Gartner

2026
Leadership Vision
for Tech CEOs

Introduction

Tech companies typically approach AI in two ways: creating AI products for customers and using AI internally to boost efficiency and productivity. These efforts often run separately, with distinct teams and strategies, and many CEOs treat them as independent initiatives. However, the most successful companies integrate both approaches, like the strands of DNA.

1.67x High-growth tech CEOs are 1.67x more likely to have integrated AI into both product/services and operations.

High-growth tech CEOs innovate in both products and operations, leveraging four key priorities:

- › **AI-native economics**
- › **Autonomous business models**
- › **Next-gen go-to-market (GTM) strategies**
- › **Defensible technology solutions**

This integrated strategy drives superior performance and sustainable growth.

DNA of AI-driven high growth

Product/services (External)

AI-native economics

Next-generation GTM

Autonomous business models
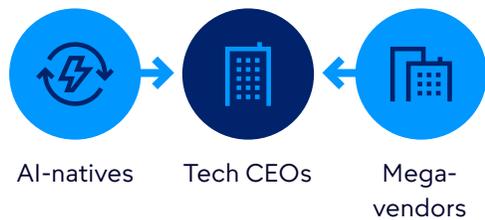
Defensible AI solutions

Operations (Internal)
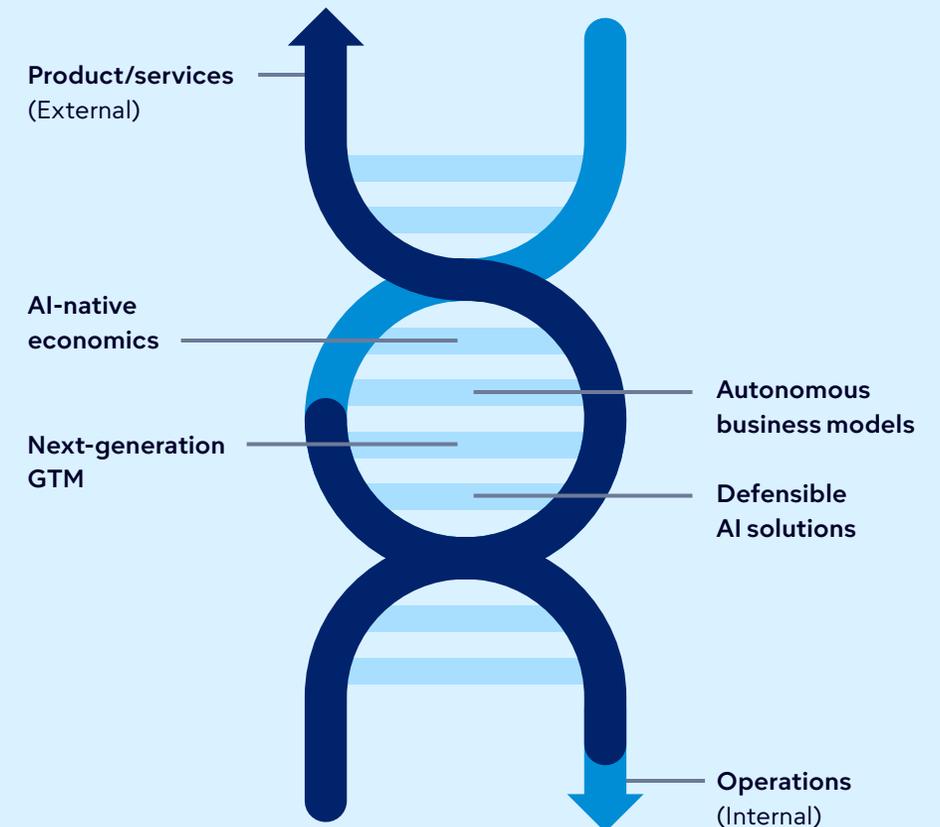
Source: Gartner

Key challenges threaten growth in 2026

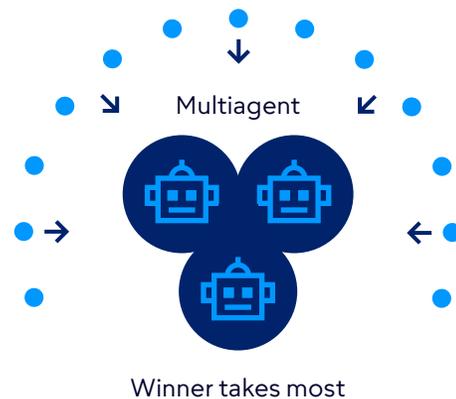Tech CEOs must manage four converging threats to tech CEO growth in 2026.

1

Tech CEOs **are squeezed between** ultra-agile AI-natives and resource-rich megavendors.
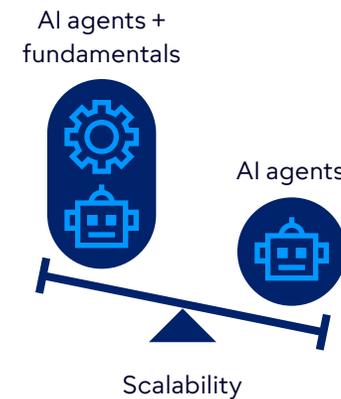
AI-natives   Tech CEOs   Mega-vendors

2

Multiagent systems **will render traditional models redundant,** leaving a brief window to capture share before consolidation.

