



The state of **AI in DAM**

Understand the current AI usage trends and their impacts on the industry

2025

Research Supported By:



About the author

Kristina Huddart is an independent consultant with 12+ years of experience helping organizations navigate and optimize their Digital Asset Management (DAM) practices and wider digital operations.

Through her consultancy, she helps global brands and cultural institutions to solve operational challenges by aligning people, processes, data, and technology. Whether an organization is selecting a new technology, optimizing and maturing an existing platform, or aiming to improve user adoption, Kristina partners closely with teams to deliver practical, future-ready solutions.

Her expertise spans industries including finance, retail, energy, eCommerce, health and wellness, publishing, startups, and cultural heritage. She supports clients with technology selection and implementation, metadata and taxonomy design, governance, workflow and process optimization, change management, and strategic planning.

Kristina is also the author of the State of AI in DAM annual research, a regular conference speaker and chair at industry events, and an educator through various programs including the Rutgers University Professional DAM Certificate Program. Her approach is collaborative, strategic, and grounded in real-world experience, ensuring that the solutions she helps implement are not only technically sound but also embraced by the teams who use them.

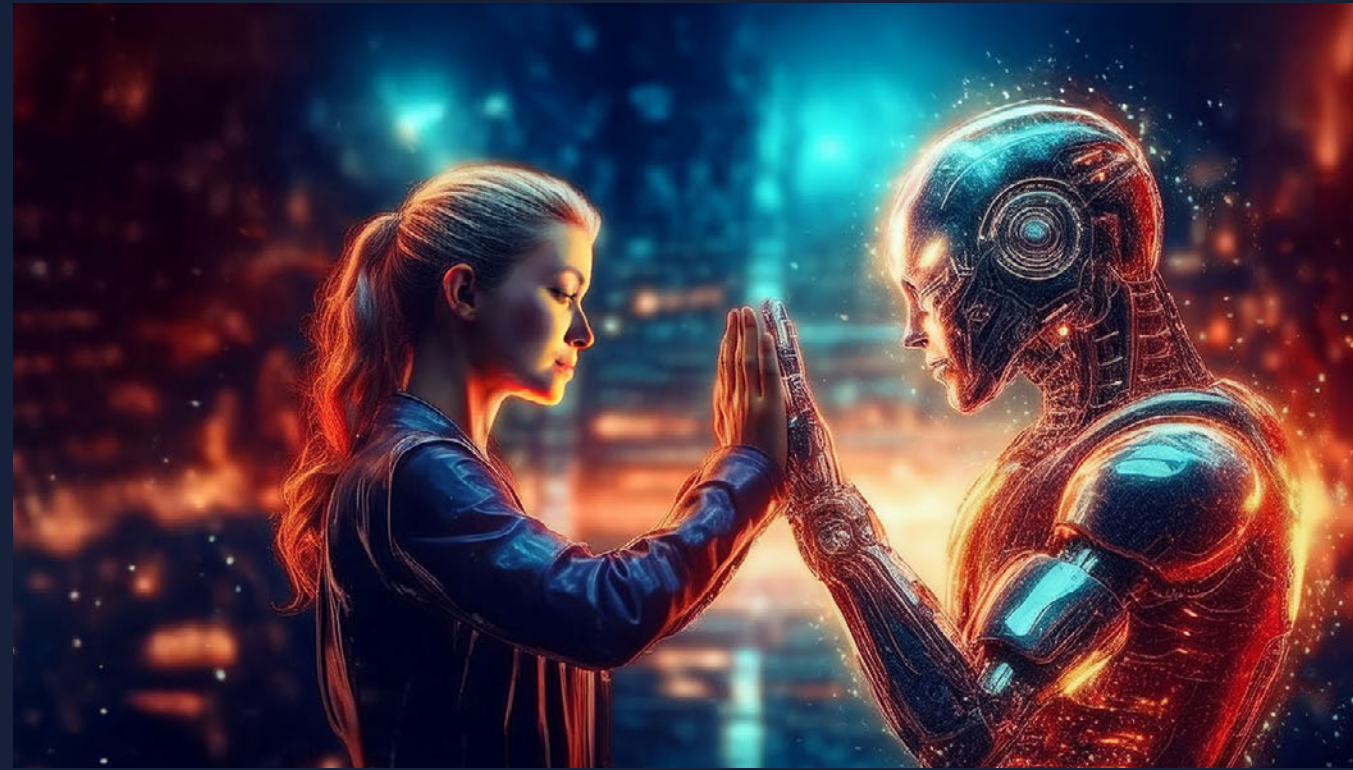
With deep expertise in digital operations and a proven track record across sectors, Kristina helps clients implement solutions that empower teams, scale with business goals, and deliver measurable ROI. Her collaborative, strategic approach focuses on continuous improvement, process refinement, and user adoption, ensuring every content operations solution is tailored for long-term success.



Kristina Huddart
DAM and Content Operations
Specialist and Consultant
kristina@huddartconsulting.com

[LinkedIn](#)

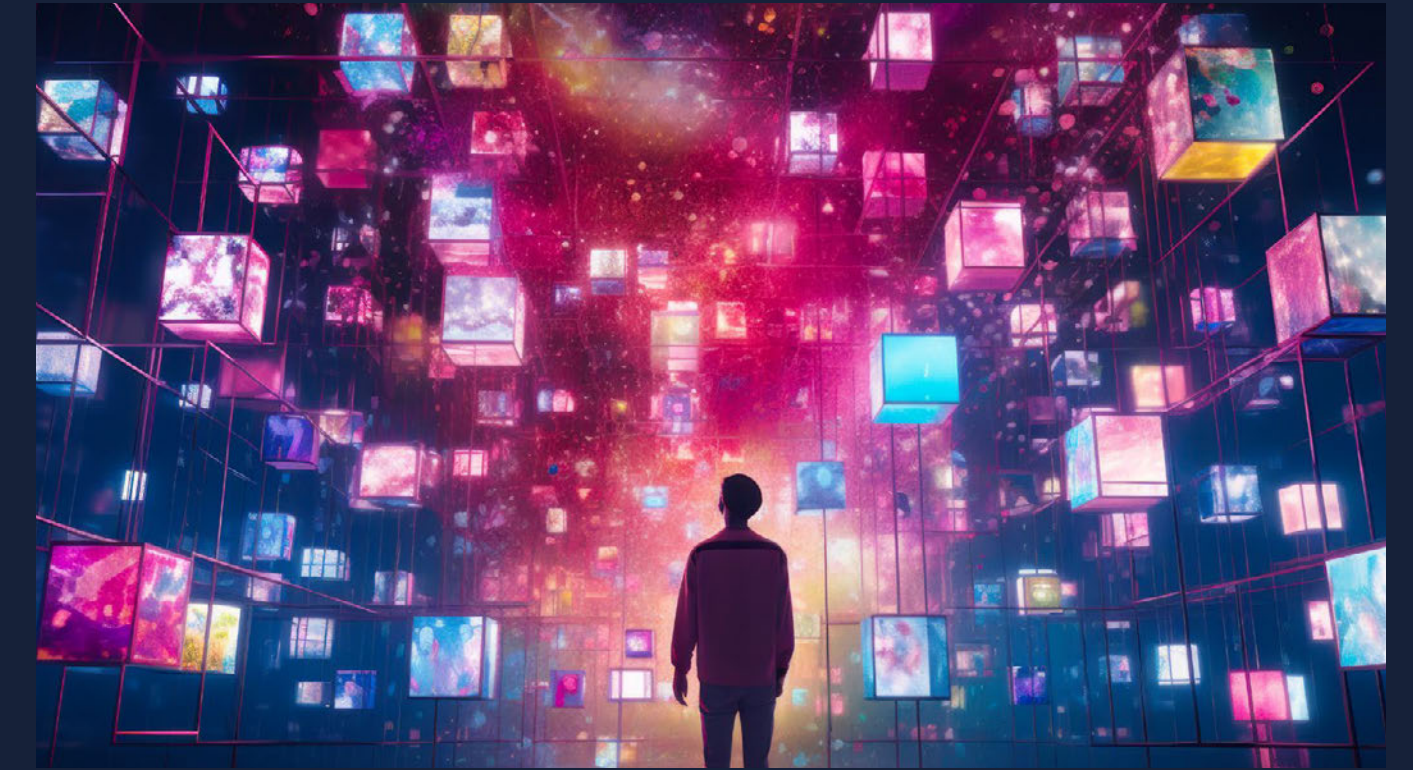
Contents



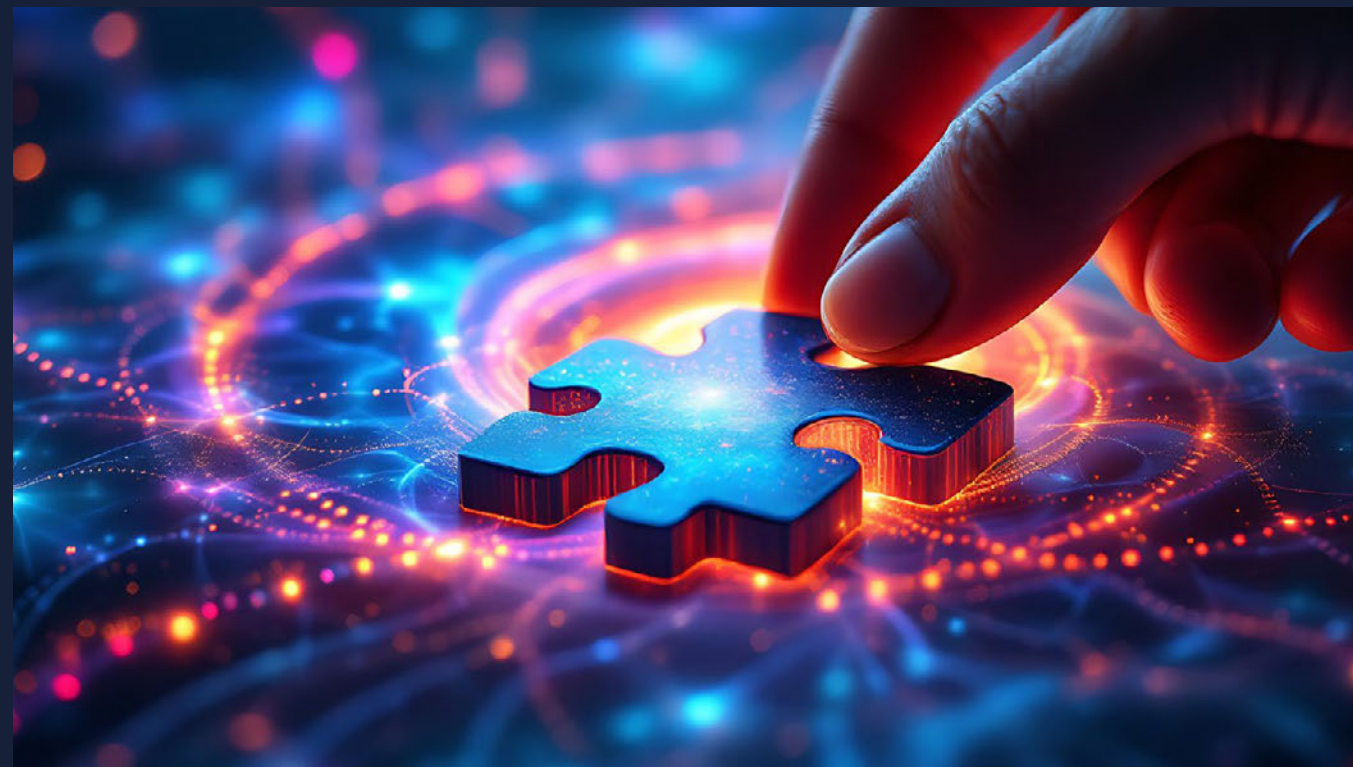
1. How We Feel About AI



2. AI in Action: *Adoption Across Content Ops*



3. AI + DAM: *What Users Really Want*



4. AI in the Real World: *Objectives and Obstacles*



5. Before the First Prompt: *The Foundations of AI Readiness*



6. What We've Learned and What's Next

2025 Research Approach



Understanding the Data

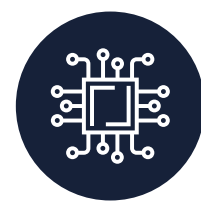
AI in DAM is no longer just a promise. It's reshaping how we manage, create, and deliver content.

From automating metadata to accelerating creative production and enabling smarter workflows, AI is transforming not just how content is organized, but how it's imagined and activated across the content lifecycle.

But adoption is not happening evenly. Some organizations are moving fast, embedding AI into production environments. Others remain cautious, curious but waiting for clearer structure, stronger evidence, or strategic direction.

This report explores how over 250 content professionals, from platform owners and brand leaders to creatives and IT teams, are navigating this shift. This research reveals how organizations are using AI in their content operations in 2025: the technologies teams are actually using, the challenges they're facing, and how their expectations stack up against what the market delivers.

Now in its third year, this research builds on insights first published in the Journal of Digital Media Management in 2022, before ChatGPT sparked the mainstream AI wave, and continues to track how AI adoption in DAM is evolving across industries, roles, and maturity levels.



What was explored

- Which AI technologies are brands using
- Challenges with AI integration
- User vs. vendor alignment
- Visions for the future of AI in DAM



Who contributed

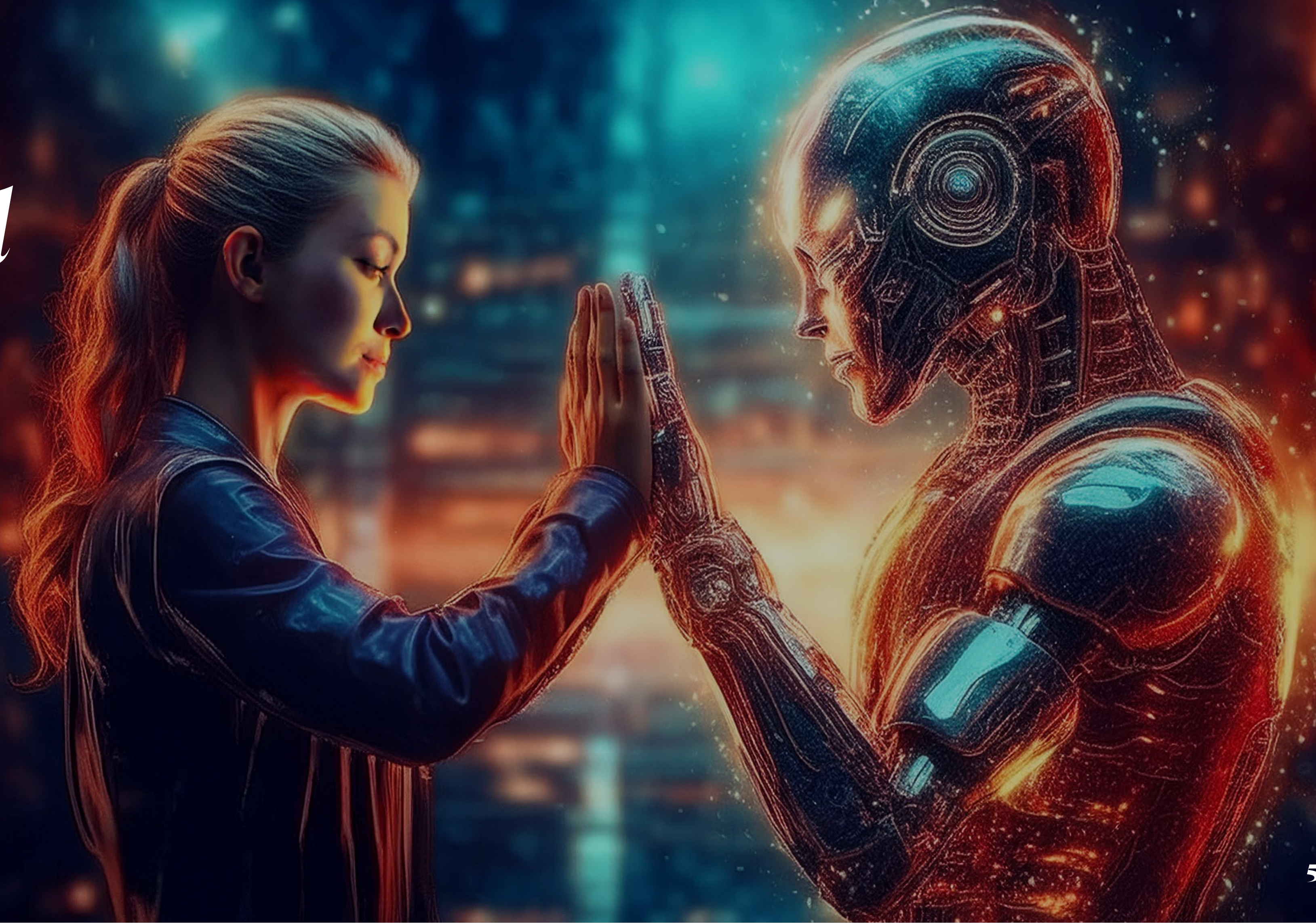
- 250+ content professionals, platform owners, IT specialists, and brand and creative leaders
- Representation across all industries
- 40% from large organizations, 60% from small to mid-sized enterprises



What the research shows

- A benchmark to see where you stand
- What's working and what's not
- Guidance for where AI in DAM is heading next

How We Feel About AI



Between Hype and Humanity



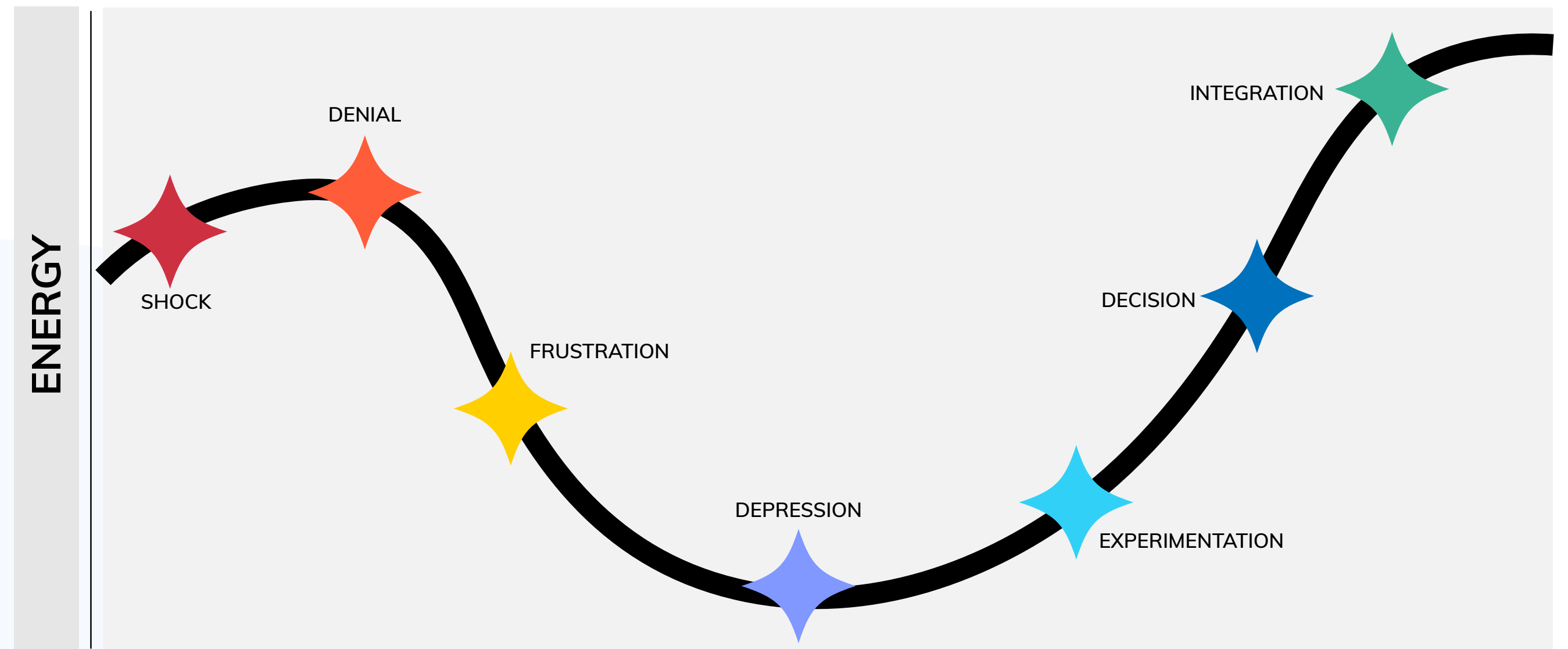
How We Feel About AI

If you've ever rolled your eyes at a new AI rollout, or nervously Googled "Is ChatGPT coming for my job?", you're not alone.

