AI and the Future of Marketing

2026 Edition



A report by the humans at Basis®

Introduction

It's been four years since AI stormed into in the mainstream, and the technology is now a daily fixture across creative, media, strategy, and analysis, used by nearly every professional in the marketing industry and funded by nearly every organization. In turn, the debate over whether the technology belongs in marketing and advertising has given way to a harder question: How much of the work can it actually be trusted to handle?

This report aims to capture the next phase of that transformation. Drawing on responses from professionals across the marketing and advertising ecosystem, it examines how agencies and brands are putting AI to work today, what the technology is actually delivering, and how the industry is preparing for a future in which a growing share of the work runs without direct human involvement.

The findings point to an industry that has grown genuinely skilled and increasingly confident with these tools. Marketers report meaningful efficiency gains for the third consecutive year, and those gains are getting larger rather than leveling off, a sign that fluency rather than novelty is now driving the returns. Confidence in AI's impact on the industry has risen alongside that proficiency, as has the willingness to fund it.

Marketers are also converting that proficiency into something more consequential than efficiency. Over the past year, organizations have begun deploying AI agents at scale, handing over reporting, campaign briefs, creative optimization, and media planning to systems that operate with limited supervision. Nearly half of all organizations have replaced human tasks with AI outright, and the vast majority now expect the advertising process itself to become at least partially autonomous within the next few years.

What has not kept pace is the industry's ability to prove that any of it is working. Only a small fraction of marketing organizations measure the return on their AI investments against defined benchmarks, and most either measure anecdotally or not at all. For a discipline built on accounting for every dollar of media spend, it is a conspicuous gap, and one that grows more costly with every workflow handed to an agent. Without evidence, organizations cannot separate an effective system from an expensive one, cannot build the case to scale the deployments that are working, and cannot responsibly weigh the human costs of decisions they are already making.

What follows is intended to help industry leaders navigate that challenge, with exclusive insights on adoption patterns, efficiency and performance gains, the rise of agentic marketing, risks and regulatory concerns, and the workforce implications of an increasingly autonomous future. Together, the findings show an industry that has learned to use AI effectively, and that must now learn to prove what those skills are worth.

Survey of 184 marketing and advertising professionals conducted July 16 – August 14, 2026.

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

How Marketers Are Using AI 4

AI and Content Creation 13

AI in Marketing: The Impact On Work 16

Looking Toward the Future 21

AI and Marketing: The Risks 23

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs 27

How Marketers Feel About AI in Marketing 35

AI and Marketing: What's Next 38

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

How Marketers Are Using AI

AI has become part of the daily rhythm of marketing work. It shapes how campaigns are imagined and researched, how creative is drafted and refined, how data gets organized and interpreted, and how media is planned and placed. For most professionals in the industry, working without AI is now decidedly the exception to the rule.

That ubiquity has led organizations to adapt their operations accordingly as they adopt more AI platforms, utilize different tools across different parts of the workflow, and allocate increasingly significant budgets to the tech.

But more AI use does not inherently mean better outcomes, and increased reliance on the same AI tools that everyone else can buy does not, on its own, produce a competitive advantage. That requires models shaped to a company's own requirements, trained on high-quality first-party data, and orchestrated by skilled employees. And on those fronts, the industry's progress has been considerably less even.

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

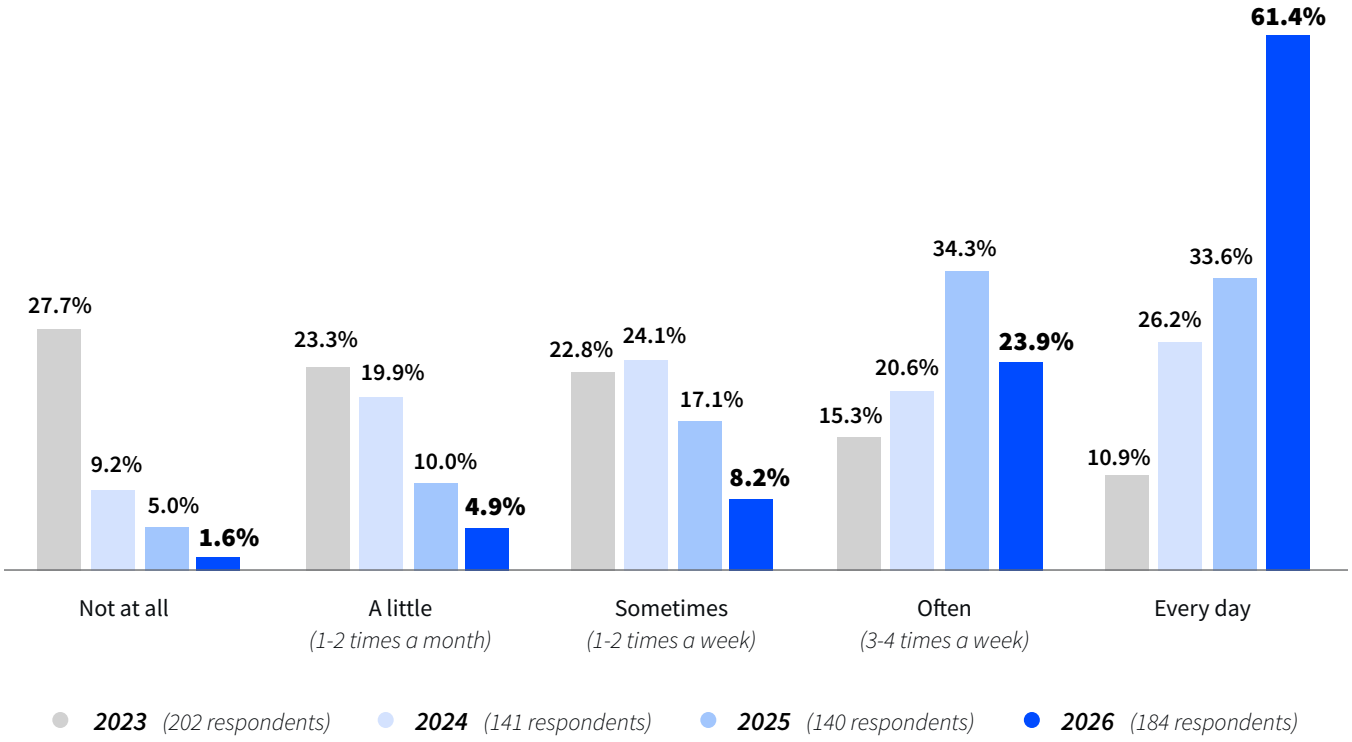
How Marketers Are Using AI

Marketers' adoption of AI is now effectively universal: 98.4% of marketing and advertising professionals say they use generative or agentic AI as part of their marketing/advertising work, and 93.5% use it at least once a week.

More notable, perhaps, is the growing frequency with which marketers and advertisers are relying on AI. Nearly two-thirds of industry professionals (61.4%) now use AI every day, up from 33.6% last year and just 10.9% in 2023.

And any residual institutional skepticism that may have once risked slowing the technology's arrival appears to have quickly dissipated. AI holdouts have all but disappeared, with just 1.6% of marketers saying they don't use the technology at all—down from 5.0% last year and 27.7% in 2023—as the industry has embraced AI with open arms.

Approximately how often do you or your organization use generative or agentic AI tools as part of your marketing/advertising work?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Are Using AI

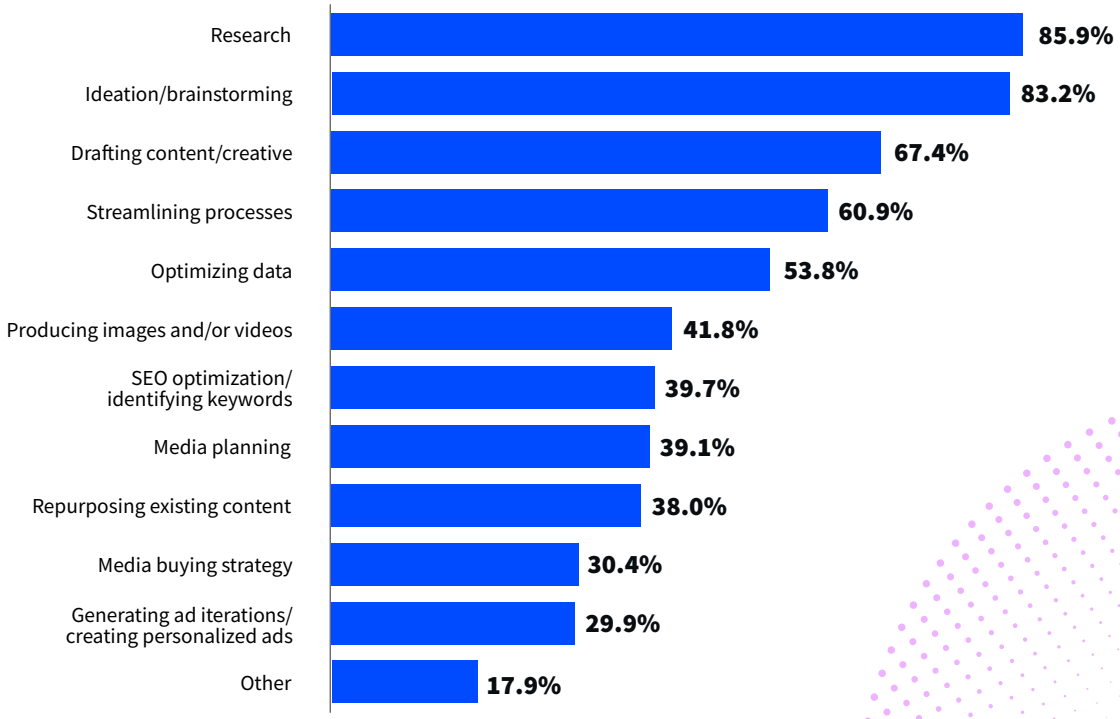
Marketers now turn to AI throughout (and across) the full campaign lifecycle, from research and ideation through creation, optimization, and analysis.

Use remains most concentrated at the front end. 85.9% of respondents say their organizations use AI for research and 83.2% use it for ideation and brainstorming, making those the two most common applications for the second consecutive year. Two-thirds (67.4%) employ AI while drafting content and creative, and 60.9% use it to streamline processes.

The sharper movement is further down the campaign lifecycle. Deploying AI for data optimization climbed to 53.8% from 35.0% a year ago. Reliance on AI for image and video production reached 41.8%, up from 25.0% in 2025. And AI-optimized media planning is now used by 39.1% of organizations. Each of those tasks sits closer to execution and measurement than to ideation, and each grew faster this year than the front-end applications that have defined AI's role in marketing in years past.

Taken together, the movement suggests AI's role is expanding from helping marketers begin their work to helping them complete it.

For what types of tasks do you or your organization use generative AI?



(184 respondents)

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

How Marketers Are Using AI

At marketing and advertising organizations, the AI platform market has grown from a one-horse race to a crowded field. A year ago, OpenAI held a lead of more than 40 percentage points over its nearest competitors. Today, the top two tools are separated by a mere 2 points, three tools have seen adoption across more than 50% of marketing teams, and organizations are far more likely to run several tools side by side than to standardize on just one.