Multiagent

Winner takes most

3
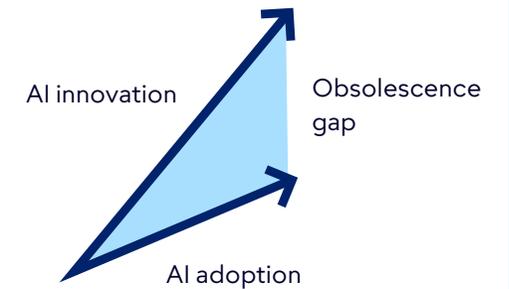
AI agents will make your GTM superhuman but **only if you have the fundamentals to avoid failing at scale.**
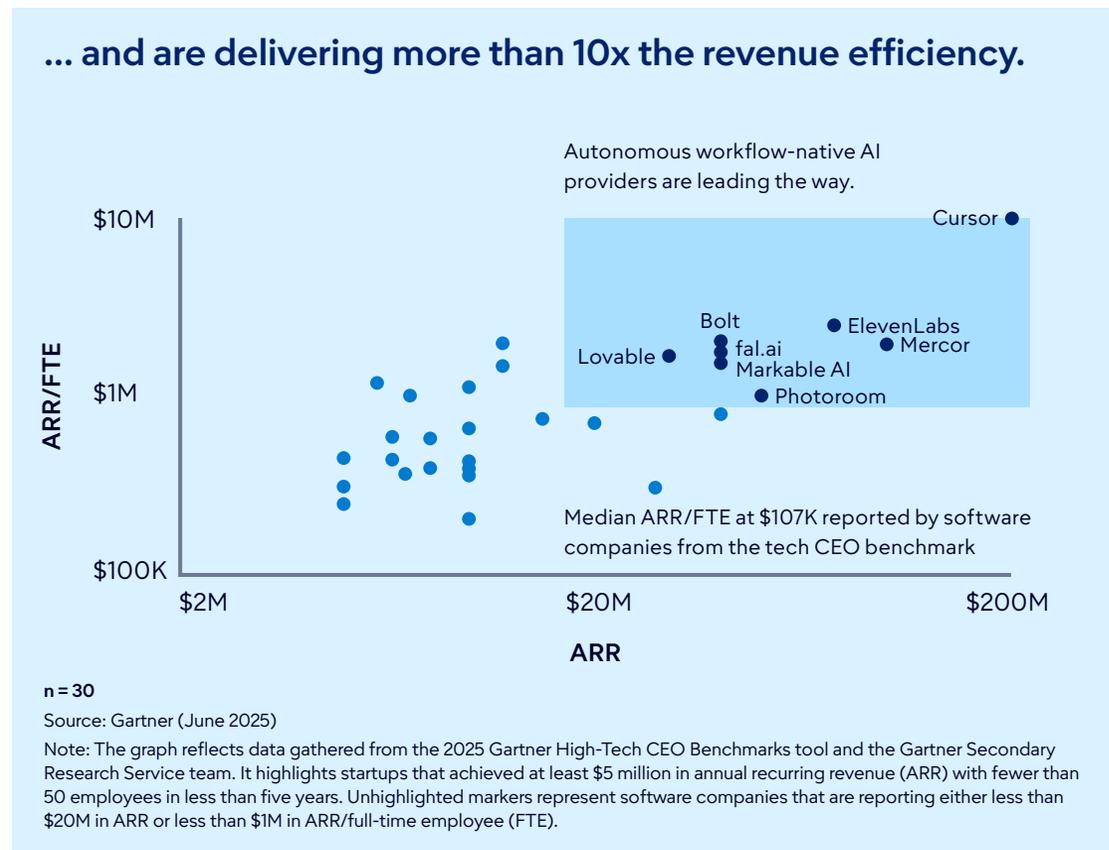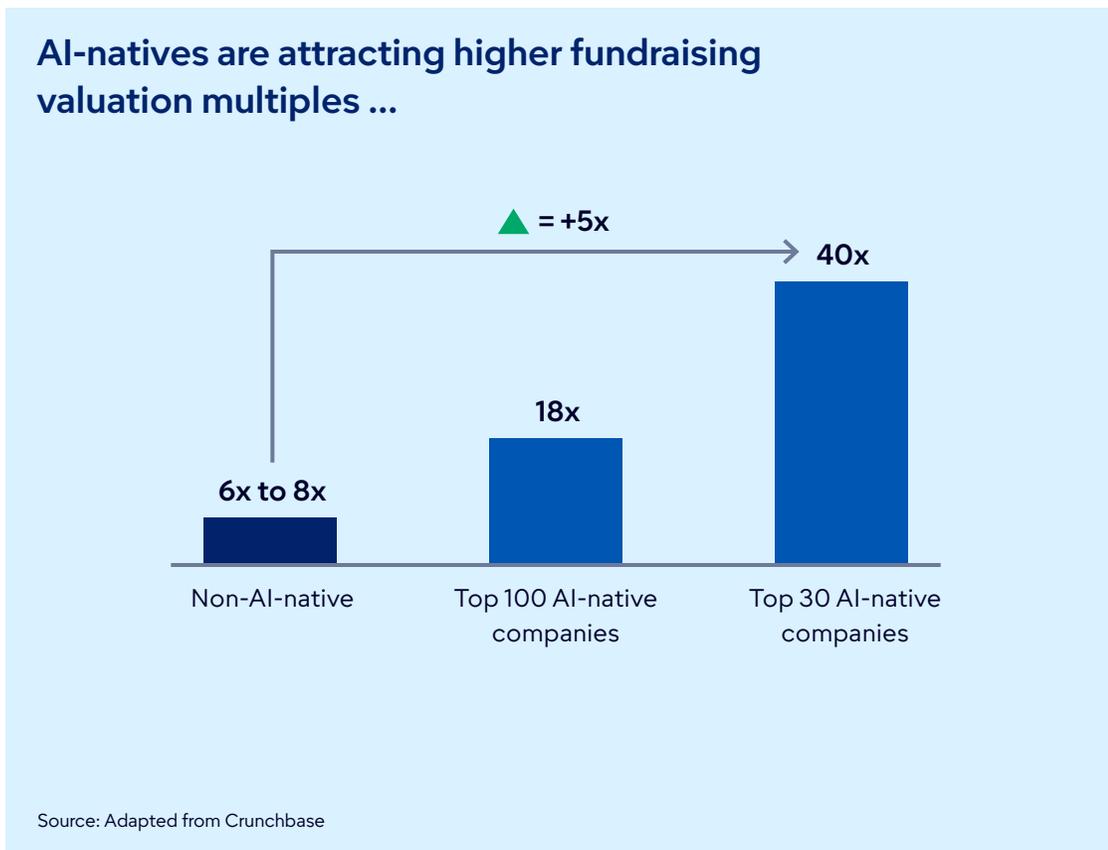
AI agents + fundamentals

AI agents

Scalability

4

An unusual gap between the pace of AI innovation and the pace of AI adoption **is creating conditions for obsolescence** before maturity.

