StackAdapt

THE AI DELEGATION GAP:

What advertisers will (and won't) trust AI to do

A note from StackAdapt's CMO

AI already has a seat at the marketing table. In our survey of brand marketers and agencies, 91% said their organization currently uses AI tools in marketing or advertising, and 86% said they use AI regularly or for most tasks. AI is also delivering value, with 88% reporting some form of AI-driven performance improvement.

But the conversation changes when AI moves closer to judgment. Marketers trust AI to help them move faster, analyze data, summarize performance, and support creative or operational work. They are more selective when AI asks for authority: to recommend budget shifts, prepare campaign changes for approval, optimize performance within human-defined rules, or execute actions inside the platform with appropriate human oversight.

This distance between using AI and trusting it with greater decision-making authority is the delegation gap. Based on two surveys—an external survey of 500 marketers at mid-market and enterprise brands and agencies, and a StackAdapt client survey of 187 marketers—this report examines where AI is gaining ground, where confidence still breaks down, and what platforms and organizations must solve before AI delegation can scale.

The report also looks at how AI delegation differs between leaders setting strategy and practitioners managing execution, because confidence can shift depending on who owns the decision and who is closest to the outcome.

The next phase of AI in programmatic will depend on how advertisers draw the line between AI authority and human judgment: which decisions AI can recommend, prepare, optimize, or act on, and which decisions require human oversight across strategy, brand stewardship, budget, and accountability.

At StackAdapt, we believe this is the defining question for AI-first advertising. Adoption is already here. The next opportunity is building the trust, transparency, control, and accountability that allow AI to move from assistance to delegated authority.

Ryan Nelsen

Chief Marketing Officer | StackAdapt

AI adoption in advertising is global

91%	90%	92%
NORAM	EMEA	APAC

Across regions, the delegation gap is consistent, but the path to trust varies. NORAM points to the importance of control and validation, EMEA highlights the role of strategic relevance, and APAC shows how readiness, governance, and infrastructure shape confidence in AI delegation.

Key takeaways

01

AI adoption is mainstream, but delegation is selective.

Marketing organizations widely use AI for reporting, analysis, creative support, and research, while higher-authority workflows like budgeting, bidding, campaign setup, and optimization remain more guarded.

02

The next AI gap is delegated trust.

Advertisers[1] are open to AI recommendations, prepared actions, and rule-based automation, but they need context, explanation, predicted impact, and clear controls before giving AI more authority.

03

Reporting is becoming a decision engine.

As AI becomes more embedded in campaign analysis, reporting is evolving from a retrospective function into the starting point for recommendations, optimization, and proactive intelligence.

[1] In this report, "advertisers" refers to brand-side marketers, agency professionals, and advertising leaders who plan, manage, optimize, oversee, or make decisions about advertising campaigns.

Key takeaways (cont'd)

04

Generic recommendations are one of the clearest reasons AI gets ignored.

AI recommendations are more likely to be ignored when they feel irrelevant, poorly explained, or disconnected from campaign goals. Recommendation quality remains uneven, especially when advertisers cannot distinguish when to trust AI over their own judgment.

05

AI capability is not the same as operational readiness.

While AI tools provide the capability for automation, scaling delegation requires operational readiness —the foundational infrastructure, governance, and accountability structures needed to support AI-driven decision-making. Without connected data, clear ownership, and defined processes, AI tools often remain underutilized or misaligned with campaign goals.

The data reveals a say-versus-do gap in AI delegation: advertisers are open to AI recommendations in principle, but in practice, they act selectively when recommendations lack campaign-specific rationale, strategic relevance, or clear KPI connection.

Contents

01

SECTION ONE

Generic AI gets ignored

Marketers aren't short on AI recommendations. They're short on suggestions that feel useful enough to act on. Only 6% of marketers said they act on in-platform AI recommendations almost always [2].

APAC respondents[3] are relatively receptive to AI guidance, with 60% acting on platform suggestions often or almost always. But relevance still matters: 53% say they ignore AI recommendations when they seem generic or irrelevant.

That doesn't mean advertisers are rejecting AI outright. It suggests they're applying a higher standard of judgment before allowing AI to influence campaign decisions. The more AI moves from analysis into recommendation and action, the more those suggestions need to be specific, timely, explainable, and grounded in the realities of the campaign.

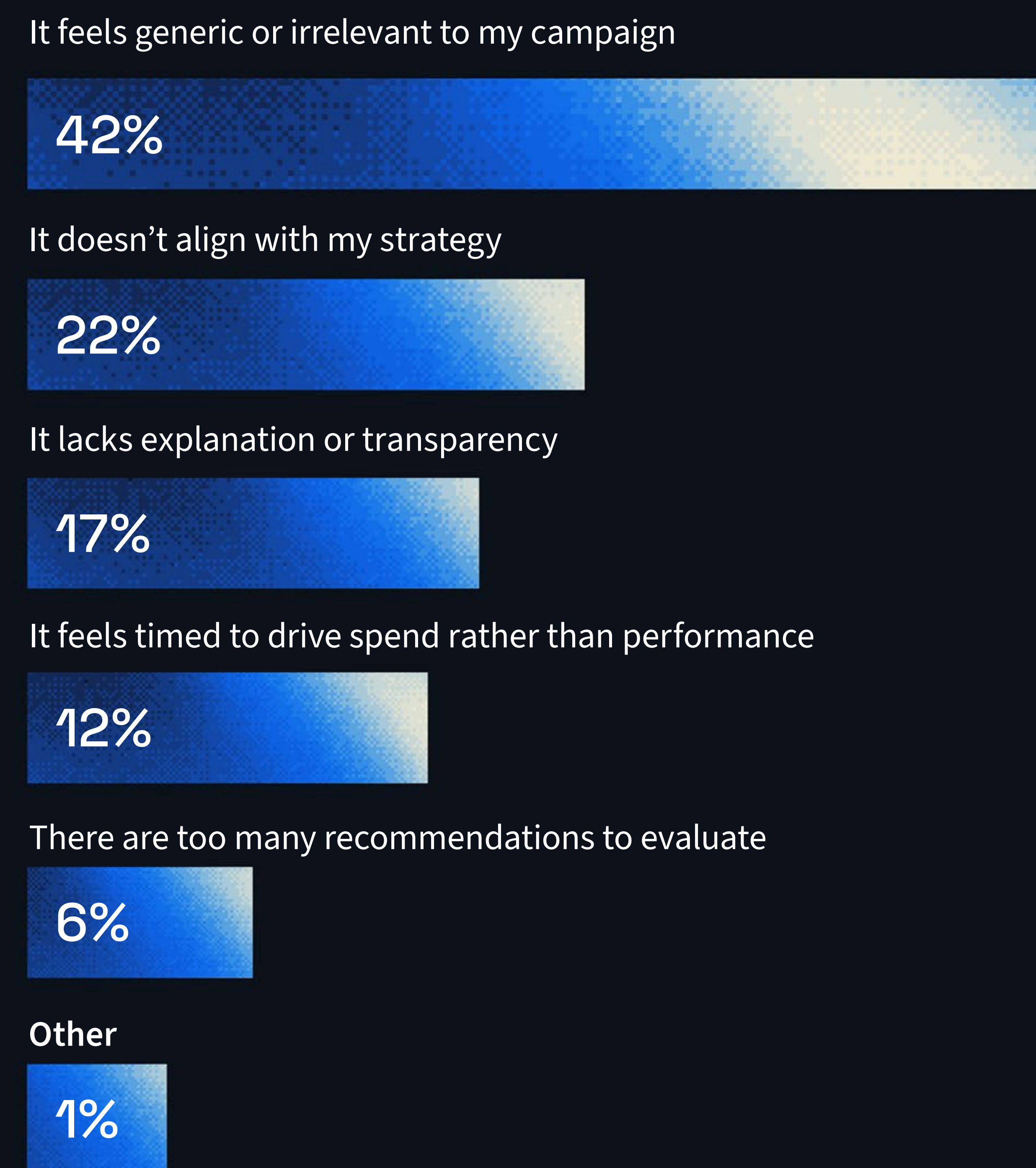
The biggest issue is relevance.

