketers Create Value

Performance measurement rises to the top because it exposes the limits of automation. AI excels at prioritizing metrics, modeling "what-if" scenarios, and identifying which levers will deliver the greatest impact against a specific performance goal. It can optimize relentlessly and at scale.

Human marketers provide the critical counterweight. They determine which metrics actually matter, connect activity to business outcomes such as revenue acceleration, pipeline quality, brand lift and long-term growth, and ensure optimization aligns with strategy. Without human marketers providing oversight, marketing becomes locally optimized and globally misaligned, trading short-term gains for long-term value.

### WHAT SKILLS SHOULD MARKETERS PRIORITIZE IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?

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# WHAT'S AHEAD

## Reinvesting Where It Counts

As AI drives efficiency, marketing leaders are not planning to downshift. They are reallocating resources toward higher-value work by investing more in innovation and future growth initiatives, personalization and customer experience, and upskilling teams in AI and emerging technology.

This forward-looking view reflects the reality that AI in marketing remains in the early stages of adoption. Many marketing leaders are still in the throes of redesigning workflows around AI and human marketer collaboration. Core barriers such as AI-data readiness, skills gaps and unclear roles continue to slow meaningful adoption.

**WHEN AI BOOSTS EFFICIENCY, HOW DO YOU PLAN TO USE EXTRA RESOURCES?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **70%** Shifting Resources Toward Innovation & Future Growth Initiatives | **58%** Focusing on Personalization & Customer Experience | **56%** Upskilling Teams in AI & Emerging Technology |
| **54%** Deepening Customer Research & Insights | **54%** Running More Tests/Optimizations to Improve Performance | **48%** Strengthening Brand Building & Long-Term Positioning |
| **46%** Investing in Creative Strategy & Storytelling | **46%** Improving Collaboration Across Marketing, Sales, Service | **46%** Experimenting with Channels & Formats |

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# WHAT'S AHEAD

## Adaptability Is the Advantage

It is also early because buyer behavior, channels and AI capabilities themselves are still in flux. Customers are beginning to use AI as part of their purchasing journey, agentic workflows are only just emerging, and governance norms are still being worked out.

"We are entering a period of extraordinary, accelerated change," Scott Brinker says. "The only sustainable advantage is in the investments we make in the adaptability of the tech stack and organization. Are you developing a culture where change and experimentation define it?"




**KEY TAKEAWAY**

If your marketing team's value is defined by tasks, AI will replace it. If it's defined by judgment, AI will amplify it.

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# BREAKOUT: UNITED STATES, EUROPE, APAC

In the **UNITED STATES**, AI adoption and ROI are further along. Yet the biggest barrier is emotional resonance, signaling that scale and automation are outpacing the ability to create meaning, trust and connection with customers.

**Most difficult barrier to AI-human collaboration: Emotional Resonance in Automated Processes**

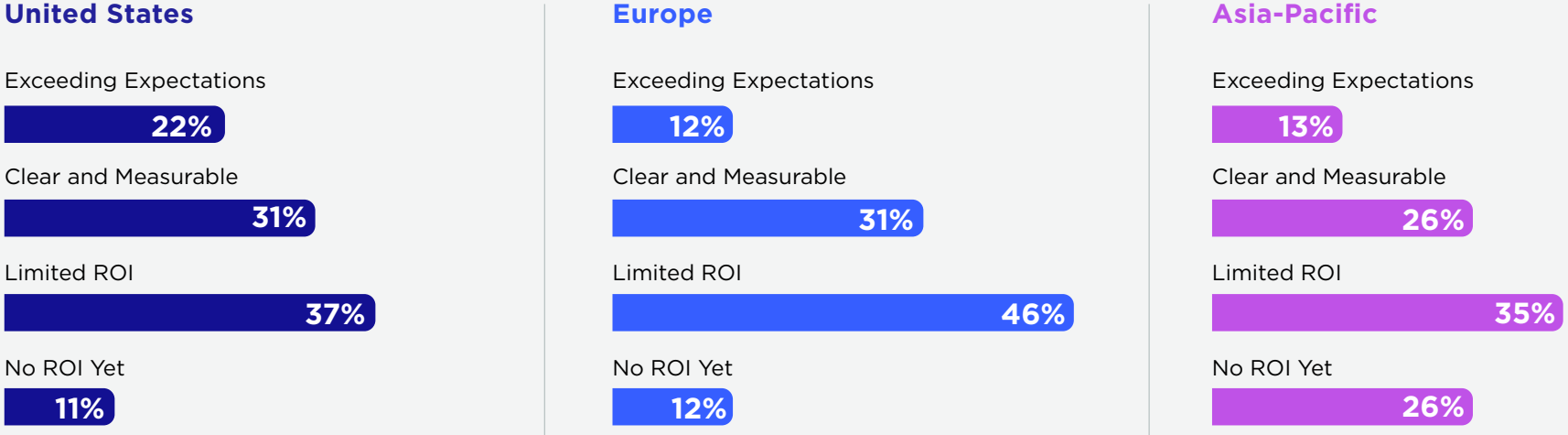
**EUROPE** tells a more structural story. Nearly half of respondents report limited returns, with AI-ready data emerging as the primary constraint. This underscores fragmentation, governance and integration challenges.

