MiQ

THE
AI CONFIDENCE
CURVE

A GLOBAL REPORT

Early adoption, **early** challenges, **early** solutions

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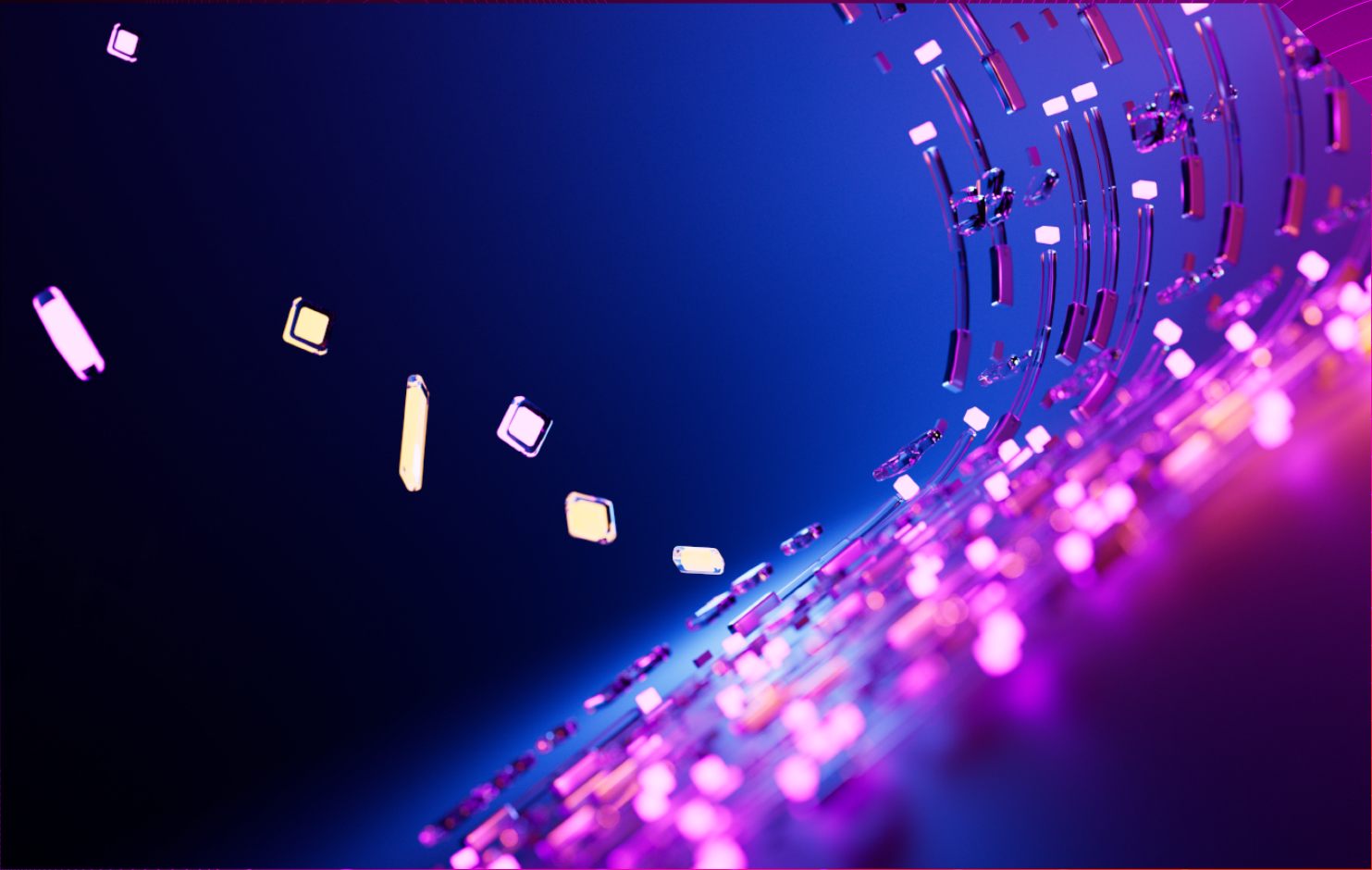
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THE LAY OF THE AI LAND

AI is the word on everyone's lips - and for good reason. In advertising and marketing, we've seen how AI and machine learning have changed things. It's made things quicker, and there are early indications that it can optimize campaign delivery and channel selection, and improve marketing outcomes.

But there are also many challenges to still overcome. MIT Media Lab's study (2025) found that 95% of organizations were seeing 'zero return' on $30-40 billion investment into gen AI. And even though 50% of AI budgets specifically went towards sales and marketing, more generic tools like ChatGPT were favored. The most dramatic cost savings and returns were seen in back-office automation.

The result? It's easy to feel unsure about the real impact of AI one moment then sing its praises the next. If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

YOUR INSIGHTS, OUR JOURNEY

As an industry, we want to map out where we are, and predict what's to come. To do this, we asked you. In September 2025, MiQ partnered with Censuswide to survey a pool of 3,169 agency and brand marketers across 16 different countries.
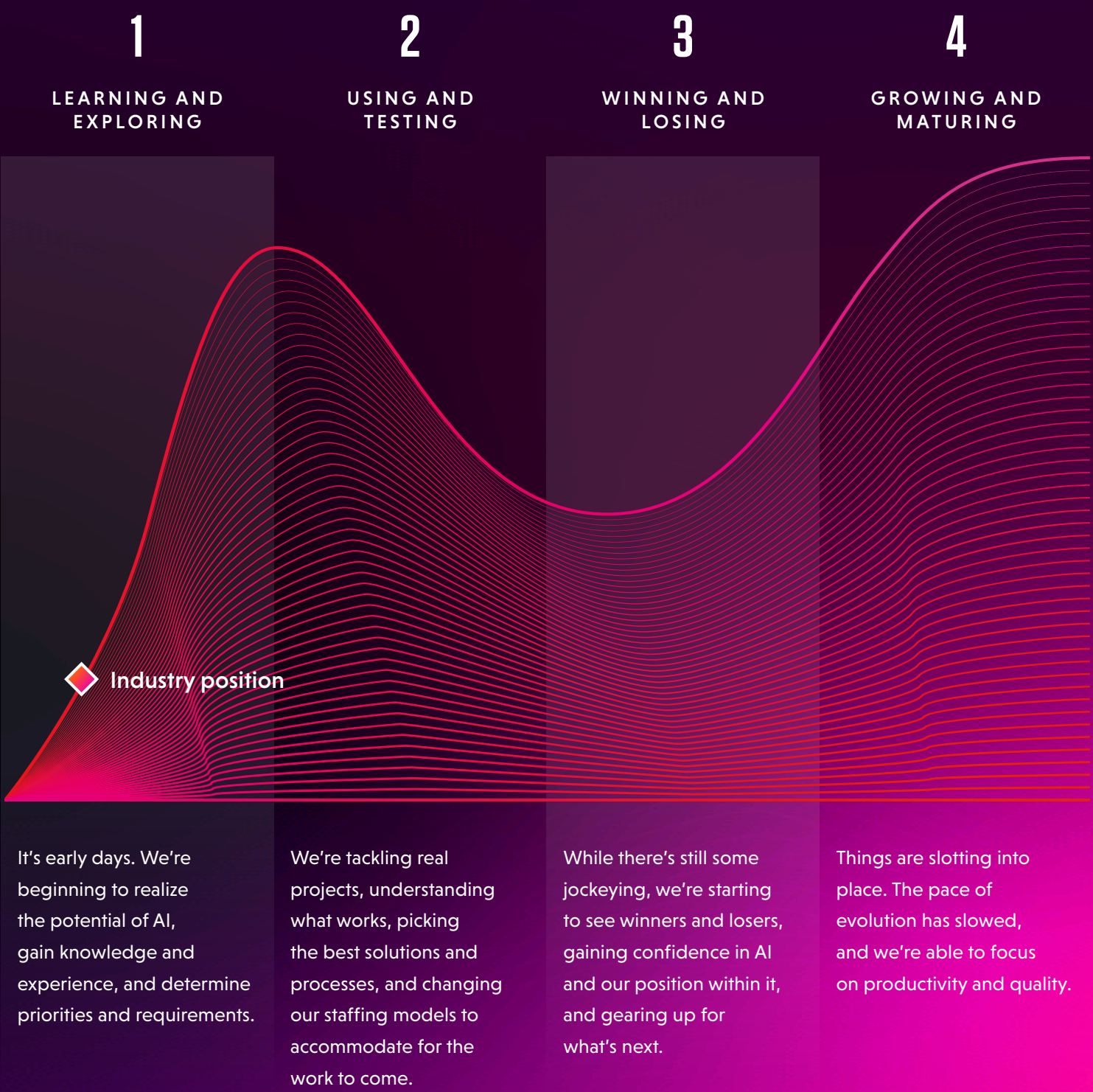
Across every level of job title and seniority, we asked how you use AI, your confidence in applying AI to advertising and marketing, and your strategies related to funnel-based marketing and optimization, audience insights, and measurement and optimization.

