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Digital
Trends

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Executive Summary

Adobe Digital Trends has, over the past 14 years, brought readers up to date with executives' views on how their organizations perform in the face of change. For the first time, we have added an extensive consumer survey to uncover what customers really think about innovations in digital experiences.

In this report, we'll define what personalization means in 2024 and how unified data lays the foundation for organizations not only to effectively personalize but also leverage generative AI to its fullest potential. Lastly, we'll explore the actual impact of generative AI on customer experience (CX) today, and how organizations can deliver on its promise.

Key Learnings:

- **Consumer experiences are still not meeting expectations.** Consumers feel companies have the potential to address their needs more closely, but many digital experiences have yet to live up to expectations. Consumers point to the fact that businesses hold enough of their data to provide better products and services but aren't making the most of it.
- **Personalization is often based on assumptions, not evidence.** Organizations often focus on personalizing individual contact points rather than creating what customers want—consistent, seamless interactions across different channels and throughout the entire customer journey. These assumptions are based on outdated information and habits.
- **Companies still aren't connecting the data dots.** Unifying data is just one piece of the puzzle to deliver exceptional digital CX, but organizations still struggle to get it right. Once properly implemented, unified data will be the foundation for organizations to build next-generation experiences, including AI-powered ones.
- **Generative AI strategy needs more attention.** The perception is that generative AI will quickly scale a newly efficient business. The reality is that while success is within reach, businesses must improve underlying data to make the most of AI.
- **Market-leading organizations have done the work on data, goals, and strategy.** Market Leaders can accelerate their ability to use generative AI because they are more likely to have sophisticated data strategies. Early Adopters—those who already have generative AI solutions in place—are six times more likely than those without generative AI solutions to have exceptional digital CX.
- **AI's potential is unrealized but achievable.** As firms integrate generative AI into their business workflows, its potential for far-reaching business impact is becoming clearer. However, the fact that so many have yet to establish business goals or KPIs shows a lack of focus and means that generative AI's potential is still far from being reached.

Section 1

Personalization and customer journey expectations.

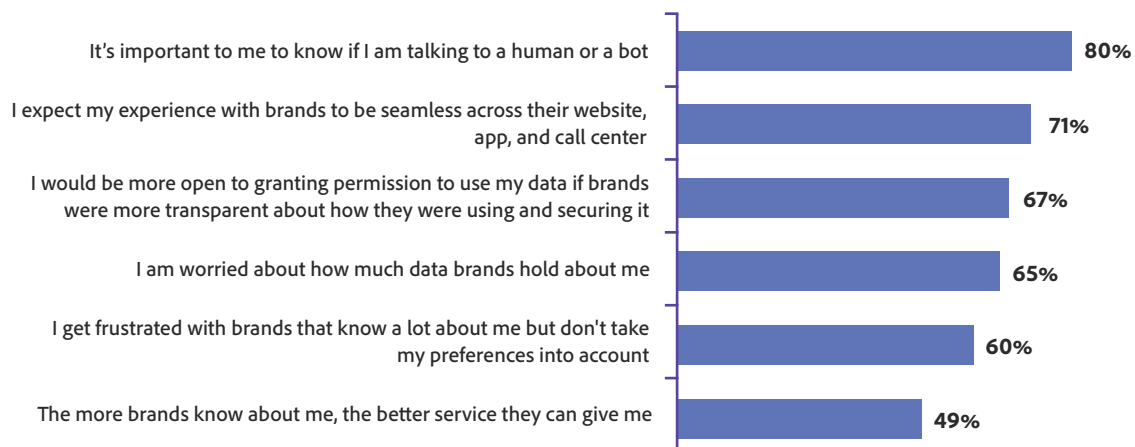
Why are we still talking about personalization?

Personalization continues to be a top business priority—and organizations still struggle to get it right. According to this year's consumer survey, just 26% of consumers described their digital experience with a brand they have an existing relationship with as "excellent."

About half of the consumers surveyed agree that "the more brands know about me, the better service they can give." At the same time, nearly two-thirds express frustration "with brands that know a lot about me but don't take my preferences into account" (Figure 1).

Organizations continue to demand more and more data, but consumers are wary, in part because of the limited personalization they have received after sharing their data in the past, along with general privacy concerns. This suggests consumers would rather brands get their core interactions right across website, email, app, and social before expanding to interactions such as automated chat or virtual try-ons.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements? (Consumer)

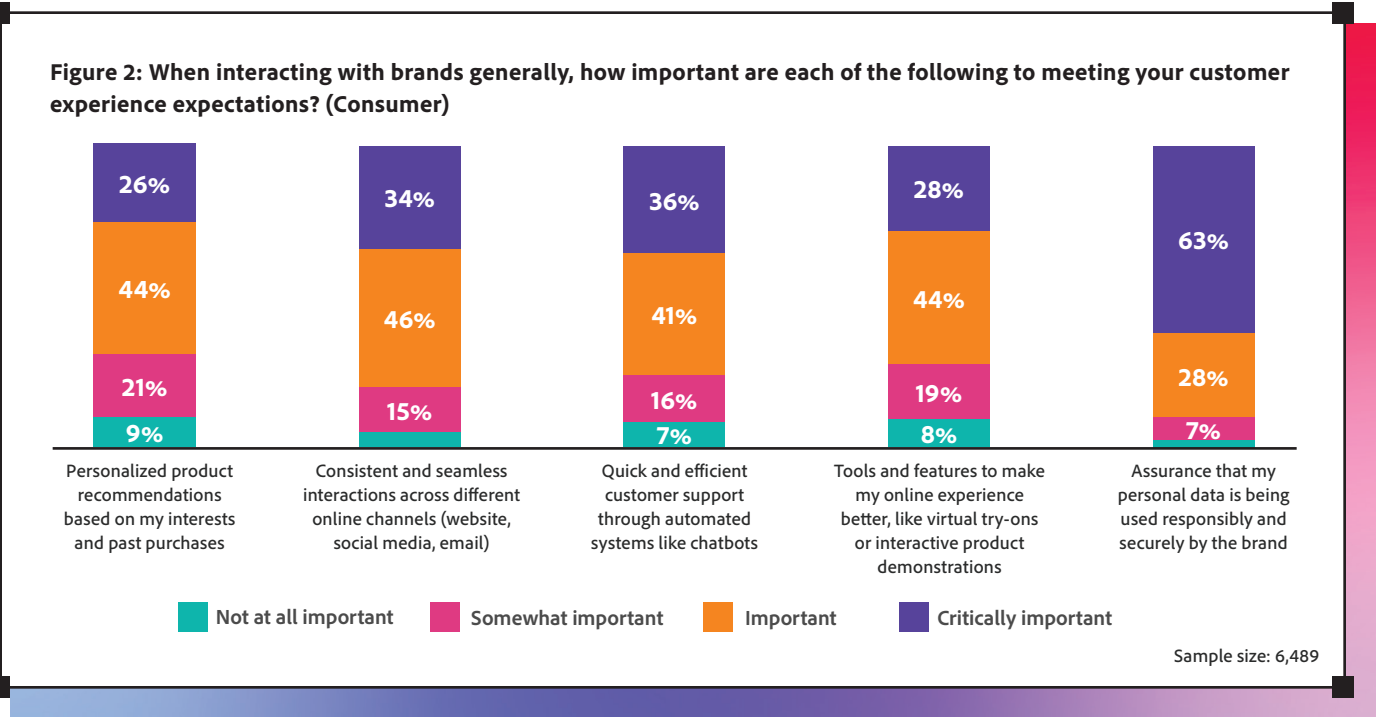


Sample size: 6,793

What personalization means in 2024.

