

Develop an AI Strategic Roadmap for Marketing

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Initiatives: [Marketing Leadership and Strategy](#); [Customer Experience](#); [Generative AI Resource Center](#)

Marketing is a leader in GenAI adoption for organizations, but long-term growth is limited by the focus on short-term results. CMOs can use this research to evolve AI-enabled capabilities and leverage the human-machine relationship across strategic planning horizons to reach marketing goals.

Overview

Key Findings

- Marketing is at the forefront of businesses' generative AI (GenAI) adoption. Nearly 70% of enterprise marketers experimenting with the technology have already implemented it or plan to do so in the next six months. Compare that to the less than 54% of business executives across other non-IT functions, according to the 2024 Gartner Generative AI Planning Survey.
- Despite being "first movers" in GenAI adoption, CMOs struggle to identify business value beyond the easy-to-evaluate use cases, such as operational efficiency.
- While AI has been used in business for years, there are no proven best practices for GenAI applications, leaving early adopters to learn by making mistakes within a critical business function.

Recommendations

For effective marketing leadership and strategy, CMOs should:

- Start with low-risk internal use cases to prove value in the short term, but look beyond cost and time savings to solving problems that create new ways to engage customers and drive revenue. This will connect marketing's contributions to enterprise objectives.

- Balance the reality that short-term execution gets in the way of long-term strategic planning. Implement guardrails to shape autonomous interaction in support of midterm planning. Don't let the current race to AI implementation impede future success.
- Prepare for machine-led decision making in long-term strategic planning. Develop policy and guardrails that account for AI's impact on employees and the specific business and customer outcomes AI adoption is expected to achieve.

Introduction

The top two most sought after benefits for GenAI by functional leaders, including CMOs, are productivity and cost reduction, with enhancing customer experience coming in third.¹ While in the short term removing the manual and mundane tasks is a win, CMOs need to build strategic roadmaps that address how they will optimize AI now, in the midterm and for the future. This is an organizational imperative to ensure competitive differentiation and is critical to an agile business model that keeps dual pace with changing customer and organizational demands.

It's important to identify and plan for how marketing will leverage customer data, empower employees and govern the work to harness the innovation and ROI that GenAI can bring. Without a roadmap for differentiation, most brands will be left at the same dead end.

To get started, identify which areas in your organization and your team are the most vulnerable to AI disruption by employing internal audits or using a maturity assessment such as the Gartner Marketing Score. (See [B2C Marketing Score](#) or [B2B Marketing Score](#).) Pay particular attention to the activities involved with analyzing and activating data, managing operations, and leading the marketing function.

Every organization is unique in its ambition and technical and cultural readiness for AI. Early adopters have both the capabilities and willingness to assume the risk associated with bringing a rapidly accelerating technology into the enterprise. Remaining organizations will learn from their mistakes and best practices, establishing responsible use guidelines and guardrails to drive future value.

Once you know your current state, then use this research to engineer how marketing will drive value and bring growth to the organization at each stage of its AI horizon (see Figure 1). We foresee three stages of AI implementation at most organizations:

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

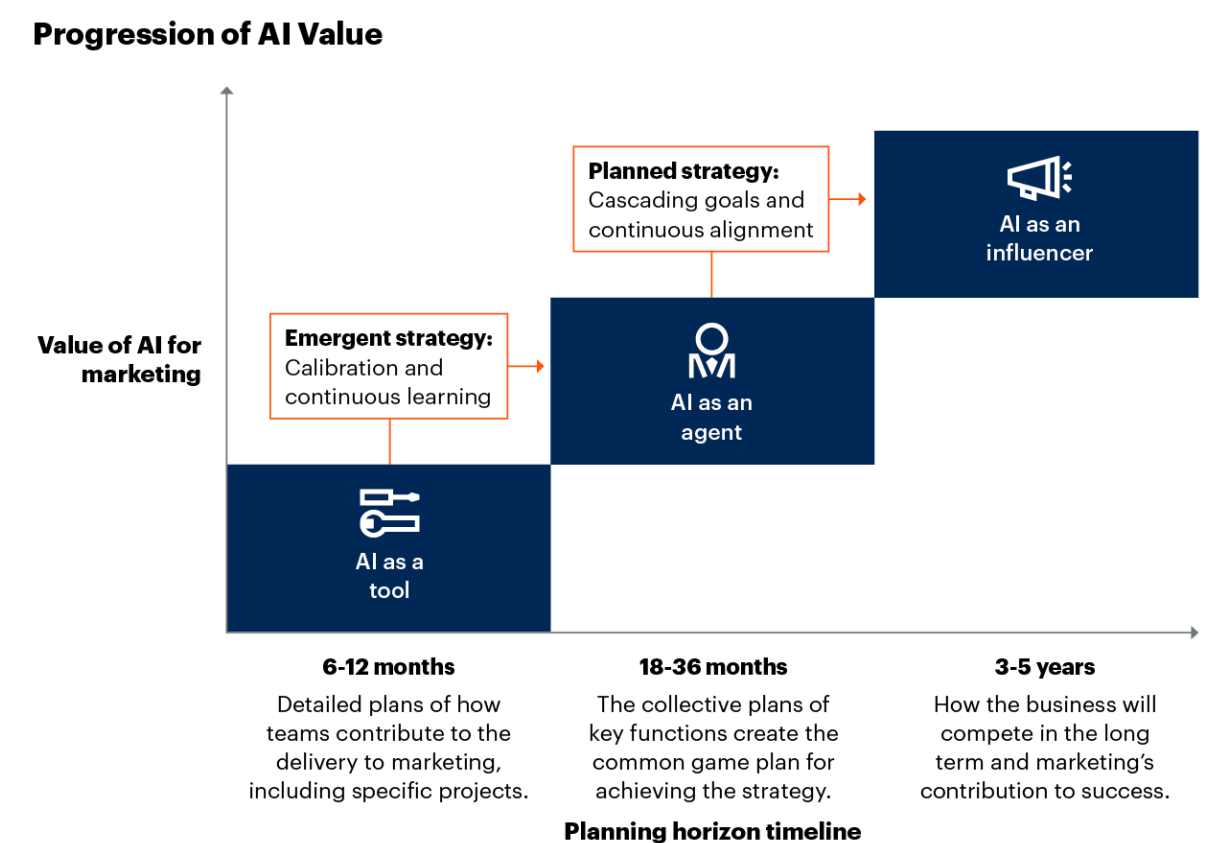
As organizations progress through each stage, the use of AI will become more automatic and with the introduction of machine customers, AI will be more autonomous.

AI as a tool. Based on organizational maturity and the dimensions of business value and feasibility for bringing AI into the function, the majority of organizations are currently using AI as a tool, reflected by the short-term planning horizon. AI as a tool reflects an organization in the early stages of AI adoption with a limited number of use cases that are positioned toward reducing the burden of manual tasks (see [Generative AI Use-Case Comparison for Marketing](#)).

AI as an agent. Early adopters should look to the midterm planning horizon of AI as an agent, as internal capabilities increase and customers begin to become more comfortable with engaging with AI as part of the organization's brand experience. AI agents are autonomous or semiautonomous software entities that use AI techniques to perceive, make decisions, take actions and achieve goals in their digital or physical environments.

AI as an influencer. There is a reason AI as an influencer emerges in the long-term planning horizon. The technology isn't there yet. But this research will give you the vision and steps to prepare for a future where AI can lead decisions more autonomously, requiring less human oversight and asserting more influence.