AI innovation

Obsolescence gap

AI adoption

AI-native economics: Trends

AI-native startups are growing at an unprecedented pace, setting a new benchmark of $1M revenue per employee

AI-natives are attracting higher fundraising valuation multiples ...

▲ = +5x

40x

18x

6x to 8x

Non-AI-native

Top 100 AI-native companies

Top 30 AI-native companies

Source: Adapted from Crunchbase

... and are delivering more than 10x the revenue efficiency.

Autonomous workflow-native AI providers are leading the way.

$10M

Cursor ●

Bolt ● ElevenLabs
Lovable ● fal.ai ● Mercor
Markable AI ●
Photoroom ●

$1M

ARR/FTE

Median ARR/FTE at $107K reported by software companies from the tech CEO benchmark

$100K

$2M $20M $200M

ARR

n = 30

Source: Gartner (June 2025)

Note: The graph reflects data gathered from the 2025 Gartner High-Tech CEO Benchmarks tool and the Gartner Secondary Research Service team. It highlights startups that achieved at least $5 million in annual recurring revenue (ARR) with fewer than 50 employees in less than five years. Unhighlighted markers represent software companies that are reporting either less than $20M in ARR or less than $1M in ARR/full-time employee (FTE).

AI-native economics: Priorities

Tech CEOs must choose between two AI-native growth models

Velocity-first growth model

AI rocket ships that are prioritizing speed over unit economics

Characteristics: High subsidy-dependent, low switching costs, thin wrapper risk, fragile retention

~25%
Gross margin (many negative)

18 mos
Average to $100M ARR

Source: Bessemer Venture Partners State of AI 2025 (August 2025), Growth Unhinged 2025 SaaS Benchmarks Report by Kyle Poyar (November 2025)

Economics-first growth model

AI compounders that are balancing growth with more sustainable margins

Characteristics: Self-sustaining, strong PMF, strong workflow depth, durable retention

~60%
Gross margin (SaaS-adjacent)

4 yrs
$3M to $100M ARR

Source: Tanay Jaipuria The State of AI Gross Margins in 2025 (September 2025), High Alpha 2025 SaaS Benchmarks Report

Key
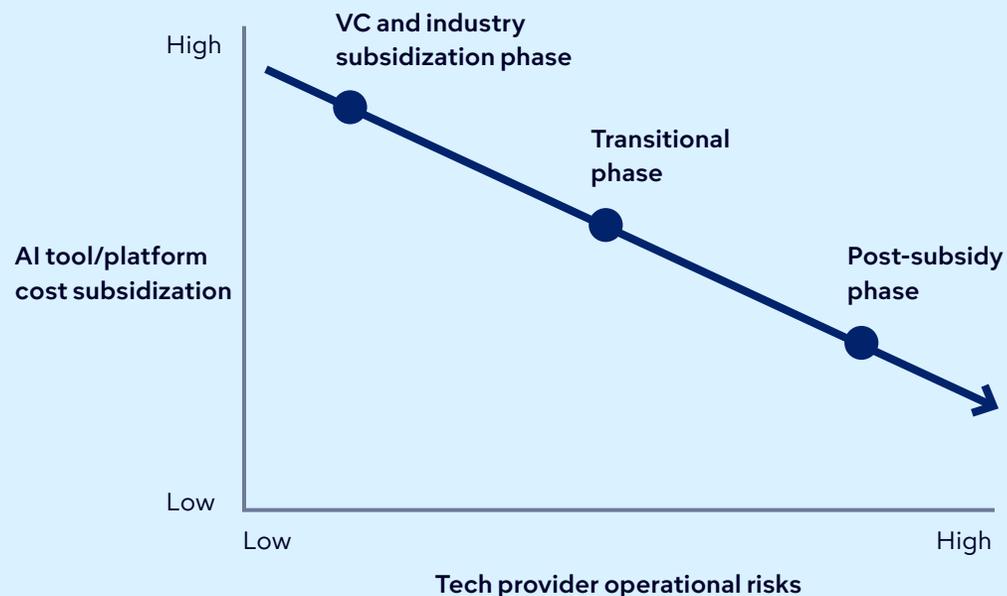
ARR
Annual recurring revenue

SaaS
Software as a service

PMF
Product-market fit
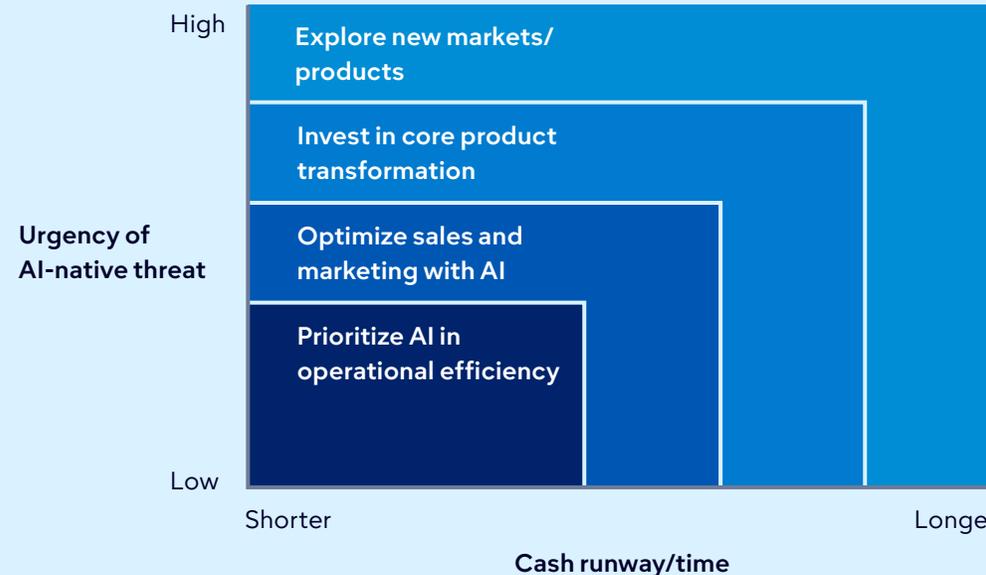
AI-native economics: Actions