**Most difficult barrier to AI-human collaboration: AI-Ready Data**

**APAC** reflects a different friction point. Higher levels of unrealized ROI and human marketers' resistance to change as the dominant barrier suggest that transformation is less about tools and more about mindset, skills and organizational readiness.

**Most difficult barrier to AI-human collaboration: Human Resistance to Change**

## IS AI IN MARKETING ACHIEVING ROI?

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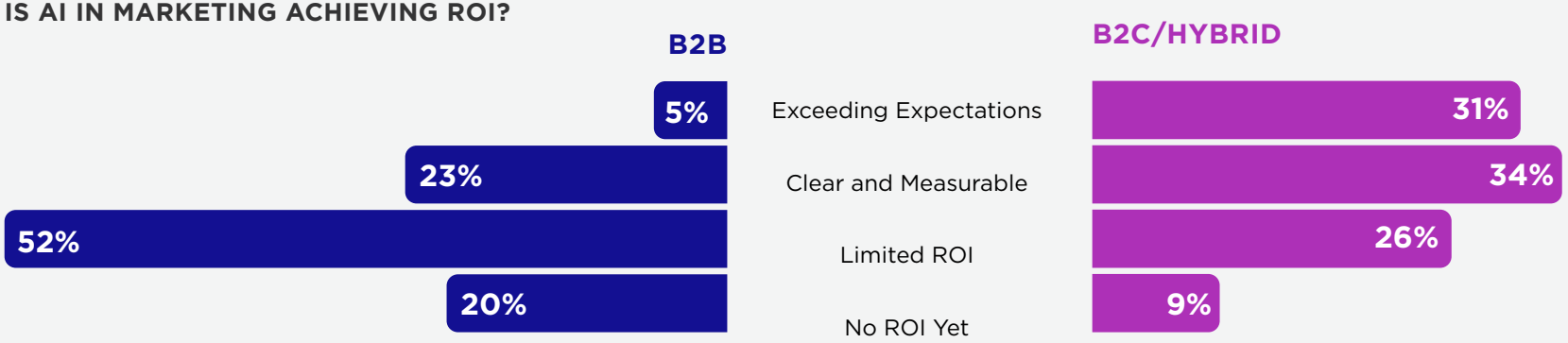
# BREAKOUT: B2B VS. B2C/HYBRID

In **B2B**, only 28% of respondents report clear or exceeded ROI from AI, while a majority are stuck in limited or nonexistent returns. Their lack of readiness to redesign workflows, with 80% admitting they are only somewhat prepared or not prepared at all, suggests AI is being treated as a productivity tool layered onto legacy processes rather than a catalyst for structural change.

**B2C/HYBRID** marketing organizations tell the opposite story. Nearly two-thirds are achieving clear or above-expectation ROI, and that success tracks directly with readiness. Fifty-six percent say they are prepared or fully prepared to redesign workflows for AI and human marketer collaboration. This supports the idea that return on AI investments is fundamentally an operating-model challenge, not a technology one.

