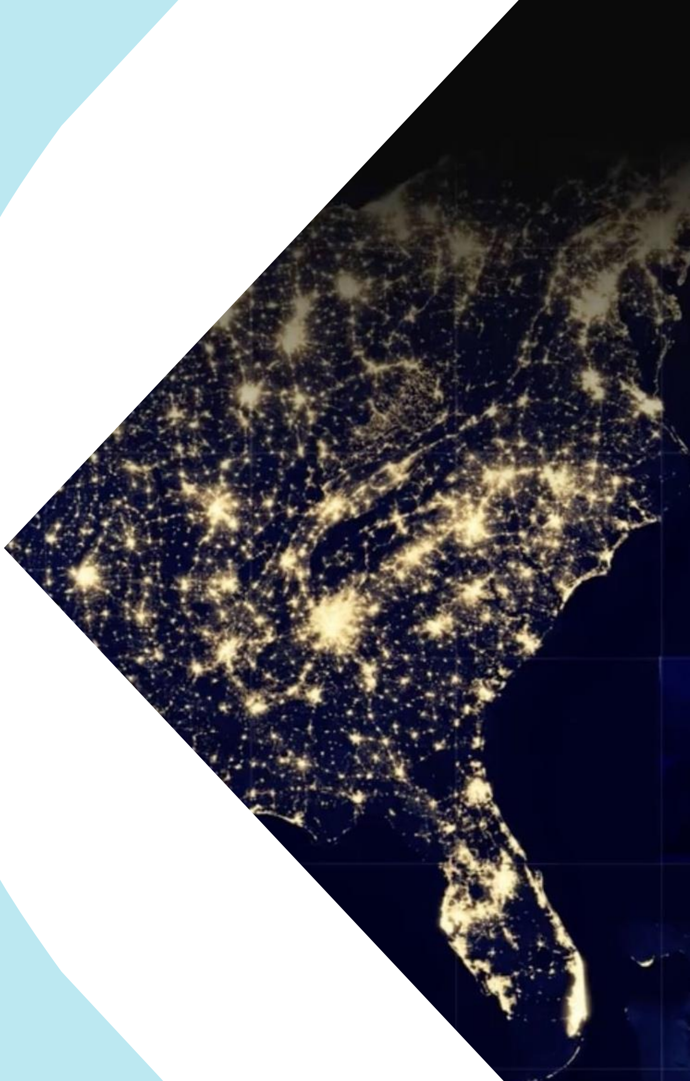
2026 BENCHMARK REPORT

AI-Readiness in Independent Agencies

What 100 agency leaders told us about readiness gaps, brand safety risks, and the path to scalable AI creative operations.

Powered by NewtonX & Innervate | July 2026



The Numbers That Define the Moment

88%

believe AI will disrupt their creative model in 3 years

92%

not yet fully equipped for AI ops at scale

64%

cite brand safety as a top adoption barrier

60%

face constant or frequent client AI demands

80%

believe AI scales creative without adding headcount

89%

expect AI to free teams from production to strategy

42%

underprepared or unsure on brand safety & legal risks

0%

called AI disruption "unlikely"

METHODOLOGY

Who Responded

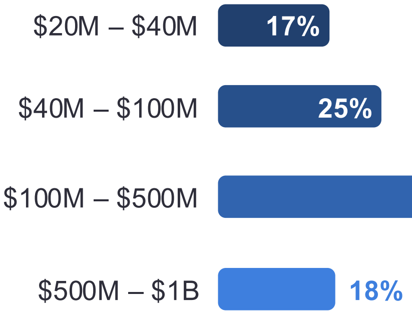
100
Agency Leaders Surveyed

19
C-Suite Respondents

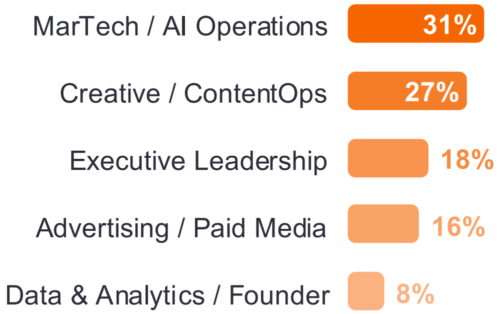
33
VP-Level Respondents

80%
North America-based

REVENUE DISTRIBUTION



JOB FUNCTION



Respondents sourced and screened by NewtonX.
Requirements: Full-time professionals at independent agencies (or only minority stake owned by holding co.) | seniority of directors+ | direct knowledge of AI in creative production | North America or UK | annual revenue of $20M-$1B

In which areas is AI having the most meaningful impact at your agency? (Rank up to 3)

	Rank #1	Rank #2	Rank #3
Copywriting	15	12	9
Visual creative (image, design, video)	34	15	12
Content personalization	10	15	15
Creative production operations (cropping, resizing to spec)	9	25	20
Performance analysis and creative optimization	10	11	20
Brand governance	8	4	10
Compliance & legal guardrails	3	7	1
Creative trafficking & activation	11	11	13

