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The Business Impact of Investing In Experience

How Experience-Driven Businesses Lead As AI Reshapes Customer Behavior And Expectations

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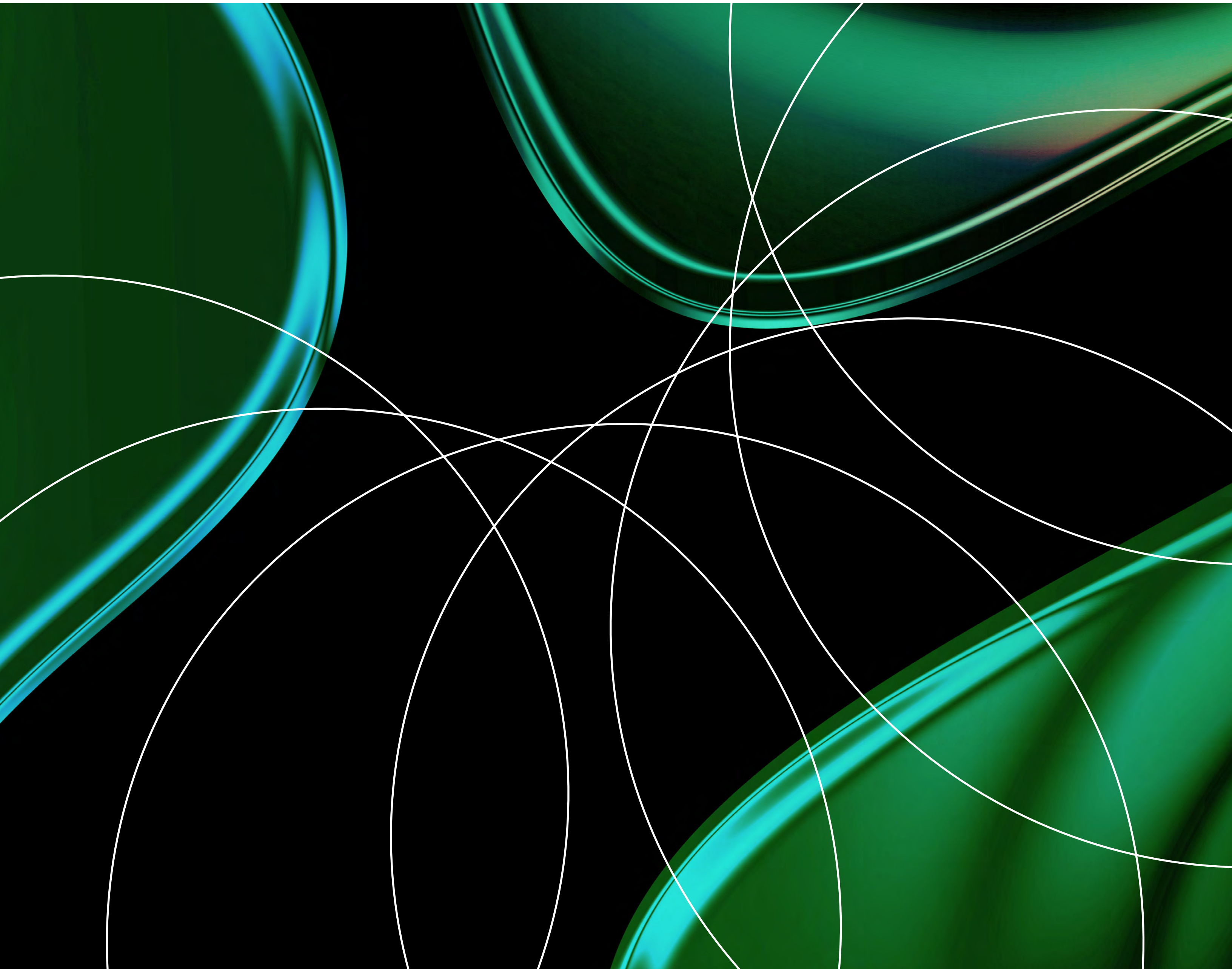

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ABOUT FORRESTER CONSULTING

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Executive Summary

As AI reshapes how brands interact with each other, customer behavior and expectations are also rapidly evolving. To remain competitive, brands must not only improve customer experience (CX) across the customer journey but also adapt to the new paradigm of AI.