## IS AI IN MARKETING ACHIEVING ROI?




## ARE YOU PREPARED TO REDESIGN WORKFLOWS FOR AI-HUMAN COLLABORATION?

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# CONCLUSION

**This research makes one point unmistakably clear: The future of marketing does not belong to AI alone, nor does it belong to human marketers working as they always have. It belongs to organizations that deliberately combine the scale, speed and analytical power of AI with the judgment, creativity and emotional intelligence of human marketers.**

**In other words, AI needs humans as much as humans need AI.**

## Why Power Partners Pull Ahead

The performance gap between "Power Partners" and "Emerging Partners" is measurable and widening. Power Partners outperform across ROI and CLV, emotional connection, personalization, creativity, speed and adaptability because they use AI to elevate a human marketer's contribution, not erase it. They do not pursue AI to do more with less. This is not a tooling strategy, rather a transformation of how marketing work actually happens.

The defining advantage of Power Partners is operating model maturity. They redesign workflows with intention, clarify roles, and build feedback loops where AI and human marketers continuously learn from one another. AI handles volume, pattern recognition and execution at machine speed; human marketers own meaning, intent, governance and differentiation. This division of labor allows marketing organizations to move faster without sacrificing trust, brand integrity or emotional resonance.

## This Is a Leadership Test

The research also makes clear that the biggest challenges ahead are deeply human. AI-ready data, skills gaps, trust in outputs and fear of change remain the primary barriers to progress. Overcoming them requires investment in people, not just platforms, and leadership that treats change management as a core marketing capability.

This study arrives at a pivotal moment. AI adoption in marketing is still early, even as buyer expectations accelerate, agentic workflows emerge, and governance norms remain unsettled. Waiting for clarity is not a strategy. In this environment, the only durable advantage is action: redesigning workflows, investing in AI and human marketer collaboration, and building a culture that learns fast and adapts quickly to market changes. Power Partners are already moving and Emerging Partners must sprint to catch up.

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**MAITRI KUMAR**
SVP, Marketing

WONGDOODY
An Infosys company

# CONTRIBUTED COMMENTARY

Marketing has entered a new era: not one where machines displace people, but where collaborative intelligence—AI and human creativity working together—becomes the source of competitive advantage. This study outlines how marketing organizations can move beyond automation and hype to build hybrid capabilities that combine machine precision with distinctly human judgment/ skills.

Our goal with this research was to answer a defining question that has emerged "Which human strengths remain irreplaceable in marketing?"

Rather than framing the future as humans versus machines, it focuses on building collaborative intelligence and understanding how marketing organizations evolve so AI amplifies those uniquely human strengths.

Our findings focus on three interlocking truths:

- **The irreplaceable human essence:** even as AI writes, designs and predicts, it cannot feel (as yet!!) AI can unearth patterns, generate options, and scale execution, but it cannot feel, interpret cultural nuance, or translate emotion into meaning—activities at the heart of persuasive storytelling and brand relevance.
- **Authentic warmth at scale is possible—but it requires human led design.** Automation can scale messages, only people can scale meaning. Human marketers must craft AI driven interactions that feel genuinely personal and meaningful.
- **Integrated intelligence unlocks better outcomes.** The highest-performing approaches don't pit human against machine; they combine data-driven precision with human intuition and judgment, creating new workflows, roles, and decision frameworks that elevate both efficiency and impact.

This report translates those principles into practical guidance for marketing leaders. The goal is to move organizations from reactive adoption to intentional practice using AI to extend human potential, not replace it.

In short, the future of marketing is collaborative intelligence – where organizations harness AI to amplify empathy, creativity, and judgment that can deliver measurable business outcome. The research study concludes that the future belongs not to AI or humans alone, but to those who learn to think together.

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# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE



**LAURENT HREN**
Director of Events
Orange Business

Industry: Technology

*"AI brings new approaches and forces marketers to be open-minded. Marketers can't be afraid of change. They should be excited about the challenge and opportunity."*

Agility and adaptability have become critical traits for today's human marketers. They've spearheaded digital transformation, navigated digital channels, and leveraged data to become better at marketing.