61%

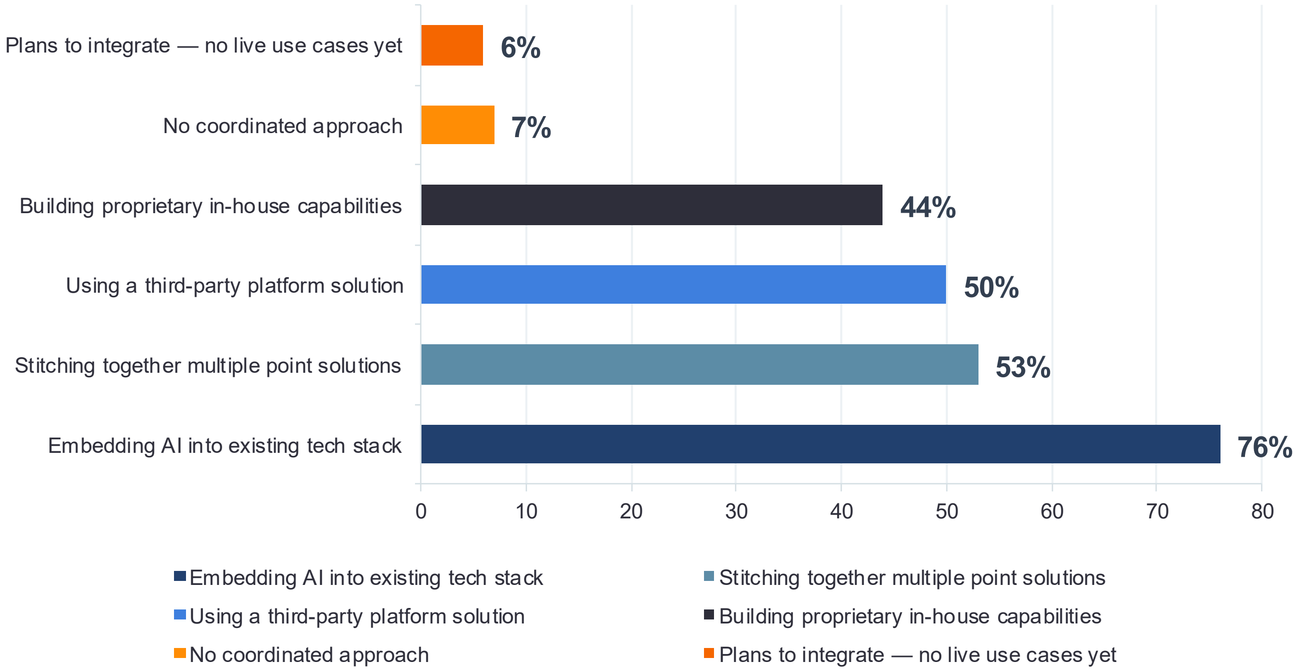
select visual/image creative as a high-impact zone — *34% as the #1 ranked area*

11%

select compliance & legal guardrails — AI least used for governance work

AI concentrates in creative generation and production; governance and compliance lag.

How is your agency currently integrating AI into your creative production and delivery workflows? (Check all that apply)



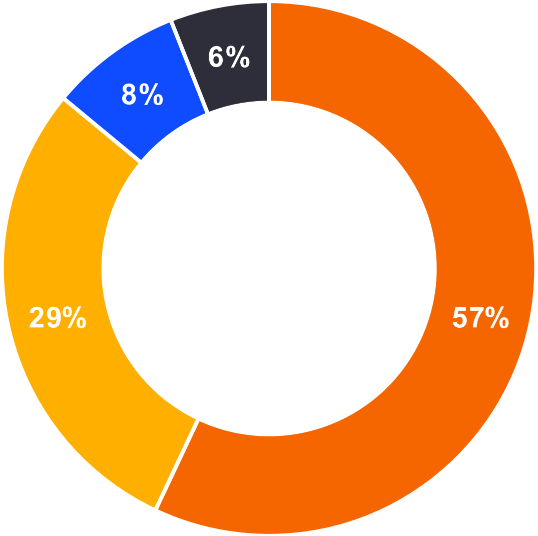
56%

using 3+ approaches simultaneously

0%

"no plans to use AI"

How would you describe your agency's current readiness to adopt AI-powered creative operations at scale?



- Making Progress (57%)
- Mostly Ready (29%)
- Fully Equipped (8%)
- Major Gaps Remain (6%)

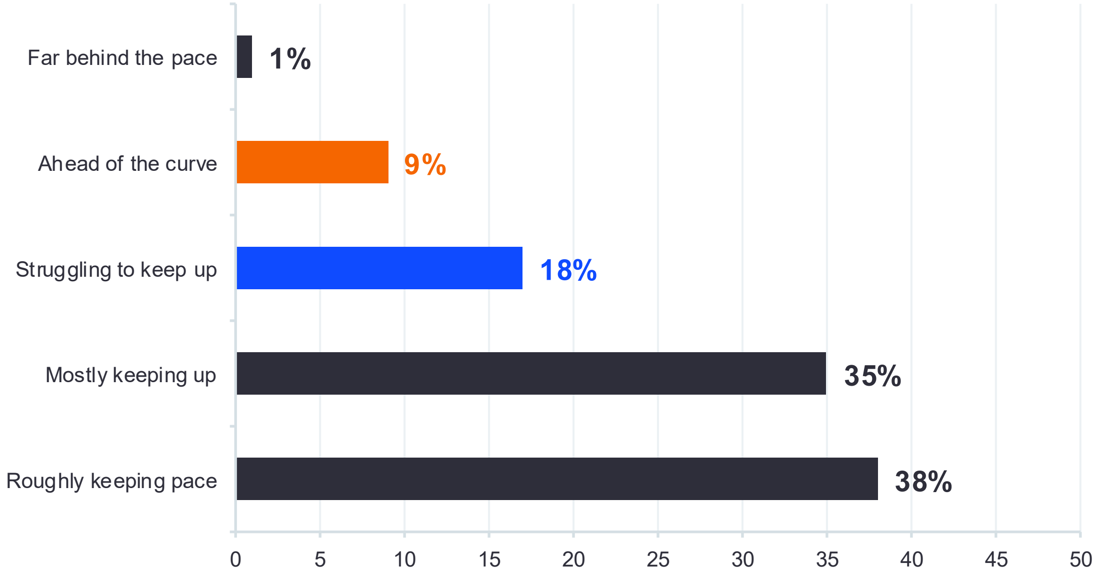
Not Ready At All (0%)