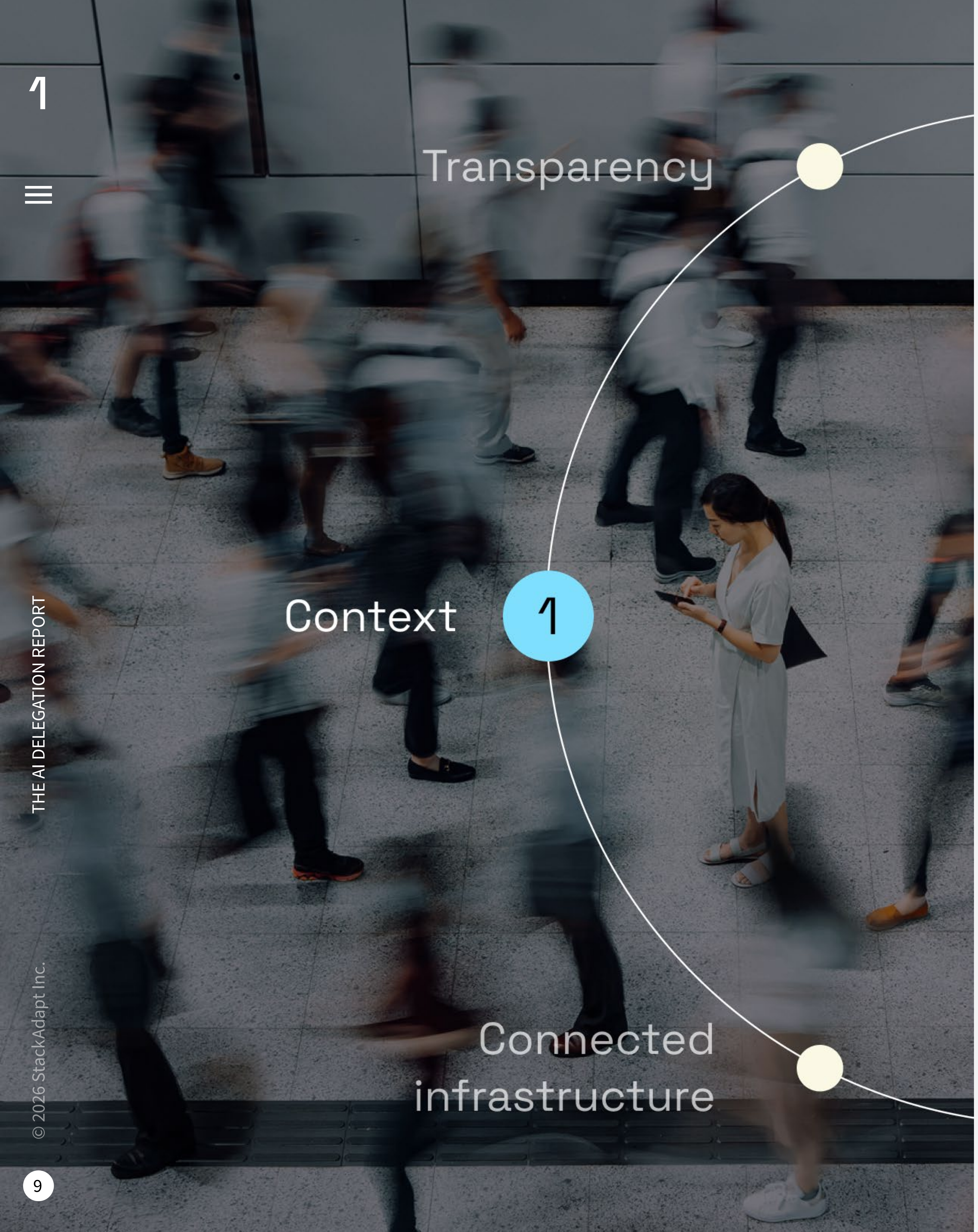
In other words, AI recommendations are often present in the workflow, but they don't always provide what advertisers need to act with confidence.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all data cited throughout this report comes from the industry survey.

[3] See the Methodology section for a breakdown of APAC countries included in the survey.

Why advertisers ignore AI recommendations





GENERIC AI GETS IGNORED

Path to delegated AI: Relevance before trust

AI recommendations earn attention when they show they understand the campaign in front of the advertiser. The top reasons advertisers act on platform recommendations are a clear explanation or rationale and a clear tie to a KPI they care about, pointing to a need for AI guidance that is grounded in campaign context.

When AI can explain why a recommendation matters, what goal it supports, and how it connects to the advertiser’s strategy, it becomes easier to move from AI guidance to delegated action.

What makes advertisers act on AI recommendations?

33%

say a clear explanation or rationale

31%

say a clear tie to a KPI they care about

Those action drivers point to a broader gap in the recommendation experience. Across relevance, timing, clarity, manageability, and ease of action, no dimension received more than 40% positive ratings, and explanation and reasoning ranked lowest at 31%.

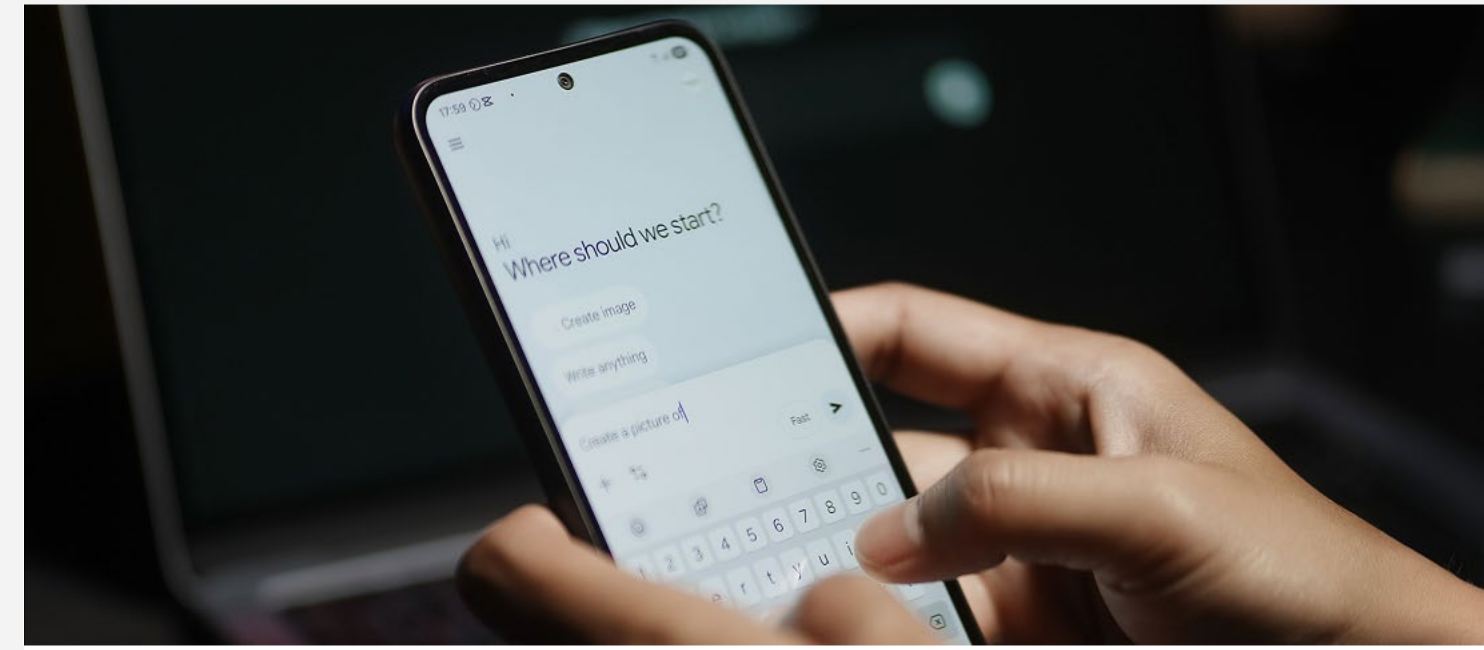
That helps explain the top shortfall advertisers identified: knowing when to trust AI over their own judgment.

The delegation gap is ultimately a judgment gap. Advertisers need to know whether AI has enough context, proof, and reasoning to influence the decision in front of them. When AI recommendations are too generic, advertisers lose confidence at the moment of action. Reporting and analysis offer a different starting point: a place where AI can build trust by explaining what happened before recommending what to do next.

What separates a useful recommendation from noise?

The difference is context. Advertisers don't care if a suggestion is created by a human or an AI, they just want good advice that helps them succeed. A recommendation that's based on a brand's own data and that shows an understanding of their campaign history has a better chance of being useful. And a recommendation that offers clear strategic rationale and shows a direct link to the advertiser's objective has a better chance of being implemented. In both regards, it's the context that creates the value.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER



What this means for marketers

Marketing teams should evaluate AI recommendations the same way they evaluate strategic recommendations from a partner or team member: by asking whether the recommendation is specific, explainable, and tied to the campaign's goals. If AI guidance feels generic, the issue may not be whether the team is ready for AI, but whether the recommendation has enough context to deserve action.