Now human marketers need to do the same with AI and become even more capable. AI can lead to better and faster targeting, usage of real-time content, and much more. "Marketing actions that used to take months, even years, can now just take a day," says Laurent Hren, director of events at Orange Business. "We're pushing AI to improve every marketing task."

One of the challenges is having to reconsider entire marketing processes and workflows that span everything from customer journeys to customer touch points. AI agents inject a massive amount of speed and scale into workflows, and marketing leaders will have to decide how much authority and autonomy to give them.

Critically, a new AI-driven process's impact on human marketers needs to be factored into the workflow equation. Do your human marketers have the relevant skills to adopt this new process? What is the cost of upskilling them? Should you bring in interns who, with the help of AI, can perform tasks of senior marketers? Will human marketers even listen to AI?

"Should you keep an existing process when you can double the value with an AI process?" Hren says. "Sounds like an easy decision but it's not. Changing a process is complex and requires people to accept it or else you won't get the results you're after. There's also no baseline to compare because the new AI process you're evaluating didn't exist six months ago."

Some marketing processes, though, must change. Hren points out that buying groups now include an AI persona. Marketers need to market to AI with content tuned to ChatGPT, not so much SEO, Hren says. The best way to do this is by bringing in AI to market to AI.

"AI brings new approaches and forces marketers to be open-minded," Hren says. "Marketers can't be afraid of change. They should be excited about the challenge and opportunity."

In their favor, human marketers are used to embracing change and finding their value in an increasingly digitized, automated world. Hren sees the future role of human marketers in shaping social and emotional customer journeys. AI, even as it advances in decision-making, will still lack the human touch needed to understand and influence feelings, experiences, and social dynamics—elements that are essential for building genuine connections with customers.

"We are still social animals," Hren says. "One of the best communication channels in B2B is still events. People need to meet in both large and tailored events. It's a dimension people will miss if you have a fully digital journey."

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**MAZ JAMASBI**
Marketing Director at GAP (recently)

Industry: Consulting

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

When Maz Jamasbi mentors marketing students at San Jose State University and Santa Clara University, he hears a common refrain. As AI disrupts and transforms marketing, what skills should they be focusing on? They're concerned about their futures — and they should be.

I prefer to give them a balanced view and prepare them for what is about to come," says Jamasbi, former marketing director at Gap Inc., marketing consultant and co-podcast creator of Who Moved My Marketing? "It's a major transformation of the marketing function, and they need to partner with AI where it makes sense and then lean into their human authenticity to differentiate their brand's personality."

Agentic AI will automate and optimize many marketing tasks. Not just the mundane, either. AI is going to take marketing into brave new territories, such as micro segmentation and hyper personalization at scale. Human marketers need to be in the loop for their intuition, cultural understanding and empathy. These human traits are crucial for brand storytelling and making authentic emotional connections.

"Young marketers need to be able to solve problems in a uniquely human way and help deliver the 'wow factor' for the brand," Jamasbi says.

He says companies that decided early on to replace human marketers with AI, which sent shock waves throughout the marketing world, are now starting to realize that AI is not particularly good at making an emotional connection with customers.

"AI lacks the experiential engine to learn from social interactions," Jamasbi says. "There is no weighting factor for AI to be able to take into account something that had happened to someone as a child, say, touching a hot frying pan, and then applying this to future interactions."

Jamasbi says human marketers outshine AI in social interactions with customers, in choosing style and tone, which vary throughout the customer journey. For instance, the initial phases of a customer relationship are going to be guarded. Interactions need to be respectful and fact-driven to earn trust. Mistakes at this stage can derail a relationship before it starts.

"AI makes mistakes all the time, and there are no real consequences when it makes them," Jamasbi says. "With social interactions, there are actual consequences. We might lose a friend or customer forever."