8% **ONLY fully equipped** for AI ops at scale

No job seniority segment averaged higher than 3.44/5

57% are "making progress" — willing, but lacking the infrastructure to fully operationalize AI at scale.

How would you characterize the pace of AI development relative to your agency's ability to evaluate and adopt new solutions?



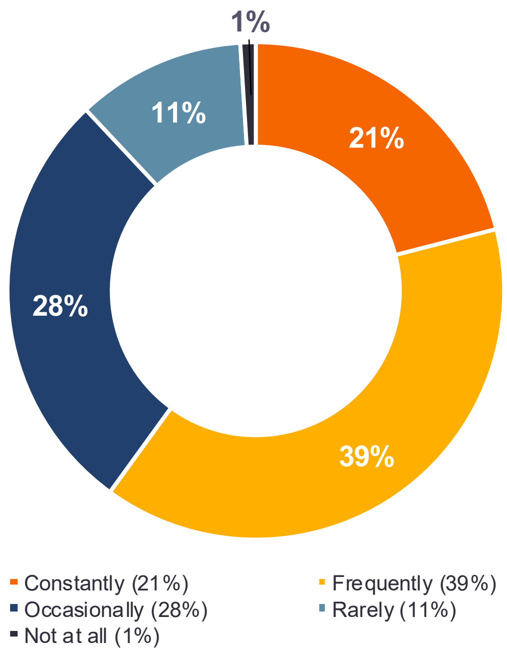
Only 9%

feel ahead of the curve on AI adoption

18%

struggling or far behind the pace of AI change

How actively are your clients asking you to demonstrate AI-driven improvements in creative quality, speed, and/or cost efficiency?



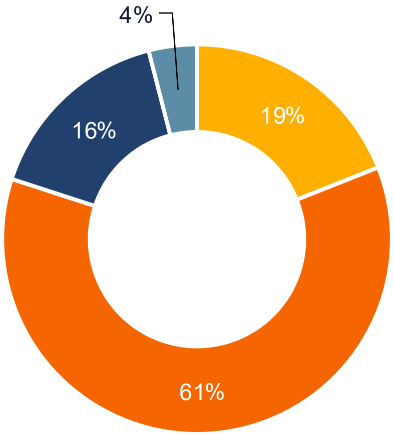
60% of agencies face clients who frequently or constantly demand proof of AI-driven improvements

Agencies are caught in an operational vice:

Clients are pushing for AI efficiency, but most agencies haven't built the infrastructure to consistently deliver — or prove — it to clients.

What do you believe AI's potential impact will be on helping your agency scale creative production across multiple client brands without adding significant headcount?

80% significant or high impact

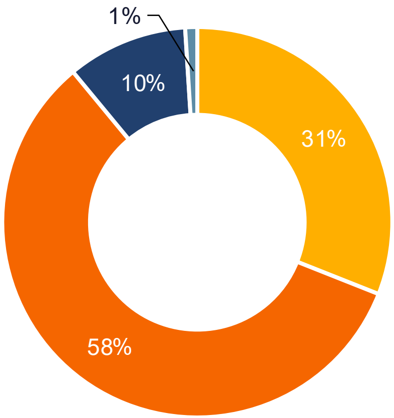


- High Impact (19%)
- Significant Impact (61%)
- Uncertain (16%)
- Low Impact (4%)

No Impact (0%)

How likely do you believe AI automation will shift your team's time away from production and trafficking tasks and toward more strategic and creative work?