In 2024, world-class digital experiences require a personalized end-to-end customer journey across all channels, delivered seamlessly and consistently. It is not a series of customized touchpoints. Four-fifths (80%) of consumers consider consistent experiences across different online channels “important” or “critical” to meeting their CX expectations, and 70% assign similar ratings to “personalized product recommendations” (Figure 2).

However, above all else, consumers want their data used responsibly, with 91% insisting it is either “important” (28%) or “critically important” (63%). Respondents were significantly more likely to rate this as critical to meeting their CX expectations than any other option.

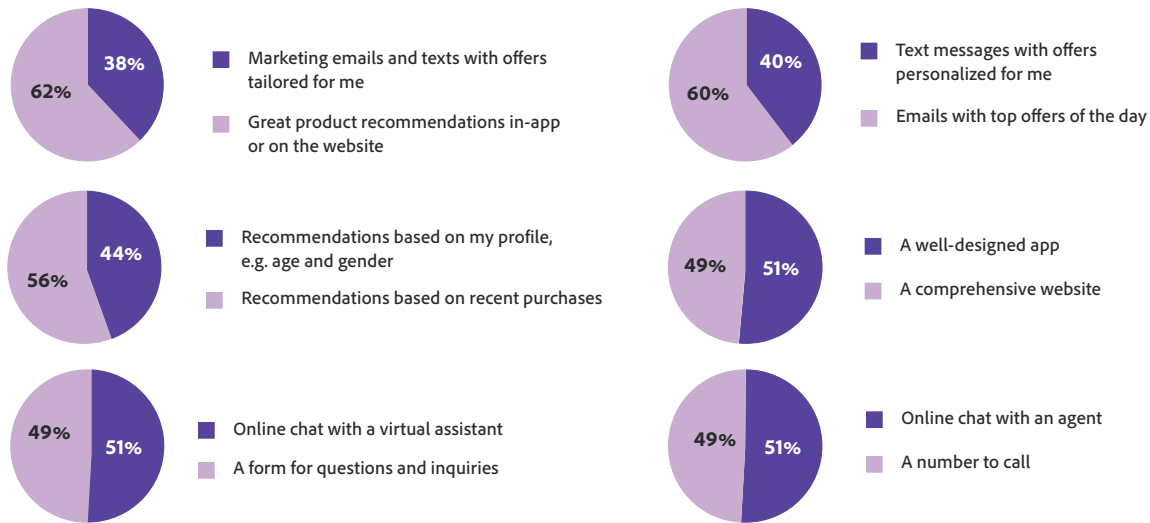


When asked what consumers value more when interacting with brands, results revealed most prefer communications on their own schedule. Almost two-thirds (60%) said they would prefer to receive an email on top offers over a personalized text message (40%). Similarly, consumers preferred recommendations via website and in-app (62%) to tailored emails and texts (38%). Cross comparisons on app versus website, chat versus forms, and other preferences were almost equally split, suggesting there is no one right path for most customers (Figure 3).

“ Real-time personalization is what our customers expect every single time, every single interaction. We must get that right and do it so you’re not coming across as creepy or trying to sell something the customer doesn’t need. You’re coming across as a partner who genuinely cares for their customers and wants the best for them.”

Parthiv Sheth
Vice President of Marketing, AT&T

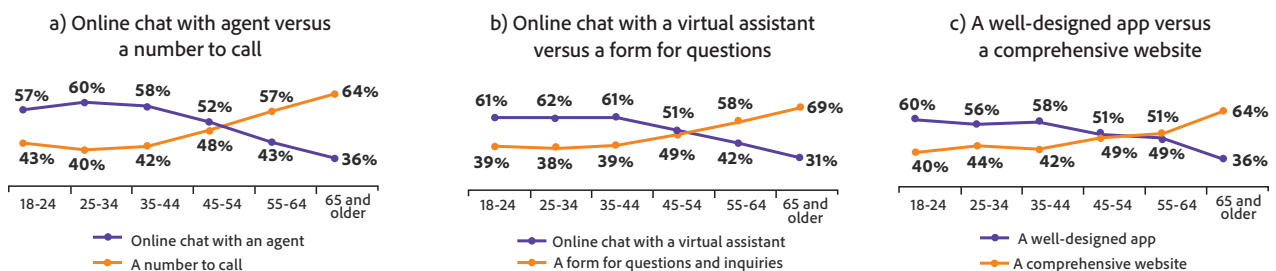
Figure 3: When choosing between different brands to do business with, which of the following are more important to you? (Consumer)



Sample size: 6,793

Drilling further into the data, we uncovered preferences by consumer age groups, revealing some interesting generational differences. For example, most consumers under 45 prefer online chat to calling or completing a form, while most consumers over 65 prefer websites to apps (Figure 4). Brands need to realize that, as some segments “age out,” the preferences of today’s younger consumers will then become the dominant expectation.