Our relationship with AI is **deeply human**. It's emotional, uncertain, and often contradictory. One moment we're amazed by what it can do; the next, we're wondering where we fit in.

It's a journey that mirrors the Kübler-Ross Change Curve: from initial shock and denial, through frustration and uncertainty, toward experimentation and, if things go well, confidence and integration.

The Change Curve



Credit: Kübler-Ross Change Curve

Still, the overall outlook is remarkably positive.

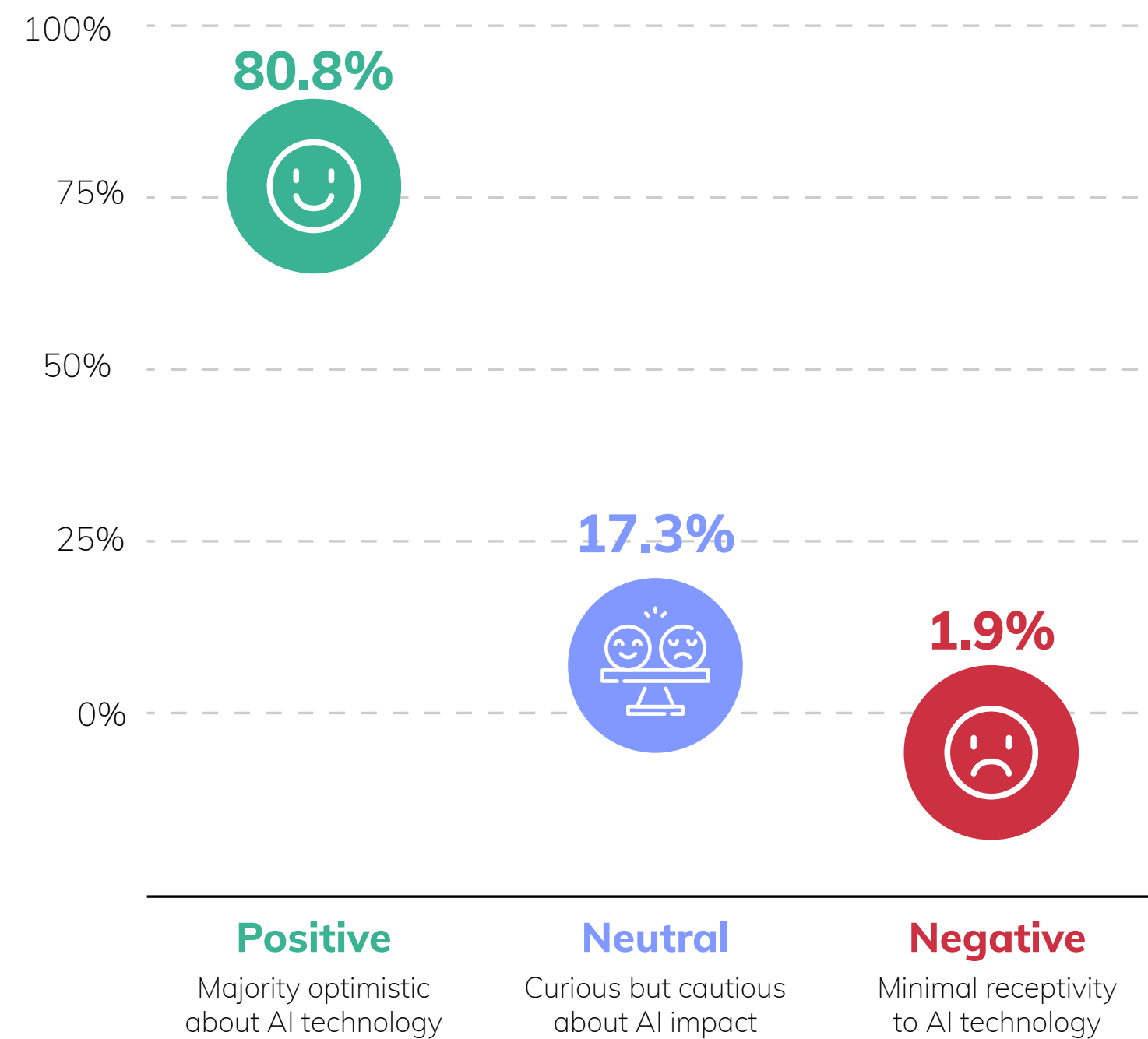
More than **80%** of individuals in the research expressed optimism about AI. This isn't just passive acceptance—it's active interest and growing confidence. Only five respondents (just 1.9%) shared a negative sentiment, showing that resistance is rare. Most people scored their optimism around a **7.8 out of 10**, suggesting that AI isn't just hype. It's personal. It's intriguing. And many are "excited but realistic" about the potential of AI.

The remaining **17%** fell into the neutral category. Not pessimistic, just... waiting. Watching. This group likely represents the "curious but cautious" middle, those waiting for clearer direction, better safeguards, or simply more proof before they dive in.

7.8

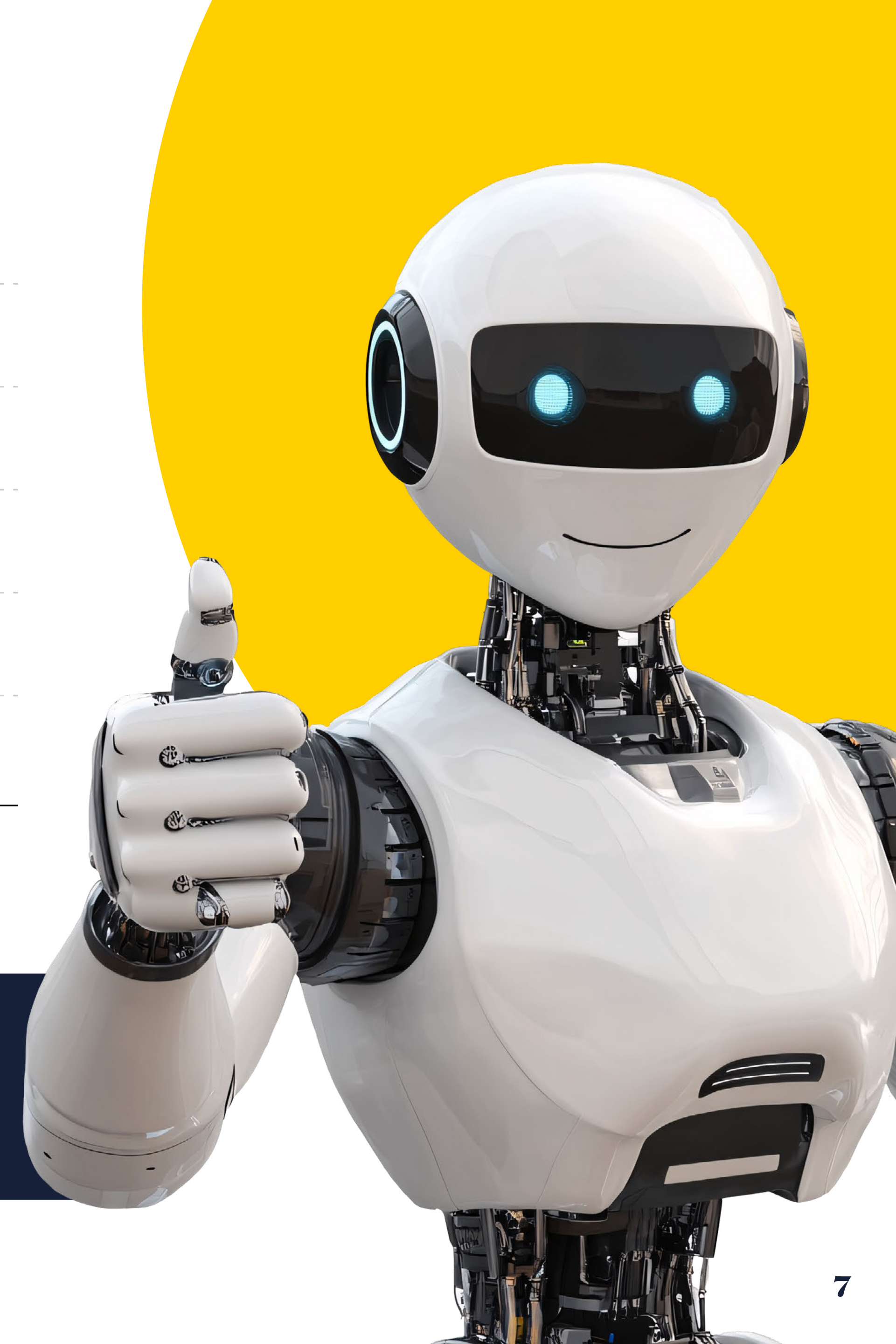
average personal optimism score for AI (out of 10)

AI Sentiment Distribution



They're not saying no to AI.

They're saying: show me it works and provide the right support.





Strategic Optimism Meets Operational Reality

There are patterns of optimism or scepticism by role, too. Executive leaders are the most confident in AI with **92% of the C-suite expressed optimism**, closely followed by **VPs and Directors (82%)**. Senior leaders and strategists are focused on scale and impact, and they're leading the charge.

Marketing, Creative, and IT teams are also optimistic, with 82% reporting a positive view. For these teams, AI presents opportunities to speed up processes, increase output, and make smarter decisions.

But neutrality grows in the roles closest to implementation and daily operations. Around **1 in 5** platform owners, operations professionals, and external partners selected "neutral." Their hesitation reflects proximity to the real friction: complex integrations, incomplete training, and uneven support. Perhaps reflecting hands-on awareness of the practical hurdles ahead.

Our community is not resisting AI.

We're asking: "Will this really help me and will you back me up when I use it?"

"AI is moving much faster than anyone I interact with realizes and will have a yet unknown (but dramatic) impact on end-to-end digital operations, in my opinion."

Observation from a research participant

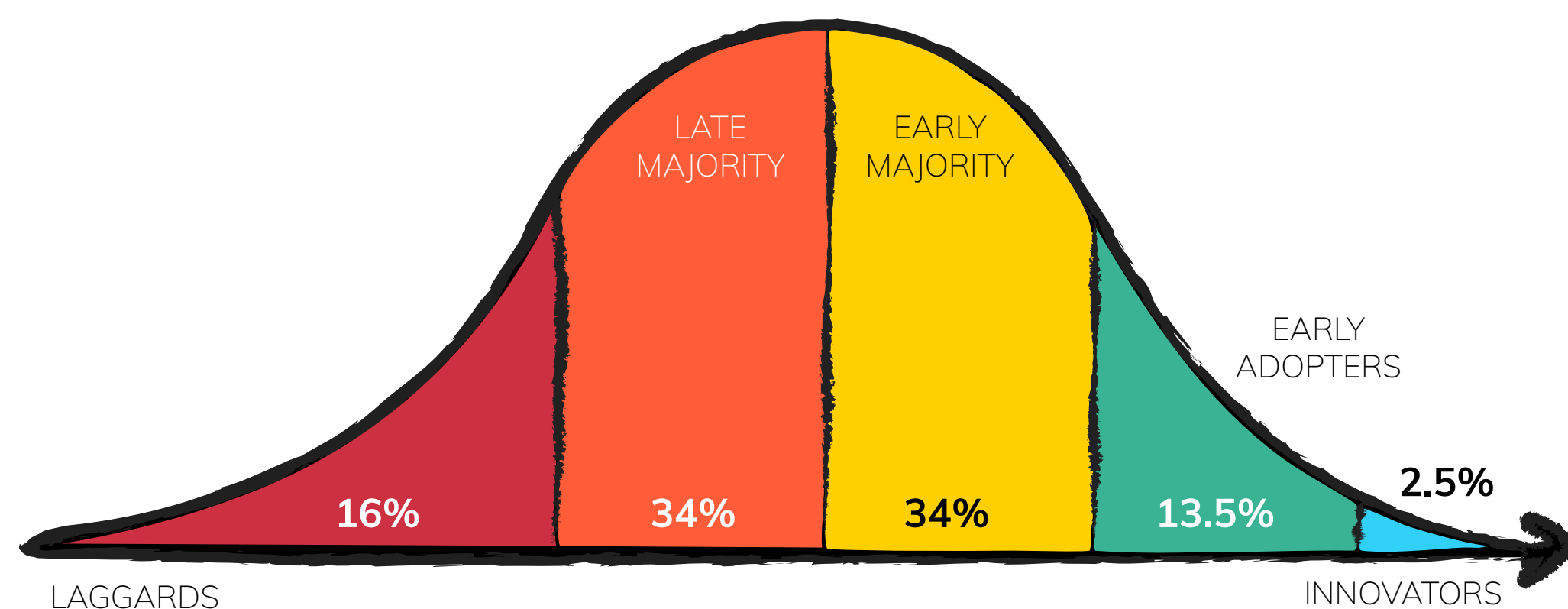
1 in 5

of operations and platform owners are neutral about AI. They are waiting for real results and support.

Optimism in the Air, Strategy on the Ground

So... if individuals are personally optimistic, what's slowing brands and organizations down?

This is where **Rogers Innovation Adoption Curve** helps us shift focus, from the individual to the organization.



Rogers Innovation Curve shows the typical distribution of how readily people take up change.

Credit: Rogers Innovation Adoption Curve

This part of the research explores how people perceive their organization's overall approach to AI, not specifically within DAM, but across the wider content and marketing technology stack. And while individuals may feel excited or curious, not all organizations are moving at the same pace.

While people may be ready, not all organizations move at the same pace.

The research shows:

- **54% of organizations** fall into the **Innovator or Early Adopter** categories, showing strong momentum and a willingness to experiment across content workflows.
- **28% sit in the Early Majority** - interested, but looking for **more structure, support, or proven use cases** before scaling.
- The remaining **18% fall into the Late Majority or Laggards**, often slowed by compliance hurdles, budget constraints, or integration readiness.

The mismatch between personal attitudes to AI and the way organizations approach AI matters. In some organizations, leadership is pushing AI adoption, but teams on the ground are still navigating what it means for their roles. In others, individuals are ready to explore, but their companies are still building policy and risk frameworks.

Bridging this gap is not about speed. It's about alignment, matching optimism with operational readiness. It means creating room for experimentation, sharing success stories, and giving cautious teams the time and tools to learn.

Because in the end, **AI adoption is not just about technology, it's about timing, trust, and transformation.**

54%

of organizations and brands are Innovators or Early Adopters of AI within their operations.

***AI in Action:**
Adoption Across
Content Ops*



AI in Use (or Not)

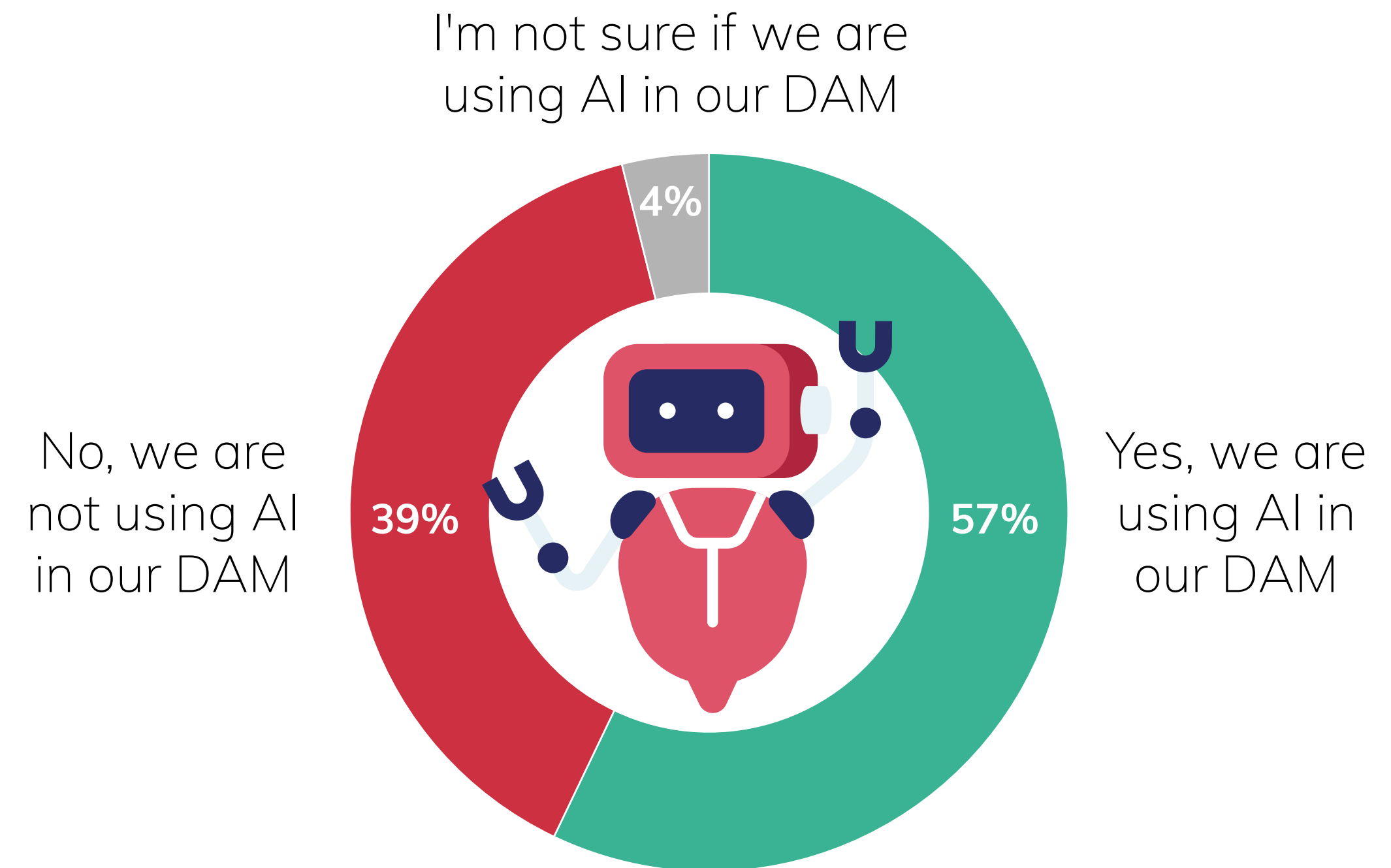


Mapping AI Adoption across the Content Operations Tech Stack

Optimism may be **high**, but actual usage tells a more layered story.