02

SECTION TWO

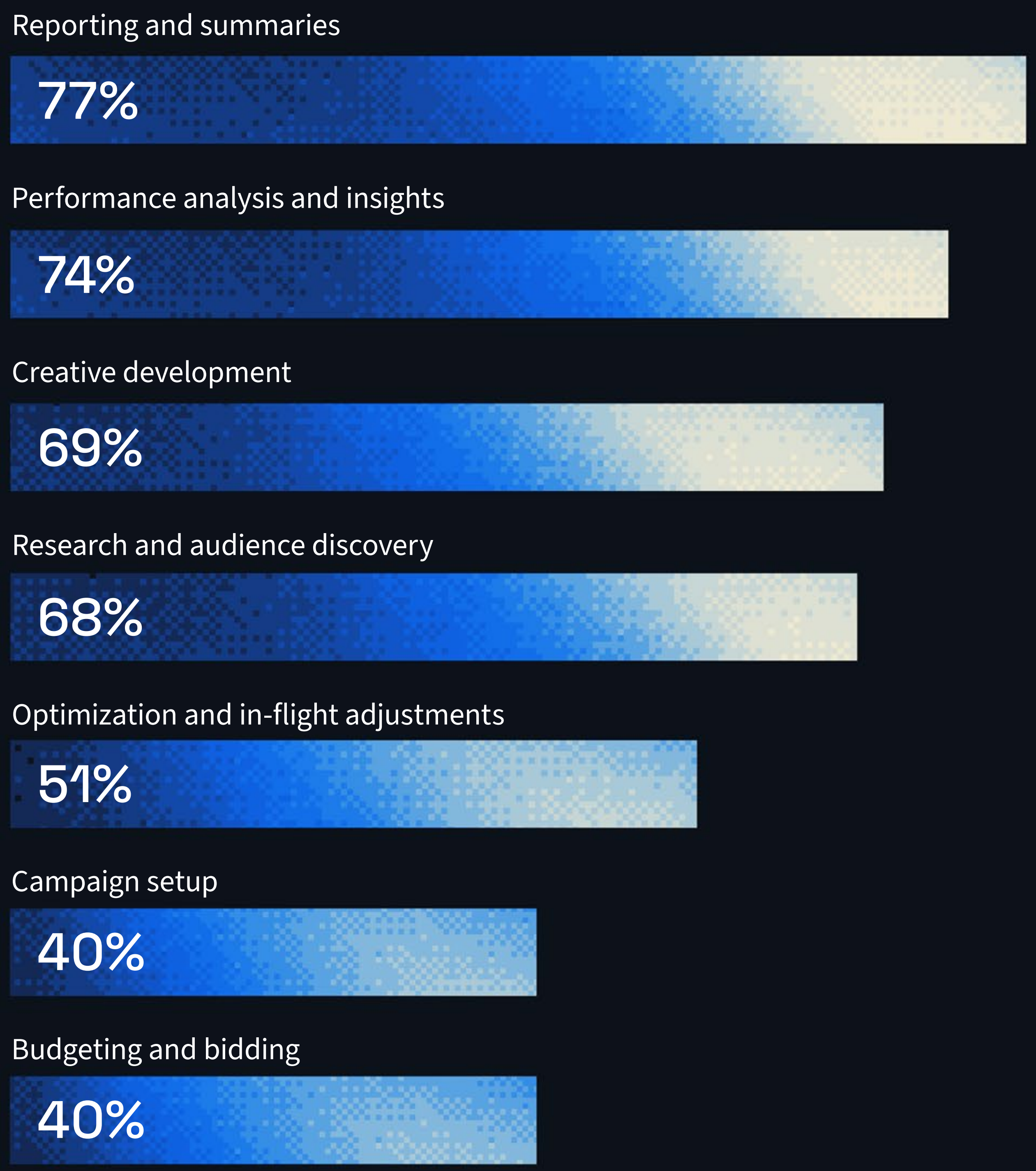
Reporting is becoming a decision layer

Reporting has always played an important role during live campaigns, especially in programmatic, where teams monitor performance and optimize while campaigns are still in flight.

AI is changing what that reporting can do. Instead of simply making reports faster to produce, AI can help teams summarize performance more frequently, surface patterns with more detail, explain what changed, and identify what may need attention next.

That makes reporting a more active part of the decision workflow. In the industry survey, AI use was highest for reporting and summaries at 77%, followed closely by performance analysis and insights at 74%. Respondents were also most comfortable allowing automation to operate in reporting and analysis, suggesting that marketers see these workflows as lower-risk, high-value areas where AI can reduce manual work and make performance easier to interpret.

Where advertisers use AI in campaign workflows today

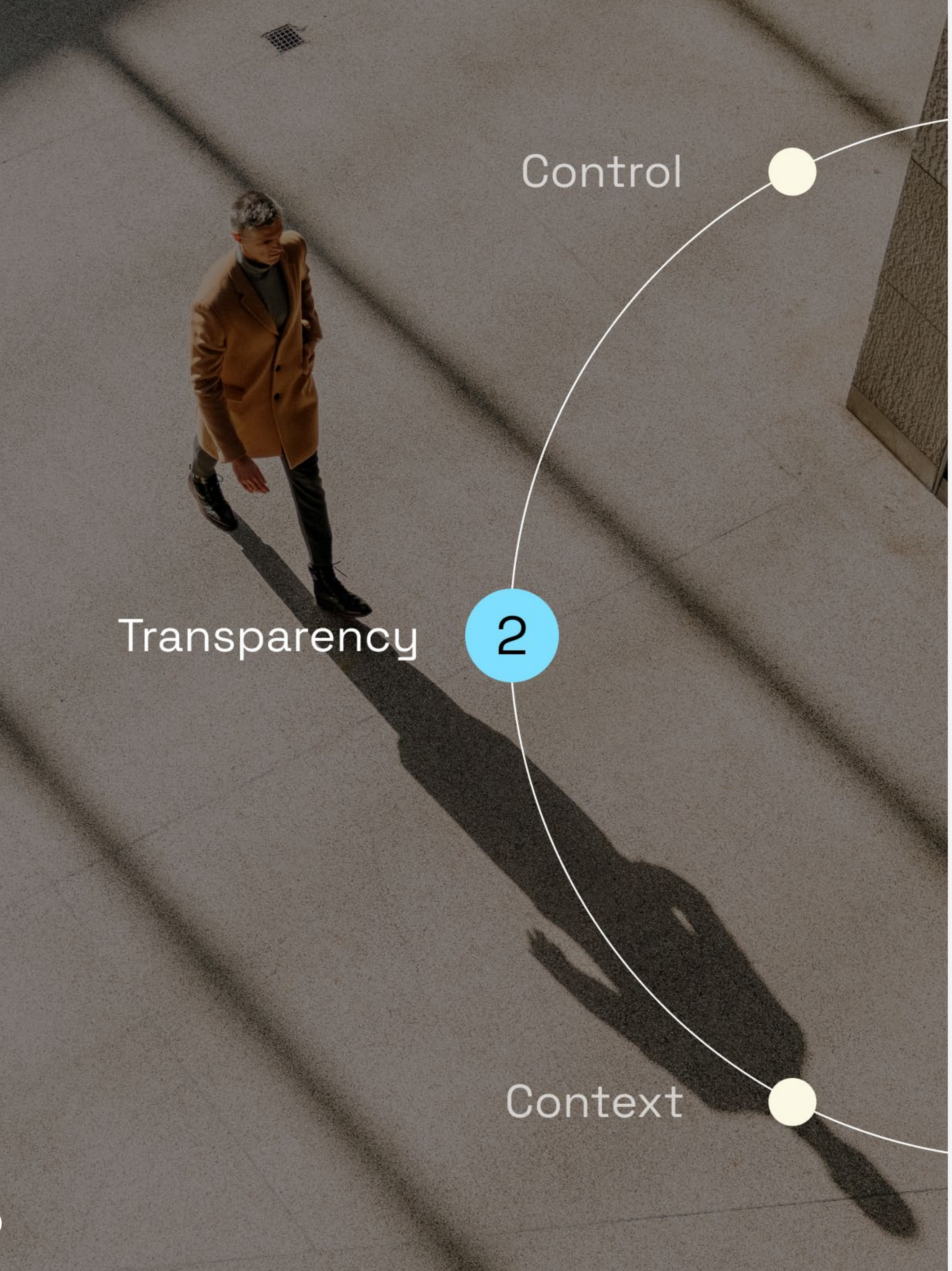


Respondents were also most comfortable allowing automation to operate in reporting and analysis (53%), suggesting that marketers see these workflows as lower-risk, high-value areas where AI can reduce manual work, surface patterns faster, and make performance easier to interpret.

In EMEA, reporting and analysis are already core AI use cases: 80% use AI for reporting and summaries, and 74% use it for performance analysis and insights.

Moreover, 88% of StackAdapt clients expect AI involvement to increase in reporting and insights, making it the strongest future-growth area.

This helps explain why adoption has moved faster than authority. Reporting and analysis give AI a lower-risk entry point to prove its value, but the insights still need the right context before teams use them to guide more consequential decisions.



Path to delegated AI: Insight before action

Reporting becomes more valuable when AI turns performance signals into interpretation. The opportunity is to move from summaries of what happened to a clearer understanding of why performance changed and what teams should do next.

The risk is that AI-generated insights can sound confident without reflecting the full campaign context. In the survey, 34% of respondents said AI recommendations do not reflect their campaign goals or context, and 37% cited limited ability to explain why a recommendation was made. That makes connected data, clear rationale, and human review essential before AI-generated reporting becomes the basis for action.

What advertisers want from AI

When asked what proactive AI support would be most useful, advertisers pointed to a cluster of capabilities that connect reporting to action.

No single capability dominates, which suggests advertisers are looking for more than faster reporting. They want AI to become a broader decision-support layer: one that identifies what needs attention, explains what changed, and helps teams decide what to do next.

41% want AI to flag risks before they escalate.

41% want AI to summarize insights.

39% want recommendations tied to campaign goals.

35% want AI to clearly explain why performance changed.

If reporting is becoming the start of the next decision, the next question is obvious: Who should make that decision? Humans, AI, or both? The answer depends on whether AI has enough context to interpret performance, recommend action, and support the decision with confidence. That is where the delegation gap becomes most visible.

The evolution of reporting with AI

Reporting is a natural starting point for AI because it combines high value with relatively low risk. AI can help advertisers analyze campaign performance in real time without piling more work on their teams. And when AI-generated insights miss the mark, as they inevitably will sometimes, marketers can validate them against other data sources before acting. That makes reporting an ideal first stop for integrating AI into a brand's workflow: it's a place where the technology can prove its value and gradually earn a larger role in decision-making.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER

What this means for marketers

Marketing teams should think about reporting as part of the decision workflow, not just a deliverable or dashboard. The teams that benefit most from AI may be those that use reporting to move faster from what happened, to why it happened, to what should happen next—and ensure AI has the campaign context, business goals, and performance signals needed to make those insights useful.

03

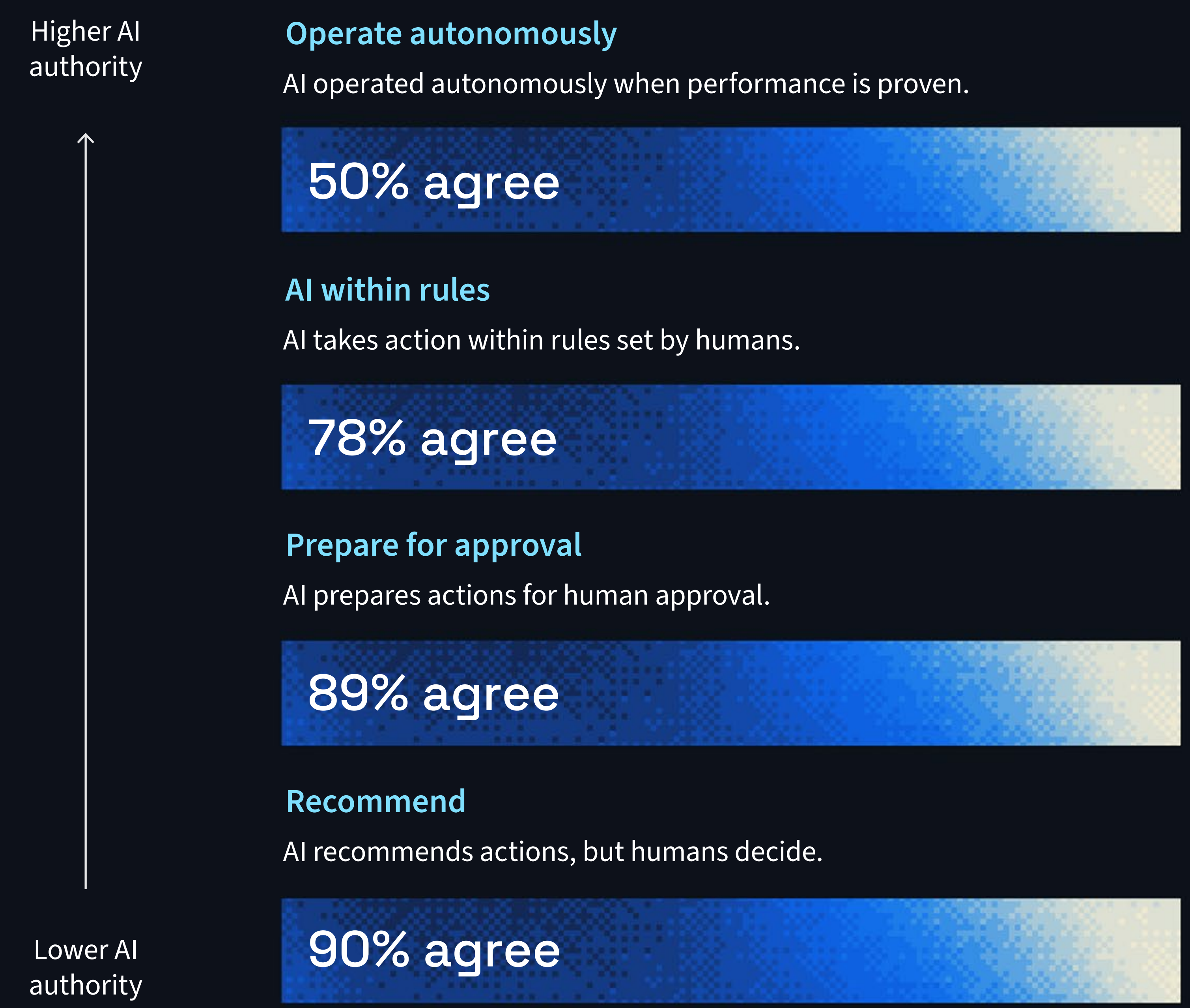
SECTION THREE

Advertising teams want proactive intelligence, not unchecked automation

As AI turns reporting into the starting point for the next decision, advertising teams are also defining how much authority AI should have in making that decision. The data points to a clear preference: advertisers want AI to surface what matters, and recommend what to do next, but they still want human judgment to set the strategy, define the guardrails, and stay accountable for the outcome.

Advertising teams are not drawing a hard line against AI action. They're drawing a line around authority. The strongest support is for models where AI helps identify, prepare, and execute decisions within boundaries humans define. As AI moves closer to independent decision-making, confidence depends on whether teams can preserve control over strategy, brand, budget, and accountability.

How much authority should AI have in advertising decisions?



This is where proactive intelligence becomes a more useful model than full automation. The next phase of AI in programmatic advertising will be defined by systems that can identify risks, interpret performance, recommend optimizations, and act within human-defined limits.

Internal client data points in the same direction: respondents were more comfortable using AI to assist decision-making or prepare actions for human approval than allowing full automation. Advertising teams are looking for a decision layer that expands what humans can confidently oversee while preserving control over strategy, brand, budget, and accountability.

Delegation looks different depending on who owns the outcome.

Role-based differences reveal one of the most human tensions in AI delegation: leadership sees opportunity, while practitioners see risk. Strategic decision-makers and hybrid operators—respondents who both contribute to strategy and manage or execute campaigns—are more comfortable allowing AI to act within rules set by humans. Hands-on practitioners are more cautious, especially when AI moves closer to campaign execution.

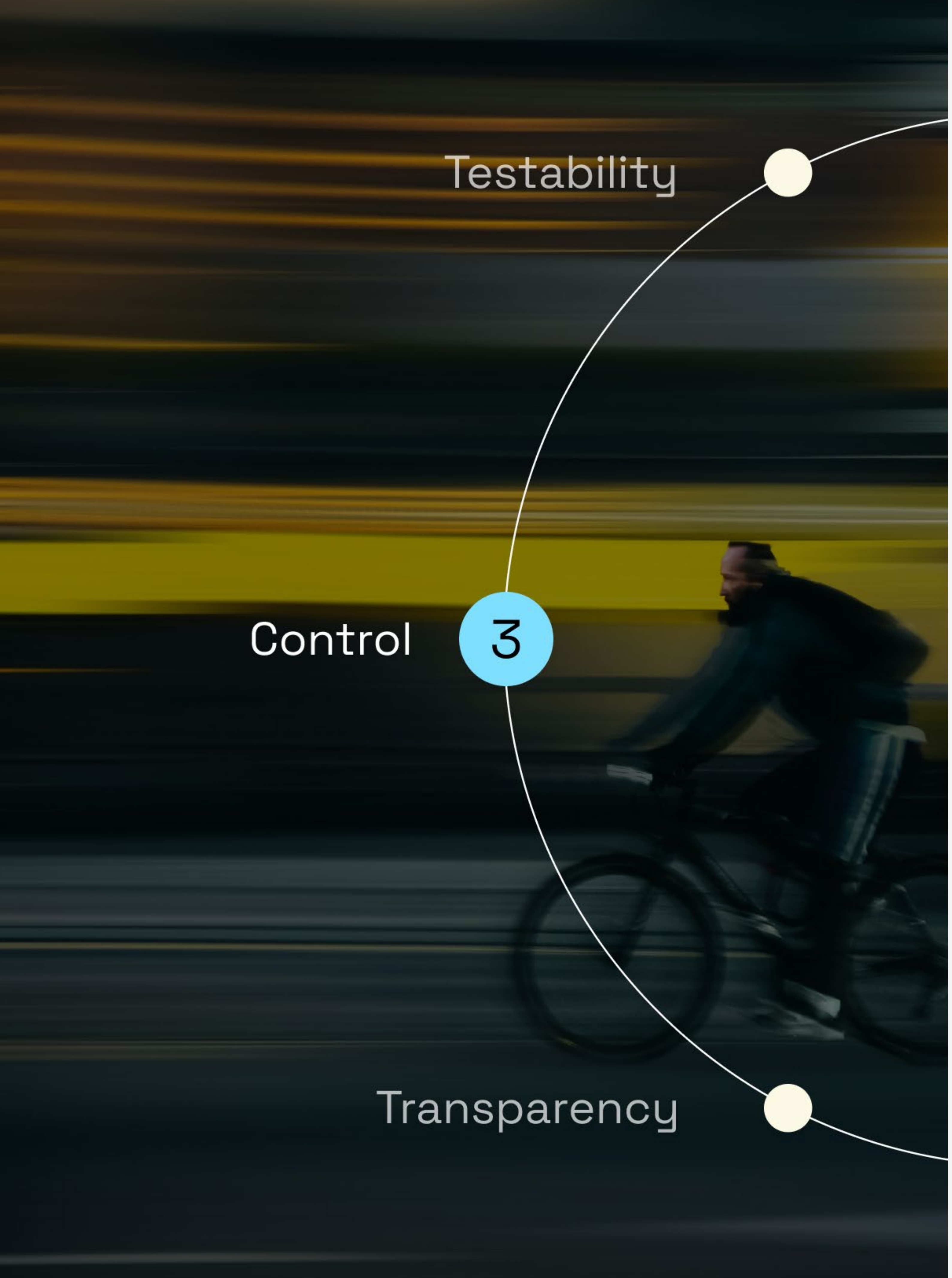
Both perspectives are valid. Leaders are often focused on speed, scale, efficiency, and competitive advantage. Practitioners are closer to the moment of execution, where an AI-driven change can affect budget, performance, brand safety, or client trust. That helps explain why the gap is most visible in areas like autonomous AI, bid optimization, and report creation, where AI can directly shape campaign outcomes.

The difference is not engagement with AI. Across role groups, respondents act on platform recommendations at similar rates.

The difference appears when recommendations become actions. Practitioners place more emphasis on safeguards such as limited-budget testing, brand safety constraints, and the ability to pause or reverse AI-driven changes. For AI delegation to scale, organizations need to connect leadership ambition with the operational controls practitioners need to act with confidence.

The gap appears to be less about whether practitioners use AI and more about what happens when AI-driven guidance becomes action. Practitioners are closer to the operational consequences of those actions, which may explain why they place greater emphasis on testing, brand safety constraints, and the ability to pause or reverse AI-driven changes.