Tech CEOs must engineer capital efficiency while controlling AI cost escalation

Tech CEOs relying on subsidized platforms must model cost increases and prepare business continuity plans …

VC and industry subsidization phase

Transitional phase

Post-subsidy phase

AI tool/platform cost subsidization

High

Low

Low — High

Tech provider operational risks

Source: Gartner

… while achieving $1M+ ARR per employee and investing in both product and operations.

High

Explore new markets/products

Invest in core product transformation

Urgency of AI-native threat

Optimize sales and marketing with AI

Prioritize AI in operational efficiency

Low

Shorter — Longer

Cash runway/time

Source: Gartner

❯ AI-native economics

Strategic guidance: Efficient scale via AI-native economics

Gartner positions

- AI-native startups are growing at an unprecedented pace, about 40% faster than traditional SaaS companies.

- Startups that built autonomous workflow-native AI that enables end-to-end execution are achieving an even more impressive $1.57 million in ARR/FTE.

- By 2026, more than 75% of venture capital funding for AI startups will be concentrated in companies that generate at least $1 million in ARR per employee.

- By 2028, software vendors that are not achieving at least $1 million in ARR per employee will realize significant declines in valuation.

- By 2030, 60% of growth-stage tech companies that do not heavily invest in both product and operational AI will be displaced by AI-native competitors and cease to exist.

40%

AI-native startups are growing at an unprecedented pace, about 40% faster than traditional SaaS companies.

Recommended Gartner insights
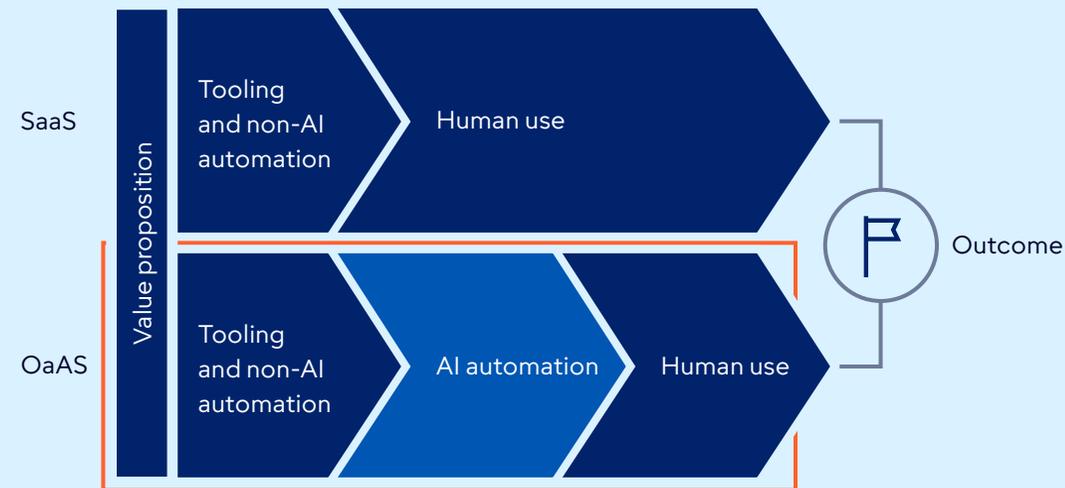
- AI Vendor Race: 10x Growth Efficiency: Trailblazers Set New Revenue Standard for Winning the AI Race

- Rising AI Costs Ahead: 3 Steps to Protect Margins as Disruption Looms

- AI Vendor Race: AI-Native Startups Command Top Investment Capital and Valuations

- AI-Native Leadership: The Blueprint for Disruptive Growth

- AI Vendor Race: The AI Investment Framework: How Growth Tech CEOs Win

Autonomous business models: Trends
Software and service models are being rewritten

Outcome as agentic solution (OaAS)
Shifts from tool use to AI automation

SaaS

Value proposition

Tooling and non-AI automation → Human use → Outcome

OaAS

Tooling and non-AI automation → AI automation → Human use → Outcome

Source: Gartner

Tech CEOs must redesign for agent-first business models by transforming pricing, delivery and service architectures, assuming agent customers that operate continuously, negotiate in milliseconds and pay per micro-outcome.

- OaAS collapses software categories, rewriting service models.
- Control shifts from system of record to systems of action.
- OaAS automates decisions, not just tasks.
- Pricing decouples from usage — charge for outcomes, not consumption.

$700B
The stakes are high. We expect OaAS to capture up to $700B of combined software and services spending by 2028.

Autonomous business models: Priorities

# Tech CEOs must prepare for the agent-to-agent economy

Your next customer won't be human.

Tech providers currently build for humans — assuming people evaluate, decide and pay. Every payment system, UX and pricing model is designed with a person on one side of the transaction. But with AI agent customers, this model breaks.

Agent customers change tech economics: AI agents work faster, cheaper and around the clock. When agents can do in seconds what humans do in hours, adoption becomes essential. Agent-to-agent commerce removes human bottlenecks, accelerating execution and boosting global GDP.