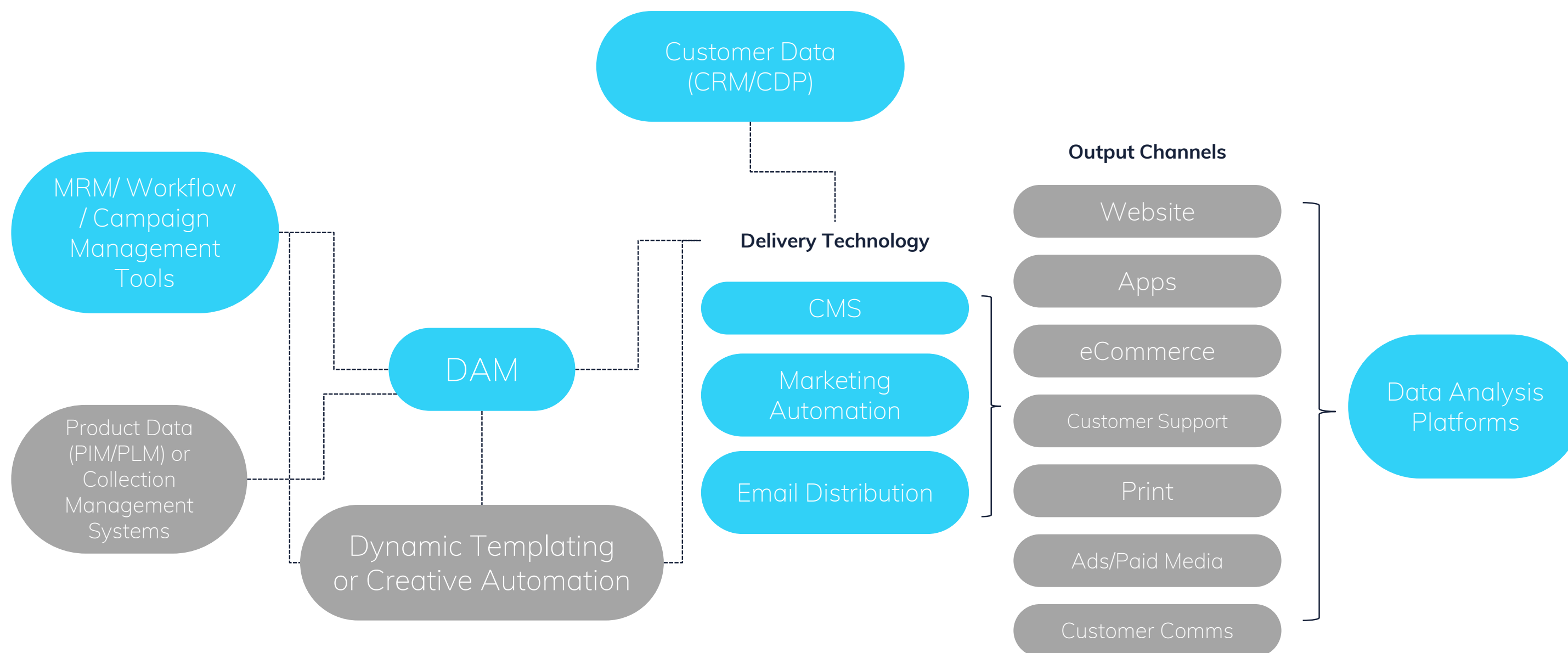
When asked whether their DAM system currently uses AI, **57% of respondents said yes**, a clear sign that AI features are no longer on the fringe of DAM. From automated tagging to content classification, these tools are increasingly built into modern DAM platforms. Still, **39% reported not using AI** in their DAM systems, and **4% were unsure**, suggesting either slow adoption or limited visibility of existing features.

Current Use of AI in our Content Operations



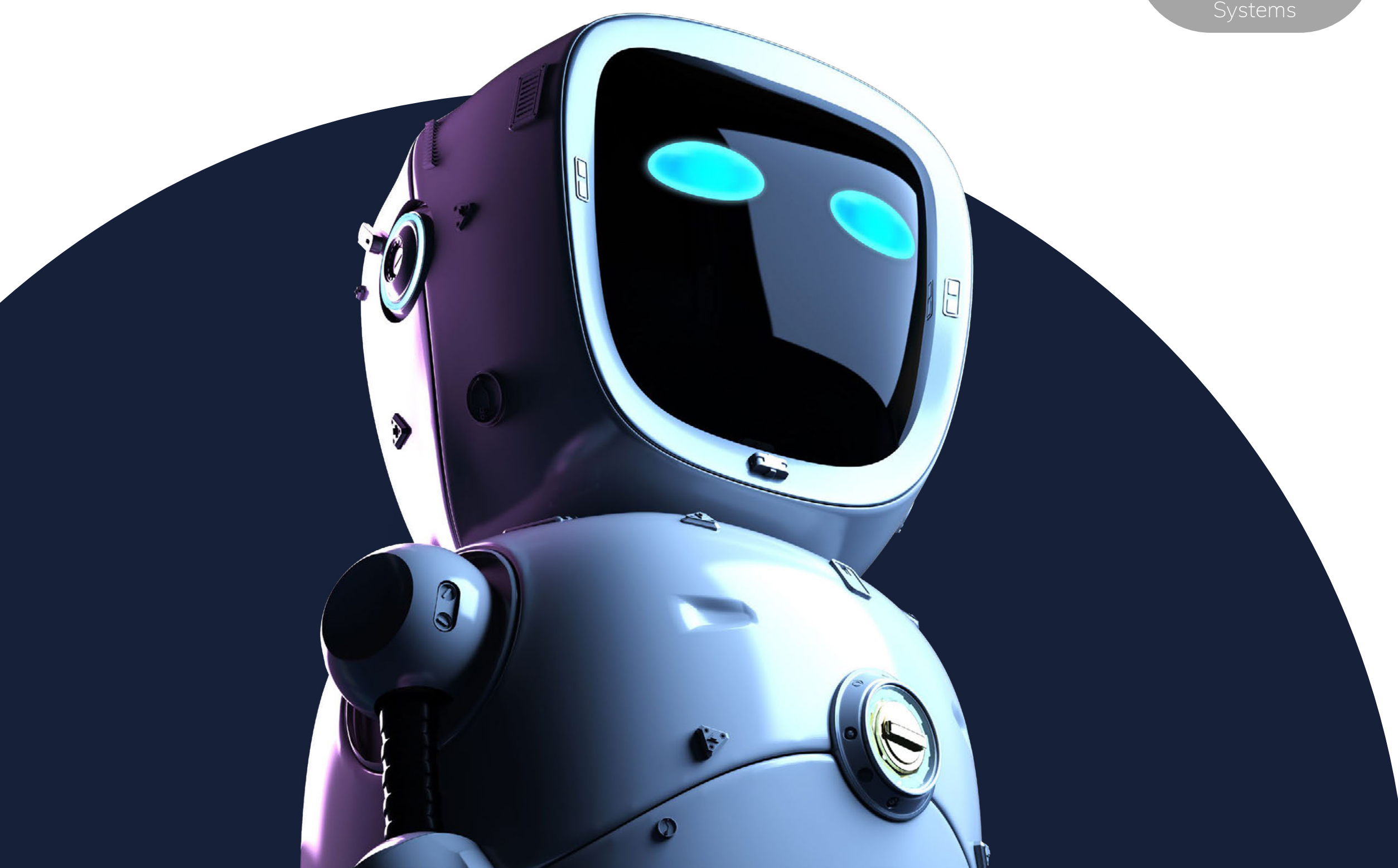
But that doesn't mean AI isn't happening elsewhere

AI is being integrated across the broader marketing and content technology ecosystem. Among all respondents, **53% are planning to use AI within their Content Management Systems (CMS)**, highlighting a focus on content generation, personalization, and delivery. Others are leveraging AI within **Marketing automation platforms (40%)**, **data analytics tools (37%)**, and **workflow or campaign management tools (36%)**, where AI powers performance tracking, campaign orchestration, and operational efficiencies. **Customer data platforms (33%)** also made the top five, aligning with increased interest in AI-powered segmentation, predictive modelling, and fueling the production of dynamic personalization.



Some organizations are choosing to embed AI directly into existing platforms. Others are layering in AI through standalone tools, often selected for specific use cases or to solve problems along the content supply chain.

Even when AI isn't embedded directly in DAM, it is clearly increasingly present across the technology ecosystem and the entire content lifecycle. For many organizations, DAM may not be the first place AI is deployed, but it's likely to become the place where AI-powered content is governed, enriched, and activated.



AI in Action



The Top Use Cases Driving Value Today

AI is no longer just about future potential. It is being used today in real, tangible ways. It is powering how teams classify, manage, and scale content across the marketing and content operations ecosystem.

But in a landscape filled with thousands of AI tools, each solving a different problem, the question is no longer just who is using AI. The more important questions are how is it being used, and which AI capabilities are actually proving most valuable in content operations.

This year's research reveals the top five AI applications currently in use across the content and marketing technology ecosystem — not just within DAM

46%

Automated Tagging and Metadata Management

Used by 46% of respondents, AI is helping teams classify assets quickly and consistently. This reduces manual effort while improving searchability and downstream workflows.

28%

Workflow and Resource Automation

28% are applying AI to streamline content reviews, task routing, and production scheduling. This leads to faster turnaround times and smoother collaboration.

34%

Enhanced Search and Discovery

Used by 34% of organizations, AI-powered search, visual recognition, and recommendation tools are making it easier for users to find what they need quickly and intuitively.

27%

Content Generation and Personalization

27% are using AI to create and adapt content at scale. This includes generating marketing copy, localizing assets, and tailoring materials for different markets and formats.

30%

Content Lifecycle Automation

30% are using AI to manage asset versioning, detect duplicates, automate cropping, support rights control, and maintain overall content quality. These capabilities help reduce friction across the content pipeline.

AI Meets Content Operations: Smarter Workflows, Stronger Results

These capabilities represent how AI is being applied across content operations, whether integrated into DAM systems, embedded in other platforms, or delivered through standalone AI tools designed to support specific stages of the content lifecycle. Many of the most widely adopted use cases align closely with core DAM functions such as tagging, search, and lifecycle management, indicating that AI is not replacing existing priorities but enhancing them. In most cases, it is being layered onto the workflows teams already rely on.

These capabilities are no longer emerging trends. They are becoming essential tools, already delivering value and setting the stage for the next wave of AI adoption.



What's Next: The AI Capabilities on This Year's Content Operations Roadmap

With experimentation well underway, organizations are now doubling down on the AI capabilities that deliver deeper insights and greater operational efficiency. The next 12 months will be less about testing the waters and more about scaling what works. We may also see a shift from foundational tools to more performance-driven, insight-generating capabilities as well as implementation of similar solutions into different platforms across the tech stack.

At the top of the list is **measuring content effectiveness and predictive analytics**, with **39%** planning to implement it. This signals a shift toward performance-led AI use, as teams prioritize ROI measurement, trend analysis, and insight-driven decision-making. With 100 organizations planning to implement this capability, this is the most in-demand capability, backed by strong cross-industry interest.

Close behind is content lifecycle automation (37%), with industries like Technology, Media & Entertainment, and Manufacturing prioritizing tools that reduce friction in versioning, rights management, and quality control.

Search and discovery improvements (34%) plan to implement this year) remain a strategic focus, particularly in sectors like Media & Entertainment, Creative Agencies, Retail & eCommerce, and Healthcare & Life Sciences where content volume and complexity are rising. Companies are looking to AI to surface the right assets faster and more intuitively.

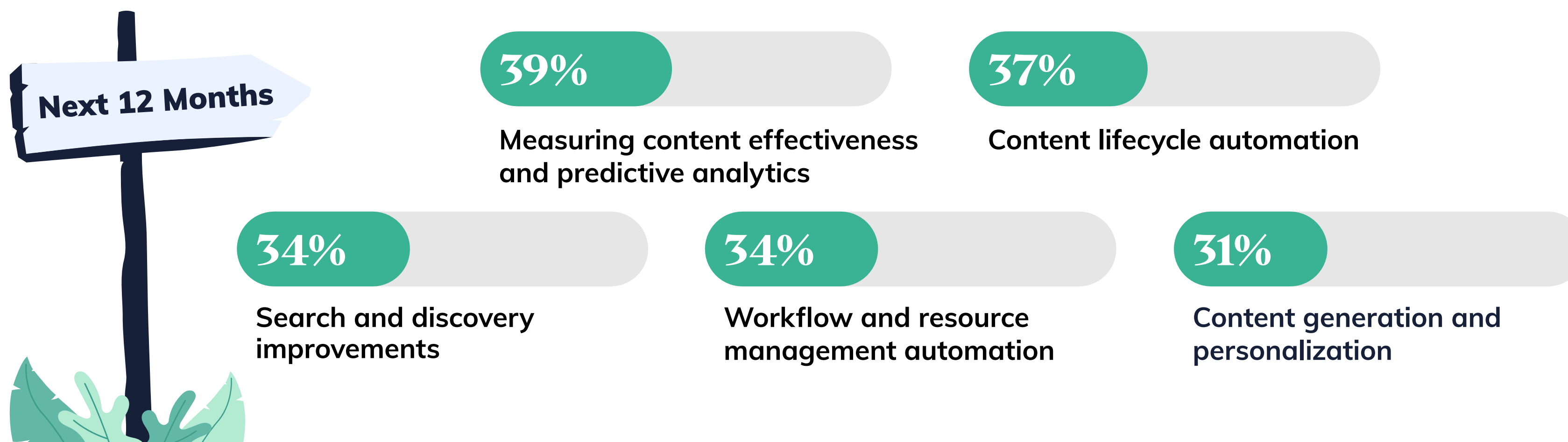
Workflow and resource management automation (34%) plan to implement this year) continues to gain traction, especially within sectors like Creative Agencies and Technology. These teams are turning to AI to reduce friction, improve consistency, and scale production, where the focus is on doing more with leaner teams.

Meanwhile, **content generation and personalization (31%)** plan to implement this year) rounds out the top five. Media & Entertainment, Creative Agencies, Retail & eCommerce, and Healthcare & Life Sciences organizations are leaning into generative tools to scale creative, localize content, and deliver more relevant customer experiences.

If you're wondering which industries are leading the charge and planning multiple AI implementations this year, here are the ones to watch:

-  **1** Technology
-  **2** Media & Entertainment
-  **3** Creative Agencies
-  **4** Retail & eCommerce
-  **5** Manufacturing
-  **6** Healthcare & Life Sciences

This 12 month roadmap reflects a shift in mindset: from using AI to move faster, to using it to work smarter across all stages in the content lifecycle and across all technologies. The next year will be less about proving AI works, and more about integrating it where it counts.



What's Off the Table for this Year: AI Capabilities Organizations Are Holding Back On

While AI adoption is gaining momentum across many areas of content operations, not every use case is moving forward. The research reveals a pattern of hesitation around specific capabilities, with some organizations choosing to delay or avoid implementation entirely.

At the top of the list is **system personalization and virtual assistance**, with **53%** of respondents saying they have no plans to implement it. This includes industries like Technology, Cultural Heritage, GLAM & Non-Profits, and Media & Entertainment, which are often seen as early adopters but may be cautious about AI-driven user experiences or already have internal solutions in place.

Following closely is **security, compliance, and reporting automation** at **49%**, and **predictive analytics** at **44%**. These capabilities may carry higher regulatory risk, require extensive data inputs, or feel less urgent to include this year compared to more operational use cases.

Content generation and personalization also sees resistance, with **43%** reporting no plans to implement it. Despite the growing buzz around generative AI, many organizations remain cautious about quality, control, and integration with existing workflows.

Finally, **workflow and resource automation** is a polarizing capability. While many Media & Entertainment organizations have it on their roadmap, **38%** across sectors including Media & Entertainment as well as Manufacturing, Cultural Heritage, GLAM, and Nonprofits are not prioritizing it. This divide likely reflects varying levels of digital maturity, often within the same industry. For some, AI offers a way to streamline complex production cycles. For others, concerns around integration, creative control, or resource limitations may be holding them back. The takeaway: success with workflow automation depends less on the technology itself and more on how ready the organization is to adopt it.

Navigating the Complexities of AI Adoption in Diverse Industries



The Cultural Heritage, GLAM, and Nonprofit sector consistently shows greater reluctance toward adopting AI, and with good reason. These organizations often work with historically and culturally sensitive material, including images of people, children, and communities, where issues of privacy, consent, and representation are paramount. Ethical concerns around AI bias and misuse are especially relevant, as is the need for transparency in how content is classified, generated, or surfaced. Paired with typically smaller budgets, limited technical capacity, and complex governance structures, AI adoption in this sector requires not only strategic planning but also a high level of care, cultural sensitivity, and public accountability.

The message is clear: not all AI is created equal in the eyes of users. Vendors promoting these capabilities must focus on integration ease, real ROI, and strong alignment with sector-specific needs. For now, some AI ambitions will remain on the shelf.

A person stands in the center of a vast, futuristic digital space. The environment is filled with a dense grid of glowing, multi-colored cubes (red, blue, yellow, green) that appear to be floating or attached to a dark, wireframe structure. The background is a deep, dark purple and blue, with a soft, ethereal glow emanating from the center. The overall atmosphere is one of high-tech, data-driven exploration.

*AI + DAM:
What Users Really Want*

AI in DAM Adoption by Industry: Innovation, Hesitation, and Everything in Between

Not all industries are moving at the same speed when it comes to AI in DAM. Adoption is shaped by more than just technology. Organizational adoption is influenced by a mix of internal priorities, operational complexity, and readiness to embrace change.

Encouragingly, **57% of organizations say they already use AI in their DAM systems**, a strong signal that intelligent features like auto-tagging and content classification are becoming a standard part of the ecosystem. For those not yet using AI or unsure, the opportunity is still ahead with growing awareness likely to accelerate future adoption.

