CallHippo

ORIGINAL RESEARCH · 2026

STATE OF AI IN CUSTOMER-FACING TEAMS

State of AI Adoption in Customer-Facing Teams

How 1,200+ revenue leaders across Sales, Support, and Customer Success are deploying AI — what's working, what isn't, and what comes next.

1,200+
Revenue professionals surveyed

14
Industries · 4 global regions

73%
Report measurable ROI from AI

CONTRIBUTING THOUGHT LEADERS

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SECTION 01

Executive Summary

AI has moved from boardroom aspiration to frontline reality. The gap between early adopters and the majority is widening — and the window to catch up is closing.

78%
of companies use AI in at least one customer-facing function

3.2×
faster resolution times for mature AI-enabled support teams

41%
avg reduction in cost-per-contact among top AI adopters

$4.1B
projected AI-in-CX market size by end of 2026 (IDC)

Five Defining Findings

1. **Adoption is mainstream, maturity is not.** 78% use AI in CX, but only 19% are truly mature with multi-function deployments.
2. **Conversational AI leads deployments.** AI chatbots are the most common entry point (62%), but agent-assist drives the highest ROI.
3. **Data fragmentation is the #1 barrier.** 58% cite siloed data as their primary obstacle — above budget, talent, or buy-in.
4. **Human + AI outperforms AI alone.** Hybrid models produce 31% higher CSAT vs. fully automated interactions.
5. **Phone remains the trust channel.** 67% prefer human voice for complex issues — validating intelligent call routing as a critical use case.

Urgency Signal

> *"The companies pulling ahead aren't just using AI — they're embedding it into the muscle memory of every customer interaction. Everyone else is playing defence."*
>
> URGENCY SIGNAL · STATE OF AI IN CX, 2026

What This Report Answers

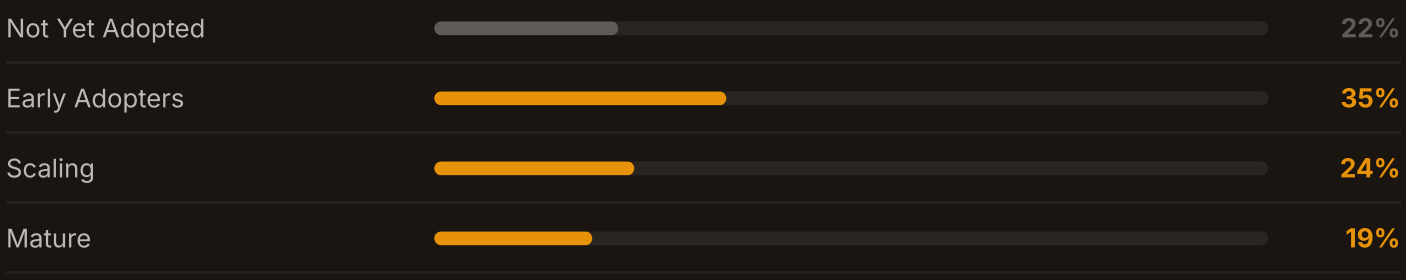
- ✓ Which AI use cases deliver ROI fastest across Sales, Support, and CS?
- ✓ What separates mature AI teams from early adopters?
- ✓ How should teams prioritise build vs. buy decisions?
- ✓ Where does the human-AI balance matter most?

SECTION 02

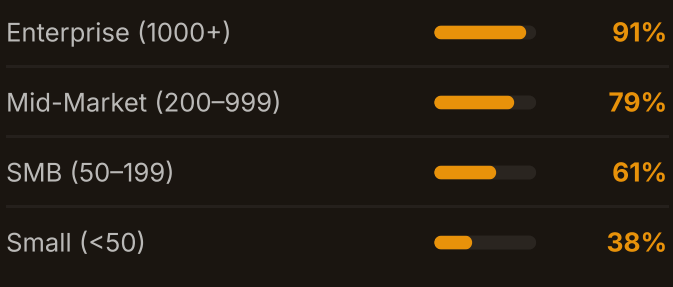
The AI Adoption Landscape in 2026

Adoption is near-universal. But the spectrum from "experimenting" to "transforming" is vast — and where your team sits determines everything.