INTRODUCING THE AI CONFIDENCE CURVE

Instead of a straight line journey or a cycle, we see the AI journey as a curve, and our position comes down to the level of confidence we feel.

1

LEARNING AND EXPLORING

2

USING AND TESTING

3

WINNING AND LOSING

4

GROWING AND MATURING

◆ Industry position

It's early days. We're beginning to realize the potential of AI, gain knowledge and experience, and determine priorities and requirements.

We're tackling real projects, understanding what works, picking the best solutions and processes, and changing our staffing models to accommodate for the work to come.

While there's still some jockeying, we're starting to see winners and losers, gaining confidence in AI and our position within it, and gearing up for what's next.

Things are slotting into place. The pace of evolution has slowed, and we're able to focus on productivity and quality.

LEARNING AND EXPLORING

From the findings, we can see the industry is in phase 1: learning and exploring. We're beginning to understand what AI can do, and prove the benefit of applying AI tools to our workflows to improve efficiency and increase performance. But there's a lot more to it, and proving results can be harder than we thought.

Even though the industry still needs to get to grips with AI and build a level of certainty, we're continuing to ramp up our investments. And that's because AI is here to stay. So one thing is for sure: it's time to build our confidence with AI.

In this report, you'll see how and why the industry is using AI. Plus, you'll discover the hurdles we're navigating, and the opportunities some of us are beginning to realize.

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USING AI TECHNOLOGY

When it comes to digital marketing, AI is everywhere. We found that 66% of us currently use AI tools on most or even all of our projects. But although we're using AI, we're not doing it as confidently as you might expect.

" I MOSTLY USE AI TO IDEATE, CREATE AND AUTOMATE

We're putting AI to work in a number of ways: at the top end of the scale, 40% of us are using it for content creation, 39% for marketing automation and 38% for social media management. We're even using it to optimize parts of our campaigns, and chat with customers. So there can be no doubt that we're finding AI useful.

CURRENT USES OF AI FOR DIGITAL MARKETING
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

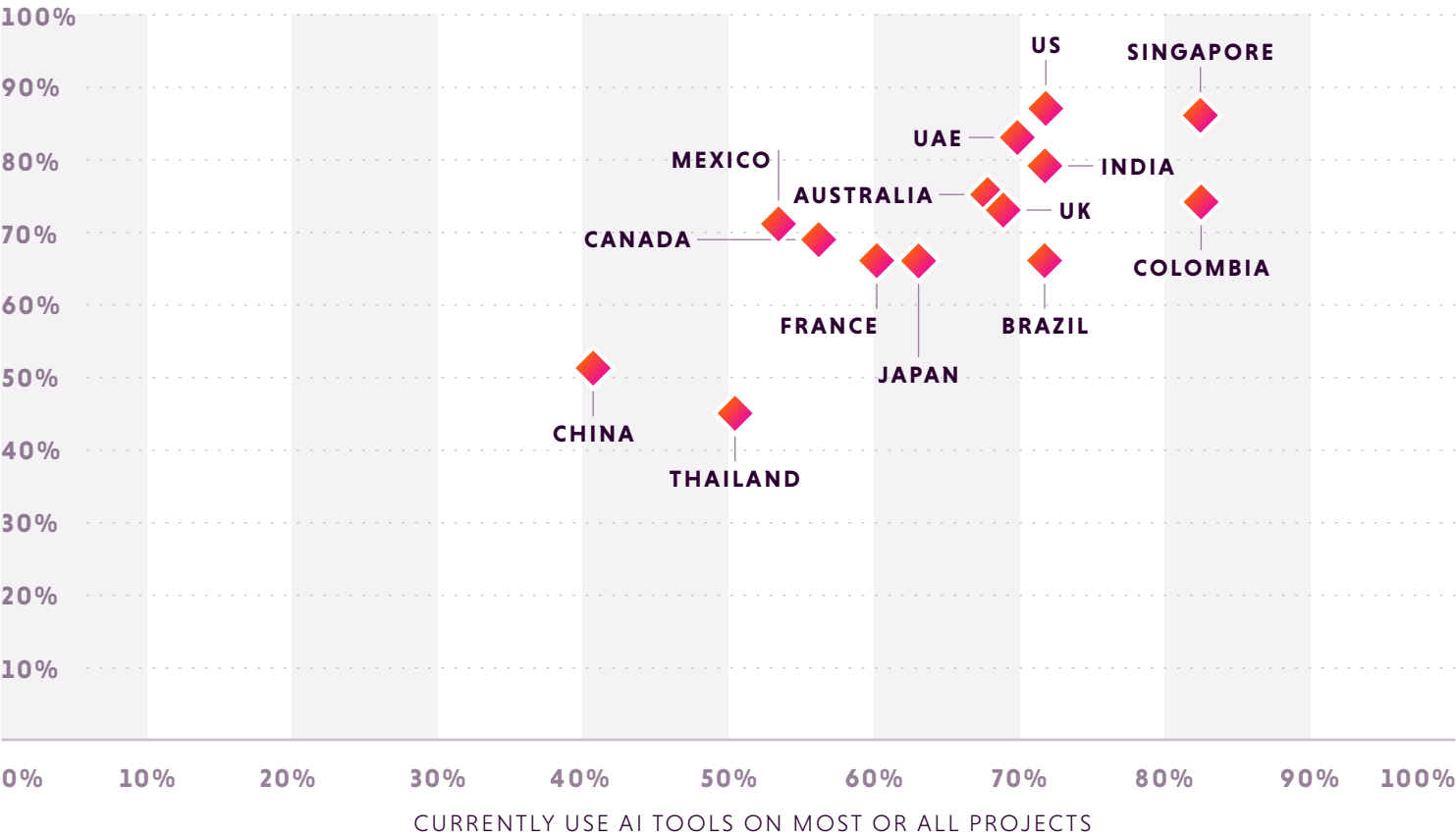|	
SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT	40%
MARKETING AUTOMATION	39%
CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT	38%
VISUAL DESIGN	37%
AD CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT	35%
SEO & CONTENT OPTIMIZATION	33%
CONTENT CREATION	32%
AD CREATIVE DESIGN/OPTIMIZATION	32%

HOW I FEEL ABOUT AI DEPENDS ON WHERE I AM IN THE WORLD

If you're in Canada, Australia or Japan, the chances are you're feeling pretty good about AI solutions. But if you're in China, Mexico, or Thailand, confidence needs to be built. This can come down to a range of factors like cultural prevalence of AI, and the tools available.