57%

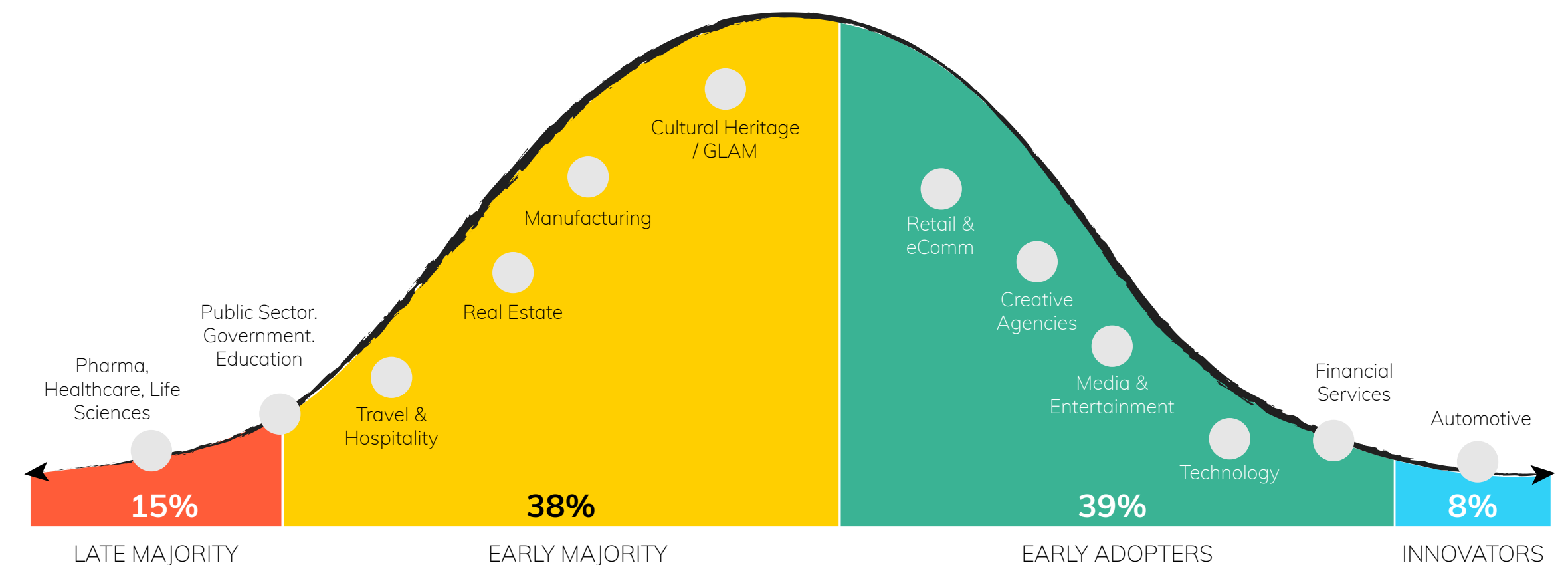
of organizations are using AI in their DAM systems

Some sectors are clearly leading the way in adopting AI in DAM across their content operations. **Financial Services, Automotive, Technology, and Media & Entertainment sectors** all report **60–100% adoption rates**, reflecting growing confidence in applying AI in DAM to content-heavy, high-compliance, or operationally complex environments. In these sectors, the demand for automation, the ability to scale, governance, and efficiency appears to be outweighing hesitation.

In contrast, industries like **retail, creative agencies, and GLAM** institutions show more mixed results. Around half are using AI in DAM, but many are still transitioning, navigating a blend of experimentation, brand concerns, or tight resources.

The steepest resistance appears in **pharma, healthcare, and life sciences, where 67% are not using AI in DAM**, likely due to compliance hurdles and risk sensitivity. **Public sector, education, and real estate** also show high levels of uncertainty, hinting at varied internal capabilities or unclear use cases. Interestingly, even with all this caution, there were no respondents who identified as true Laggards, a sign that within the content operations and DAM communities, most organizations are at least exploring or considering AI, even if they haven't implemented it yet.

The pattern is clear: **AI in DAM adoption tracks closely with industry readiness and use case maturity.** Fast-moving, content-intensive sectors are pushing forward. Others are still building the foundations—balancing innovation against complexity, compliance, or cost.



AI Success Starts with Mature Tech Stack Foundations

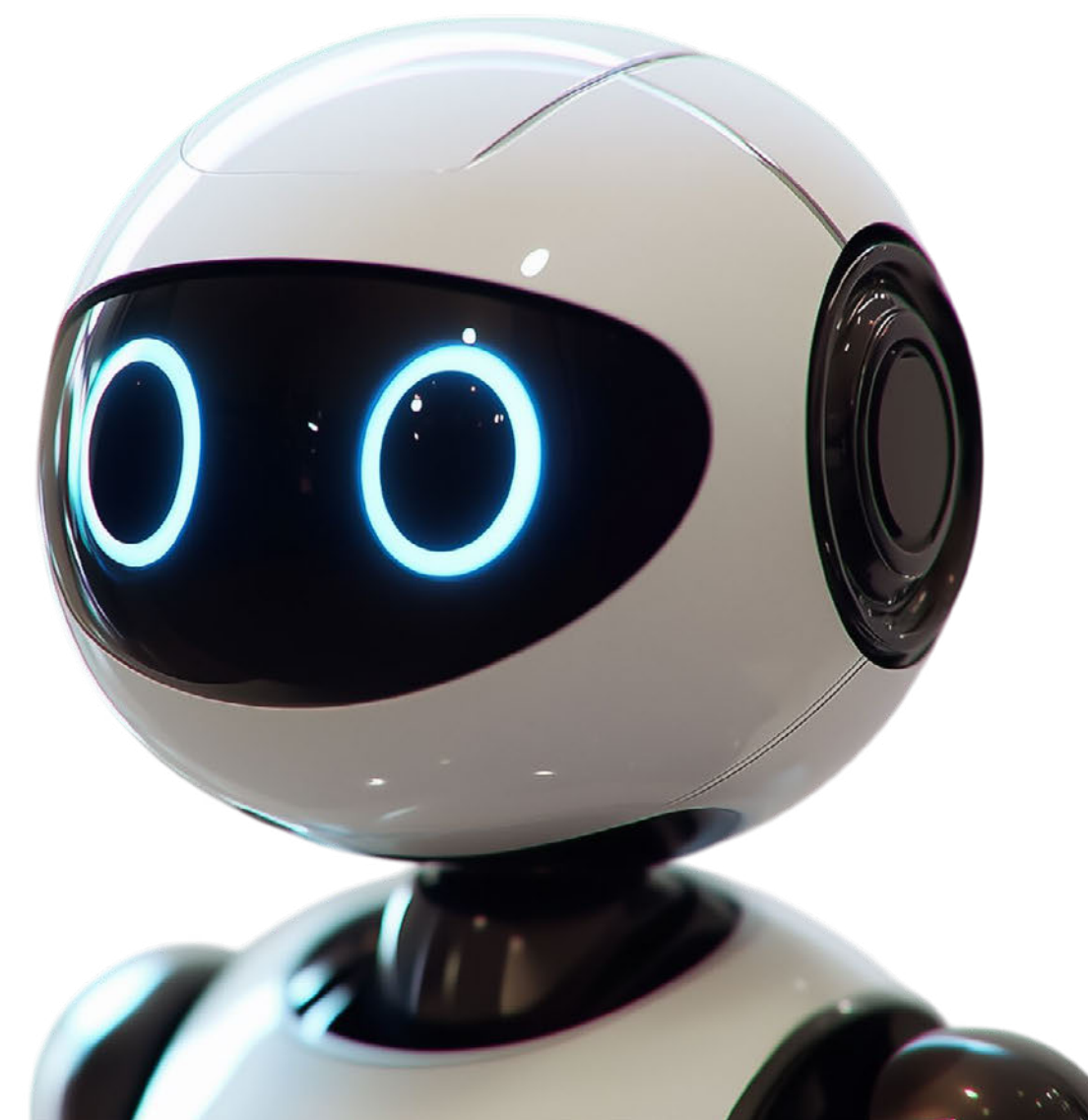
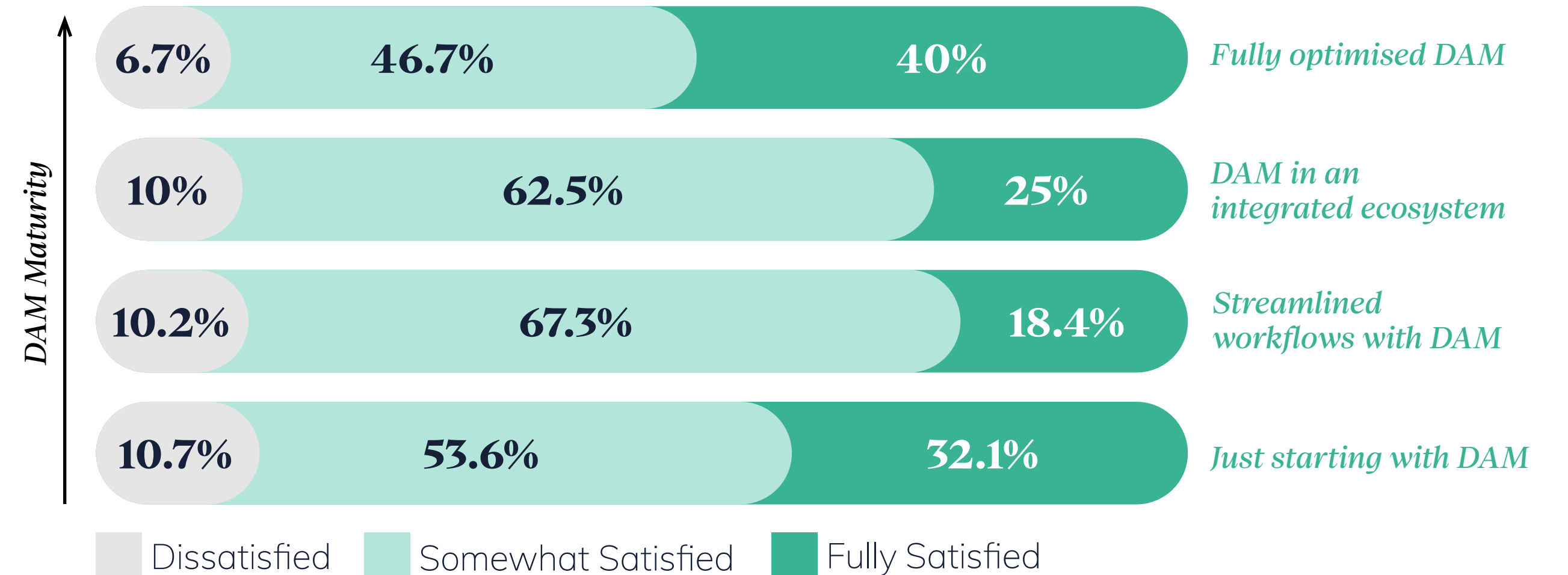
To understand why some organizations are seeing more value from AI than others, it helps to look beneath the surface at the maturity of the systems supporting it.

When this research data is segmented by DAM maturity, a pattern emerges. The more advanced the DAM system, the higher the rate of full satisfaction and the lower the rate of dissatisfaction.

- **Organizations with fully optimized, adaptive DAM systems** report the highest satisfaction (40% fully satisfied) and the lowest dissatisfaction.
- **Those with streamlined workflows but still scaling their DAM systems show** the highest percentage of teams wanting more from their vendors (67% somewhat satisfied).
- Surprisingly, **even organizations in the initial stages of DAM adoption** report a strong satisfaction rate (32% fully satisfied), possibly due to positive first impressions with out-of-the-box AI tools baked into the latest release from DAM vendors, like auto-tagging.

The key takeaway: satisfaction with AI is shaped as much by organizational readiness and mature foundations as it is by vendor capabilities.

Satisfaction with AI Capabilities by DAM Maturity Level





AI Is Only as Strong as Its Foundation

AI does not operate in isolation. It builds upon and amplifies the systems, structures, and content it is given. If workflows are disjointed, metadata is inconsistent, content quality is poor, governance is weak, or user adoption is low, AI will not solve those issues. It will reflect and often magnify what already exists. No matter how advanced the AI tool appears, AI's ability to deliver value depends on the quality of the foundation beneath it.

Many organizations approach AI with high expectations but without the foundations needed to support them. Disappointment often follows. Not because the AI is flawed, but because the underlying systems, content, and processes **are not ready**.

To unlock AI's full potential, the **fundamentals must come first**. That means aligning people, defining processes, structuring metadata and taxonomy, and ensuring the broader core tech stack is well integrated and designed for scale and future growth.

This isn't just about DAM. AI success depends on the maturity of the entire ecosystem including the platforms that feed into DAM and those that rely on it. Taxonomy, governance, integration architecture, leadership, and change management all play a critical role. Organizational readiness relies on optimizing the **foundations across the entire tech stack**.

AI will only ever be as effective as the systems and structures it's built on. For teams still early in their digital maturity journey, the priority is clear: don't rush into AI. Prepare for it.

The AI in DAM Wishlist

Top Requested AI Features Within DAM Systems

AI Capability	Respondents
1 Automating tagging and metadata management	74%
2 Improving search and discovery	74%
3 Automated workflows and resource management	59%
4 Measuring content effectiveness and predictive analytics	53%
5 Security, compliance and reporting automation	49%

What Organizations Actually Want Built Into Their DAM

If you've ever spent hours cleaning up metadata, digging for assets, or manually routing content for review, you're not alone. And you're definitely not the only one hoping AI can take some of that off your plate.

When asked which AI capabilities would be most valuable **if built directly into their DAM**, users came back with a clear wishlist.

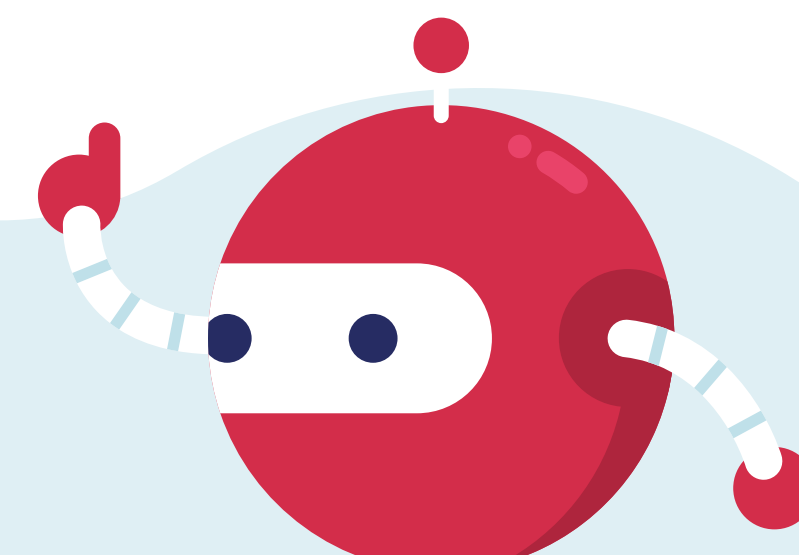
Automated tagging and metadata management and improving search and discovery both top the list, tied at 74%. Automating metadata entry and improving asset discoverability remain critical pain points and prime opportunities for AI to reduce manual effort and increase consistency across growing volumes of content, that often arrive virtually bare of metadata.

But the expectations go beyond asset-level tasks. **Workflow and resource management automation** was ranked highly by 59% of respondents, reflecting a growing desire for AI that improves and automates process flow, reduces friction, and supports lean creative teams. This capability is especially valued by Executive Leaders, who are motivated by operational efficiency, cost reduction, and smarter resource allocation across increasingly complex content ecosystems.

Analytics and performance insights were also a top priority, with 53% of respondents wanting predictive and effectiveness-focused tools built directly into their DAM. This reflects a shift in mindset from simply managing content to actively measuring its impact with customers. Users want AI that helps identify which assets drive engagement and revenue, enabling smarter creative briefing, better budget planning, and more strategic investment in content production. For many, the goal is clear: to connect asset usage directly to business outcomes and finally quantify Return on Asset Investment.

Even **security and compliance automation** made the top five. A sign that teams aren't just thinking about speed. They're also thinking about scale, risk, and governance. In an era of increasing regulatory pressure, organizations, and particularly IT and Technical Professionals, are beginning to view AI as a partner in governance.

The bottom line: users expect AI that is fully integrated into the DAM experience, solving real problems, supporting strategic goals, and tailored to the distinct needs of each team. There is an expectation that these AI features are no longer considered extras. They're becoming core to what users now expect from a modern DAM system.



Expectations vs. Reality



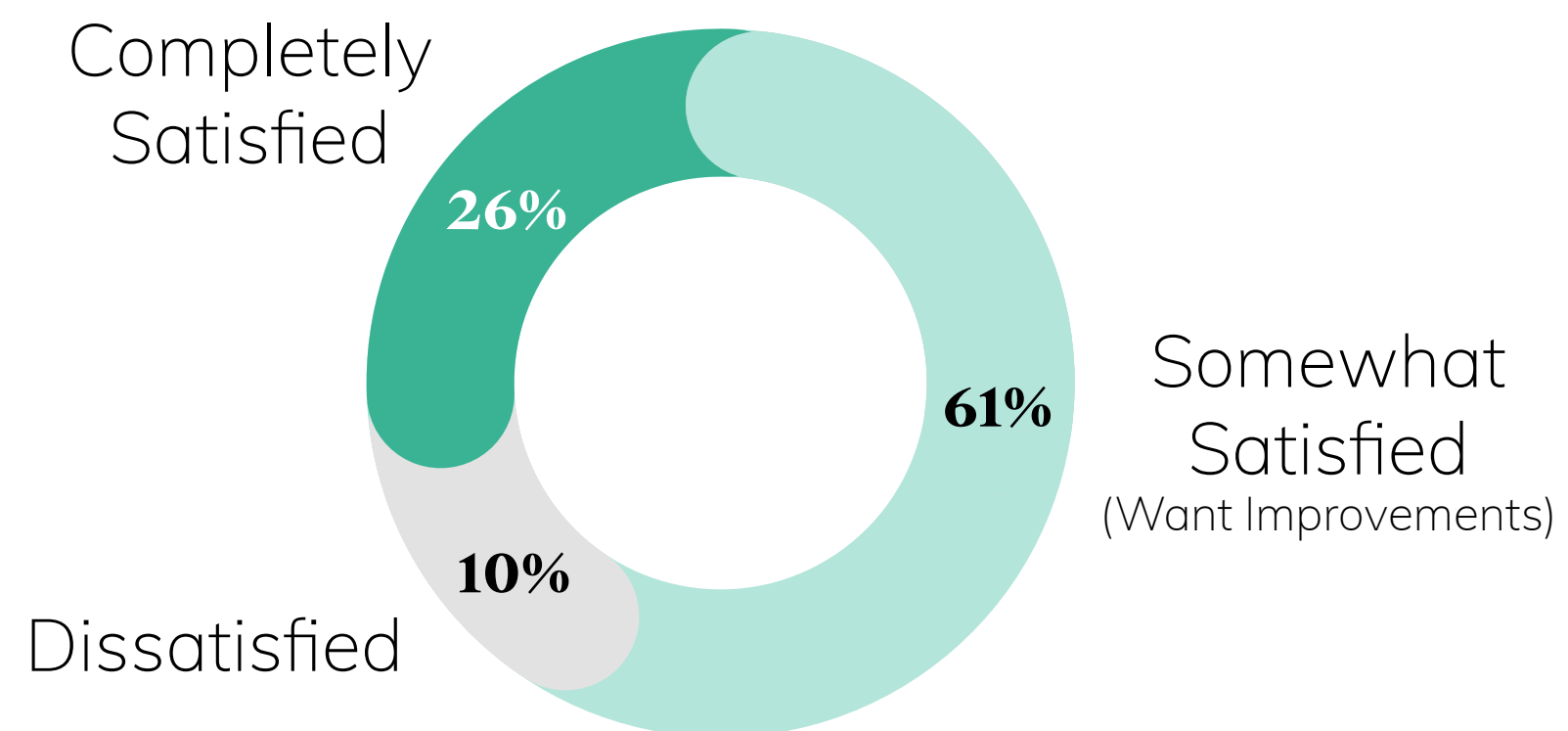
Why AI in DAM Still Needs Human Guidance

We know your AI wishlist is long, and at times, a little fantastical. From intelligent auto-tagging to predictive insights, smarter search, and hands-free content workflows, the ambition is clear.