ChatGPT remains the most widely used AI tool in marketing, but its dominance has eroded considerably. 74.5% of industry professionals now say they or their organizations use the platform in their marketing/advertising work, down from 88.6% a year ago.

As for who closed the gap, the big winner was Anthropic, with Claude going from 17.9% adoption in 2025 to 72.3% in 2026—moving from a distant fourth to a near-tie for first in the span of a single year. Microsoft Copilot (55.4%) and Google Gemini (47.8%) both grew their presence as well, helped along by the prominence of Microsoft 365 and Google Workspace at organizations across the country.

Design-focused tools have also gained ground, with Adobe Firefly at 20.1% and Midjourney at 17.9%, reflecting marketers' growing reliance on AI for visual media.

Which of the following tools and platforms you (or your organization) use in your marketing/advertising work?

2025
(140 respondents)

ChatGPT	88.6%
Gemini	45.0%
Copilot	41.4%
Claude	17.9%
OTHER	13.6%
Midjourney	12.1%
Adobe Firefly	12.1%
Agentforce	5.0%
Stable Diffusion	1.4%

2026
(184 respondents)

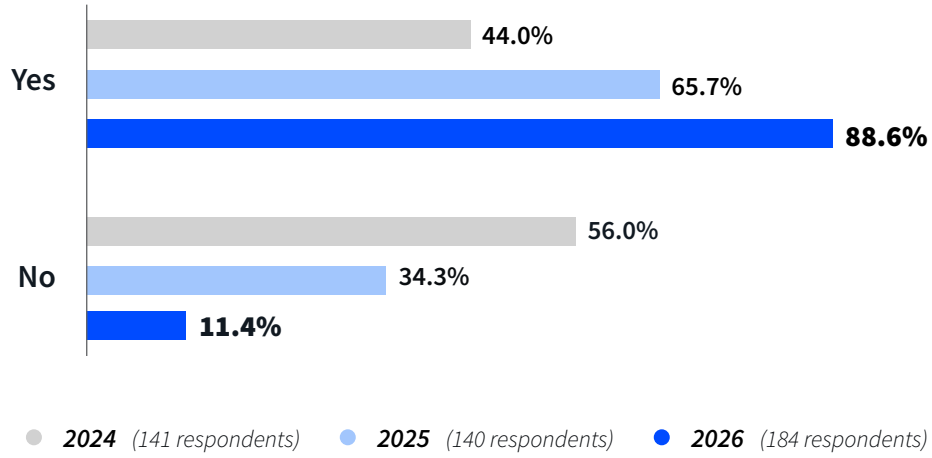
ChatGPT	74.5%
Claude	72.3%
Copilot	55.4%
Gemini	47.8%
Adobe Firefly	20.1%
Midjourney	17.9%
perplexity	13.0%
Grok	5.4%
jasper	3.3%
Stable Diffusion	2.2%
Agentforce	1.6%

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Are Using AI

Marketing and advertising organizations are increasingly committing a significant share of their budgets to AI tools. 88.6% of marketers say their organization pays for premium AI tools, up from 65.7% a year ago and 44.0% in 2024.

Does your organization currently pay for/subscribe to any premium AI tools?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Are Using AI

The paid market pecking order has shifted even more dramatically than the free one, with Anthropic soaring to the top of the list. Among organizations that pay for AI tools, premium versions of Claude are now used by nearly two-thirds of marketers and advertisers, including 33.1% who have adopted Claude Pro and 22.1% using Claude Enterprise.

OpenAI's premium tiers remain widely used, with ChatGPT finding a home with 59.6% of marketing teams that pay for AI. Microsoft Copilot Premium held fairly steady year-over-year at 29.4%, while paid versions of Google Gemini have seen 24.6% adoption.

Enterprise-grade subscriptions are worth watching in their own right: In addition to Copilot Premium, Claude Enterprise (22.1%) and ChatGPT Enterprise (12.9%) both now hold meaningful share, a sign that organizations are moving AI off individual desktops and onto the company's books as shared infrastructure.

Taken together, the evolution bodes well for marketers and their budgets. Where one vendor held a commanding lead a year ago, several now compete for the same work, and most organizations run more than one of them. That competition works in marketers' favor, bringing more leverage on pricing and terms, more freedom to match specific tools to specific tasks, and less exposure to any single vendor's roadmap.

Which of the following paid AI tools does your organization currently use?

Among organizations using paid/premium AI tools.

2025
(92 respondents)

ChatGPT Plus	38.0%	Claude Pro	15.2%
ChatGPT Pro	31.5%	Adobe Firefly	14.1%
Copilot	28.3%	Midjourney	13.0%
ChatGPT Enterprise	19.6%	Agentforce	7.6%
Google AI Pro	18.5%	*OTHER*	5.4%

2026
(163 respondents)

Claude Pro	33.1%	ChatGPT Enterprise	12.9%
Copilot	29.4%	Claude Max	9.2%
ChatGPT Pro	25.2%	Gemini Plus	7.4%
Claude Enterprise	22.1%	*OTHER*	6.7%
ChatGPT Plus	21.5%	Gemini Ultra	2.5%
Midjourney	19.0%	jasper	2.5%
Adobe Firefly	16.6%	Agentforce	1.2%
Gemini Pro	14.7%		

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

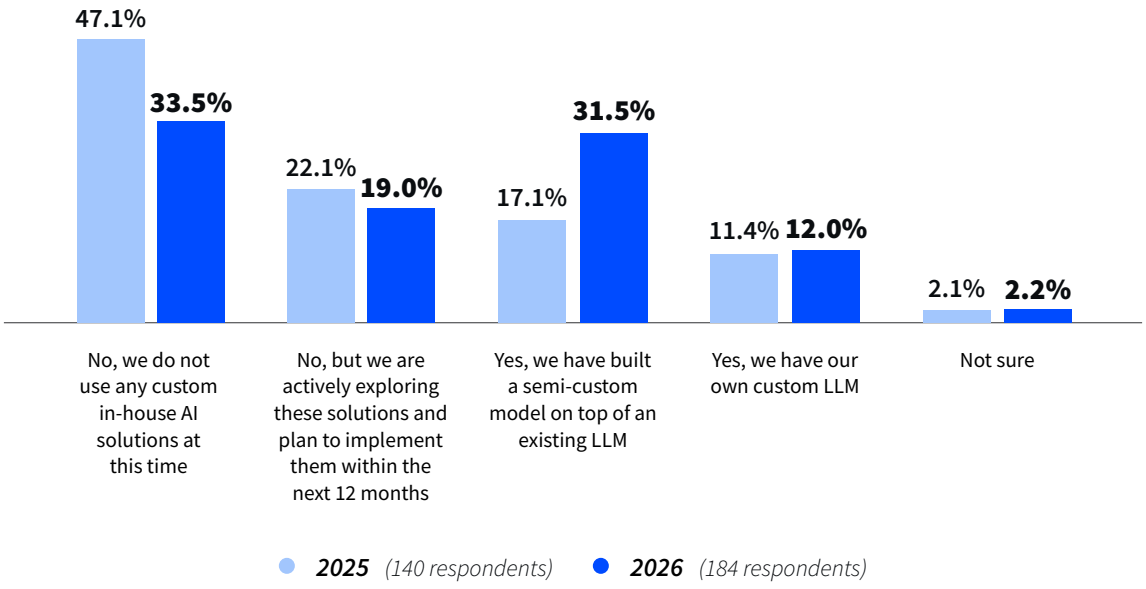
How Marketers Are Using AI

Off-the-shelf AI tools are powerful, but they're also the same tools that are available to everyone else—including competitors. Differentiation requires something a rival cannot simply buy, and for most organizations, that means four things working in concert: a model shaped around their own requirements, proprietary data to train it on, people skilled enough to direct it, and benchmarks capable of telling them whether any of it worked.

On the first, marketing and advertising organizations have made considerable progress over the past year, but plenty of opportunity still remains. More than four in 10 marketing and advertising professionals (43.5%) now say their organizations use either a custom LLM or a semi-custom model built on top of an existing one, up from 28.5% a year ago. Semi-custom models account for nearly all of that growth, climbing to 31.5% from 17.1%, as marketers find it faster, more efficient, and/or more effective to build on an existing model than to train one from scratch. Another 19.0% say that, while their organizations do not currently use custom in-house solutions, they plan to implement custom solutions within the next 12 months.

Still, one-third of organizations do not currently use any in-house AI solutions and have no imminent plans to do so. While that figure has fallen sharply from 47.1% last year, it demonstrates that a substantial share of the industry is still competing with the same off-the-shelf tools available to every one of its rivals. And as more of the marketing workflow moves to AI, the distance between organizations building tailored capability and those relying on generic tools will only get harder to close.

Does your organization use any custom in-house AI solutions?



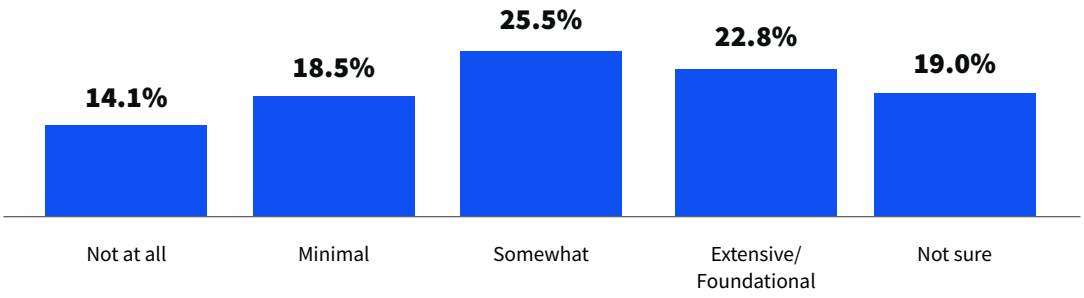
 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Are Using AI

In an AI-powered future, as the technology becomes more ingrained in marketing workflows, first-party data will be the key to unlocking differentiated outcomes. As such, data quality will set the ceiling on output quality. A model working from consented, unified customer records can segment an audience, tailor a message, and write in a brand's voice in ways a generic tool cannot, because it has something proprietary to reason from.

But as of 2026, just 22.8% of industry professionals call first-party data foundational to their organization's AI initiatives, a figure that has barely moved from 21.4% a year ago despite 12 months of rapid AI investment. Another 25.5% describe that data as somewhat useful but not yet integrated into AI use cases, while roughly one-third say first-party data plays little-to-no role in their organization's current AI work.

How central is first-party data to your organization's current AI initiatives?



