

# Al and the Agency of the Future:

Rethinking Roles, Redefining Revenue, and Reshaping Business Models

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## **Executive Summary**

In 2025, AI is mission-critical for marketing and advertising agencies. No longer optional, AI is now a fundamental driver of efficiency, scalability, and competitive advantage.

Widespread AI adoption is powering operational efficiency and innovative business models. Leading agencies are using AI assistants and agents to transform productivity and automate routine tasks, allowing them to focus resources on strategic and creative work.

Agencies that proactively implement AI are discovering new revenue streams and improving profit margins. But while AI is changing agency operations, it's primarily supplementing human capabilities—not replacing them.

As **Forrester** predicts, "In 2025, B2B organizations will finally harness the AI advantage. Successful companies will tackle infrastructure challenges and realign resources while also resisting the urge to lay off headcount to satisfy the pressure for financial returns."

Now is the time to shift from exploration to implementation. Agencies that effectively position AI offerings, integrate advanced AI capabilities, and improve profit margins maintain a true advantage over the competition and capture the ability to scale.

2025 is the year AI agents move from experimental to essential. The agencies that figure out how to embed AI into their workflows—not just for insights, but for execution—are the ones that will win."



PAUL DERAVAL CEO, NINJACAT

# **Top Insights**

### Al is now business-critical for agency operations. Early adopters are ahead of the curve, with 92%

Early adopters are ahead of the curve, with 92% reporting that AI is increasing agency productivity. Many actively use AI to fuel agency growth, with 96% stating this technology is key to scaling business

**8**%

# The implementation process needs work.

Agencies are prepared for advanced AI implementation, yet many face challenges with the process. Over half (57%) report technical integration issues. This highlights the need for unified solutions that streamline data management and deployment.



# Al-powered data and insights are a top priority.

Despite some implementation challenges, 89% of agencies intend to increase investments in Al over the next year. The largest percentage (41%) plan to prioritize investing in Al-powered data and insights, confirming a need for reliable data analysis solutions.

### CHAPTER 1: Al Is Now a Business Imperative

Leading agencies no longer view AI as a future trend. Instead, AI is already making a significant impact on agency operations, enabling enhanced creativity, advanced analysis, and more efficient work.

Agencies must adopt AI to stay ahead—and the majority have already begun the process. Many marketing and advertising agencies actively use AI-powered tools for tasks ranging from generating content to streamlining workflows to evaluating data.

According to the ninth edition of Salesforce's State of Marketing Report, leveraging Al is marketers' number one priority. This initiative outranks other pressing issues like improving marketing ROI and attribution.

### Al usage is high, particularly for data and analysis

Agency decision-makers report that their teams are deep in the implementation process, with 91% actively using AI technologies. 63% use AI extensively across teams, while 28% report more limited usage (Figure 1.1).



Although Al adoption is widespread across most agencies, full implementation remains a distant goal for some. 8% are still exploring Al tools and use cases—which means they risk losing the ability to compete with fast-moving agencies.

While AI plays a number of roles in agency operations, two applications stand out above the rest. 74% of agencies report using AI for data analysis and insights, while 72% rely on this technology for campaign strategy and optimization (Figure 1.2).

But that's only the beginning. More than half of agencies (58%) use AI to generate content and communicate with clients. Many (42%) also rely on AI for operations and workflow management.



To accommodate these wide-ranging use cases, agencies must choose AI-powered technology carefully. The most effective tools centralize data for efficient analysis and support data sharing across applications.

### Al increases productivity, but there's room to grow

No matter the use case, AI technology empowers agencies to eliminate manual tasks and automate repetitive processes. This results in higher productivity and more time to execute strategic work and high-value tasks.

Agencies overwhelmingly report that AI positively affects productivity. 32% report a significant increase, while 60% report a slight increase (Figure 1.3).



To maximize productivity, agencies must prioritize technology that goes beyond simply analyzing data and synthesizing content. As Chapter 5 reveals, leading agencies are deploying AI agents to initiate tasks, make decisions, and work across platforms.



### Agencies depend on AI to scale and plan to invest more

Al technology contributes productivity gains beyond the present moment. As a result, most agencies consider Al integral to organizational growth. In fact, 96% of agency decision-makers declare this technology key to scaling operations. 19% consider it essential for scaling, while 54% declare it important and 23% view it as helpful (Figure 1.4).



Scaling successfully requires agencies to juggle multiple moving pats, including expanding their customer base, growing a team, upgrading services, and building the right tech stack. For many agencies, this involves dedicating additional budget to Al.

