

WARC



Whitepaper

The Marketing Equalizer:

Leveraging AI for mid-market growth

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Report summary

Mid-market companies—with anywhere from 10 to 499 employees—are a vital component of the business world, but they are often overlooked.

Over the last five years, mid-market marketers have faced challenges ranging from COVID-19 to suppressed customer demand and sky-rocketing costs. The rate of change in the marketing landscape, including channel fragmentation, volatile platform algorithm changes, and signal loss from cookie deprecation, hasn't made life any easier.

In this report, Intuit Mailchimp and WARC examine how mid-market marketing organizations are responding. How are marketing teams structured? What marketing channels are being adopted? How are marketers leveraging AI?

The picture that emerges is one of marketing teams in transition.

With smaller staffs and budgets and myriad tasks on their plate, mid-market marketers have high hopes that AI can make them more competitive. But they also know they need to upskill their AI literacy.

This report gives mid-market marketers insights into how they compare with their peers in terms of marketing investment, channel usage and martech priorities, and introduces a framework of guidance on how to leverage AI as a great "equalizer" that makes it possible to do more with less by augmenting their marketing output and performance.

Methodology

This paper is based on a panel-sample online survey conducted by WARC on behalf of Mailchimp from January 23 to February 11, 2025.

The survey consisted of 1,205 respondents in the US (304), UK (301), Canada (300), Australia (150) and New Zealand (150). Respondents worked in marketing or advertising functions for companies with 10-499 employees and represented a mix of B2C (54%) and B2B (46%). The margin of error is +/- 3%, at a 95% confidence level.

In parallel, we conducted nine interviews with subject matter experts and thirteen interviews with marketing leaders.

Experts interviewed



Jose Miguel Belloso

Principal Product Marketing Manager
AI, Intuit Mailchimp



Oliver Feldwick

Chief Innovation Officer
T&P



Caroline Giegerich

VP
AI & Marketing Innovation,
IAB



James Hurman

Founder / Co-founder
Previously Unavailable, Tracksuit,
Toothcrush and Storytech



Nicole Leffer

CMO
AI Advisor,
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Javier Moral

CEO
Disruptivos



MaryAnn Pfeiffer

Founder
108 Degrees Digital Marketing



Jack Tam

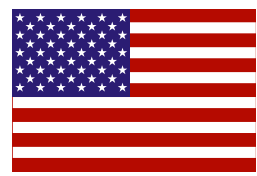
SVP
Engineering,
Intuit Mailchimp



David Tiltman

SVP
LIONS Intelligence

Marketing leaders interviewed



Chief Marketing Officer, Digital App / SaaS, United States

Marketing Director, E-commerce, United States

VP of Commercial, E-commerce, United States



Chief Marketing Officer, Digital App / SaaS, Canada

Director of Marketing, E-commerce, Canada

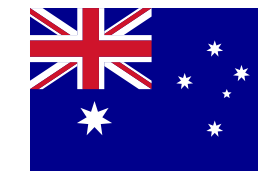
Director of Marketing and Communication, Nonprofit, Canada



Head of E-commerce, E-commerce, UK

Head of Marketing, Professional Services, UK

Marketing Director, Digital App / SaaS, UK



Chief Digital Officer, Finance / Insurance, Australia

Global Head of Marketing Digital App / SaaS, Australia

Head of Marketing, Publishing, Australia



Marketing Director, Digital App / SaaS, Spain

The views, information and opinions expressed in this whitepaper are those of the people interviewed and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of Intuit, Mailchimp or any of its cornerstone brands or employees. The primary purpose of this whitepaper is to educate and inform. This whitepaper does not constitute financial or other professional advice or services. Any future predictions are based on current data and subject to change. Survey findings are based on a specific sample and may not be universally applicable.

Introduction by WARC



Alexis Wolf

Head of Advisory,
WARC

Ask any marketer if they're overwhelmed, and the answer is usually yes. Ask one at a smaller company, and the answer is certainly yes.

Mid-market organizations are pivotal to our economies, but their marketing realities often look very different from those of larger enterprises. According to Marketing's Law of Double Jeopardy, smaller brands face a dual disadvantage: they have fewer customers and lower brand loyalty. Bigger brands enjoy scale, familiarity, and data advantages that theoretically make marketing efficiency and effectiveness easier to achieve.

On top of that, smaller teams juggle more responsibilities with fewer resources, while still being expected to deliver the same level of sophistication, creativity, and measurable impact.

Even with these odds seemingly stacked against them, these organizations are resilient and ambitious to win in marketing. According

to Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Insights, almost half of all small businesses believe what would most benefit their business in the near term is a successful marketing campaign.

Against that backdrop, artificial intelligence has emerged as a potential equalizer. In this study we found that nearly every mid-market marketer believes AI will improve marketing effectiveness. Yet it was also the skill set most lacking inside marketing teams. This tension between optimism and readiness defines where the mid-market stands today: confident in the potential of AI, but still searching for practical routes to apply it.

It's important to note that tools alone don't build brands: people do. And doing more, faster doesn't always mean better. Marketing effectiveness has to be rooted in intelligent people deploying a smart strategy. But, when used properly, technology can augment stages of that process. For mid-market teams specifically, AI offers a way to turn their constraints into advantages. It can unlock

a small team's superpower of agility, turn scattered data into clarity, and transform a lack of bandwidth into bigger, more impactful bets.

This is what led WARC and Intuit Mailchimp to create The Marketing Equalizer. Drawing on a global survey of marketers and in-depth conversations with marketing and AI leaders, this report explores the state of marketing in the mid-market, the need for more effective marketing plans, and how technology can help these organizations compete on new terms.

This report serves as both a mirror and a roadmap: a reflection of where the mid-market stands today, and a practical guide to how AI and martech can help close the distance between ambition and advantage.

We explore this and more in the following pages. We hope you find this report useful in achieving greater marketing impact.

Foreword from Mailchimp



Jillian Ryan

Senior Manager,
Content Marketing Strategy,
Intuit Mailchimp

When a mid-market company talks about growth, it's not just an abstract goal—it's an absolute imperative. These businesses, often the unsung heroes of their economies, sit right in that sweet spot: too big to rely on scrappy startup tactics, but too small to compete with the behemoth budgets of large enterprises. This means they constantly have to figure out how to do more with less.

That challenge has only been magnified over the last few years. Macroeconomic headwinds like rising costs and suppressed customer demand put constant pressure on marketing organizations already struggling with lean teams and limited specialist headcount. For marketers trying to drive revenue, this means every single dollar, every hour of effort, and every strategic choice absolutely must count. They've already streamlined their toolkits, leaning heavily on accessible martech

solutions. Now, the smart ones are looking for the next gear.

We're at a pivotal moment. Marketing practices—from optimizing channel mix to retaining the right talent—are only getting more complex. Our research for this report, conducted with WARC, shows that mid-market marketers are acutely aware of one major gap in their arsenal: AI literacy and capability.

The good news? They're also overwhelmingly optimistic about AI's potential, with 98% believing it will improve marketing effectiveness. They see it as the equalizer that finally lets one person do the work of five, freeing up limited time for the strategic, high-value tasks that actually move the needle.

But this transition isn't automatic. AI isn't a silver bullet; it's a powerful tool that must serve a solid strategy. That's why this report is essential reading.

Inside, you'll see exactly how your mid-market marketing peers are investing—from their surprisingly heavy commitment to marketing budgets, especially in B2B, to their reliance on owned channels like email and SMS. More importantly, you'll get a clear, four-step roadmap for AI adoption. It breaks down the process from diagnosing your biggest pain points to strategically implementing AI so that it drives effectiveness, not just efficiency.

It's time to stop worrying about the talent gaps and limited bandwidth. The digital transformation you need to unlock new growth is happening now, and AI is becoming the most critical competitive edge. For mid-market marketers, speed is a huge advantage, and those who delay risk ceding ground to faster-moving competitors.

Let's dive in.

Key takeaways by chapter

1 The resilient mid-market: Overcoming challenges and pursuing growth

Economic pressures are compounding the systemic issues faced by mid-market companies.

Smaller marketing departments mean organizations often lack specialists in core disciplines. They also struggle to recruit talent with the right know-how.

Expertise in AI is identified as the biggest capability gap.

2 The mid-market's marketing playbook: What's working now

Channel diversification is low. Across both paid and owned media, the average mid-market company uses just 4.85 channels.

Short-term goals appear to drive paid media selection, with search, social, and retail media dominating.

Owned channels, including email and SMS, are critical to building momentum.

3 Martech and AI: The powerhouse duo transforming marketing

Martech plays a pivotal role for mid-market marketers, especially in B2B.

Companies with access to 4+ martech platforms conduct more tests, optimize more effectively, and feel they have a competitive edge.

Most mid-sized organizations are only just starting their AI journey, and clear barriers to adoption remain. However, 98% believe AI will drive an uplift in marketing effectiveness.

4 The equalizer advantage: How mid-market marketers can unlock the potential of AI

AI can't replace a sound marketing strategy, but it can amplify effectiveness.

AI can augment creativity and decision-making ("done with you") or automate execution ("done for you"), giving marketers leverage to address their pain points.

Adoption must be a structured journey—diagnose pain points, assess readiness, assign leaders, and map use cases to clear goals.

Chapter 1

**The resilient
mid-market:
Overcoming
challenges and
pursuing growth**



The mid-market remains resilient despite strong headwinds to growth

The last 5 years have been challenging for all types of businesses, but mid-market companies have stayed optimistic, even as they remain in the eye of the storm.

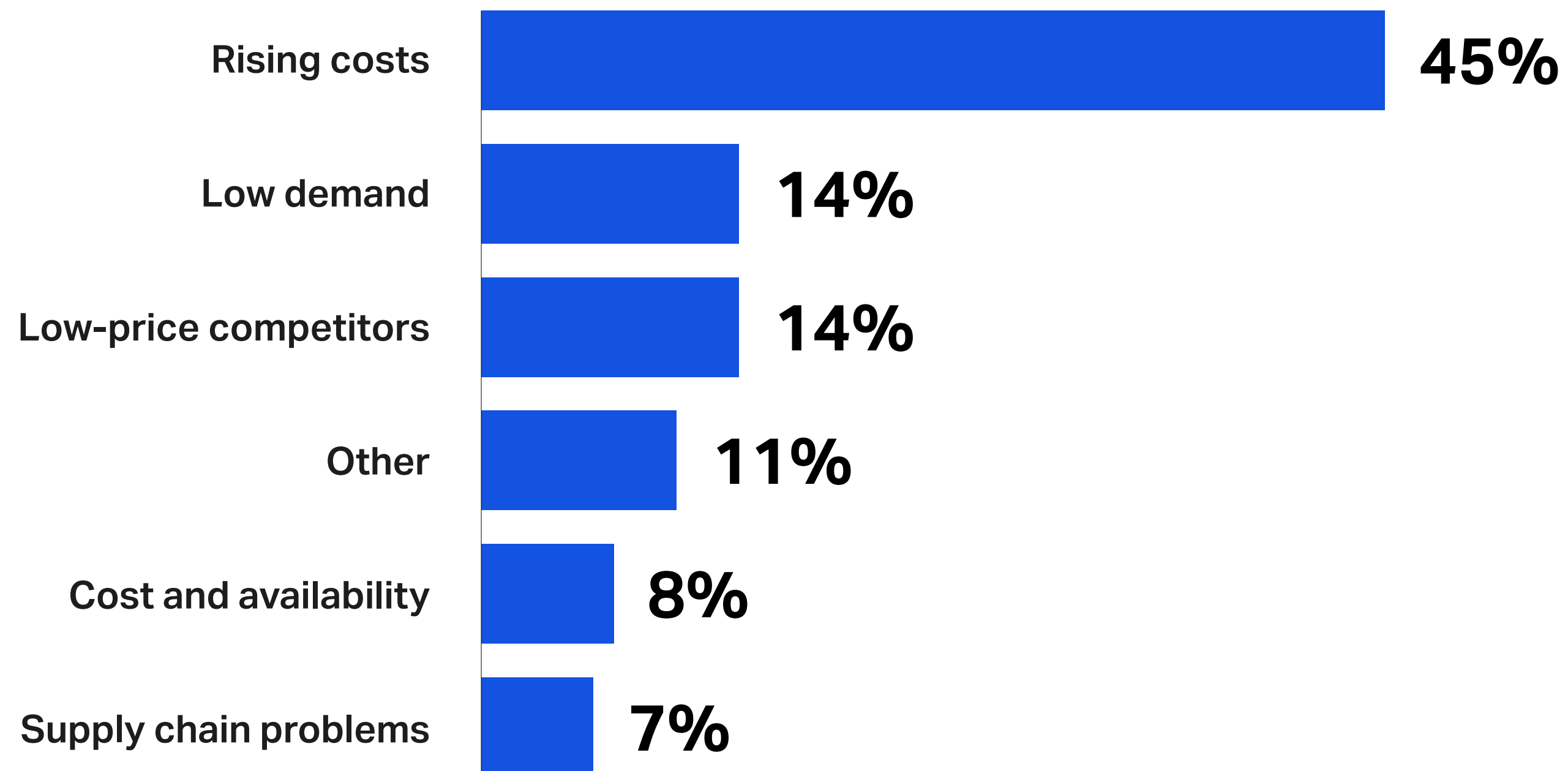
After the COVID-19 pandemic in the early 2020s, a series of macro-economic factors has constrained growth for mid-market companies: a cost-of-living crisis that suppressed customer demand, wage inflation, soaring energy prices and a short supply of skilled labor.

More recently, geopolitical disruptions and uncertainty over tariffs have added to the burden, with mid-market companies feeling more constrained.

Despite those challenges, mid-market businesses are confident in their business prospects. According to Intuit QuickBooks research, while only 41% describe their business as growing, 60% predict higher quarterly revenue over the next three months.¹

¹ Intuit QuickBooks, Small Business Insights, Sept. 2025

Greatest challenge facing small businesses, Global



US, UK, Australia, Canada sample: July 2025 n=4,593

Source: Intuit QuickBooks, Small Business Insights, Sept. 2025

The playing field isn't equal

The resilience of mid-market companies is also challenged by "the Law of Double Jeopardy," which says that smaller brands tend to have fewer customers and their customers are less loyal than their larger competitors.

As marketing effectiveness expert Les Binet pointed out in Mailchimp's "How to Grow Your Brand" report, "Big brands have all sorts of advantages over smaller ones. It's easier for big brands to acquire customers because people find them easier to remember and easier to buy... Conversely, smaller brands suffer from a host of corresponding disadvantages: fewer customers, lower loyalty rates, weaker pricing power and higher unit costs."

For mid-market organizations, identifying the most efficient and effective routes to driving growth and revenue is mission-critical.