We foresee a fractal ecosystem of agents interacting and exchanging value in real time — a fast-evolving landscape full of opportunity for tech CEOs in infrastructure and applications.

AI agent capabilities that make the agent-to-agent economy inevitable

Can negotiate

Can discover

Can trust

Can think

AI agents

Can transact
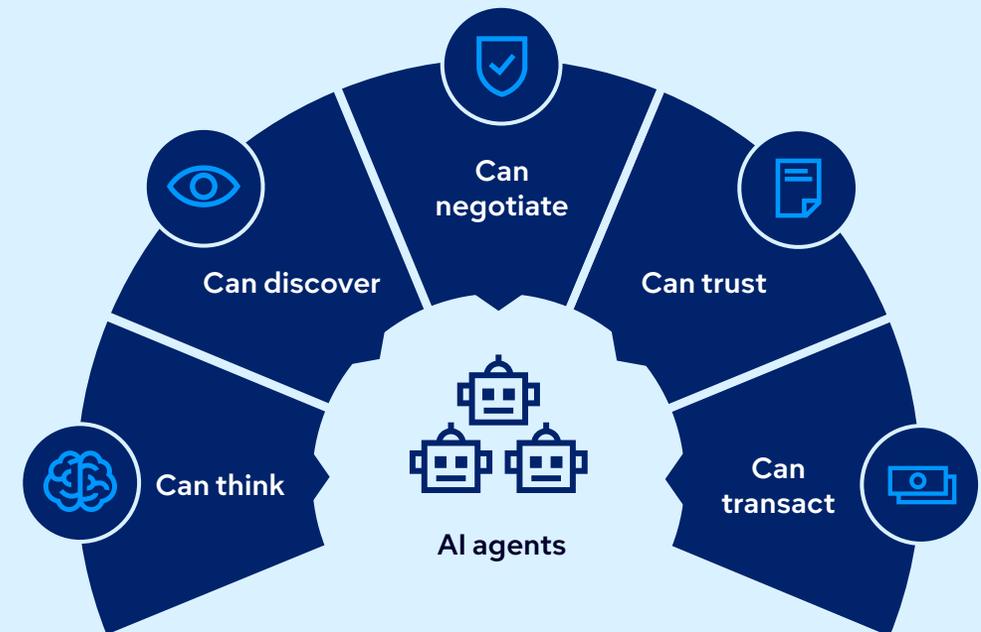
Source: Gartner

Autonomous business models: Actions

Prepare for new autonomous business models that create entirely new markets and revenue streams

OaAS

- Adapt pricing/packaging
- Enable transparent usage

Find task-centric opportunities

+

Launch customer pilots

Agent-to-agent economy

Transform pricing, delivery and service architectures for millisecond-duration outcomes

Build critical infrastructure

or

Develop agent applications

Agent sprawl will create enterprise chaos without orchestration infrastructure — multiagent orchestration will be a major battleground in 2026.

Autonomous business models
Strategic guidance: Transition to agent-native models

Gartner positions

- By 2028, SaaS providers with pricing models tied to measurable outcomes will achieve a 30% higher annual revenue growth rate.

- By 2030, 50% of tech CEOs will routinely engage with agentic customers, forcing tech CEOs to redesign pricing models, sales processes and customer experiences for agent customers who can evaluate and negotiate in milliseconds as opposed to weeks and months.

- Through 2030, early adopters building agent-native business models will capture up to 5x more revenue growth over human-only competitors through agent-to-agent commerce and market share displacement.

- By 2035, the first Fortune 500 company will operate with less than 1,000 human employees.

30%
By 2028, SaaS providers with pricing models tied to measurable outcomes will achieve a 30% higher annual revenue growth rate.

Recommended Gartner insights

- Agent-to-Agent Economy: Position Now for Autonomous Business Shift

- Innovation Insight: Outcome-as-Agentic-Solution Commercializes AI Outcomes

- Tech FutureSight: Outcome-as-Agentic-Solution Upends Revenue by Collapsing Software and Services

- Agentic AI Reshapes Software and Services Market Share, Margin and Risk

- Emerging Tech: AI Vendor Race — AI Gateways Usher in the Agent-to-Agent Economy

Next-gen GTM strategies: Trends

Wave 3 GTM: From handoffs to hands-off

Wave 1
The analog era

1990 to 2004

- Rainmakers and rolodexes
- "Let's do lunch!"
- Middle of funnel: Handshakes
- Measurement: Activity

Wave 2
The automation era

2005 to 2024

- Content and clicks
- "Book a demo!"
- Middle of funnel: Handoffs
- Measurement: Leads

Wave 3
The agentic era

2025+

- "Ask me anything!"
- Middle of funnel: Hands-off
- Measurement: Outcomes

AI sales development representatives (SDRs) and concierge agents are rewriting the rules for how tech companies sell.

> Next-gen GTM strategies: Priorities

Architect for agentic qualification

**Critical warning —
don't deploy if:**

→ **Too early**

→ **Too simple**

→ **Too complex**

Wave 3 GTM

Replace manual handoffs with agents that qualify through conversation.

**Demand
creation**

**Demand
capture and
nurture**

SDR agents profile
and identify targets,
initiate outreach,
and nurture and
funnel leads to
concierge agents.

**Qualification
and discovery**

Concierge agents
qualify prospects
through questions
and deliver
sales-qualified
opportunities and
digital sales rooms
to sales reps.

**Negotiation
and closing**

**Sales focuses on
closing — freed from
qualification, discovery
and buyer education.**

Source: Gartner

Next-gen GTM strategies: Actions

Architecting the agentic GTM motion

The agentic GTM fit curve

Positive

Impact on unit economics

The sweet spot
(Unlocks scale by automating qualification and education)

The friction trap
(Adds unnecessary barriers to intuitive paths)

The trust gap
(Automating high-stakes trust destroys economics)

Negative

Simple and self-serve

Consultative motions
(Sales rep involvement)

Hypercomplex and custom

Sales motion complexity

Source: Gartner

❯ Next-gen GTM strategies

Strategic guidance: Transform to Wave 3 GTM execution

Gartner positions

- AI concierge agents will drive an increase in the use of intelligent chat by tech CEOs from 38% in 2025 to over 80% by 2029.