*"AI lacks the experiential engine to learn from social interactions"*

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Continued

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

**MAZ JAMASBI**
Recently Marketing Director at GAP

Industry: Consulting

Further down the customer journey, after trust has been established, interactions can be more playful and show more of the brand's personality and uniqueness. In these phases, the customer relationship can really blossom. In the customer retention phase, style and tone change again. Communications need to be clear and business-like, underscoring the brand as a valued partner.

While AI may have been trained to communicate in certain styles at different stages of the customer journey, it may not be able to pick up on subtle signals and nuances that a human marketer can detect through intuition, cultural understanding and empathy.

"Humans can modify and regulate the conversation based on what we know about relationships," Jamasbi says. "This is where humans bring a lot of value, why we need the human in the loop."

*"Humans can modify and regulate the conversation based on what we know about relationships."*

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**STEPHEN SHULTZ**
Vice President, Brand Marketing
First American

Industry: Finance

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Far too many marketers view AI as a threat, but Stephen Shultz, vice president of brand marketing at First American, encourages his team to adopt a different mindset. Think of AI, he says, as a digital partner that helps process ideas, explore possibilities, and take on the deep research and "homework" marketers rarely have time to do on their own.

First American, a 136-year-old financial institution, is integrating AI throughout the enterprise for customer-facing services and internal productivity solutions. Under the direction of First American's CMO, the marketing teams are adopting new tools and processes to amplify their impact. That work includes training AI tools on the company's brand, market perspective, and customer research data. Insights are then shared across teams to inform strategy and execution. The goal is not to replace people, but to give them better information and insights that make their work stronger and more efficient.

"We've always been a people-first company, and AI fits naturally into that," Shultz adds. "It supports the people doing the thinking, creating and serving so they can perform at their best."

The marketing team can leverage AI and synthetic customer personas to test market assumptions, track how competitors are positioning themselves, and refine ideas before they reach real customers. The technology helps identify opportunities, but it is still human intuition that turns those insights into something original and meaningful.

"AI can tell us what's typical," Shultz says. "Human creativity tells us what's possible. The difference between those two defines great marketing."

Within marketing, Shultz and his team are building AI-powered assistants to help marketers plan, train and measure more efficiently. The tools fill gaps in areas like research, data analysis, or performance modeling to enable a small team to produce a higher volume of high-quality work. "For lean teams, it's a huge advantage," he says. "AI helps us scale what we can deliver without sacrificing the quality of the thinking or the creativity behind it."

For Shultz, human creativity is more than a soft skill. It's the competitive moat grounded in research, insight and understanding of the customer and market. "AI is great at pattern recognition and surfacing what is common, but in brand marketing we want to break from that," he says. "It takes our creative people to figure out the right disruption to that pattern."

*"AI can tell us what's typical, human creativity tells us what's possible. The difference between those two defines great marketing."*

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Continued

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

**STEPHEN SHULTZ**
Vice President, Brand Marketing
First American

AI also helps senior marketers bridge conversations with the business side. "In the same way we create customer personas, you can ask AI to act as a skeptical CFO and help identify the financial metrics that best demonstrate impact for a particular campaign," Shultz explains. "It helps connect marketing outcomes to business results and enables everybody to scale up their capabilities."

He says marketers should view AI not as a threat but as a new way of working with technology that empowers them to create even more business value. In his view, AI is a catalyst for better marketing, not just faster marketing. It expands the scope of research, accelerates iteration, and improves decision-making. But its real value shows up when human creativity takes those insights and transforms them into something distinct.

"Without human creativity," Shultz says, "you're just accelerating toward the average."

*"AI is great at pattern recognition and surfacing what is common, but in brand marketing we want to break from that. It takes our creative people to figure out the right disruption to that pattern."*

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**MARIA SAMOILESCU**
Marketing Advisor and Former Director of Brand Content Strategy at Prudential Financial

Industry: Finance

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Having led integrated marketing and content strategy inside major global financial services organizations and now advising companies across financial services, SaaS, fintech, and other regulated industries, Maria Samoilescu has seen firsthand how much time enterprise teams spend maintaining content that must constantly be updated. In environments where regulations, product details, and compliance language shift frequently, even a minor update can ripple across dozens of materials.