The three most common applications of AI in DAM today are **automating tagging and metadata, improving search and discovery, and supporting content lifecycle automation**. These high-value use cases are already delivering value, and many systems now offer them out of the box. But as adoption grows, so does the gap between what users imagine AI can do and what it actually delivers today.

Among respondents currently using AI in their DAM, only **26% say they are fully satisfied** with the results. A majority (**61%**) are **somewhat satisfied**, indicating momentum but also clear room for improvement. Just under **10% reported dissatisfaction**, often pointing to weak integrations, limited training support, or third-party tools that were not well-aligned with brand-specific needs.

Overall Satisfaction with AI Capabilities in DAM Systems



Let's remember, technology can only take us so far. AI is not a magic button, and it does not arrive pre-trained on your brand, workflows, or governance rules. Most AI tools need guidance, iteration, and human oversight to perform well.

The real issue lies in **expectation setting**. That is why research like this, and open knowledge-sharing within the content and creative operations communities, is so important. It helps create a more realistic, collective understanding of what AI can do today and where AI still requires time, training, and **human support**.

When teams understand the current capabilities of AI in DAM, they are better equipped to define where AI solutions can help, train AI deliberately and with clean data, and embed AI and automation into structured workflows while maintaining human oversight. **AI is not a shortcut or a finished product.** That's not a limitation. It's the path to long-term success.

Integration Matters: How Organizations Plan to Connect AI with DAM

AI isn't just about capabilities, it's about context. To deliver meaningful results, it needs direct access to your content, metadata, usage data, and workflows that live inside the DAM. And for most teams, that means plugging AI directly into their DAM.

Importantly, **38% of organizations are pursuing multiple integration strategies**, combining native tools, plugins, and custom builds to meet different needs across teams and use cases.

Overwhelmingly, teams are looking for AI that feels like a natural extension of their DAM, not a separate add-on. Whether through embedded features, flexible plugins, or custom-built integrations, the expectation is clear: **AI should work where the content lives and where teams prefer to operate.**

Here's how organizations ranked their preferred integration approaches:



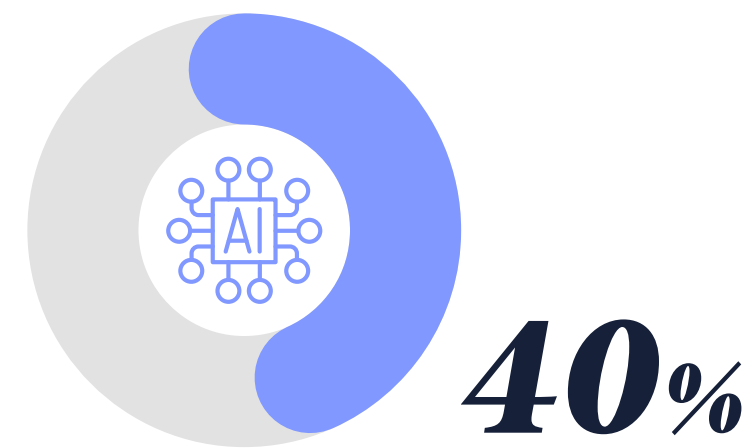
Pre-built plugins from DAM vendors

Plugins offer flexibility with minimal setup, making it easy to add AI with modest budgets and shorter timelines.



Native, out-of-the-box functionality

Embedded directly into the DAM, native AI is ready to use immediately. It reduces onboarding friction and puts integration maintenance in the hands of the vendor.



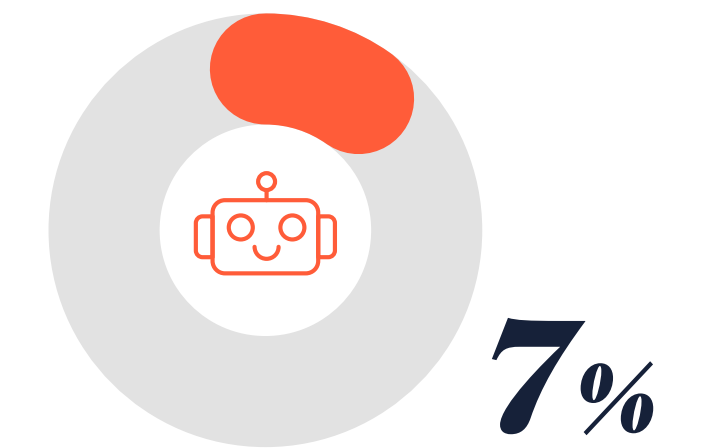
Bespoke integrations using in-house or external AI tools

Custom integrations give organizations full control over AI design, data handling, and security. This approach is ideal for teams with specific use cases or regulatory needs, and heavily preferred by Financial Services & Pharmaceutical, Healthcare, and Life Sciences industries.



Integrating AI through other non-DAM platforms

Some organizations plan to keep AI separate from DAM, embedding it in other parts of the content lifecycle such as CMS, marketing automation, or analytics tools.



Using standalone AI tools with no integrations

Standalone tools can address niche use cases but often create silos, requiring manual steps and limiting scalability.

A hand is shown placing a puzzle piece into a larger puzzle structure. The puzzle pieces are glowing with a blue and orange light. The background is a dark blue space filled with glowing particles and light trails, suggesting a digital or futuristic environment. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

*AI in the Real World:
Objectives and Obstacles*

Start with the Why



What Teams Really Want from AI

Before adopting any new technology, especially AI, it's essential to **start with a clear "why."** In the real world, this isn't just about chasing the next big trend. It's about real people's time, real budgets, and real operational change. Without a defined purpose, AI becomes just another experiment. One that risks becoming a flop, a failure, or a costly distraction. With a clear purpose, AI can become a strategic enabler.

When asked what they hope to achieve with AI and automation in the next 12 months, brands were clear: it's about **doing more, faster, and smarter.**

Efficiency and productivity top the list, with nearly **70%** selecting it as a key outcome. Closely behind, **55%** are chasing time savings and speed-to-market. These responses show that AI is being deployed to remove bottlenecks, reduce manual work, and unlock capacity.

41% want better data and insights, reinforcing that foundational practices, like good metadata and analytics, are essential for effective AI.

Only **26%** prioritize cost savings, confirming a growing trend: AI is being treated less as a cost-cutting tool and more as a force multiplier.

Across roles, perspectives differ but the goal is the same: to make content operations work better for people and the business.

Executives focus on scale and strategic impact. Ops teams want to reduce repetitive tasks and manage content more efficiently. **Marketers seek speed and better customer experiences.** Each role sees AI differently but all agree it should simplify the complex, automate the mundane, and elevate what matters.

Top 3 outcomes organizations hope to achieve by using AI and automation

Efficiency and increased productivity

70%

Time savings and speed-to-market

55%

Improved data quality and insights

41%

Preparing for Impact



How AI Will Reshape Content Operations

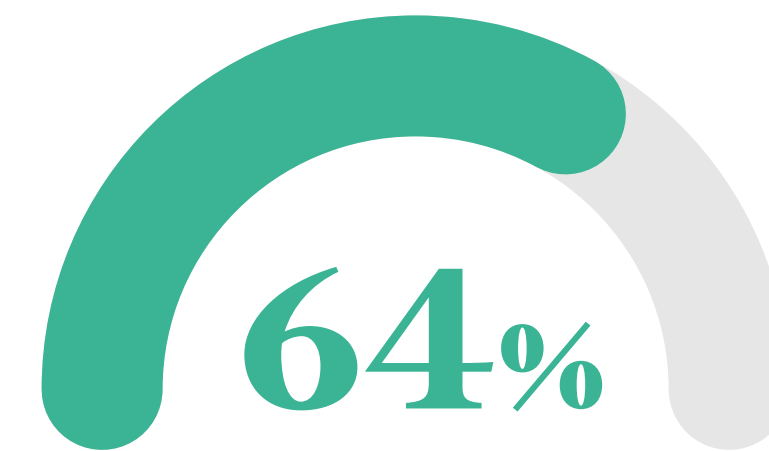
When asked how AI and automation will impact their organization, participants revealed not just what they expect to change but how they plan to adapt, invest, and evolve in response.

AI Is a Catalyst for Modernization

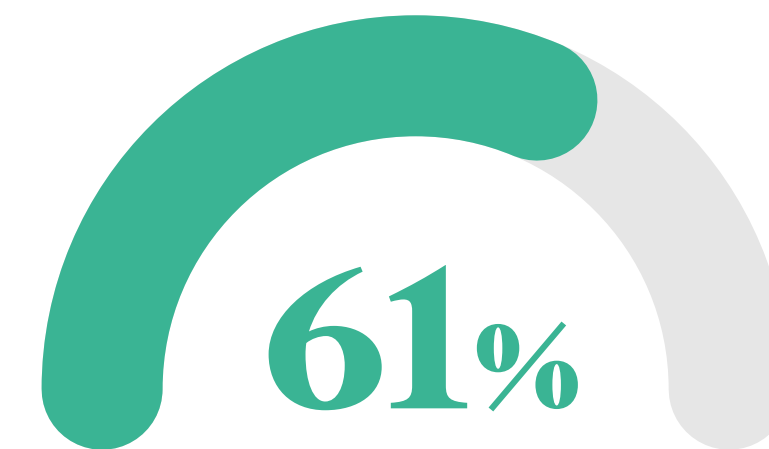
AI is accelerating digital transformation across content operations. **64% of organizations** say they plan to use AI as a reason to **upgrade legacy tools**, while **61% are investing in new technologies** altogether. This isn't just about adding AI into what already exists. It's about rethinking the foundation. Teams are using AI as a trigger to modernize and mature their tech stacks, build smarter infrastructure, and ensure the systems around their content are ready for what comes next.

Organizations with more advanced DAM practices are leading this shift. Those with deeply integrated or fully optimized structures are far more likely to invest in cutting-edge tools, while teams that are still in early adoption mode are focused on upgrading basic infrastructure.

But it's not just the technology that's changing.



Upgrade Legacy Tools



Implement New Technologies

Reskilling People, Not Replacing Humans

Many organizations are preparing their people for what comes next.

Despite the headlines, most teams don't view AI as a workforce threat. Only **14%** of organizations expect staff reductions. Instead, **53%** are focused on upskilling and training, equipping their teams to work alongside AI, not be replaced by it.

This mindset is especially strong among those still getting to grips with their DAM. These teams recognize the skills gap and are prioritizing internal development to close it early.

AI and automation will...

"...free up staff to focus on other work"

"...let us do more with less"

Unexpected Research Finding: Team Expansion Is on the Table

AI is also creating new opportunities. **18%** of organizations expect to grow their teams as AI introduces new roles and capabilities. From prompt engineering to AI-driven planning and governance, content operations are expanding and so are the teams behind them.

External Support: A Gap and an Opportunity

Only **10% of organizations** say they plan to bring in external AI expertise. This may seem low, but it reflects the growing accessibility of AI. With a multitude of **free trials, instant results, and no prerequisite of skills**, teams are getting started with experimenting with AI technologies rapidly and independently, without relying on System Integrators to the degree they did in the past.

However, as organizations scale toward more complex use cases like personalization, analytics, and governance, there remains a clear need for strategic guidance from consultants and domain experts to ensure AI is implemented successfully. Those with deeply integrated or fully optimized DAMs are **twice as likely** to seek outside help. As AI use cases expand into areas like personalization, analytics, and governance, so does the need for strategic guidance.



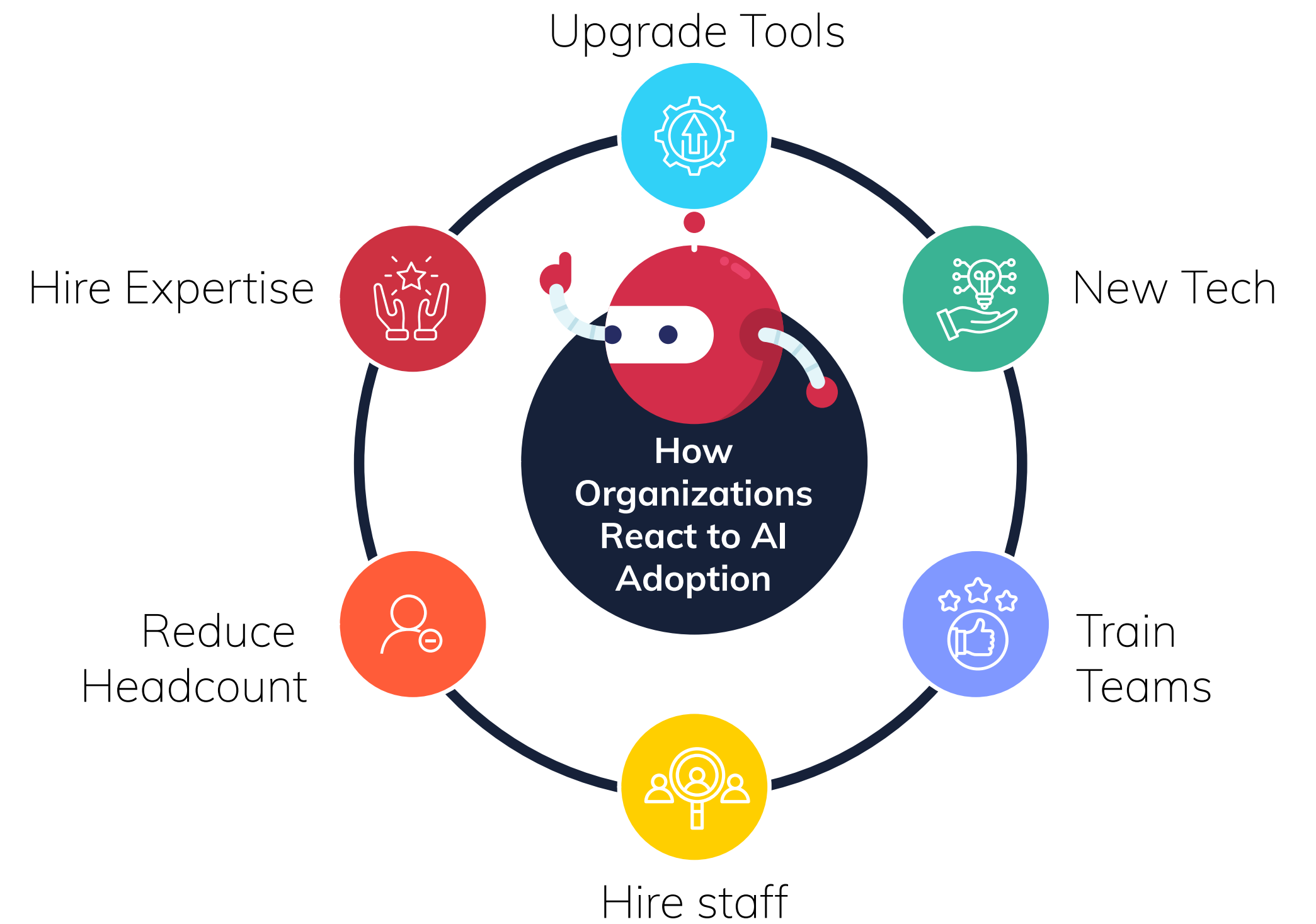
The Bigger Picture

Efficiency, Scale, and Customer Value

From internal teams to technology choices, one theme runs through it all: organizations want to deliver more and faster without compromising quality.

At its core, AI adoption in content operations is about doing more with what you have. Whether through upgraded tools or trained teams, the goal is clear: efficiency, scalability, and stronger customer outcomes. While AI removes manual work, it can also create new responsibilities including oversight, governance, and strategic alignment. This is where maturity plays a role. Organizations with optimized systems are using AI to extend their reach and elevate customer experience. Others are still laying the groundwork.

AI isn't just helping teams work faster. It's helping them work smarter and deliver more meaningful results at scale.



Barriers to AI Adoption



More Than Just Technical Challenges

AI adoption is accelerating, but it's far from frictionless. When asked about the biggest barriers to implementation, respondents revealed that the challenges are not just technical. They are strategic, cultural, and operational.

The top concern? **Data privacy, security, and rights management**, cited by **49% of participants**. In today's regulatory environment, this is unsurprising. Many teams are hesitant to let AI tools touch sensitive content, particularly when rights, consent, and legal risks are unclear. This concern is even higher in sectors like financial services, healthcare, and GLAM, where ethical responsibility and public trust are paramount.

Just behind that, **40% of organizations struggle to train AI models to meet their specific business needs**. This highlights a persistent gap between generic AI capabilities and the tailored results required in brand, campaign, and rights-driven environments.