- By 2027, 95% of sellers' research workflows will begin with AI, up from less than 20% in 2024.

- Continued rapid adoption of answer engines and zero-click searching puts tech CEOs who don't evolve their websites in the next six to 12 months at risk of their websites becoming obsolete demand generation channels.

- By 2030, AI agents will control 67% of B2B tech purchases, replacing storytelling with machine-readable, structured data in marketing.

- By 2028, B2B tech buying journeys will be orchestrated through AI microcampaigns — requiring demand generation leaders to adopt an "AI-first" content strategy that delivers modular, semantically rich assets optimized for both human buyers and machines.
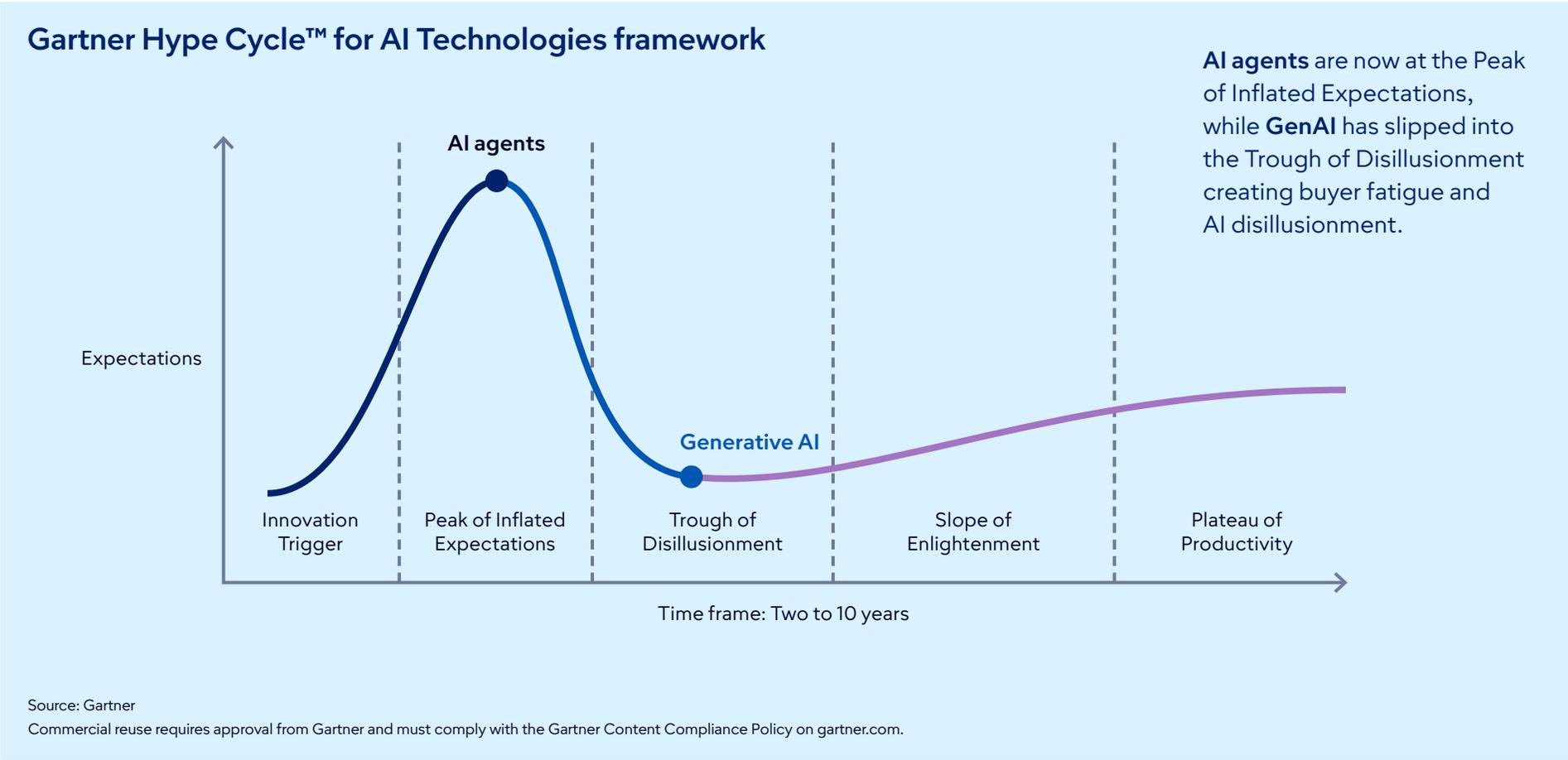
95%

By 2027, 95% of sellers' research workflows will begin with AI, up from less than 20% in 2024.