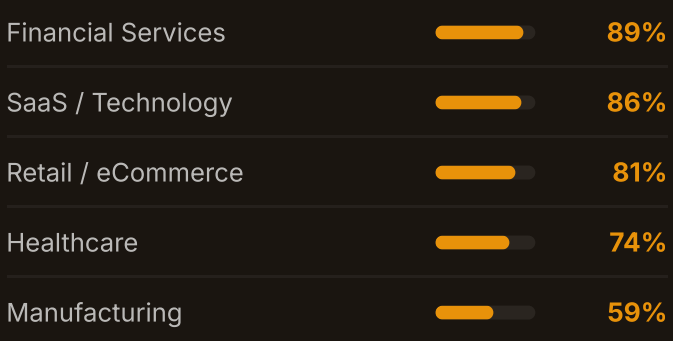
AI MATURITY SPECTRUM — CUSTOMER-FACING TEAMS (2026)



BY COMPANY SIZE



BY INDUSTRY



> *"SMBs are the fastest-growing AI adoption cohort — up 28 points year-over-year. Affordable, natively integrated AI tools have removed the enterprise-only barrier."*
>
> SOURCE: IDC AI MARKET TRACKER, Q4 2025

SECTION 03

AI Use Cases by Function

Different teams deploy AI differently. Here's where each function is seeing the most traction and what the outcomes look like.

↗ SALES

68%	Lead scoring & prioritisation
61%	Auto call summaries & CRM sync
54%	Conversation intelligence
41%	Predictive deal risk alerts
38%	Real-time coaching

+24%

increase in qualified pipeline from AI-assisted prospecting

🎧 SUPPORT

74%	AI chatbot & self-service
66%	Intelligent ticket routing
58%	Agent-assist (next-best answer)
52%	Sentiment & escalation detection
44%	QA automation & compliance

−41%

reduction in cost-per-contact for AI-mature support orgs

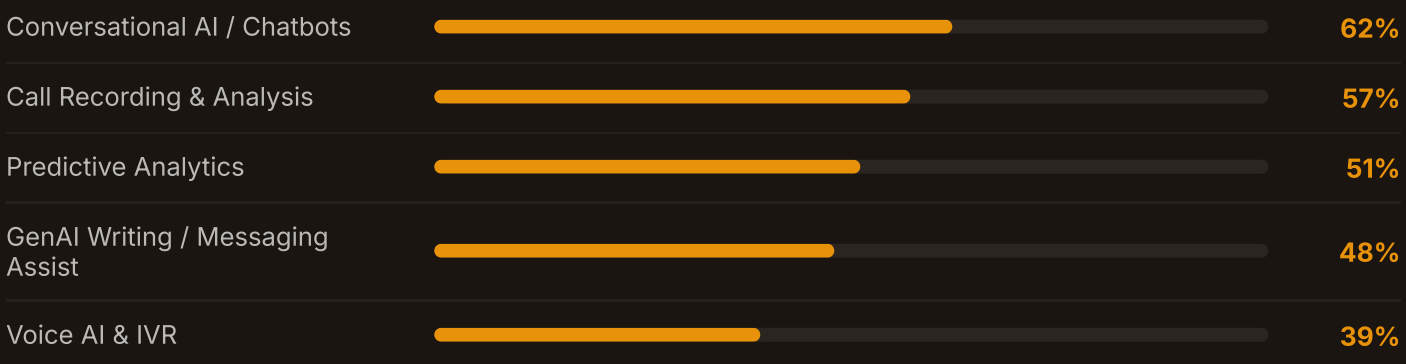
✓ CUSTOMER SUCCESS

61%	Churn risk prediction
55%	Health score automation
43%	Automated QBR prep
39%	Upsell signal detection
31%	Personalised success playbooks

+18%

improvement in net revenue retention for AI-driven CS teams

CROSS-FUNCTION AI USE CASES — ADOPTION RATE



SECTION 04

Measuring the Business Impact

The data is unambiguous for teams at maturity. Every key operational metric moves — significantly.

