

AI in Marketing: Leadership and Impact in Europe

Marketers are no longer asking if they should adopt AI - the conversation is now about how fast they can scale.

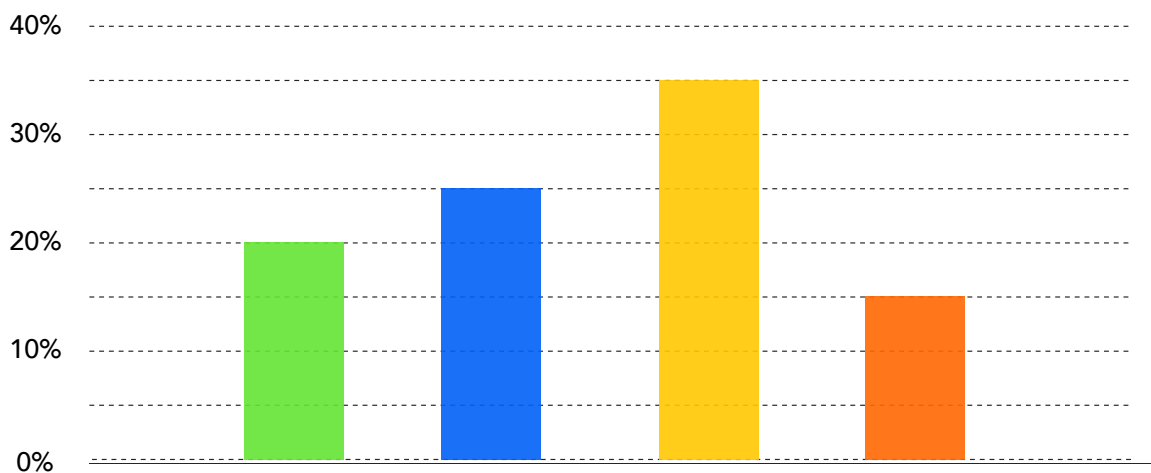


AI is reshaping the way brands operate, not just in terms of tools and tactics, but in how they structure their teams, spend their budgets, and measure impact. This report, based on responses from 300 senior marketers split evenly across the UK, France and Germany, explores where brands sit on the adoption curve, the gains they're seeing, and where the growing pains still lie.



AI Adoption: From Pilots to Prototypes

While most marketers say their organisation is either scaling or implementing AI, just 16% have moved into what could be considered true leadership, where proprietary AI tools, real-time engagement models and fully agentic campaign systems are in play. France edges slightly ahead of other markets here, with nearly one in five marketers claiming a leadership position, but the region as a whole is still catching up with the hype.



Exploring: Experimenting with entry-level AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, or AI-powered assistants for content drafting or basic brainstorming.

Scaling: Integrating AI across multiple channels for dynamic creative optimisation, AI-powered media buying, or personalised content recommendations using predictive models.

Implementing: Using AI for tasks like automated social media management, predictive analytics for campaign performance, or basic audience segmentation.