Recommended Gartner insights

- Conversational AI Is the Death Knell for Traditional Lead Qualification

- Predicts 2030: Mass AI Adoption Shatters Business Playbooks, Writing New Growth Rules

- AI Vendor Race: The Next-Generation GTM Model Using Agentic AI to Drive Growth

- Innovation Insight: AI SDR Agents for Inbound and Outbound Sales Communication

- AI Vendor Race: Crush the Competition: Differentiate With 4 Dimensions in Conversational AI

- Content Experience: Amplify Engagement With AI-Enabled Microcampaigns
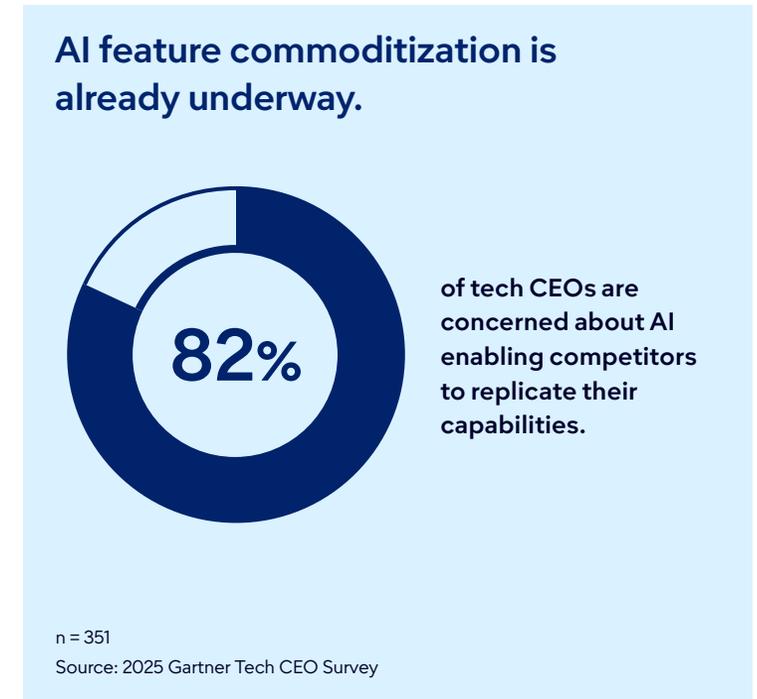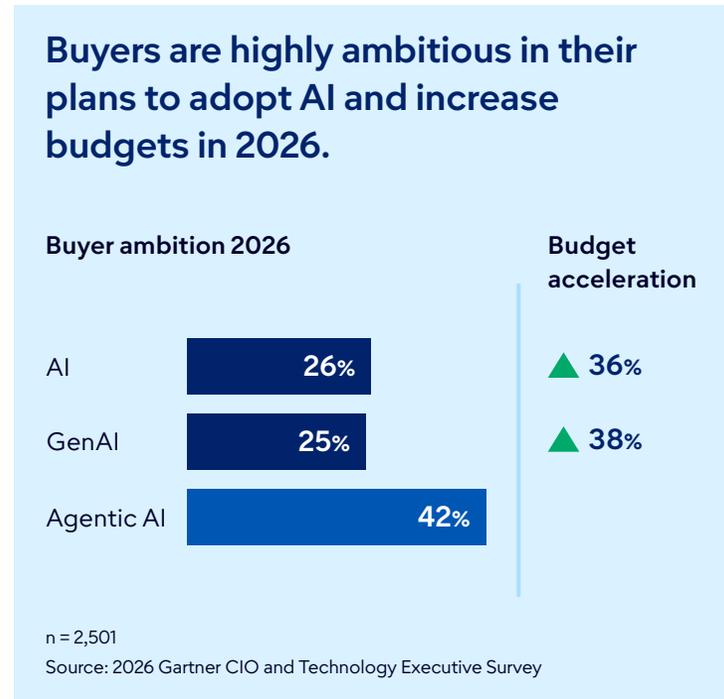
Defensible technology solutions: Trends

AI pace of innovation is faster than pace of adoption

Gartner Hype Cycle™ for AI Technologies framework

AI agents are now at the Peak of Inflated Expectations, while **GenAI** has slipped into the Trough of Disillusionment creating buyer fatigue and AI disillusionment.

AI agents

Expectations

Generative AI

Innovation Trigger | Peak of Inflated Expectations | Trough of Disillusionment | Slope of Enlightenment | Plateau of Productivity

Time frame: Two to 10 years

Source: Gartner
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Defensible technology solutions: Priorities

Despite buyer fatigue and AI disillusionment, tech CEOs must accelerate investment in AI or risk obsolescence

Major platforms are absorbing domain-specific AI capabilities that directly threaten specialized startups.

Underperforming tech CEOs think they have been overindexing on AI due to AI hype.

High-growth AI conviction

▲ 2.2x

Others   AI

n = 351
Source: 2025 Gartner Tech CEO Survey

Buyers are highly ambitious in their plans to adopt AI and increase budgets in 2026.

Buyer ambition 2026

		Budget acceleration
AI	26%	▲ 36%
GenAI	25%	▲ 38%
Agentic AI	42%	

n = 2,501
Source: 2026 Gartner CIO and Technology Executive Survey

AI feature commoditization is already underway.

82% of tech CEOs are concerned about AI enabling competitors to replicate their capabilities.

n = 351
Source: 2025 Gartner Tech CEO Survey

Defensible technology solutions: Actions

Overcoming AI obsolescence with a two-pronged approach

Gartner Agentic Compass
Benchmark capabilities against enterprise needs.

Your use case
Healthcare medical literature autonomous flow

- 25th percentile
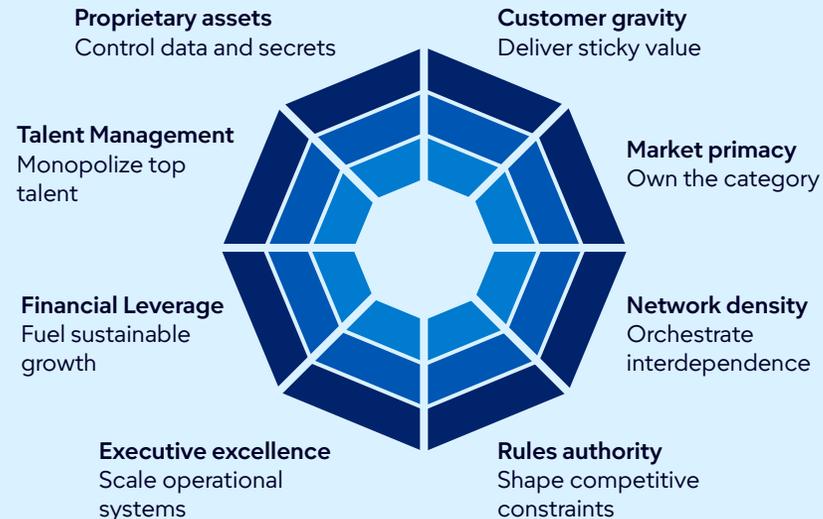- 50th percentile
- 75th percentile

Complexity
Oversight
Personalization
Volatility
Data richness
Criticality
Collaboration

Source: Gartner

Gartner MoatMap
Build and compound moats across multiple dimensions.

