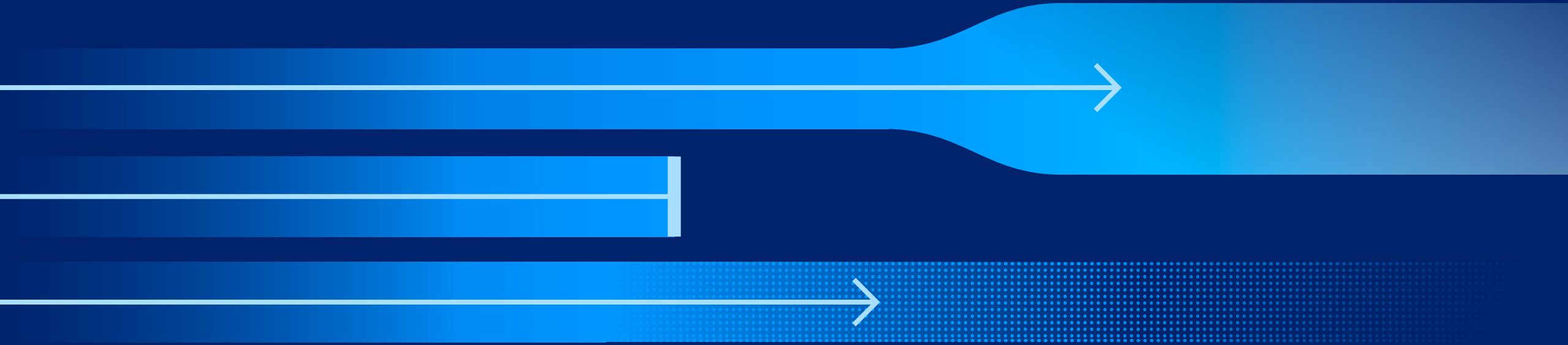


Finding the Right Communications Investment Mix in the AI Era

What communications leaders should stop, automate or double down on



Communications leaders face a new budget reality

Strategic planning assumption

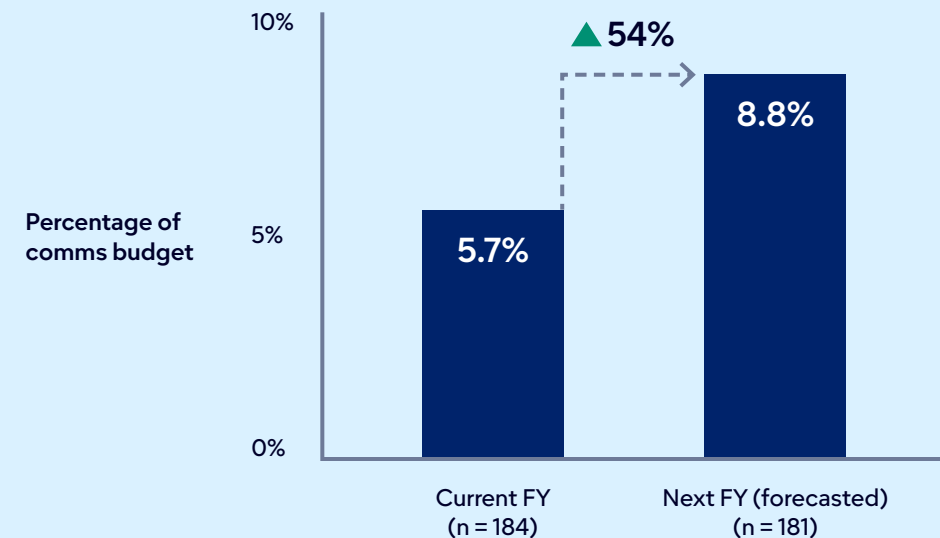
50% By 2030, 50% of heads of communications will review spend and outcomes quarterly, shifting away from annual budget reviews to scenario-driven resource allocation.

Why traditional budgeting no longer works

Communications budgets are under growing pressure as AI costs rise and expectations for measurable impact increase. With limited resources and expanding transformation mandates, communications leaders must move beyond incremental budgeting, eliminate low-value work and redirect investment toward AI, analytics, automation and other future-ready capabilities.

Change in communications budget allocated to GenAI

Mean percentages



n = 181-184 communications leaders. Base size varies by year.

Q: What percentage of your total communications budget is being allocated to generative AI (GenAI) spending in the current fiscal year and what do you expect it to be in the next fiscal year?

Source: 2026 Gartner CCO Survey, conducted October through December 2025 among 200 communications leaders in North America and Europe.

The survey was fielded through an independent third-party research provider

Introducing the cut-protect-invest framework

3 decisions drive better resource allocation

The cut-protect-invest framework translates zero-based prioritization into practical budget decisions for heads of communications. By systematically categorizing every activity and spend line, they can ensure resources are reallocated from legacy, low-impact areas to high-value, transformation-driving investments.

How to use the framework

1

Cut



Eliminate or radically reduce activities that no longer deliver strategic value, even if they are politically sensitive or have a long-standing tradition.