AI USE AND FUTURE PLANNING BY COUNTRY

PLAN TO USE MORE IN CURRENT ROLE - NEXT 12 MONTHS

US
SINGAPORE
UAE
MEXICO
INDIA
AUSTRALIA
CANADA
UK
COLOMBIA
FRANCE
BRAZIL
JAPAN
CHINA
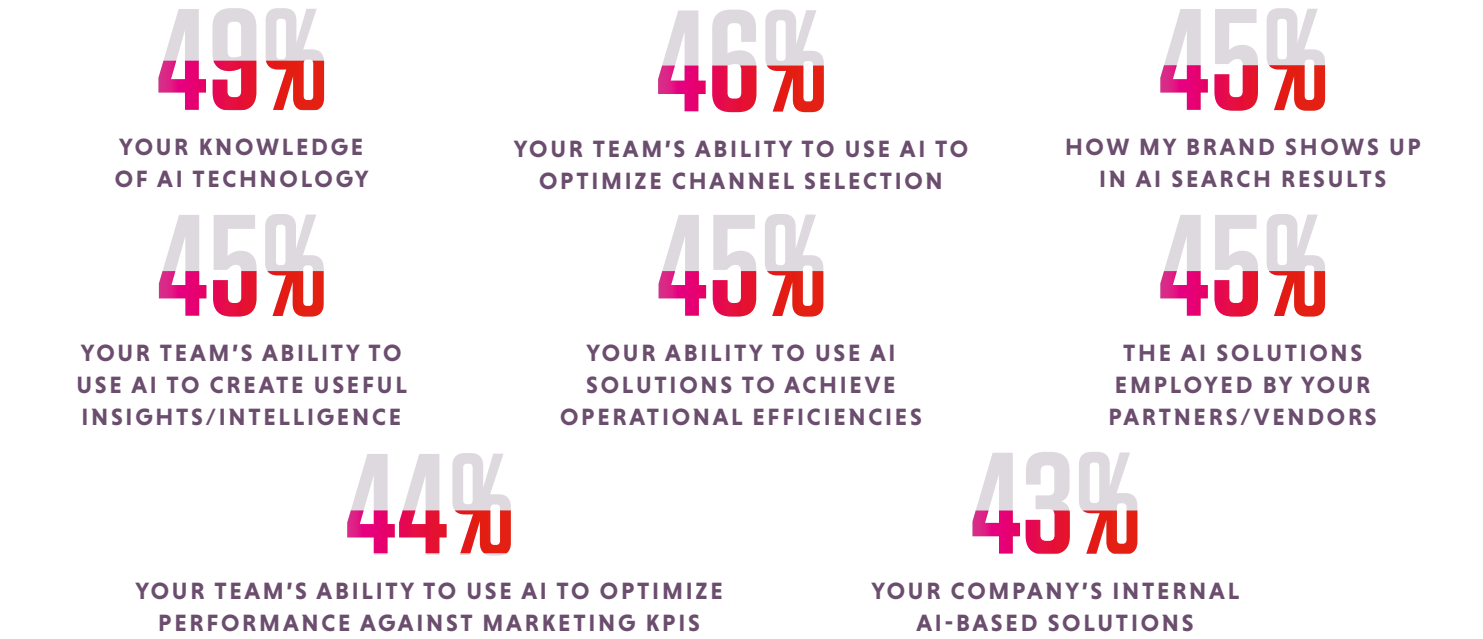THAILAND

CURRENTLY USE AI TOOLS ON MOST OR ALL PROJECTS

I'M SORT OF CONFIDENT WITH THE TECH, AND KINDA KNOW HOW TO USE IT

Nearly half of marketers (49%) say they're fully confident in their knowledge of AI tech. But for those who do say 'Yep, I'm comfortable with the tech', only 45% of us say we're 'fully confident' in our ability to use AI solutions to achieve operational efficiencies. In other words, knowing how AI tech works doesn't necessarily mean we feel ready to use it effectively.

The industry saw similar confidence responses in previous digital media growth areas (like social, mobile and programmatic). As we get used to adopting new tech and workflows, this is a normal dynamic.

MARKETER CONFIDENCE IN AI, BY TASK/CATEGORY

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

49%
YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF AI TECHNOLOGY

46%
YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY TO USE AI TO OPTIMIZE CHANNEL SELECTION

45%
HOW MY BRAND SHOWS UP IN AI SEARCH RESULTS

45%
YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY TO USE AI TO CREATE USEFUL INSIGHTS/INTELLIGENCE

45%
YOUR ABILITY TO USE AI SOLUTIONS TO ACHIEVE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES

45%
THE AI SOLUTIONS EMPLOYED BY YOUR PARTNERS/VENDORS

44%
YOUR TEAM'S ABILITY TO USE AI TO OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE AGAINST MARKETING KPIS

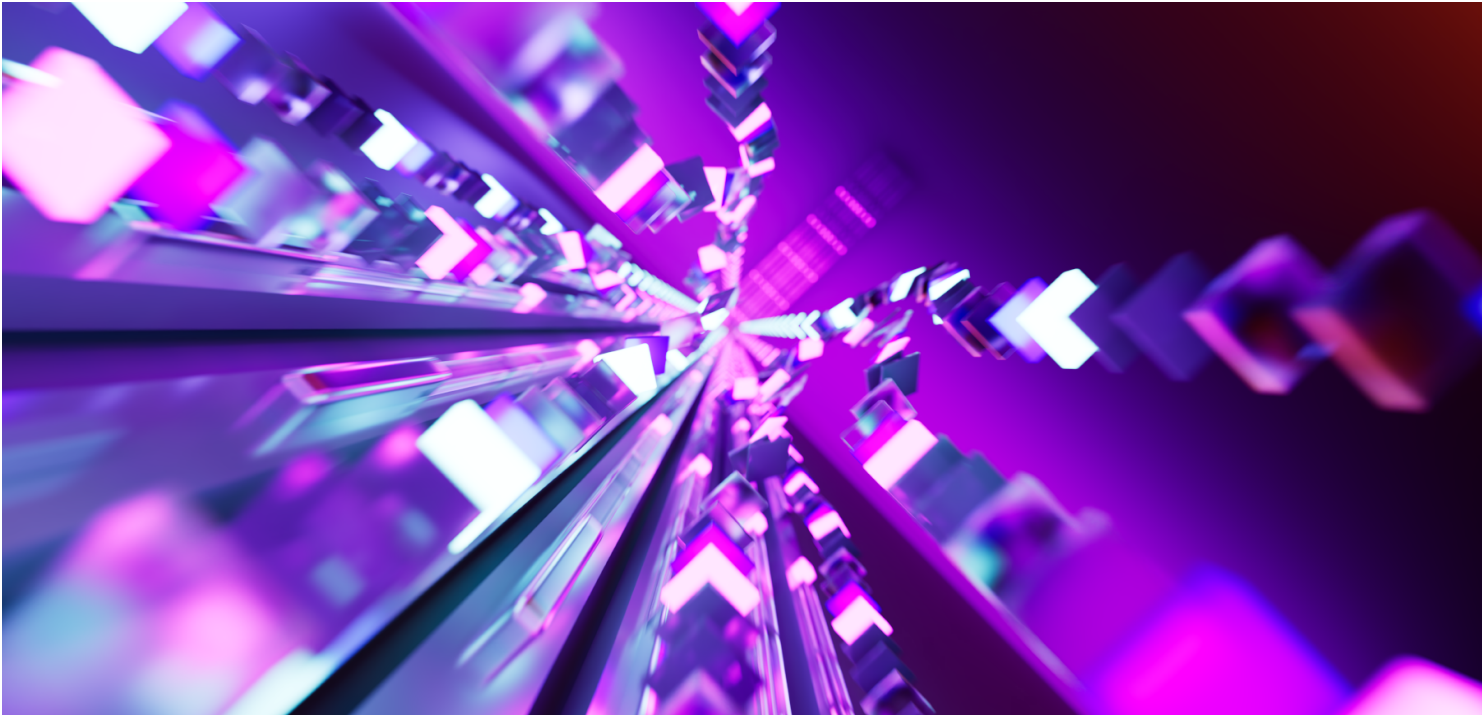**43%**
YOUR COMPANY'S INTERNAL AI-BASED SOLUTIONS

WHAT'S LEADING TO OUR LACK OF CONFIDENCE?

Let's be honest: the speed of AI development is enough to give us all whiplash. Marketers have to keep up with new models, new tools, and constant changes. So the goalposts are constantly moving. It's no wonder we're questioning AI, and asking how we actually achieve performance.

KEY REASONS FOR LACK OF CONFIDENCE
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

42%
OUR BRAND/CLIENTS DON'T ALLOW DATA TO BE SHARED WITH OUR AI TOOLS

38%
I HAVEN'T RECEIVED PROPER TRAINING ON WORKING WITH AI TOOLS

38%
MY ORG DOESN'T UNDERSTAND HOW AI/LLMs WORK WELL ENOUGH

35%
WE DON'T HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW OUR PARTNERS' AI SOLUTIONS WORK

28%
I DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW AI OR LLMs WORK WELL ENOUGH

25%
I DON'T TRUST AI-BASED SOLUTIONS

OVER 4 IN 10 OF US CAN'T SHARE OUR DATA WITH AVAILABLE TOOLS

This is a pretty fundamental challenge. If AI isn't fueled by the right data, it can't kick campaigns into high gear. To make the most of data takes more than a ChatGPT login, but we don't all have the know-how to work around this.

OVER A THIRD OF MARKETERS ADMIT THEY DON'T HAVE THE RIGHT TRAINING

AI isn't 'old' enough to have experts in all areas, and custom-built internal tools often don't have training available. Even marketers who were 'fully confident' in their team's ability to drive marketing outcomes and optimize performance feel the same: more than one in ten said a lack of training was a key concern.

CURRENT TOOLS CAN BE TOO TRICKY TO FIGURE OUT

To make things more complicated, it's not enough to just have AI-powered solutions. If they don't quickly integrate into businesses, match existing workflows and ingest brand data, marketers tend to write them off.

HOW TO CONFIDENTLY USE AI TECHNOLOGY

When it's built and used correctly, AI tech can deliver bespoke outcomes and incredibly powerful performance. Here are some foolproof ways to ensure you're putting your best tech forward:

1 TAP INTO TECH THAT'S BUILT FOR PURPOSE

When you use bespoke solutions built by data scientists and AI experts, you'll achieve bespoke results. For example, if you ask a generic tool (like ChatGPT) to recommend a media plan, the lack of data, training and memory leads to generic recommendations.

2 MAKE SURE EXPERT TECH IS USED BY THE EXPERTS

Without the right skills, it's difficult to evaluate AI tech for campaign delivery and optimization. Asking a team to use AI tools without the proper training is like asking someone to run a meeting without a clear agenda: they don't know what outcome they need to achieve, or how.

3 KEEP UP WITH THE PACE OF CHANGE

One of the biggest reasons that marketers aren't confident using AI is because there's a lack of client data being shared with these tools. But there are answers. The right partner can bridge this gap, or provide a workaround with other datasets. Plus, by providing specialist services like trading, analytics, strategy and creative, partners can keep your finger on the pulse and ahead of what's to come.
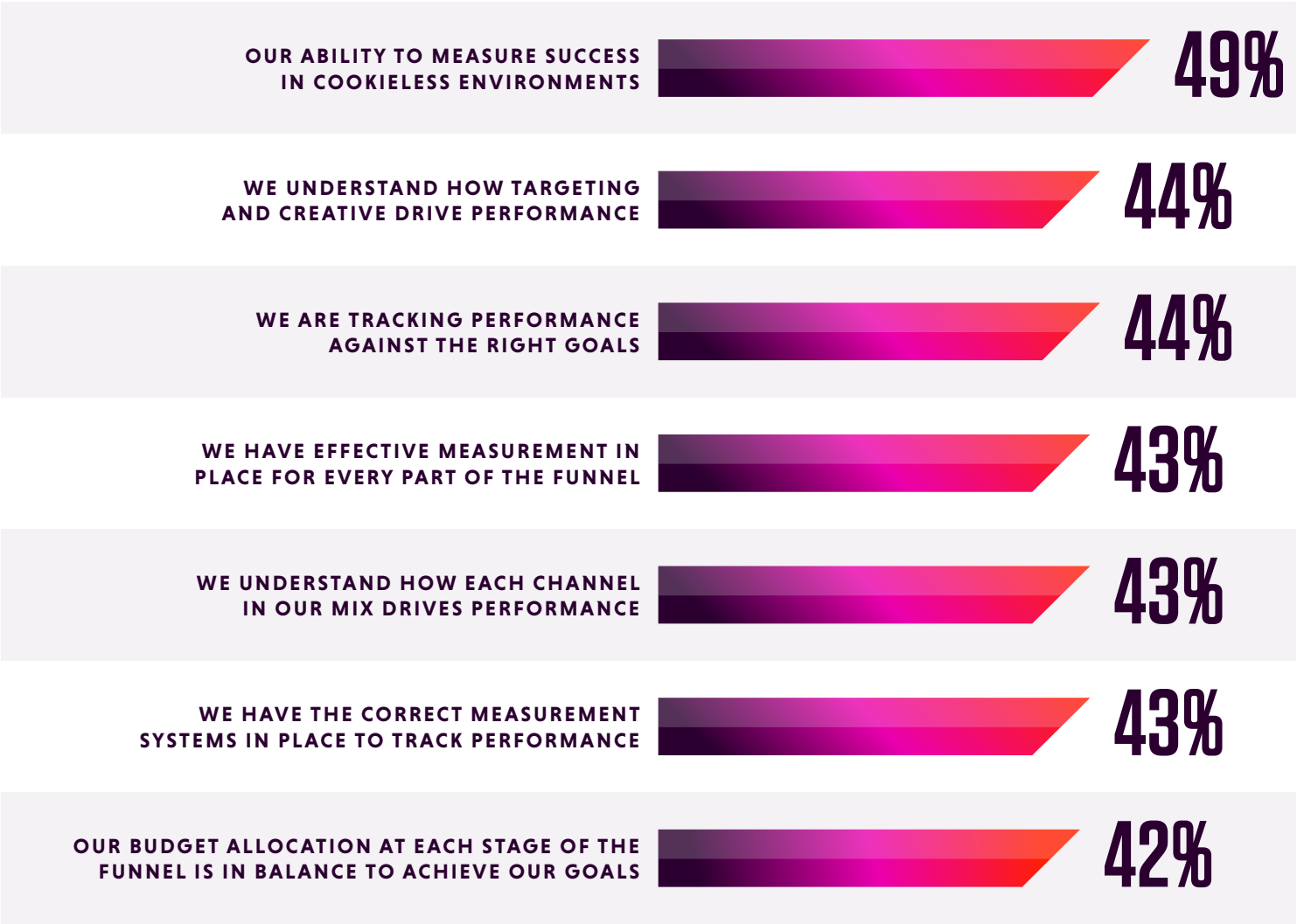
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DRIVING RESULTS
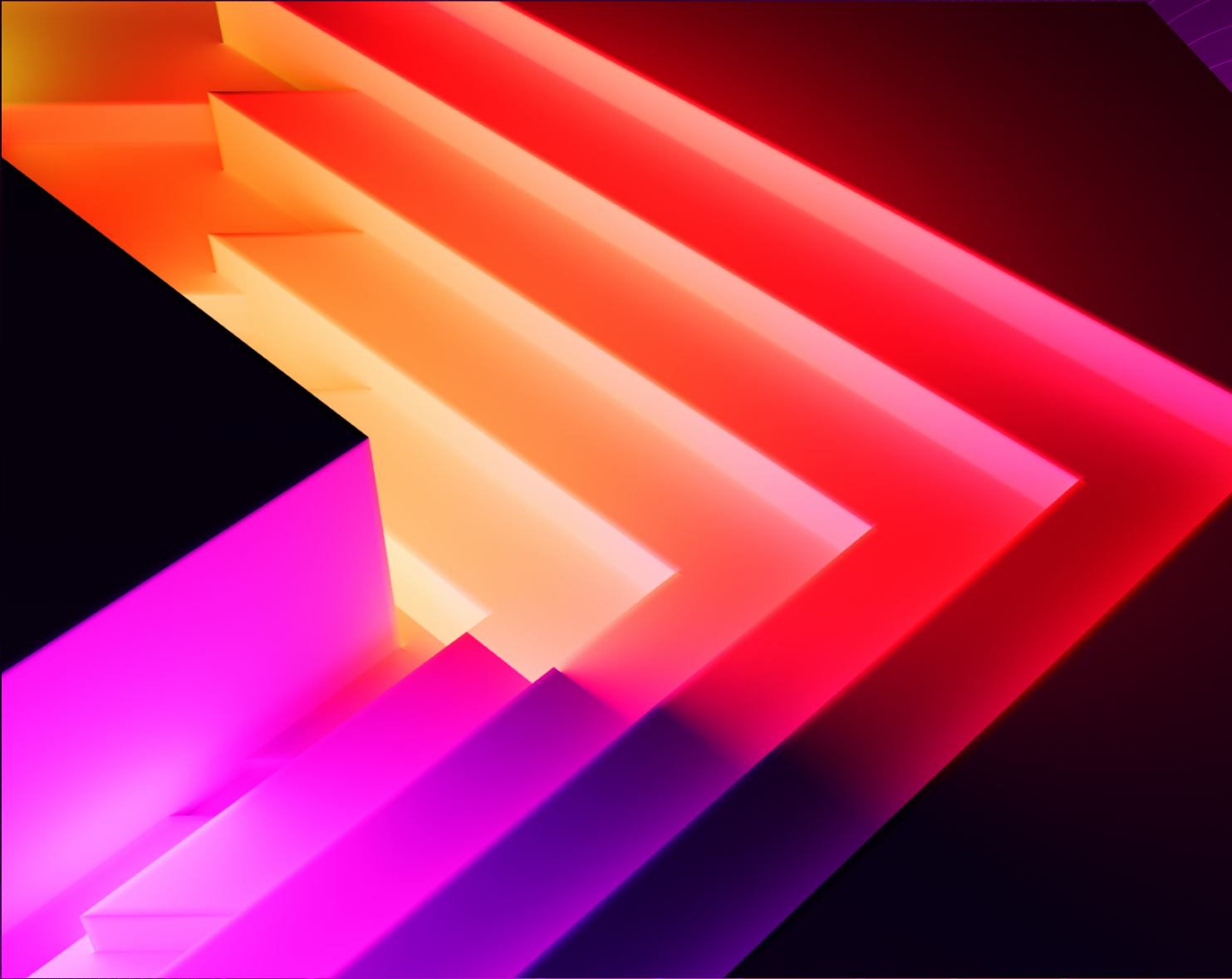
For nearly half of marketers, AI makes measuring cookieless environments a piece of cake. Representing a slightly smaller slice, 44% of us feel confident knowing how targeting and creative drive performance. And another 44% feel like we're tracking against the right goals.

Interestingly, 47% of senior marketers feel confident in their teams' ability to optimize performance, compared to 36% of junior professionals. For those of us who can say we're at a senior level, we tend to be more confident in internal and external solutions.

CONFIDENCE AROUND PERFORMANCE AND MEASUREMENT
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

OUR ABILITY TO MEASURE SUCCESS IN COOKIELESS ENVIRONMENTS	**49%**
WE UNDERSTAND HOW TARGETING AND CREATIVE DRIVE PERFORMANCE	**44%**
WE ARE TRACKING PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE RIGHT GOALS	**44%**
WE HAVE EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT IN PLACE FOR EVERY PART OF THE FUNNEL	**43%**
WE UNDERSTAND HOW EACH CHANNEL IN OUR MIX DRIVES PERFORMANCE	**43%**
WE HAVE THE CORRECT MEASUREMENT SYSTEMS IN PLACE TO TRACK PERFORMANCE	**43%**
OUR BUDGET ALLOCATION AT EACH STAGE OF THE FUNNEL IS IN BALANCE TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS	**42%**

"I'M CONFIDENT DRIVING RESULTS, SO I'M PLANNING TO USE AI MORE

When we look to the next 12 months. 75% of marketers who feel confident achieving great results will ramp up their use of AI, and half of those say they have the right goals in place to track performance. For 41% of us who feel confident in our team's ability to optimize against results, sharing data is the top concern - with training coming a close second.
So it's perhaps a case of getting to grips with things before going all-in on AI.

"DIFFICULT-TO-MEASURE METRICS AREN'T SO DIFFICULT NOW

The specific goals marketers track didn't really change how confident they felt about driving results. Whether we focused on click-through rates or brand sentiment, marketers were just as likely to feel capable of optimizing for them. It suggests that AI-powered measurement tools are beginning to pay off, and perhaps harder metrics are becoming a lot easier to measure.

HOW TO CONFIDENTLY DRIVE RESULTS WITH AI

We all want AI-powered optimization to drive measurable, repeated performance.
Discover how to become confident achieving this - and more:

PLUG IN YOUR CAMPAIGN MEASUREMENT

AI can do almost anything, but it can't optimize towards goals it can't measure. Make sure your AI-based solutions are fully integrated with your campaign measurement, and ensure they are closely connected to performance-related decisions.

ASK TO SEE PROVEN PERFORMANCE AND APPLIED INSIGHTS

If your partners say they have excellent decisioning power against your KPIs, ask to see real incremental reach, conversion or clicks. And see how audience insights are being applied to your campaigns, and continually optimized.
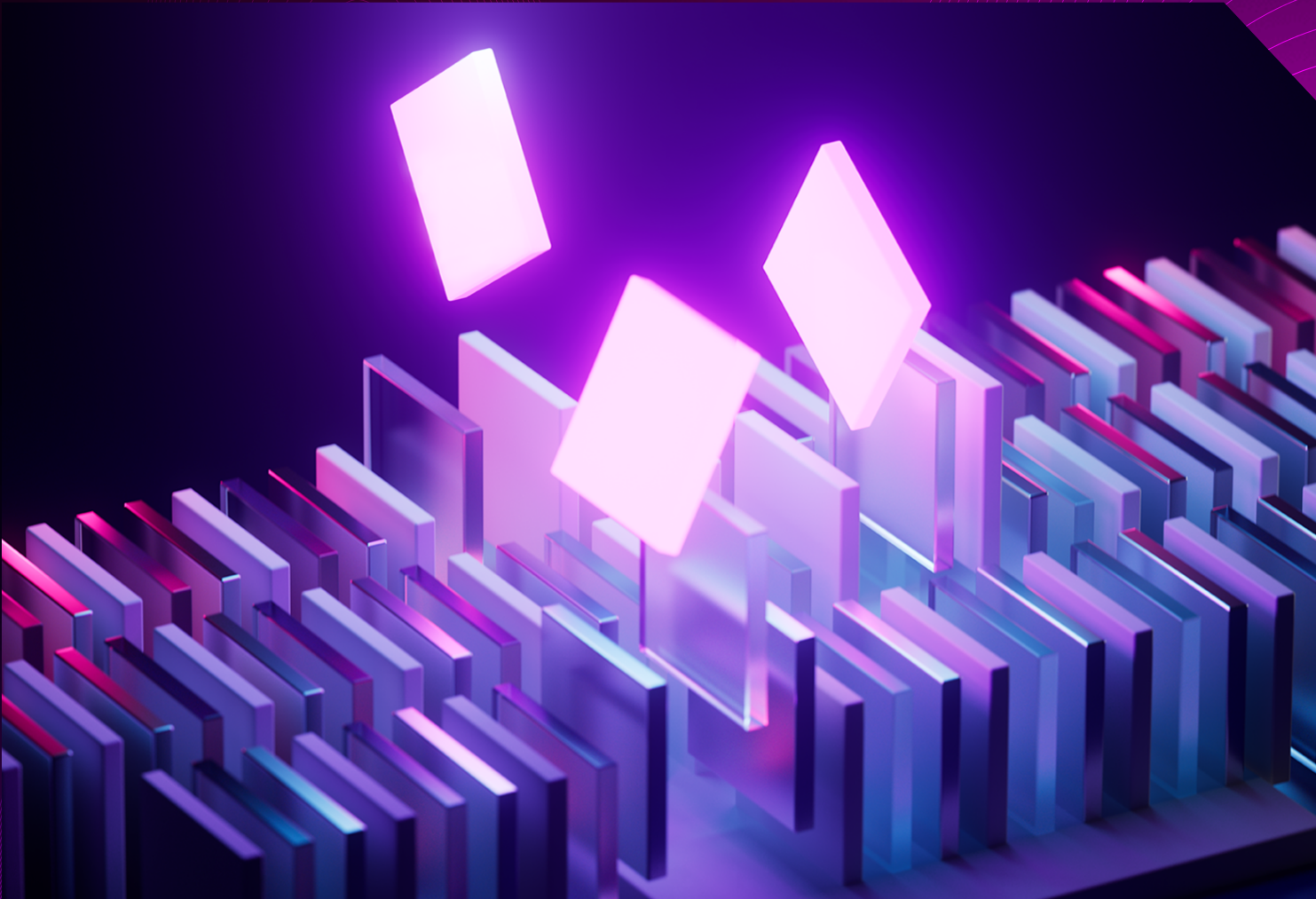
MAKE YOUR METRICS FLEXIBLE