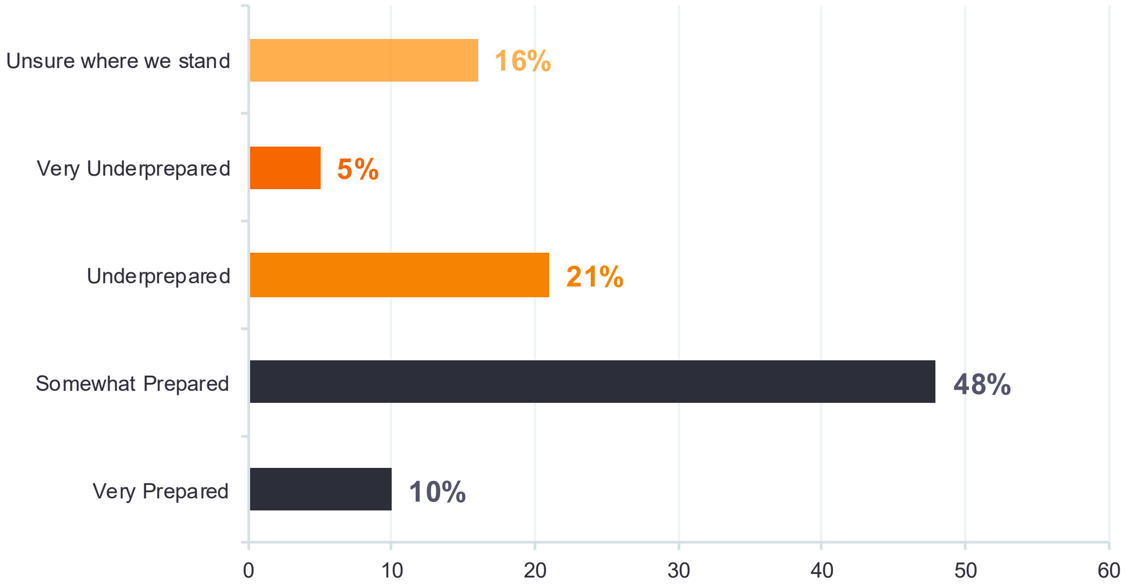
89% likely or very likely



- Very Likely (31%)
- Likely (58%)
- Unsure (10%)
- Very Unlikely (1%)

Unlikely (0%)

How prepared does your agency feel to manage brand safety and legal compliance risks introduced by AI-generated creative?



42%

Underprepared, very underprepared, or unsure

10%

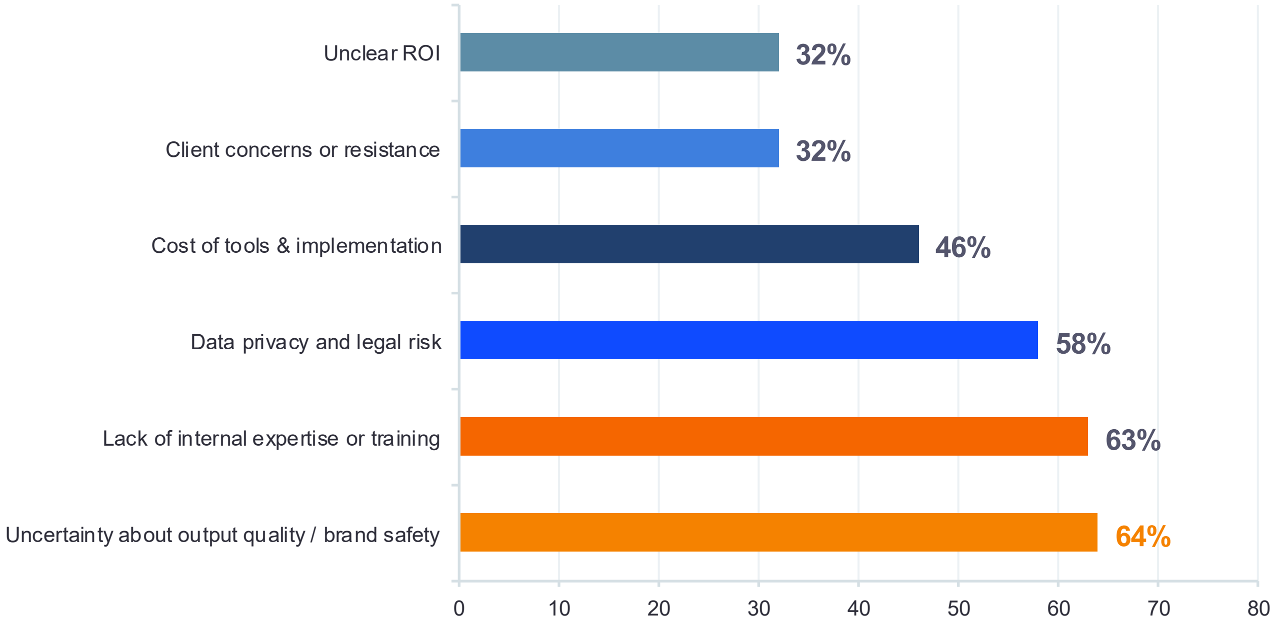
Selected "fully prepared”

88%

of agency leaders believe AI is likely (42%) or very likely (46%) to fundamentally disrupt their creative business model within the next 3 years.

11% **Uncertain**	**0%** **Unlikely**	**1%** **Very Unlikely**

What are the biggest barriers slowing deeper AI adoption in your creative operations? (Check all that apply)



Biggest barriers to scaling with AI

What's the single biggest challenge your agency faces in using AI to scale creative production for clients right now?

~27-30%	**Off brand/brief, inconsistent, low quality, unreliable results (or needs heavy human correction)**
~23%	**Legal compliance, IP & data privacy**
~16%	Skills, training, knowledge gaps, in-house expertise
~15%	Integration of AI into existing workflows and techstack
~13%	Business model strain, ROI, unclear AI/token costs, pricing pressure as AI impacts billable hours

The Editing Tax: Human Time Didn't Disappear. It Just Moved.

What's the single biggest challenge your agency faces in using AI to scale creative production for clients right now?