In the next year, agencies intend to commit additional financial resources to Al. The vast majority (89%) plan to increase investments in Al technologies in the next 12 months (Figure 1.5).



### CHAPTER 2: AI Fuels Growth & Expands Relationships

Agencies increasingly rely on AI to drive growth—from augmenting capabilities to developing specialized offerings to expanding client rosters. Most look to AI to deliver ROI or cost savings, which means they have to evaluate AI investments strategically.

Decision-makers expect a positive client response to AI, and many believe it will lead to better client relationships. This means the AI tools they adopt must have a clear benefit for the agency and the client.

"Over the past year, our team has embraced AI, transforming the way we work. While adapting to new technology almost always comes with challenges, the benefits have been undeniable. AI-powered tools have decreased time spent on routine tasks, allowing our teams to focus on high-impact, revenue-driving initiatives."



**ROI and cost savings define AI success** 

Financial returns are a top priority for agencies that invest in Al. In fact, 67% use cost savings or ROI to measure the success of Al implementation (Figure 2.1).



As the McKinsey Superagency in the Workplace report reveals, decision-makers face pressure to generate ROI. Over half (51%) of C-level executives expect genAl to create at least 5% revenue growth in the next three years.

However, ROI is just one measure of success. 60% of agencies measure time saved on manual tasks, while 55% focus on error reduction rates. And 57% measure success based on client satisfaction ratings, reinforcing the importance of client relationships (Figure 2.1).

For many agencies, Al already delivers measurable improvements. 74% report that Al is most effective for data analysis and insights as well as campaign strategy and optimization (Figure 2.2).

Over half (58%) report that AI is most effective in improving client communication and service, while 54% report it's most helpful for content creation and management (Figure 2.2).



### Al adoption allows for expanded client rosters

While nearly 90% of agencies intend to increase investments in AI over the next year, many find that AI allows them to take on more clients without additional resource outlay. 89% of decision-makers believe AI will enable the agency to expand its client roster using existing resources (Figure 2.3).



To achieve growth without incurring significant expense, agencies must invest in tools that align with business goals and agency offerings. With the right technology, agencies can supplement the work of existing team members and increase productivity.

"The biggest misconception we see is organizations touting that they have AI, but they haven't customized it to enhance their businesses offerings. Simply having AI is likely bragging about owning a toolbox. The toolbox by itself will not produce something people need. You still need a plan, experience, and skill to produce something valuable. The value of AI becomes realized when it is used to improve how a business can meet its client's needs more effectively. While many companies have access to AI, not all AI has been adopted equally."



### Agency clients have a positive view of AI

Agencies are optimistic about how AI will transform client relationships. 84% believe AI will redefine agency-client relationships for the better (Figure 2.4). This demonstrates the strategic importance of AI and its role in gleaning insights from client data.



However, not all decision-makers have such an optimistic outlook. 15% believe AI will introduce challenges as it changes the agency-client relationship.

Yet many agencies report that clients are already embracing Al-enhanced services. 87% of agencies receive a positive client response, with 38% indicating a very positive response. Only 4% report a negative response to Al-enhanced services (Figure 2.5).



To elicit a positive response, agencies must rethink how they position AI-powered services. For many clients, the technology itself doesn't make a difference. Only the result matters.

Clients don't care about Al—they care about outcomes. Agencies leveraging Al aren't just automating tasks; they're delivering insights in real time, optimizing campaigns at scale, and proving their value faster than ever before. That's the real differentiator.



JESSICA GRAESER VP OF MARKETING, NINJACAT

### CHAPTER 3: Technical Issues Are Slowing Implementation

While agencies recognize the value of Al and use it extensively, few have fully adopted this technology. According to HubSpot's State of Marketing 2025 report, marketers are still unclear about how to incorporate Al. Less than half understand how to use Al in their marketing strategy.

Many agencies face organizational and technical barriers to full adoption. This indicates a need for unified data solutions, a wider range of software integrations, and large-scale stakeholder buy-in.

According to the ninth edition of Salesforce's State of Marketing Report, "only 31% of marketers are fully satisfied with their ability to unify customer data sources." A lack of unified data prevents many agencies from working efficiently or gleaning valuable insights.

### Most agencies have capacity for deeper AI adoption

Only a small fraction of agency projects fully leverage AI capabilities. Just 12% of agencies use AI across most (76-100%) projects. 42% use AI for half to three-quarters (46-75%) of projects, while 39% use AI for 21-45% of projects (Figure 3.1).



While agencies are enthusiastic about the potential AI offers, few are fully on board with this technology. Most agencies have significant capacity for deeper AI adoption. In many cases, refocusing on overarching goals is the key to moving forward.