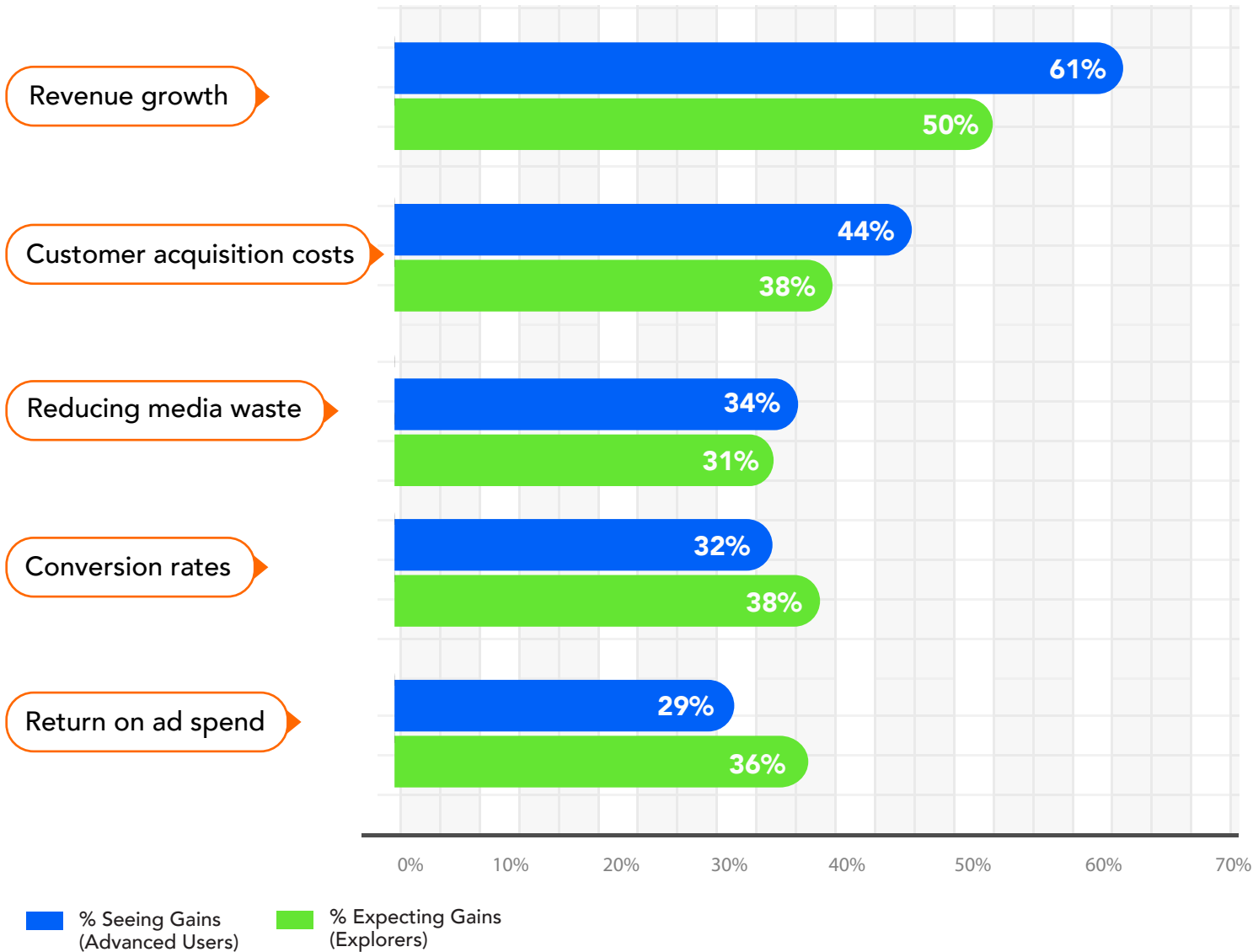
Leading: Developing in-house AI models or custom algorithms for real-time customer engagement, building proprietary tools for predictive audience insights, or using agentic AI for end-to-end campaign management.

Encouragingly, only a small minority (21%) remain in the earliest phase of exploration, suggesting a strong collective push towards operationalising AI. But the gap between exploring and leading is wide. Moving beyond use cases like content drafting or basic automation means tackling the tougher issues of integration, training and trust.

What's Working, and What's Not (Yet)

AI is delivering, and in some areas, it's outperforming expectations. Marketers who've moved past the exploratory stage are already seeing clear uplifts in efficiency and spend effectiveness, particularly on revenue growth and customer acquisition costs. Interestingly, even media waste is being cut more effectively than marketers originally anticipated.

However, not every metric is seeing the same gains. Conversion rates and return on ad spend are two areas where marketers still in the exploration phase had higher hopes than those further along have realised. This suggests that while AI excels at automation and targeting, driving actual business outcomes still depends heavily on creative execution, accurate data, and smart deployment.



One telling detail: among leading organisations, nearly half are now investing more than 20% of their marketing budget into in-house AI development, by comparison, most other organisations continue to invest in vendor solutions with less internal alignment or expertise.



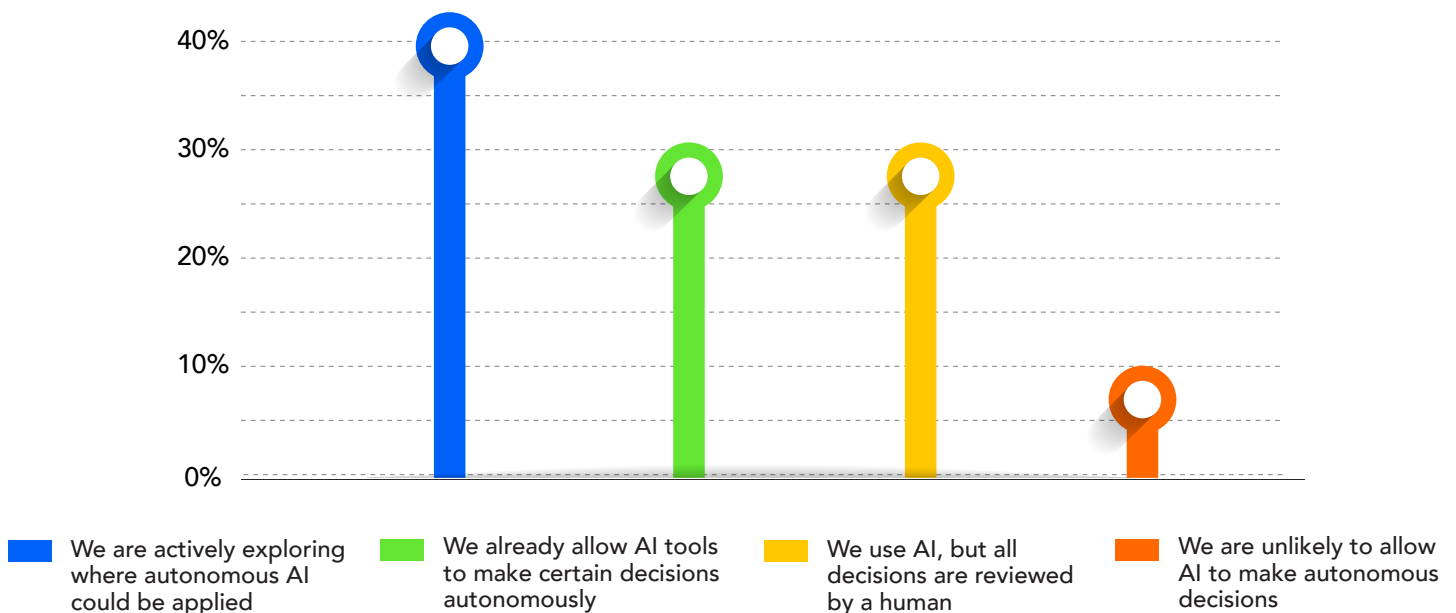
Top Tip

Prioritize improving personalization and engagement with AI to improve your relationship with customers. For marketers, it's a win-win to leverage AI to enhance customer personalization and engagement, it can optimize how you're talking to customers and help craft messages people actually want to see. Consider AI tools that tailor content and experiences to individual preferences, ensuring deeper engagement and loyalty from your best customers. But don't forget: The most important factor in this equation is data. If you're looking to implement AI-driven personalization engines that can analyze customer data and deliver tailored content and offers in real time, you need a solid data foundation to fuel those decisions.