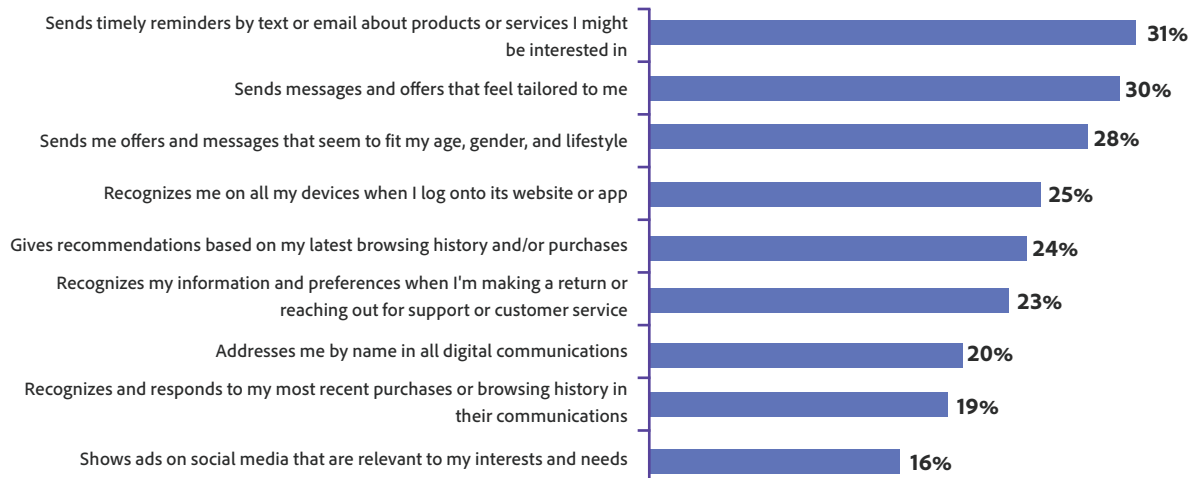
Figure 4: When choosing between different brands to do business with, which of the following are more important to you? (Consumer)



Sample size: 6,793

Only consumer segmentation with detailed insight behind it is going to get businesses closer to meeting expectations. For instance, consumers valued tailored messages that are timely and relevant among their top three priorities in personalization (Figure 5). At the same time, only 20% of consumers valued being addressed by name. Having their information and preferences recognized when reaching out for support or customer services is more important (23%), as is being recognized when they log in on different devices (25%).

Figure 5: Personalization that consumers value the most from brands (top 3). (Consumer)



Sample size: 6,556

There is evidence brands need to pay closer attention to what consumers are telling them. While 40% of practitioners align with consumers in prioritizing recommendations, they also prioritize addressing customers by name (40%, Figure 6), which as we've seen was significantly less a priority for consumers (20%, Figure 5).

Positively, practitioners routinely use data and analytics to predict consumer needs by segment (47%), which indicates they are able to take different approaches to communication preferences. By interpreting buying behaviors and browsing habits, practitioners can focus on their audience's true needs and preferences with the goal of enhancing the customer journey rather than chasing after every data point.

Figure 6: The ways that practitioners say they routinely personalize digital content for customers.



Sample size: 3,197

Indeed, the link between strong data practices and routine personalization efforts is demonstrated in our research. As illustrated in Figure 7, practitioners rating their customer data system (CDS) as “highly effective” are more likely to routinely personalize across channels—with recommendations, in real time, using generative AI crafted content—compared to those rating their CDS as “moderately/ineffective.”

Figure 7: Aspects of digital content that practitioners say they are routinely personalizing versus the effectiveness of their organization's customer data systems.



Sample size: 1,700



CASE STUDY

Henkel AG & Co., the German multinational chemical and consumer goods company, has enhanced its operations with the new digital platform "RAQN," powered by Adobe Experience Platform. This technology is transforming how the company manages its 30+ brands, enabling tailored experiences across channels. With cloud-based tools for content, customer data, and assets, Henkel has streamlined 300 web domains, facilitating personalized engagement for B2B, B2C, and B2B2C interactions. [Learn More >](#)

Section 2

Unified data and insights are foundational for personalization.

Connect your data for seamless, personalized journeys.

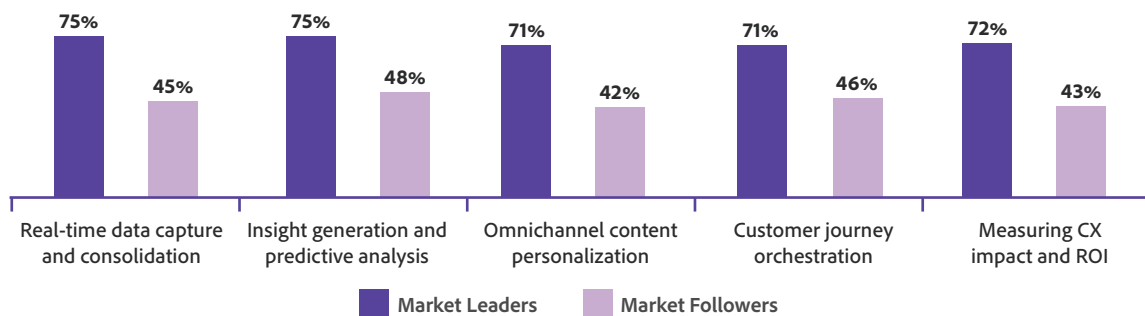
Data sophistication is vital to effective personalization. Without the data capabilities to make intelligent product recommendations or route the customer to the most effective customer service journey, digital touchpoints cannot fulfill their promise.

Take the chatbot experience, for example. Chatbots are dependent on intelligent data and mostly used for service or to help the customer self-direct their purchasing journey. Yet, they are also the most likely to disappoint. About half of consumers (49%) rate their experiences with chatbots as either “very poor,” “poor,” or just plain “adequate.”

When asked what improvements a brand could make to provide a better digital experience, consumers named improving customer service transfers (52%) or making self-service support easier (44%) as the top two. To achieve this, a smooth flow of data between departments and systems is critical.

An organization's data-related capability also correlates with market performance. Figure 8 shows that Market Leaders (those who outperformed their sector peers in 2023) are more likely to rate their data-related capabilities as "best-in-class" or "above average" across all five measures of functionality versus Market Followers (those who merely kept pace or underperformed their sector in 2023).

Figure 8: Senior executives rating their data-related capabilities as "best in class" or "above average." Market Leaders vs. Market Followers



Sample size: 1,243

Many organizations recognize that their data strategies are still very much "in development." This is echoed by practitioners, who rated their customer data systems as merely "average" to "ineffective" in providing consistent data across all touchpoints (52%) and enabling a holistic customer view (57%).

THE *Coca-Cola* COMPANY

CASE STUDY

Understanding customers is a challenge for consumer packaged goods companies (CPGs) because they rarely sell directly to the customer. As a result, they have to make the most of the data they can acquire. Coca-Cola does this by bringing together its regional CDPs to create a single view that gives real-time insights into global customers. In just the first phase of deploying Adobe Real-Time Customer Data Platform and Adobe Journey Optimizer, Coca-Cola brought together 98 million customer profiles from more than 100 countries, with plans for billions of profiles in the future, allowing the company to target consumers by drink preference, lifestyle, location, and more. [Learn More >](#)

More than half of senior executives (55%) identified "customer data management" as the top technology area they prioritize for investment in 2024. Such tools they've prioritized on unifying data into a single source of truth that can be accessed—subject to the right permissions—for a number of purposes, including data security and compliance, customer service, marketing, and product development.