The Law of Double Jeopardy shows that brand growth relies more on attracting new customers than just keeping the ones you have. Here's the deal: loyalty is closely tied to brand awareness. The more people recognize your brand, the more likely they are to stick with you. Smaller brands face a double whammy—they have fewer customers to start with, and those customers tend to be less loyal. In contrast, bigger brands benefit from higher recognition, leading to better customer retention.

How to Grow Your Brand, Intuit Mailchimp

Ty Heath

Director, The B2B Institute at LinkedIn and LinkedIn Brand Expert

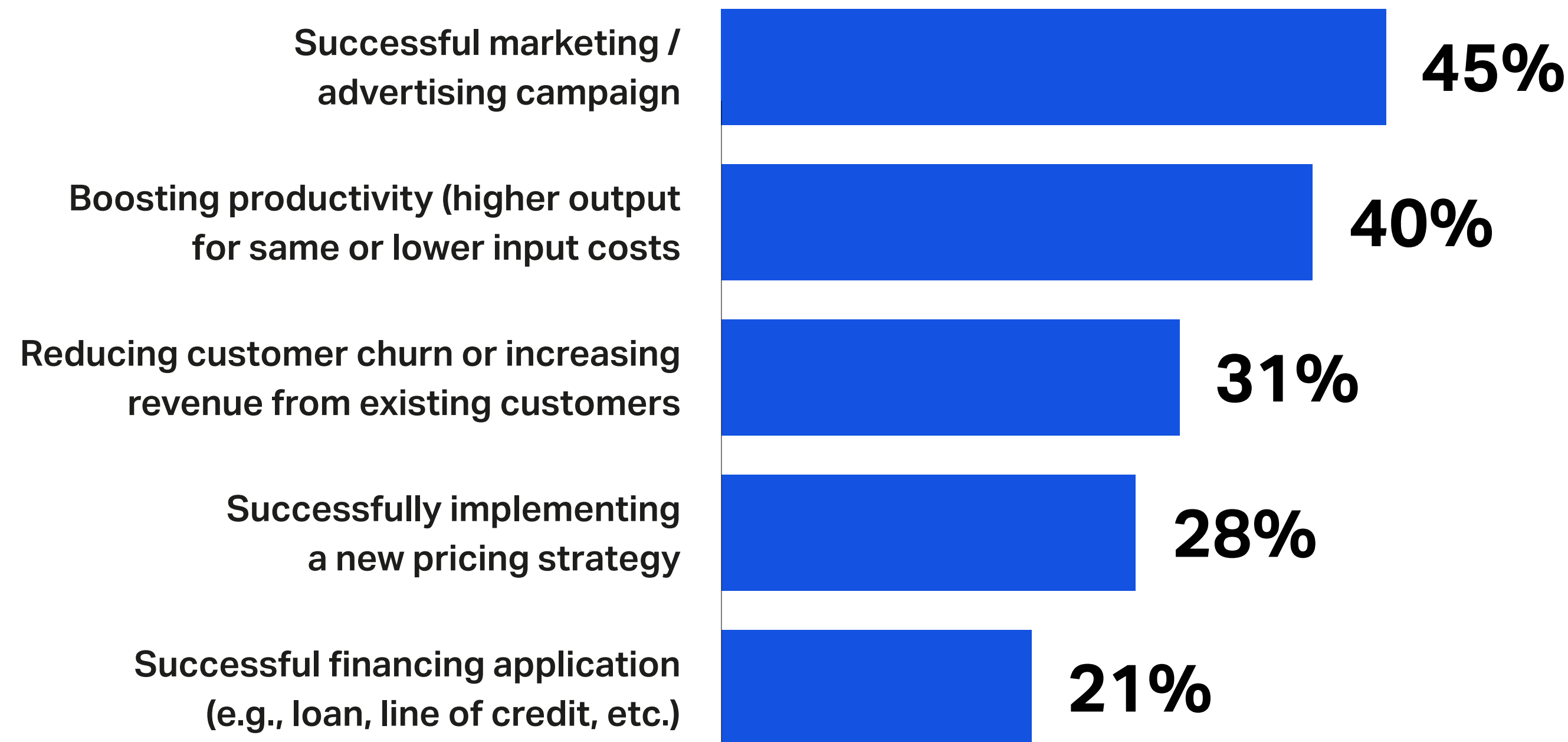
Effective marketing is more important than ever

Mid-market marketers are at a turning point in which, in a complex business landscape, marketing is a key growth driver for their organizations.

According to Intuit QuickBooks Small Business insights, a successful marketing/advertising campaign is the top initiative on small business’s immediate wish list.

But for marketers at these organizations, knowing which levers to pull is becoming increasingly difficult. Marketers must manage growing competition, channel fragmentation, volatility in platform algorithms, and signal loss as platforms move toward privacy-first ecosystems.² In addition, the rise of AI search on platforms like ChatGPT is upending longstanding search marketing tactics.

Most beneficial business priorities for the next quarter, Global



US, UK, Australia, Canada sample: July 2025 n=3,357

² WARC, *The Future of Programmatic*, 2024

Source: Intuit QuickBooks, *Small Business Insights*, Sept. 2025

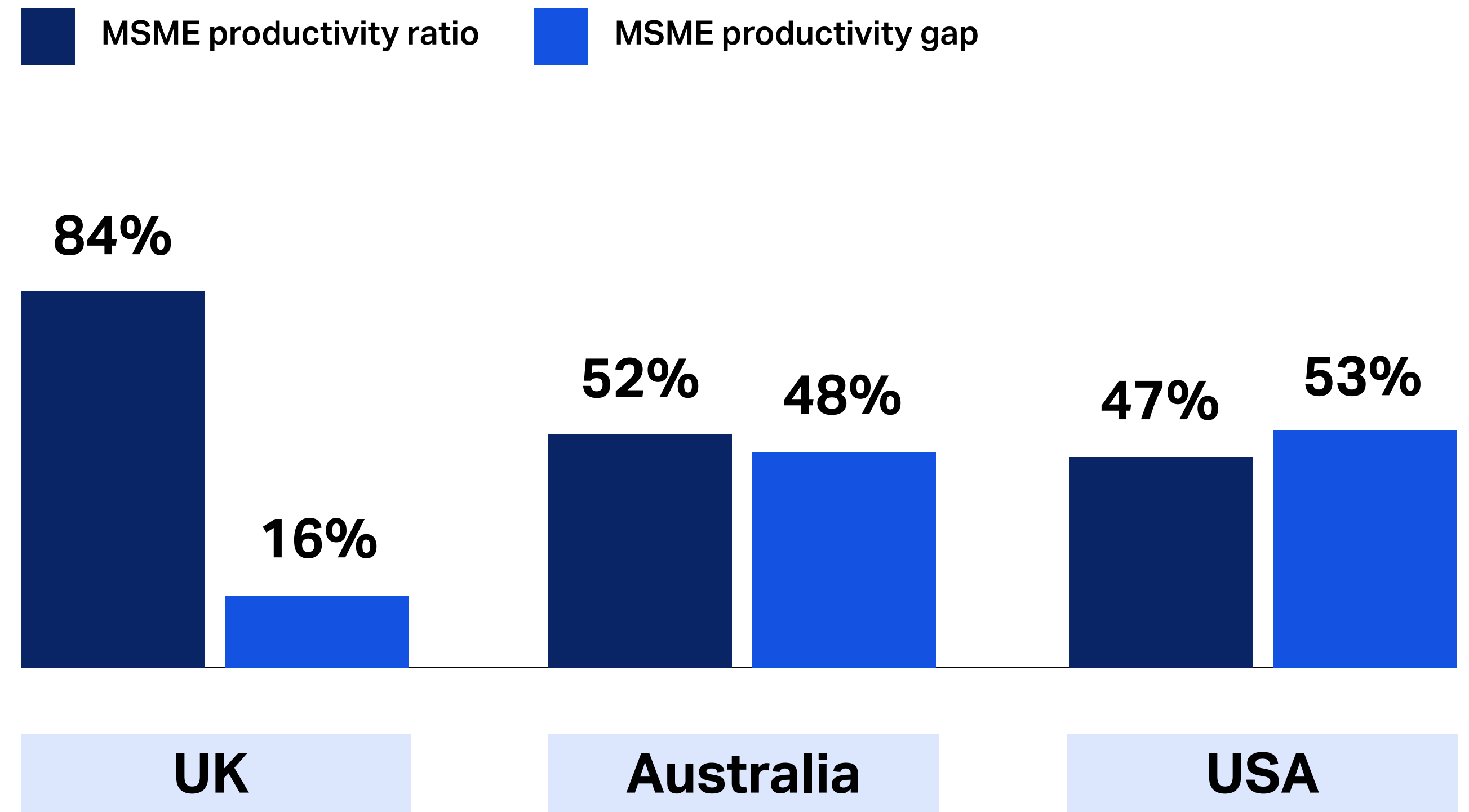
Productivity fuels mid-market performance

Productivity was the second most sought-after change marketers are looking for according to Intuit QuickBooks Small Business insights.³

Measured by value added per worker, global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company has shown that micro-, small and mid-size enterprises (MSMEs) lag well behind larger firms. The gap ranges from 16% in the UK to as high as 53% in the US.

If mid-market companies in advanced economies could boost productivity to match that achieved by the top quartile of large organizations, total GDP would increase by 5%, according to McKinsey.

MSME productivity as % of large company productivity



³ Intuit QuickBooks, Small Business Insights, Sept. 2025

Source: The rise of MSMEs (micro, small, and medium enterprises) | McKinsey

Note: McKinsey's analysis did not include Canada or New Zealand. Micro enterprises are 1 – 10 employees; Small enterprises are 11- 50; Medium enterprises are 51 – 250

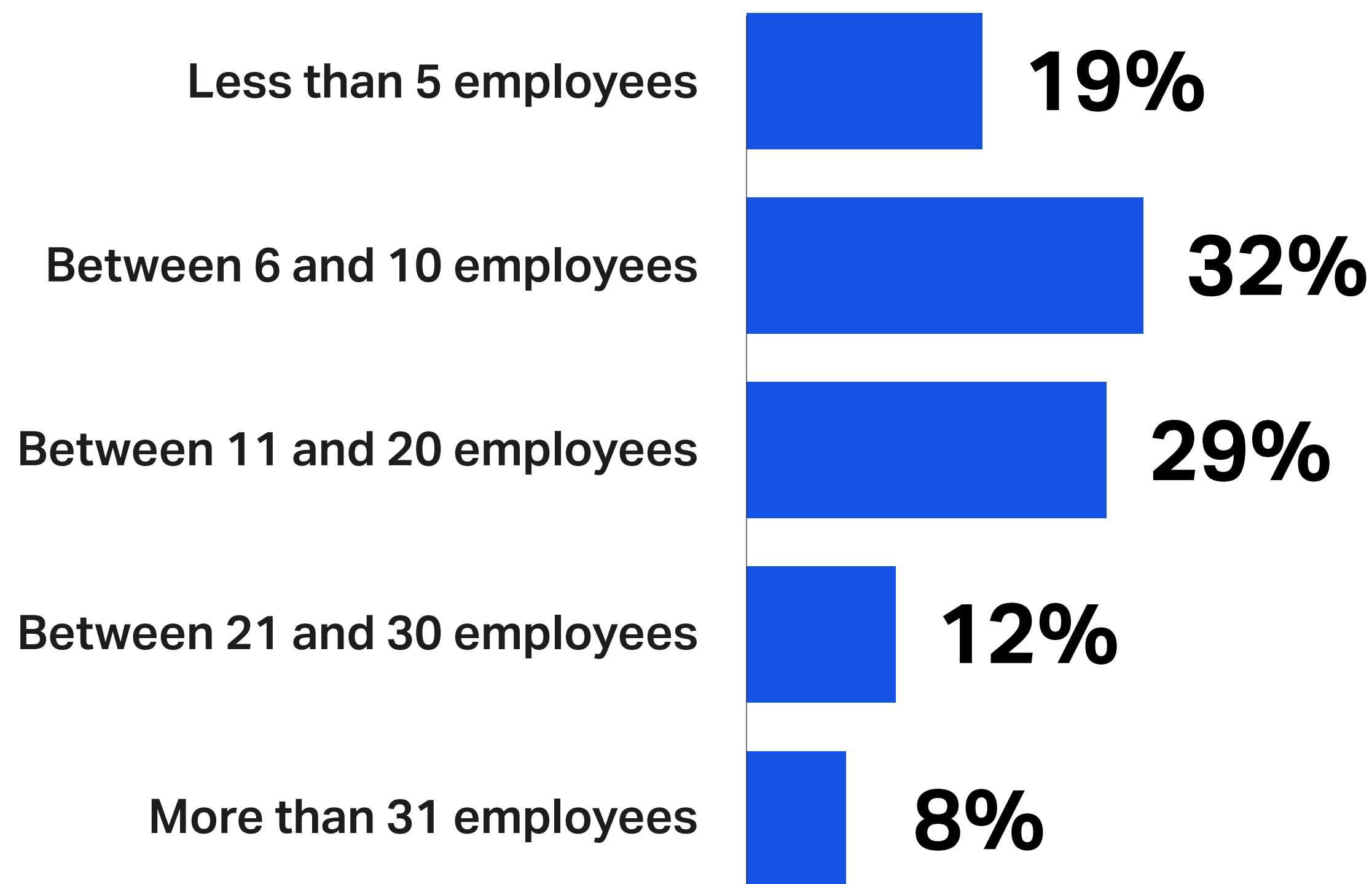
Mid-market marketing teams run lean

Marketing departments in mid-market companies exemplify the need to do more with less. According to the Marketing Equalizer survey by WARC and Mailchimp, 51% of total respondents said their marketing department had 10 or fewer employees. Even among companies employing 250 to 499 people, 32% had a marketing staff of 10 or fewer.

The positive news is that these numbers look set to grow. Sixteen percent of our total sample said marketing headcount would increase significantly over the next 12 months, with a further 58% predicting at least some growth. Virtually none predicted reductions.

The pattern was similar across regions, although respondents in Australia and New Zealand demonstrated higher levels of confidence in their ability to grow their marketing headcount than those in the other countries in our survey. A combined 86% of respondents in those two geographies expected an increase in the next 12 months, compared to 78% of respondents in Canada, 71% of US respondents and 64% of those in the UK.

Size of marketing department in mid-market companies, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Talent is an ongoing challenge

Staffing issues run deeper than simply lacking the budget to hire a sizable team.

The biggest hurdle cited by our respondents was finding candidates with the requisite skills. This was particularly true in the US, where 58% of respondents said it was a challenge, compared to 43% in Australia and New Zealand.