> *AI often produces content that's off-brief or misses nuanced emotional cues, forcing our teams in heavy editing loops.*
>
> — **Chief Marketing Officer**

> *AI generates volume but often misses nuanced brand voice and compliance guardrails. We spend nearly as much time editing and aligning outputs as we would creating from scratch.*
>
> — **VP, Marketing** in Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI

> *Balancing speed and scale with quality control and brand consistency. AI can speed up production, but we still need strong human oversight, approval workflows, and governance…*
>
> — **Senior Director** in Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI

> *Our teams spend significant time reviewing and correcting AI outputs to ensure they align with client standards, which erodes the efficiency gains we expected.*
>
> — **Creative Director**

The last-mile problem:

~27-30% of agencies name inconsistent, off-brand/off-brief AI output (or heavy human correction is needed) as their single biggest scaling barrier. Making AI output brand-safe remains almost entirely a manual task — and that's where the ROI evaporates.

What Agencies Actually Want

What would need to be true about an AI-powered creative ops solution for your agency to feel genuinely confident adopting it?

~28%	**Legal / IP clarity and data protection explicitly addressed**
~25-29%	**Brand governance, guardrails & consistency built into the platform — not bolted on**
~17-18%	Seamless workflow integration with existing systems and martech stack
~15-18%	Enterprise-grade security and transparent controls over content generation & approvals
~12%	Proven ROI

> “ROI that is sustainable and reportable. Elimination of hallucinations. Ability to work agentically with partner or client agents.
>
> — **Operations Director** in Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic

> “Clear governance, strong IP and data protections, and confidence the outputs consistently meet brand and creative standards - and it needs to integrate into existing workflows.
>
> — **Senior Director** in Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI

What Agencies Are Building Toward: Human-Led, AI-Executed

In your view, what's the ideal balance between human and artificial intelligence in your agency's creative operations - and how close are you to that balance today?

59% | **say the ideal is humans leading and AI executing — what's missing is the platform to make that division of labor reliable, on-brand, and scalable.**

> *Humans set the strategy, taste, and guardrails. AI handles the volume and operational grind.*
>
> — **Senior Director, Operations**

> *[Use AI] to handle repetitive and operational tasks, such as asset adaptation, versioning, tagging, and workflow automation, while humans focus on strategy, creativity, judgment, and decision-making*
>
> — **Strategy Director** in Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic

Reality today: Many respondents describe themselves as mostly human-executed today, with aspirational targets of shifting to mostly AI-executed. 13% explicitly stated they are nowhere close to their ideal state.

Voice of the Agency

Unfiltered: what agency leaders said when asked about their biggest challenges, needs, and vision

ON GOVERNANCE

"For me to feel genuinely confident adopting an AI solution, it would need to be sophisticated in the way it receives and stores inputs like SOPs, guidelines, and guardrails—and consistently output results based on those inputs."

— **CMO** (Q12)

ON GOVERNANCE

"…Robust brand governance capabilities that can encode client-specific style guides and flag deviations automatically, combined with clear audit trails for compliance and legal accountability."

— **Creative Director** (Q12)

ON QUALITY + GOVERNANCE

"If it can be trained accurately about our specific brand and our existing previous work. This would help to give the AI work more of a personal "us" feeling."

— **Editorial Director** in Creative / Content (including ContentOps) (Q12)

ON INTEGRATION

"It would need to allow collaboration and access to MANY team members across roles and permission sets. Would also need to be able to connect to a variety of tech stacks / inputs."

— **VP, Experience Design & Content Solutions** (Q12)

IN GENERAL

"…to simplify and accelerate the content production process without sacrificing creative quality or brand consistency. It should fit seamlessly into our existing workflows and clearly demonstrate gains in efficiency, speed and effectiveness."

— **Strategy Director** in Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic (Q12)

ON HUMAN INTELLIGENCE + AI

"Humans set the strategy, taste, and guardrails. AI handles the volume and operational grind."

— **Senior Director Operations** (Q13)

KEY FINDING — 1

The Readiness Paradox (Q10)

Agencies know disruption is coming — but most haven't built the infrastructure to meet it

88%
believe disruption is likely within 3 years (Q9)

8%
feel fully equipped for AI ops at scale (Q3)

63%
are still "making progress" or have "major gaps" (Q3)

HIGH Readiness: (Fully Equipped or Mostly Ready) ***n=37***	**Top barrier:**	**(70%) Data privacy & legal compliance & (62%) uncertainty about quality or brand concerns**
	Lowest barrier:	**(24%)** Unclear ROI
MID Readiness: (Making Progress) ***n=57***	Top barrier:	**(68%)** Lack of internal expertise/training & **(67%)** uncertainty about quality or brand concerns
	Lowest barrier:	**(21%)** Client concerns or resistance
LOW Readiness: (Major Gaps Remain) **N=6**	Top barrier:	**(83%)** Tied between lack of internal skills/training & unclear ROI
	Lowest barrier:	**(33%)** Client concerns or resistance

KEY FINDING — 2

The Brand Safety & Governance Gap

Brand safety is the #1 cited barrier — yet most agencies lack guardrails to address it

64%

cite brand safety & quality uncertainty as #1 adoption barrier (Q10)

42%

Underprepared, very underprepared, or unsure about AI brand safety risks (Q8)

10%

feel ”fully” prepared (Q8)

> *Balancing high-volume asset variation with strict client brand safety and legal compliance.. AI allows us to rapidly scale, but brand alignment is still a time-consuming manual process.*
>
> — **VP, ACD** in Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic (Q11)

> *It would need to be sophisticated in the way it receives and stores inputs (SOPs, guidelines, and guardrails). Then, more importantly it would need to be successful at consistently outputting results based on those inputs.*
>
> — **Chief Creative Officer** (Q12)

C-suite level seniority (n=19): [Q9] highest disruption fear (4.47/5), [Q8] lowest brand safety preparedness (3.11/5). No seniority level or job function gave higher than 3.60/5 in the area of [Q8] brand safety preparedness.