Increasingly, analysts suggest the most popular format for unifying data is the customer data platform, or CDP.* These

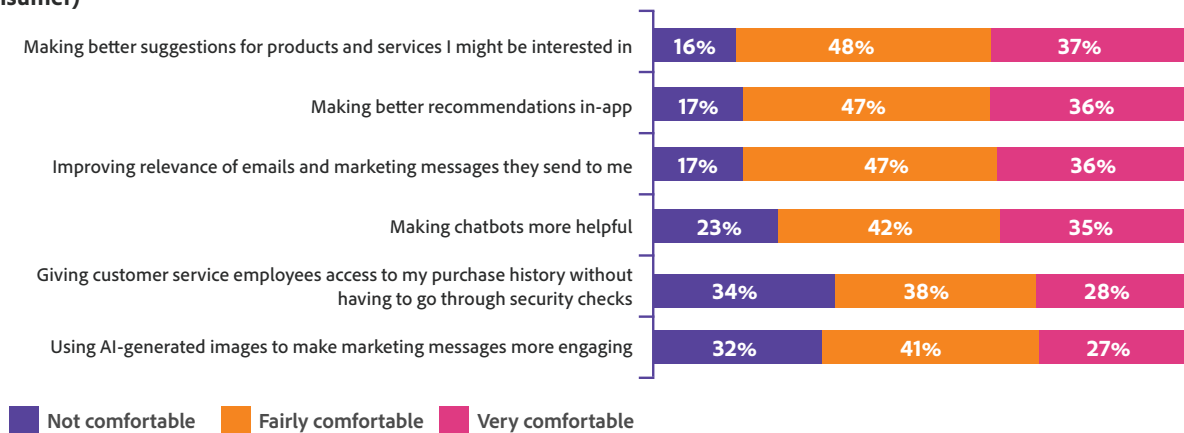
data platforms unify, segment, and activate data for all the necessary systems and stakeholders required, giving the organization a single source of truth for customer data to help create seamless, personalized journeys.

From compliance to competitive edge.

Confidence in data compliance underpins organizations' willingness to explore new technology solutions and digital strategies to keep innovating. Technology will inevitably encourage that exploratory thinking, and data will fuel that technology. To make the most of the data and technology equation, organizations must be confident they are protecting both themselves and their customers' data.

Perhaps surprisingly, despite their concerns over data privacy, consumers are broadly comfortable with brands using AI, particularly if it would lead to brands making better recommendations and improving communications (Figure 9).

Figure 9: How comfortable are you with the brands you deal with using AI for each of the following purposes? (Consumer)



Sample size: 6,532

However, consumers do still have some concerns. Around one-third are uncomfortable giving customer service employees access to their data (34%), which could impact organizations' efforts to improve automated self-service, a noted priority for brands and consumers.

Moving forward, brands will need to be diligent in adopting more transparency around data policies. That means providing clear consent options and explaining how and where data is used, particularly when it comes to AI.

Organizations recognize this is easier said than done. More than half (57%) of practitioners say ensuring quality and customer trust in AI-generated content will be a top challenge in 2024, while 38% of organizations with generative AI solutions in place also agree that "building trust by embedding responsible data and AI practices" will have a big impact on their businesses.

Market leaders exemplify responsible data practices.

When it comes to using customer data to power new technology like generative AI, Market Leaders are pulling ahead of Market Followers in terms of having effective customer data systems to ensure data

privacy, develop content responsibly, and meet security standards and brand requirements.

In fact, Leaders are twice as likely to agree their progress in guaranteeing data privacy and security standards is already done (37% vs. 17%). Conversely, 41% of Followers say they have either “not started/have no plans to start” or are just at the “planning stage,” compared to only 19% of Leaders (Figure 10).

When using generative AI for content creation and distribution, Market Leaders are ahead of Market Followers in ensuring brand safety and legal compliance (78% vs. 63%).

There is an even bigger gap between Market Leaders and Followers when it comes to having the data needed to develop AI content responsibly (75% vs. 50%) (Figure 11).

By getting their data house in order first, Market Leaders are laying the critical groundwork to leverage generative AI capabilities for content creation, customer support, and more in a secure, responsible manner.

Figure 10: Senior executives rating their progress in “Ensuring data privacy and security standards as they pertain to AI.” Market Leaders vs. Market Followers

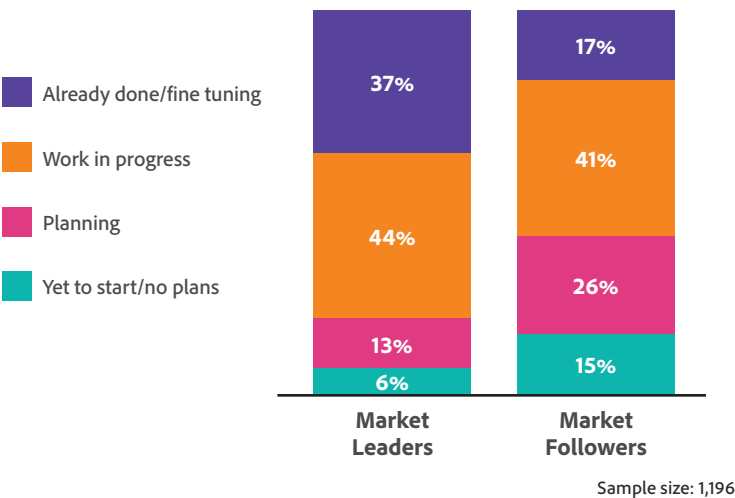


Figure 11: Practitioners’ agreement with statements related to their plans to use generative AI for content creation and distribution. Market Leaders vs. Market Followers