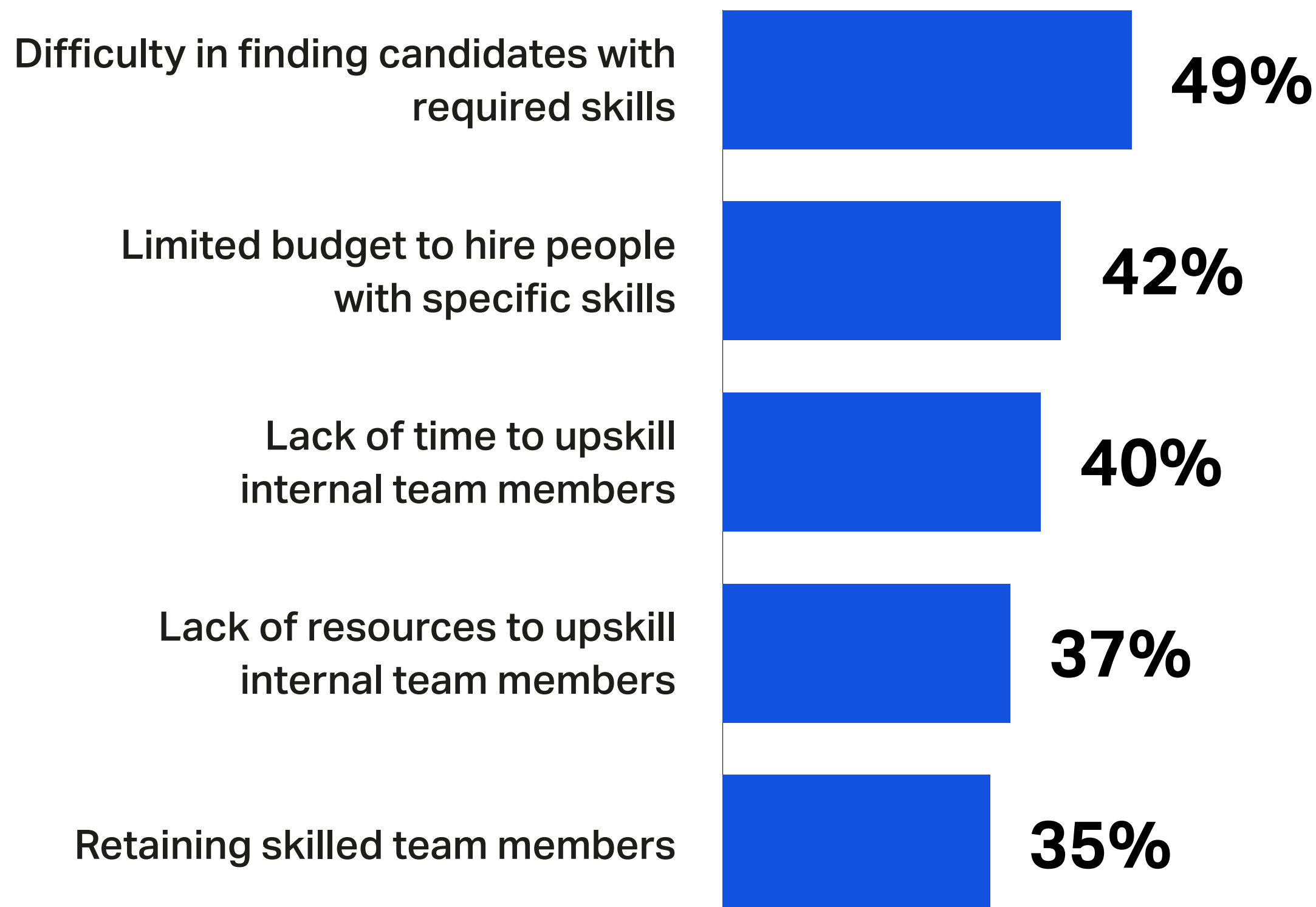
With time and money under constant pressure, mid-sized companies also struggle to bring in new marketing team members with specific skills or upskill existing team members.

In a hyper-competitive market, retention is yet another headache. Individuals with expertise in certain areas—AI being a prominent example—are in high demand, and may be more naturally attracted to bigger businesses.

It’s happened to me. A bigger business hears what someone’s done and they say: ‘Hey, come and work for us and we’ll pay you more’... Then all that IP is lost and you have to start from scratch.

Chief Digital Officer, Finance / Insurance, Australia

Challenges in staffing marketing teams, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Setting marketing priorities is a necessity for mid-market companies

Limited resources require mid-market marketing teams to prioritize how they staff. Much as they'd like to, they simply can't afford to cover every base.

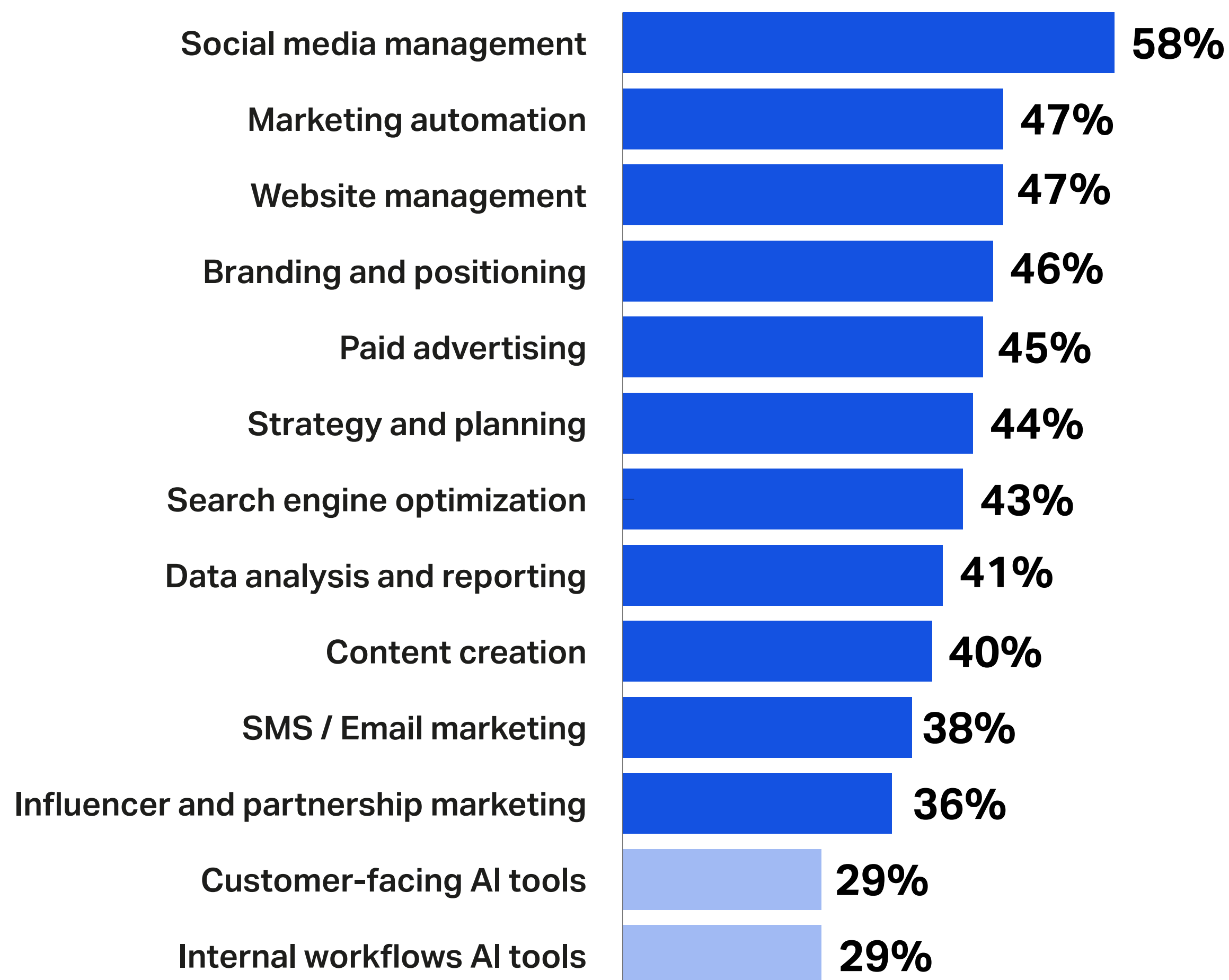
As we'll see in Chapter 2, social media is one of the primary channels mid-market marketers deploy. As a consequence, well over half of respondents (58%) employed at least one specialist in this area.

Conversely, only 38% had a team member specializing in email and/or SMS marketing. UK respondents were most likely to have this staffed (44%), while New Zealand respondents were the least likely (25%). In situations where a business doesn't have staff dedicated to this function, outside agencies may be playing this role.

Overall, there was a higher degree of specialization in B2B than B2C when it comes to email / SMS marketing; 42% of B2B firms had dedicated staff vs. 34% of B2C companies. B2B companies were also somewhat more likely to have specialists in marketing automation (50% vs. 45%) and SEO (46% vs. 41%).

Notably, AI—whether used for internal or external purposes—was a low priority across most geographies and organization types when it comes to hiring specialists. New Zealand was an outlier, however; 37% of respondents had staffed for internal AI workflows and 35% for customer-facing AI tools.

Areas covered by specialist marketing staff, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Lack of AI capability is a leading concern

If AI is where mid-market marketers most lack in-house expertise, it's also their area of greatest concern—especially in terms of customer-facing solutions.

The companies most likely to identify this as a shortcoming were those with marketing departments of 10 people or less (35%); those operating in B2C (34%); or those based in the US (37%) or the UK (34%).

Two quotes from our interviews capture where the mid-market feels it is missing out:

“For a small company like ours, we just need to get more content volume out there. If AI picked up some of that work, we could focus on the high value stuff that really makes an impact.”

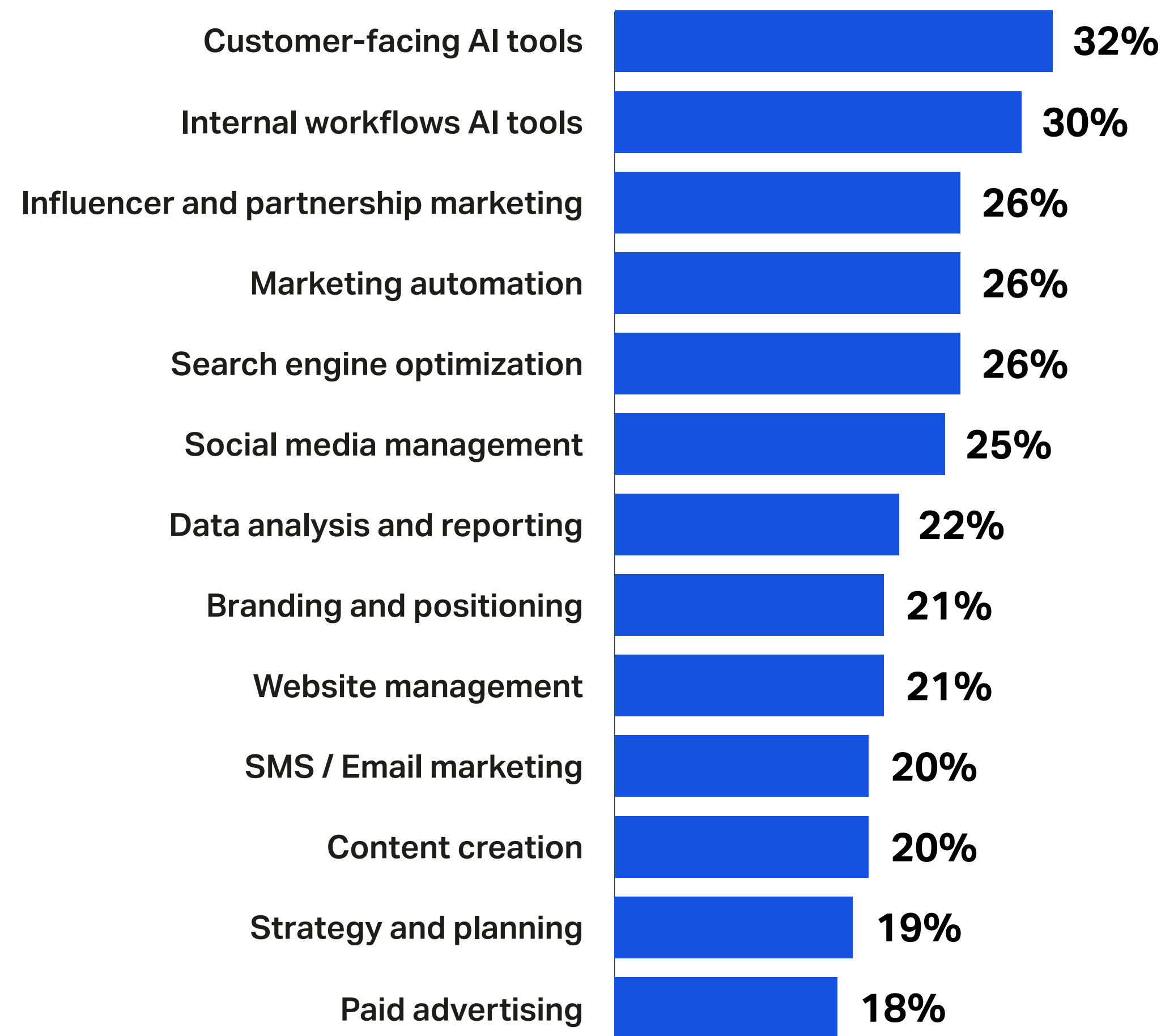
Global Head of Marketing,
SaaS, Australia

“Ultimately, I think there’s always going to have to be a human element. But what AI will mean is that one person can achieve what it takes five or six copywriters to do today.”

Head of E-commerce,
Luxury Accessories, UK

In other words, efficiency and scaling marketing are two top of mind benefits of AI. AI has potential to enable the delivery of higher volumes of relevant content through channels like email and SMS, accelerating the impact mid-market companies can have on their category and customers. And yet, these use cases are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to AI’s potential application.

Areas where mid-market companies feel they lack skills / capability, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Multiple barriers stand in the way of improved marketing performance

Effective marketing requires continuous improvement, and the marketers we interviewed identified a wide range of challenges.

Key obstacles included the input constraints we have described in this chapter: small marketing teams, a lack of bandwidth, a shortage of personnel with the necessary skills, and limited access to advanced tools and technology (including AI).

But output constraints featured just as prominently. Our survey respondents were looking for better ways to measure effectiveness; collect, analyze, and integrate data; and ideate, execute, and optimize new strategies and tactics.

These same concerns were repeated time after time, regardless of geography, size of marketing department, or operational sector.



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

What we've learned in this chapter

1 Marketing teams in mid-market companies tend to be small

In our research, over 50% of organizations had 10 or fewer marketers on staff. Even if budget exists, the biggest challenge is finding and hiring people with the right know-how.

2 The consequence is that marketing teams often lack specialists in core disciplines

This restricts both the quantity and the quality of the output they can generate, inhibiting efforts to improve marketing performance.

3 AI is the area where marketing teams are least likely to have in-house specialists

One-third of global firms cite customer-facing and internal AI tools as a significant capability gap.

Chapter 2

The mid-market's marketing playbook: What's working now



Mid-market companies know they need to put more effort into marketing

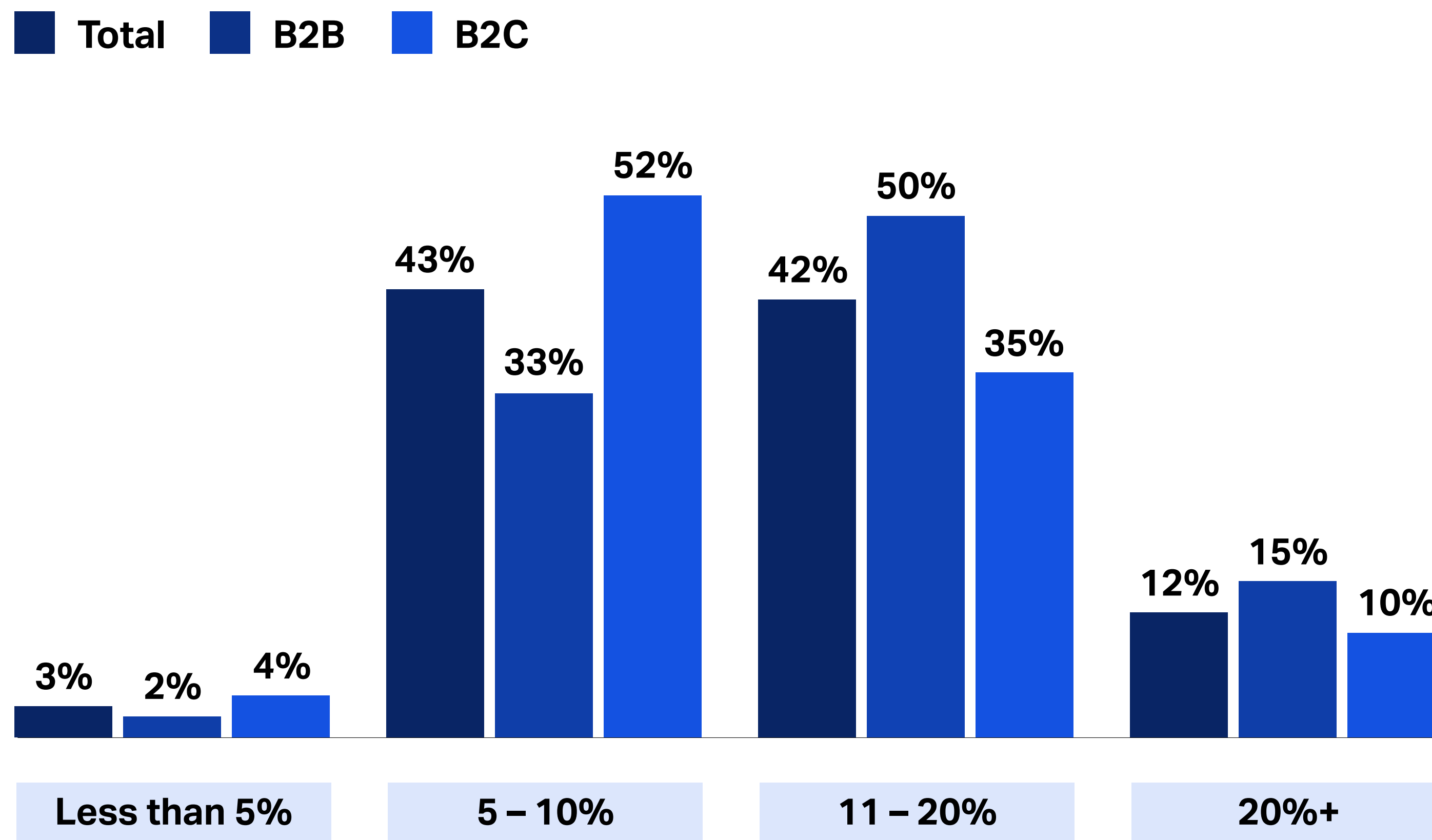
To break through the Law of Double Jeopardy and drive growth and revenue, marketing investment is vital.

More than half (54%) of the organizations in our sample dedicated 11% or more of their total operating budget to marketing. Investment levels were markedly higher in B2B than B2C.

Companies with 250 – 499 employees are willing to spend competitively: 58% of this segment invested at least 11% of their operating budget in marketing.

In addition, our survey shows that the larger the marketing team is, the bigger the budget. Among companies with at least 11 people on the team, 71% allocated at least 11% of the budget to marketing. At companies with 10 or fewer marketing staffers, only 37% invested at that proportion.

Percent of operating budget allocated to marketing, Global



Numbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Marketing investment tends to be concentrated in 4 – 5 channels

Even if the mid-market invests heavily in marketing on a proportionate basis, budgets may still be small in absolute terms. One result is that spend is spread across a limited number of touchpoints.

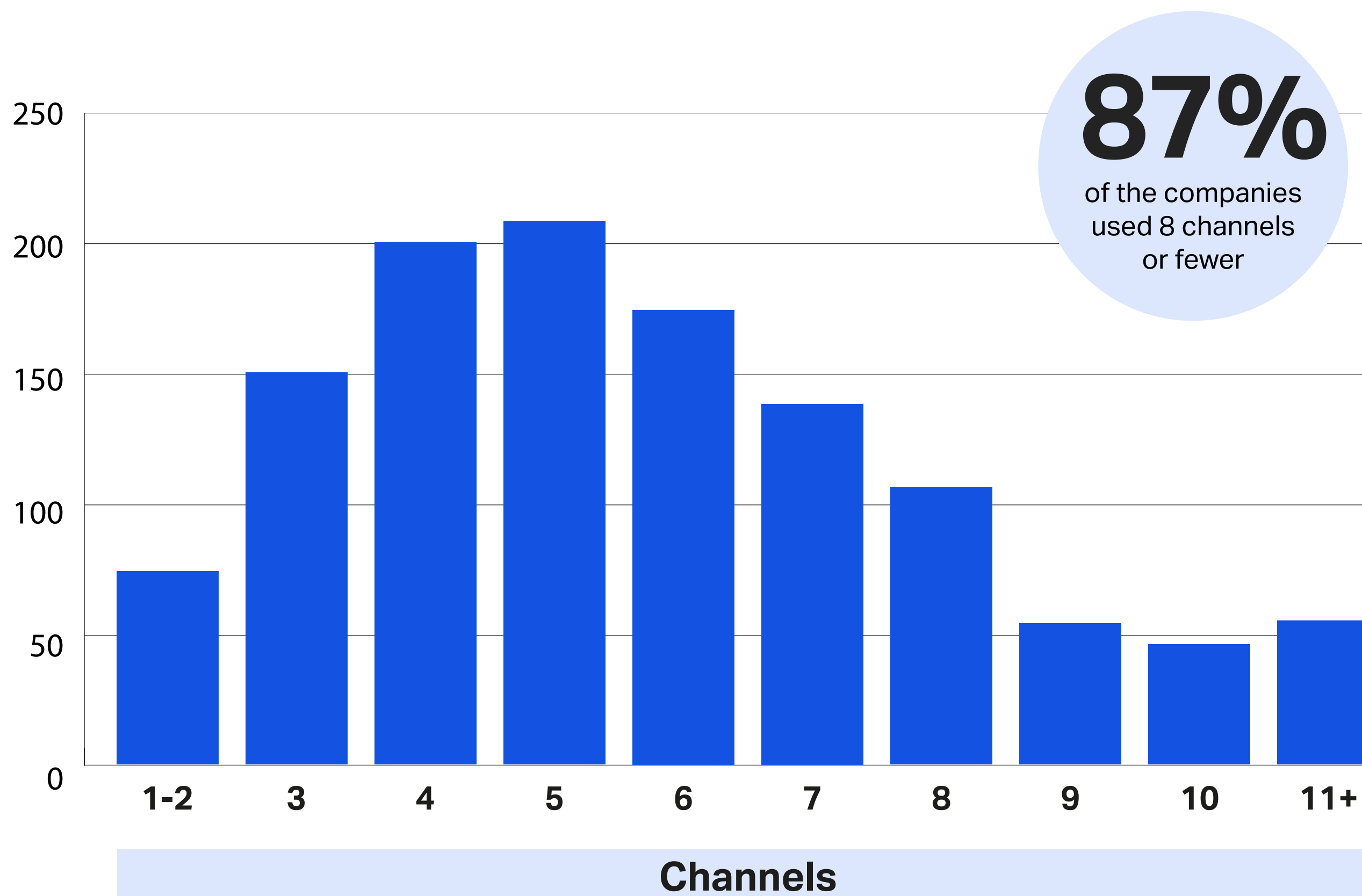
From a list of 18 channels, respondents were asked which they used regularly. The list covered both paid media and owned channels (such as website content, email, owned social, webinars, SMS and messaging via WhatsApp or similar platforms).

The majority of companies (87%) used eight channels or fewer, with the median figure being 4.85.

It’s never wise to divide a marketing budget into fragments so small they don’t create meaningful results, but the evidence shows that omnichannel diversification does drive increased ROI. According to WARC’s “The Multiplier Effect” paper, each additional paid channel in the mix improves revenue ROI by 11%.¹

¹ WARC, The Multiplier Effect, 2025

Number of channels used regularly, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Media usage skews heavily toward digital

When it comes to media usage, digital channels are used far more regularly than legacy media such as TV and radio. Paid search and paid social were especially popular among respondents, with B2C companies also leaning heavily on retail media.

This skew was repeated across geographies and organizational size. At 24%, even the largest companies in our sample (those employing 250 – 499 people) were only marginally more likely to use TV.

Sponsorships and podcasts were more favored by B2B companies than B2C, while B2C firms were much more likely to use radio / audio.

The research also highlighted the importance of influencer and creator marketing.² 39% of B2C and 38% of B2B companies said they were using this strategy regularly. One attraction is that spending on influencers can be leveraged across both paid and owned channels.

These findings do not necessarily equate to investment levels by channel. But they do show which are considered key on a day-to-day basis.

Media channels used regularly, Global

	Total	B2B	B2C
Paid search	59%	53%	63%
Paid social	54%	56%	52%
Retail media	44%	39%	48%
Influencer / creator marketing	39%	38%	39%
Online display	34%	30%	37%
Online video	32%	32%	31%
Radio / audio	22%	15%	28%
Sponsorship	21%	23%	18%
TV	19%	19%	19%
Podcasts	18%	20%	16%
Print	17%	17%	17%
Out of home	10%	9%	12%

Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

² WARC, Marketers plan to invest more in brand ambassadors in 2025

Paid media channel choices reflect short-term priorities

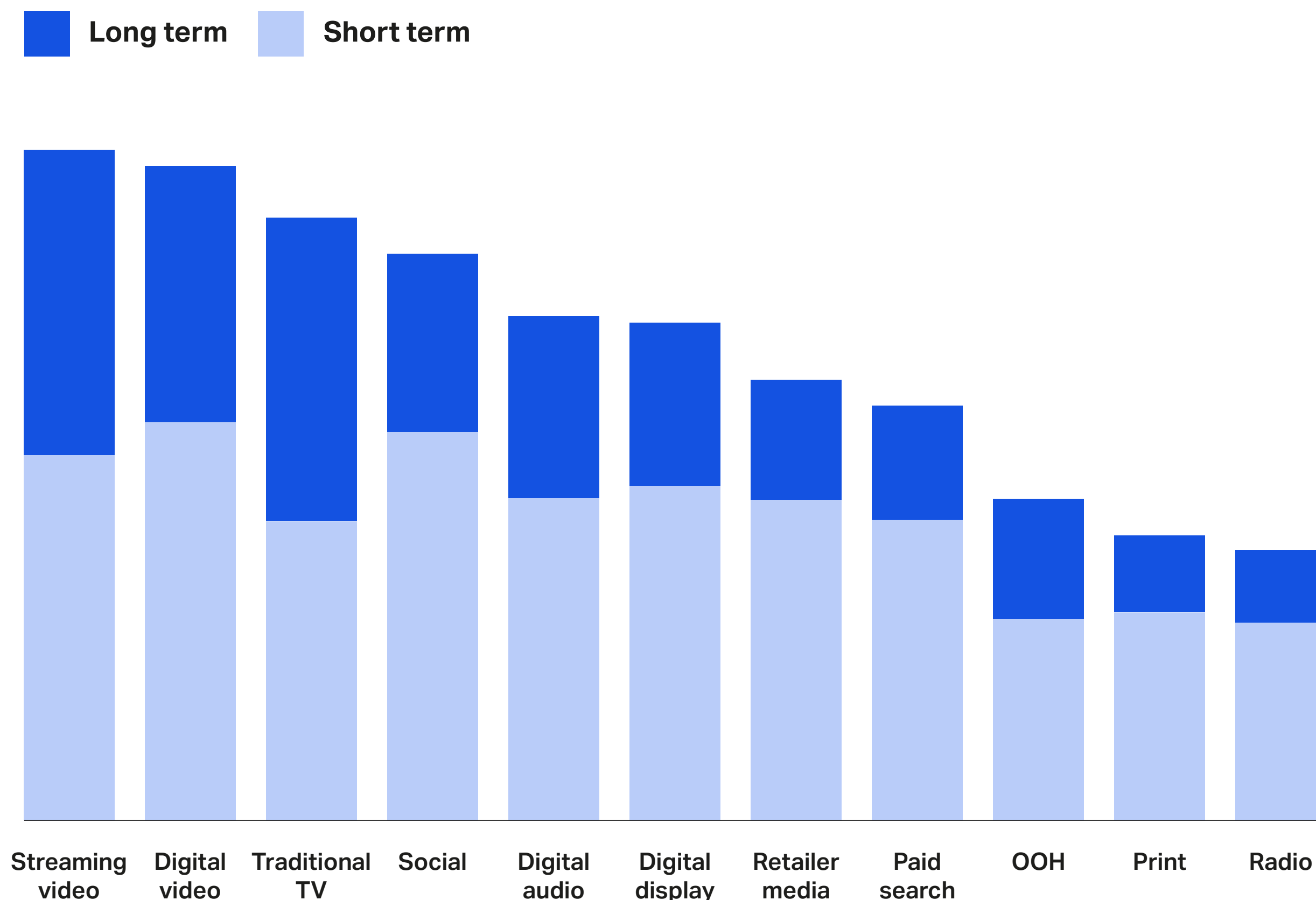
Mid-market marketers should keep an eye on whether it’s too reliant on channels that deliver shorter-term returns.

In “The Multiplier Effect,” WARC and a coalition of marketing effectiveness experts demonstrated that media channels often do “double duty,” paying back across both short- and long-term timescales.³ Consequently, channels should rarely be thought of as being just for “brand” or “performance” advertising.

However, there are impact differences. Video channels, whether digital or linear, are notably more effective than other channels in generating long-term revenue ROI, according to an analysis by [Analytic Partners ROI Genome](#). For channels such as social, display or paid search, returns tend to be more concentrated in the near term.

It’s true that certain media will be cost-prohibitive for a significant proportion of mid-size organizations. But however tight budgets are, marketers need to ensure they create future demand as well as reach buyers who are currently in-market. Otherwise, they run the risk of hitting the [performance plateau](#) – or worse, entering a “[doom loop](#)” where slowing growth persuades advertisers to continue “optimizing” their spend against short-term wins at the cost of long-term growth.

Long-term vs. short-term revenue ROI by channel



Source: Analytic Partners ROI Genome

³ WARC, The Multiplier Effect, 2025

Owned channels are foundational for mid-market companies

Although paid media is important for mid-market companies, owned channels—including their email and messaging—are also foundational, especially when it comes to reaching buyers in-market.

In our survey, respondents were more likely to use paid search or paid social regularly as marketing channels than their owned channels. But the value of owned channels can be significant; according to Mailchimp’s [Revenue Blueprint report](#), 9% of marketers who currently use email marketing software tools said email was a foundational marketing strategy.⁴

And for B2B companies, levers like webinars and content marketing also come into play as opportunities to engage with both prospects and in-market buyers.

Owned channels provide mid-market companies with sustainable, cost-effective touchpoints that build lasting customer relationships beyond the temporary visibility of paid media. By strategically investing in website optimization, email marketing, and content development, organizations can reduce their dependency on increasingly expensive paid channels while creating valuable assets that continue to generate leads and nurture prospects throughout the entire buyer journey.

⁴ Mailchimp & Ipsos, [The Revenue Blueprint, 2024](#)

How the mid-market views email marketing, Global



69%

of Total Marketers agree that email is the foundation of their organization's marketing strategy



59%

of Total Marketers state that as search becomes less utilized, email remains a necessary channel for customer engagement

Source: [Mailchimp & Ipsos, The Revenue Blueprint, 2024](#)

Email is deployed across the funnel

Email marketing isn’t just for driving conversions. Done right, it can also increase brand equity by adding value and building trust. A trend noted by many of our interviewees was that email delivered a consistently high ROI compared to other channels.

Other interviewees pointed to the zero-party and first-party data about customer preferences that email generates, comparing it favorably versus what can be sourced from walled garden platforms.

The key takeaway was that email is deemed appropriate to every customer lifestage. It has the potential to push people through the funnel and then keep them engaged post-purchase. For revenue leaders—marketers in organizations that have shown significant growth while also being in the top tier of revenue—email is the top channel for generating awareness and driving purchases, according to Mailchimp’s [Revenue Blueprint report](#).⁵

To this end, several interviewees described how automations had driven significant gains. By sending tailored emails in response to specific customer signals, automations maximized both relevance and timeliness. Interviewees noted this practice led to higher open rates, higher click-throughs, and higher response levels.

⁵ Mailchimp & Ipsos, [The Revenue Blueprint, 2024](#)

We use email for two primary purposes. The first is to nurture leads who might not be ready to buy for another nine months. We keep them warm within the database by sending highly personalized content at the right time. The second purpose is retention of existing clients.

Head of Marketing, Professional Services, UK

We use email for retention, and we have a really high repeat purchase rate. These are also our highest AOV [average order value] customers. It’s about finding the right cadence, showing the right content, and bringing brand awareness into email while still driving conversion.

Director of Marketing, Skincare, Canada

Success with email is driving adoption of SMS

SMS marketing delivers many of the same benefits as email. It can be highly personalized and demonstrates a business’s commitment to meeting customers on their own terms.

SMS has two sizable advantages. First, there are far fewer companies fighting for space in message lists. Second, no other channel is so immediate or difficult to ignore. When SMS and email marketing work cohesively together, it can lead to better business outcomes such as higher sales and revenues and increased customer loyalty.⁶

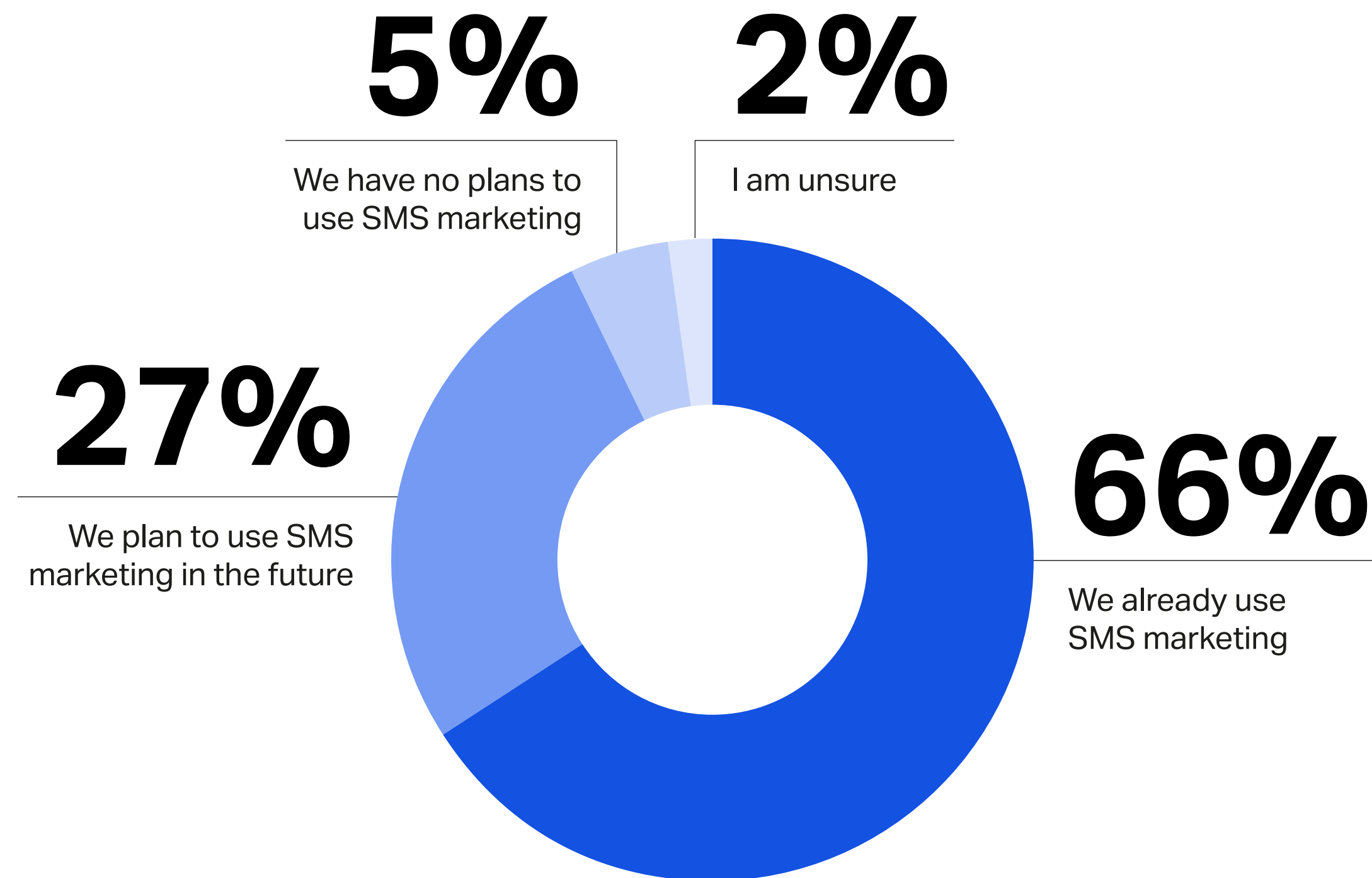
Increasingly, organizations that have seen strong returns from email marketing are adding SMS as a complementary channel. By combining the strengths of each, mid-market companies are creating richer and better-coordinated customer experiences. Mailchimp users saw up to a 97% higher click rate when they used both email and SMS.*

In the survey by Mailchimp and Ipsos, nearly half of marketers believed this two-pronged approach increased open rates across both channels.⁷

We’re thinking of developing a quasi-VIP scheme, and SMS will be perfect for that. Previews, special discounts, one-day-only flash sales, that sort of thing. Our sales force already texts with established customers, so we’re planning on programming it out and doing more.

VP of Commercial, B2B Wholesale, USA

SMS marketing adoption among companies using email software tools, Global



Source: Mailchimp & Ipsos, The Revenue Blueprint, 2024

⁶ Mailchimp and Harvard Business Review, Engage, Convert, Repeat: The Winning Formula of SMS and Email Marketing, 2024

⁷ Source: Mailchimp & Ipsos, The Revenue Blueprint, 2024

* Based on US users who sent both email and SMS campaigns compared to users who sent only email campaigns from 8/1/23 to 1/05/25

What we've learned in this chapter

1 Relative to their overall operating budget, mid-market companies spend heavily on marketing

Mid-marketers invest highly in marketing efforts. B2B organizations are particularly committed. However, channel diversification is low. The median for channels used regularly is just 4.85.

2 Paid media usage skews heavily toward digital, with search and social dominating

Mid-market marketers may be focusing too much on the short term. Investment should also be directed to creating future demand.

3 Owned media plays a critical role in building brand momentum

Email is used across every stage of the funnel and delivers high levels of ROI. SMS is seen as strongly complementary, and adoption is growing.

Chapter 3

Martech and AI: The powerhouse duo transforming marketing



Martech plays a pivotal role for mid-market companies

The tech stack an organization employs is key to their marketing, financial, and accounting operations.

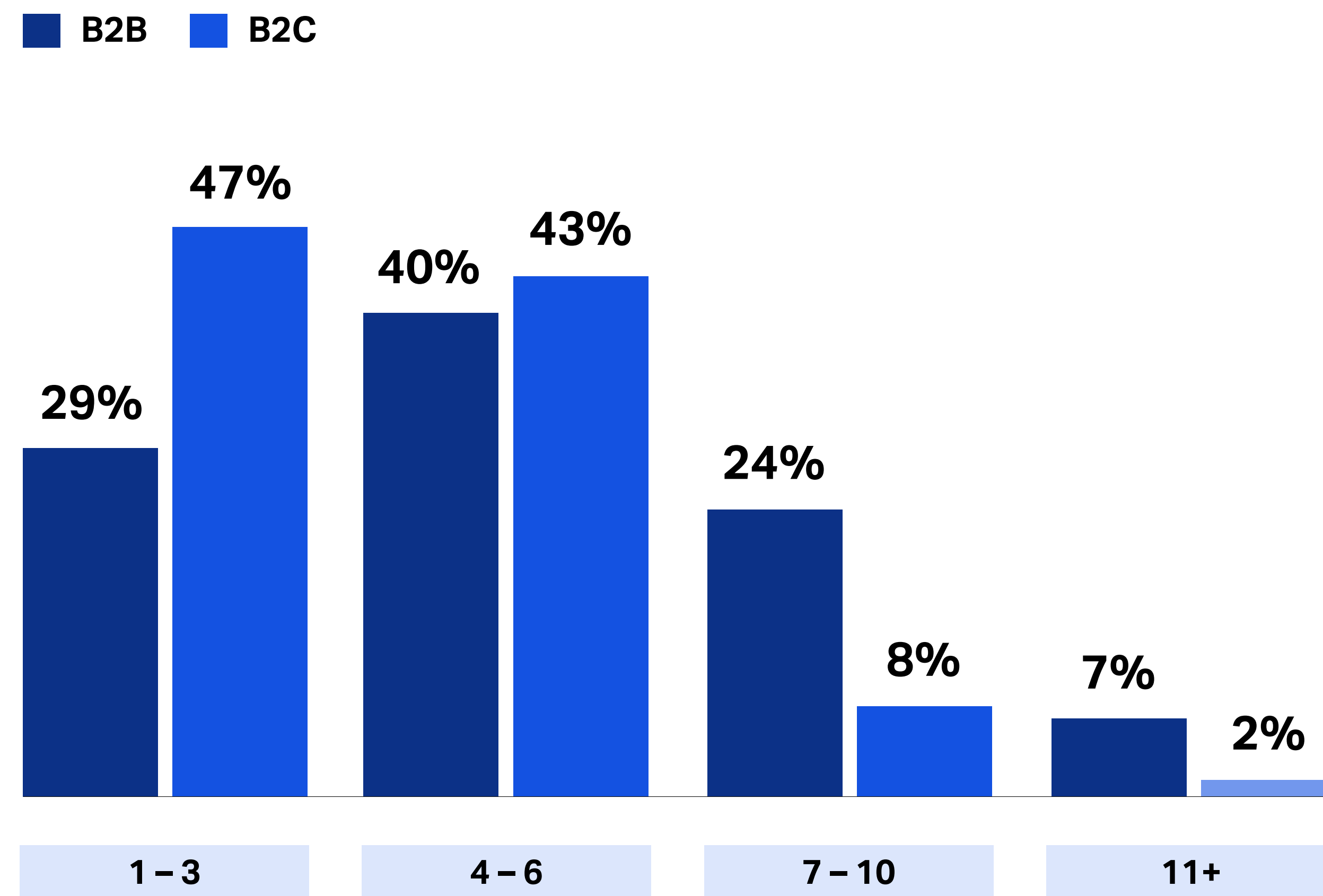
The attraction is obvious. Technology platforms help with the heavy lifting, alleviating time and cost pressures. They also provide a route by which mid-sized companies can level up to larger, better-resourced organizations and outpace their competitors.

This can be observed by looking at the tech stacks of mid-market marketing organizations. Of the companies in our research, 61% were using four or more martech platforms. This average was driven by high adoption rates in B2B.

One-third of mid-market B2B companies said they were using 7+ platforms, compared to just 10% of B2C firms. This reflects the more complex customer journey and longer path to purchase for typical B2B products and services, as well as the need to target multiple stakeholders and align marketing and sales journeys.

Firms with larger marketing departments (11 or more staffers) were also more likely to use more martech platforms; 83% worked with at least four, compared to 41% of those with smaller staffs.

Number of martech platforms used, Global



Note: Numbers may not add up to 100 because of rounding

Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Martech empowers marketers to experiment

With resources stretched, mid-market marketers need to optimize every dollar spent.

It's important to double down on activities that have been proven to work—but at some point, returns will inevitably start to diminish. Rather than simply repeating tried-and-tested tactics, organizations need to experiment. This could apply to trialing new channels or testing new concepts in channels that are already part of the mix.

In our research we observed a correlation between the number of platforms used and investment in trialing new strategies and tactics. One-third of marketers with four or more martech platforms dedicated at least 31% of their marketing budget to test and learn activities. Among those with three or fewer martech platforms, only 18% invested in experimentation at that level.

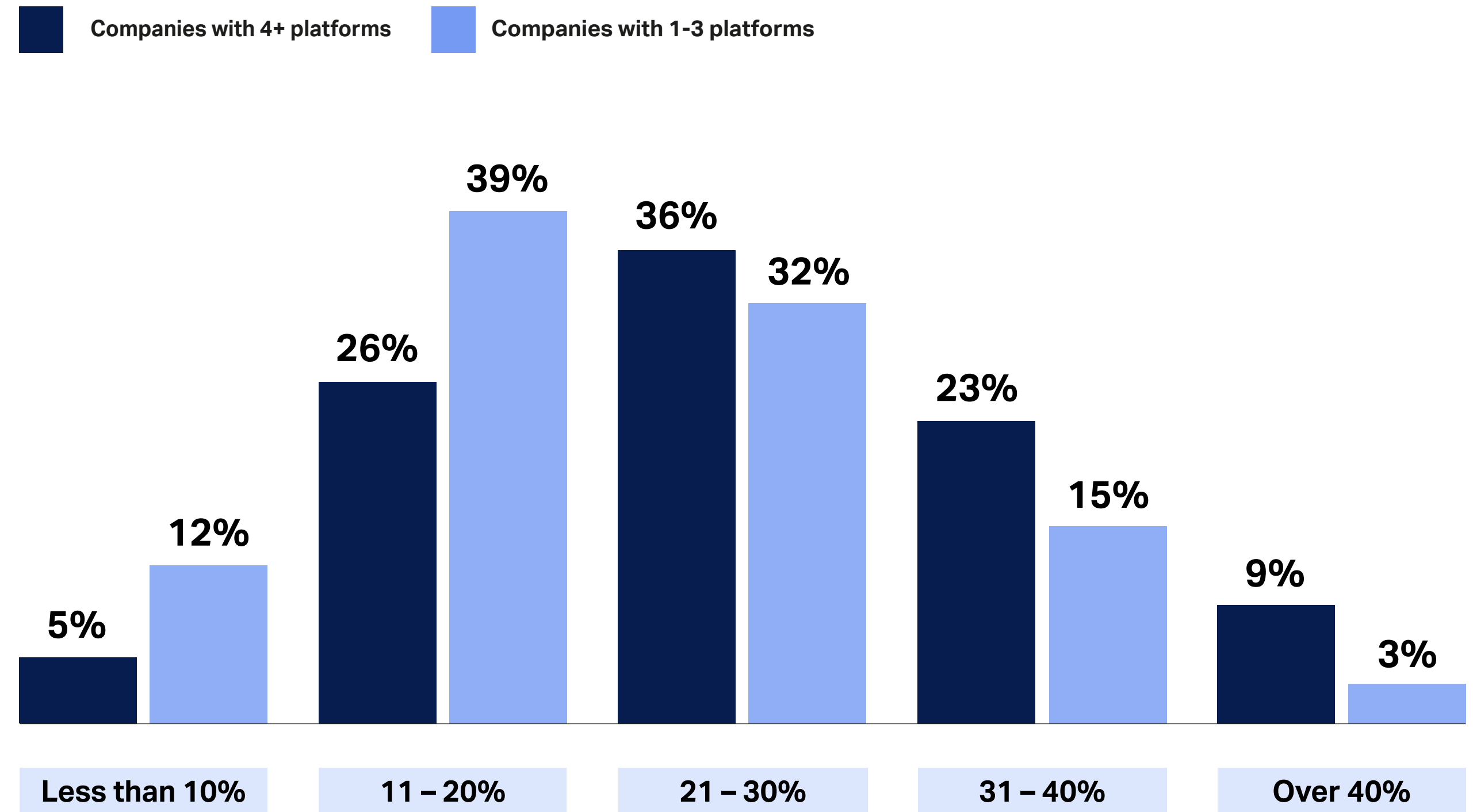
If you're not constantly testing, you're not going to advance anything.

MaryAnn Pfeiffer

Founder, 108 Degrees Digital Marketing



Percent of budget spent on trialing new strategies and tactics, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Martech and AI improve mid-market marketers' competitive standing

Investing in martech doesn't just correlate to greater investment in experimentation. The number of martech platforms a company has is also strongly aligned with its ability to compete with other firms.

When we asked respondents to rate their competitiveness as a marketing organization in comparison to similar-sized companies in their category, those who worked for businesses with access to four or more martech platforms were 11 points more likely to rank themselves ahead of their competitors than those with fewer martech platforms.

A similar pattern emerged in companies where AI had been widely adopted. However, the difference was somewhat smaller. That's because most of the mid-market is only just starting its AI journey.

I do fundamentally believe that if you've got a human team and you've also got a human team using AI brilliantly and the two of them were in a race to create the best brand, with all other resources remaining the same, I think the humans plus AI team has an edge that would make them grow faster.

Oliver Feldwick,
Chief Innovation Officer, T&P



Marketing competitiveness versus peer group, Global

	Slightly or significantly ahead	The same or behind
Companies with 4+ martech platforms	65%	35%
Companies with 1 – 3 martech platforms	54%	46%
Companies where AI is widely adopted	70%	30%
Companies where AI is only partially adopted	61%	39%

Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Usage of AI is broad, but not often deep

The majority of mid-market marketers say they are using AI in their marketing function.

However, adoption tends to be partial. This is particularly true in the US, the UK, and, perhaps counter-intuitively, larger marketing departments. 32% of companies with a team of 11 or more said AI was widely deployed, compared to 39% of organizations with fewer marketing staff.

Another factor that correlates to greater adoption is the size of the company. Of the companies where AI was widely adopted, only 9% were firms with between 10 and 49 employees.

Extent of AI adoption by country

	US	UK	Canada	ANZ
Not adopted at all	3%	5%	1%	1%
Minimal adoption	18%	23%	8%	12%
Partial adoption	52%	44%	49%	43%
Wide adoption	27%	28%	42%	44%

Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

Most AI use cases are fairly nascent

According to Intuit QuickBooks Small Business Insights, most AI usage at smaller businesses involves using publicly available tools like ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot for research, brainstorming, or first-draft copy creation.

So far, we're just playing with AI. I'm very focused on it and tell my team to use it as much as they can. But we are now in the discovery phase figuring out what AI can do across the business.

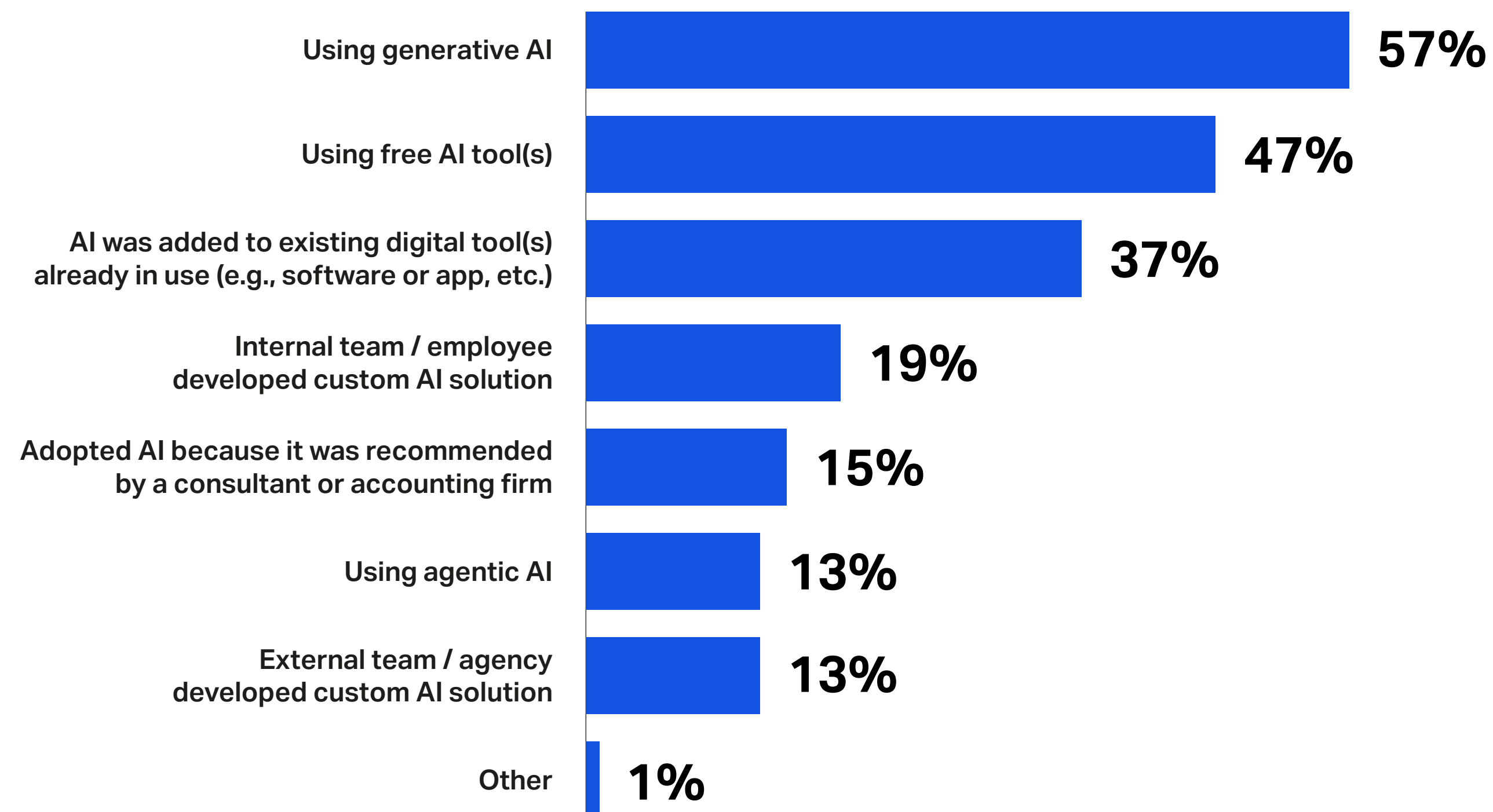
Marketing Director, Digital App / SaaS, Spain

There are exceptions, of course. A few of the companies we spoke to had recognized the potential of AI solutions for more specific use cases and were jumping on the opportunity.

We've been using AI agents to help with using our data to develop personas and unique value propositions on an ongoing basis, which is a huge timesaver. As a small organization we just can't invest in that type of work at this point. I've been learning how to build AI agents to help us in that way, so we can work smarter not harder.

Director of Marketing and Communication, Nonprofit, Canada

How small businesses are using AI technologies, Global



US, UK, Australia, Canada sample: July 2025 n=3,175

Source: Intuit QuickBooks, Small Business Insights, Sept. 2025

Mid-market marketers are alert to AI’s potential

Mid-market marketers believe AI will drive efficiencies and boost accuracy. And they also expect AI to help them scale their marketing efforts or deliver more accurate targeting and reporting.

There was very little difference in respondents’ viewpoints about AI’s benefits in various geographies, size of marketing staff, or orientation toward B2B or B2C.

Our research also showed near-unanimous agreement that AI will bring a sea-change in marketing performance going forward.

Just 2% of respondents said they didn’t think it would improve metrics, and the largest percentage (22%) expected the biggest uplift to come from improved engagement rates, followed by finding new prospects and leads (18%).

Primary anticipated benefit of incorporating AI, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

The capability gap impacts AI adoption

The principal constraint on achieving the promise of AI for marketing is clear: Mid-market marketers feel they lack the skills and knowledge to embrace AI fully.

To be honest, the subject of AI is a bit taboo because it’s so unknown.
Chief Digital Officer, Finance / Insurance, Australia

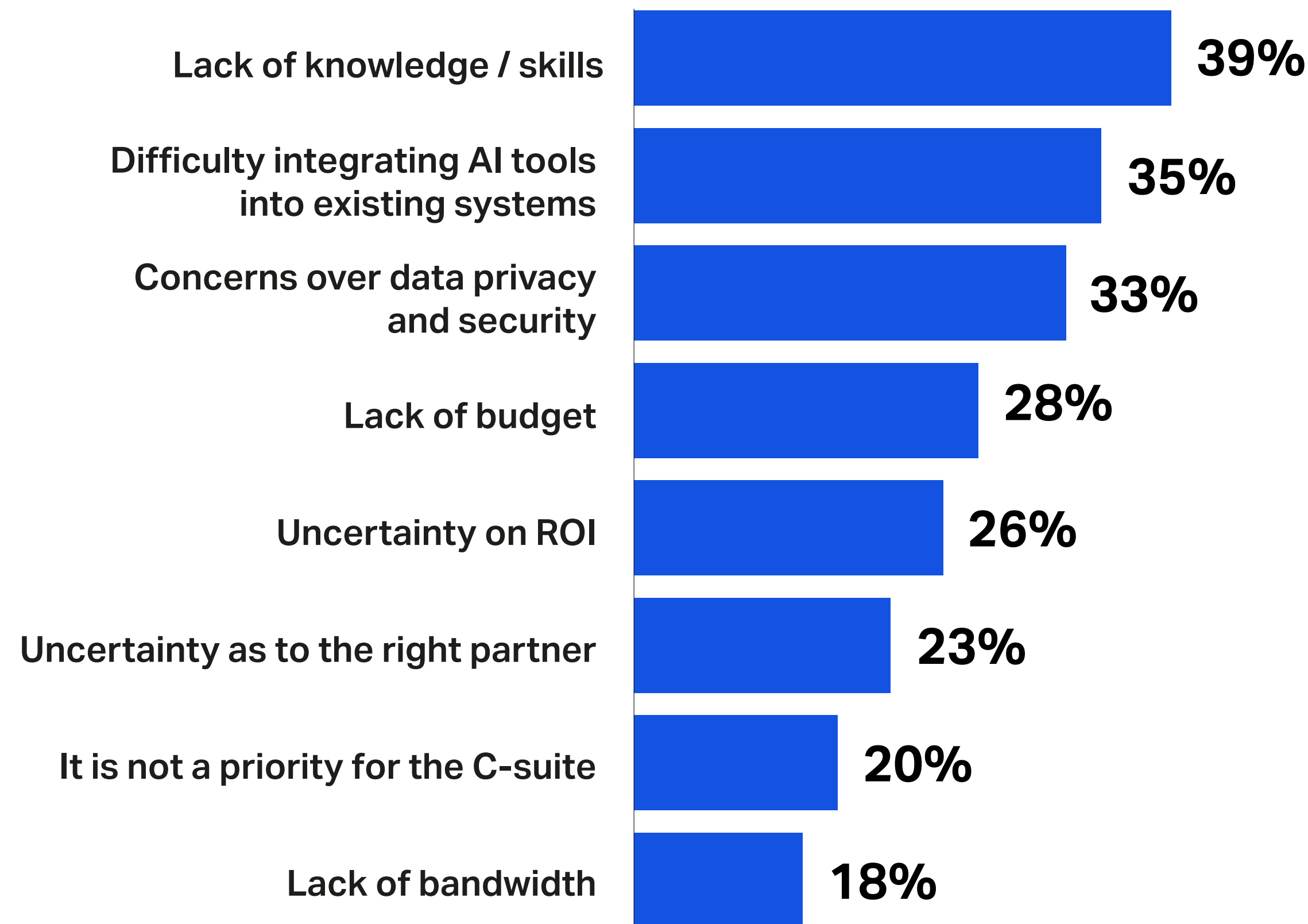
Lack of knowledge has knock-on effects: More than one in three respondents (35%) worried about how they’ll integrate AI tools into their existing systems, and 33% cited data privacy and security concerns.