KEY FINDING — 3

The Editing Tax: AI Promises Efficiency, Delivers Rework

For many agencies, AI hasn't reduced work — it shifted it. Human time moved from creating to fixing.

> *AI generates volume, but often misses nuanced brand voice and compliance guardrails. We spend nearly as much time editing and aligning outputs as we would creating from scratch.*
>
> — **VP, Marketing** in Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI (Q11)

> *AI can generate content quickly, but without standardized tools, workflows…and guardrails across teams, it often creates more rework, technical debt, and quality control issues.*
>
> — **Director of Technology** (Q11)

> *The promise of cost-efficiency versus the reality of needing a human to use these AI tools do not match.*
>
> — **Vice President, Experience Strategy** (Q11)

> *We are nowhere near there and currently AI actually results (sometimes) in adding to the workload rather than have net positive impact (!). I don't know if there's an ideal balance yet.*
>
> — **VP, Data & Analytics** (Q13)

+27%

of agencies called out maintaining brand consistency, quality, and safety in AI output as their single biggest barrier to scaling creative product [in their own words-Q11].

The "last mile" — making AI output brand-safe — remains almost entirely manual.

KEY FINDING — 4

Point Solution Fatigue: The Frankenstein Stack Problem

Agencies are stitching together disconnected tools (Q2) — and paying for it in brand risk and operational debt

76%
embedding AI into existing tech stacks

53%
stitching together multiple point solutions

56%
using 3+ approaches simultaneously

> *Too many spot solutions…*
>
> — **Creative Director** (Q11)

> *It would need to allow collaboration and access to MANY team members across roles and permission sets. Would also need to be able to connect to a variety of tech stacks / inputs.*
>
> +
>
> *Uncertainty about which tools to use amongst the glut of tools being rolled out week by week.*
>
> — **VP, Experience Design & Content Solutions** (Q12 & Q11)

> *It needs to seamlessly help and integrate rather then be a constant separate tool or prompt*
>
> — **AI Architect** (Q13)

KEY FINDING — 5

The Change Management Gap

63% of agencies cite lack of internal expertise as on of their top organizational barriers to deeper AI adoption for creative ops — yet training barely exists

63%

cite lack of internal expertise or Training as a top barrier (Q10)

18%

struggling or far behind the pace of AI change (Q4)

0%

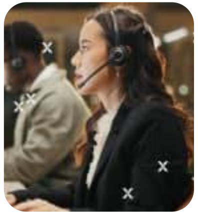
selected "no plans to use AI" — adoption is universal (Q2)

> *Lack of skills and knowledge plus internal creative resistance*
>
> — **CMO** (Q11)

> *[We need] mandatory training that is ongoing… Incorporate skill checks and use cases per person into our annual performance reviews.*
>
> — **SVP** in Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI (Q12)

> *A cohesive approach and change management program that brings team's & colleagues at all levels along*
>
> — **VP** in Data & Analytics (Q11)

> *Easy to learn, re-skill/upskill, and support/guidance in workflow process changes and change management.*
>
> — **CMO MarTech** (Q12)



KEY FINDING — 6

Business Model Under Pressure: The Revenue Model Is Breaking

Clients want AI efficiency. But when AI replaces billable hours, what are agencies paid for?

60%
clients frequently or constantly demand AI-driven proof

80%
believe AI enables scaling without adding headcount

88%
expect fundamental disruption to their business model

> *Getting clients on board. How to charge fees when they know we're spending less time on work.*
> — **Director of Data & Product** (Q11)

> *We're in the middle of a massive disruption and no one has any idea what an 'ideal' business model looks like right now.*
> — **VP, Experience Design & Content Solutions** (Q13)

> *The promise of cost-efficiency versus the reality of needing a human to use these AI tools do not match.*
> — **Vice President, Experience Strategy** (Q11)

> *We are nowhere near there and currently AI actually results (sometimes) in adding to the workload rather than have net positive impact (!). I don't know if there's an ideal balance yet.*
> — **VP, Data & Analytics** (Q13)

APPENDIX

By Agency Revenue Band

Revenue	Q3: readiness to adopt AI-powered creative ops at scale *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Not ready at all, 5=fully equipped)*	Q4: your pace of AI dev relative to your ability to evaluate & adopt new solutions for creative ops *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Far behind, 5=Ahead of the curve)*	Q5: frequency of clients asking for improvements in AI-driven creative quality, speed, &/or cost efficiency *(on a 1-5 scale: 1=Not at all, 5=Constantly)*	Q8: agency preparedness to manage brand safety & legal compliance risks from genAI *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Very underprepared, 5=Very prepared)*	Q9: likelihood that AI will fundamentally disrupt your business model in 3 years *(on a 1-5 scale, with 1=Very unlikely, 5=Very likely)*
$20M to <$40M	3.57	3.86	3.71	3.71	4.29
$40M to <$$100M	3.22	2.78	3.33	3.11	4.67
$100M to <$$500M	3.43	3.63	3.73	3.45	4.35
$20M to <$$40M	2.90	2.60	3.70	2.80	4.10
$40M to <$$100M	3.69	3.31	3.56	3.06	4.31
$500M to <$$1B	3.33	3.22	3.83	3.78	4.28

Analysis of Q2 (AI integration approach) by Agency Size

n=17

$20M to less than $40M

Dominant Strategies: This group relies heavily on embedding AI into their existing systems and tech stacks (71%) and using third-party platform solutions (71%).