2

Protect



Safeguard resources for essential, differentiated and trust-building activities that are core to business outcomes.

3

Invest



Prioritize new funding for capabilities and tools that drive measurable transformation and productivity, especially in AI, analytics and automation.



Tip

To illustrate how the cut-protect-invest framework works in practice, the following slide shows scenarios on how heads of communications can apply these principles to real-world budget challenges.

Scenario 1

10% budget cut, stakeholder pushback

Mandated 10% cuts force tough calls as stakeholders resist letting go of legacy work

Cut



- “Zombie” projects
- Low-engagement events
- Underperforming agencies
- Obsolete roles

Protect



- Crisis communications
- Compliance-driven operations
- Core internal communications for change/ culture alignment

Invest



- Workflow automation
- Scalable communications technology
- Advanced analytics to show impact



Outcome



Streamlined communications processes



Increased resilience



Stronger advisory role



Maintain essential functions and demonstrate impact

Scenario 2

Flat budget, mandate for AI transformation

Stagnant budgets and AI disruption push leaders to redeploy resources to fund transformation

Cut



- Low-impact legacy content and recurring events
- Spend on manual internal communications
- Commoditized agency outputs

Protect



- Strategic measurement
- Executive visibility
- High-value stakeholder engagement, supporting transformation

Invest



- AI-powered content
- Integrated analytics
- Upskilling talent for business partnering and data capabilities



Outcome



Shift from legacy to future-ready work



Inform faster, data-driven decision making



Enable transformation without additional funding



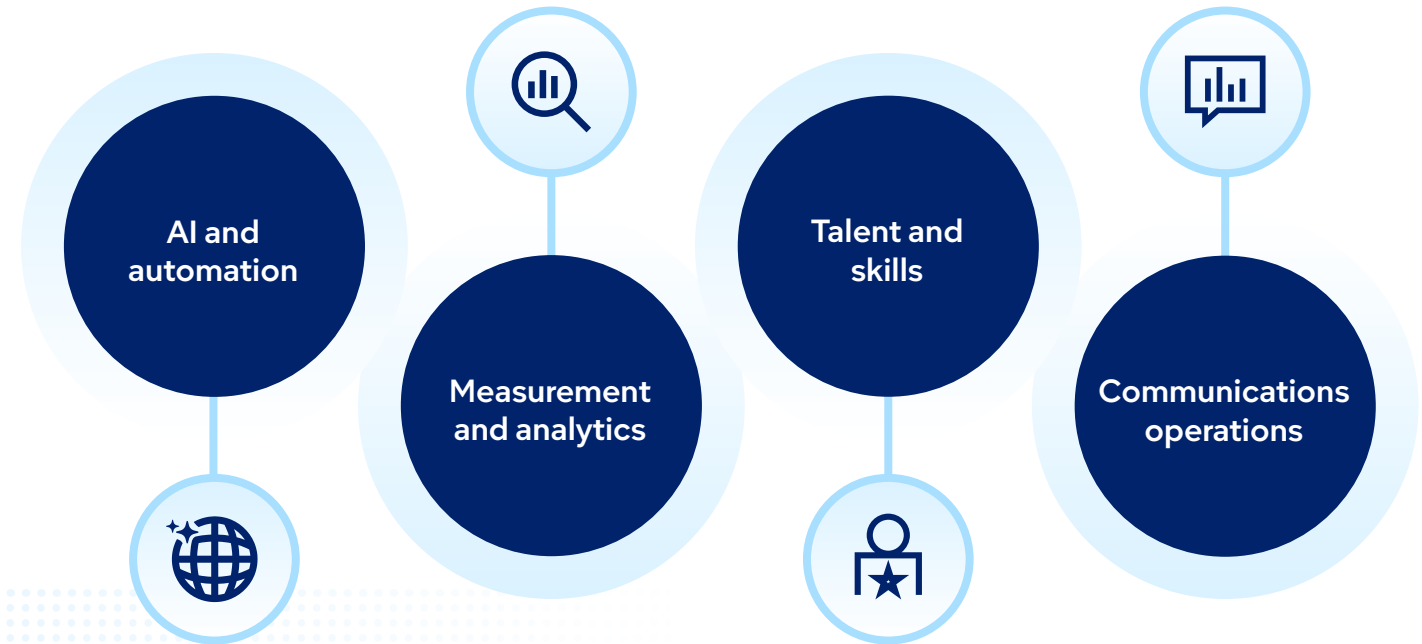
Boost recognition as a strategic partner and value center

Where communications leaders are redirecting investment

Focusing on productivity, measurement and future skills

Communications leaders are redirecting resources toward capabilities that improve productivity, demonstrate impact and support AI-enabled transformation.

Future competitiveness depends less on increasing budgets and more on reallocating resources toward AI, analytics, automation and future-ready talent.



Actionable, objective insights

Position your organization for success. Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools for communications leaders.

On-Demand Webinar

Transforming Communications for an AI-enabled World

Redesign the communications function to deliver higher value in an AI-enabled organization.



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