Historically, this high-volume work fell on marketers. Today, AI is beginning to automate much of this dynamic content maintenance, giving marketing teams the freedom to focus on more strategic, revenue-driving work.

"Marketers create value when they're focused on the questions AI can't answer: intent, relevance, and commercial impact," Samoilescu says. "On a product launch, that means identifying what will accelerate revenue. On a thought-leadership campaign, it means understanding what will drive brand value and influence decision makers."

*"Marketers create value when they're focused on the questions AI can't answer: intent, relevance, and commercial impact"*

Although marketers have used AI for years in areas like automated media buying, the speed, breadth, and sophistication of current AI capabilities can trigger both anticipation and resistance inside organizations navigating change.

"Mixed feelings around AI are to be expected. Change feels disruptive before it feels productive," Samoilescu says. "But the data I've seen so far shows AI-driven workflows increase marketing speed by roughly 40%, with more creative shipped and less operational drag. That lift has strengthened marketing's credibility, with marketing at the forefront of shaping enterprise AI strategy."

She points to webinars as a practical example of where AI and human marketers complement one another. Modern AI tools can generate the entire ecosystem around a webinar: the event brief, slide deck, email sequence, social posts, and printed collateral. But the strategic foundation remains a human responsibility.

"AI can generate assets at extraordinary speed, but it can't generate meaning. Marketers' role is to answer the foundational questions around meaning, context, intent and governance," she says.

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Continued

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

**MARIA SAMOILESCU**
Marketing Advisor and Former Director of Brand Content Strategy
Prudential Financial

Looking forward, Samoilescu believes marketing organizations will increasingly rely on a new hybrid role: the marketing engineer. This emerging function blends strategy, process design, and AI fluency to help teams determine where automation adds value and where human judgment is essential.

"Curiosity and adaptability will matter more than ever to thrive in an AI-enabled world," Samoilescu says. "You need internal evangelists proving the value hybrid human-AI workflows can unlock. And from what I've seen in practice, once roughly a quarter of a marketing team leans in, the entire organization begins to shift."

This hybrid model, she believes, will allow marketers to innovate faster, differentiate more clearly, and outperform.

*"Human marketers shine when they're freed up from tactics to focus on higher value, strategic work. We've just begun to scratch the surface of what the hybrid human-AI collaboration can unlock."*

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**SHOMA NARAYANAN**
Marketing Director
DBS Bank

Industry: Banking

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

At DBS Bank, AI is a force multiplier designed to help marketing operate at a level of speed, relevance and precision that simply isn't possible with human effort alone. That power shows up in two key areas: hyper-personalization at scale and agentic marketing workflows.

"We're using AI to increase efficiency and effectiveness at scale, because that's where we feel the power really lies," says Shoma Narayanan, marketing director, group marketing and communications, at DBS Bank.

Hyper-personalization at scale represents the most visible shift, and it starts with data. Banks have always possessed rich customer data within their own ecosystems, everything from transaction behavior to spending patterns to signals of major life changes. DBS Bank built a centralized data lake to make that information actionable.

AI can now assess where a customer is in their journey, compare that behavior to similar customers, and determine which product, message and offer is most relevant in that moment. Hyper-personalization also includes the ability to generate far more creative variations, particularly across digital channels.

*"We're using AI to increase efficiency and effectiveness at scale, because that's where we feel the power really lies."*

"With the creative piece, we're trying to figure out what creative an individual customer is most likely to respond to," Narayanan says. "We're not fully there yet, but we're doing a lot of testing and experimentation."

Human marketers remain central to hyper-personalization. They define parameters, set guardrails and decide how far automation should go. While AI delivers automated nudges, humans enable higher-value interactions, such as arming relationship managers with "next best conversation" insights so they know exactly what to lead with when speaking to a customer.

The second area of focus is agentic marketing workflows. Modern marketing execution is complex by default. Even a single campaign must be deployed across numerous owned and paid channels, often requiring significant manual coordination.

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Continued

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

**SHOMA NARAYANAN**
Marketing Director
DBS Bank

At DBS Bank, AI is a force multiplier designed to help marketing operate at a level of speed, relevance and precision that simply isn't possible with human effort alone. That power shows up in two key areas: hyper-personalization at scale and agentic marketing workflows.