Role group	Comfortable with AI action within set rules	Comfortable with autonomous AI
Strategic decision-makers	~78%	~58%
Hybrid operators	~81%	~47%
Hands-on practitioners	~59%	~34%



Path to delegated AI: Rules before autonomy

The closer AI gets to campaign execution, the more control matters.

Advertisers are open to AI action when authority is bounded. The preferred model is controlled delegation: AI can recommend, prepare, and act within rules, while humans retain authority over strategy, brand, budget, and accountability.

Co-pilot models are more realistic than fully autonomous agents

No matter how good AI and automation get, most advertisers will want to retain some level of control over existential questions like strategy, positioning, and budget. That's why it's important for many that their tools go beyond fully autonomous campaign management and offer co-pilot models that speed up execution and improve outcomes while keeping humans responsible for the most important decisions.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER

When defaults become delegation

AI delegation doesn't always happen through a deliberate decision to hand over more authority.

That matters because default settings can quietly shape how much authority AI has inside a campaign. When automation is accepted without review, teams may have less visibility into what context the AI is using, what assumptions it's making, and how its outputs affect campaign outcomes.

As automation expands, advertisers need AI feature activation to be visible, understandable, and easy to adjust.

In the survey:

22% of respondents intentionally chose most platform automation features.

38% said most were deliberate, with some defaults accepted without reviewing.

29% said active automation was about half deliberate and half defaults.

11% said most active features were platform defaults or unclear by default.

What this means for marketers

Marketing leaders should treat AI delegation as a spectrum of authority. Teams can start by defining where AI should recommend, where it should prepare actions for approval, and where it can act within human-defined rules.
That approach helps organizations expand AI's role gradually while preserving control over strategy, brand, budget, and accountability.

Advertisers are open to AI taking on more responsibility when humans define the rules. But greater authority raises a higher standard for trust, especially around brand safety, transparency, and control.

04

SECTION FOUR

AI trust starts with brand safety and explanation

As advertising teams give AI more influence over campaign decisions, the trust question becomes more concrete. The barriers are tied to the practical risks of campaign execution: whether AI will protect the brand, use reliable data, explain its reasoning, and give teams enough visibility to justify or reverse a decision.

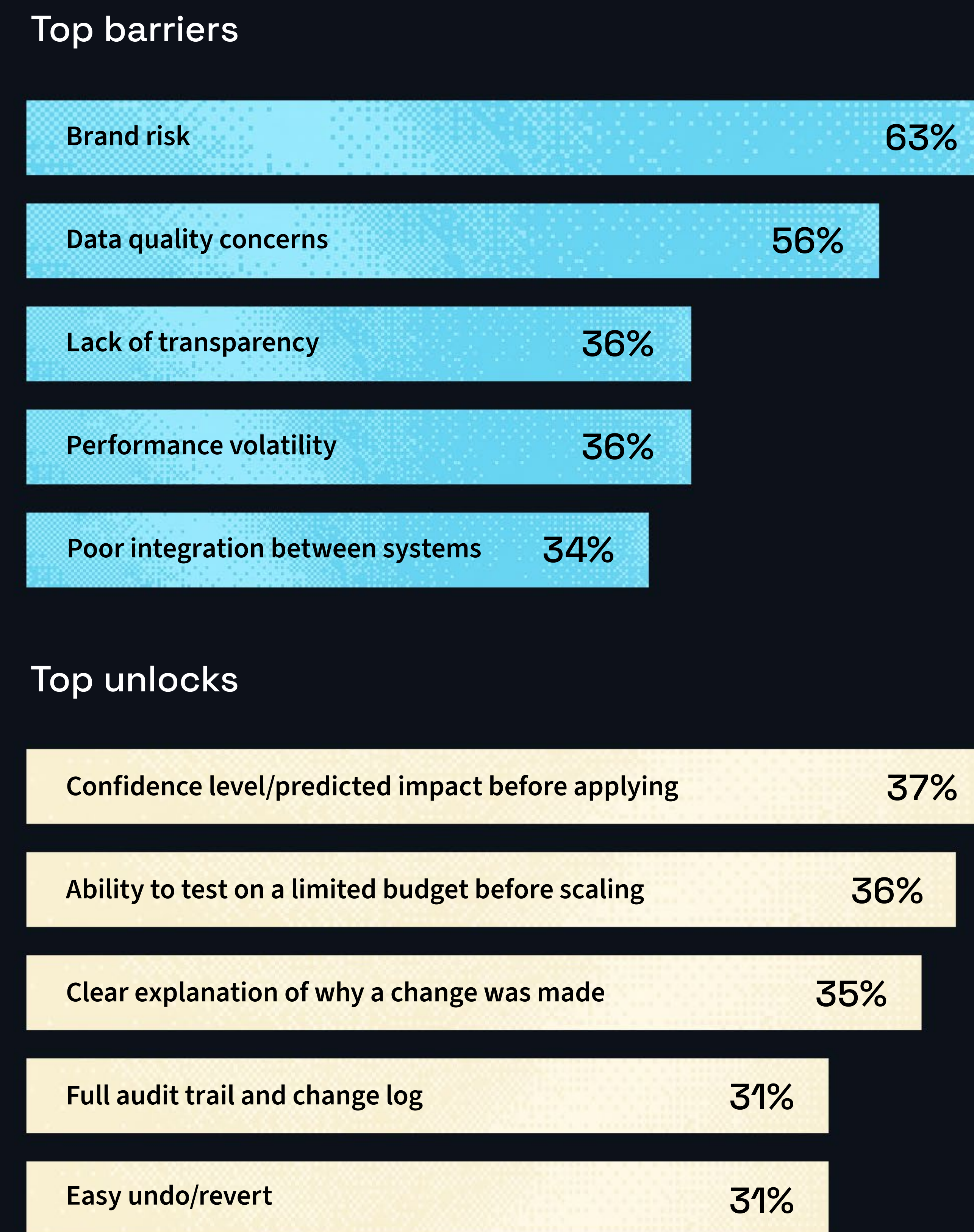
The industry survey shows that brand risk and data quality are the dominant hesitation points, followed by transparency, performance volatility, and integration challenges.

Brand risk was the most widely selected hesitation factor and the top first-ranked concern. On the unlock side, no single capability dominated, suggesting advertisers need a bundle of trust builders: predicted impact, limited-budget testing, and clear explanations.

StackAdapt clients show a similar pattern when asked about their general hesitation toward delegating more control to AI, with brand risk, data quality concerns, and lack of transparency ranking as the top concerns.

Across both datasets, the message is that advertisers need confidence in both the recommendation and the conditions around it.

What blocks AI delegation—and what would unlock it



Brands vs. agencies: Same delegation gap, different trust pressures

Brand-side advertisers and agencies are moving in the same direction on AI delegation, but the trust gap shows up in different ways.

Brands

Brand-side teams are more likely to own the final business outcome, so AI recommendations need to connect clearly to KPIs, budget decisions, and brand impact.

For brands, trust depends on whether AI can improve performance while protecting brand safety, governance standards, and internal accountability.

Brands need AI that helps them justify decisions to internal stakeholders.

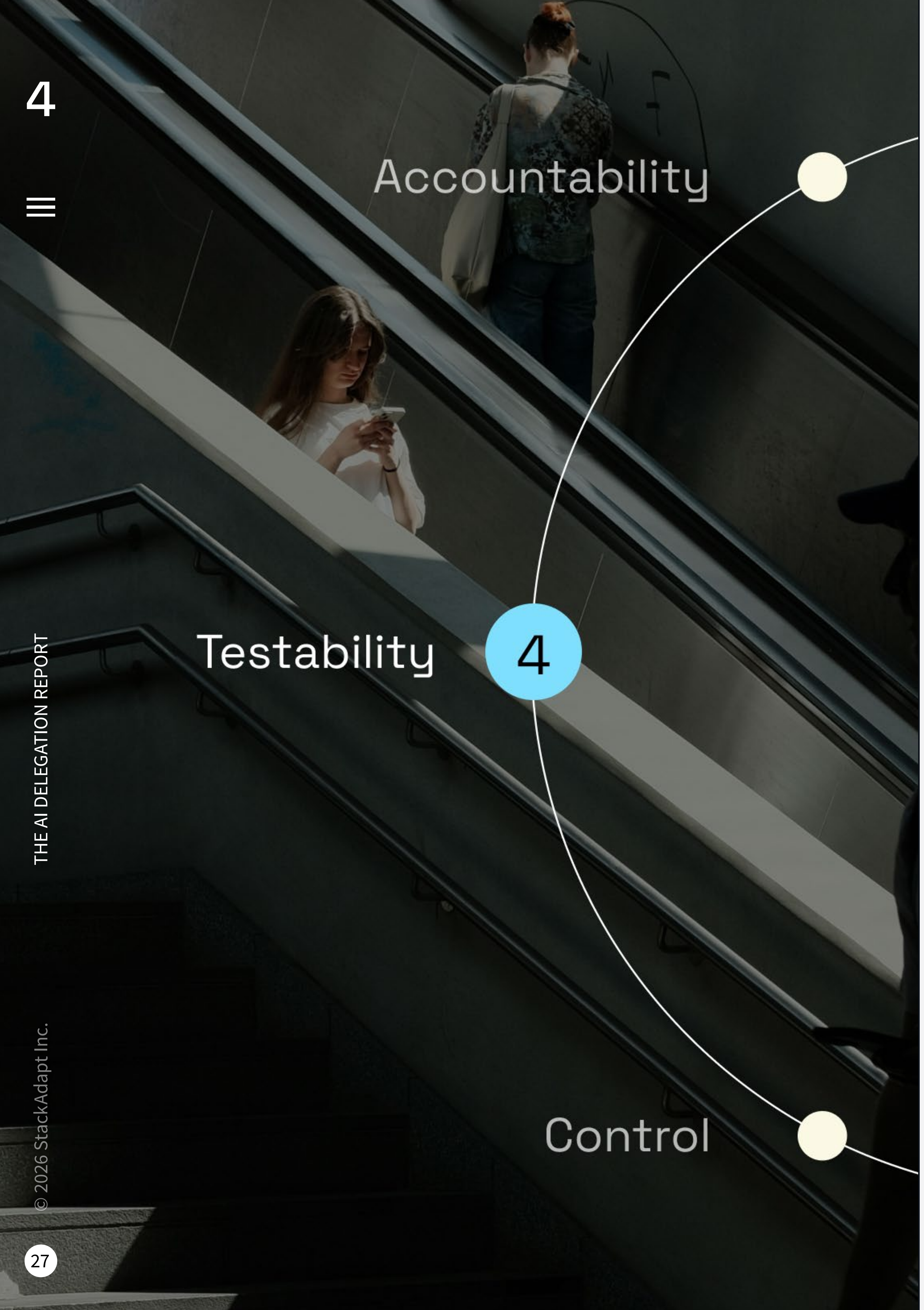
Agencies

Agency teams often manage AI across multiple clients, campaigns, and platforms, so consistency, explainability, and workflow fit become critical.

For agencies, trust depends on whether AI can support faster execution without creating friction across client approvals, platform differences, and shared accountability.

Agencies need AI that helps them justify recommendations to clients and coordinate action across teams.

Agencies are more likely than brands to act on AI recommendations often or almost always (**56% vs. 47%**), but they're also more likely to say leadership expectations are ahead of readiness (**63% vs. 55%**).



Path to delegated AI: Risk containment before delegation

Before advertisers delegate more control, they need risk to be contained. Brand safety, data quality, transparency, testing, audit trails, and undo options give teams a way to evaluate AI decisions before they become business or reputational risks.

Control and explainability must come before automation can scale

Trust, not technology, will be the main obstacle to advertisers' AI adoption. As marketers give AI a larger role, they'll continue to demand visibility into how decisions are made and what data those decisions are based on. They'll also require the ability to intervene when necessary. Clear explanations as the AI does its work—plus auditability after the fact—will be table stakes as advertisers grow comfortable with AI's processes and outcomes. The minute automation scales past the point where someone can answer for it, advertisers will pull back.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER

What this means for marketers

Trustworthy AI requires more than strong performance claims. Before expanding AI's role, teams should define what risks need to be visible, what actions require approval, what changes can be tested safely, and how quickly humans can intervene. The more consequential the decision, the more important those controls become.

Trust also depends on proof. Once advertisers can see and control AI-driven actions, they need to know whether those actions are improving outcomes that matter to the business.

05

SECTION FIVE

AI is accelerating marketing, but it has to prove business impact

AI is already creating measurable value for advertising teams, but the clearest gains are showing up first in the way teams work.

In the industry survey, 88% of respondents reported some form of AI-driven performance improvement. The strongest benefits were tied to speed and efficiency. More than half of respondents cited reduced time spent on manual optimizations, faster campaign setup or launch, and faster optimization cycles, suggesting that AI's clearest impact today is helping teams move through campaign workflows with less manual friction.

These results show that AI is reducing friction, increasing capacity, and helping teams move faster across campaign workflows.

88%

of respondents reported some form of AI-driven performance improvement.

Workflow and efficiency gains

Reduced manual optimization time

62%

Faster campaign setup or launch

56%

Faster optimization cycles

53%

Better audience targeting

47%

Direct business metrics

Improved ROAS

27%

Lower CPC

22%

The next measure of AI maturity is whether those workflow improvements translate into stronger business outcomes. While nearly half of respondents cited better audience targeting at 47%, direct performance metrics were lower: 27% cited improved ROAS and 22% cited lower CPC.

Client data points in the same direction, with an important caveat: StackAdapt clients who use AI as a regular part of their workflow were more likely to report performance improvements than clients who use AI only occasionally. That suggests AI value may compound when teams use it deeply enough to change how they work. At the same time, the data cannot prove whether deeper AI usage creates better outcomes, or whether higher-performing teams are simply more likely to adopt AI more deeply.

The takeaway is still useful: AI maturity appears connected to stronger perceived value, but the next phase will require clearer proof of causality, impact, and repeatable business results.

Path to delegated AI: Proof before expansion

AI has proven its ability to accelerate work. The next proof point is business impact: showing that faster setup, reduced manual optimization, and better analysis can compound into stronger performance, better decision quality, repeatable results, and, ultimately, business growth.

How should organizations evaluate AI impact?

Efficiency wins fans, but effectiveness wins funds. It's fair for advertisers to start measuring AI by the metrics that are easiest to move: things like speed, setup time, and hours saved show up fast and look good in a deck. But it's vital they also go past operational efficiencies and uncover business outcomes like ROAS and reduced ad spend. Ultimately, the right evaluation framework will prove AI's efficiency gains and business outcomes separately, and show how one helps drive the other.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER

What this means for marketers

AI efficiency gains are a meaningful sign of progress, especially when they help teams optimize faster, launch campaigns more efficiently, and reduce manual work. The next step is to connect those workflow gains to decision quality and business impact. Marketing teams should evaluate whether AI is helping them make stronger choices, improve outcomes, and build a clearer case for expanding delegation.

AI is already helping teams move faster, but scaling that value requires the right operating foundation. The next constraint is organizational readiness: whether teams have the data, governance, workflows, and accountability to support deeper delegation.

06

SECTION SIX

AI ambition is outpacing AI readiness

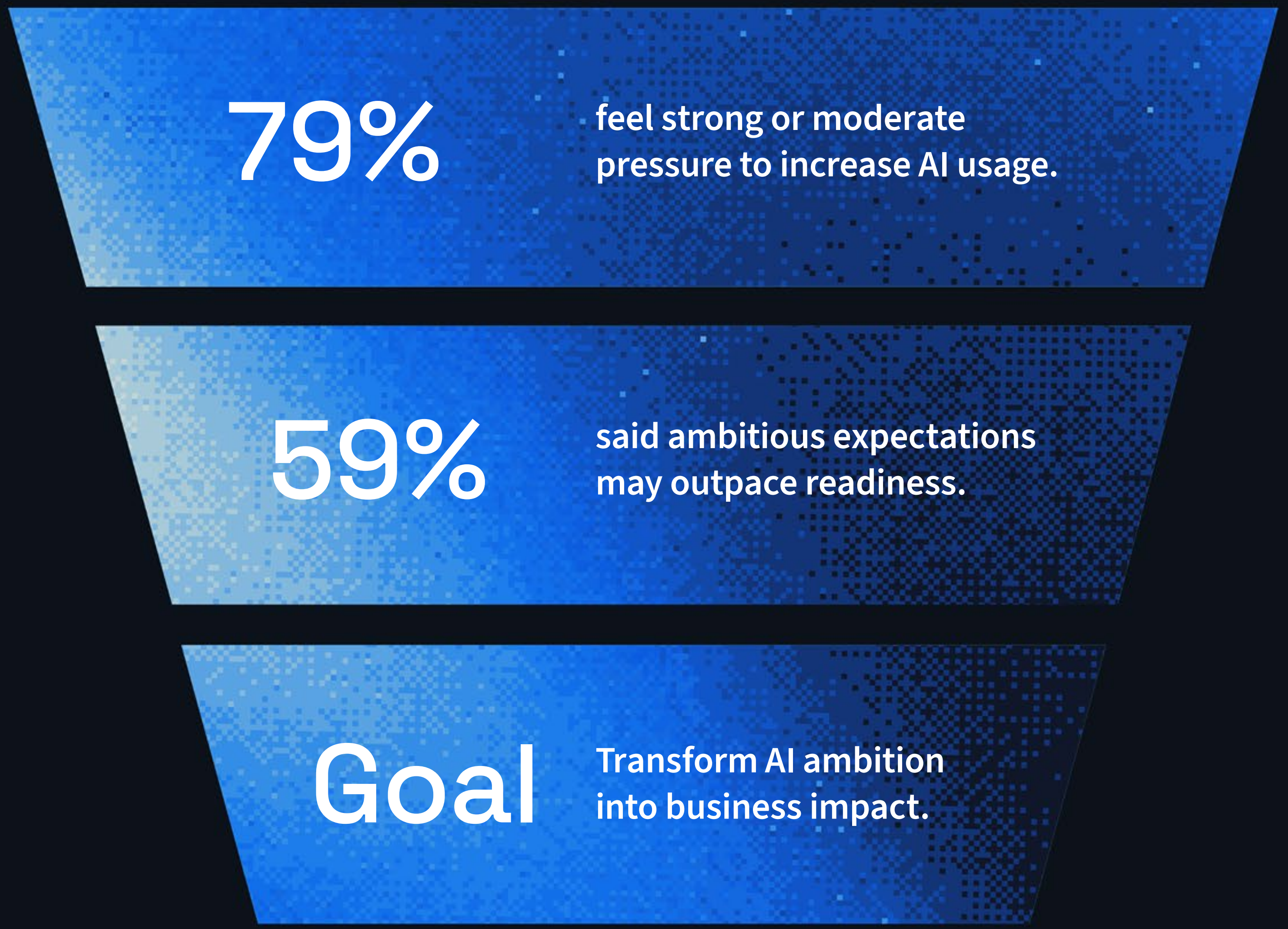
AI adoption is increasingly a leadership priority, but scaling AI across advertising workflows requires more than enthusiasm.

79% of respondents said they feel strong or moderate pressure to increase AI usage.

59% said leadership expectations are ambitious but may be ahead of current readiness.

That tension shows where many organizations are now: leaders see AI as a growth and efficiency opportunity, while teams are still building the governance, workflows, data foundations, and accountability models needed to support deeper delegation.

AI ambition is high, but readiness is still catching up



Operational readiness is a major part of that gap:

19%	**said their AI tools are fully integrated into their marketing and advertising workflows.**
49%	**cited fragmented data pipelines as a barrier to AI delegation.**
41%	**cited CRM or first-party data that isn't integrated with buying platforms.**
83%	**said varying AI capabilities disrupt efficiency at least somewhat.**

Those gaps matter because AI delegation depends on the quality and completeness of the signals AI can use. When data, tools, and workflows are disconnected, AI may generate recommendations that don't reflect the full campaign context. That makes it harder for teams to trust the recommendation, understand the rationale, or act with confidence.

The pressure is also coming from the top.

Executive and C-suite leadership is the strongest source, with 35% rating it as an extreme source of pressure. Industry trends and fear of falling behind competitors follow closely, cited that way by 28% of respondents. AI adoption has become both a leadership mandate and a competitive signal, which helps explain why expectations can move faster than most teams are prepared for.

But ambition can outpace execution when teams are asked to use AI more deeply before they have clear rules for where AI can act, who approves its recommendations, how outputs are evaluated, and who owns the outcome when AI-driven decisions underperform.

Authority needs accountability

As AI takes on more influence in campaign decisions, ownership becomes harder to define. In the industry survey, accountability for poor AI-driven decisions was split across several groups.

The split matters. AI delegation can't scale when authority expands faster than ownership. Before teams give AI more control, organizations need clearer rules for who approves AI-driven actions, who monitors outcomes, and who owns the decision when performance, budget, or brand risk is affected.

Brands are more likely to hold the individual operator or campaign owner responsible for AI-driven outcomes. Agencies are more likely to share accountability across the team, manager, and platform or vendor, reflecting the more complex mix of clients, teams, and tools involved in agency workflows.

Who is accountable for AI outcomes?

31%	said the team collectively would be accountable.
31%	said leadership or the decision-maker who approved the recommendation.
28%	said the manager overseeing the campaign.
26%	said the individual operator or campaign owner.
17%	said there is no clear accountability.

Note: Multiple responses were allowed; percentages may exceed 100%.

The gap between ambition to use AI and readiness is particularly significant in EMEA, where 80% feel moderate or strong pressure to increase AI usage and 53% say leadership expectations may be ahead of current readiness.

While leaders and practitioners experience AI from different vantage points, the broad trust requirements are consistent: AI needs to be explainable, reviewable, reversible, and accountable.

The StackAdapt client survey reinforces that AI readiness looks different depending on the role. Strategic decision-makers are more likely to focus on data quality concerns, while hands-on users have less independent authority over AI delegation decisions.

Fragmented infrastructure creates a ceiling on AI delegation. When data, tools, and workflows are disconnected, AI may be able to generate recommendations, but teams have less confidence that those recommendations reflect the full campaign context.

80%

feel moderate or strong pressure to increase AI.

53%

say expectations may exceed readiness.

Path to delegated AI: Readiness before confidence

Leadership ambition is creating momentum, but delegation requires an operating model. Teams need clear governance, connected data, defined approval paths, and accountability structures before AI can scale from task support to decision support.

AI experimentation vs. AI transformation

The difference between AI experimentation and AI transformation isn't how much AI a company uses, it's how seamlessly the technology fits into the ways people do their work. If using AI requires people to deviate from their normal workflows, that's still experimentation—and it's likely to deliver isolated productivity gains at best. But when the AI tools fade into the background and just become part of the fabric of people's jobs, that's transformation—and that leads to AI reliably contributing to better business outcomes.

Nate Elliott | Principal Analyst, AI at EMARKETER

What this means for marketers

Leaders should treat AI readiness as an operating model question. Without those foundations, pressure to use more AI can create more complexity instead of better decisions.

The readiness challenge is global, but the path to confidence varies by market. Across regions, advertisers share the same broad delegation gap, while emphasizing different trust signals.

07

SECTION SEVEN

The delegation gap is global, but the path to trust varies by region

AI adoption amongst teams is high—between 90–92%—across every region surveyed[4]. That consistency reinforces the global nature of the delegation gap. Across markets, advertising teams are already using AI; what varies is what they need in order to trust AI with more campaign authority.

NORAM

Trust through control

NORAM respondents appear more operationally cautious. They're less likely than EMEA and APAC respondents to act on platform recommendations often or almost always: 47% in NORAM, compared with 59% in EMEA and 60% in APAC.

For NORAM, the path to trust centers on validation: approval workflows, audit trails, reversibility, and testing before scaling.

EMEA

Trust through strategic relevance

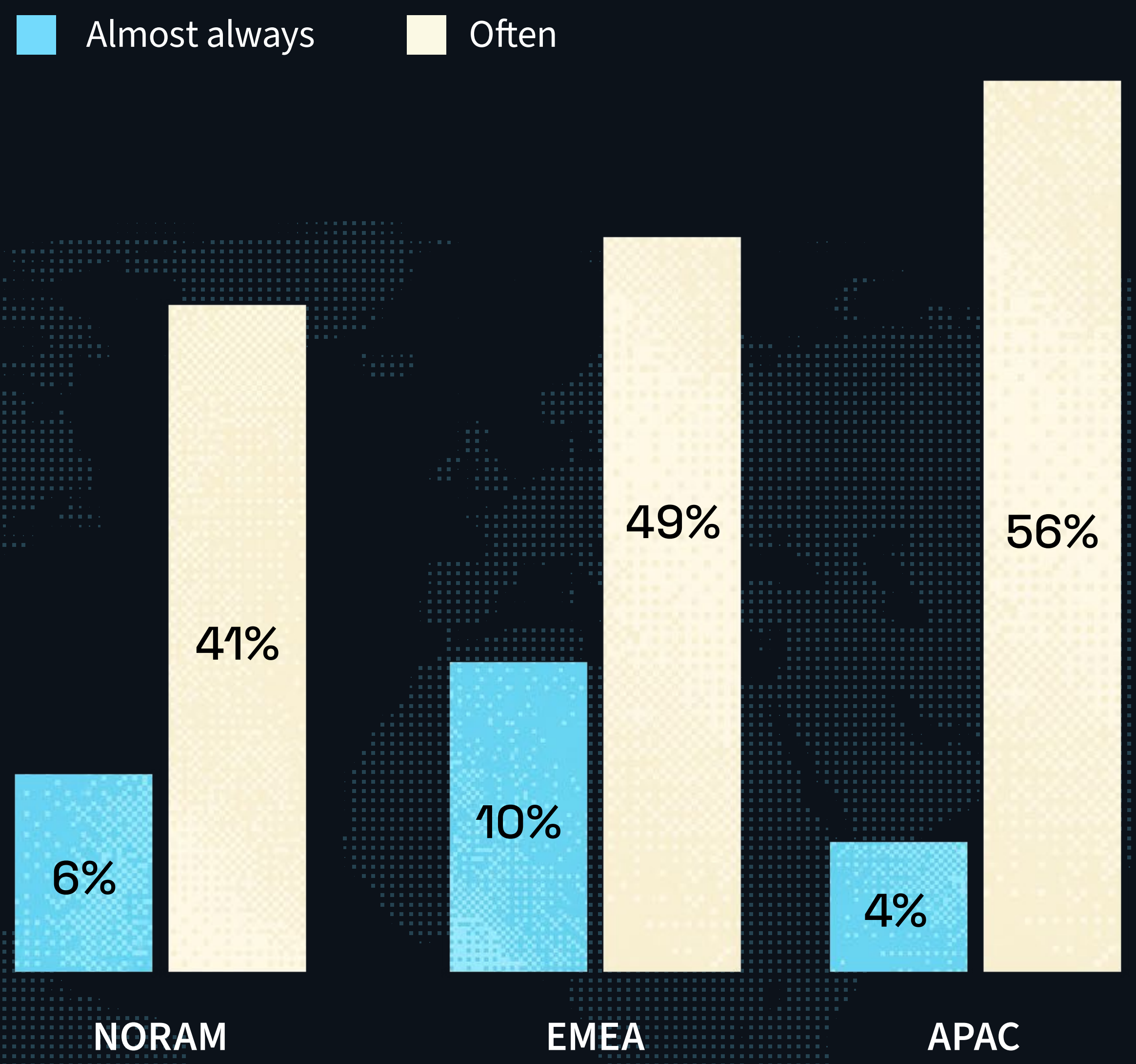
EMEA respondents are more recommendation-receptive, with 59% acting on platform recommendations often or almost always.

This makes EMEA a strong market for proactive intelligence, especially when recommendations are clearly tied to KPIs, backed by rationale, and relevant to campaign strategy.

EMEA's openness to AI recommendations doesn't mean advertisers are ready to delegate blindly: only 22% say they're very confident evaluating whether AI is making the right campaign decisions.

[4] See the Methodology section for a country breakdown.

How often do you act on AI-generated recommendations surfaced directly within your advertising platforms?



Note: Only “Often” and “Almost always” responses are shown; remaining response options are omitted for clarity.

APAC

Trust through readiness

APAC shows the strongest mix of AI appetite and readiness pressure. AI usage is highest at 92%, and 60% act on platform recommendations often or almost always.

At the same time, 81% feel at least moderate pressure to increase AI usage, and 67% say leadership expectations may be ahead of readiness.