Top 5 Barriers to AI Adoption



49%

Data privacy, security, and rights management



40%

Training AI models to meet business needs



36%

Concerns about ethics and AI biases



35%

Integration issues and complexity



34%

Choosing and implementing the right AI tools

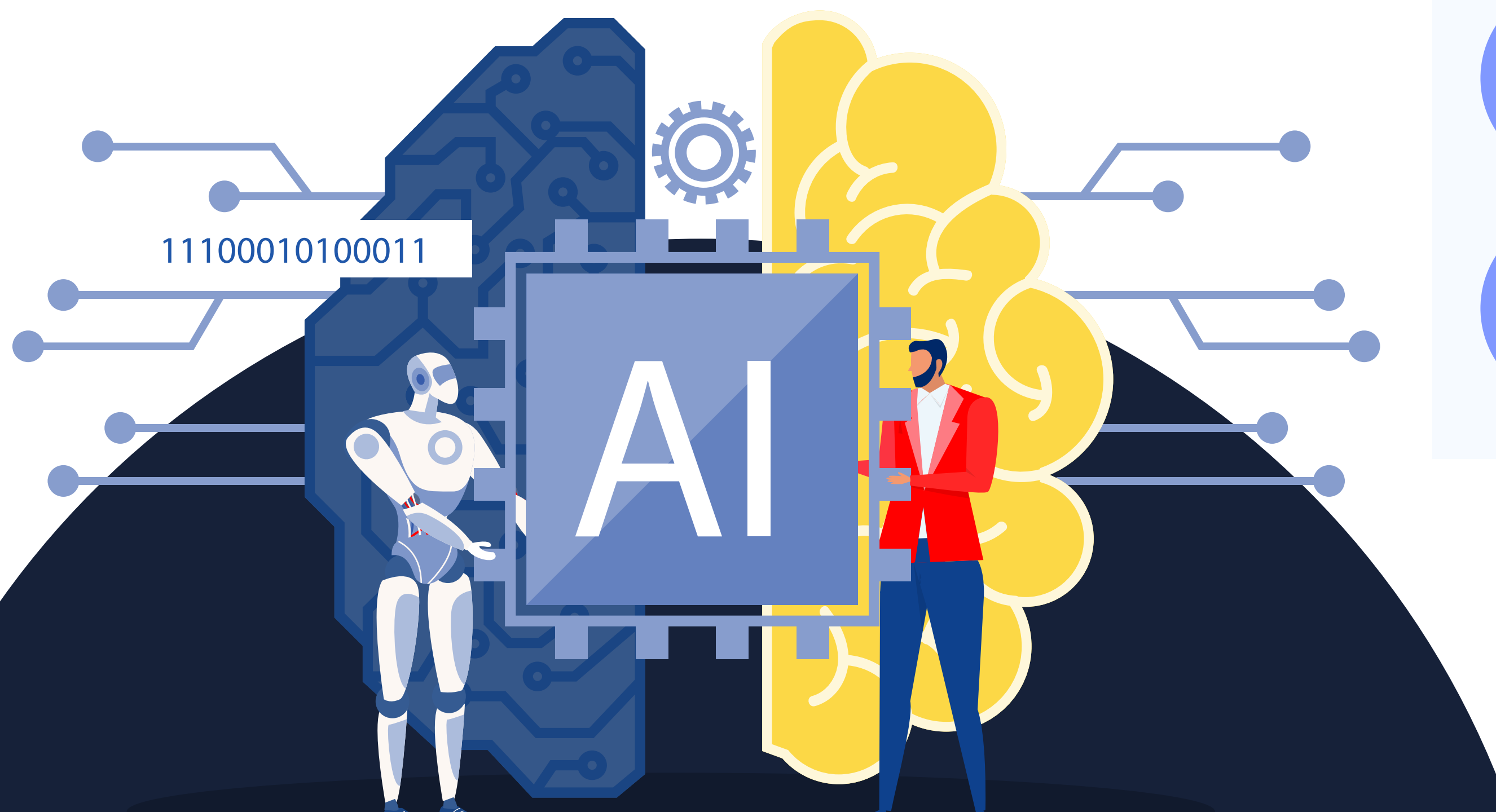
Complex Tech, Limited Time, and Competing Priorities

Beyond data concerns, organizations are running into friction as they try to operationalize AI across complex tech stacks and with teams that may not be fully prepared.

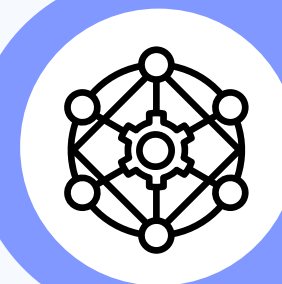
AI doesn't fail because teams lack interest. It fails when they **lack time, clarity, or cohesion**.

Over one-third of respondents (35%) cited **integration complexity** as a major hurdle. With so many disconnected tools in the martech stack, embedding AI across workflows is still messy. Choosing the right tools isn't easy either with **34% of respondents** say they're overwhelmed by the market and unsure which solutions will actually work.

Research participants also reflected on a familiar tension - where ambition exists, but execution is stalled by bandwidth, misalignment, or internal blockers. It's no surprise that **user adoption and leadership buy-in** were also flagged by over a quarter of respondents.

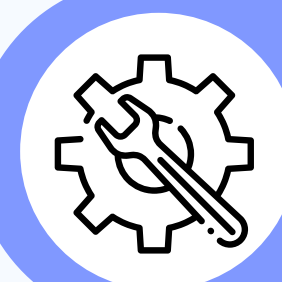


Challenges in AI Implementation



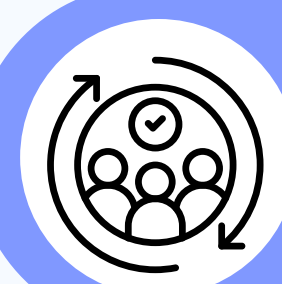
Integration Complexity

Many organizations struggle with integrating AI into existing tech stacks.



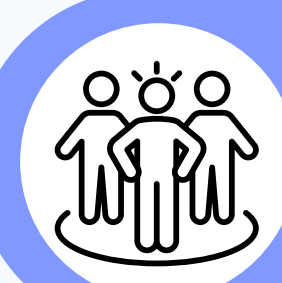
Tool Selection

Choosing the right AI tools can be overwhelming for organizations.



User Adoption

Gaining user acceptance is a significant hurdle in AI deployment.



Leadership Buy-in

Securing support from leadership is crucial for successful AI initiatives.

Across Industries and Digital Maturity Levels

Industry Influences the Challenge

While many AI adoption challenges are universal, the nuances **vary significantly by industry**. The nature of content, governance standards, and regulatory risk shape how organizations perceive and prioritize barriers.

AI barriers look different depending on the industry.



GLAM and Nonprofits lead in concerns about privacy (**67%**) and ethics (59%), driven by sensitive content and public accountability.



Financial services focus on security (**69%**), integration, and ROI, reflecting regulatory pressure.



Manufacturing reports broad concern, especially around vendor choice (**44%**) and ROI (**39%**).



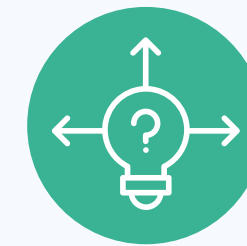
Creative agencies are feeling overwhelmed by rapid change, reporting high concern for training, ethics, and pace of AI tools.

Across all industries, **privacy, training, and integration** continue to surface as shared friction points reinforcing that while the use cases differ, the foundational challenges often remain the same.

Digital Maturity Shifts the Challenge, But Doesn't Eliminate It

The story shifts when looking at **DAM maturity**. Some barriers fade with experience while others change shape as organizations evolve.

AI adoption challenges evolve with DAM maturity.



Organizations in the **early-stages** of implementing a DAM struggle with foundational issues when implementing AI: **ethics, uncertainty, skills gaps, and unclear ROI**.



More advanced teams face **integration hurdles, training** AI models, and **performance measurement**.



Fully optimized, digitally mature organizations report **fewer barriers** overall, with concerns shifting toward **scaling and governance**.

The data shows that **barriers aren't static**, they evolve with each stage of DAM maturity. Which means **AI strategy shouldn't be one-size-fits-all**. It needs to meet organizations where they are with the right roadmap, timing, and support.

From Friction to Fit



Training AI for Real-World Impact

Many of the barriers holding organizations back point to the same root issue: generic AI doesn't always meet specific business needs. That's why more organizations are moving beyond off-the-shelf tools and looking for solutions they can shape.

AI in content operations is no longer seen as a one-size-fits-all solution. **Nearly two-thirds (65.5%)** of respondents say they need AI tools that can be trained to meet specific goals, signaling a growing demand for precision, adaptability, and brand alignment.

65.5%

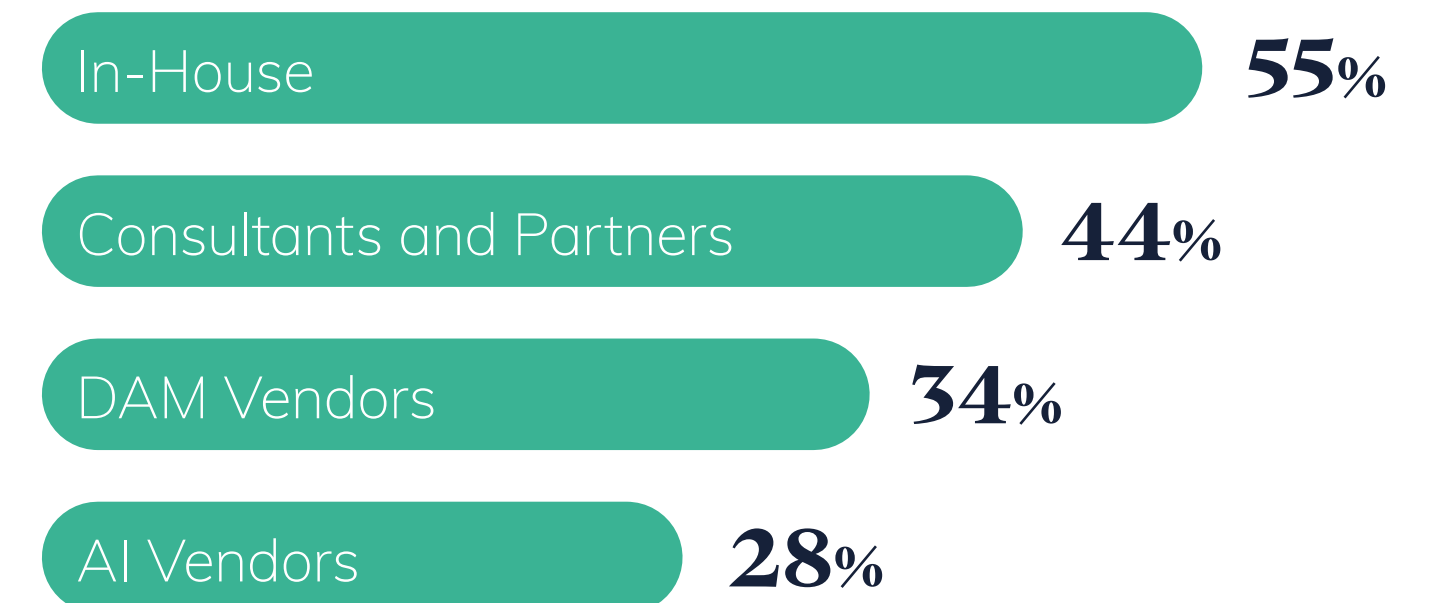
of respondents say they need AI tools that can be trained to meet specific goals

This push for trainability is especially strong in sectors like **creative agencies, manufacturing, automotive, and GLAM**, where content nuance and metadata complexity make generic solutions insufficient. Still, **24% remain unsure**, reflecting the need for better education around what training AI involves and how it improves quality, consistency, and performance.

AI training isn't being left to chance but it's not being handled by just one team either. Most

organizations are blending approaches when it comes to training and implementation. **55% plan to manage training their AI technologies internally**, building on existing brand knowledge and talent, while **44% will bring in external consultants and partners** for added expertise. In a telling shift from last year, **fewer organizations expect their vendors to do the heavy lifting**. Just **34% expect AI training support from DAM vendors** and only **28% expect their AI vendors to provide training support**, suggesting that more teams are taking ownership of training their AI using brand-specific data.

Who trains your AI?



Most organizations are building hybrid support models, combining internal talent with strategic partnerships. The message is clear: AI isn't just being adopted it's being shaped to fit the business. And that shaping requires both training and trusted support.

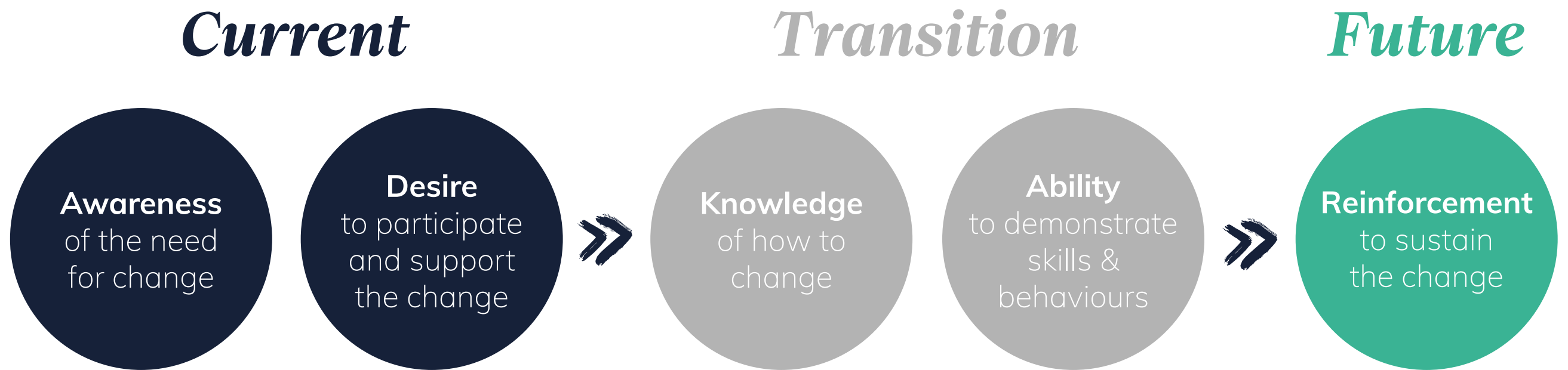


*Before the First
Prompt:
The Foundations of
AI Readiness*

From Interest to Action

Why AI Needs Change Management

The move from AI curiosity to AI implementation is not just a tech journey. The patterns emerging in the data reflect the classic stages of organizational transformation, well captured in the **ADKAR model: Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement.**



Many individuals are already there on **Awareness** and **Desire**. They know what AI is and are personally excited about its potential. But organizations are often slower to catch up. That's where structured change management comes in.

AI can't just be installed. It requires **Knowledge**, through internal education and clear communication. It needs **Ability**, through well-supported experimentation, defined processes, and thoughtful governance. And it succeeds through **Reinforcement**, using success stories and outcomes to build trust and momentum.

Clarity Over Chaos: Enabling AI-Driven Change

Resistance often surfaces when people are asked to move forward without clarity or when change feels unclear or rushed. AI can feel fast, fuzzy, and forced which makes deliberate change planning and change enablement essential. People need clarity on what is changing, why it matters, and how they are supported.

For those experimenting with AI now, this is the moment to formalize a plan to bring everyone along on this fast changing journey:



Identify internal champions



Define clear goals and success metrics



Build internal knowledge through holistic change management



Create safe environments for experimentation

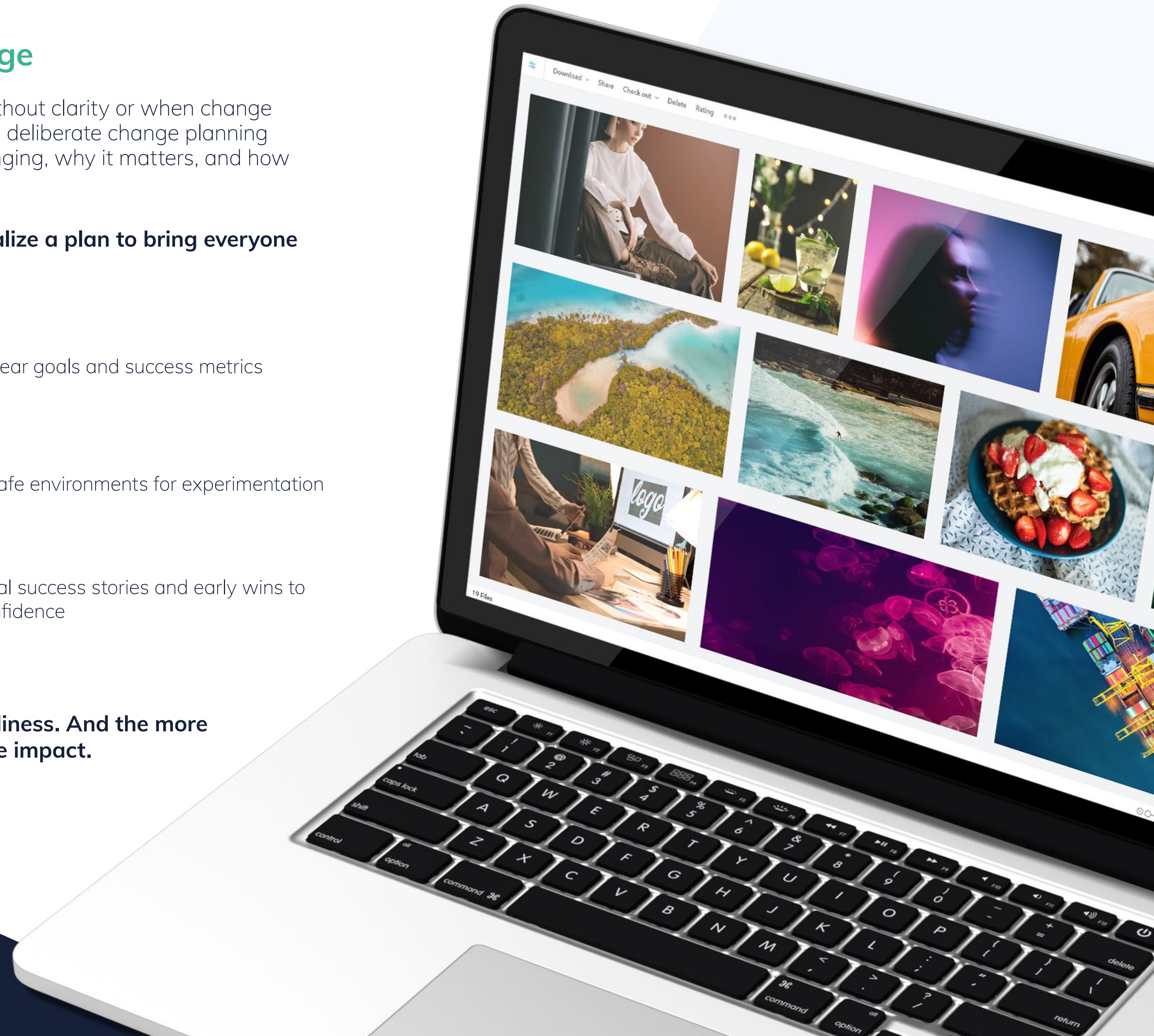


Align use cases with strategic value



Share real success stories and early wins to build confidence

AI adoption isn't just about tech maturity. It is about change readiness. And the more intentional the approach, the faster interest turns into sustainable impact.



AI Is Here, But Is There a Plan?

AI may be everywhere in conversation, but it's not yet fully embedded in strategy. According to this year's data, **63% of organizations say they now have an AI strategy, policy, or plan in place**, while 35% still don't. The fact that **1 in 3 organizations still lack an AI policy** suggests many strategies are either informal or poorly communicated — especially in teams not directly leading AI initiatives. Whether due to missing documentation, siloed decision-making, or lack of internal alignment, this gap highlights a disconnect between those setting the direction and those expected to deliver it.