"We're using AI to increase efficiency and effectiveness at scale, because that's where we feel the power really lies," says Shoma Narayanan, marketing director, group marketing and communications, at DBS Bank.

Hyper-personalization at scale represents the most visible shift, and it starts with data. Banks have always possessed rich customer data within their own ecosystems, everything from transaction behavior to spending patterns to signals of major life changes. DBS Bank built a centralized data lake to make that information actionable.

*"It's better to future cast and see what we need to do going forward rather than get an agent to do the human being's job because that is doomed for failure."*

AI can now assess where a customer is in their journey, compare that behavior to similar customers, and determine which product, message and offer is most relevant in that moment. Hyper-personalization also includes the ability to generate far more creative variations, particularly across digital channels.

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**AJAY KAKAR**
Head of Corporate Branding
Adani Group

Industry: Infrastructure

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Looking back, we will see a trend wherein every few years, marketing falls in love with the "next" shiny object. Remember the metaverse? Exactly.

Today, AI is "the" buzzword. Influencers, consultants and agencies are tripping over themselves to tell marketers that they must adopt AI or risk extinction. Boards hear the noise, expect this from CMOs, and suddenly everyone's in a frenzy.

But before we press the throttle, it may help if we pull back and take a breath.

AI, indeed, holds the promise and potential to revolutionize how we work, and our productivity is expected to increase manifold. While there are early signs that life without AI will be unimaginable, are there enough proven case studies for all of us to take the plunge, or "miss the bus," today?

Here's the inconvenient truth: AI is not intelligent. It borrows intelligence and only performs as well as the human (marketer, in this case) asking questions. AI does not create meaning unless a human supplies the context, judgment and curiosity. If you ask AI the wrong questions, it will confidently give you the wrong answers, beautifully formatted and in all probability, useless.

The current reality (or constraint) is that while AI can dissect and analyze vast historical datasets in microseconds, it cannot see the future — unless that future resembles the past.

*"In its current avatar, with AI, is there a possibility of any innovation, any newness?"*

Is there a spark of originality or instinctive leap that one can expect, today? Here's a classic example: The first ATM wasn't born from a dataset, it came about because someone noticed consumers shuttling between home and office with no time to visit their assigned bank branch. This insight or invention required lived experiences, the power of observation, empathy and insight into real human friction. And confidence that though there is no past reference or success to emulate, investing in this idea will revolutionize the future of branch banking and will transform and make the lives of consumers easy, forever.

"In its current avatar, with AI, is there a possibility of any innovation, any newness?" asks Ajay Kakar, head of corporate branding at Adani Group.

Emotion is the second wall AI can't climb. AI can say the right thing, grammatically and stylistically but often plainly and with a rational slant. A poet, lyricist or gifted creative can say the same thing in a way that leaves you with a lump in your throat. That emotional resonance still belongs to humans.

Yes, AI is incredibly valuable. It accelerates mundane tasks. It surfaces insights faster. It helps decision

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Continued

# EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

**AJAY KAKAR**
Head of Corporate Branding
Adani Group

making before marketers put pen to paper. But speed is not strategy, automation is not empathy. If consumers feel or experience the "artificial" at the cost of the human touch or engagement, in all possibility trust will evaporate instantly and may rarely return.

"AI is just a tool, a very valuable tool, but should not be seen as the destination," Kakar says.

For the next generation of marketers, the mandate is clear: Be digitally fluent and AI-savvy, but above all, be consumer-savvy. Marketing is still a human business. It's like cooking. AI can prep the ingredients, but humans decide how much salt, garnish or cheese to add to suit the taste of every individual.

"Somewhere along the way our industry seems to have forgotten that as marketers, our starting and ending point must always be the consumer," Kakar says. "We're not in the AI business; we're in the business of influencing consumers; we are in the 'experience' business. AI is, today, an extremely promising means towards that end."

*"Somewhere along the way our industry seems to have forgotten that as marketers, our starting and ending point must always be the consumer."*

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