Figure 1: Progression of AI Value



Source: Gartner
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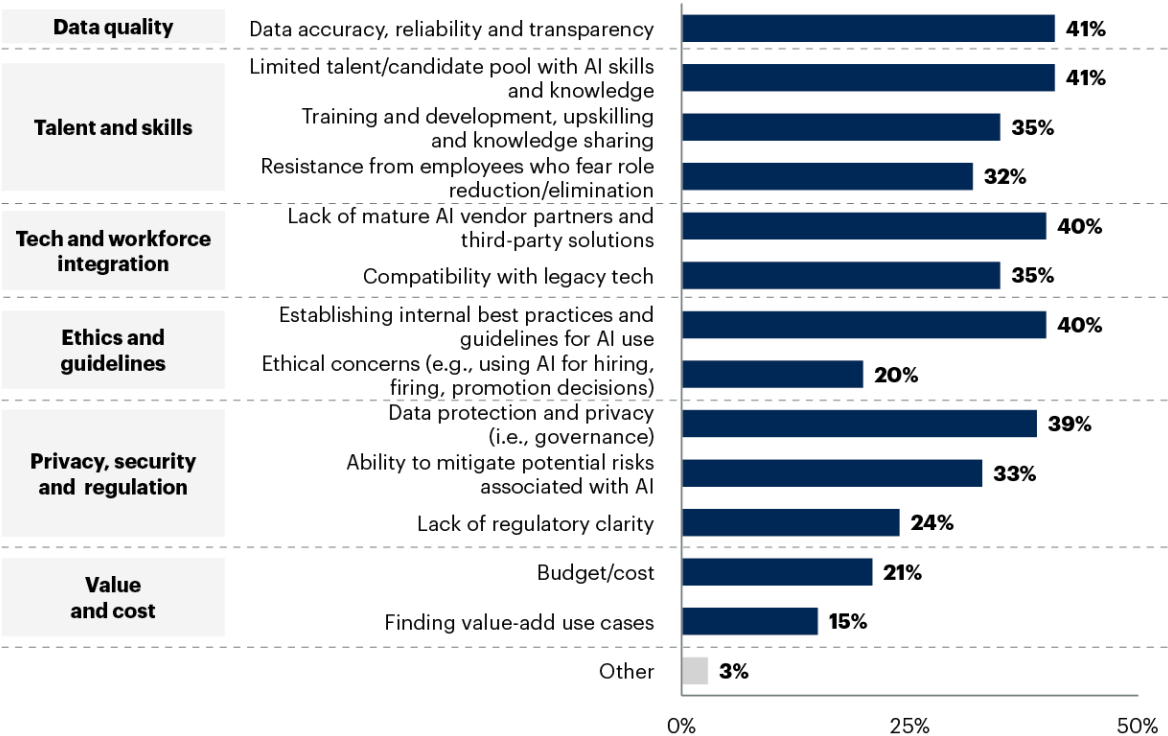
Wherever you are on your journey, Gartner has identified three key areas of focus to help you move forward with more clarity around what it takes for an organization to bring AI to the enterprise at scale. Start by addressing the barriers to successful utilization of AI (see Figure 2), including data, tech and talent, and trust concerns.

Discipline in these three areas will be critical to the success of AI implementation across all planning horizons. Overlooking small cracks in your foundation now will only become amplified as AI magnifies errors in its outputs.

Figure 2: Top Challenges in the Implementation of GenAI

Top Challenges in the Implementation of GenAI

Multiple responses



n = 100 marketing leaders

Q. In your understanding, what are some potential challenges with the implementation of Generative AI in your organization?

Source: Gartner Generative AI 2024 Planning Survey

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As we move toward AI as an agent, models will learn from each other at a speed human data processing can't match. Agents will begin to predict and execute tasks independently. Without a human in the loop, agents may take multiple consequential actions in rapid succession and bring about significant impacts before a human notices.

Now is the time to prioritize the establishment of data privacy protocols, clear process guardrails — including legal and ethical guidelines around autonomy — liability and robust security measures that will shape your AI-enabled future.

Analysis

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

In this phase, AI planning is company-centric, primarily focusing on internal productivity and operational efficiency.

Guiding principle: AI is a tool.

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

Strategy: To prove the value of AI in the near term, work within your system. While the democratization capabilities of GenAI bring opportunity to marketing teams who have been asked to do more with less for years, you must actively manage this newfound productivity to ensure short-term efforts quickly move from efficiency to effectiveness.

Evaluate internal applications with your marketing leadership team by prioritizing use cases and set performance objectives that support existing KPIs. These low-risk implementations also support the gradual culture change necessary for members of your marketing teams to adapt to how to engage with the technology. How you guide your leaders to manage the newfound productivity of the team will be key to your long-term success.

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

Help your team adopt an AI-first mindset by focusing on how AI can augment your employee's daily work and building an AI-first culture. See [Case Study: Human-Centric Generative AI Strategy](#) for a practical example. Key considerations across data, tech, talent and trust include:

- Appoint GenAI ambassadors, early tech adopters and doers in your organization who can host open forums and are empowered to address questions and concerns directly or escalate major concerns to you or members of your leadership team.
- Create and participate in a closed feedback loop with the organization to solve the biggest concerns. This is particularly important for CMOs who want to champion AI adoption and lead the necessary culture change to engage in creating solutions to address major concerns.

- Partner with technology or operational leaders to work with vendors to explore tech capabilities that are focused on optimizing workflows and tasks such as querying data, standardizing metadata and categorizing outputs for employees to automate repetitive tasks.
- Establish human review panels to ensure someone reviews outputs before they reach a customer. This will build internal trust through an understanding of how models work and customer trust by ensuring the reliability of outputs they engage with.

