

# Develop an AI Strategic Roadmap

Marketing is a leader in generative AI adoption for organizations, but focusing on short-term results limits long-term growth. Use this research to evolve AI-enabled capabilities and leverage the human-machine relationship across three strategic planning horizons to reach marketing goals.



CMOs' most sought-after benefits of generative AI (GenAI) are productivity and cost reduction, followed by enhancing the customer experience.<sup>1</sup> While removing manual and mundane tasks is a win in the short term, CMOs need to build strategic roadmaps that address how they will optimize AI now, in the midterm and for the future.

Specifically, CMOs must identify and plan for how marketing will leverage customer data, empower employees and govern the work to harness the innovation and ROI that GenAI can bring. Without a roadmap for differentiation, most brands will arrive at the same end. Gartner has identified three stages of AI implementation at most organizations (see Figure 1):

- AI as a tool
- AI as an agent
- AI as an influencer

As organizations progress through each stage, the use of AI will become more automatic, and with the introduction of machine customers, AI will be more autonomous.

» Figure 1. Progression of AI Value





## AI as a Tool

In this phase, AI planning is company-centric, primarily focusing on internal productivity and operational efficiency. The majority of organizations are currently using AI as a tool. This reflects short-term planning horizons where an organization is in the early stages of AI adoption with a limited number of use cases, which are focused on reducing manual tasks.



## AI as an Agent

AI agents are autonomous or semiautonomous software entities that use AI techniques to perceive, make decisions, take actions and achieve goals in their digital or physical environments. In this phase, planning and AI evolution expand the scope of AI to become more customer-centric and to address use cases that support the delivery of better customer experiences and the unique value that a brand can provide. Early-AI-adopter organizations should start looking now at the midterm planning horizon of AI as an agent, as internal capabilities increase and customers become more comfortable with engaging with AI as part of the brand experience.



## AI as an Influencer

In this phase, AI is woven into the fabric of society (like a mobile phone). AI influences our decisions as businesses and customers. There is a reason AI as an influencer emerges in the long-term planning horizon. The technology isn't there yet. But this research will give you the vision and steps to prepare for a future where AI can lead decisions more autonomously, requiring less human oversight and asserting more influence.

## Short-Term Planning Horizon: Focus on Low-Risk Internal Use Cases

**Guiding principle:** AI is a tool.

**Business impact:** AI is supporting internal stakeholder productivity and experience.

**Strategy:** To prove the value of AI in the near term, work within your system. Evaluate internal applications with your leadership team by prioritizing use cases and performance objectives that support existing KPIs. These low-risk implementations also support the gradual culture change necessary for members of your team to adapt to engaging with the technology. How you guide your leaders to manage the newfound productivity of the team will be key to your long-term success.

**Operations:** The short-term AI as a tool horizon is a critical moment for upskilling employees to ensure they understand how to use AI to help make them more productive and find business efficiencies. Employees want to use AI, but the vast majority (88%) voice a need for more internal guidance. Only 7% of organizations provide comprehensive guidance across key AI topics (for example, how to leverage AI to enhance employees' workflows, when certain AI technologies will become available, etc.).<sup>2</sup>

**What you should do now to get ahead:** Productivity still ranks low on CEOs' top strategic business priorities heading into 2025.<sup>3</sup> To showcase marketing's value to the business, focus on the outcomes that new white-space marketing can fill because of productivity gains. Identify what improved productivity allows the organization to achieve, and ensure leaders and managers in the marketing organization are aligning newfound productivity to support those broader business initiatives.

**How you can mitigate risk:** Take ownership over how customer data is managed and how your organization communicates the use of AI to customers. Use-case-specific data quality and governance are critical components to success of AI applications now and will become more vital in the midterm planning horizon as AI agents begin to engage with each other to make decisions. There is a real risk of losing trust with customers at this moment. CMOs must take a proactive approach through content certification and transparency to help customers understand how their data is used to train AI models and how AI is used to engage them.

## Midterm Planning Horizon: Implement Guardrails to Shape Autonomous Interactions

**Guiding principle:** AI as an agent.

**Business impact:** AI begins to act on its own based on logic and reasoning. It helps find new insights for businesses, employees and customers. AI algorithms improve by helping customers achieve their goals through data analysis that simplifies decision-making.

**Strategy:** Focus on how you can uniquely serve priority customers. Identify target customer segments or personas to ensure GenAI is learning from and producing assets that are focused on the right customers. This is even more important as the volume of messaging and the precision of marketing increase.

**Operations:** AI can act on behalf of both customers and employees, but it still requires validation and a level of oversight by humans that will need to be accounted for in terms of processes and people.

**What you should do now to get ahead:** Marketing needs to evolve to focus on using AI agents to better meet customers where they are, providing information that helps them make decisions based on how brands can uniquely help them. Organizations that focus on the continuous development and refinement of data-driven customer personas will be more successful at using AI to deliver compelling experiences because customers' objectives and needs are a foundational part of their learning architecture.

**How you can mitigate risk:** Brands need to balance investments in brand differentiation to meet the needs of human customers while also investing in logic-based tools to drive the rule-driven decisions of machines. Don't get too far ahead of what the technology is proven to do. Measure your use cases against feasibility and value to ensure you are pacing your ambitions pragmatically.

## Long-Term Planning Horizon: Prepare for Machine-Influenced Decision Making

**Guiding principle:** AI is an influencer.

**Business impact:** CEOs tell us they believe up to 20% of their company's revenue will come from machine customers by 2030.<sup>3</sup> Last year, Gartner estimated that by 2025, there would be 15 billion connected products with the potential to behave as customers — to shop for services and supplies for themselves and their owners.<sup>1</sup>

These new AI-agent customers will influence buying decisions, act on humans' behalf and automate and augment tasks and purchases. They will be driven by the rules and logic programmed into them by their human owners, requiring organizations that own and interact with these agents to understand and address the requirements of both machine and human customers.

**Strategy:** CMOs need to rethink the brand-customer relationship to include a new category of customer that isn't human and can't be influenced, but is an influencer. For example, a machine customer could generate a written review about a product or service based on its experience with a brand. Machine customers will require marketers to bifurcate their strategies based on human versus machine target audiences. In the near future, they will be able to act autonomously on behalf of customers based on context, preferences and rules set by customers.

**Operations:** Work in partnership with product, sales, customer service, marketing technology, customer experience (CX) and data and analytics leaders to identify scenarios where machine customers can use your products and services.

**What you should do now to get ahead:** Invest in pilots of identified use cases and start with transactions that are low in complexity. Identify critical touchpoints in the customer journey where customers would prefer to delegate their time to a machine customer proxy to:

- Maximize time spent elsewhere
- Increase objectivity
- Remove emotion from decisions, or
- Reduce decision fatigue

At the same time, identify touchpoints in the customer journey where there is the opportunity to differentiate through delivering a human-certified experience.

**How you can mitigate risk:** The combined use of data along different customer journeys for human customers, machine customers and combinations of both will be essential for effective marketing outcomes. The speed of the purchase process by machine customers will make the constant monitoring and optimization of the customer journey and resulting marketing outcomes critical to success.

<sup>1</sup> **Gartner Generative AI 2024 Planning Survey.** This survey was conducted to examine generative AI's use case implementation and impact by business function. The survey was conducted from September through November 2023. In total, 822 business executives who lead corporate functions outside IT and who indicated will begin or continue to implement generative AI across the next 12 months qualified and participated. The research was collected via online surveys in English. The sample was equally split across the following eight corporate functions: finance; HR; marketing; sales; customer service; supply chain; procurement; and legal, risk and compliance. The sample mix by location was North America (n = 536), Europe (n = 176) and Asia/Pacific (n = 110). The sample mix by size was \$50 million to less than \$500 million (n = 119), \$500 million to less than \$1 billion (n = 129), \$1 billion to less than \$10 billion (n = 374) and \$10 billion or more (n = 200). Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

<sup>2</sup> **2023 Gartner Managing Organizational Reputation Survey.** This survey sought to explore reputation leaders' approaches, capabilities and performance, as well as employees' impact and thoughts on organizational reputation, including issues related to generative AI. It was conducted online from June to July 2023. The 993 respondents were from North America (n = 570), Western Europe (n = 231), Nordics (n = 106) and APAC (n = 86). Nine percent of respondents were reputation leaders who were responsible for reputation management initiatives. Fourteen percent of respondents were cross-functional leaders who regularly communicated to stakeholders about organizational reputation. Seventy-seven percent of respondents were full-time employees without specific reputation management or communications responsibilities. Respondents came from a variety of industries, including financial services (n = 151), healthcare providers (n = 149), manufacturing (n = 136), pharmaceuticals (n = 122), health insurance (n = 71), retail (n = 58), IT or high tech (n = 52), non-health insurance (n = 35), and others. Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

<sup>3</sup> **2024 Gartner CEO and Senior Business Executive Survey.** This survey was conducted to examine CEO and senior business executive views on current business issues, as well as some areas of technology agenda impact. The survey was conducted from July 2023 through December 2023, with questions about the period from 2023 through 2025. One-quarter of the survey sample was collected in July 2023, and three-quarters was collected from October through December 2023. In total, 416 actively employed CEOs and other senior executive business leaders qualified and participated. The research was collected via 356 online surveys and 60 telephone interviews. The sample mix by role was CEOs (n = 282); CFOs (n = 81); COOs or other C-level executives (n = 32); and chairs, presidents or board directors (n = 21). The sample mix by location was North America (n = 175), Europe (n = 94), Asia/Pacific (n = 93), Latin America (n = 41), the Middle East (n = 8) and South Africa (n = 5). The sample mix by size was \$50 million to less than \$250 million (n = 77), \$250 million to less than \$1 billion (n = 101), \$1 billion to less than \$10 billion (n = 166), and \$10 billion or more (n = 71). Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

# Actionable, objective insight

Position your marketing organization for success. Explore these additional resources and tools for marketing leaders:

Already a client?  
Get access to even more resources in your client portal. [Log In](#)

## Webinar

CMOs, Prepare Your Organization to Deliver on GenAI in 2025

Learn about the shifts CMOs must make to capitalize on GenAI's promise.

[Watch Now](#)



## Webinar

The Gartner Top Marketing Predictions for 2025: AI's Impact Creates New Mandates

Explore how CMOs can prepare for disruption and establish organizational readiness.

[Watch Now](#)



# Connect With Us

Get actionable, objective insight that drives smarter decisions and stronger performance on your mission-critical priorities. Contact us to become a client:

**U.S.:** 1 855 322 5484

**International:** +44 (0) 3300 296 946

[Become a Client](#)

**Learn more about Gartner for Marketing**

[gartner.com/en/marketing](https://gartner.com/en/marketing)

**Stay connected to the latest insight**