In-House Development: They are the least likely to build proprietary AI capabilities in-house, with only 29% taking this approach.

Point Solutions: Just over half (53%) stitch together multiple point solutions to manage their workflow.

n=25

$40M to less than $100M

Dominant Strategies: Embedding AI into existing systems peaks in this category at 80%, indicating a strong preference for augmenting their current tech stack rather than rebuilding it. Using third-party platforms remains very high at 72%.

In-House Development: Similar to the smallest tier, only 32% of these agencies are investing in building proprietary capabilities in-house.

Point Solutions: 52% of these respondents rely on stitching together multiple point solutions.

Key Takeaways & Trends

Embedding AI and Third-Party Tools Lead the Market: Regardless of the agency's size, embedding AI into existing tech stacks and utilizing third-party platforms are universally the most popular integration methods.

In-House Builds Peak at the Mid-to-Large Tier: The financial resources and technical headcount required for proprietary AI development seem to align best with the $100M–$500M revenue bracket. Smaller agencies ($20M–$100M) compensate by relying more heavily on existing off-the-shelf platforms.

High Adoption Rates: Across all revenue categories, an overwhelming majority have actively implemented AI. Very few respondents — averaging less than 10% per category — reported having "no coordinated approach," "no live use cases," or "no plans to use AI" in their creative operations.

n=40

$100M to less than $500M

Dominant Strategies: As the largest respondent group, they also heavily favor embedding AI into existing systems (78%). However, their reliance on third-party platforms drops slightly to 65%.

In-House Development: This group is the most likely to invest in custom solutions, showing a significant jump to 57% building proprietary capabilities in-house.

Point Solutions: 50% utilize stitched-together point solutions.

n=18

$500M to less than $1B

Dominant Strategies: Embedding AI into existing systems (72%) and using third-party platforms (67%) remain their top choices.

Point Solutions: This enterprise tier shows the highest reliance on stitching together multiple point solutions at 61%.

In-House Development: In-house proprietary builds drop down to 44% compared to the previous tier, perhaps reflecting a shift toward enterprise-grade third-party solutions or point-solution integration rather than ground-up custom builds.

SEGMENTATION INSIGHT

By Job Seniority

Revenue	Q3: readiness to adopt AI-powered creative ops at scale *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Not ready at all, 5=fully equipped)*	Q4: your pace of AI dev relative to your ability to evaluate & adopt new solutions for creative ops *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Far behind, 5=Ahead of the curve)*	Q5: frequency of clients asking for improvements in AI-driven creative quality, speed, &/or cost efficiency *(on a 1-5 scale: 1=Not at all, 5=Constantly)*	Q8: agency preparedness to manage brand safety & legal compliance risks from genAI *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Very underprepared, 5=Very prepared)*	Q9: likelihood that AI will fundamentally disrupt your business model in 3 years *(on a 1-5 scale, with 1=Very unlikely, 5=Very likely)*
C-suite (C-levels + owner/founder/partner)	3.26	3.37	3.84	3.11	4.47
Department Head or Line of Business Head	3.44	3.50	3.61	3.17	4.22
Senior Director or Director	3.40	3.40	3.57	3.60	4.17
Vice President	3.42	3.18	3.73	3.42	4.42

SEGMENTATION INSIGHT

The C-Suite Paradox

The leaders most anticipating disruption feel the least prepared to manage its risks.

4.47 / 5

C-suite disruption expectation score
— ***highest of any seniority level (Q9)***

3.26 / 5

C-suite readiness for AI creative ops adoption score
— ***lowest of any seniority level (Q3)***

3.11 / 5

C-suite brand safety preparedness score
— ***lowest of any seniority level (Q8)***

No seniority segment averages better than 3.44/5 on AI-creative ops adoption readiness or 3.60/5 on brand safety preparedness.
The gap exists at every level — but it's sharpest at the top.

Only 9% of agencies say they're ahead of the curve on AI — the other 91% are racing to keep up.

SEGMENTATION INSIGHT

By Job Function

Revenue	Q3: readiness to adopt AI-powered creative ops at scale *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Not ready at all, 5=fully equipped)*	Q4: your pace of AI dev relative to your ability to evaluate & adopt new solutions for creative ops *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Far behind, 5=Ahead of the curve)*	Q5: frequency of clients asking for improvements in AI-driven creative quality, speed, &/or cost efficiency *(on a 1-5 scale: 1=Not at all, 5=Constantly)*	Q8: agency preparedness to manage brand safety & legal compliance risks from genAI *(on a 1-5 scale; 1=Very underprepared, 5=Very prepared)*	Q9: likelihood that AI will fundamentally disrupt your business model in 3 years *(on a 1-5 scale, with 1=Very unlikely, 5=Very likely)*
Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic	3.56	3.50	3.38	3.50	4.25
Creative / Content (including Content Ops)	3.56	3.44	3.81	3.52	4.37
Data / Analytics	2.75	2.50	4.00	2.25	4.50
Executive Leadership (C-Suite / VP)	3.00	2.83	3.61	3.06	4.39
Founder / Owner / Partner	3.75	4.00	3.75	2.75	4.50
Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI	3.42	3.48	3.71	3.58	4.23

Analysis of write-in answers by Job Function

Creative & Content (incl. ContentOps)

n=27

Tool Fatigue & Inconsistency: frustration with the sheer volume of new solutions. Struggling with "consistency from our AI tools," pointing out that even with clear prompts, AI will "frequently apply distinct workflows to similar problems rather than keeping a consistent cadence".