### Accuracy is a top Al-related concern

One of the main barriers to Al adoption is concerns related to Al's veracity. 55% report concerns with the accuracy of Al-generated insights, while 13% take issue with the lack of transparency. An additional 32% report concerns with the loss of human touch (Figure 3.2).



According to the Ascend2 report, **The Evolution of AI in Marketing** most marketers trust AI-generated results yet still incorporate human review in the process. Just over two-thirds report relying on human judgment to validate AI output.

Cleaner data and in-depth training can also address reliability concerns. And while implementing Al guidelines can encourage responsible Al usage, many organizations have a long way to go in adopting risk management policies.

### **Technical challenges compromise AI adoption**

For many agencies, technical issues also prevent full AI adoption. In fact, 57% report facing technical integration challenges as they work to implement AI (Figure 3.3).



This highlights the need for AI tools that unify data and integrate with the agency's tech stack. By adopting an AI solution that serves as a single source of truth for marketing analytics, agencies can overcome technical challenges and fully implement AI.

However, technical issues are just one concern. 55% of agencies struggle with resistance to change (Figure 3.3). To alleviate fears of AI replacing team members, agencies must communicate how AI augments rather than supplants existing roles.

In addition, 48% report a lack of AI-related expertise, which demonstrates the need for advanced training and support. Less than half of agencies (41%) cite cost as an implementation barrier, but finding a cost-effective solution is still critical (Figure 3.3).

### **Custom solutions may slow AI implementation**

In some cases, technical issues may stem from overly complex Al implementations. 32% of agency decision-makers report using custom-built Al solutions, while 19% use third-party API integrations. Only 26% use existing SaaS platform features (Figure 3.4).



For agencies struggling with technical challenges, a unified data solution is the ideal option. It simplifies and harmonizes data, stores it in a single location in the cloud, and integrates with marketing and analytics tools to connect data across applications.



### CHAPTER 4: Al Is Reshaping the Agency Business Model

Agencies that adopt AI unlock new opportunities for revenue generation. Leading agencies are monetizing AI capabilities and using the technology to increase profitability. Many are also developing new AI-powered revenue streams.

Balancing AI with human expertise creates some friction. But agencies that successfully blend AI efficiency with human creativity and strategic thinking stand to gain a significant competitive advantage.

As Ascend2's Evolution of Al in Marketing 2025 report reveals, more than three-quarters of marketers believe businesses that opt out of implementing Al will position themselves at a significant competitive disadvantage.

### Al is a powerful tool for revenue generation

Al is more than a cost-saver-it's a revenue driver. Top agencies tie Al directly to revenue.

Many primarily adopt Al for its ability to generate revenue. 42% rank improved profit margins as the top potential benefit from the technology (Figure 4.1).



However, some agencies also highly value Al's automation and efficiency benefits. 18% rank freeing up time as a top potential benefit, while 17% are most excited about automating monotonous tasks (Figure 4.1).

Almost half (45%) of agencies have already added Al-specific service tiers, using the technology to capture revenue and differentiate services. An additional 28% have shifted to value- or outcome-based pricing, while 19% have adjusted rates to reflect efficiency (Figure 4.2).



The remaining 8% haven't yet made changes to their pricing model. While these agencies may benefit from Al-related cost reductions, they're likely leaving money on the table. To compete, they must reconsider cost and value and then rethink pricing tiers.

### Al capabilities support competitive differentiation

Most agencies promote their Al capabilities to clients, using this technology as a selling point. In fact, 86% report actively promoting Al capabilities to clients (Figure 4.3).



Simply promoting AI tools or dashboards won't necessarily resonate with clients. Instead, agencies can make a bigger impact by highlighting the outcomes and benefits of AI and using the technology to create solutions that clients genuinely need.



#### Al supports rather than replaces human expertise

Al adoption is already affecting agency team structure, and it's likely to continue to affect resourcing decisions. 71% of agencies have hired AI specialists in the past year (Figure 4.4), highlighting the growing need for experts in this field.



In some cases, AI-related efficiency gains have altered staffing needs. 55% of agencies report that AI has contributed to staff reductions (Figure 4.5). This trend is likely to continue on the same path for the foreseeable future. In the next five years, 74% of decision-makers think AI could replace specific roles within the agency (Figure 4.6).



Yet it's important to note that most agencies view AI as a partner rather than a replacement for human roles. 72% use AI to support and enhance human tasks, while just 25% use AI to replace certain roles or functions (Figure 4.7).



Although agencies use Al to automate manual tasks, most depend on human experts for strategic thinking and guidance. To succeed with Al, agencies must balance automation with human enhancement.