73%
of mature adopters report positive ROI within 12 months

8.4mo
median time-to-positive-ROI for AI in customer support (Gartner)

31%
higher CSAT for hybrid human+AI vs. fully automated

AI IMPACT METRICS — MATURE ADOPTERS VS. NON-ADOPTERS

METRIC	NON-ADOPTERS	EARLY ADOPTERS	MATURE AI TEAMS
First Contact Resolution Rate	61%	69%	**82%**
Avg. Handle Time (min)	9.2	7.4	**4.8**
Customer Satisfaction (CSAT)	3.6/5	3.9/5	**4.4/5**
Agent Productivity (tickets/day)	28	36	**51**
Cost Per Interaction	$12.40	$9.10	**$5.30**
Revenue Per Rep (indexed)	1.0×	1.3×	**1.8×**

EXPERT VOICE · 01 OF 03

RS

Rahil Sultan

Chief Business Officer, SmartLabs by Unicloud

AI CHATBOTS | PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS | CONTENT GENERATION | KNOWLEDGE BASE AI

> *"Marketing has become super easy with automated tools. We have also adopted AI assist bots in many of our user facing systems and has constructively enhanced the experience — reducing escalations and other dependencies on team."*

ON WHAT'S WORKING WITH AI AT SMARTLABS

The Challenge He Flags

> *"Too much content goes unchecked and high reliability on tools make employees go for shortcuts than actual legwork that is crucial for their learning phase."*

Rahil's concern isn't AI capability — it's the culture it can quietly create. When teams over-rely on automation, the judgment and effort that build real expertise can erode without anyone noticing.

His Advice to Teams

> *"Use AI wisely — as an option, not a dependency for every critical task. Apply your mind first, rather than blindly trusting that AI will solve all problems. The moment you stop doing the real legwork is the moment you stop growing. Don't be lazy."*

— RAHIL SULTAN

AI IMPACT RATING	COMPANY SIZE	AI APPROACH	PRIMARY BENEFIT
3 / 5	51–500 employees	Build Custom Solutions	Time Saving & Automation

EXPERT VOICE · 02 OF 03

AT

Alok Thakur

Cofounder & Director of Engineering, BeatRoute Innovations

CONVERSATION INTELLIGENCE | CALL ANALYSIS | FIELD SALES AI

> *"At BeatRoute, our platform serves on-ground sales reps who are making dozens of calls a day. When we embedded AI into beat planning and visit recommendations, what used to require a manager manually crunching data now happens dynamically — smarter routes, prioritized outlets, real-time nudges on what to push. The result wasn't just efficiency, it was effectiveness. Reps converted more, covered more ground, and the job felt more manageable."*

ON WHAT'S WORKING — ALOK THAKUR

The Biggest Win

> *"The biggest win has been AI turning our field sales reps from order takers into smart decision makers — better routes, better priorities, better conversions, without them even realizing AI is doing the heavy lifting."*

His Advice to Teams

> *"Don't start with the AI — start with the problem instead. The teams that win aren't the ones who added AI everywhere, they're the ones who found one painful, repetitive decision and made it smarter."*

— ALOK THAKUR

Approach: **Build custom AI solutions** tailored to specific field workflows

AI IMPACT RATING	COMPANY SIZE	AI TOOL USED	PRIMARY BENEFIT
4 / 5	51–500 employees	Conversation Intelligence	Time Saving & Automation

EXPERT VOICE · 03 OF 03

AM

Ajay Mian

CEO, Alletec

AI EMAIL DRAFTING | AI CHATBOTS | LEAD SCORING | CONTENT GENERATION

> *"AI has given us competitive advantages and helped us win new customers."*
>
> AJAY MIAN · ON THE MEASURABLE IMPACT OF AI AT ALLETEC

The CEO's Perspective

As a CEO leading a technology company, Ajay Mian's view of AI is unambiguously commercial. Where others talk about productivity and efficiency, Ajay cuts to the competitive outcome: AI is helping Alletec win deals.