These are all bigger obstacles than budgetary limitations or uncertainty as to short-term ROI; although as always, marketers will want maximum assurance they’re investing their money wisely.

Solving these challenges means taking steps to build AI literacy among internal employees—a topic that will be covered in more depth in Chapter 4. It also means working with martech partners that provide easily-implemented tools that address common pain points (such as improving engagement rates or increasing customer lifetime value).

Accordingly, the most welcomed solutions are likely to come from existing partners that can seamlessly integrate with the current martech stack.

Barriers to using AI-driven solutions more extensively, Global



Source: Mailchimp, The Marketing Equalizer: Leveraging AI for Mid-Market Growth, survey conducted by WARC, Jan. 2025

What we've learned in this chapter

1

To alleviate resource constraints, mid-market marketers lean heavily on martech

Companies with more martech platforms experiment more, are better placed to optimize, and think they have a competitive edge.

2

The mid-market believes AI will dramatically improve marketing effectiveness

However, most companies are only at the start of their AI journey. Adoption is patchy and use cases are often nascent.

3

There are barriers to overcome before AI-enabled solutions reach the tipping point

Mid-market companies are looking for more relatable use cases, stronger proof points, and turnkey products and services.

Chapter 4

**The equalizer
advantage:
How mid-market
marketers can
unlock the
potential of AI**



To grow, mid-market marketers must get the fundamentals right

In an increasingly competitive environment, growth is a priority, and effective marketing is more important than ever. The final chapter of this report focuses on how to put AI to work in a way that doesn't just help make marketing more efficient, but also (and more importantly) more effective.

But AI usage isn't a shortcut to effectiveness. Growth relies on sound strategy that focuses on the fundamentals of marketing effectiveness. Mid-market companies should remember the following tenets:

1. To navigate the Law of Double Jeopardy, focus on building brand awareness and bringing in new customers.
2. Think long term, rather than short term, when planning marketing investments, and embrace an omnichannel approach that captures current demand as well as future demand.
3. Optimize your channel mix – consider the potential of owned marketing channels like email and messaging that can provide valuable zero-party and first-party customer data that can operate as a sustainable system for driving both long-term growth and short-term ROI.

Successful mid-market AI implementations can be an equalizer that allows mid-marketing teams to do more with less; helping marketing organizations expand their customer base, boost their share of memory, and increase the quantity of customer data.

AI itself doesn't drive growth. AI is certainly an input into a growth mechanism for a company if they can use it to help make some of the things that they do more efficient, but it won't drive the growth itself. The AI needs to be in the service of someone who understands growth and is using it to grow.

James Hurman

Founder / Co-founder, Previously Unavailable, Tracksuit, Toothcrush and Storytech



A lot of the focus is on short-term efficiencies. For example, cost of campaign development, or the number of assets that can be created per campaign. These are relatively easy to track and measure. However, if the only impact is on efficiency rather than effectiveness, the team may be missing opportunities.

David Tiltman,

SVP, LIONS Intelligence



AI can help solve the most pressing pain points

Most mid-market marketing teams are only at the beginning of their AI journey, but 98% of respondents to our survey believe it will improve marketing metrics.

With smaller teams, tighter budgets, and fewer specialized resources, AI becomes a flexible tool that adapts to the problem at hand. Some pain points call for AI done with you (augmentation): where AI augments human knowledge, creativity, and decision-making. Others call for AI done for you (automation): where AI executes on set tasks or workflows. In many cases, AI can do both, giving marketers leverage they couldn't otherwise access.

How AI can be a partner to the mid-market's most pressing pain points

Augmentation ← → Automation



Industry perspectives

If you've equipped your team with the skills to know how to use AI, you can now use the AI to fill in any skills gaps. A marketer who knows how to get the most out of AI can turn it into the expert in almost anything.

Nicole Leffer

CMO AI Advisor, A. Catalyst LLC



In smaller organizations, marketers need to be much more generalist. They're working across the whole gamut from research and diagnosis and strategy and then implementation and execution and measurement. What AI presents as the most incredible opportunity is the ability to be able to upskill in each of those areas on the fly.

James Hurman

Founder / Co-founder, Previously Unavailable, Tracksuit, Toothcrush and Storytech



Industry perspectives

AI can improve the speed at which you get the same or higher quality of work. And because you're able to do certain things quicker, you now open up the possibility to do more of the things on your marketing wish list. That impact cascades—when you can do that next thing you otherwise wouldn't have, that could be the thing that moves the needle for you.

Nicole Leffer

CMO AI Advisor, A. Catalyst LLC



It's not just about doing things faster, it's about being able to do things differently to get to a better result. So, improving the effectiveness of your work because you've been able to bring different strategic perspectives, different audience perspectives, or being able to refine and iterate your thinking better as a result of AI.

Oliver Feldwick

Chief Innovation Officer, T&P



The biggest opportunity is using AI to see around corners—diagnose the blind spots we all have. Marketers don't always know what they're missing, but the models can highlight those areas and surface possibilities that a human might not have the time or perspective to connect. AI can help you recognize patterns across research, creative, and media that you couldn't have seen otherwise. That kind of connective tissue can change the game for small teams.

Caroline Giegerich

VP, AI & Marketing Innovation, IAB



Mid-market marketers must balance AI ambition with practicality

For all the promise of AI, the reality is that using it means striking a balance between thinking of AI as something that can do it all and accepting that it's not a silver bullet.

To implement solutions successfully, it's helpful to understand—step by step—how AI fits into the marketing workflow of a mid-market company.

The process starts with diagnosing pain points and identifying the areas of **impact** you need to prioritize.

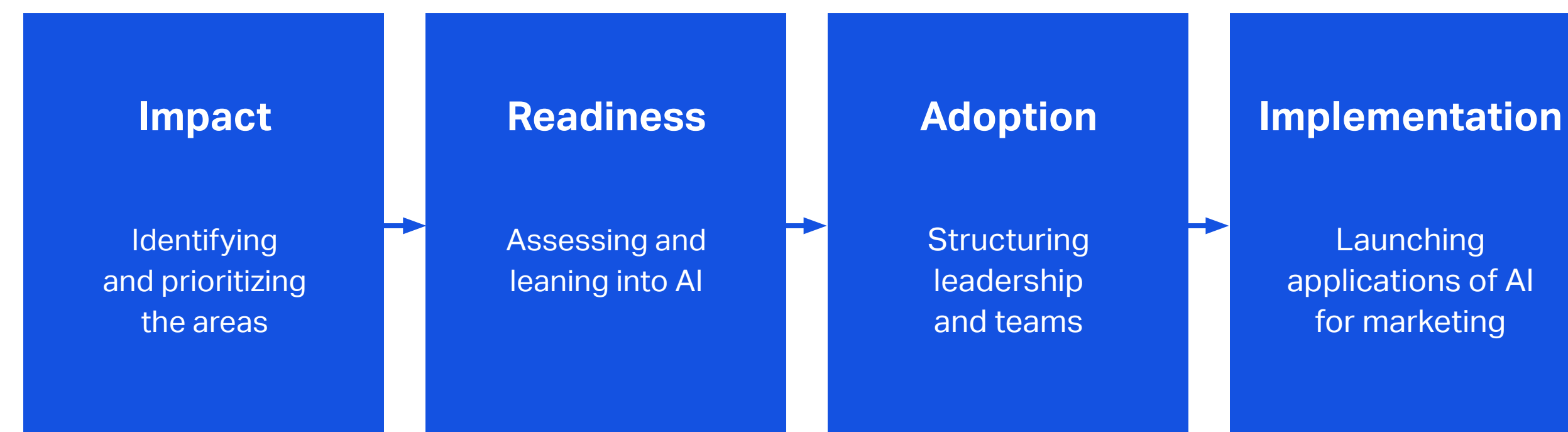
Next comes assessing **readiness**: The extent to which the company should lean into AI.

That's followed by **adoption**: Setting the stage for success by appropriately structuring leadership and teams.

And lastly, **implementation**: Setting objectives and launching applications of AI for marketing.

The bottom line: Approach AI as a structured journey, rather than a single decision in time. Mid-market marketers that start with well-defined initiatives will be better positioned to capitalize on AI's benefits.

AI roadmap for mid-market companies



Impact

Diagnosing gaps and identifying how AI can address marketing challenges

Although mid-market companies face an array of marketing challenges, identifying the most pressing ones is an important step, and should be done well before starting to implement any AI solutions.

Here are three action items mid-market companies should use to start to analyze where AI will have the most impact:

- 1. Assess where marketing results are falling short of expectations.** Ground the process in data and use metrics from across the funnel (such as brand awareness, lead generation, acquisition costs, conversion rates and retention metrics) to identify which processes, marketing channel choices, or data management practices are holding back growth.
- 2. Look beyond the marketing department.** Commercial leaders can provide valuable insight, and so can those on the front lines of customer service. In addition, inventory management or product managers might have insight into issues that marketing teams can't see.
- 3. Choose two or three top challenges.** Focus on areas where improvement could meaningfully impact growth. Don't try to solve every problem with AI; that will lead to a scattershot approach.



Industry perspectives

Rather than taking a top-down approach asking, ‘What can AI do for us?’, I recommend a bottom-up approach: ‘What are we already doing, and how can AI plug into those things in practical ways that make them faster or better?’

James Hurman

Founder of Previously Unavailable and Tracksuit,
Toothcrush and Storytech



The first step is defining where you have the biggest challenge as a marketer. Is it with compelling content creation, precise audience targeting, or efficient spend optimization? Once you define that, the next step is to develop a brief that outlines how AI can act as a strategic thought partner to solve your challenges.

Jose Miguel Belloso

Principal Product Marketing Manager, AI, Intuit Mailchimp



Map your process and ask what are the things that take a lot of time that shouldn’t? These are our really important tasks—where could AI help? Then match the tools to the problem. Otherwise you risk performative AI—doing AI as a signal to the market rather than actually solving a problem. That’s why a meaningful starting point is that audit and assessment. Otherwise you’re just doing AI for the sake of it, and that doesn’t land.

Oliver Feldwick

Chief Innovation Officer, T&P



Readiness

Chart a practical roadmap toward AI maturity

Beginning to formalize an AI journey begins with understanding your starting point. Assessing what stage of AI maturity your organization has achieved helps to give language to where you are in your journey, as well as chart practical next steps to achieve the next phase.

Of our research, just 35% of respondents in our survey are “AI Embedded,” having widely adopted AI. The largest share (47%) are “AI Applied,” who have partially adopted AI. “AI Emerging” and “AI Absent” companies make up the rest, at 15% and 3% of the respondent base.

With 65% below the AI Embedded level, that leaves plenty of room for mid-market companies to advance their AI literacy and implementation on a path toward maturity.

Reported stage of AI maturity, Global

AI embedded	35%	AI is leveraged as a systemized partner to the marketing strategy, supported by budget, leadership, and culture
AI applied	47%	AI is gaining traction, with some pilots, partial investment, and growing alignment to goals
AI emerging	15%	AI adoption is more limited, with few resources and less leadership support
AI absent	3%	No AI adoption

Readiness

Assessing AI Maturity

Beginning to expand your AI capability starts with understanding your starting point. While every AI journey will look different, this checklist helps gauge where your company stands.

Checklist for self-assessing AI readiness. Check one box for each area and score 1, 2, or 3 based on which box is checked.

Strategic alignment

- AI projects are ad hoc, not tied to marketing goals – 1
- AI is linked to some marketing priorities but not fully embedded – 2
- AI is central to achieving marketing and business growth objectives – 3

Data & tech infrastructure

- Data is siloed, systems don't connect well with AI tools – 1
- Some integrations exist, but gaps limit scale – 2
- Unified data systems fully support AI-driven initiatives – 3

Risk & governance

- No clear policies on AI risk, data use, or transparency – 1
- Some governance policies exist but are inconsistently applied – 2
- Strong policies cover ethics, risk and transparency in AI use – 3

Leadership & support

- No clear executive champion; AI is peripheral – 1
- One or two leaders support AI, but wider buy-in is limited – 2
- A senior champion drives AI adoption, with broad team support – 3

Marketing budget & investment

- No specific budget for AI in marketing – 1
- Limited funds for pilots or vendor tools – 2
- Dedicated budget to test, scale and sustain AI investments – 3

Talent & skills

- Little to no in-house AI or data expertise – 1
- Some staff with skills; ad hoc training plans – 2
- Strong talent base plus active upskilling or hiring strategy – 3

Experimentation & use cases

- Few or no AI pilots in marketing – 1
- Some experiments, but limited measurement or scaling – 2
- Regular pilots, clear ROI tracking and scaled applications – 3

Culture & change readiness

- Teams resist new tools; failures stall progress – 1
- Some openness to AI, but the mindset is still cautious – 2
- Strong culture of experimentation, with learnings shared openly – 3

Add up scores to determine your company's AI readiness.

8–11 points = AI Absent

12–15 points = AI Emerging

16–20 points = AI Applied

21–24 points = AI Embedded

Total:

Adoption

Appoint accountable AI leaders

Mid-market marketers are sometimes stuck in a reinforcing loop when it comes to AI implementation. Our survey found that among all marketing-related tasks, AI initiatives are the least likely to have dedicated staff assigned to them. At the same time, AI is the area where marketing executives are most likely to feel their company lacks capabilities.

The good news is that this cycle can be broken. With an accountable leader (or leaders) who own AI efforts and keep them from drifting, mid-market marketers can help build strength more quickly.

The table to the right depicts how an organization can structure internally for AI. It aligns the type of staffing to the corresponding AI maturity model level, showing how roles and responsibilities can change and grow as AI becomes more embedded.

One thing that’s important to note is that companies on the smaller side within the mid-market space will by necessity need to be more proactive in spreading AI responsibility around, so they do not overload any one person or team.

No matter how a company chooses to manage its AI initiatives, an organized approach will pay off.

Example organizational structures for AI deployment, based on AI maturity level

	AI champion	Centralized AI leadership	Hub and spoke	Fully Embedded
Org structure	One motivated marketing leader informally tests and leads adoption	One marketing leader has official AI responsibility laddering up to management	Central team sets direction and standards; connected teams execute and report	Integrated into every team and coordinated via shared tools and governance oversight
Corresponding Maturity Model	AI Emerging (minimal adoption)	AI Emerging (minimal adoption)	AI Applied (partial adoption)	AI Embedded (wide adoption)

Adoption

Cultivate an experimentation mindset

Accountable leaders also need to have an open mind and flexible approach when it comes to embedding AI into their marketing organization. As our survey found, working with martech providers is a powerful way to enable experimentation and learn the right lessons.

Our research showed a clear correlation between the number of martech platforms a company used and the percentage of marketing budget allocated toward trialing new strategies and tactics, such as those infused with AI.

In addition, experimentation boosts knowledge and skills capabilities, making it easier to adapt and learn as AI maturity grows.

How to put experimentation on the front burner

The cost of not testing and learning now will be felt later on as AI-ready companies start to put new processes and systems in place. The biggest risk is being blind-sided by new business models that AI makes possible. While many companies are focused on immediate efficiencies, the bigger threat to their long-term success may come from category-disrupting innovation.

David Tiltman
SVP, LIONS Intelligence



The real opportunity for small to medium-sized businesses is the chance to make waves and take risks learning to use AI in a way that is harder to do within big organizations. It's a moment where the nimbleness of smaller teams can actually be an advantage.

Oliver Feldwick
Chief Innovation Officer, T&P



Adoption

Take an intentional approach to furthering maturity

Getting started and making space for experimenting is an important part of establishing a culture of success for leveraging AI. But systemizing deeper use of AI requires an intentional approach.

Without clear governance, training protocols, and phased rollouts, AI initiatives become isolated experiments that fail to scale or integrate with existing business processes. Yet, according to the IAB State of Data 2025 report, less than half of companies are developing solutions to address AI implementation.¹ Lacking a systematic approach leaves organizations vulnerable to common pitfalls like data security vulnerabilities, accuracy issues, and workflow disruptions.

Adopting a methodical progression ensures that each stage builds foundational capabilities, from leadership buy-in and team education to risk management and performance measurement, creating sustainable long-term advantages rather than temporary productivity gains.

Absent → Emerging	Emerging → Applied	Applied → Embedded
<p>Create awareness of AI capabilities and educate leadership and teams</p> <p>Analyze marketing data for areas needing improvement</p> <p>Assess current martech vendors for AI capabilities</p> <p>Begin developing governance and risk management documents</p>	<p>Assign ownership and responsibility for AI initiative</p> <p>Set aside a budget for more extensive AI pilots or tests with current or new martech vendors</p> <p>Start measuring ROI from AI pilots and tests</p>	<p>Scale successful AI pilots across other marketing functions</p> <p>Add specialized talent to manage AI programs</p> <p>Formalize governance and risk management</p> <p>Embed AI into strategic planning and link to revenue goals</p>

¹ Source: IAB State of Data 2025: Evolution of AI for Media Campaigns

Industry perspectives

You can't just give a team a tool and expect them to, in the midst of their busy schedule, learn how to use it with no resources, training courses, or anything to help them learn how to use it. They're not going to get very far.

Nicole Leffer

CMO AI Advisor, A. Catalyst LLC



Scalability, privacy, accuracy. Those are the three pillars I use when advising teams on AI adoption. Ask: Can this workflow scale? What's the privacy footprint of my data? And is the output accurate enough to be relied on? If you don't keep those three in mind, adoption will create more problems than it solves.

Jose Miguel Belloso

Principal Product Marketing manager, AI, Intuit Mailchimp



It's really important to set up those foundational systems so that when you hit a moment of scale, you don't have to scramble to make things work. It's typical to build a lot of aiding solutions for right now until we get to the next phase. But when you get there, you need to take off all those Band-Aids and then rebuild all those systems, which takes a lot more than if you just set it up from the beginning.

Director of Marketing and Communication

Nonprofit, Canada

Industry perspectives

The biggest barrier is often just not starting. You don't need to be an expert, you need to be curious. Play with it, test it against real problems, and you'll very quickly see where it's useful and where it isn't.

Director of Marketing and Communication
Nonprofit, Canada

One of the challenges is, there's always going to be some level of discomfort... I think the way to adopt is not just to say, here's a tool, go use it. It's about creating space for people to experiment, to learn, to make mistakes, and to also share what's working. Otherwise it stays isolated in silos.

Jack Tam
SVP, Engineering, Intuit Mailchimp



In marketing, AI will dramatically transform experimentation, evolving it from manual to fully automated. Today's tools let you run experiments like A/B or multivariate tests on email and SMS content—from subject lines to full campaigns. AI takes this further by actually optimizing them for you. Instead of merely providing a platform for testing, AI embeds intelligence directly into your marketing workflows. Take subject line testing as an example: AI can autonomously generate dozens of variations, test them in real-time, and deploy the winner—transforming what used to be a multi-step manual task into a seamless, self-optimizing process. AI will no longer be just a content generation tool, but a strategic partner that designs, executes, and continuously optimizes for your desired outcomes.

Jose Miguel Belloso
Principal Product Marketing manager, AI, Intuit Mailchimp



Implementation

Match AI use cases to measurable marketing goals

AI experiments and integrations will be more likely to achieve positive results by determining the areas of application and aligning them to the expected benefits.

One example of this approach is to align the marketing metrics where mid-market companies expect to see the most uplift from AI with the types of AI tools that support those goals. For example, marketers in our survey said they expected AI to provide the biggest uplift in metrics related to improved engagement rates. Two examples of AI tools that can help are those that personalize email content or optimize subject lines based on previous engagements.

You want to have some kind of strategy or operational plan that the tools are going to slot into, as opposed to using them because they look shiny.

James Hurman

Founder / Co-founder, Previously Unavailable, Tracksuit, Toothcrush and Storytech



Expected metrics benefit (from survey)	AI tool examples
Improving engagement rates	Scale successful AI pilots across other marketing AI content personalization based on user behavior; AI tools that optimize subject lines, ad copy, article / blog headlines
Finding new prospects and leads	AI lead scoring tools; audience modeling to find lookalike audiences
Increasing revenue	AI tools that find cross-sell or upsell opportunities; dynamic pricing tools
Maximizing customer lifetime value	AI tools for customer retention and loyalty; AI customer service agents
Improving conversion rates	A/B testing tools; AI-customized landing pages

Implementation

The equalizer advantage in action

Use case: An AI-enabled growth loop in action

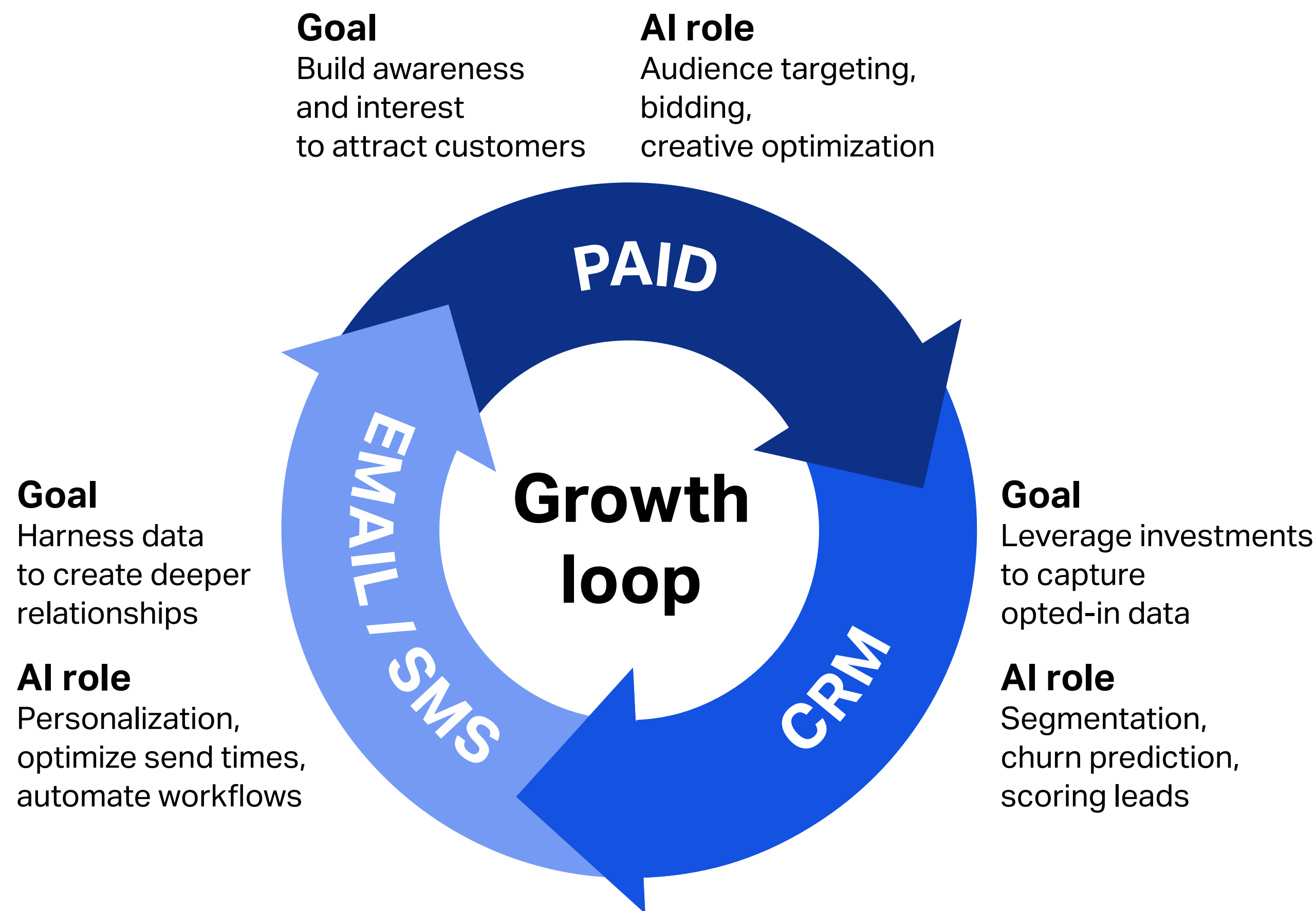
For mid-market marketers, an important entry point for embedding AI is to help tighten the connections between paid and owned channels and the CRM systems that inform both. Together, these form a growth loop, where one component feeds the other.

AI can be integrated in each part of the loop.

- **Paid:** AI tools that focus on discovery and acquisition.
- **CRM:** AI tools to help capture and organize data and signals.
- **Owned:** AI tools that emphasize converting attention into deeper engagement.

When mid-market marketers use AI across all of these areas, in an organized, strategic and measurable way, they set themselves up to discover new routes to drive growth and revenue. Leveraging AI to augment marketing effectiveness allows smaller organizations to unlock the marketing equalizer effect: achieving competitive advantage that otherwise would take more resource, talent, and levels of specialism to achieve.

An AI-enabled growth loop across paid and owned channels



Industry perspectives

If AI can make it easier to take what happens in owned and feed it back into CRM, and then back out into paid, that's where you start to see growth compounding. It's not just one-off campaigns—it becomes a living system where every piece of data and content makes the next one smarter. And for smaller teams, AI is the thing that makes it possible without needing 10 specialists to manage each handoff.

Caroline Giegerich

VP, AI & Marketing Innovation, AB



We've been using AI agents to help with using our data to help us develop personas and unique value propositions on an ongoing basis, which is a huge timesaver. As a small organization we just can't invest in that type of work at this point. I've been learning how to build AI agents to help us in that way, so we can work smarter not harder.

Director of Marketing and Communication

Nonprofit, Canada

The ROI on email is king, if you have a proper database that is curated, clean and healthy. [Our clients] try to do that manually. So this is a game changer for them. When we segment and create an automated communication for them, it will run to effectively convert paid customers. You had this hidden money in your database, and you didn't know that you can find it with Mailchimp.

Javier Moral

CEO, Disruptivos



Industry perspectives

Most marketers in these smaller organizations are already doing paid and they already have some kinds of owned channels—email, social, website—but they’re treating them as separate activities. The magic happens when you can connect them. That’s where AI can step in, because it’s not just about efficiency, it’s about integration. It can help you see how the actions in one channel should trigger the next, and how signals in one area can inform what happens in another. That loop is what builds momentum.

Caroline Giegerich

VP, AI & Marketing Innovation, AB



What AI can also do is potentially glean insights from all this data and make it easier to extract relevant insights. That could be segmenting audiences, creating the right offers, or understanding which customers are likely to churn. AI could help marketers spend less time trying to stitch things together manually, and more time actually acting on those insights. And I think that’s where the real promise comes in—not just saving you effort, but making your marketing smarter and more informed.

Jack Tam

SVP, Engineering, Intuit Mailchimp



What we've learned in this chapter

1 Focus on using AI to improve marketing effectiveness, not just efficiency

Keeping the fundamentals of marketing growth in mind is paramount when starting to incorporate AI. Mid-marketers should approach AI as a structured journey that starts with well-defined initiatives to maximize effectiveness.

2 Mapping AI solutions to the top marketing obstacles will enable companies to determine where to implement "AI done for you" or "AI done with you" solutions

Martech partners can support and enable AI experimentation, helping mid-market companies to learn the right lessons.

3 AI experiments and integrations will be more likely to achieve positive results by determining the areas of application and aligning them to the expected benefits

An important entry point for embedding AI is to help tighten the connections between paid and owned channels and the CRM systems that inform both. Together, these form a growth loop, where one component feeds the other.

Final takeaways

1 The resilient mid-market: Overcoming challenges and pursuing growth

Mid-market marketing teams are resilient but constrained. Small teams, limited budgets, talent shortages, and economic pressures make it harder to compete with larger brands. Faced with the need to do more with less, mid-marketers cite AI as a leading capability gap.

2 The mid-market's marketing playbook: What's working now

Marketing investment is strong but spread thin. Spend is concentrated in just a handful of channels, often skewed toward short-term digital tactics, while owned media like email and SMS remain underutilized growth engines.

3 Martech and AI: The powerhouse duo transforming marketing

Martech and AI provide leverage. Companies with broader martech adoption are more likely to experiment and feel competitively stronger. Nearly all mid-market marketers believe AI can improve effectiveness, but adoption remains partial and skills gaps persist.

4 The equalizer advantage: How mid-market marketers can unlock the potential of AI

AI is becoming the mid-market's competitive edge. Marketing teams that commit to AI adoption as a structured journey can turn efficiency gains into sustained growth. Those that delay risk ceding ground to faster-moving competitors.

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For nearly 40 years, WARC has been powering the marketing segment by providing rigorous and unbiased evidence, expertise and guidance to make marketers more effective. Across several platforms – WARC Strategy, WARC Creative, WARC Media – its services include 100,000+ case studies, best practice guides, research papers, special reports, advertising trend data, news and opinion articles, as well as awards, events and advisory services.

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