The story shifts when segmented by DAM maturity. AI strategy adoption rises sharply with maturity, from just **42% of organizations without a DAM** to **95% of those with fully optimized, governed systems**. This progression makes sense: as foundational challenges like metadata and workflow are solved, attention shifts to intelligent automation and governance.

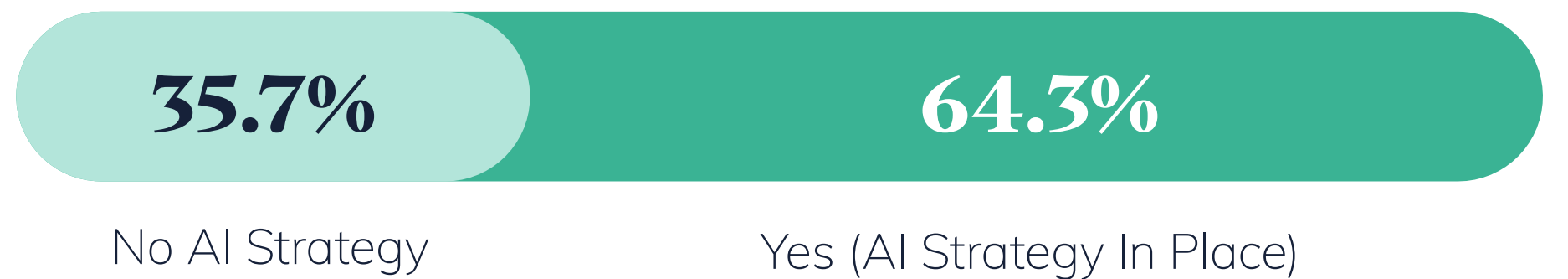
The tipping point appears as **organizations move from early DAM adoption into more mature, integrated use**, where strategic plans jump from 52% to 75%. This is the critical moment when teams shift from simply storing and accessing assets to actively streamlining workflows and enabling automation. At this stage, a formal AI strategy becomes essential. Content management evolves into content intelligence, and governance moves from helpful to non-negotiable.

In a space as complex and fast-moving as AI, **a clear strategy isn't a nice-to-have, it's how you avoid chaos**. Without it, organizations risk shadow IT, duplicate efforts, overprocuring tools, and making decisions that don't align with broader goals. AI demands coordination, not just experimentation. Strategy keeps innovation connected to business value.

If your organization is starting to streamline how you manage content, now is the time to define your AI strategy. Without one, you risk fragmented tools, siloed experiments, and missed opportunities. A clear plan ensures AI works with, not against, your broader business ambitions.

Just because AI is being used doesn't mean there's a plan behind it.

Does your Organization have an AI Strategy?



“My company has a team dedicated to analyze, advise, recommend and approve AI tools”

Observation from a research participant

From Awareness to Advantage



Why AI Risk Readiness Matters

At this point, education about AI isn't the barrier, employee enablement is. Most employees are aware that **AI comes with risks**, but they lack clarity on how to navigate them. Without clear guidance from their employers, teams are left unsure about what's acceptable, what's off-limits, and how to make responsible decisions. **Ethical use of AI requires leadership** and that starts with policy, training, and support.

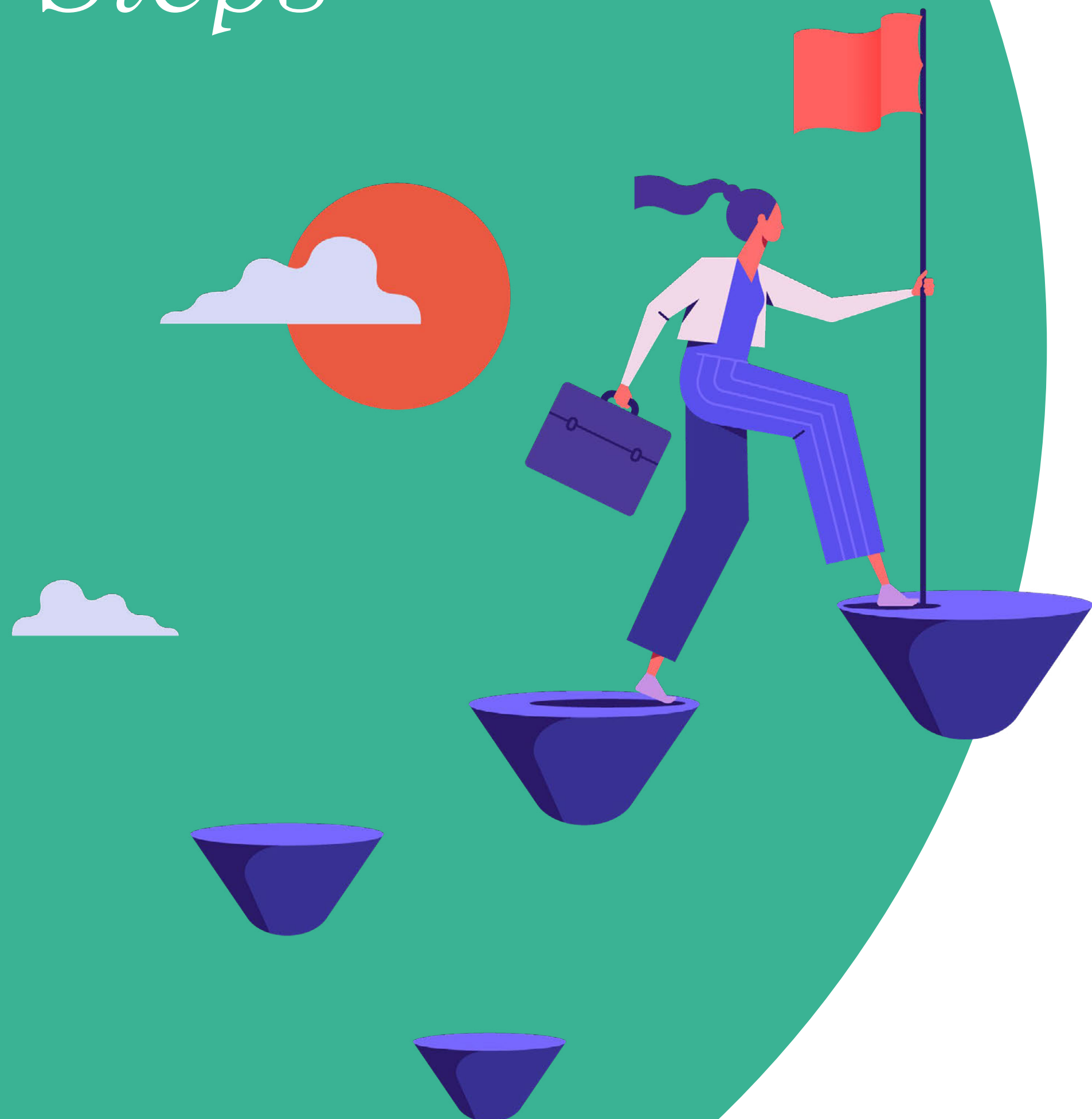
Organizations that move beyond theoretical risk and build real-world frameworks for governance, transparency, and ethical use will unlock more than just safety — they'll gain a strategic edge. In a world where regulators, clients, and even internal leaders are watching closely, **AI risk maturity becomes a differentiator**.

Those who can demonstrate control over AI-related risks — from data quality and bias to IP governance and tool accountability — will not only move faster, but with more trust and buy-in behind them. Responsible **AI isn't a checkbox. It's a foundation for innovation at scale.**

Think about the early days of online shopping. Everyone saw the potential, but few trusted it. Shoppers worried about security, businesses hesitated to take payments online, and many companies delayed adoption. It wasn't until clear **security standards, data handling protocols, and consumer protections** were put in place that online commerce really took off.

AI is at a similar inflection point. The technology is powerful, the interest is high — but trust, transparency, and governance are what will unlock scale. The organizations that put the right safeguards in place now won't just be compliant — they'll be first in line to lead.

Actionable Steps



The AI Enablement Framework for Brands

To move beyond the “shiny toy” syndrome and hype of AI technologies and to navigate the thousands of tools claiming to solve every problem, brands need a clear AI enablement framework. One that connects strategy to execution and innovation to governance.

These six steps provide a practical path to build AI capabilities with clarity, control, and measurable impact.

Operationalize and Governed AI

Operationalize AI with governance policies, guardrails, and AI training programs as well as ongoing change management support

Evaluate AI Tools across the Marketplace

Review best-in-breed, available tools and alternatives to select the right tool to achieve your business objectives

Run Safe Experiments

Start small with pilots and proof-of-concepts to test AI tools in controlled, low-risk areas

Define the Why

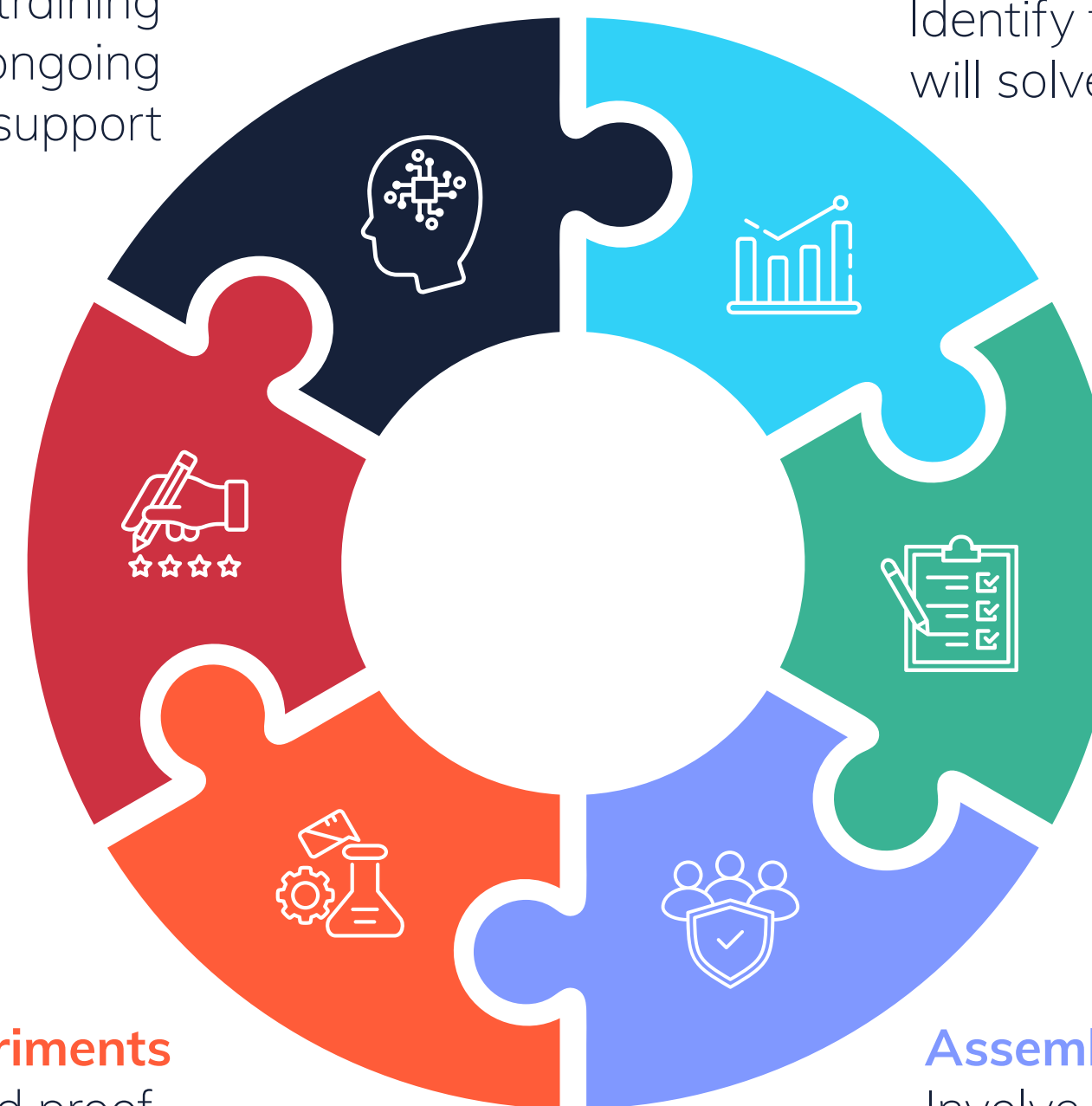
Identify the business problem AI will solve and set clear goals

Assess Readiness

Evaluate your digital, data, and organizational maturity

Assemble a Cross-Functional Team

Involve marketing, IT, legal, ops, creative teams, and data specialists from the start