Sample size: 1,589

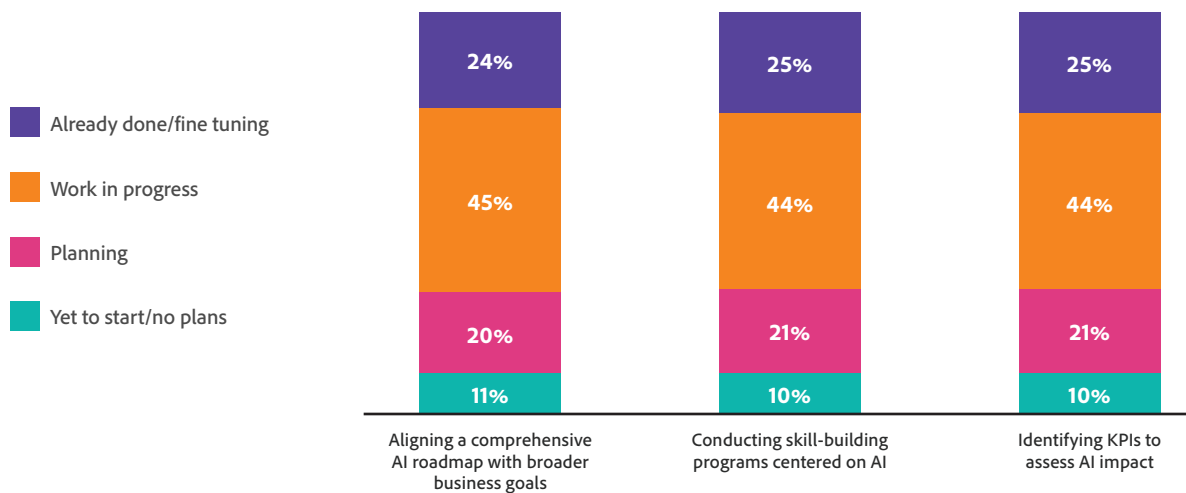
Qualcomm, a multinational company with expertise in telecom and semiconductors, has developed an integrated approach to engaging its business customers. They connected customer data across channels and experiences so marketers may personalize at every point of the journey for complex B2B needs. Whether a journey begins at a website and ends in a trade show, or whether the customer is from the automotive or mobile sectors, Qualcomm can use AI and advanced data sharing capabilities to tailor real-time personalization to each lead. [Learn More >](#)

Section 3

Clear starting points and future goals for generative AI.

Generative AI presents many ways to improve CX and drive business transformation. However, our survey shows that most organizations haven't yet connected generative AI to larger transformation or CX goals. Only about one-quarter of senior executives have done so, but encouragingly, 45% are working toward it (Figure 12).

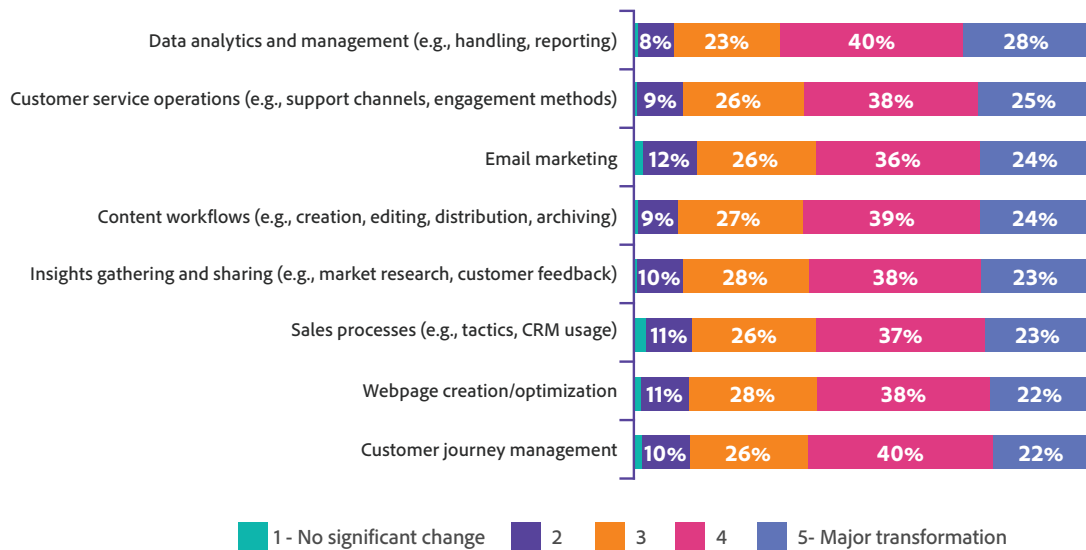
Figure 12: Senior executives' readiness for generative AI across specific organizational areas.



Sample size: 2,175

Around two-thirds of senior executives are optimistic that generative AI will deliver significant or major business transformation across the board, from data analytics and customer service to webpage optimization, email marketing, and content workflows (Figure 13). However, given that less than one-quarter have a roadmap and only one-quarter have identified KPIs (Figure 12), there's a risk that their generative AI deployments may not live up to expectations without more strategic oversight.

Figure 13: Senior executives' assessment of the degree that generative AI will transform their organizations' current operations.



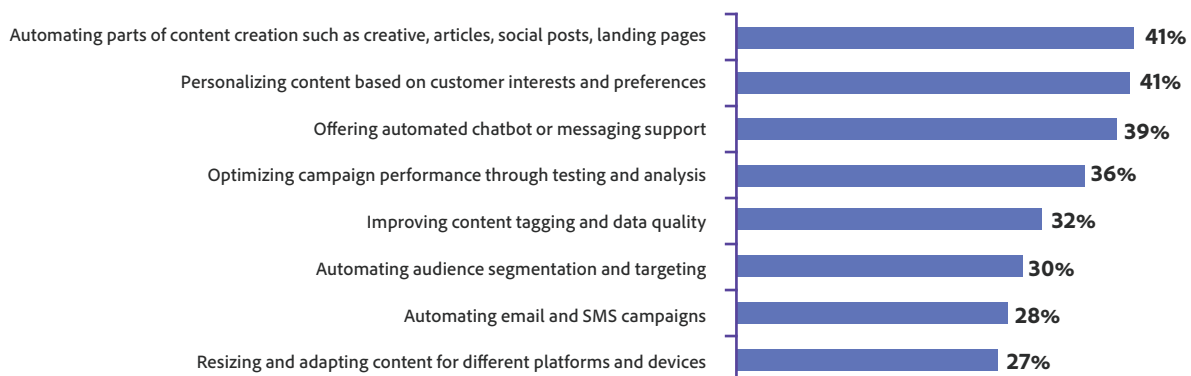
Sample size: 2,084

Generative AI's first use case is content.

It's time to marry executives' aspirations with pragmatic business cases and consumer needs.

Practitioners who have either already adopted or are in the process of implementing generative AI capabilities were asked to identify the areas where their organizations will use it in digital marketing and experience management. The top answer is content. Both automating content creation and personalizing content are top use cases (Figure 14).