Al isn't a trend—it's a fundamental shift in how marketing works. Agencies that figure out how to blend Al-driven efficiency with human creativity will be the ones shaping the future of our industry.



JESSICA GRAESER VP OF MARKETING, NINJACAT

### CHAPTER 5: Al Agents & Autonomous Al Are the Future

Forward-thinking agencies are looking beyond the generative AI content tools that dominated industry conversations two years ago. Instead, they're leading the way by prioritizing AI agents and autonomous AI.

Adoption is projected to increase quickly over the next two years. According to the Deloitte Tech, Media & Telecom Predictions 2025 report, "In 2025, 25% of companies that use genAl will launch agentic Al pilots or proofs of concept, growing to 50% in 2027."

Most agencies feel prepared for this next level of Al integration, and most have identified key areas for the next stage of investment. The vast majority anticipate a positive impact from Al in the next few years, signifying an optimistic outlook.

### Agencies are actively experimenting with AI agents

Most agencies are already familiar with AI agents, which sets the stage for widespread adoption. 62% are very familiar with AI agents, while 35% are somewhat familiar (Figure 5.1).



Al agents will focus on performing "commoditized marketing activities," according to the Forrester piece, Al Fluency Is the CMO's Next Superpower. This will free up human employees to take responsibility for creative and strategic tasks.

While AI agents are gaining traction, adoption is far from complete. 59% of decision-makers report actively using AI agents, while 27% are still in the early stages (Figure 5.2). This indicates a major opportunity for agencies to pioneer new AI capabilities.



### Al investments center on data and insights

Most agencies intend to invest more in Al over the next 12 months (Figure 1.5). And many have already identified areas where they plan to invest. The largest group (42%) intends to focus on data analysis and insights, suggesting a growing need for unified data solutions and Al agents that can take action across disconnected platforms (Figure 5.3).

Some also plan to increase investments in Al-powered content and strategy. 22% intend to prioritize investing in campaign strategy and optimization, while 21% plan to prioritize content creation and management (Figure 5.3).



The reason for investing in Al-powered data analysis and insights is clear. 35% of decision-makers expect the biggest benefit from this capability (Figure 5.4).

Some agency leaders also anticipate significant benefits from content creation and management (27%) and campaign strategy and optimization (20%) (Figure 5.4). However, fewer place the highest value on client communications and operations or workflow management.

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While genAl and Al assistants are table stakes for many agencies, using Al for advanced data and analysis is a key priority in 2025. The HubSpot State of Marketing 2025 report designates Al-powered data analysis and reporting as a top five marketing trend.

### Agencies are prepared for advanced AI solutions

Virtually all (99%) of agencies feel ready for next-level AI solutions. Yet some still need to make progress in this area. While 68% report being very prepared for advanced AI solutions, 31% are only somewhat prepared (Figure 5.5).



To position themselves for the next phase of integration, agencies must clarify their goals and identify gaps. By adopting the right data partners and AI technologies, agencies can ready themselves for advanced solutions and new opportunities for revenue generation.

Early on, some feared AI might replace human expertise, but we saw it as an opportunity to highlight its role in enhancing talent—eliminating tedious tasks so our experts can focus on meaningful analysis. Now, with AI embedded in our workflows, the excitement is real. Thanks to our partners at NinjaCat, we're pushing boundaries and looking ahead to what's next. The future is bright, and we're just getting started!



### Agency leaders are bullish on AI

Over the next three years, agencies overwhelmingly anticipate positive changes from AI integration. 90% have a positive outlook on the benefits of AI, with 49% anticipate a moderately positive impact and 41% expecting a significant positive impact (Figure 5.6).



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As a result, most agencies consider AI essential to future strategy. 72% consider AI extremely important, while 26% view this technology as moderately important (Figure 5.7).



This optimistic outlook strongly suggests that agencies will continue to prioritize AI implementation. Yet overly simplistic solutions are likely to fall out of favor. To capture the full value of AI, agencies must differentiate their offerings and embrace advanced solutions.

Marketing moves fast. Agencies leveraging AI agents are setting the pace. AI-powered automation isn't a competitive advantage anymore; it's the price of staying relevant.

# Conclusion

The data is crystal clear—Al is transforming how marketing agencies operate and generate revenue. Al is already creating business value for many agencies. 45% have created new Al-powered revenue streams. And 42% are adopting Al because of its ability to improve profit margins.

It's no surprise that the vast majority are bullish on AI or that 89% plan to increase AI investments in the coming year. AI isn't just a tool. Instead, it's becoming a core driver of agency growth and competitive advantage.