Make sure you're one of the 44% of marketers who feel they're measuring success against the correct goals. When your priorities change, make sure your solution can too. Your AI-powered measurement will be stronger if it can flex towards any goal.
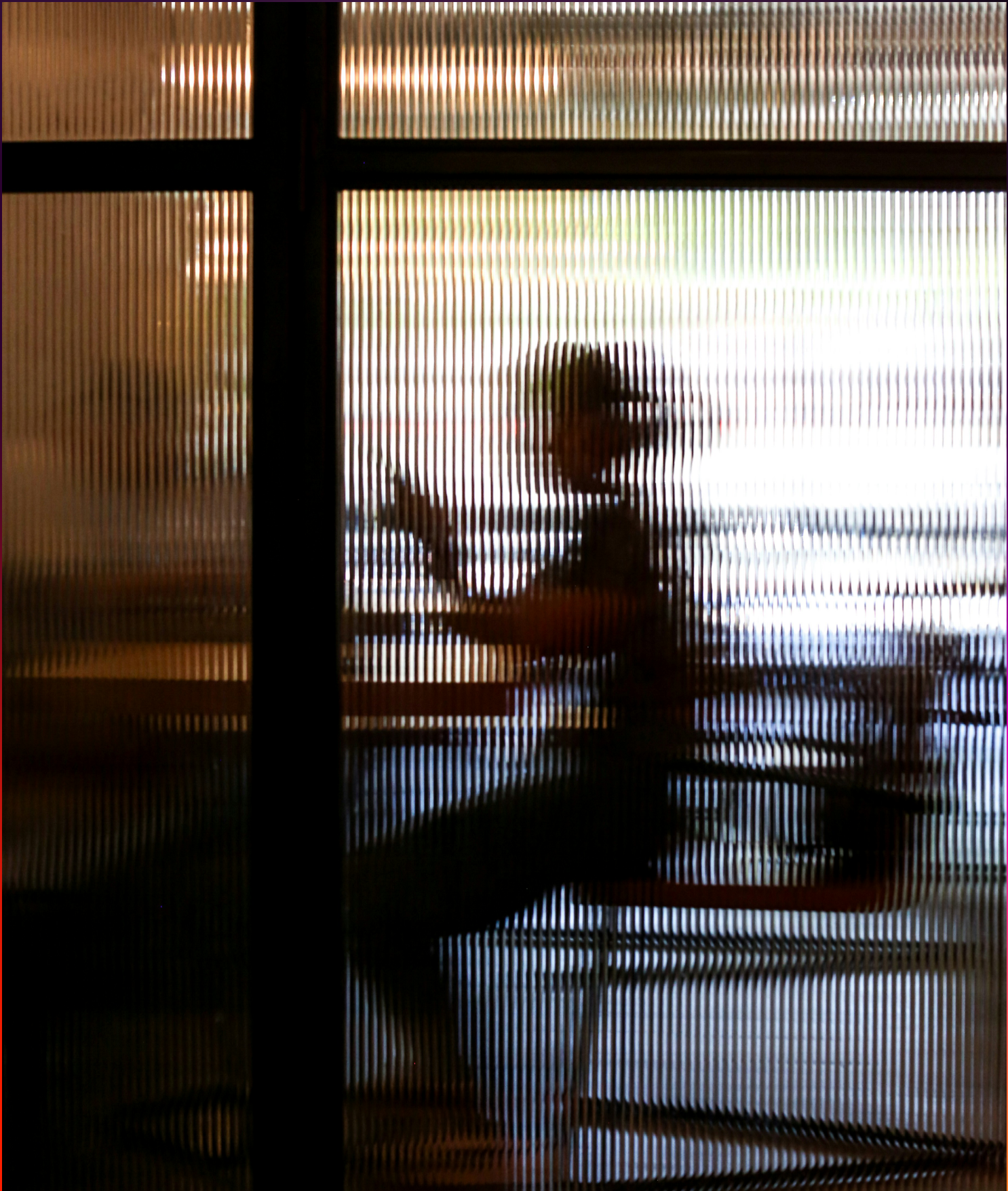
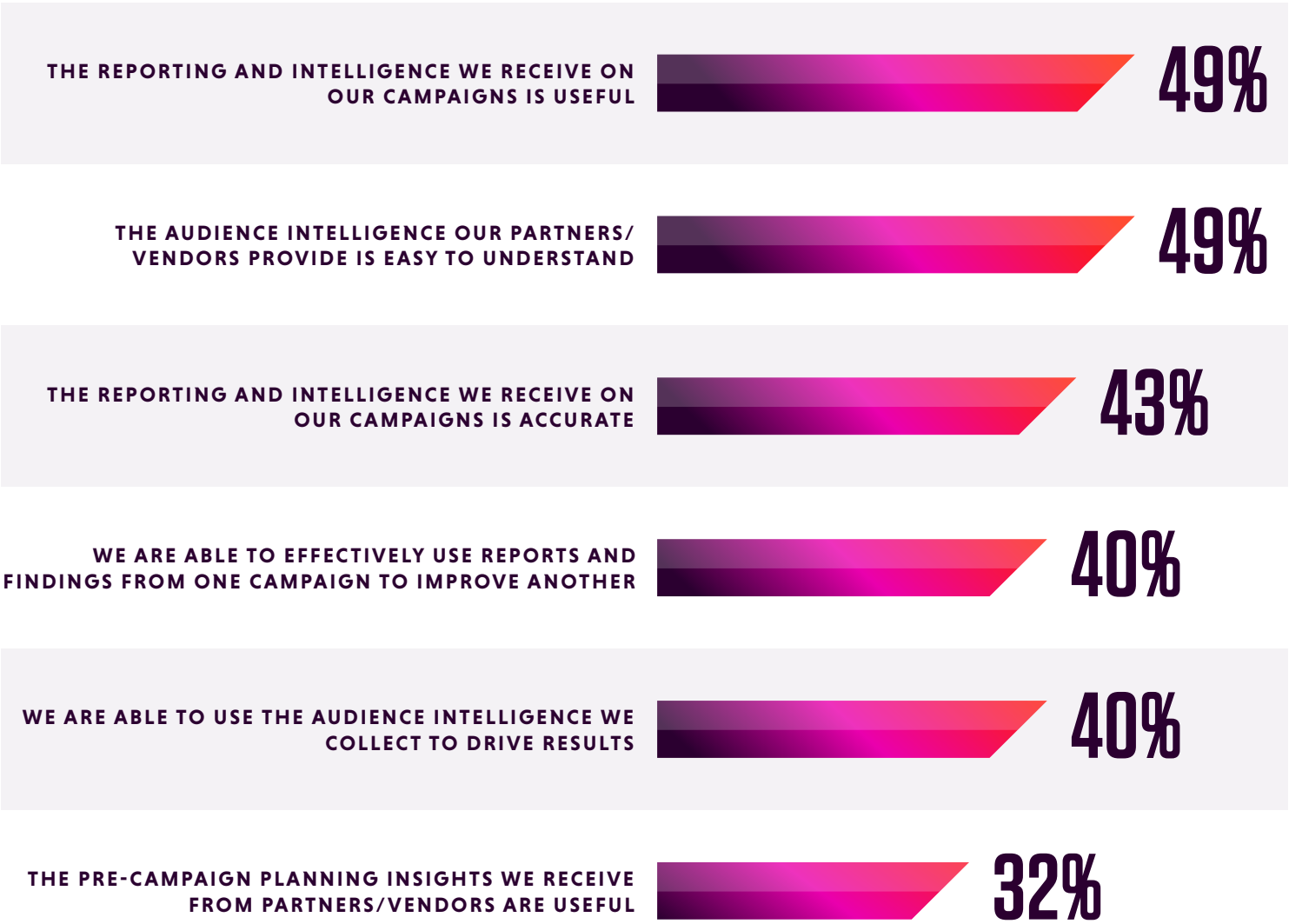| 1 | 2 | 3 | **4** | 5 | 6 |