- Sustainable
- Transitional
- Temporary

Proprietary assets
Control data and secrets

Customer gravity
Deliver sticky value

Talent Management
Monopolize top talent

Market primacy
Own the category

Financial Leverage
Fuel sustainable growth

Network density
Orchestrate interdependence

Executive excellence
Scale operational systems

Rules authority
Shape competitive constraints

Source: Gartner

90%

Within 18 to 24 months, 90% of vertical and point-solution AI startups will be obsolete.

❯ Defensible technology solutions

Strategic guidance: Combating AI obsolescence

Gartner positions

- Within 18 to 24 months, the majority of domain-specific "AI for X" solutions currently being built will face obsolescence.

- The commoditization rate has increased, meaning an amazing feature built today can become a commodity in days, not years.

- Market leaders do not stumble into competitive moat; they systematically construct advantages across multiple dimensions to innovate value, dominate markets and operate at scale, creating exponential difficulty for rivals.

- AI-accelerated commoditization will kill 90% of startups that bet solely on product differentiation.

- For startups currently operating between Seed and Series A funding rounds, their next 12 months must be dedicated to moving at least one dimension on the Gartner MoatMap from Temporary to Transitional. This demonstration of momentum toward a sustainable moat is crucial, as Series A investors will fund momentum toward a moat, not solely revenue growth.

90%
**AI-accelerated commoditization will kill 90% of startups that bet solely on product differentiation.**

Recommended Gartner insights

- Positioning Domain AI Agents: 18 Months to Build a Moat Before Obsolescence

- Innovation Insight: Use the Gartner Agentic Compass for Better Business Outcomes

- MoatMap: The Survival Guide to Building Competitive Advantage for Tech CEOs

- Use Gartner's Agentic Compass for Effective Product Leadership

- Hype Cycle for Artificial Intelligence, 2025

Tech CEOs' imperative for 2026: Build AI-driven high growth into their company DNA

The four priorities in this vision are not to be implemented sequentially — they compound together. AI-native economics fund the transition to agent-native autonomous business models. Agent-native models enable third-wave GTM. Defensible advantages protect the value created by the first three and the investment in AI technology.

Tech CEOs who execute across all four priorities will define the next era of enterprise software and services.

DNA of AI-driven growth

Source: Gartner
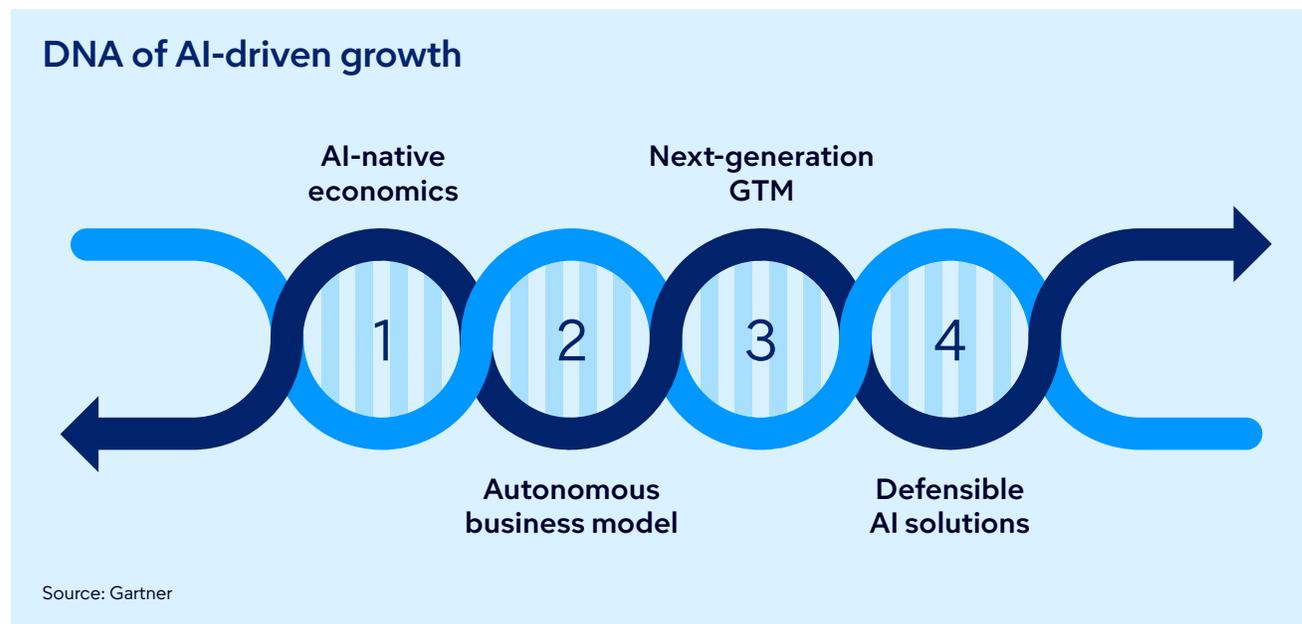
Actionable, objective insights

Explore these additional complimentary resources and tools
for high-growth tech CEOs:

Webinar

Leadership Vision for Tech CEOs: How to
Build AI-Driven Growth for 2026

Learn how to embed AI into your company's DNA.

Watch Now

Insights

AI Vendor Race

Win the AI race with agility and foresight.

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Insights

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