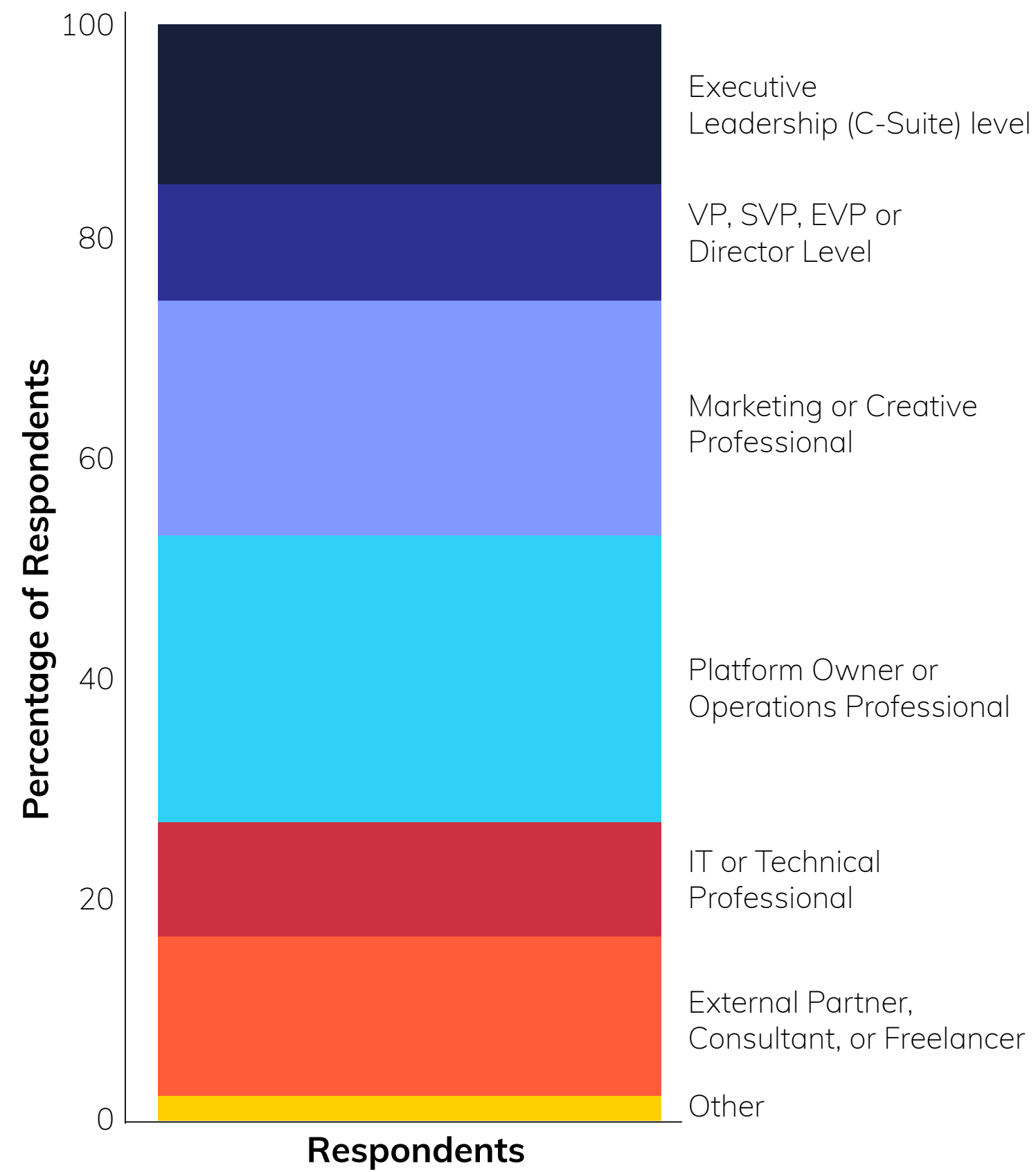


*What We've
Learned and
What's Next*

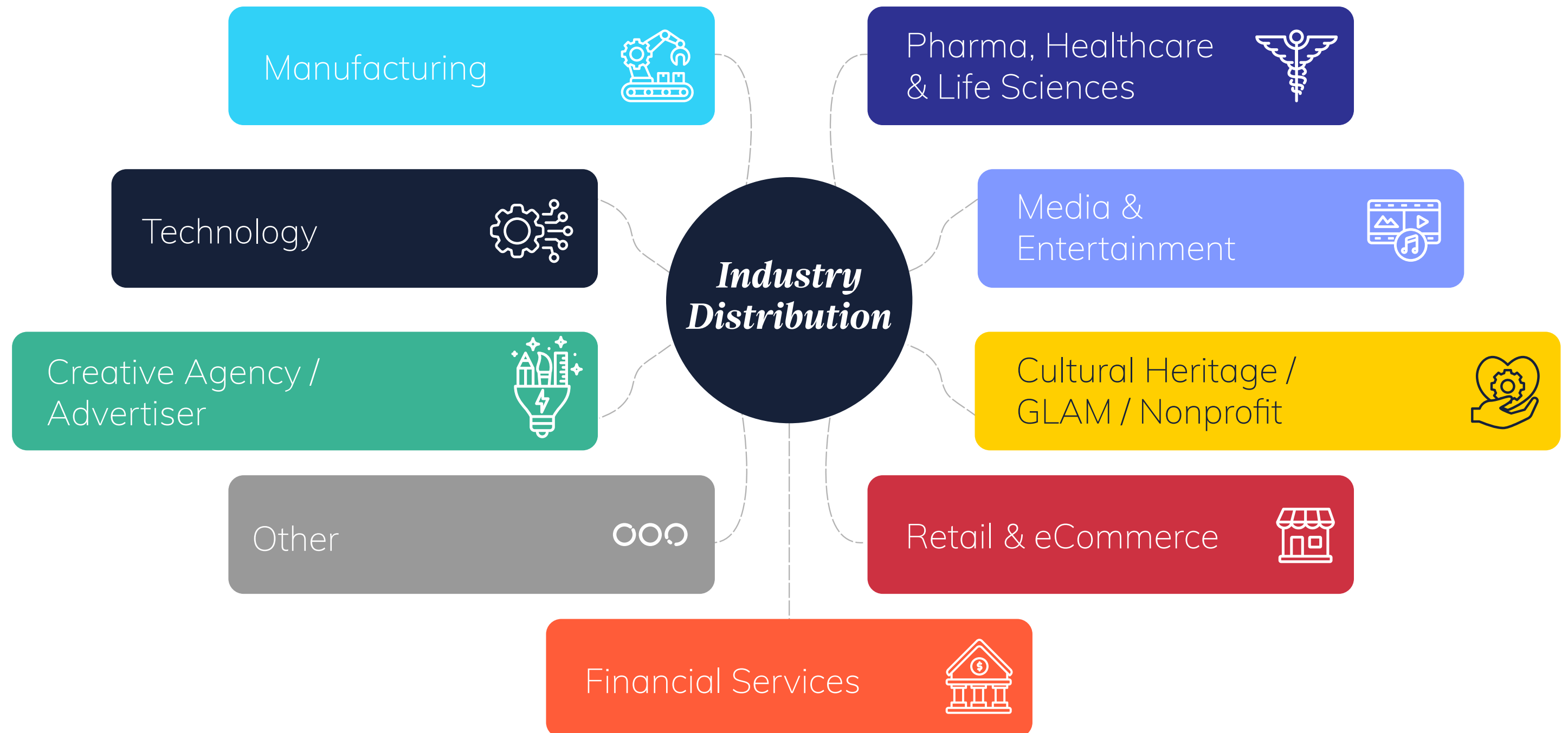


2025 Research Approach: Demographics

Respondent Roles

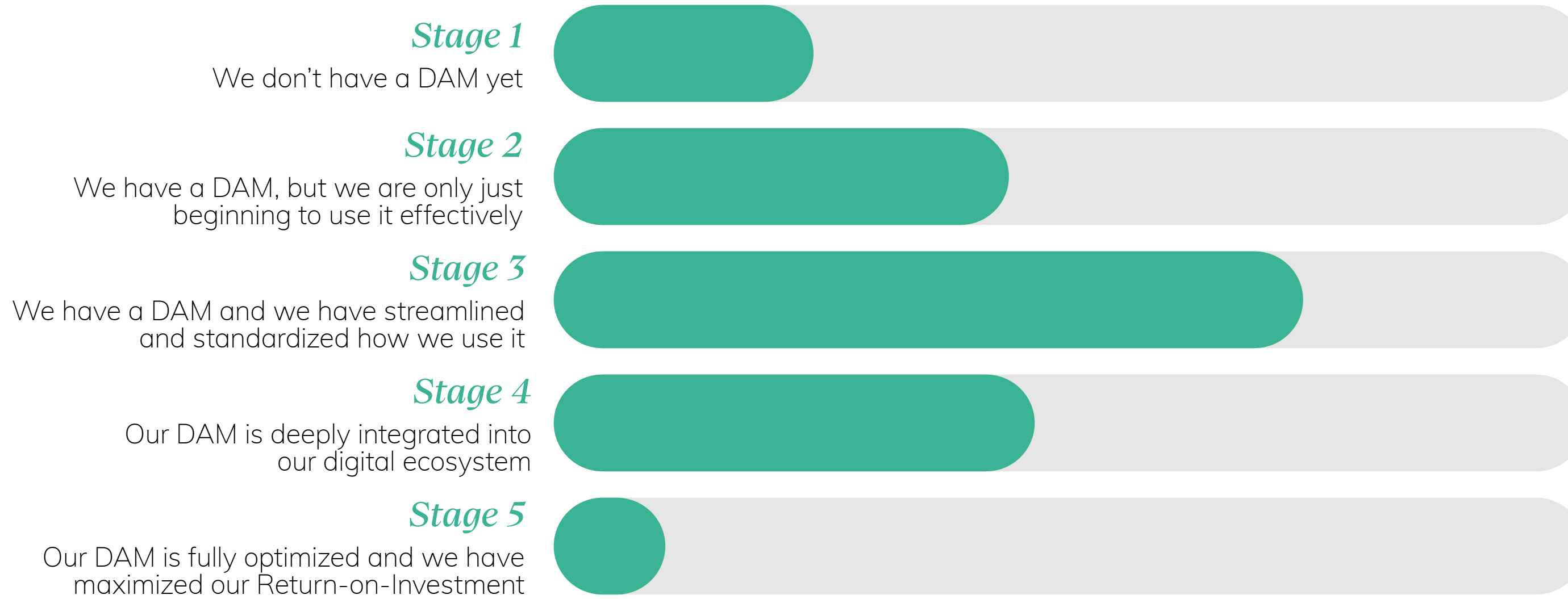


Industries Represented

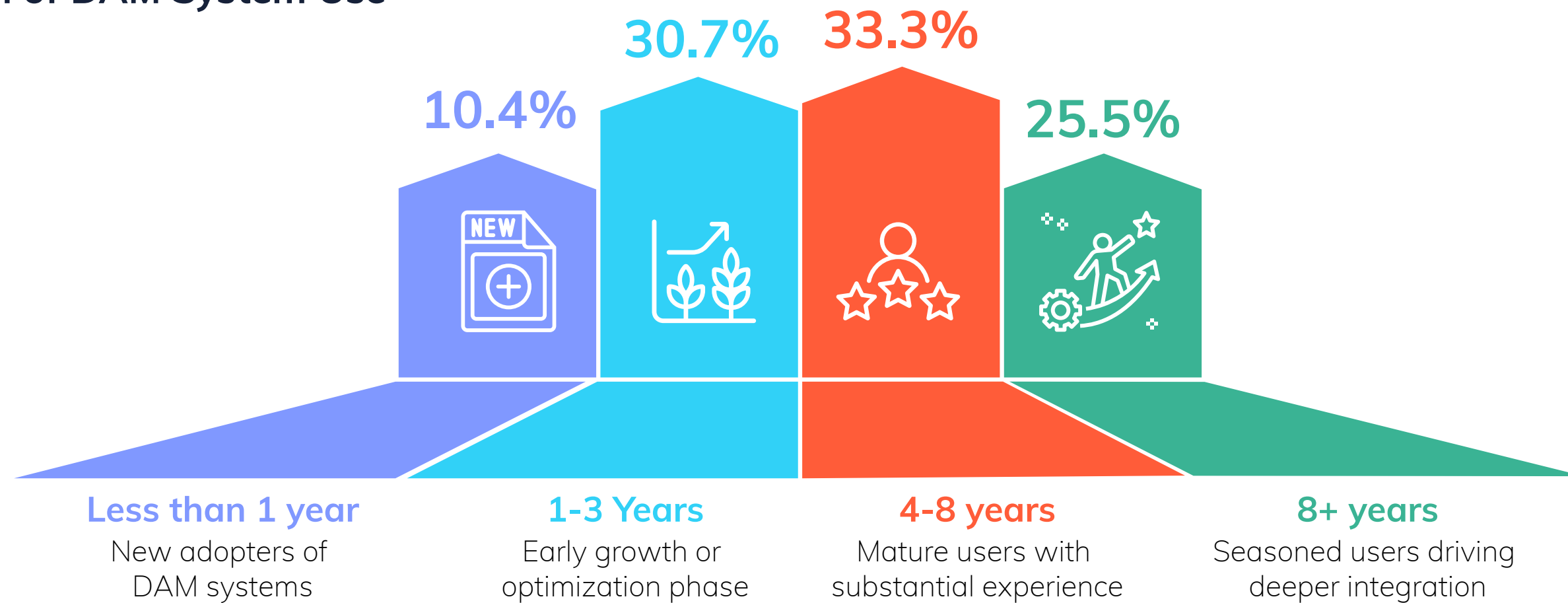


2025 Research Approach: Demographics

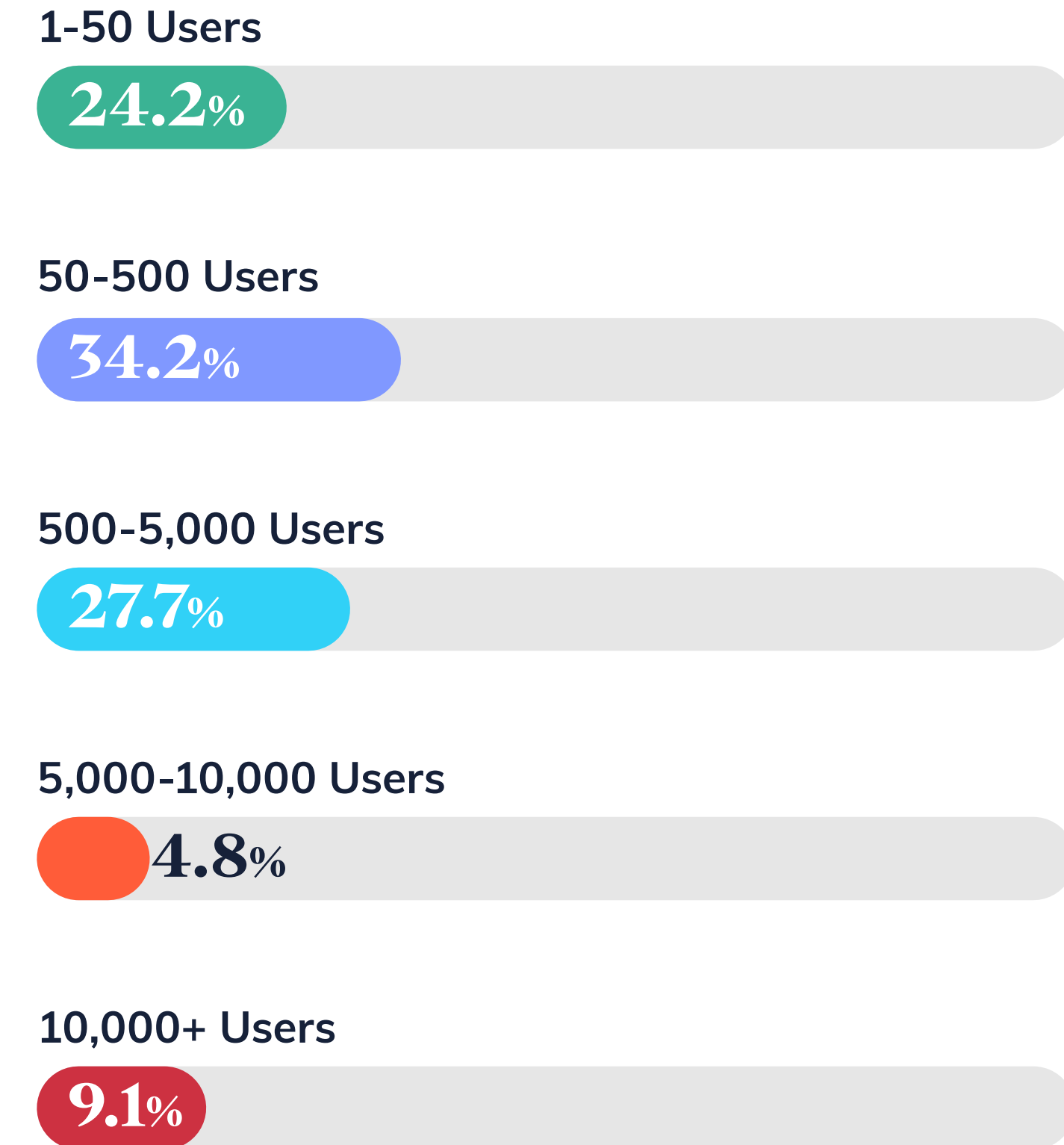
Respondents by DAM Maturity Level



Duration of DAM System Use



Distribution of DAM System Users



Summary and Takeaways

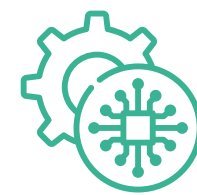


AI in Content Operations and Digital Asset Management is no longer a future vision. It's an active transformation. But adoption isn't linear. It's layered, nuanced, and deeply dependent on an organization's maturity, mindset, and readiness to align technology with purpose.

This year's research shows growing optimism, expanding experimentation, and a clear shift from curiosity to control. But it also reveals the gaps: strategy is still missing in too many places, ethical concerns remain unresolved, and operational enablement is struggling to keep pace with innovation.

AI isn't something brands can bolt on. It must be shaped, trained, governed, and embedded with living, breathing humans, not just in tech stacks, but in culture, process, and decision-making. The organizations that succeed won't be the ones using the most tools. They'll be the ones using the right tools, in the right way, with the right enablement strategy.

3 Key Takeaways



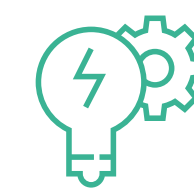
AI Strategy Is the Missing Link

While AI adoption is growing, 1 in 3 organizations still lack a clear strategy and that's holding back progress. Strategy isn't optional. It's how innovation becomes operational.



Trainable, Transparent

AI is the future. Brands want AI that fits their world, not generic solutions. Demand is rising for tools that can be trained, moderated, and focused on specific metadata fields. AI must be brand-aware and explainable by design.



AI Will Evolve Beyond Features Into a Layer Across the Stack

The future of AI isn't in isolated functions or even in individual technologies. It's in modular, cross-platform agents that streamline collaboration across DAM, CMS, PIM, and workflow tools with human oversight built in.

Predicting the Future



What's Next for AI in Content Operations?

AI in DAM and content operations is moving fast, and the future is not about individual features. It's about intelligent systems that **collaborate with humans across the content lifecycle**.

AI agents will guide governance, automate prep work, and flag issues before teams even ask. These agents won't be generic. They'll be **trained on brand-specific data**, learning your taxonomy, tone, and what good, on-brand content looks like. They'll live across DAM, CMS, PIM, and workflow tools, becoming a modular layer that supports tagging, rights, QA, personalization, and more.

AI will reshape collaboration. Instead of managing tasks across disconnected platforms, **AI will nudge, route, and support creative and operational teams**. It will enable real-time, role-aware, human-in-the-loop orchestration. Search will be transparent. Workflows will adapt. And soon, AI may even build its own integrations, streamlining data sharing without extensive developer input.

AI in DAM will act as an **assistant to DAM managers and content operations professionals**, handling the repetitive tasks like metadata tagging, content lifecycle automation, improving search and discovery, and automating workflows. Meanwhile, humans will oversee the AI, manage governance, and handle the growing volume of content being created across their organizations.

But this isn't just about speed. It's about doing better work. AI will help content managers monitor quality, help marketers personalize at scale, and help DAM teams prove value with ROI-driven insight.

The goal is not just more AI. It's the right AI. **Tailored, trained, trusted, and aligned with how teams actually work**. And getting there depends on organizations prioritizing these three things:

- 1. AI that fits the business, not the other way around**
- 2. Teams that trust and adopt AI because of a culture of ongoing change management**
- 3. Systems that scale without spinning out of control**

That's where I believe things are heading. Not toward more AI. **Toward more meaningful, manageable, and measurable AI**, that works across platforms, with humans, and at the pace our organizations and customers expect.

Reflections from
Kristina Huddart





Are you ready for AI in Content Operations?

If you're building your AI strategy, exploring use cases, or looking for support applying these insights in your organization, I'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch to talk about how AI is shaping the future of DAM, content supply chains, and creative workflows and how to make it work for your team.

kristina@huddartconsulting.com

Whether you're just getting started or ready to scale, I can help you turn ideas into action.

With thanks for your support!

And a heartfelt thank you to the organizations who supported this year's research. Your involvement made this work possible and reflects a shared commitment to advancing knowledge and sparking meaningful conversation across the community.



About this research

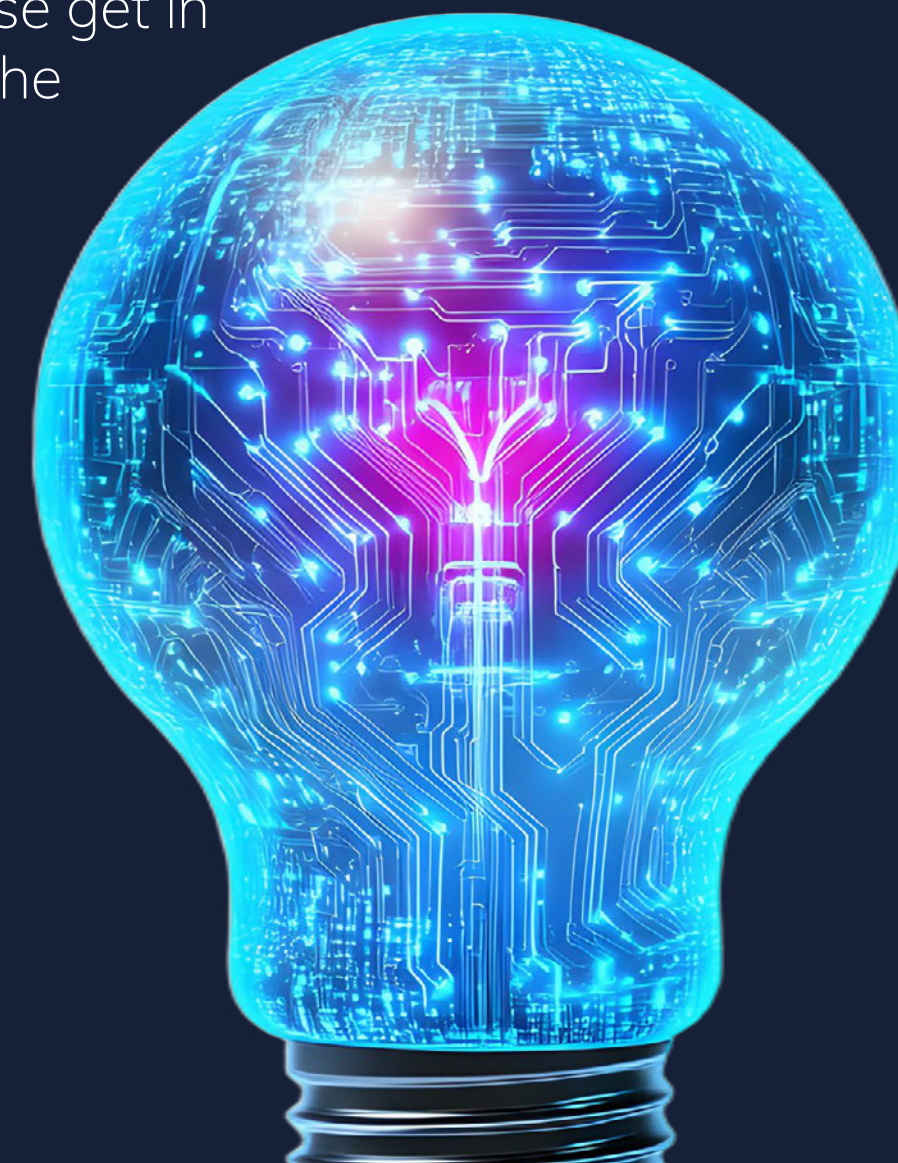
A huge thank you to everyone who contributed their time, insights, and experiences to this year's research.

Your real-world insights are what made this report valuable, practical, and grounded in the realities of day-to-day content operations. And you have been instrumental in shaping our understanding of AI in DAM and content operations.

The goal of this research is to track how AI is evolving across DAM and content operations, turning complexity into clarity and hype into actionable strategy.

If you're interested in contributing to future research, digging deeper into the findings, or applying these insights within your team, please get in touch. Your voice helps shape the direction of the conversation.

Want to get involved or go deeper into the data? Let's connect.





Huddart Consulting
kristina@huddartconsulting.com
www.huddartconsulting.com