The readiness gap is both technical and organizational. APAC respondents cite fragmented data pipelines and disconnected CRM or first-party data as major infrastructure barriers, while also pointing to ownership and governance challenges that can make AI delegation harder to scale.

For APAC, trust depends on better-connected data, clearer ownership across teams, and more contextual recommendations.[5]

The opportunity is strong, but AI delegation will need to earn confidence across the operating model, not just with individual users. As more teams rely on AI, the path to delegated trust in APAC will depend on whether organizations can align data, governance, and accountability with the pace of adoption.

[5] APAC results are based on an Australia-heavy sample, with Singapore also represented.

Across regions, the trust requirements are consistent: AI needs to be explainable, relevant, controllable, and accountable. The regional differences show where to emphasize different trust signals: control in NORAM, strategic relevance in EMEA, and readiness in APAC, where adoption pressure is high and delegation depends on the operating model catching up.

In APAC, we have a clear split: AI adoption is racing ahead, but our operational readiness is lagging behind. Clients are under real pressure to scale up, but momentum often stalls when they hit disconnected data or unclear ways of measuring success. The issue isn't a lack of appetite for AI—it's having the right infrastructure to back it up. To build trust, we must stop treating AI as a 'set-and-forget' tool. We need to provide clients with connected data and a clear view of accountability. This turns AI from a 'black box' suggestion into a partner that actually delivers on campaign performance. For APAC, the path forward is simple operational discipline: linking our marketing tech to real business outcomes, so that leaders can move from 'experimenting' to 'scaling' AI with confidence.

Liam McCarten | VP of Sales, APAC, at StackAdapt

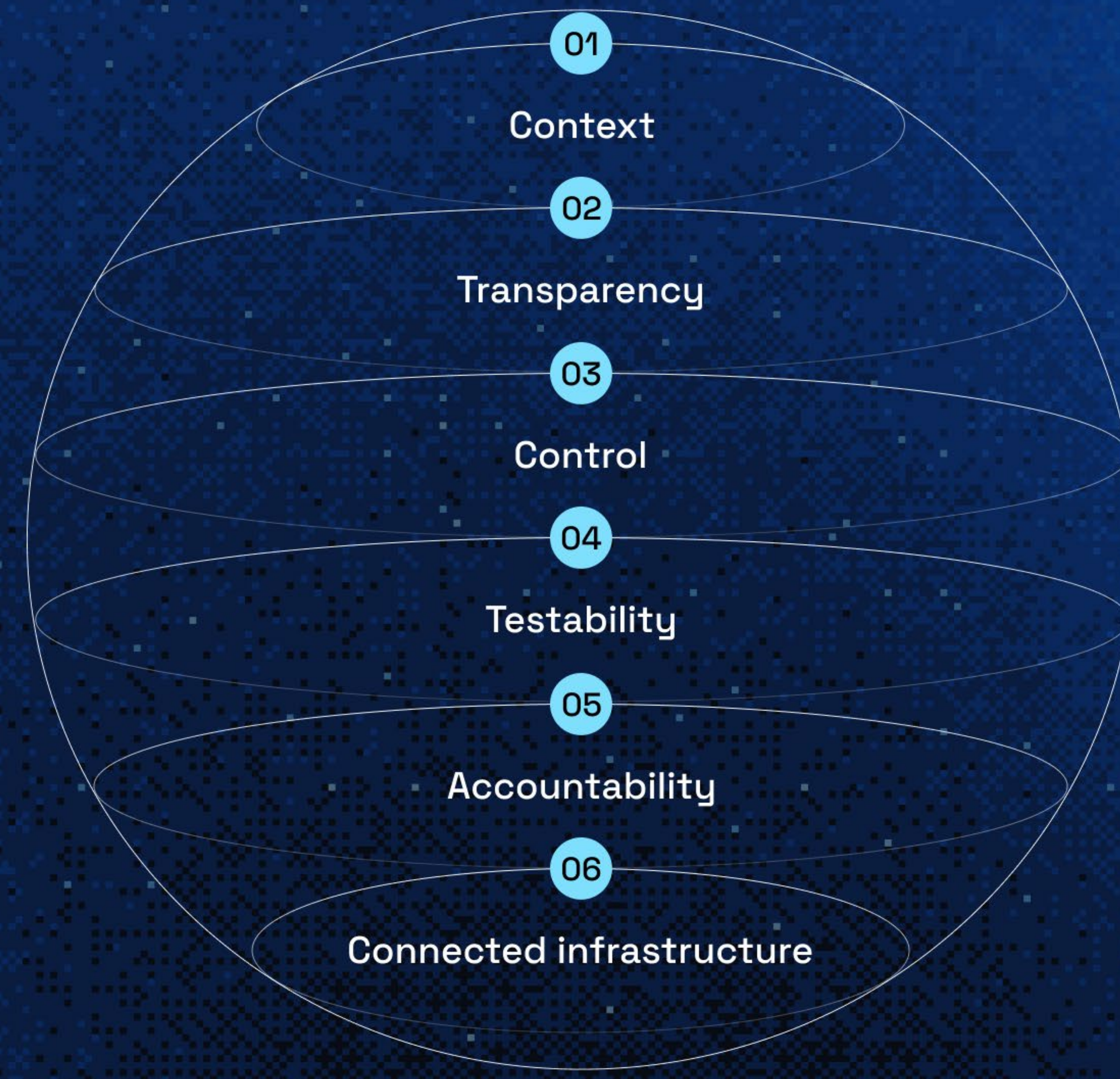
Across sections and regions, the pattern is clear: AI authority grows when trust is designed into the workflow. The future of AI in programmatic depends on the conditions that make delegation feel relevant, controlled, testable, and accountable.

The future of AI in programmatic is delegated trust

AI has already changed how advertising teams work. The future will be defined by how it changes the way they make decisions.

As AI moves deeper into planning, activation, optimization, and measurement, the question is no longer whether advertisers will use it. The question is how much authority they will trust it to take on.
The companies that close the AI delegation gap will be the ones that build the governance, confidence, and operating models needed to let humans and AI make better decisions together.

The six conditions for AI delegation.



01

Context

AI recommendations need to reflect the campaign, audience, KPI, brand nuance, business priority, and regional market context. Relevance is what makes AI worth listening to.

02

Transparency

Advertising teams need to understand why a recommendation was made, what data informed it, and what outcome is expected. Interpretability turns reporting and analysis into decision support.

03

Control

AI must operate within human-defined rules, including approval paths, budget caps, brand safety constraints, escalation triggers, and override rights. Authority should expand only within clear boundaries.

04

Testability

Advertisers need ways to test AI recommendations and actions at a limited scale before expanding automation. Outcome proof is what allows AI authority to grow responsibly.

05

Accountability

Organizations need clarity on who owns decisions, outcomes, and failures when AI is involved: the operator, the team, leadership, the platform, or some combination of each. Delegation can't scale when authority expands faster than accountability.

06

Connected infrastructure

AI delegation requires integrated tools, connected data, reliable attribution, and clear ownership across media, data, and analytics teams. Operating readiness is what allows AI to move from isolated task support to accountable decision support.

Delegation will grow when advertisers can see how AI thinks, test what it recommends, control where it acts, and know who is accountable for the outcome. The next generation of programmatic AI will be judged by how well it earns trust, not only by how much it can automate.

That's why StackAdapt is helping businesses transform the way they grow by combining AI-native technology and intelligent automation with human creativity and expertise. AI is the foundation, and humans are the orchestrators.

With Ivy Studio™ at the center of the AI-first experience, StackAdapt brings unified planning, activation, optimization, and measurement together to help advertisers navigate the next evolution of AI-first advertising.

Book a meeting with our team today to learn more.

Methodology

This report draws on two quantitative surveys conducted to understand how advertising teams are using AI today, where they're willing to delegate campaign authority, and what conditions must be in place for AI-driven decision-making to scale.

The industry survey was conducted by leading B2B market research company, NewtonX, from May 19, 2026 to June 8, 2026 among 500 marketing and advertising professionals at mid-sized and enterprise organizations. Respondents included both senior leaders and hands-on practitioners involved in programmatic advertising strategy, execution, or platform use. The audience included brand-side advertisers as well as agency professionals serving enterprise clients.

The external survey sample included respondents from six markets: the United States (n=258), Canada (n=42), the United Kingdom (n=72), Germany (n=28), Australia (n=84), and Singapore (n=16). Regional cuts are used throughout the report to identify where AI adoption, recommendation behavior, delegation comfort, and readiness barriers vary across NORAM, EMEA, and APAC.

The report also incorporates a StackAdapt global client survey of 187 respondents, designed to compare broader industry sentiment with the experiences of StackAdapt users. This survey explored AI adoption, performance impact, delegation preferences, trust barriers, and the conditions that would make clients more comfortable allowing AI to take on a larger role in campaign workflows.

Throughout the report, "advertisers" refers to brand-side marketers, agency professionals, advertising leaders, and hands-on campaign practitioners who plan, manage, optimize, oversee, or make decisions about advertising campaigns. Findings are reported as percentages of respondents unless otherwise noted. Where internal and external survey results are compared, the report treats them as directional comparisons because question wording, response formats, and sample composition may differ.

StackAdapt is the leading AI advertising and orchestration platform marketers rely on to drive brand growth and revenue. Built entirely in-house with an easy-to-use interface, StackAdapt unifies programmatic and owned channels—including CTV, DOOH, display, native, audio, email, and more—into one seamless experience. The platform makes it easy to find the right audience, personalize creative, run campaigns, optimize, and measure results in one place. Trusted by the most forward-thinking brands and agencies, StackAdapt combines speed of innovation, deep vertical expertise, and partnership that powers real business growth.

For more information, visit stackadapt.com.