(184 respondents)

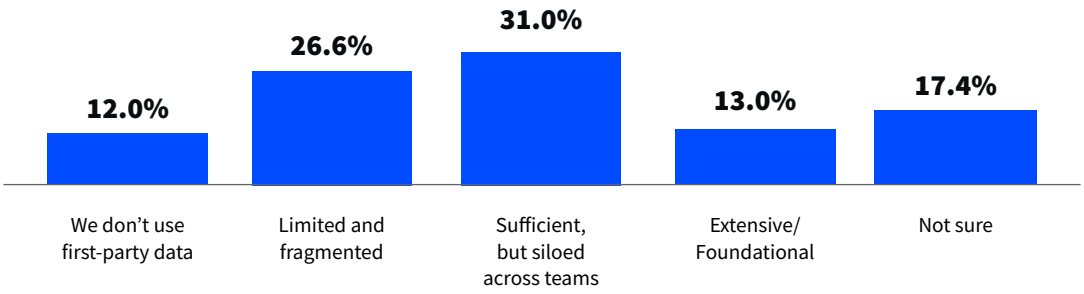
 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

How Marketers Are Using AI

When it comes to data quality, the picture is even less encouraging: Just 13.0% of marketing and advertising professionals describe their organization's first-party data as extensive and well-structured, down from 17.9% last year. More than a quarter (26.6%) call it limited and fragmented, and 12.0% say they do not really use first-party data at all. Another 31.0% describe their data as sufficient but siloed across teams, which leaves it technically available, but practically out of reach.

How would you describe your organization's first-party data?



(184 respondents)

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI and Content Creation

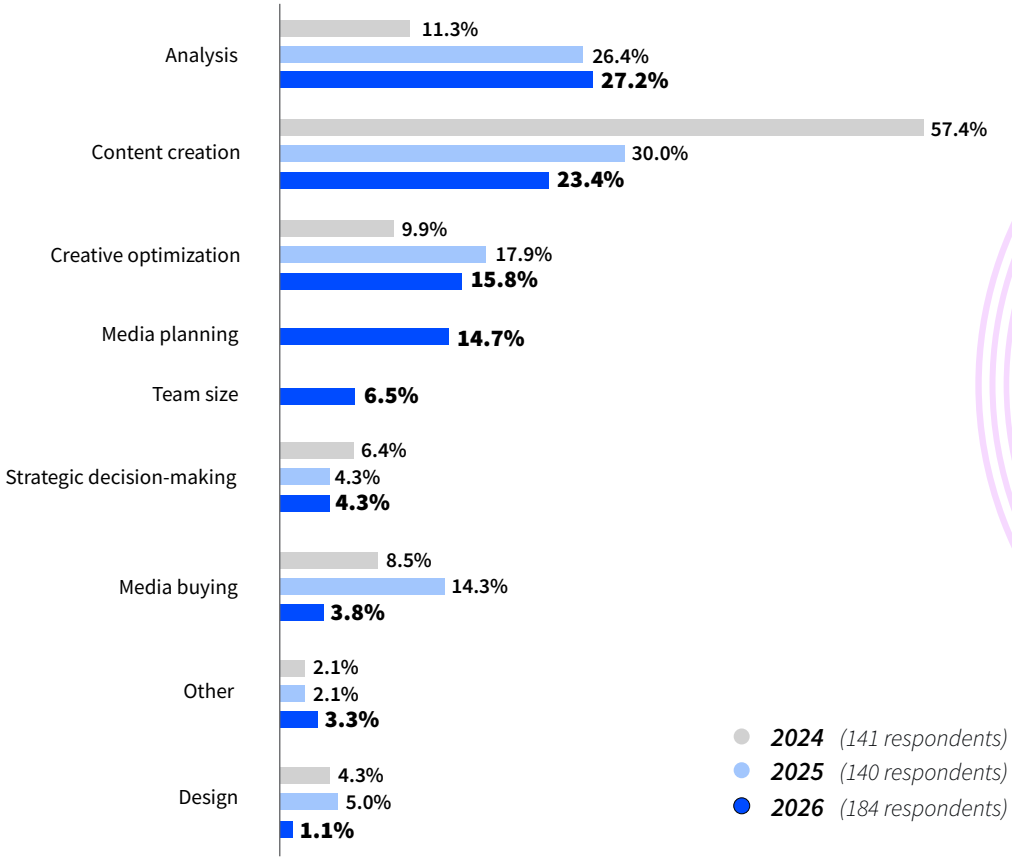
When generative AI first arrived, marketers assumed content creation would be the part of their work it changed most. In 2024, for instance, 57.4% named it the aspect of the digital marketing process most likely to be impacted by AI, more than every other answer combined.

That assumption has since inverted. Content creation now ranks second at 23.4%—less than half its 2024 share—while analysis has taken the top spot at 27.2%, up from 11.3% two years ago. Creative optimization (15.8%) and media planning (14.7%) follow.

The shift tracks what marketers have learned through daily use: Pattern recognition and data processing are what these models do best, and the industry has recalibrated its expectations toward those strengths rather than toward the chatbot capabilities that introduced most people to the technology in the first place.

Also of note, 6.5% of respondents named team size as the part of the marketing process they expect AI to affect most. While a relatively small share, it nods to some of the fears that have hovered over the industry around AI and job security.

What part of the digital marketing process do you expect to be most impacted by AI?



 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

AI and Content Creation

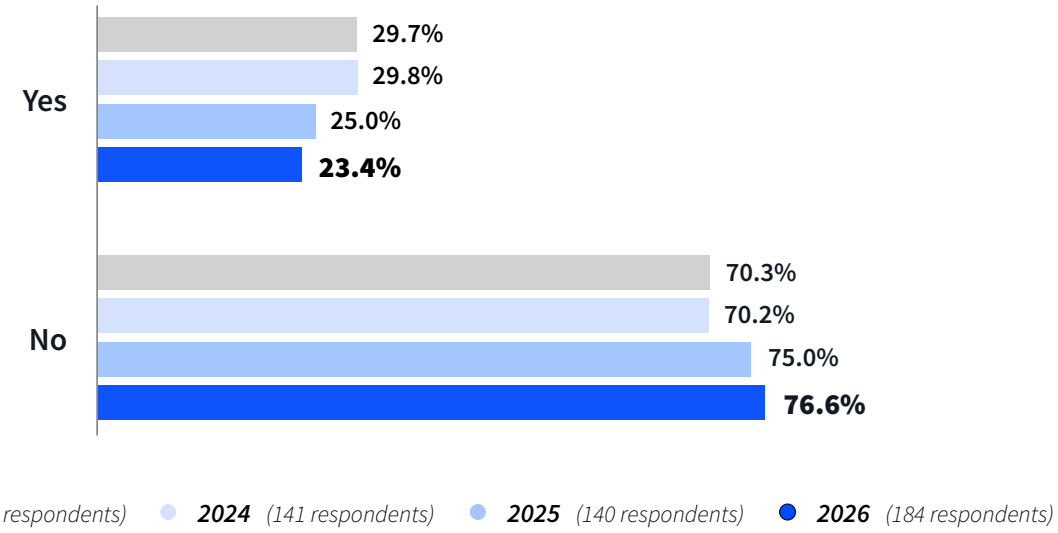
For as much as AI is expected to reshape content, marketers remain comparatively underwhelmed by the content it produces. 76.6% of industry professionals say AI-generated content still falls short of their organization's human-generated work, up from 75.0% last year and 70.2% in 2024.

The finding runs against the grain of nearly every other trend uncovered by this year's survey. The models have improved, marketers have grown considerably more skilled at using them, and adoption has reached saturation…but despite all of that, confidence in the content AI produces has fallen for the second consecutive year.

The likeliest explanation here is that marketers have gotten better at judging those outputs. Four years of daily AI use has sharpened the industry's eye for what AI produces well and what it does not, and expectations have risen accordingly. The proliferation of low-effort AI content across the open web has almost certainly made that signature easier to recognize as well.

Either way, the finding reinforces the approach marketers have increasingly taken: using AI to accelerate the content process rather than to finish it, with human expertise applied to the work before it reaches an audience.

Is AI-generated content as good as (or better than) your organization's current human-generated content?



 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

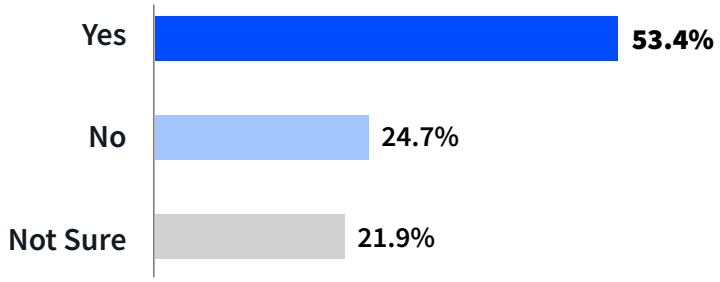
AI and Content Creation

While marketers have spent the last four years learning to use AI, their audiences have been spending that time learning to search with it. Chatbots and AI Overviews now answer a growing share of queries outright, which leaves the site that supplied the answer with no visit to show for it.

The shift is changing the fundamentals of discoverability, with visibility increasingly dependent on whether an AI system cites a brand's content, rather than on where that content ranks in a list of links.

Marketers are beginning to take notice, and a majority of organizations have started to respond. 53.4% of marketers say their organization has begun optimizing content specifically for AI search, an emerging practice most commonly referred to as "generative engine optimization" or "answer engine optimization."

Has your organization begun optimizing content specifically for AI search (aka GEO/AEO)?



(178 respondents)

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI in Marketing: The Impact on Work

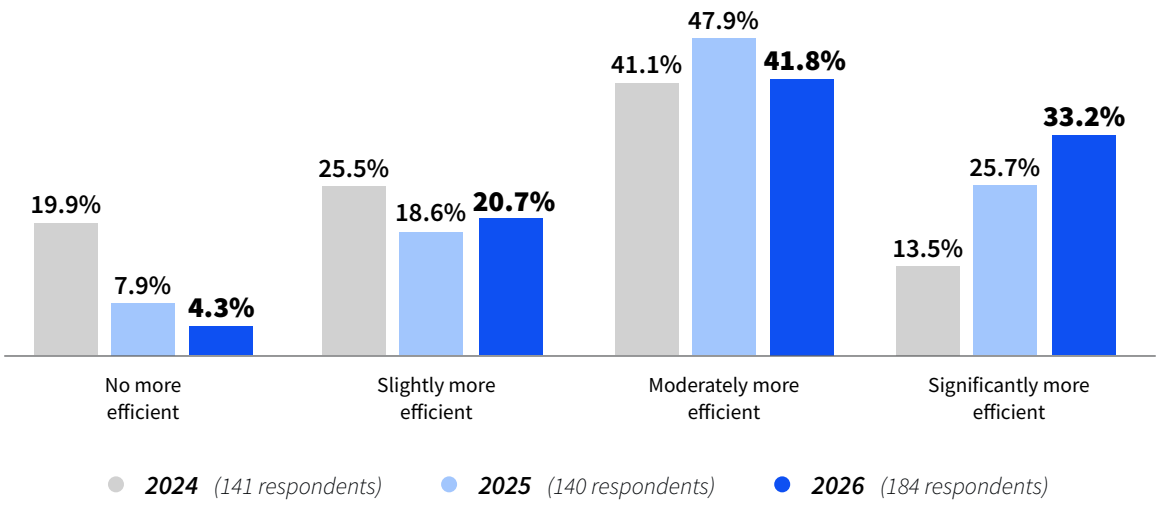
Of everything AI promised marketers, efficiency has been among the easiest claims to test. Four years in, marketers say that promise is indeed being kept—and the gains are growing.

Three-quarters of marketing and advertising professionals (75.0%) say AI made them moderately-to-significantly more efficient at their jobs over the past 12 months. Just 4.3% report no efficiency gains at all, down from 7.9% last year and 19.9% in 2024.

The intensity of those gains is rising as well: The share of marketers reporting significant efficiency improvements has grown every year, from 13.5% in 2024 to 25.7% in 2025 to 33.2% today. That pattern points to increasing proficiency, rather than novelty or one-time gains, as marketers become more skilled with these tools and more savvy about where and when to use them.

Crucially, it's worth recognizing that these gains are compounding, with new efficiency building on the gains seen in previous years. Taken at face value, the practical result is an industry that is operating at a pace it could not have sustained just a few years ago, with the same teams turning around more work in less time—moving through production cycles faster, reacting to changes more quickly, and optimizing more of the campaign lifecycle than they did, or could, before AI entered the workflow.

Over the course of the last year, do you believe that AI has made you more efficient at your job?



 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

AI in Marketing: The Impact on Work

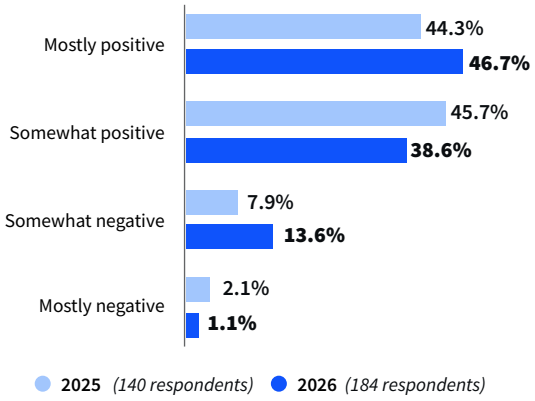
Expectations for AI's future impact have grown as well.

85.3% of marketers believe AI will make marketers moderately-to-significantly more efficient at their jobs within the next three to five years, and nearly half (46.7%) expect that improvement to be significant.

Senior leaders remain the most optimistic, with 55.4% of those at VP-level and above expecting significant efficiency gains. That's compared to 42.0% of entry-to-mid level workers, who are the employees likeliest to be using AI most heavily in their day-to-day work, carrying out the broader AI strategies set by their leaders—and, potentially, the most at risk of having their jobs one day replaced by that technology.

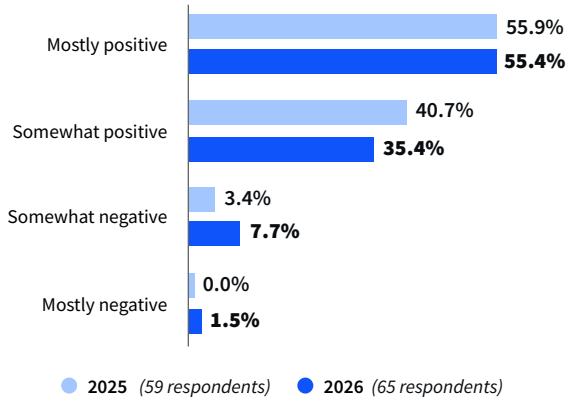
Do you believe that AI will make marketers more efficient at their jobs within the next 3-5 years?

(Overall)



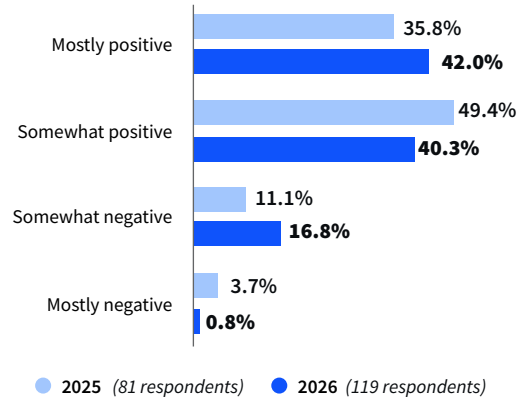
Marketing and advertising leaders

(VP-level and above)



Entry-to-mid level employees

(Director-level and above)



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

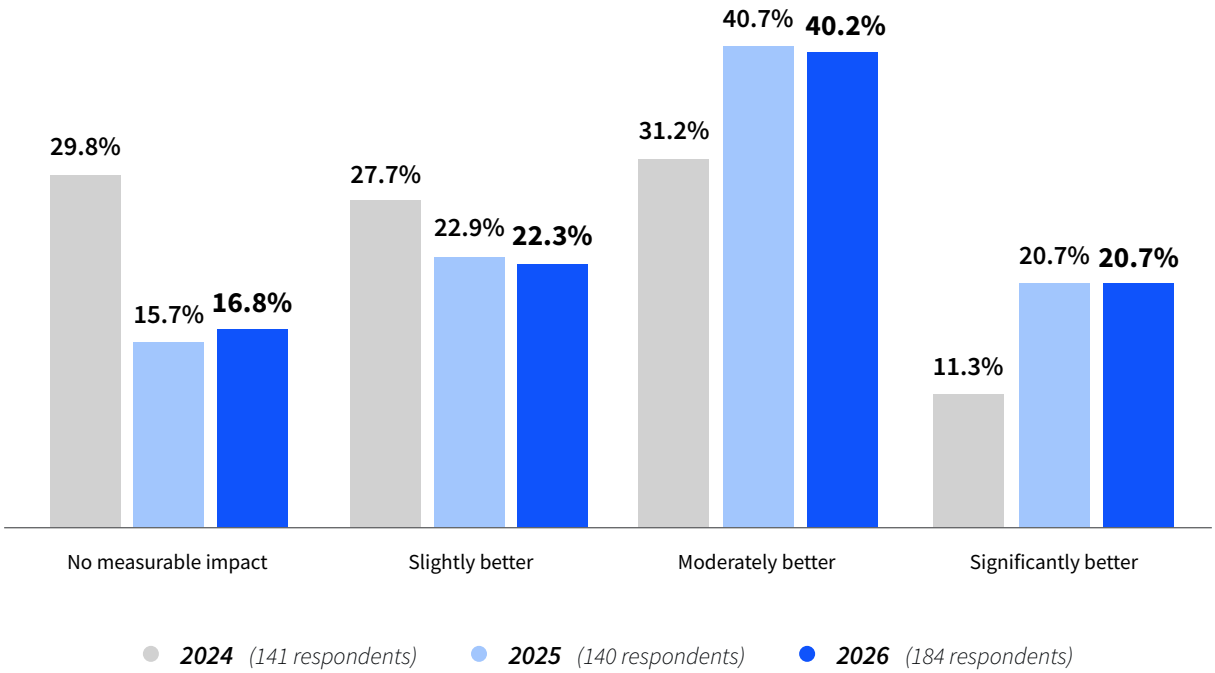
AI in Marketing: The Impact on Work

Beyond efficiency, marketers are also seeing meaningful performance improvements thanks to AI. 60.9% of marketing and advertising professionals say AI made them moderately-to-significantly better at their jobs over the past 12 months, the second consecutive year of compounding performance gains.

Of course, that still leaves 39.1% of respondents reporting little-to-no measurable improvement in their job performance, including 16.8% who say they're seeing no measurable impact whatsoever—nearly identical to last year. So despite efficiency gains accelerating and performance gains compounding around them, a persistent share of the industry is not getting better at its work with AI, and most organizations have no reliable way to determine why.

Over the course of the last year, do you believe that AI has made you better at your job?

(Overall)



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

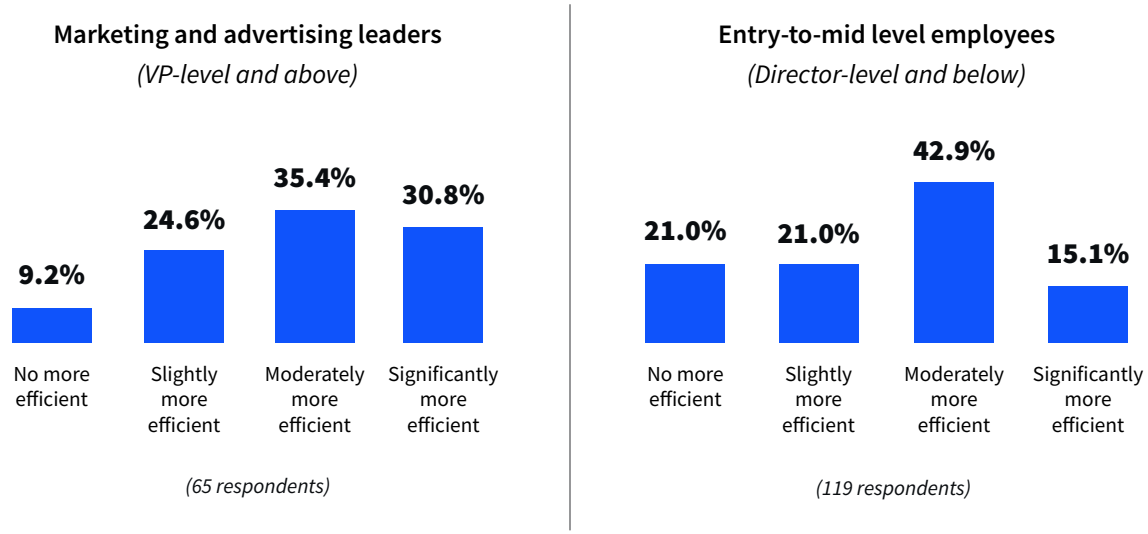
AI in Marketing: The Impact on Work

Interestingly, many of the sharpest performance gains appear to be coming from senior leaders, with 66.2% saying they believe AI has made them better at their jobs in the last year. For entry-to-mid level workers, however, the benefits have begun to plateau, with 63.9% saying AI has made them only slightly-to-moderately better and 21.0% saying the technology has had no measurable impact on their job performance.

The spike is indicative of AI playing an expanding role at marketing organizations. Senior leaders are more likely to lean on the technology for synthesis, analysis, and decision support. Meanwhile, entry-to-mid level workers are often using AI to produce and process—work in which the technology reliably changes how fast something gets done, but does not *necessarily* change its quality. The result is a scenario in which AI is helping both groups get more efficient, but where only leaders perceive an improvement in quality.

That distinction could have meaningful implications for how organizations train and deploy AI going forward. When performance benefits accrue mainly to those directing the work rather than those performing it, it can lead to an enthusiasm gap that, without proper focus, will only grow harder to close.

Over the course of the last year, do you believe that AI has made you better at your job?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI in Marketing: The Impact on Work

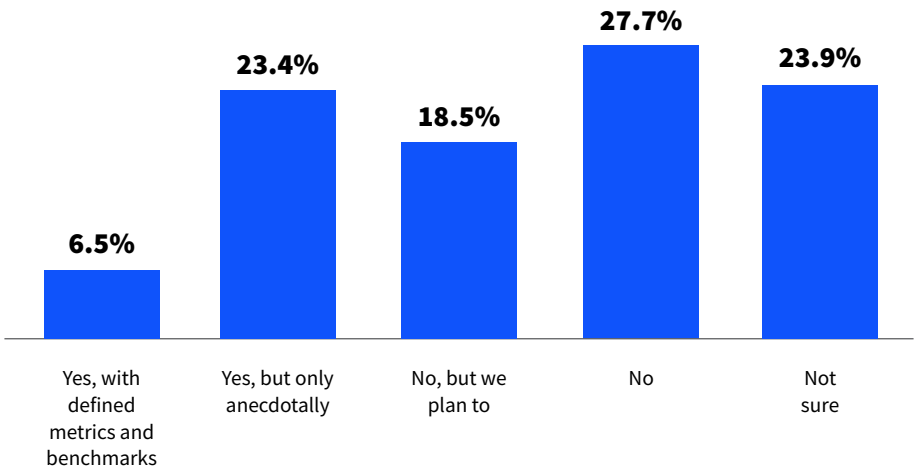
Of course, self-evaluated benefits can only tell us so much, and as AI use continues to expand and AI budgets continue to grow, so too will the expectations around its impact.

Yet despite this inevitable increase in scrutiny, marketers are doing remarkably little to establish whether their AI initiatives are actually working. Just 6.5% of marketing and advertising organizations measure the ROI of their AI investments with defined metrics and benchmarks, a striking figure in an industry that has spent the last two decades moving toward rigorous accountability around every dollar of media spend. Another 23.4% say they measure the return on their AI investments, but only anecdotally.

That leaves more than two-thirds of marketing organizations (70.1%) that either do not measure the ROI of their AI investments or are unsure whether anyone at their organization is measuring it, indicating a lack of clarity around goals and around what AI success even looks like.

The consequences of this freewheeling approach will only grow as AI takes on more of the work. Organizations without defined benchmarks cannot distinguish a genuinely effective deployment from an expensive one that merely feels productive. They cannot build the internal case to scale what is working. And they cannot identify what to cut when budgets tighten. For an industry that purports to hold every media dollar to account, the absence of a comparable standard for AI is unlikely to hold much longer, particularly as those investments continue to swell.

Does your organization measure the ROI of its AI investments?



(184 respondents)

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

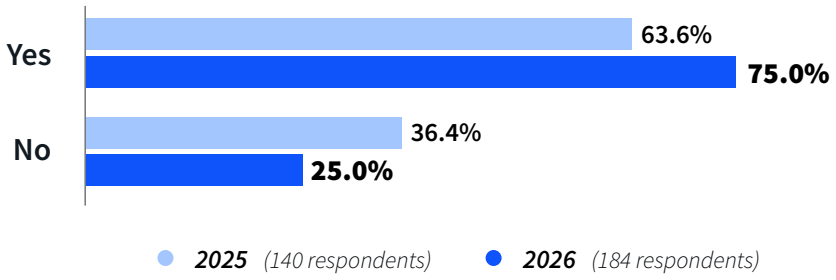
Looking Toward the Future

Alas, AI-generated efficiency and performance gains do not come free. They require organizations to fund the tools that produce them, and marketing and advertising organizations have been doing exactly that. Three-quarters of marketers (75.0%) say their organization invested in technology to automate or streamline processes over the last 12 months, up from 63.6% in 2025.

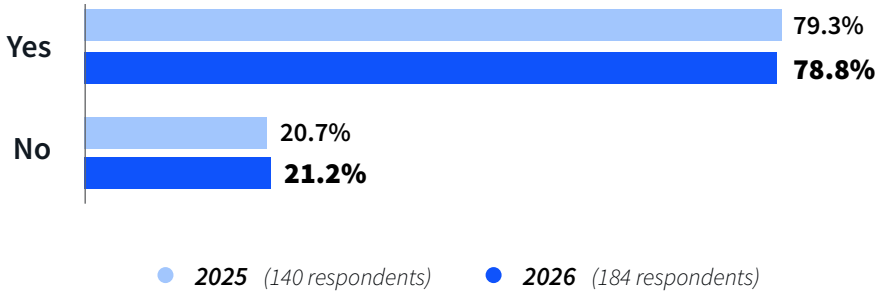
That momentum shows no sign of slowing. 78.8% of respondents say their organizations plan to invest in new technology that automates or streamlines processes within the next 12 months, which promises to build new capacity and additional capabilities on top of what they've already put in place.

The continued investment in this kind of technology raises the stakes on measuring its impact. As automation and AI budgets are compounding, they are doing so largely on the strength of vendor-touted benefits and self-reported gains rather than defined benchmarks. The larger those cumulative investments grow, the harder they become to defend without concrete evidence, and the more important it will become that organizations start showing real results.

Within the last 12 months, has your organization invested in new technology to automate or streamline processes?



Does your organization have plans to invest in new technology to automate or streamline processes within the next 12 months?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Looking Toward the Future

To date, marketers and advertisers have been quick to adopt AI across a wide range of workflows, an approach that has already led to rapid evolution across the industry. Marketers overwhelmingly expect that trajectory to continue in the years ahead, with 90.2% of industry professionals believing that AI will radically transform digital advertising within the next three to five years.

This conviction—coupled with near-universal adoption—is emblematic of an industry that has largely stopped debating AI's transformative potential and started contending with what it will require: new workflows, new skills, new guardrails and, inevitably, new ways of proving that all the investments are paying proper dividends.

Do you believe AI will radically transform digital advertising within the next 3-5 years?



(184 respondents)

 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

AI and Marketing: The Risks

The same daily use that has made marketers more efficient with AI has also given them a much clearer view of what the technology gets wrong, and this year's data shows an industry considerably less sanguine about the risks than it was 12 months ago.

Concerns around AI have intensified on virtually every front. For the first time, a majority of industry professionals rate AI's brand safety and misinformation threat as significant rather than moderate. Worry about the technology's environmental footprint climbed nearly 18 percentage points in a single year. And support for regulation reached levels that put the industry well ahead of the government bodies that might actually supply it.

And yet, none of this has slowed adoption. Even as marketers come to see AI's problems more clearly, they are not backing away. Instead, they are building it deeper into their operations while those problems remain unresolved, leaving the responsibility for managing them in the hands of the organizations doing the building.

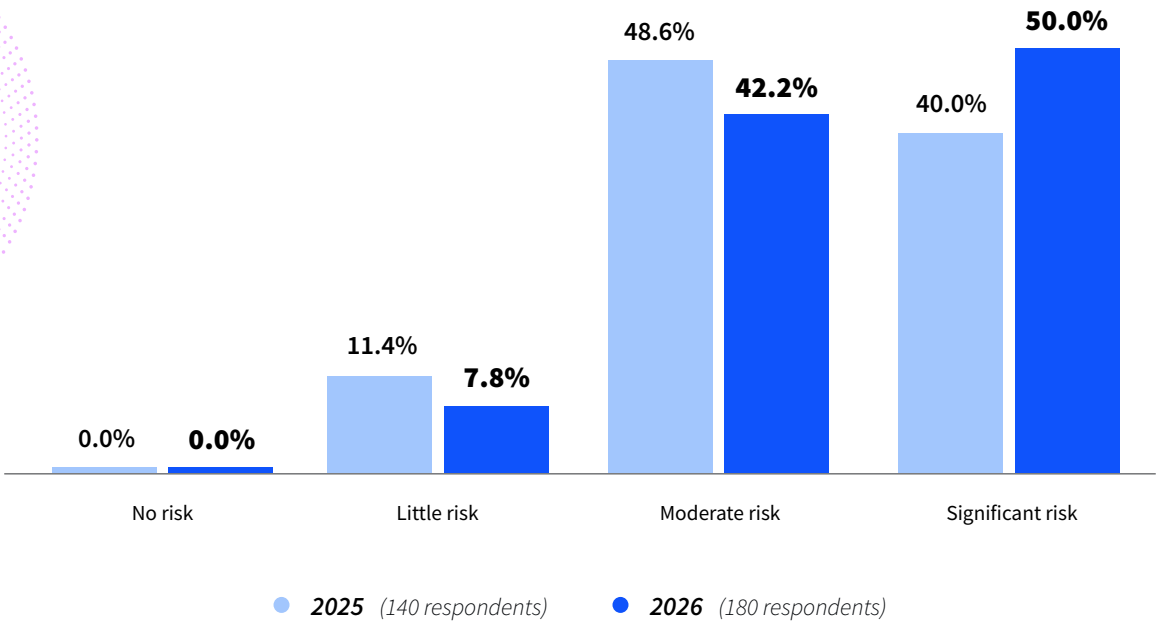
Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI and Marketing: The Risks

AI slop has become a permanent fixture across the open web and walled gardens alike, and the mis- and disinformation traveling alongside it has created an array of new brand safety problems. Those problems compound for marketers, who face the dangers of running ads alongside synthetic garbage, as well as the separate risk of publishing inaccurate AI-generated content on their own channels.

The industry appears to recognize these threats without exception, with 100% of respondents agreeing that AI poses a brand safety and misinformation risk for digital marketers. 92.2% call that risk moderate-to-significant, up from 88.6% a year ago.

Do you believe AI poses a brand safety and misinformation risk for digital marketers?



 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis

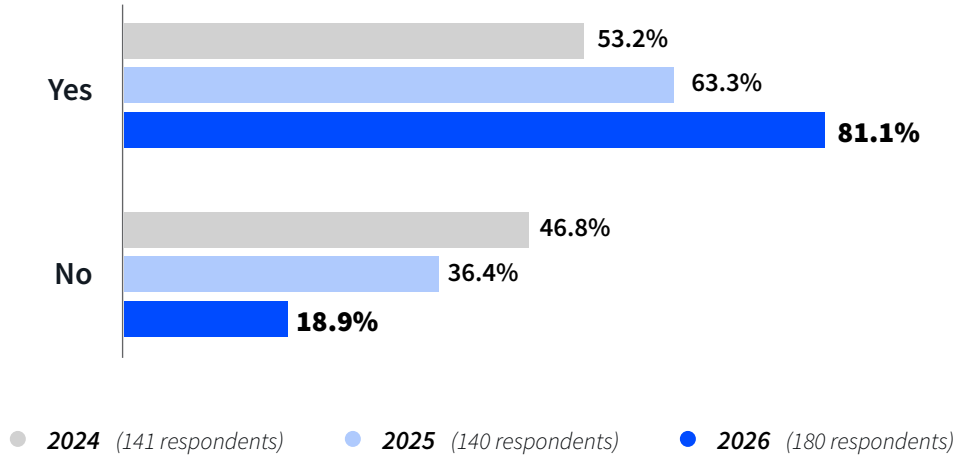
AI and Marketing: The Risks

The resource-thirsty infrastructure behind AI has become increasingly difficult to overlook. As data centers arise at a pace that strains local power grids and municipal water supplies, the costs of that buildout have drawn steady scrutiny from the general public.[1] Marketers appear to have been paying attention.

81.1% of marketing and advertising professionals say they are concerned by the environmental impact of AI's significant energy needs—up from 63.6% last year and 53.2% in 2024—as what was once a slim majority has evolved into something of a consensus.

That concern now sits awkwardly alongside an industry that has spent the past four years dramatically expanding its use of the technology. How marketers reconcile the two is likely to become a live question for organizations carrying public sustainability commitments, and a more pressing one as agentic systems—which run continuously rather than on demand—take on a greater share of the workload.

Are you concerned by the environmental impact of AI's significant energy needs?



[1] *https://www.theverge.com/ai-artificial-intelligence/995917/data-center-nyt-midterm-poll-september*

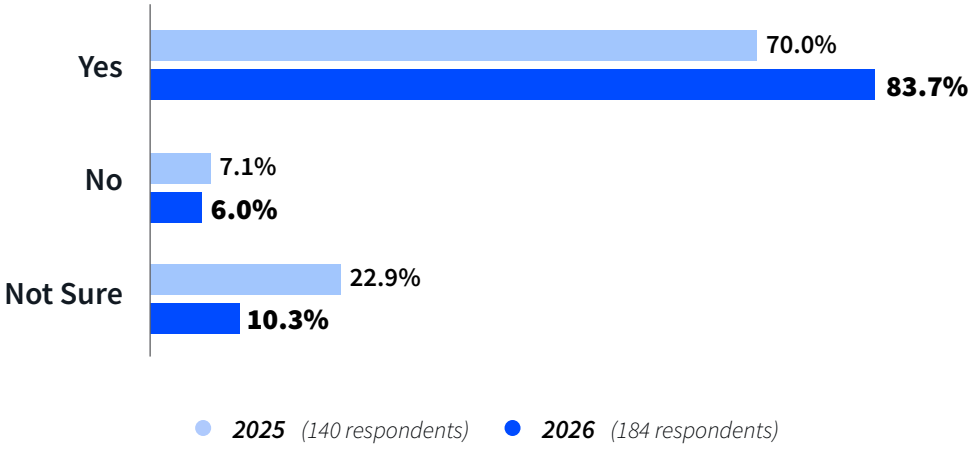
Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI and Marketing: The Risks

With federal regulators taking a deliberately hands-off approach toward AI, the marketing industry has been left to make its own decisions around weighty topics such as acceptable use, disclosure, and accountability.

Though the circumstances appear unlikely to change anytime soon, that is nevertheless not what marketers say they want. 83.7% of marketing and advertising professionals believe AI's development and usage should be regulated, up sharply from 2025, while just 6.0% think it should go unregulated.

Do you believe AI's development and usage should be regulated?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Every efficiency has a source. When marketers report doing more in less time, it's because some portion of the work they used to do is now being handled by AI, and over the past year, marketing organizations have grown markedly more willing to make that trade.

But the scope of that "outsourced" work is changing. AI's role has expanded from discrete tasks to entire workflows, with agents now planning, producing, and optimizing across the campaign lifecycle under limited human direction. Functions that demanded a person's continuous involvement a year ago increasingly do not.

How the industry feels about that shift depends a great deal on the person you're asking—and, more specifically, where in the industry they sit. Senior leaders tend to see the arrival of agentic AI as a long-awaited opportunity to redirect human expertise toward strategy, relationships, and brand building, while those closer to the day-to-day work are notably less optimistic. The findings in this year's survey lend support to both perspectives, and offer a clearer picture of how quickly responsibility is shifting from people to machines.

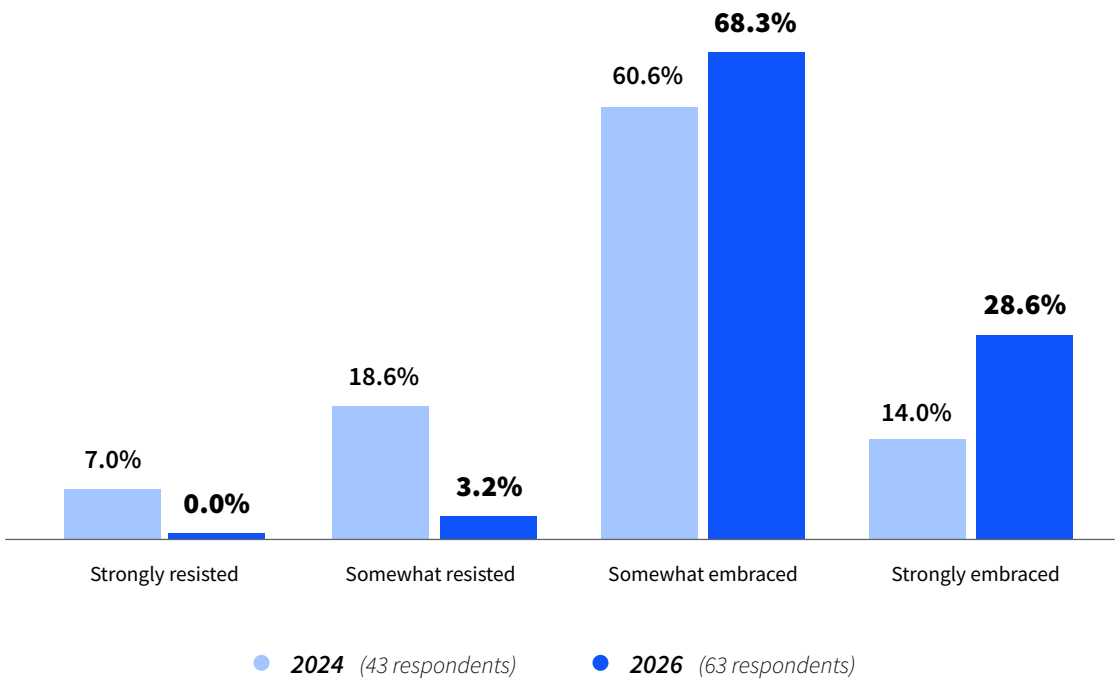
 Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Resistance to AI appears to have all but disappeared from marketing organizations. 96.9% of marketing and advertising leaders say their teams have embraced AI in their marketing and advertising work, up from 74.6% just two years ago. The share reporting any resistance at all fell from roughly a quarter of organizations to 3.2%, and not one leader surveyed described their team as strongly resisting the technology. Enthusiasm for AI has deepened as well as spread, with 28.6% of leaders now saying their teams have strongly embraced AI—double the 14.0% who said the same two years ago.

Have you found that your employees have embraced the use of AI in their marketing/advertising work?

Marketing and advertising leaders (VP-level and above)

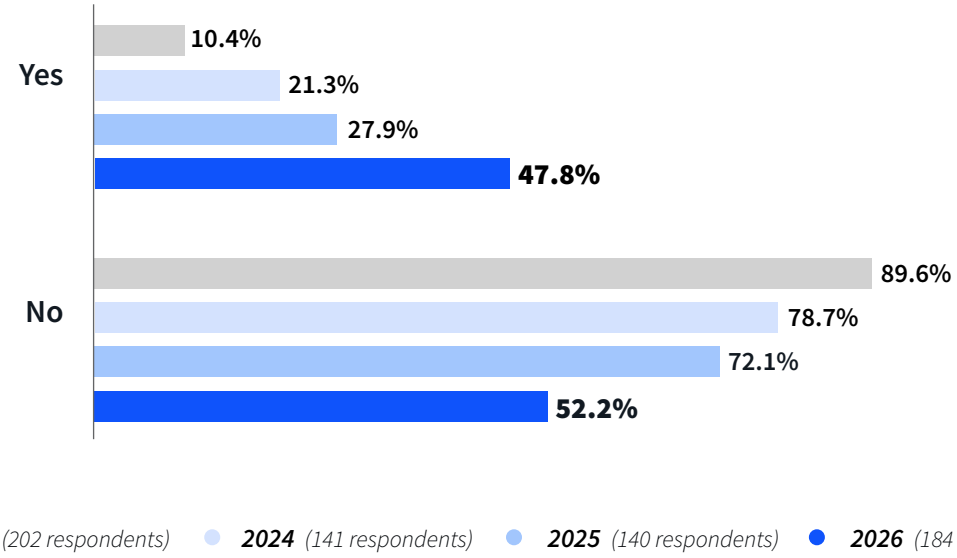


Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Organizations are reassigning work from humans to AI faster than at any point since the technology's emergence. Nearly half of marketing organizations have now handed work that people used to do over to software, with 47.8% of marketers saying their organization replaced human tasks with AI solutions within the last 12 months—up from 27.9% a year ago and 10.4% in 2023.

Within the last 12 months, has your organization replaced any human tasks with AI solutions?



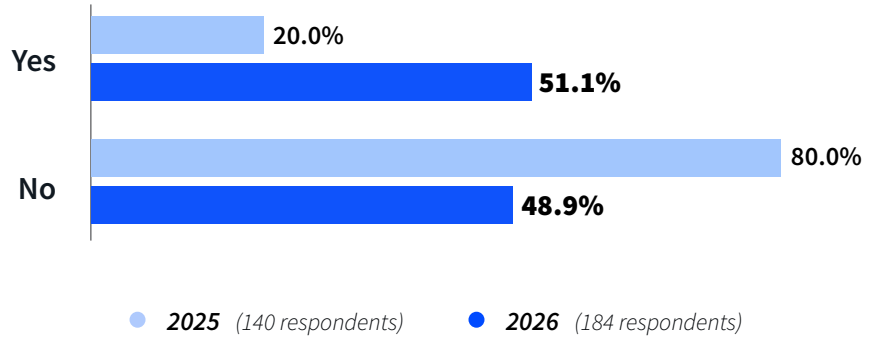
Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Agentic AI is beginning to make its mark on marketing. More than half of all marketers say their organizations have created or begun to use AI agents for marketing and/or advertising work, a 155.5% increase year-over-year.

That growth signals rising trust in what AI can handle on its own, paired with leaders' appetite for automation. Agents pull data, make decisions, and take action to meet a predefined objective, all with limited or no human involvement. But that autonomy has arrived faster than the foundations meant to support it: While half the industry now runs agents, just 13.0% of marketers describe their organization's first-party data as extensive and well-structured, most likely resulting in agents underperforming their potential.

Has your organization created or begun to use any AI agents for marketing and/or advertising work?



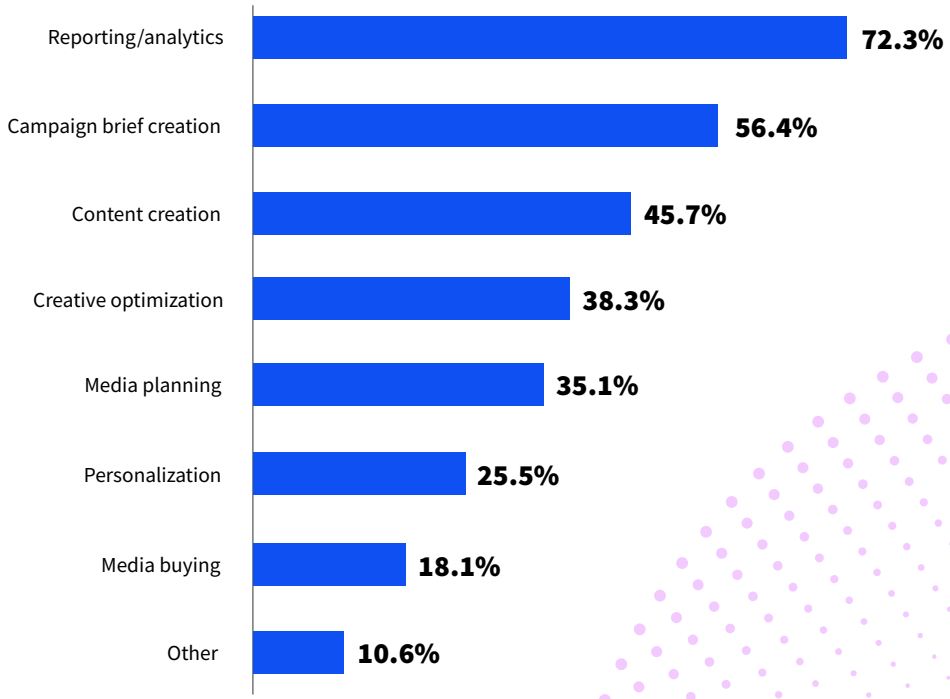
Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Reporting and analytics are by far the most common assignment for these early agents, perhaps unsurprisingly given the way those tasks play to AI's core strength: ingesting large volumes of data and surfacing the patterns and takeaways buried inside.

But marketing agents are not confined to analysis. More than half of organizations with agents use them to draft campaign briefs (56.4%), and sizable shares have handed over content creation (45.7%), creative optimization (38.3%), and media planning (35.1%). Each of those functions was, until recently, considered a judgment-driven task that required a person's direct involvement from start to finish. No longer.

What kind of AI agents has your organization created?



(94 respondents)

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

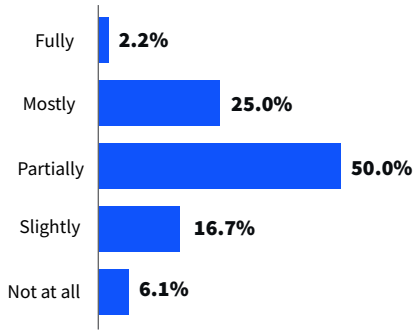
The industry is not treating any of this as a passing phase. More than three-quarters of marketers and advertisers (77.2%) believe the digital advertising process will be at least partially agentic or automated within the next three to five years, and more than a quarter (27.2%) expect it to be mostly or fully automated in that time.

Senior leaders are considerably more bullish than the people who will operate inside whatever system results. Nearly 40% of those at VP-level and above expect digital advertising to be mostly or fully agentic within five years, compared to roughly 20% of those at director level and below.

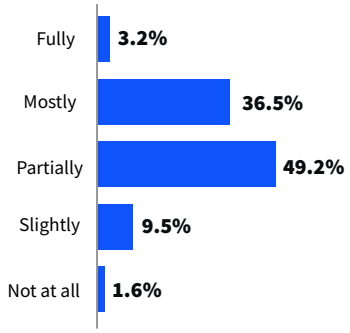
This divide reflects more than differing levels of optimism. Senior leaders are the ones commissioning agentic systems and setting timelines for their rollout, while those at director level and below are the ones who will work alongside those systems day to day. Each group is forecasting from a different vantage point, and organizations planning aggressive automation timelines should bear that in mind as they scale their agentic workflows.

Do you believe that digital advertising will be agentic/automated within the next 3-5 years?

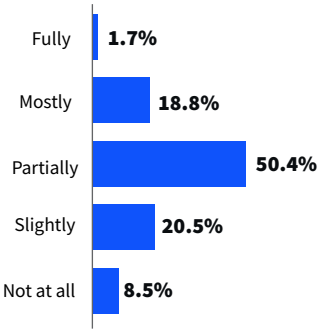
(Overall)
(180 respondents)



Marketing and advertising leaders
(VP-level and above)
(63 respondents)



Entry-to-mid level employees
(Director-level and above)
(117 respondents)



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

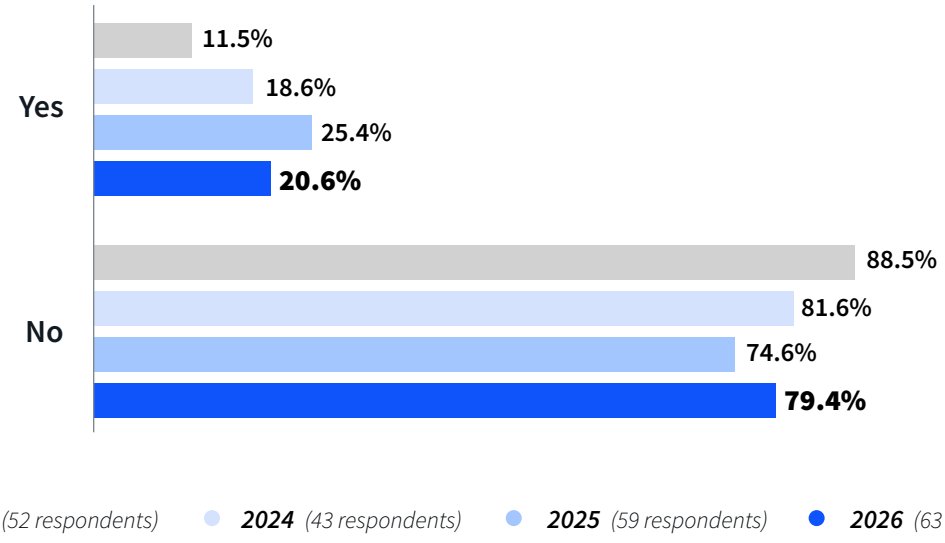
AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Rapid task replacement has not translated into equivalent job cuts…or, at least, not yet. 20.6% of marketing and advertising leaders say they have used AI to replace human employees, or currently have plans to do so, down from 25.4% last year but nearly double the 11.5% who said so in 2023.

While that year-over-year decline is notable, the underlying figure remains substantial, with one in five marketing and advertising leaders having already cut staff because of AI or expecting to do so imminently. It's also happening while task automation expands faster than it has at any point since these tools became widely available, which suggests organizations are currently putting the additional capacity toward more work, rather than fewer people.

Have you used AI to replace human employees, and/or do you presently have plans to do so?

Marketing and advertising leaders (VP-level and above)

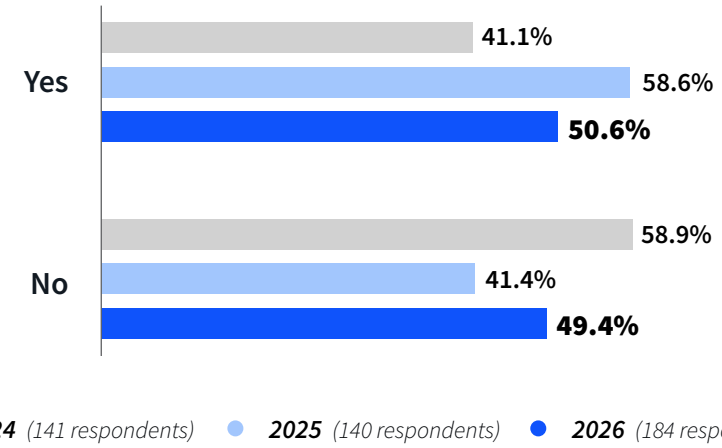


Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI’s Impact on Marketing Jobs

Concerns about AI’s toll on marketing jobs remain widespread, though they have eased slightly over the past year. Just over half of all marketers (50.6%) now believe AI will lead to substantial job losses in their industry within the next three to five years, down from 58.6% last year but still well above the 41.1% who felt that way in 2024.

Do you believe that AI will lead to substantial job losses in digital marketing within the next 3-5 years?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

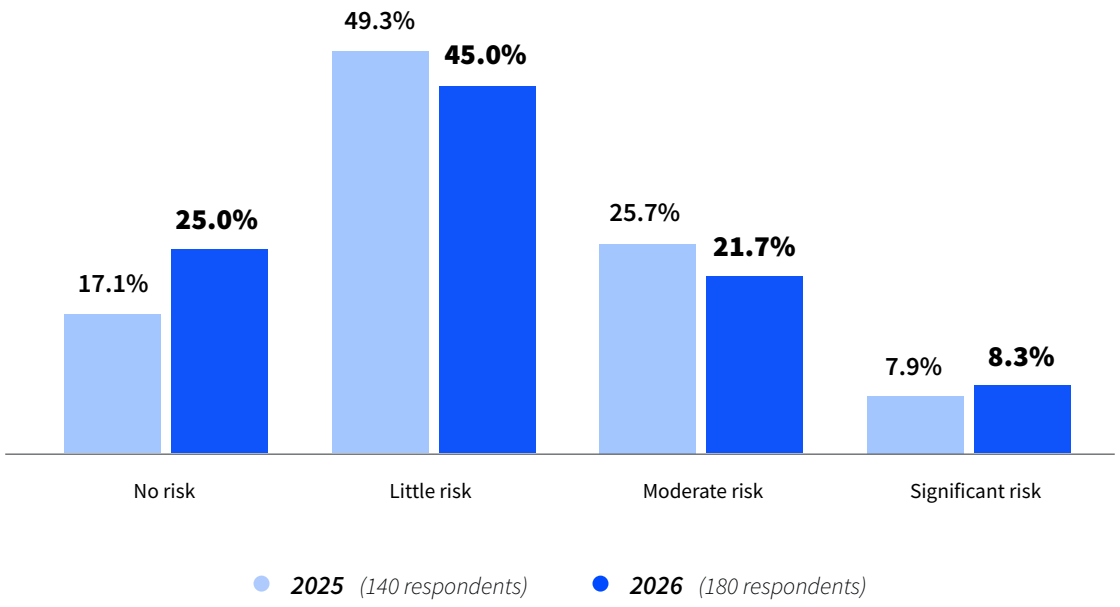
AI's Impact on Marketing Jobs

Curiously, marketers view their own prospects far more favorably than the industry's. 70.0% say there is little-to-no risk that AI could replace their own job within the next three to five years, up from 66.4% last year, even as task replacement and agent adoption both accelerated.

The explanation for this may well be tied to the ways organizations have scaled their AI efforts to date. Task replacement nearly doubled this year, but the share of leaders using AI to replace employees fell, meaning AI is absorbing the work while the employees who remain direct the output. That arrangement appears to have made individual marketers more productive and more valuable to their organizations, and their sense of job security reflects it.

How long the arrangement holds, however, is another question entirely. Organizations are automating tasks far faster than they are reducing headcount, and as of yet, it remains unclear whether that reflects a durable division of labor, or simply a lag.

Do you believe there is a risk that AI could replace your job within the next 3-5 years?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

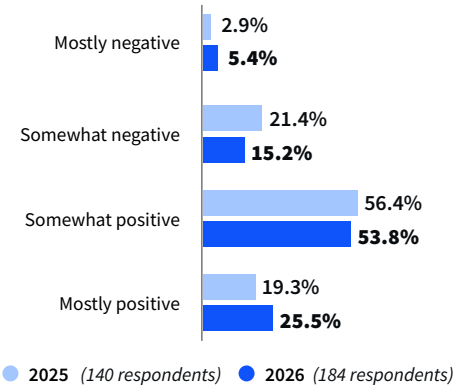
How Marketers Feel About AI in Marketing

Marketers remain broadly optimistic about what AI means for their industry. 79.3% of industry professionals believe AI will have a positive impact on marketing and advertising, up from 75.7% a year ago. The conviction of that belief appears to be strengthening as well, with the share of marketers describing AI's impact as mostly positive climbing from 19.3% in 2025 to 25.5% this year.

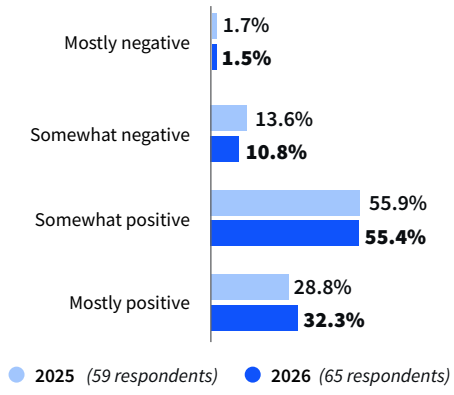
Additionally, the long-running AI "optimism gap" divide between senior leaders and everyone else is still present, but it's slimming. 87.7% of leaders at VP-level and above hold a positive view of AI's impact, compared to 74.7% of those at director level and below, but the number of entry-to-mid level employees who feel that AI will be "mostly positive" nearly doubled year-over-year.

What impact do you believe AI will have on the marketing/advertising industry?

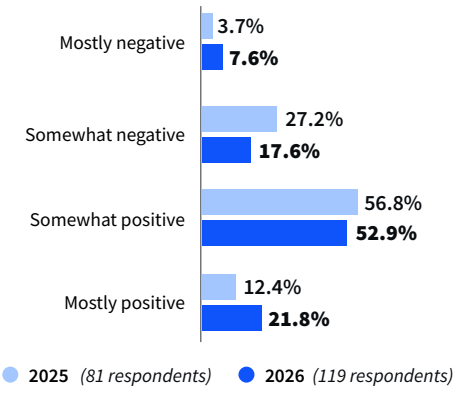
(Overall)



Marketing and advertising leaders
(VP-level and above)



Entry-to-mid level employees
(Director-level and above)



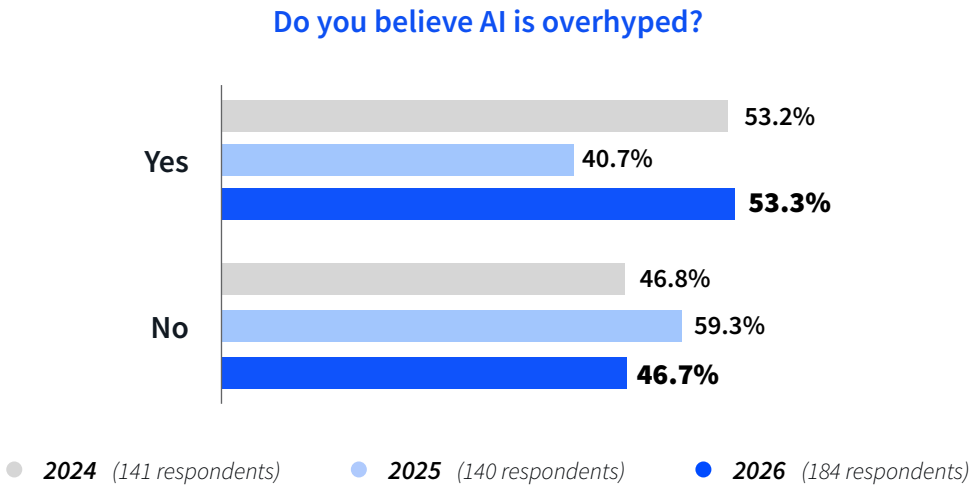
Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Feel About AI in Marketing

Familiarity also appears to have made marketers harder to impress. Over half of all marketers and advertisers (53.3%) say they believe AI is overhyped, up sharply from 40.7% a year ago.

That skepticism is almost certainly not aimed at what AI does today—after all, marketers are reporting real efficiency gains, real performance gains, and rising confidence in the technology's impact on their industry—but at what AI has been promised to do. Long-touted capabilities like fully automated, end-to-end advertising workflow that run without human oversight remains a pitch, rather than a product, and marketers now have enough hands-on experience to see the distance between the two clearly.

That clarity has made industry professionals more appreciative of what AI delivers today and more confident in their own value alongside it, but it may also be leaving marketers overconfident about what comes next. Sentiment here has already swung once: 53.2% called AI overhyped in 2024, only 40.7% did in 2025, and now 53.3% do today. The technology is still advancing at an extraordinary pace, and many of the same professionals who doubted its usefulness three years ago are now among its most enthusiastic users. There is little reason to expect that see-saw to stop. Whether marketers' confidence in their own position holds up through the next swing, however, is a separate question entirely.

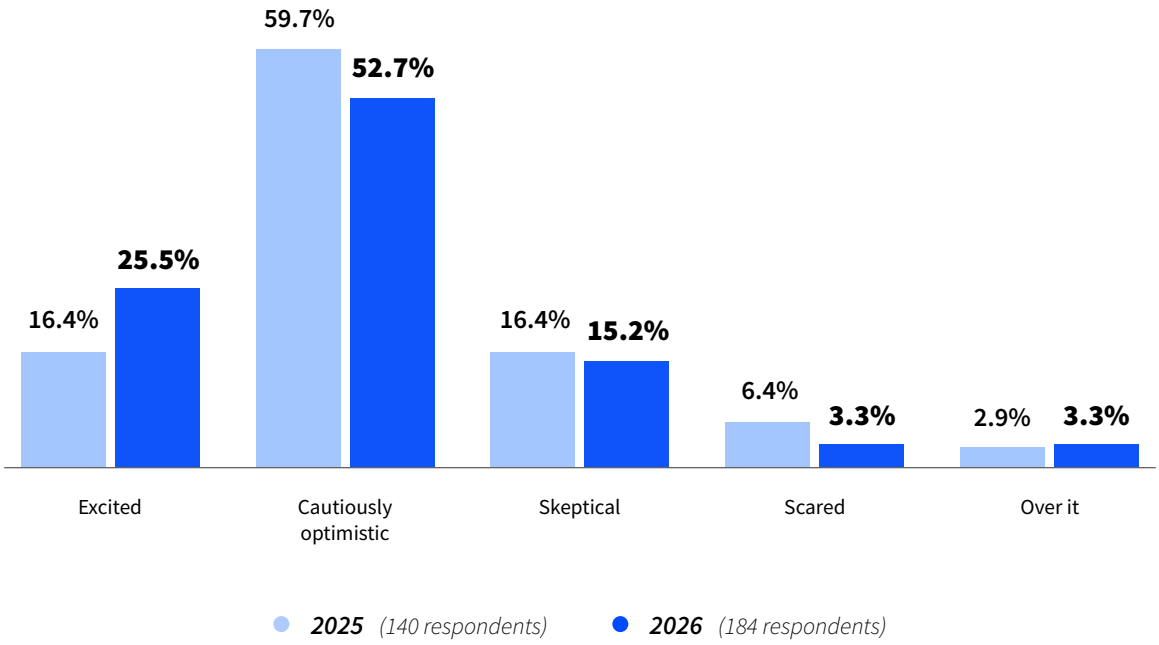


Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

How Marketers Feel About AI in Marketing

Overall, attitudes toward AI have grown increasingly favorable over the past year. A quarter of marketing and advertising professionals (25.5%) now describe themselves as excited about AI, up from 16.4% in 2025, while another 52.7% called themselves “cautiously optimistic.” Taken together, 78.2% of the industry now feels positively toward AI in marketing.

What is your current attitude towards AI in digital marketing?



Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI and Marketing: What's Next

After four years of exploration, experimentation and adoption, marketers have come to largely embrace AI. More importantly, they're growing increasingly confident when wielding it, reporting new efficiency and proficiency gains in each of the last three years—a pattern that indicates accumulated skill far more than it reflects the enthusiasm of early adoption.

Much of the conversation surrounding AI treats human involvement as friction to be engineered out of the process, but this year's data points the other way. The marketers reporting the largest gains are the ones who have spent the most time learning what these tools do well and where they fail, and the organizations getting the most from AI are the ones whose people have learned to direct it.

Whether that advantage survives the coming agentic wave, however, is the question that will hang over the rest of the decade. More than half of marketing organizations now run AI agents, and the industry broadly expects advertising to become at least partially autonomous in the next three-to-five years. Human judgment is currently what separates good AI output from mediocre AI output. In workflows designed to run without continuous human involvement, it is far less clear where that judgment gets applied, or how anyone would notice if it stopped being applied at all.

That uncertainty would be at least somewhat easier to sit with if the industry could measure what its AI is producing. But as of today, it simply cannot: Just 6.5% of marketing organizations evaluate their AI investments against defined benchmarks, and the consequences of that gap compound in three directions at once:

1) Effectiveness: Without benchmarks, organizations cannot separate a genuinely effective deployment from an expensive one that feels productive. Every subsequent AI decision becomes a judgment call informed by impressions and vendor claims, which is precisely the kind of reasoning marketing spent two decades training itself out of.

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

AI and Marketing: What's Next

2) Credibility: AI budgets are growing faster than almost any other line item in marketing, and they are currently the least defensible ones. When scrutiny arrives—and it will— a response consisting of "Our teams say it's helping" will inevitably not survive a CFO's follow-up question. Marketers who cannot demonstrate returns on AI will find those budgets harder to renew and much harder to expand.

3) Agentic Foundations: An agentic system optimizes toward whatever it is told to optimize toward. But an organization that can't properly define what "good" looks like for an AI workflow cannot give an agent a target worth hitting, and it will subsequently have no reliable way to tell whether the agent is hitting its mark. Autonomy applied to an unmeasured process simply produces more of that process, faster.

For marketing leaders, the priorities that follow are about building conditions in which AI can be held to account. That starts with first-party data, which only a small minority of organizations currently describe as extensive and well-structured, and for which no amount of model sophistication can truly compensate. It extends to the sprawl of disconnected tools most marketing organizations have accumulated, because measuring AI's contribution is close to impossible when planning, execution, reporting, and reconciliation live in separate systems that were never designed to speak to one another. And it depends on continuing to invest in the people who have grown skilled at this work, who remain the mechanism by which AI produces something better than average.

Of course, there is a version of the next few years in which the technology advances far enough that none of this matters, and the fully autonomous, end-to-end marketing workflow arrives as promised. The industry has heard that forecast before, which is part of why a majority of marketers now call AI overhyped even as they report their best year with it yet. But the more likely outcome increasingly appears to be the one this year's data already describes: capable technology in the hands of skilled people, producing results that compound for organizations able to identify and repeat what works.

The industry has earned its confidence. What it has not yet built is the ability to prove that confidence is warranted, and in a discipline that takes pride in measuring everything else, that gap cannot, and will not, stay tolerable for long.

Copyright © 2026 Basis. All Rights Reserved.

Basis®

Since 2001, Basis has provided unified software and services to simplify and automate digital media operations, improve efficiency, and drive increased profitability at marketing organizations. Today, Basis is the most comprehensive media automation and intelligence platform in the industry and the only unified media platform to consolidate planning, digital operations, reporting, and financial reconciliation across programmatic, publisher-direct, search, and social.

Learn more at **Basis.com**.





basis.com