Autonomous AI: Trusting the Machine

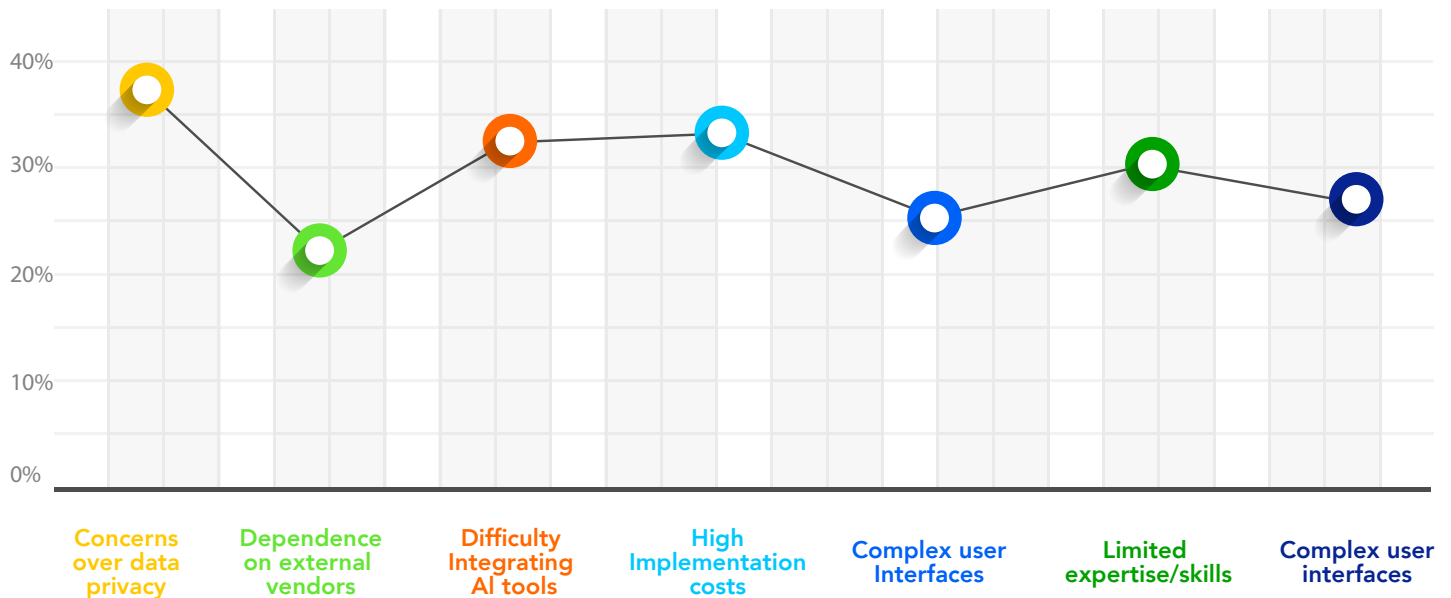
Comfort levels with AI autonomy are high, but they're tempered with caution. While most marketers say they are open to letting AI make decisions independently, most are still in the testing phase, evaluating which parts of the process are suitable for automation and where human oversight is still required.



Leading organisations show a clear shift in mindset here. They're more than twice as likely to allow AI to make some decisions within a defined scope, signalling a move towards scalable, semi-autonomous frameworks rather than blanket human review.

Barriers to Scale: A Mix of Practical and Structural

It's not reluctance that's holding AI back, it's complexity. Privacy concerns top the list of obstacles, alongside implementation challenges such as integration difficulties, high costs and a lack of internal AI expertise. Surprisingly, softer issues like stakeholder resistance or lack of buy-in are less common, suggesting that leadership teams are aligned on AI's potential but need support on the execution front.



And with just over a year to go before the EU AI Act comes into force, only 28% of marketers say they have a clear compliance strategy in place. That leaves a significant portion still in planning or unaware, a regulatory gap that could create serious disruption for AI-reliant teams.



Top Tip

Address barriers with strategic planning. Each organization is going to be different when it comes to challenges and barriers to AI adoption. It's important to think through the common barriers, such as data privacy concerns, cost and resistance to change, and understand how each could impact you. To help with this, consider each challenge through an organizational and technical lens. From an organizational perspective, what challenges could your people run into? A lack of expertise or fear of change? And from a technical perspective, how will you combat issues like model accuracy, integration with other tools and systems, and scalability? Taking a two-fold approach can help you discover where you may face barriers within your marketing org and the technologies you employ.



From Capability to Culture: Where to Start

Quality data is the cornerstone of effective AI. Focus on strengthening and enriching your first-party data to glean as much value as possible. Then, scale your data access and connect to a people-based identity solution that can help you achieve a complete view of customers online and offline.

There are lots of nuances when it comes to how much your organization should invest in AI tools and technologies. Try and think through what areas have the highest ROI potential, such as predictive analytics and real-time data insights, and go from there.

For those who may have just started their AI journey, consider working with a partner or vendor that can help set you up for success. The right partner can help you set clear goals and KPIs, effectively apply AI to your data, and give you the strong foundation of identity.