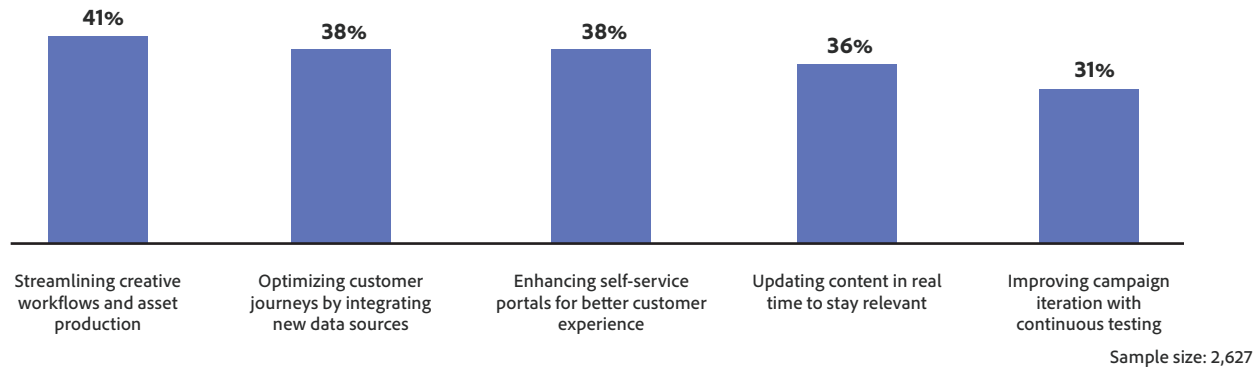
Figure 14: Top areas where practitioners who have either adopted or are implementing generative AI capabilities plan to use it in digital and marketing experience management.



Sample size: 1,051

To accelerate their customer experience initiatives, practitioners are prioritizing effective use of generative AI in organizing, streamlining, and improving creative production efficiency (41%, Figure 15). But 38% also recognize its potential to help customers self-serve—a key consumer request from our survey—and to understand more about their customers' journeys (38%).

Figure 15: Practitioners' intentions to deploy generative AI in 2024 for accelerating and enhancing marketing and customer experience initiatives.



On the other hand, consumers said that beyond data security, their key needs are seamless customer service (Figure 2) and efficient customer support via chatbots. For example, 77% of consumers said, “quick and efficient customer support through automated systems like chatbots is important or critical,” and 51% would rather chat online with an agent than call (Figure 3).

It follows that organizations should focus their efforts on improving the chatbot experience, however, the foundational work—unifying customer data—must first be in place for automated tools like chatbots to accurately customize interactions.

“It's not as simple as just hooking up to the internet and putting whatever comes back in front of customers. It has to be thoughtfully done. But I absolutely think generative AI can help us in ecommerce, marketing, and software development. There's a lot of opportunity, but it's a marathon, not a sprint.”

Jordan Broggi
Senior Vice President & President – Online, Home Depot

Organizations' generative AI objectives must ultimately be set to solve both internal business goals and customer pain points. While it may take significant time and resources to fully achieve those aims, it's possible to enjoy some faster success that can put the business on the path to greater efficiency and lay the foundations for deeper investment going forward.

Based on the survey results from practitioners, streamlining content workflows (41%, Figure 15) and personalizing content (41%, Figure 14) emerge as pragmatic starting points for many. This approach yields tangible financial benefits for businesses in a relatively short period and minimizes disruption to their existing infrastructure.

When we asked senior executives about the primary methods they are employing to enhance workflow efficiency and reduce costs in 2024, 52% identified “automating manual tasks through the use of content AI and chatbots” as their top selection.

Automating manual tasks can deliver substantial cost savings when inputting standardized information into a generative AI tool. Examples include adapting existing content for different audiences, products, and regions, or idea generation or concepting for skilled employees to finalize creative assets (Figure 16).

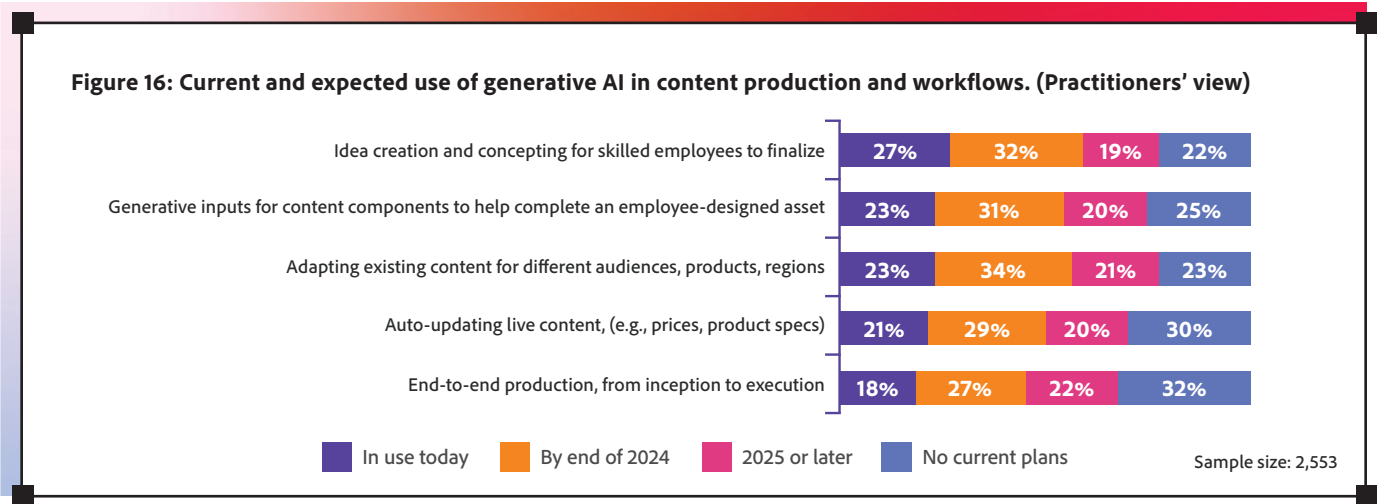
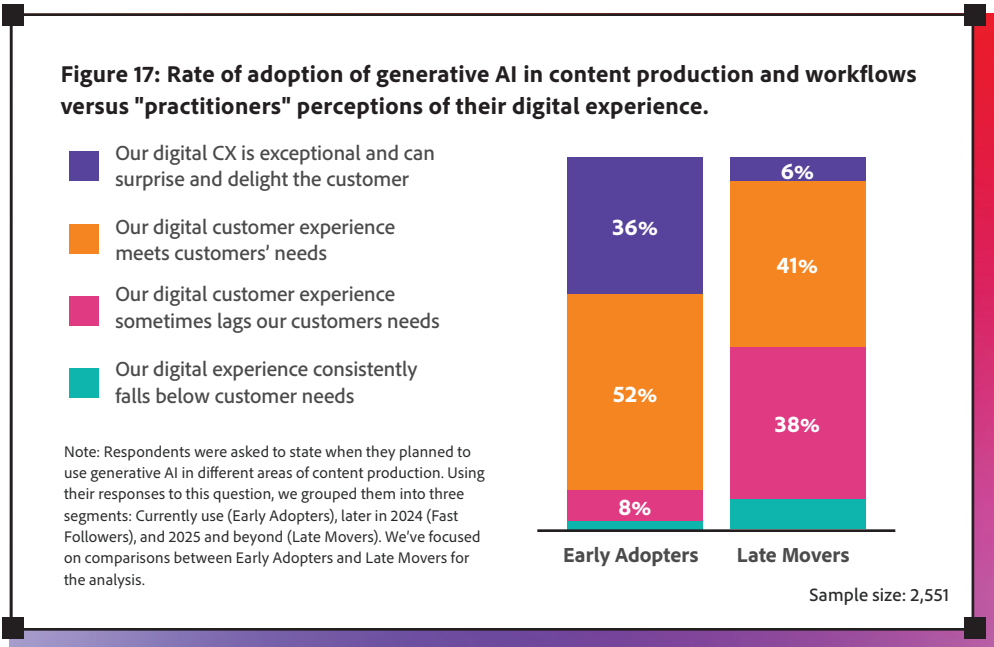