GENERATING INSIGHTS AND INTELLIGENCE

Nearly half of us (49%) find campaign reporting useful. But only 40% of marketers strongly believe they can apply findings from one campaign to another, and just 32% find pre-campaign insights helpful.

This really shines a light on a bigger issue: we're not super pumped about the pre-campaign insights we get. Thanks to the challenges of using first-party data, they're easy to understand but a pain to action. And sometimes, things are up and running before you actually get your hand on those all-important insights.

CONFIDENCE IN REPORTING/INSIGHTS
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

THE REPORTING AND INTELLIGENCE WE RECEIVE ON OUR CAMPAIGNS IS USEFUL	**49%**
THE AUDIENCE INTELLIGENCE OUR PARTNERS/VENDORS PROVIDE IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND	**49%**
THE REPORTING AND INTELLIGENCE WE RECEIVE ON OUR CAMPAIGNS IS ACCURATE	**43%**
WE ARE ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY USE REPORTS AND FINDINGS FROM ONE CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE ANOTHER	**40%**
WE ARE ABLE TO USE THE AUDIENCE INTELLIGENCE WE COLLECT TO DRIVE RESULTS	**40%**
THE PRE-CAMPAIGN PLANNING INSIGHTS WE RECEIVE FROM PARTNERS/VENDORS ARE USEFUL	**32%**

"I'M CONFIDENT USING AI-POWERED INSIGHTS FOR THE PURCHASE JOURNEY

If we focus on engagement and site traffic, we tend to feel more confident in their ability to generate useful insights and intelligence. And marketers who view consumers through the lens of a funnel or purchase journey (rather than channels) find it easier to generate meaningful insights with AI.

"I WOULD GET BETTER INSIGHTS IF I COULD USE BETTER DATA

For the 37% who say they're struggling to use AI to create insights and intelligence, the inability to use client data with their AI tools is a huge consideration. When we can't feed an existing AI tool with brand or client data, it can feel like game over. (After all, the output is only as good as the input.) If it's not possible to use first-party data, using reliable and accurate third-party sources can help build useful analytics.

HOW TO CONFIDENTLY BUILD AND ACTIVATE AI-POWERED INSIGHTS

We all want AI-powered optimization to drive measurable, repeated performance. Discover how to become confident achieving this - and more:

BETTER KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO BETTER INSIGHTS

44% of marketers feel their organization doesn't understand AI or LLMs, and they say this is why they lack particular confidence with insights and intelligence. Having a better understanding of AI in general can help us use AI in specific ways.

CREATE CUSTOM REPORTING FOR CUSTOM OPTIMIZATION

You need transparent reporting that you can customize to align with your KPIs and brand goals. Your solutions then need to activate those learnings through automation and optimization, improving campaigns in real time - not next time.

USE A BIGGER VARIETY OF PLATFORMS AND DATA

If you can't activate across platforms, you're missing out. A partner-agnostic approach helps you find quality users, not just big audiences. Your solution should use multiple models and AI tools to go beyond your existing data, connecting quality and quantity data inputs. Taking a 'best-in-class' approach means you'll soon get top marks.

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PLANNING FOR THE CONSUMER JOURNEY
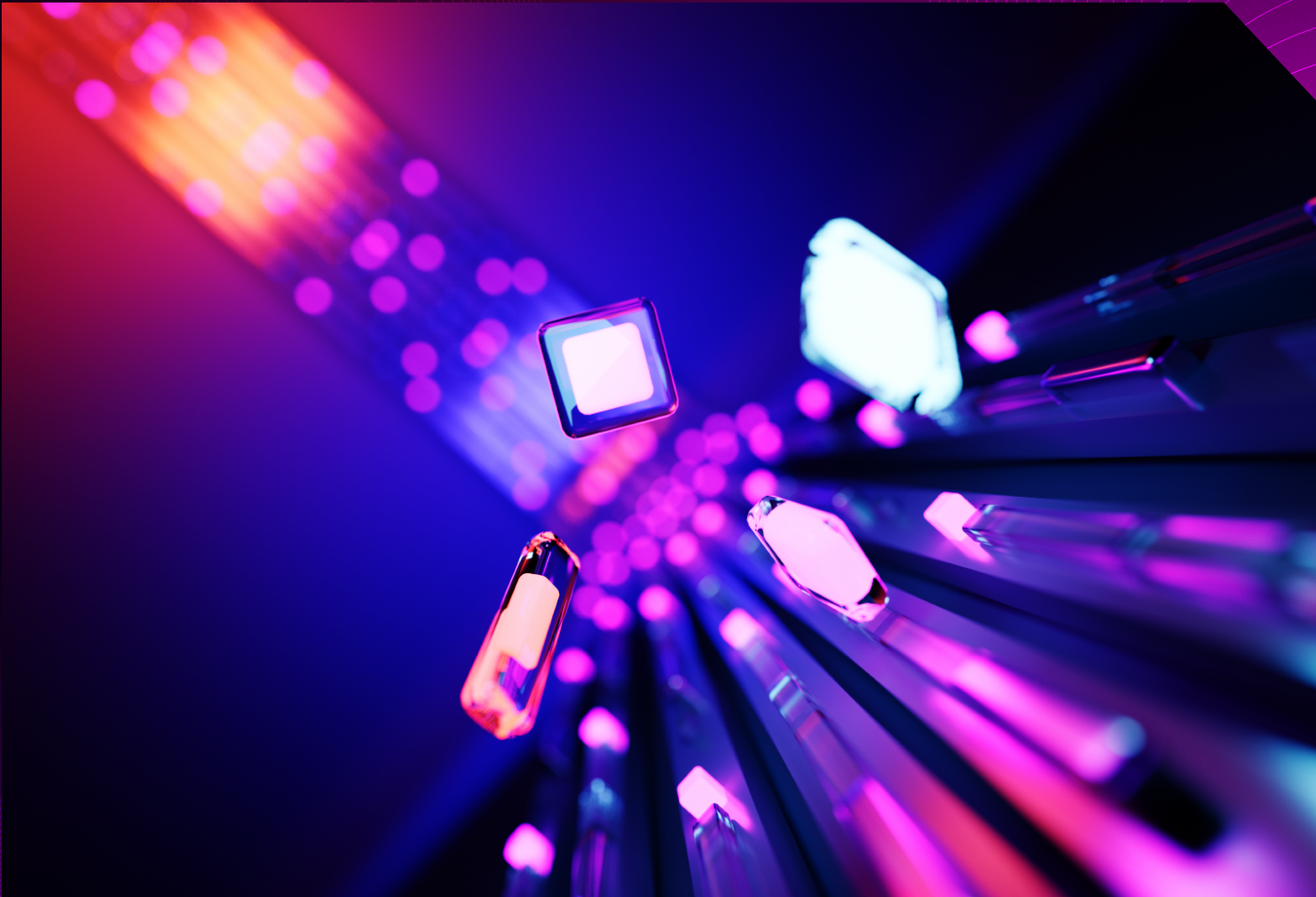
Even though every consumer is different, it doesn't phase AI. In fact, AI promises true customization, giving us a way to dynamically optimize strategies and our channel, platform and format mix.

" I'M CONFIDENT THAT OUR CREATIVE IS TAILORED TO EACH STAGE

Generally, marketers are most confident about the creative shown to consumers, with 44% feeling like it's optimized to each stage of the funnel. And when it comes to understanding how different channels drive performance, 43% of us are all smiles.

FUNNEL-BASED OPTIMIZATION
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

44%
OUR CREATIVE IS TAILORED TO OUR
TARGET AT EACH STAGE OF THE FUNNEL

44%
WE UNDERSTAND HOW EACH CHANNEL IN
OUR MIX DRIVES PERFORMANCE

43%
WE HAVE EFFECTIVE MEASUREMENT IN
PLACE FOR EVERY PART OF THE FUNNEL

42%
OUR BUDGET ALLOCATION AT EACH STAGE OF THE
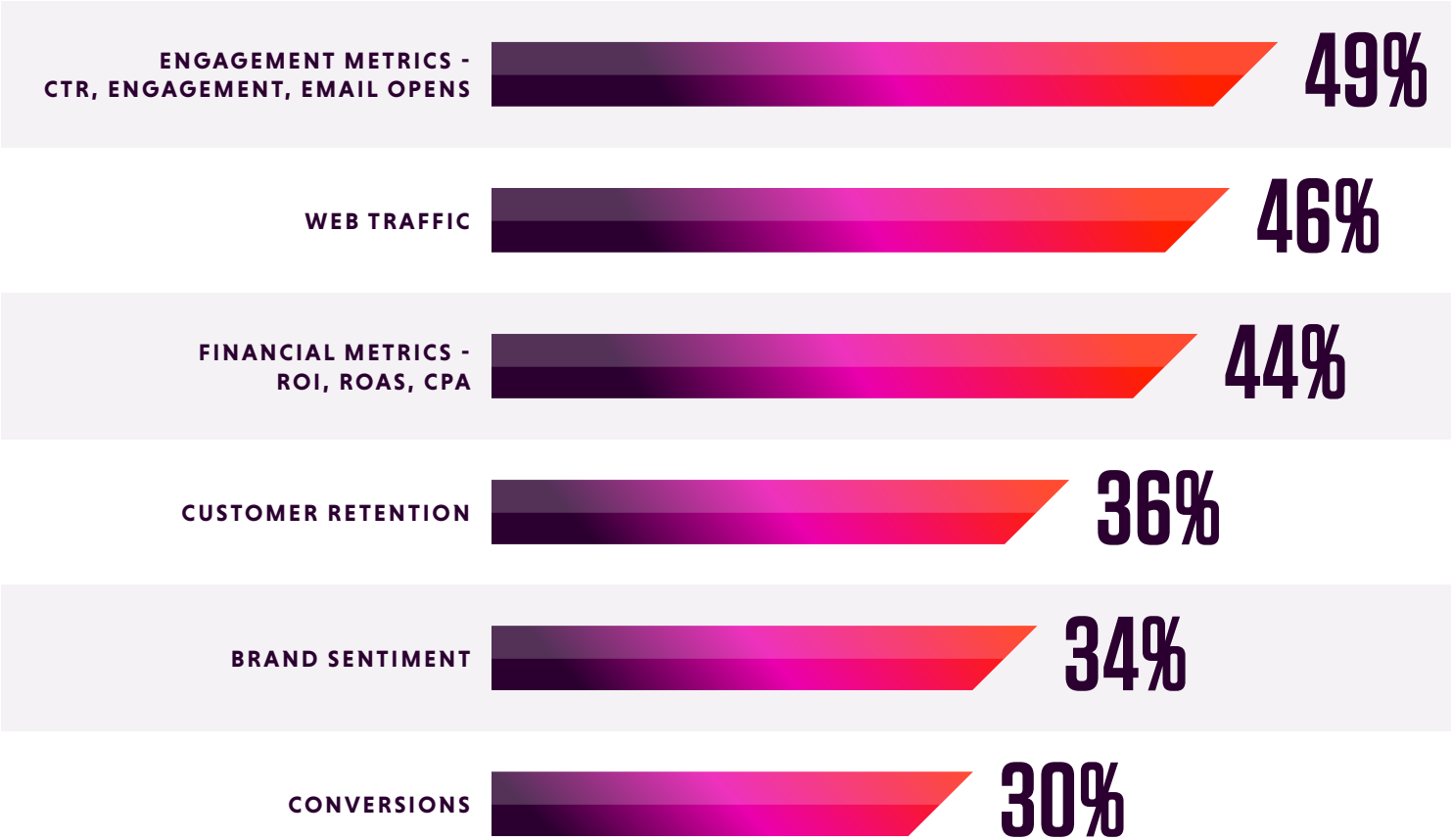FUNNEL IS IN BALANCE TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS

"MY MAIN METRIC MIGHT BE A MAIN HURDLE

49% of us use engagement metrics (like CTR, engagement and email opens) as our primary metric. While measurement and delivery has become more sophisticated than ever, our metrics have yet to catch up. And it's having a knock-on effect: just 43% of marketers strongly feel that they have effective measurement in place for every part of the funnel.

PRIMARY SUCCESS METRICS USED (PICK UP TO 3)

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS

Metric	Percentage
ENGAGEMENT METRICS – CTR, ENGAGEMENT, EMAIL OPENS	49%
WEB TRAFFIC	46%
FINANCIAL METRICS – ROI, ROAS, CPA	44%
CUSTOMER RETENTION	36%
BRAND SENTIMENT	34%
CONVERSIONS	30%

HOW TO CONFIDENTLY PLAN AND MEASURE THE CONSUMER JOURNEY

For marketers looking to build confidence in using AI for planning and channel optimization, it's time to think like a consumer. Here are some powerful things to consider:

73% OF US NOW PLAN FOR THE CONSUMER JOURNEY

When you better understand what your audience is watching, browsing and buying, you'll say goodbye to waste and hello to better performance. With a customized approach, you can hit your goals across those channels and modes, and optimize towards the outcomes that matter. (For those of us working like this, we're likely to use AI-based tools across 3 areas.)

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DATA

To achieve true customization, your solution ideally needs to connect first-party data into the model. At the very least, your solution should help you understand a range of digital browsing and context, TV and video viewership, store visitation, product preferences, and commerce media data, feeding all that information back into your models and supporting an omnichannel approach.

BRING HUMAN KNOW-HOW TOGETHER WITH AI

Just **46%** of marketers say they're confident in their team's ability to use AI tools to optimize channel selection for their campaigns. So while AI tools are powerful, there's no replacement for your critical thinking and expertise. Look for solutions that are transparent, letting you uncover insights, build audiences, and pull reports. AI with a human touch is the most effective kind of AI.

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CONCLUSION

Only 25% of marketers actually trust AI tools, and just 45% feel confident using them - yet 72% of us plan to adopt AI next year. The 27% difference is what we call 'the confidence gap'.

This gap highlights that AI is a double-edged sword. As the amount of solutions continues to grow, we actually feel less sure about what's out there and how to use it.

The good news? There are practical solutions we can put in place. Whether we're already embracing AI or turning a blind eye, we can all lean into the opportunity AI is giving our industry.

As we continue to learn about AI and explore what's possible, marketers should also:

TAP INTO TECH THAT'S BUILT FOR PURPOSE

PLUG IN CAMPAIGN MEASUREMENT

USE A BIGGER VARIETY OF PLATFORMS AND DATA

BRING HUMAN KNOW-HOW TOGETHER WITH AI

At MiQ, we'll be paying close attention to how the industry closes the confidence gap and moves along the AI confidence curve.

Stay tuned.