Agencies are thoughtfully incorporating AI into operations, with 84% reporting positive client reception and 90% anticipating positive impact. However, most view this technology as an enabler rather than a disruptor. Instead of replacing human talent, AI augments capabilities and creates new opportunities for strategic roles.

To successfully integrate AI, agencies must think ahead instead of maintaining the status quo. By investing in AI agents and unified data solutions, agencies can access the tools they need to drive value for clients while maximizing ROI for the business.

Al isn't replacing marketers—it's giving them superpowers. The agencies that understand this shift will unlock new efficiencies, drive better results, and create more value for their clients than ever before.



JESSICA GRAESER VP OF MARKETING, NINJACAT

# Methodology & Demographics

### Methodology Note

This survey was conducted by UserEvidence in January 2025. It includes input from 547 respondents based in the United States.

### **Industry Distribution**

The data represents a diverse cross-section of agencies, including advertising agencies, business services advertising, media and entertainment agencies, and media buying agencies (Figure 0.1).



### **Company Size**

45% of respondents work for mid-size agencies with 200-1,000 employees (Figure 0.2). 34% work for large enterprises with 1,000+ employees, and 21% work for small agencies with up to 200 employees.



### **Leadership Roles**

Respondents represent key decision-makers across agency functions. 18% are in the c-suite, 25% are VPs, 32% are director level, and 18% are managers (Figure 0.3).



### **Functional Areas**

Respondents represent four main functional areas. 40% work in operations, while 19% specialize in product. 19% specialize in client services, while the remaining 15% specialize in data and analytics.



## About UserEvidence

UserEvidence is a software company and independent research partner that helps B2B technology companies produce original research content from practitioners in their industry. All research completed by UserEvidence is verified and authentic according to their research principles: Identity verification, significance and representation, quality and independence, and transparency. All UserEvidence research is based on real user feedback without interference, bias, or spin from our clients.

### UserEvidence Research Principles

These principles guide all research efforts at UserEvidence—whether working with a vendor's users for our Customer Evidence offering, or industry practitioners in a specific field for our Research Content offering. The goal of these principles is to give buyers trust and confidence that you are viewing authentic and verified research based on real user feedback, without interference, bias, and spin from the vendor.

#### 1. Identity Verification

In every study we conduct, UserEvidence independently verifies that a participant in our research study is a real user of a vendor (in the case of Customer Evidence) or an industry practitioner (in the case of Research Content). We use a variety of human and algorithmic verification mechanisms, including corporate email domain verification (ie so a vendor can't just create 17 gmail addresses that all give positive reviews), and pattern-based bot and AI deflection.

#### 2. Significance and Representation

UserEvidence believes trust is built by showing an honest and complete representation of the success (or lack thereof) of users. We pursue statistical significance in our research, and substantiate our findings with a large and representative set of user responses to create more confidence in our analysis. We aim to canvas a diverse swatch of users across industries, seniorities, personas - to provide the whole picture of usage, and allow buyers to find relevant data from other users in their segment, not just a handful of vendor-curated happy customers.

#### 3. Quality and Independence

UserEvidence is committed to producing quality and independent research at all times. This starts at the beginning of the research process with survey and questionnaire design to drive accurate and substantive responses. We aim to reduce bias in our study design, and use large sample sizes of respondents where possible. While UserEvidence is compensated by the vendor for conducting the research, trust is our business and our priority, and we do not allow vendors to change, influence, or misrepresent the results (even if they are unfavorable) at any time.

#### 4. Transparency

We believe research should not be done in a black box. For transparency, all UserEvidence research includes the statistical N (number of respondents), and buyers can explore the underlying blinded (de-identified) raw data and responses associated with any statistic, chart, or study. UserEvidence provides clear citation guidelines for clients when leveraging research that includes guidelines on sharing research methodology and sample size.

# About NinjaCat

NinjaCat is the leading Enterprise Data & AI Platform for Marketing, transforming how brands, agencies, and media companies harness data and AI to drive marketing performance. Our platform unifies fragmented marketing data into an enterprise-grade data cloud, enabling AI-powered insights, automation, and decision-making at scale.

With NinjaCat Data Cloud, marketing teams can centralize and normalize data from hundreds of channels—powering Al-driven analytics, campaign intelligence, and automated reporting. Our proprietary Al agents enhance marketing execution, automating complex workflows and accelerating time-to-insight.

Trusted by top marketing teams, NinjaCat enables enterprises to eliminate data silos, streamline reporting, and leverage Al-driven automation to drive performance with confidence. The platform powers over 150,000 automated reports monthly, monitoring \$4 billion in media spend annually. Learn more at www.ninjacat.io.