What you should do now to get ahead: Productivity still ranks low on CEOs' top strategic business priorities for 2024 through 2025. ³ So, emphasizing productivity as the main desired outcome of marketing's utilization of AI is not going to accelerate marketing's value to the business. Instead, focus on the outcomes that new white-space marketing can fill because of productivity gains. Identify what improved productivity allows the organization to achieve and ensure leaders and managers in the marketing organization are aligning newfound productivity to support those broader business initiatives.

One way to accomplish this shift is by viewing the relationship with customers through a more strategic lens. For example, set KPIs around higher engagement, customer lifetime value (CLV) and qualified leads due to an AI-powered initiative.

How you can mitigate risk: CMO budgets are in decline. Don't focus on small optimizations at the expense of potential transformation. Take ownership over how customer data is managed and how your organization communicates the use of AI to customers. If you lack budgets or required skills, appoint a member of your team to represent the marketing position. Data quality and governance are critical components to success of AI applications now and will become more vital in the midterm planning horizon as AI agents begin to engage with each other to make decisions. There is a real risk of losing trust with customers at this moment. CMOs must take a proactive approach through content certification and transparency to bridge the trust gap by focusing on transparency in how customer data is used to train AI models and how AI is used to engage them. (See [A CMO's Guide to Implementing Generative AI.](#))

When every organization is using AI for the same benefits, CMOs must gauge organizational receptivity to risk and push applications that are on the leading edges of those spaces.

Midterm Planning Horizon: Implement Guardrails to Shape Autonomous Interactions

In this phase, planning, and AI evolution, expands the scope of AI to become more customer-centric and to address use cases that support the delivery of better customer experiences and the unique value that a brand can provide.

Guiding principle: AI as an agent.

Business impact: AI begins to act on its own based on logic and reasoning. It helps find new insights for businesses, employees and customers. AI algorithms will benefit from learning based on customers' ability to accomplish their goals, aided by AI that sifts through data/content for them to make decisions easier.

Strategy: Focus on how you can uniquely serve priority customers. Identify target customer segments or personas to ensure GenAI is learning from and producing assets that are focused on the right customers (See [Quick Answer: Use Segments and Personas Together to Understand and Target Most Valued Customers](#).) This is even more important as the volume of messaging and precision of marketing increases.

Progressive brands will begin to introduce agents to customer journeys to take on tasks for human customers in areas that are typically mundane, effortful or overwhelming because of the abundance of potential selection criteria.

As the AI agency gap closes, moving from agents that require strong supervision to those that act autonomously and execute complex goals, marketers will need to focus on the most important moments across the customer journey to be successful. (See [Innovation Insight: AI Agents](#).) That success will rely on the quality of your first-party customer data or synthetic data built to mimic first-party data that supports systems where real data is expensive, unavailable, imbalanced or unusable because of privacy regulations.

Operations: AI is capable of acting on behalf of both customers and employees, but it still requires validation and a level of oversight by humans that will need to be accounted for in terms of process and people. Key considerations across data, tech, talent and trust include:

- Optimize metadata and unstructured data to ensure the most relevant information is accessible to employees and customers. AI agents will learn from your data and then adapt. You need to make sure they are adapting based on the right inputs.

- Work with your enterprise AI team to identify and mitigate risks. AI governance is a key component to assessing risks related to data quality and privacy violations, offering continuous model monitoring and correction to ensure fairness.
- Work with cross-functional teams to determine, document and enforce governance standards for testing and implementation, as well as establishing QA processes to balance critical thinking and a proper degree of trust in GenAI outputs.

What you should do now to get ahead: Marketing needs to evolve to focus on using AI agents to better meet customers where they are, with information that helps them make decisions based on how brands can uniquely help them. The current proliferation of data and access to information leave consumers overwhelmed and unable to make decisions. According to a study by Accenture, “75% of people surveyed feel bombarded by advertising and 73% feel overwhelmed by too many options.” ⁴

It's important for organizations to focus on increasing their customer understanding capabilities because without that muscle, customer algorithms will be undifferentiated and achieving personalization will be a challenge. Organizations that focus on the continuous development and refinement of data-driven customer personas will be more successful at using AI to deliver compelling experiences because customers' objectives and needs are a foundational part of their learning architecture.