Figure 16 also shows where there is an opportunity for organizations looking for a competitive advantage to take the lead. Interestingly, 50% of practitioners currently admit implementation for auto-updated content, such as price information, isn't in the plan until 2025, if at all. Yet, using generative AI to perform this task is one of the more reliable and straightforward use cases.

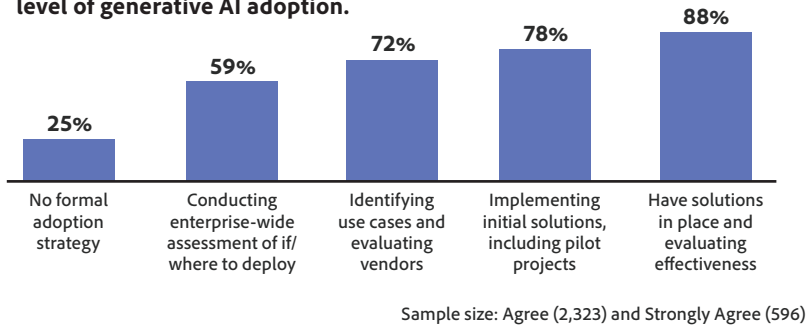
Internal strategies for adopting generative AI.

We categorized practitioners into two main groups based on their responses: those who are currently using generative AI, referred to as Early Adopters (Figure 17), and those who indicated



implementation by “2025” or expressed “no current plans,” referred to as Late Movers. Early Adopters are six times more likely than Late Movers to report that their digital experience is exceptional, demonstrating that generative AI adoption is correlated with brands delivering superior CX.

Figure 18: Organizations agreement (agree or strongly agree) to having an organizational culture to work on cross-functional AI initiatives by level of generative AI adoption.

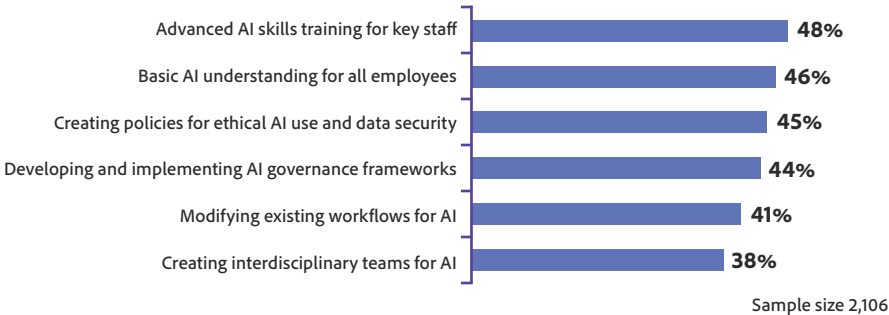


Successful businesses boast another characteristic that allows them to maximize the benefits of this technology—their corporate culture. As illustrated in Figure 18, organizations currently using AI solutions are three and a half times more likely than organizations with no formal strategy to agree they have a culture fit to work on cross-functional AI initiatives (88% versus 25%).

What does that look like? Companies have identified their top priority as providing advanced AI skills to key team members (48%, Figure 19). Of course, eventually all staff within an organization could be interacting with AI to a greater or lesser extent. Understandably, an almost equal priority is ensuring all employees have a basic understanding of AI (46%).

It might seem concerning that just 38% cited creating interdisciplinary teams as important. We’ve already seen that effective generative AI implementation involves input from business leaders, marketers, customer service operatives, data analysts, strategists, and more. AI

Figure 19: Senior executives' top priorities for preparing for generative AI in 2024.

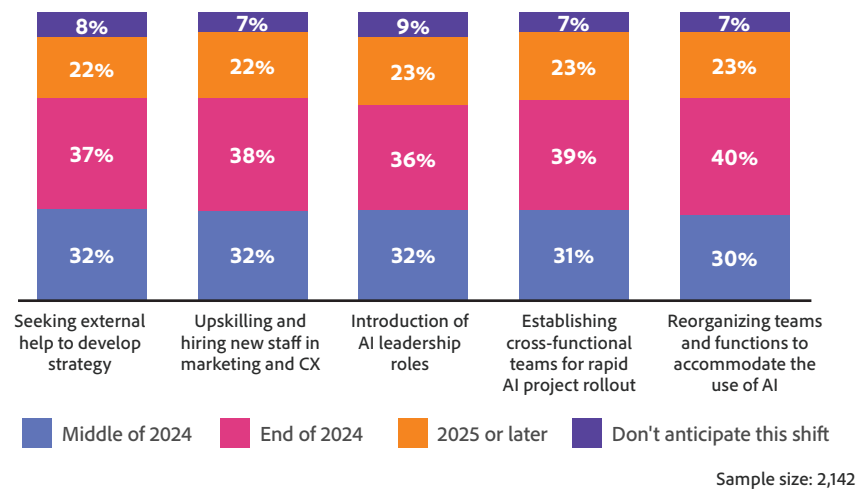


implementation cannot be stuck in silos. With 24% of senior executives either done with or fine tuning their AI roadmap around broader business goals and 45% still in progress (Figure 12), interdisciplinary teams will be essential to delivering on the promise of generative AI. However, there are positive signals that organizations are moving in the right direction.

From pilots to powerhouse.

Without clear goals, integrated teams, or leadership support, it's no surprise that most organizations are still in the pilot phase with generative AI. For example, less than half of practitioners (45%, Figure 16) currently use or plan to use generative AI in end-to-end content production by the end of 2024 because

Figure 20: The timeline senior executives anticipate changes to their organizational structure to support the adoption of generative AI.



this would require a degree of systems and workflow integration to work smoothly.

As stated earlier, we shouldn't be worried that only 38% of senior executives felt creating interdisciplinary teams was a top priority. Put in the context of Figure 20, it turns out that 70% of senior executives are establishing cross-functional teams for rapid AI project rollout by the end of this year, with 70% also reorganizing their teams and functions.