In March of 2026, Adobe commissioned Forrester Consulting to evaluate the business impact of investing to improve customer experience. To do this, Forrester conducted an online survey with 415 global digital business, marketing, and analytics decision-makers with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics. All respondents participate in selecting their organizations' technologies to support CX and marketing initiatives and in defining metrics to evaluate success.

To analyze performance, we identified best practices for managing people, processes, and technology, then asked respondents to rate their companies' performance. With this data, we conducted a maturity assessment and identified respondents at companies that embrace CX best practices across these three pillars. We call these experience-driven businesses (EDB) and found that 31% of respondents work at EDBs.

This study found that while improving CX is a top priority, not all brands are investing across the three pillars. For those making the effort, the investment is paying off. Not only do EDBs experience superior business performance across the customer journey, but they are also meeting or exceeding customer expectations and adapting to changing customer behaviors by adopting AI more effectively.

EDBs grew revenue **1.2x** more and increased customer lifetime value **1.4x** more in the past year than other companies.

Key Findings

EDBs invest across people, process, and technology. In today's increasingly AI-powered economy, businesses must improve CX and create a more cohesive experience across the entire customer journey. But not all brands are investing equally across people, processes, and technology pillars. Approximately one-third of respondents work at EDBs.

AI is disrupting traditional CX delivery, discovery, flow, and results. Not only are brands using AI to improve personalization and create more effective self-service, but consumers are also increasingly turning to AI-powered large language model (LLM) answer engines to interact and conduct research on brands' websites rather than visiting websites directly. This shift requires brands rethink their websites and how experiences are designed, discovered, and delivered.

Digital transformation requires tackling big challenges. Adopting AI properly is hard, and EDBs are coming up against those challenges more so than non-EDBs that are not investing as much in AI. Brands that lead in the market will have to first find ways to implement an effective data strategy, hire employees with the right skills, and build systems that are connected across channels, product lines, and business units.

Investing in experience drives better performance across the customer lifecycle. EDBs outperformed non-EDBs in critical metrics like customer lifetime value (1.2x) and revenue growth (1.4x). That performance is driven in part by key indicators, including improved reach (1.9x), form submission (3.0x), order value (2.0x), retention (1.7x), and earned growth rate (1.5x).

Improving CX Is A Top Priority, But Not All Brands Are Experience-Driven

Research consistently shows that website and digital experience improvements have moved from nice-to-haves to strategic imperatives across industries.[1] In the post-COVID-19 era, CX is an even more important driver of loyalty, satisfaction, and revenue. This insight is far from revolutionary, but many businesses leaders have still not fully committed to a strategy that is fully customer-obsessed and experience-driven. To learn more, we surveyed 415 global professionals in marketing, CX, and digital business functions with responsibility for decisions involving CX tech and metrics development and found that:

- **CX, AI, and innovation are priority paths to growth.** Not surprisingly, the top priority in this study is growing revenue, specifically in new segments or markets (76%) (see Figure 1). But the priorities that immediately follow tell a compelling story: Whether entering new markets or building loyalty (67%), brands know that to drive growth, they must differentiate themselves by improving the experiences of their customers and prospects (74%). The two primary paths to success are 1) developing better product offerings (65%) and 2) using AI to accelerate digital business and customer self-service (64%).

- **AI is shifting consumer expectations and how brands approach CX.** Consumers are increasingly connected digitally to brands by a growing collection of devices, channels, platforms, and interfaces. In this environment, their behaviors are continuously evolving and their expectations for convenience and relevance are ever growing.[2] But we are still on the left side of the AI adoption curve. Most brands have not grown their AI practice beyond tactical applications, leaving existing operating models largely in place. As it stands, the most common uses are to streamline reporting (67%) and operate more efficiently (64%). Only 40% are using AI to create new ways of working that directly impact CX while just 35% use AI agents to automate existing workflows without much human intervention.