The "Human-First" Stance: Firmly believe that "humans need to run AI, not the other way around". Workflow where AI handles repetitive tasks while humans lead strategy.

Exec. Leadership (C-Suite / VP)

n=18

ROI Reality Check: executives note that "currently AI actually results (sometimes) in adding to the workload rather than have net positive impact (!)". They admit that they are "still working out where the highest ROI is".

Risk Mitigation: concerned with "internal tensions [and] resistance" as well as "legal boundaries around ownership". To avoid liability, some are currently restricting AI to "using existing or owned assets and scaling them, not using AI to create new assets".

Core Philosophy: maintain that the industry must be "human first," AI used strictly as a supporting tool for generating production outputs.

Key Takeaways & Trends

The Leadership Disconnect: There is a notable gap in perception between Founders/Partners (where half feel ahead of the curve) and Executive Leadership (where a third feel they are struggling or falling behind). This aligns with previous insights where C-Suite executives noted the difficulty of finding actual ROI and managing internal change, while founders maintain a broader optimism about using AI to support production.

Execution vs. Evaluation: The teams closest to daily media execution (Paid Media/Programmatic) feel entirely stable navigating the pace of AI. In contrast, the teams tasked with evaluating the tech stack (MarTech/AI) or guiding the broader operational strategy (Execs) report higher levels of struggle, likely due to the massive volume of new software flooding the market.

Founders/Partners

n=4

Founders: Agency owners are highly polarized but lean confident. Half of the founders surveyed (2) believe their agency is "ahead of the curve," while 1 is "mostly keeping up" and 1 is "struggling to keep up".

Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic

n=16

Legal & Client Hurdles: very focused on "strict client brand safety and legal compliance". Getting client sign-off "causes delays and multiple iterations," making rapid AI scaling a "time-consuming manual process".

Aggressive Automation Goals: seem to aim for heavier AI execution than their Creative counterparts, with one suggesting an ideal state of "30% human strategic oversight and 70% AI driven execution". However, they acknowledge they are still "relying heavily on human oversight" today.

Marketing/Ad Technology & Operations / AI

n=31

Brand Safety vs. Volume: "balancing speed and volume with maintaining consistent brand voice and visual identity" is huge operational challenge. Content that's off-brief, low quality or "misses nuanced emotional cues," it often forces heavy human correction.

Targeting the Ideal Balance: trying to quantify the future of creative work. Overall, they champion a "human powered, AI enhanced" approach.

Change Management: team adoption is a major hurdle… rolling out AI requires significant upskilling and change management with some internal resistance to AI use.

Analysis of Q4 (ability to keep pace w/ AI) by Job Function

n=27

Creative & Content (incl. Content Ops)

Keeping Pace: The majority of creatives (74%) feel they are adequately managing the disruption, split evenly between "mostly keeping up" (10) and "roughly keeping pace" (10).

The Extremes: A small subset (11%) feels they are successfully staying "ahead of the curve" (3 respondents), while 15% admit they are "struggling to keep up" (4 respondents).

n=4

Data & Analytics

Pricing & Business Models: immediately zero in on the financial friction of AI, asking "how to on charge fees when they know we're spending less time on work".

Bandwidth Limitations: They note the difficulty of "keeping up with the pace of developments in the space and people having enough bandwidth to learn them effectively".

Efficiency Drivers: view AI strictly "as a tool, not a replacement for people," designed primarily to "increase the output/revenue of headcount".

n=22

Executive Leadership (C-Suite / VP) + Founders

Feeling the Pressure: Executives are experiencing the most friction and fatigue. One-third (33%) report falling behind, with 5 stating they are "struggling to keep up" and 1 respondent uniquely admitting they are "far behind the pace". This was the only respondent in the entire survey to select the "far behind" option.

No Front-Runners: Zero executives feel their agency is "ahead of the curve" when it comes to evaluating and adopting new AI solutions.

n=31

Marketing/Ad Tech & Operations / AI

The Largest Cohort: As the group typically responsible for practically evaluating and integrating these tools, 71% feel they are managing the pace (12 mostly keeping up; 10 roughly keeping pace).

Leading but Strained: This department contains the highest raw number of professionals who feel "ahead of the curve" (4), but also a notable segment (16%) who are "struggling to keep up" (5).

n=16

Advertising / Paid Media / Programmatic

The Most Stable Group: This function reports the most consistent experience across the agency, with 100% of respondents stating they are successfully managing the pace of AI.

Zero Outliers: Exactly half (8) are "mostly keeping up" and the other half (8) are "roughly keeping pace," with none struggling and none claiming to be ahead of the curve.