With these two elements in place, those organizations will be in a strong position to move from pilots to long-term generative AI-driven strategies.

Indeed, senior executives at organizations with generative AI solutions already in place (Mainstreamers) show a path toward broader rollouts more so than those at organizations just starting to implement initial solutions (Piloters).

- **Leadership.** Organizationally, Mainstreamers are making strides compared to Piloters, with the former more than twice as likely to introduce AI leadership roles by the middle of 2024 (44% vs. 32%). They are also reorganizing team functions at a similar rate (40% vs. 29%).
- **Data.** Responsible data use is imperative for organizations and consumers. Mainstreamers are twice as likely as Piloters to state that they have ensured privacy and security standards pertaining to AI are in place or are fine tuning them (47% vs. 25%).
- **Roadmap.** Mainstreaming organizations are more than twice as likely as Piloters to agree they have "done or are fine-tuning" a comprehensive AI roadmap (42% vs. 22%), showing they have a structured and goal-oriented rather than piecemeal approach.
- **KPIs.** Mainstream organizations are twice as likely as Piloters to claim "best in class" CX measurement (34% vs. 21%).

This foundational work means that further down in the business, Mainstreamers in organizations using generative AI in 2024 are much better placed than Piloters to drive growth in adapting content (45% versus 29%), to use generative AI for ideation (49% versus 32%), and to update content in real time (45% versus 28%).

Overall, there is still an opportunity for more progress with generative AI. Over three-quarters of senior executives (76%) are still working on, planning, or have not yet started aligning it to broader business goals, and 75% are in a similar position when it comes to identifying KPIs that will show its impact. Both will be necessary if generative AI is to fulfill its potential and deliver tangible returns on investment.

Recommendations

Exceptional digital CX through personalization, generative AI, and unified data.

To deliver on the needs of customers today across their buyer's journey and to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by generative AI, organizations should focus on the following key recommendations distilled from this year's Digital Trends research:

- **Understand your customers and don't make assumptions about personalization.** Build a better understanding of how and where customers want to experience personalization and how touchpoints should connect across their journey. Then use that understanding to "right-size" digital experiences based on their preferences.
- **Unify your data and use it to deliver what your customers' expect.** Data must be unified in a robust system and ready to support emerging CX innovations. Only then can you gain more accurate insight into consumer needs and effectively personalize across journeys. Customers are looking for brands to improve tailored messages and timely reminders, give relevant recommendations, and recognize them across channels.
- **Reinforce data governance.** Consumers want reassurance that their data is being used appropriately and securely, especially in the hands of generative AI. And internal teams want reassurance they can use data to inform their strategies without inadvertently breaching that trust. Strong data compliance policies can be built on the back of robust data systems to instill that trust and pave the way for progress.
- **Content is a solid starting point.** Start your generative AI journey by optimizing and scaling content. From there, work to build more complex use cases. Automating customer support tasks, such as chatbot experiences, are attractive to brands but require sophisticated data systems.
- **Break down cross-functional siloes.** Integrate systems, cross-functional teams, and workflows that will allow you to embed generative AI as an integral part of your business operations.
- **Align generative AI to overall business goals.** The promise of generative AI won't be realized with a piecemeal approach. Organizations need to set realistic generative AI goals that are aligned with real business priorities and investment to drive effective transformation and achieve sustained growth.

Methodology

Executive survey

The executive survey was fielded in January and February 2024 to Econsultancy, Adobe lists, and external panels. Launched on January 1, 2024, the survey closed on February 19, 2024, with 8,600 qualified respondents.

- 76% of all respondents are client-side marketers. The remaining 24% comprises agency executives, consultancies, and marketing technology/services vendors. This report presents insights from client-side marketers.
- 37% of client-side respondents are senior director level or above, and 63% are practitioners (made up of junior executives, managers, and director-level respondents). Throughout the report, we compare these two groups.
- As defined by the target market, the client-side sample is split between B2B (32%), B2C (23%), and those addressing both markets equally (45%).
- The client-side sample is global, with Europe providing the largest share of respondents (42%), followed by North America (32%) and the Asia-Pacific region (22%). The survey was translated into eight languages.
- Every business sector is represented, with most client-side responses coming from technology (21%), manufacturing and engineering (14%), retail and ecommerce (14%), financial services (13%), and media and entertainment (7%).

Executive Market Leaders, Challengers, and Followers

This study draws comparisons between Market Leader and Market Follower organizations. These are defined based on practitioners' and senior executives' responses to a survey question relating to their 2023 company performance versus sector competitors. Focusing on these insights allows us to explore issues that most differentiate commercially successful from unsuccessful organizations.

- Market Leaders are senior executives and practitioners who agreed they "significantly outperformed" their sector (21% of all respondents).
- Market Challengers are senior executives and practitioners who agreed they had "slightly outperformed" their sector (35% of all respondents). While they are not called out specifically in this report, their responses are included in all the respondents' figures.
- Market Followers are senior executives and practitioners who agreed they had "kept pace" with their sector or "slightly or significantly underperformed" their sector (44% of all respondents).

Customer Data Systems—Moderately/Ineffective and Highly Effective

Respondents were asked to rate aspects of their customer data system on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the most effective. Areas rated included:

- Provides consistent data across all customer touchpoints
- Enables rapid insights for personalization
- Produces actionable insights that give us a competitive edge
- Provides a holistic view of the customer
- Maintains rigorous data privacy and security

Using their responses to this question, we grouped them into three segments: Highly Effective, Effective, and Moderately/Ineffective. We only compared Highly Effective and Moderately/Ineffective executive groups for the analysis.

Generative AI adoption—Mainstreamers and Pilots

Respondents were asked to state their organization's status regarding the adoption of generative AI. Using their responses to this question, we grouped them into two segments:

- Mainstreamers—those who have solutions in place and are evaluating effectiveness.
- Pilots—those who are implementing initial solutions, including pilot projects.

Generative AI usage for workflow content production—Early Adopters and Late Movers

Respondents were asked to state when they planned to use generative AI in different areas of content production (Figure 17). Using their responses to this question, we grouped them into three segments: Early Adopters, Fast Followers, and Late Movers.

Consumer Survey

Between February 1, 2024 and February 13, 2024, we surveyed 6,800 consumers who engaged with brands online within the past three months. In addition to an even gender split, the country and age breakdowns included the following:

- 49% were men and 51% were women.
- 12% were aged 18–24, 17% were from the age bands of 25–34, 35–44, and 45–54, respectively, 20% were from 55–64, and 13% were from 65–74.
- Respondents were sourced from across 13 countries across three regions. A majority of respondents came from US, UK, France, and Germany.



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