> Though AI for CX is still in the early stages of adoption, it is already reshaping consumer expectations.

FIGURE 1

Business Priorities For 2026

(Showing “Critical priority” and “High priority”)

76% Grow revenue and customers in new segments/markets

74% Address evolving customer expectations

74% Improve the experience of our customers/prospects

72% Leverage AI for business decision-making

67% Increase customer retention/loyalty

65% Innovate and develop new products/services

64% Use AI to accelerate our digital business and customer self-service

61% Improve our ability to innovate

59% Deploy AI agents to reduce operational and administrative costs

58% Improve the experience of our employees

56% Improve differentiation in the market

49% Shorten sales cycles

48% Reduce manufacturing or service delivery costs

45% Increase influence and brand reach in the marketplace

41% Better comply with regulations and requirements

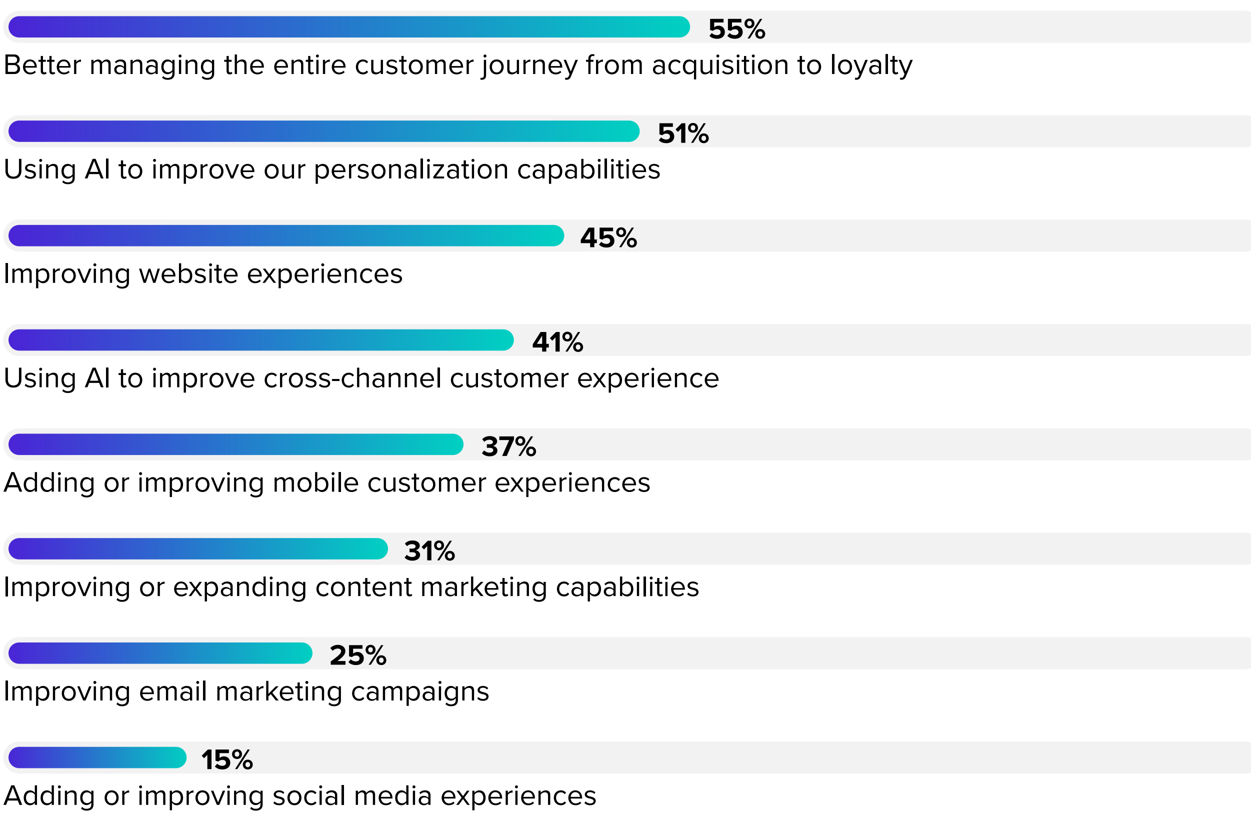
Base: 415 marketing, CX, and digital business decision-makers at the manager level or higher with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at their organization
Source: Forrester’s Q1 2026 ROI of CX Survey E-66763

- **Improving CX means creating cohesive, connected, and personalized experiences across the entire customer lifecycle.** When asked what tactical steps they are taking to improve CX over the next 12 months, respondents report their top goal is to better manage the entire customer journey, from acquisition through loyalty (see Figure 2). Brands are starting to use AI to achieve this goal, both to improve personalization capabilities and connect experiences across channels.

  Investing in mobile experience is a top-five priority but even more important is improving websites, which ranks third.

FIGURE 2

Top Priorities To Improve Customer/Prospect Experience Over The Next 12 Months



Base: 395 marketing, CX, and digital business decision-makers at the manager level or higher with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at their organization where improving customer or prospect experience is at least a moderate priority
Source: Forrester's Q1 2026 ROI of CX Survey E-66763

- **Customer obsession is critical.** We also asked respondents for the two most important CX strategic initiatives and found that brands are most focused on improving CX by 1) transforming their culture to be more customer-centric (54%) and 2) adopting experience design practices (46%). Brands know that customer obsession is the path to success. This insight was validated in Forrester's State Of Customer Obsession Survey, 2025 where executive decision-makers at customer-obsessed enterprise companies reported, on average, 53% faster revenue growth, 43% faster profit growth, and 53% better customer retention than firms that were not customer-obsessed.[3]

EBDS COMMIT TO EXCELLENCE ACROSS PEOPLE, PROCESSES, AND TECHNOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, we identified best practices for managing people, processes, and technology, and then asked respondents to rate how well their businesses perform in these areas. Across 44 different attributes, we conducted a maturity assessment and identified the respondents at companies who embrace CX best practices across these three pillars. We call these leaders experience-driven businesses (EDBs) and found that 31% of respondents work at EDBs.

EDBs Are Adapting To The Changing Paradigm More Effectively

To understand EDBs' behavior and performance more deeply, we compared them to the bottom one-third and found that EDBs not only use AI more broadly, but also invest more heavily in capabilities that go beyond decision-making and actually touch the customer experience. EDBs are also adopting AI more successfully, with respondents 1.3 times more likely to say their AI initiatives exceeded stakeholder expectations than non-EDBs.

AS CUSTOMER BEHAVIORS SHIFT AND AI REFERRALS SURGE, IMPROVING WEBSITE EXPERIENCE IS ESSENTIAL

In an independent study, Forrester found that traditional website traffic dropped roughly 10% year over year in 2025.[4] As customers increasingly turn to AI-powered answer engines rather than visiting websites directly, brands are being forced to design website experiences for machines as well as humans. This adoption signals a permanent shift in how customers discover and evaluate solutions.

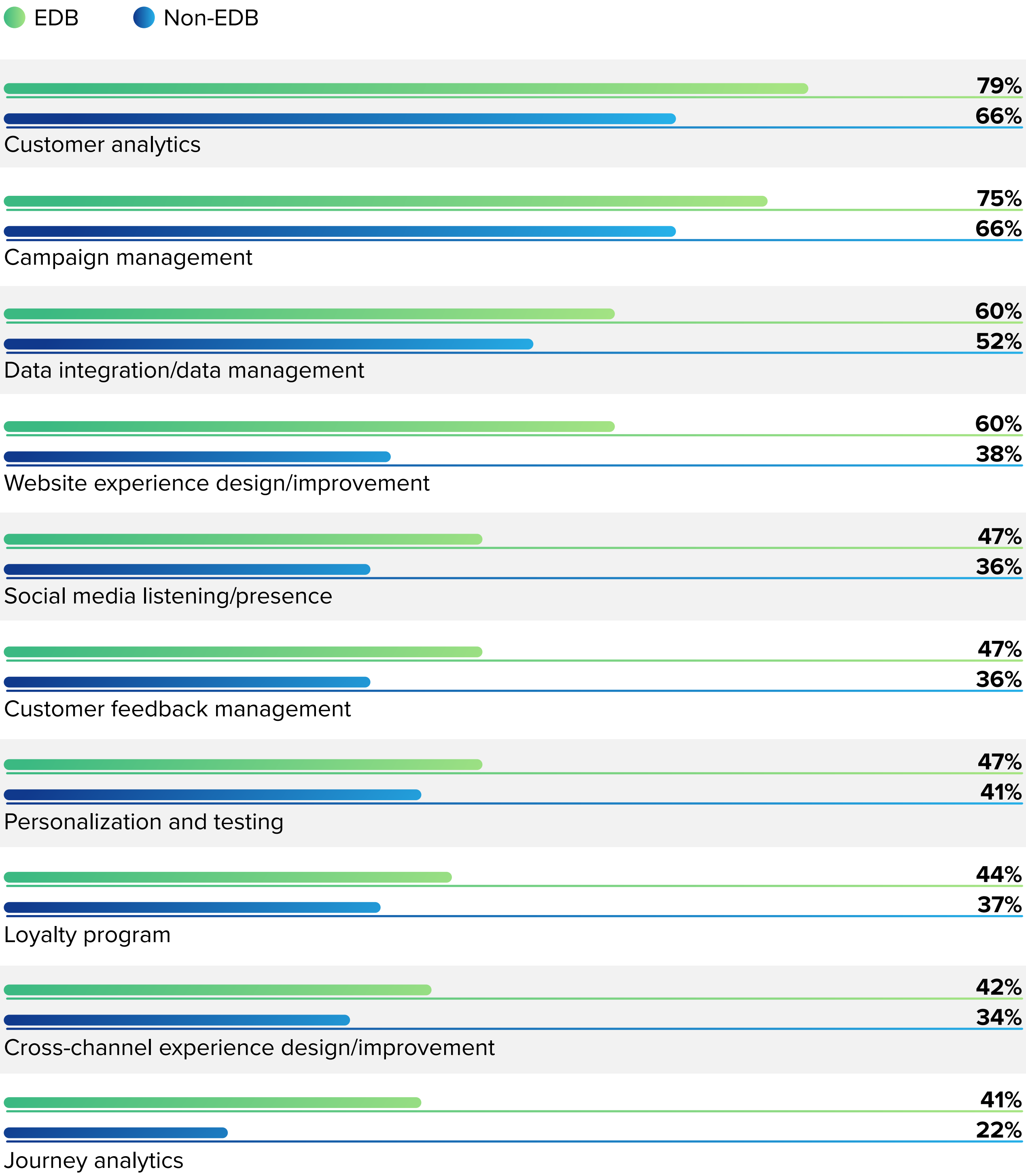
As it turns out, improving website experiences is not only a CX priority, but also has the biggest gap between EDB and non-EDBs investment. EDBs are 1.6 times more likely to have a dedicated budget line for website experience improvements in 2026 (see Figure 3).

EDBS ARE MEETING CUSTOMERS WHERE THEY ARE, ESPECIALLY USING CONVERSATIONAL AI

Another significant gap between EDBs and non-EDBs is investing in AI to accelerate digital business and customer self-service (74% vs. 56%). AI-powered chatbots and intelligent voice assistants use large language models to understand natural language, answer complex questions, and handle transactions (like checking order status or transferring funds) without requiring customers to navigate predefined menu trees or wait for human agents.

FIGURE 3

Budget Line Items For 2026



Base: 415 marketing, CX, and digital business decision-makers at the manager level or higher with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at their organization
Source: Forrester's Q1 2026 ROI of CX Survey E-66763

Modern AI capabilities make it practical for organizations to deploy sophisticated self-service applications. Well-designed AI self-service provides answers quickly with minimal effort, creating positive experiences that build loyalty.[5] When brands get self-service right, consumers will benefit in ways that were previously unimaginable and brands will save money. Anecdotally, Forrester has found that the cost difference is dramatic: Human agent-assisted interactions cost approximately $7, while self-service interactions cost just pennies.[6]

But building transformational self-service applications requires significant work in the form of infrastructure, talent, technology, customer data protection, and hallucinations — and getting it wrong comes with huge risks. Companies that succumb to pressure to cut operating costs without first doing the hard work of building a strong foundation for AI risk deploying AI-powered chatbots and intelligent virtual agents prematurely and in contexts where they are unlikely to succeed, therefore eroding customer experience and brand reputation.[7]

MODERNIZING CX REQUIRES TACKLING BIG CHALLENGES

As EDBs invest to transform CX, many face budget constraints, a lack of alignment across organizational departments, or no clear leadership. But the most common barriers EDBs face achieving their CX priorities are an inability to effectively organize data for AI and decision-making (71%), a lack of staff with required emerging AI skills (65%), and disconnected systems across channels, product lines, and business units (62%). These challenges can prevent brands from keeping up with changing customer needs or market dynamics (56%). Additionally, outdated or legacy technologies are slowing 47% of EDBs.

EDBs Outperform In Critical Metrics

Respondents at EDBs reported that in 2025 their companies outpaced non-EDBs in revenue and customer lifetime value (CLV) growth. Using midpoint averages, we found that in 2025 EDBs experienced 1.2 times more revenue growth (13% vs. 11%) and 1.4 times CLV growth (5.6% vs. 4.0%). Most strikingly, EDBs were 1.6 times more likely to experience revenue growth of 15% to 19%. That improved performance is reflected in EDB's Net Promoter Scores℠, which improved at 2.6 times the rate of non-EDBs.[8]

EDBS PERFORM BETTER ACROSS THE CUSTOMER LIFECYCLE

Readers will recall that the top CX improvement priority for brands is to better manage the entire customer journey, and EDBs are finding their investments are paying off. Higher levels of growth in capstone metrics (revenue, CLV, and NPS) are driven by success at each stage of the customer lifecycle, from consideration to loyalty.

Starting at the beginning of the customer lifecycle, EDBs consistently improved performance at higher rates than non-EDBs (see Figure 4):

FIGURE 4

DISCOVER	EVALUATE	PURCHASE/ACT	PARTICIPATE/USE
1.5x New website visitors	**2.4x** Requests for information	**2.0x** Average order value	**1.2x** App downloads
1.5x Brand awareness	**1.2x** Email open rate	**1.5x** Email conversion rate	**1.2x** Repeat visitors
1.9x Reach	**3.0x** Form submissions	**1.4x** Return on ad spend	**2.0x** Time to value
1.3x Percent of content personalized			

Base: 415 marketing, CX, and digital business decision-makers at the manager level or higher with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at their organization
Source: Forrester's Q1 2026 ROI of CX Survey E-66763

Further along in the funnel, The best-case scenario is an engaged, repeat buyer. With that in mind, EDBs showed that they do a better job than non-EDBs later in the customer lifecycle as well (see Figure 5):

FIGURE 5

ENGAGE	
1.4x	Social media engagement
1.6x	Click-through rate

GROW	
1.7x	Retention rate
1.2x	Repeat purchase rate
1.8x	Cross-sell/ upsell rate
1.5x	Earned growth rate

Base: 415 marketing, CX, and digital business decision-makers at the manager level or higher with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at their organization
Source: Forrester's Q1 2026 ROI of CX Survey E-66763

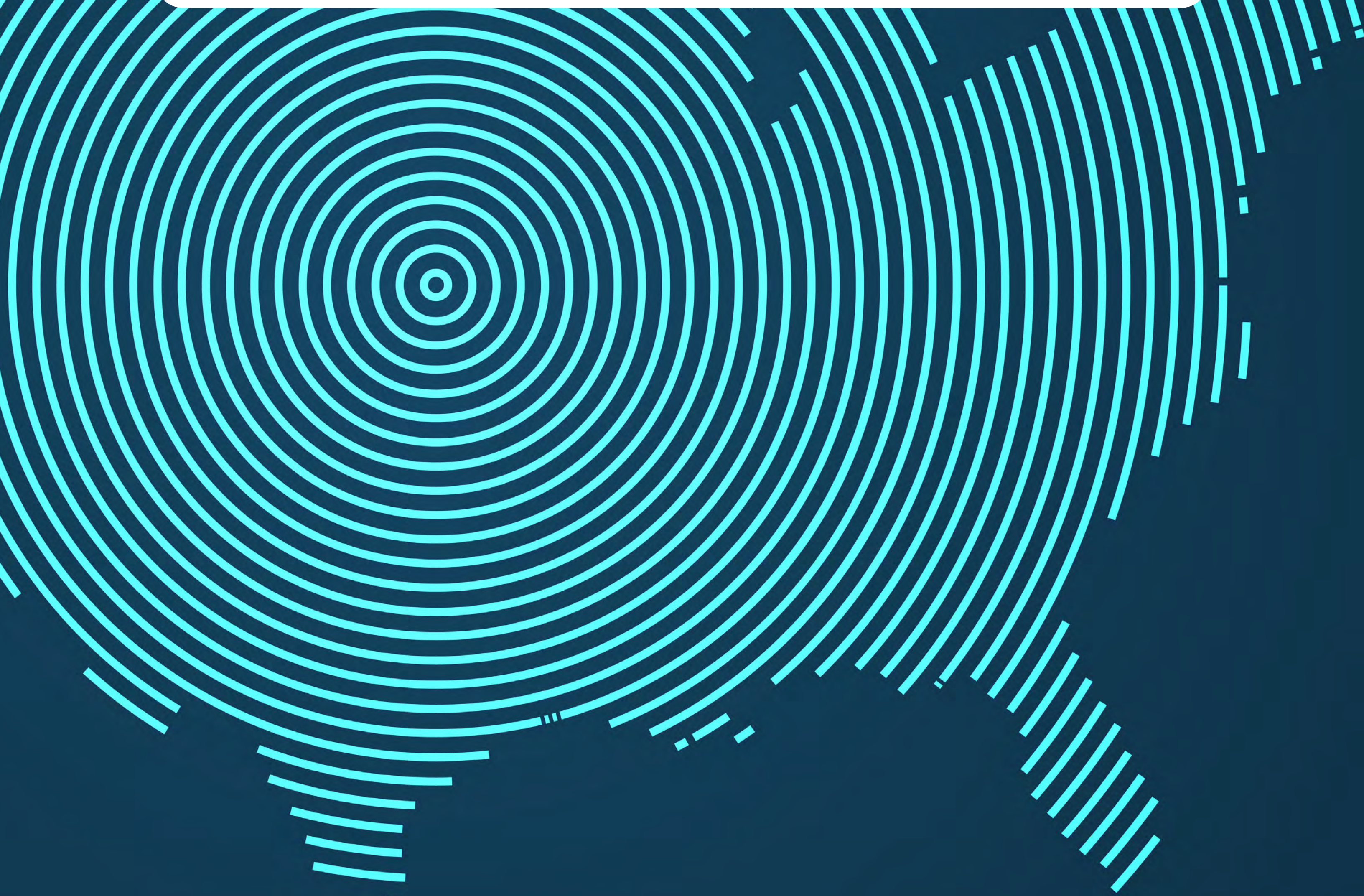
Key Recommendations

The transition toward the EDP maturity requires redefining your organization's CX landscape. To thrive in this new era, brands must shift their strategy from mere task completion to a transformation of the customer journey. This requires a disciplined approach to how AI use cases are selected, how new ways to make decisions are trusted, and how they are governed across the enterprise. Forrester's survey of 415 marketing, CX, and digital business professionals about the impact of investing in CX across the entire customer journey yielded several important recommendations:

Embrace a formal process for AI agent use case selection to ensure CX success. Brands must leverage AI to deepen personalization and craft modern self-service journeys, but the promise of AI agents is only as strong as the strategy behind them. Deployment failures are frequently rooted in poor initial use case selection. To mitigate this risk, organizations must move away from "innovation for its own sake" and instead use a rigorous assessment framework. By objectively comparing potential business value and CX impact against the anticipated deployment effort, technical risk, and long-term cost, leaders can ensure they are solving the right problems for their customers.

Shift focus from how to automate steps to how to trust an AI-based CX. As AI begins to make CX decisions currently handled by humans, the cost of high-quality decision-making will drop, replacing basic automation with agentic insight. However, this shift makes trust the paramount currency of the digital relationship. The decision to grant an AI agent the power to personalize and direct customer actions hinges on three pillars: 1) the explainability of its reasoning, 2) the confidence in its guardrails, and 3) the absolute integrity of its data protection. In this new era, every CX outcome must be analyzed through these trust factors rather than just the efficiency of the automation.

Use your automation centers of excellence (COEs) or AI working groups to coordinate AI advancement. Without centralized oversight, AI agent and model sprawl is set to create the next generation of fragmented technology silos, undermining a unified customer experience. The scarcity of specialized skills and the challenge of exposing enterprise data in an organized, AI-ready manner add layers of complexity to the next phase of CX. Automation COEs or dedicated AI working groups are essential for providing the architectural guidance, consistent enterprise policies, and best practices required for long-term success. These groups can ensure that AI advancement scales safely and consistently across all customer touchpoints.



Appendix A: Methodology

In this study, Forrester conducted an online survey of 415 marketing, CX, and digital business professionals with responsibility for CX technology decisions and metrics development at organizations with at least 500 employees in North America, Europe, and Asia Pacific. The survey evaluated the impact of investing in CX across the entire customer journey. Respondents were offered a small incentive as a thank-you for time spent on the survey. The study began in February 2026 and was completed in March 2026.

Appendix B: Demographics

INDUSTRY	
Retail	**17%**
Manufacturing	**16%**
Financial services and insurance	**14%**
Technology	**13%**
Media and entertainment	**13%**
Healthcare	**11%**
Travel and hospitality	**10%**
Government	**6%**

EMPLOYEES	
20,000 or more	**24%**
10,000 to 19,999	**23%**
5,000 to 9,999	**28%**
1,000 to 4,999	**21%**
500 to 999	**5%**

LEVEL	
C-level executive	**6%**
Vice president	**33%**
Director	**42%**
Manager	**20%**

REGION	
Asia/Pacific	**37%**
Europe	**38%**
North America	**25%**

TARGET CUSTOMERS	
Only businesses	**10%**
Primarily businesses	**12%**
Roughly equal businesses and consumers	**34%**
Primarily consumers	**22%**
Only consumers	**21%**

DEPARTMENT	
Marketing/advertising	**23%**
Analytics/measurement	**20%**
Customer experience	**19%**
Digital business	**16%**
Customer success	**11%**
Customer service	**11%**

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Appendix C: Supplemental Material

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Consumer Marketing, CX, And Digital Leaders: How To Thrive Through Volatility In 2026 (US), Forrester Research, Inc., April 13, 2026

The Future Of Digital Experiences, Forrester Research, Inc., May 28, 2026

Messaging For A Zero-Click World, Forrester Research, Inc., June 10, 2025

Appendix D: Endnotes

[1] Source: Consumer Marketing, CX, And Digital Leaders: How To Thrive Through Volatility In 2026, Forrester Research, Inc., April 13, 2026.

[2] Source: The Future Of Digital Experiences, Forrester Research, Inc., May 28, 2026.

[3] Source: Forrester's State Of Customer Obsession Survey, 2025.

[4] Source: Messaging For A Zero-Click World, Forrester Research, Inc., June 10, 2025.

[5] Source: The Conversational AI Platforms For Customer Service Landscape, Q4 2025, Forrester Research, Inc., November 5, 2025.

[6] Source: Ibid.

[7] Source: Ibid.

[8] Net Promoter, NPS, and the NPS-related emoticons are registered U.S. trademarks, and Net Promoter Score and Net Promoter System are service marks, of Bain & Company, Inc., Satmetrix Systems, Inc. and Fred Reichheld.

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