Persona development will also need to extend to AI agents acting on behalf of human customers because they have different requirements for the consumption of information to make decisions. While machine customers will operate based on the parameters set by human customers, they will execute efficiently because they apply objectivity and logic over emotion.

Developing quality brand content to meet customers at pivotal moments will become increasingly important to delivering on marketing objectives and will outpace the capacity of employees whose creativity is not augmented by technology. CMOs must focus on gleaning quality insights to ensure AI isn't just about the creation of more volume, but of more value.

How you can mitigate risk: Brands will need to balance investments in brand differentiation to meet the needs of human customers while also investing in logic-based tools to drive the rule-driven decisions of machines. Don't get too far ahead of what the technology is proven to do. Measure your use cases against feasibility and value to ensure you are pacing your ambitions pragmatically (see [Generative AI Use-Case Comparison for Customer Experience](#)).

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

In this phase, AI is woven into the fabric of society (like a mobile phone). AI influences our decisions as businesses and customers.

Guiding Principle: AI is an influencer.

Business impact: CEOs tell us they believe 25% of their company's revenue will come from machine customers.³ In fact, it is estimated that by 2025, there will be 15 billion connected products with the potential to behave as customers — to shop for services and supplies for themselves and their owners.¹

Gartner predicts that by 2027, 50% of people in advanced economies will have AI personal assistants working for them every day. These new AI-agent customers will influence buying decisions and act on behalf of humans, and automate and augment tasks and purchases. They will be driven by the rules and logic programmed into them by their human owners, requiring organizations that own these agents to understand and address the requirements of both machine and human customers. Through predictive analytics and behaviors modeled after customer personas, GenAI can help organizations identify where machine customers could be best positioned.

Strategy: CMOs will need to rethink the brand-customer relationship to include a new category of customer that isn't human and can't be influenced, but is an influencer. For example, a machine customer could generate a written review about a product or service based on its experience with a brand. Machine customers will require marketers to bifurcate their strategies based on human versus machine target audiences. In the near future, they will be able to act autonomously on behalf of customers based on context, preferences and rules set by customers (see [Top Strategic Technology Trends for 2024: Machine Customers](#)).

Operations: Work in partnership with product, sales, customer service, marketing technology, CX, and data and analytics leaders to identify scenarios where your products and services could be utilized by machine customers (see [Presentation Slides: 50 Emerging Examples of Machine Customers](#)). Key considerations across data, tech, talent and trust include:

- Prepare for the unexpected, such as potential influx of requests and orders by machine customers or the need for new content and digital commerce formats required to serve machine customers' evaluation of pricing and features.
- Adopt a composable approach to your martech stack, which will allow for the flexibility necessary to adapt your capabilities quickly to meet the changing demands for human experiences and detailed information required by machines.
- Work with talent management partners and vendors to account for training and skills development on an ongoing basis. New demands will require new skills and potentially new roles to manage this new type of customer. .

What you should do now to get ahead: Most importantly, the technology must work. Marketing should build off enterprise standards to ensure privacy and consent are considered during every interaction between a machine and human.

Invest in pilots of identified use cases and start with transactions that are low in complexity. Identify critical touchpoints in the customer journey where customers would prefer to delegate their time to a machine customer proxy to maximize time spent elsewhere, to increase objectivity, remove emotion from decisions or reduce decision fatigue. At the same time, identify touchpoints in the customer journey where there is the opportunity to differentiate through delivering a human-certified experience.

Understand that your customer journeys will be a combination of human, machine and mixed. Consider what ethical standards, legal issues and risk mitigation are needed to operate in a world of machines as customers.

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

In addition, marketing organizations may have to make sections of their customer journey's "overtly human" to attract the attention and focus of human customers that control the direction, pattern and buying patterns of machine customers and agents.

Trust with machines will be based on data-based differences. Trust with humans will still involve emotion. Marketers will need the discipline to optimize for both.

Evidence

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

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

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

⁴ [The Empowered Consumer](#), Accenture.

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Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

[Generative AI Use-Case Comparison for Marketing](#)

[A CMO's Guide to Implementing Generative AI](#)

[Benchmark Marketing's Generative AI Strategy and Performance](#)

[Lay the Groundwork for a Huge New Market: Machines That Are Customers](#)

[How to Manage the Impact of GenAI on Customer Experience](#)

[Presentation Slides: 50 Emerging Examples of Machine Customers](#)

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