His AI stack — email drafting, customer-facing chatbots, lead scoring, and content generation — reflects a deliberate focus on revenue-generating touchpoints where AI directly influences customer acquisition.

The Challenge He Identifies

PRIMARY CONCERN

Security & Privacy

A recurring concern among CEOs handling customer data across enterprise clients — especially as AI tools access sensitive interaction logs.

> *"Start with what's available within the standard products you currently use, before starting to custom develop your own solutions."*
>
> — AJAY MIAN

AI IMPACT RATING	COMPANY SIZE	AI APPROACH	PRIMARY CONCERN
3 / 5	51–500 employees	Scale Existing Tools	Security & Privacy

SECTION 06

What's Holding Teams Back

Despite strong momentum, 81% of teams report at least one significant barrier to scaling AI. Here's what the data reveals.

Top Barriers to AI Scaling

Siloed / fragmented data	58%
Lack of AI talent internally	44%
Employee resistance to change	38%
Budget / ROI uncertainty	35%
Integration complexity	33%
Regulatory / compliance	28%
Lack of vendor trust	21%

The Data Problem

58% cite siloed data as their #1 blocker. Fragmented CRM, support, and product data leaves AI models producing generic, low-confidence outputs.

86%

of companies with 5+ CX tools report siloed data
Source: Nextiva, 2025

The Trust Gap

33% of employees fear AI threatens their role. Companies that invest in AI fluency programmes see 88% satisfaction rates — the gap is addressable through enablement.

33%

Fear job displacement

88%

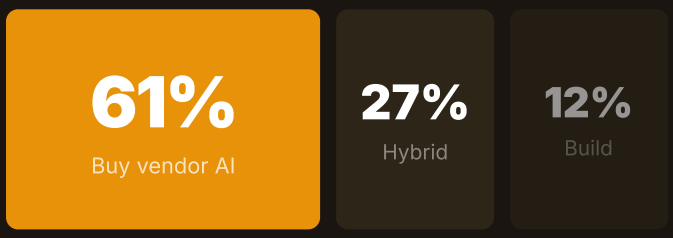
Satisfied after AI training

SECTION 07

How AI Strategy Is Evolving

From point-solution experimentation to platform consolidation — how teams are rethinking their AI stack in 2026.

BUILD VS. BUY — 2026 SPLIT



Vendor-AI dominates due to faster time-to-value. Pure build is declining as foundational model costs drop.

STACK CONSOLIDATION IN PROGRESS

Seeking single AI platform	71%
Plan to reduce tools	54%
Prioritising native CRM AI	48%
Voice/phone AI top priority	43%

2026 AI INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

HIGHEST PRIORITY

- ✓ Intelligent call routing & IVR
- ✓ AI agent-assist tools
- ✓ Conversation intelligence

HIGH PRIORITY

- ✓ Predictive analytics & churn risk
- ✓ Auto-summaries & CRM sync
- ✓ QA automation

GROWING INTEREST

- ✓ Voice AI & real-time coaching
- ✓ Proactive outreach automation
- ✓ AI-native contact centres

SECTION 08

Recommendations by Maturity Stage

Actionable next steps tailored to where your team is today.

JUST STARTING

Lay the Foundation

- ✓ Audit your CRM data quality before adding AI on top
- ✓ Choose 1 high-volume, low-complexity use case first
- ✓ Set a 90-day metric — resolution time, CSAT, or deflection
- ