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AI: The race for a use case

A year of research reveals what IT and business leaders really think about AI — and how AI vendors can position themselves for success

“Stop with the marketing hype and cut to the chase.”

IT decision maker | Wholesale sector | 3,000+ employees

IT and business leaders lay down a challenge to AI vendors:
Be clearer on what you offer and what benefits it delivers

In 2024, AI dominated the IT agenda—but beneath the noise, tech decision makers had a clear message: **Show us real value.**

To track and understand their evolving needs and perceptions, we surveyed IT and business leaders from our Vanson Bourne Community – the humans at the heart of technology – every month, throughout the year.

This report gives you access to what they told us and key insights from the research, focused on four themes:

Plans
What they've been doing

Perceptions
What they really think about AI

Priorities
What they want to achieve

Pain points
What's holding them back

For each theme, we'll explore:

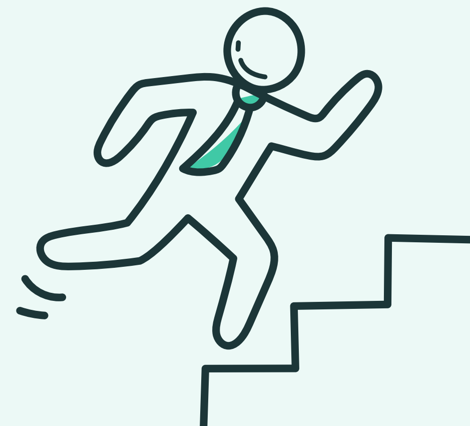
>> The insights revealed through our research
>> What that means for AI vendors
>> How research can help you act with confidence

Plans

What IT and business leaders have been doing

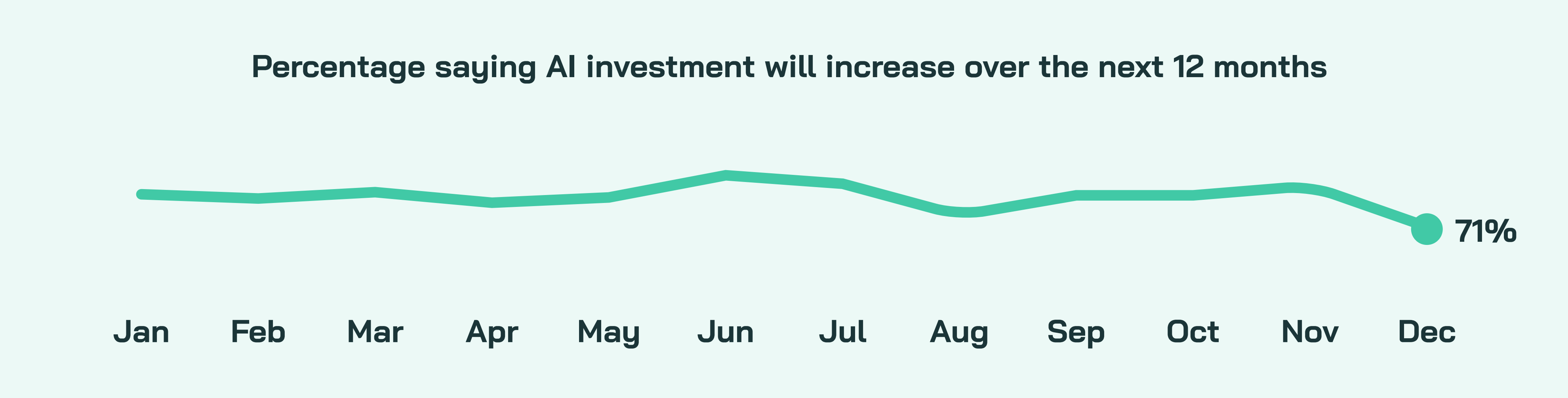
"At the moment, it's a bit of a 'wild west'. Not one supplier really knows the business well enough to suggest how best to use the AI tools, nor how to adapt them for us to use."

Business decision maker | Transport sector | 5,000+ employees

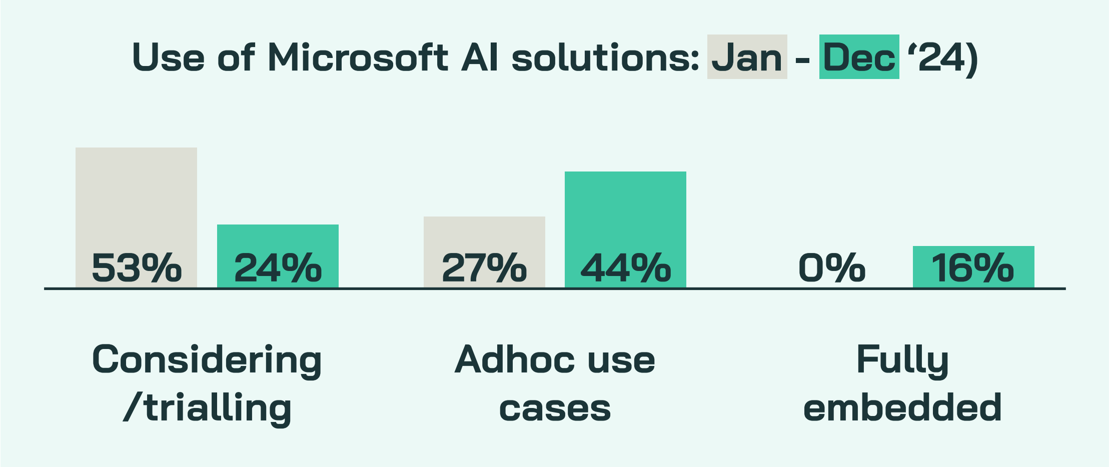


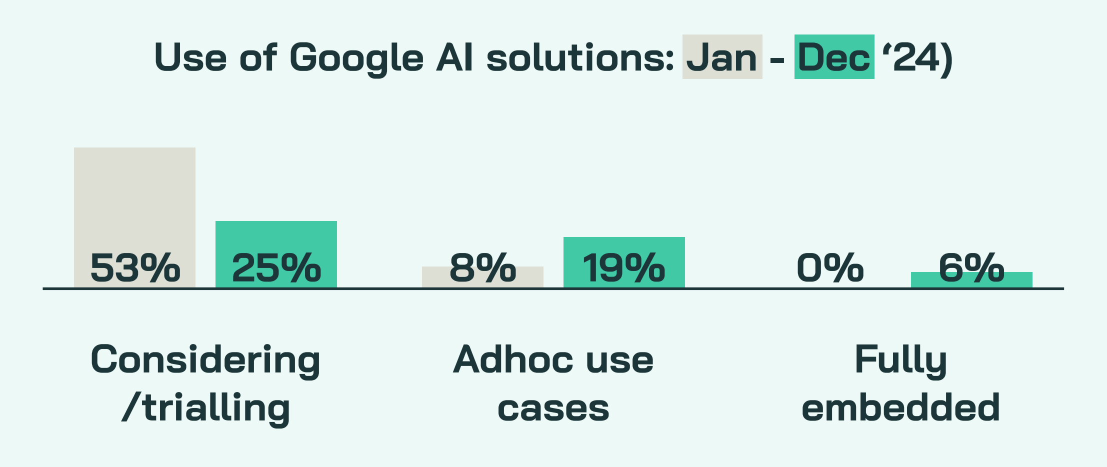
AI investment is rising, but most organisations are still experimenting—with adhoc use dominating

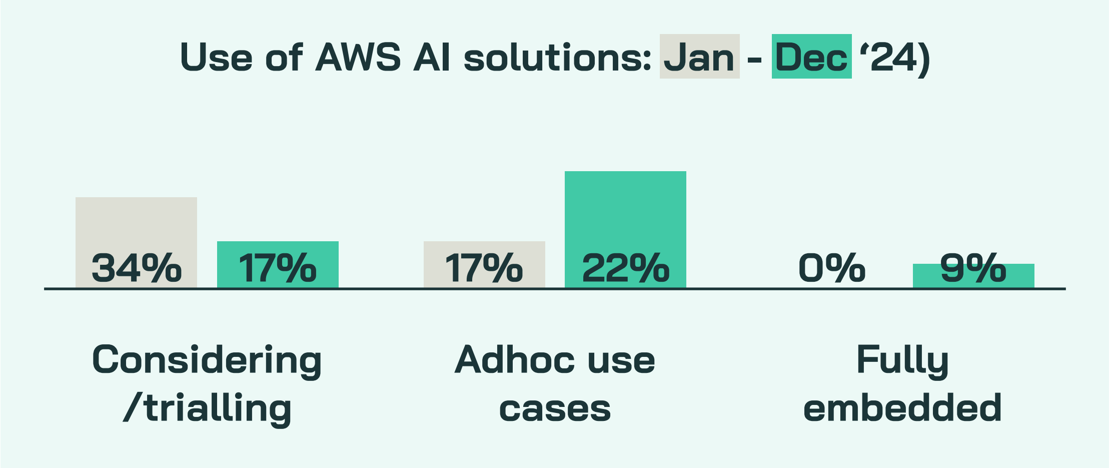
Throughout 2024 we tracked AI investment plans among IT and business decision makers. The vast majority each month reported that investment was expected to rise over the coming 12 months—with little sign of that momentum changing in 2025.

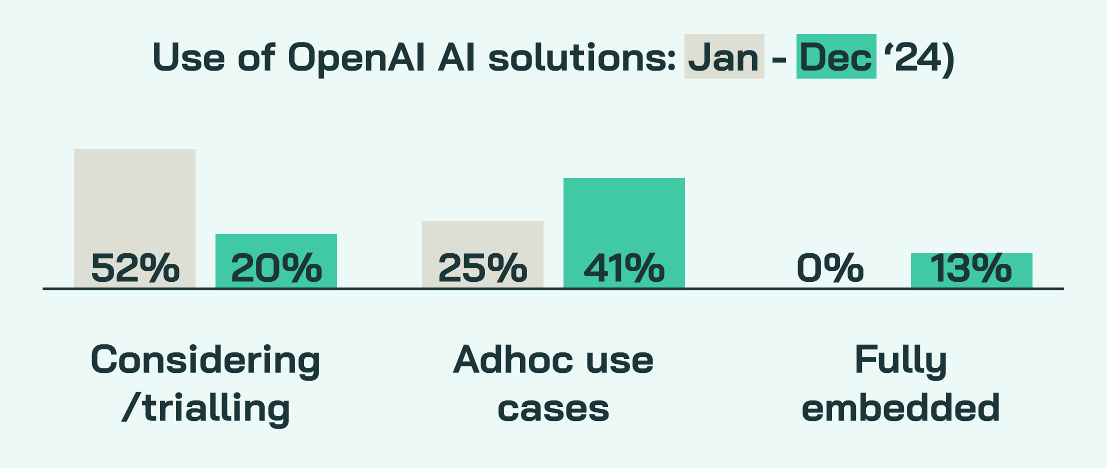


When it comes to AI use, across the industry's big players like Microsoft, Google, AWS, and OpenAI, we've seen a clear shift from considering/trialling AI to more adhoc use—with only a small percentage who report fully embedding AI solutions.







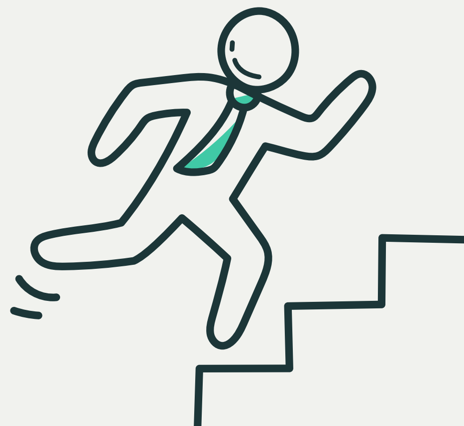


What this means for AI vendors:

Tech buyers are still exploring—be the guide they trust. Showcase clear use cases, proven outcomes, and relatable success stories to cut through the noise and position your organisation more effectively.

How research can help:

In such a dynamic market, understanding your customers and what they're facing is vital. From identifying emerging trends to spotting untapped opportunities, gaining market insight through research can give you the edge over your competition and make for more informed, more effective positioning and communications to your target audience.



Perceptions

What IT and business leaders really think about AI

"Currently, vendors are showing what AI can do, rather than asking what we need AI to do."

Business decision maker | Media sector | Less than 100 employees

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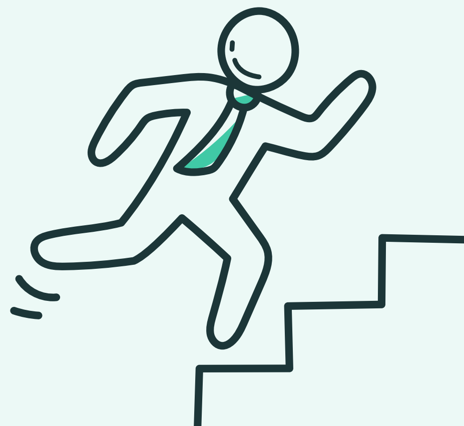


In a crowded market of claims and counter claims, trust issues risk stalling AI's potential

Our research highlighted the sheer amount of AI messaging that people face today. IT and business decision makers reported seeing AI-related content from at least 3-4 vendors every month in 2024. No surprises that this was dominated by Microsoft, Google, Amazon, and OpenAI. This bombardment of comms is starting to shape opinions when it comes to AI, but as our findings show, not always for the better:

>> In May, 67% felt positive about AI for their organisation, but only 57% felt the same personally

>> In August we found that most think AI enthusiasm is higher than it used to be (58%)

>> However, AI vendors need to be careful not to lose that enthusiasm through over-hyped or under-cooked comms: 69% believe AI isn't currently capable of delivering what the marketing promises

>> And in December, only 20% said their organisation's AI use had exceeded expectations in 2024

Business decision maker (Healthcare sector, 1,000-2,999 employees) on AI vendors:

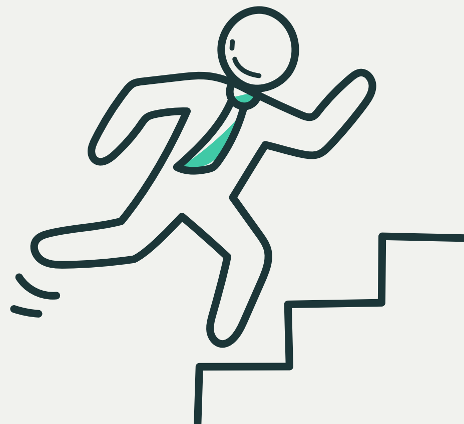
"They need to increase trust levels in their services; there are so many risks and threats. We need to know more about protection and how we can use AI safely."

What this means for AI vendors:

Lose the buzzwords, embrace the facts. Communicate clearly and credibly—grounding your messaging in trusted data and real customer outcomes.

How research can help:

Testing your messaging with real decision makers helps identify what resonates and what doesn't—and why. In a noisy sector, with marketing resources and budgets being ever-squeezed, this gives you the confidence to make decisions that count—giving your comms a better chance of connecting, inspiring and driving action.

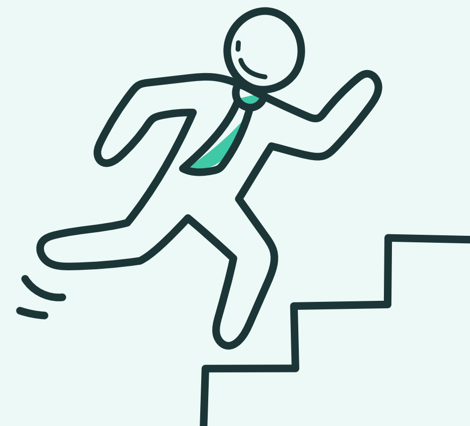


Priorities

What IT and business leaders want to achieve

"AI hasn't really been described in terms of business benefits yet. Once this is clearly explained and articulated we'll be in a position to really understand if this will be a cost or a transformation."

IT decision maker | Manufacturing sector | 3,000+ employees



As AI use grows, so too does confidence—but there's more to be done and a growing need for external help

Confidence in AI strategies is rising, from **30%** in April to **39%** in October. However, most remain "somewhat confident" (41%) while 10% still have no AI strategy. While use of external providers dipped slightly from 69% in April to 63% in October, those feeling "reliant" on providers actually increased from **33%** to **39%** over the same period.

Confidence in AI strategy

30% April → **39%** October

Those reporting they are "very" or "mostly confident" in the effectiveness of their organisation's AI strategy

Reliance on external providers

33% April → **39%** October

Those reporting they are "reliant" on external service providers in developing and/or implementing their AI strategy

IT and business leaders share what they need from AI vendors:

"Define clear use cases where AI adds real business value."
Business decision maker | Telecoms sector | 3,000+ employees

"Present an unarguable business case."
IT decision maker | Manufacturing sector | 3,000+ employees

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What this means for AI vendors:

Help your customers connect the dots. Highlight your strategic credentials by illustrating what your solution can do and the long-term business value it delivers—through use cases and measurable impact.

How research can help:

Seeing your brand through the customers' eyes brings huge strategic and tactical value. From measuring awareness of what you offer to insights into specific perceptions and needs, brand research lays out rock-solid foundations on which to build a better approach.

Pain points

What’s holding IT and business leaders back

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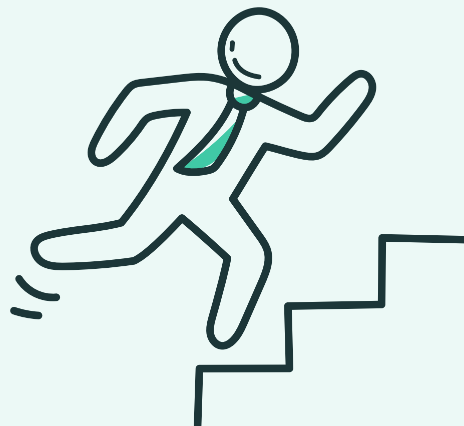
"Data breaches, data leaks, loss of control over our own data. Customer and employee concerns over their data. Recent leaks within what was previously considered secure have not helped."

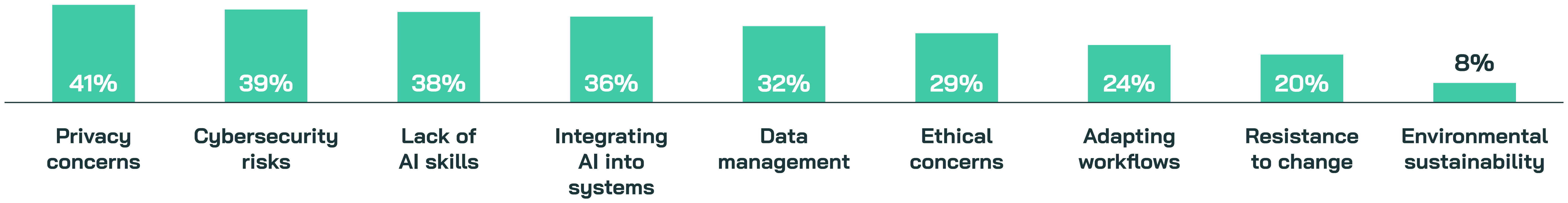
Business decision maker | Retail sector | 3,000+ employees



With widespread potential use, AI is also presenting widespread potential challenges for organisations

In July we asked IT and business decision makers what their greatest concerns are relating to the introduction of AI at their organisation – there was no standout answer, but rather an array of concerns for AI vendors to address:

Greatest concerns about the introduction of AI in organisations



A central issue is the erosion of control:

67%
agree that GenAI is democratising AI usage across organisations

however...

44%
believe at least one in ten employees are using non-sanctioned AI tools

58%
say this is impacting the ability to maintain control over data compliance

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What this means for AI vendors:

Address concerns head-on, demonstrating your understanding of what your customers need. Show how your solution mitigates risks and solves challenges—from security and governance to seamless integration and skill gaps.

How research can help:

In a changing market, racked by questions and concerns about what AI can offer, research that demonstrates your understanding and offers thought leadership will set your organisation apart. It gives you the ability to shape industry conversations based on actual data, helping build a reputation in the customer's mind as a knowledgeable and trusted partner.

What we’ve learnt in 2024:

Focus areas for vendors in 2025:

AI investment is rising, but most organisations are still experimenting—with ad hoc use dominating → Tech buyers are still exploring—be the guide they trust. Showcase clear use cases, proven outcomes, and relatable success stories to cut through the noise and position your organisation more effectively.

In a crowded market of claims and counter claims, trust issues risk stalling AI’s potential → Lose the buzzwords, embrace the facts. Communicate clearly and credibly—grounding your messaging in trusted data and real customer outcomes.

As AI use grows, so too does confidence—but there’s more to be done and a growing need for external help → Help your customers connect the dots. Highlight your strategic credentials by illustrating what your solution can do and the long-term business value it delivers—through use cases and measurable impact.

With widespread potential use, AI is also presenting widespread potential challenges for organisations → Address concerns head-on, demonstrating your understanding of what your customers need. Show how your solution mitigates risks and solves challenges.

Understanding industry specific needs. Building trust in a dynamic environment. Communicating with clarity.

Tailored-to-tech research can help >>>

B2B research built for the tech sector

Your brand isn’t generic. Neither is our research. For over 25 years we’ve been focused on one industry: technology.

In such a unique and dynamic sector, understanding and anticipating customer needs and market trends is vital. The right research gives you the confidence to lead. Our tech-specialist research combines quantitative precision with qualitative depth, engaging real decision-makers to uncover actionable insights—helping you drive your business forward and achieve measurable results.

Market understanding

Brand research

Communications testing

Thought leadership research

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Stronger insights. Smarter strategy.

Let’s talk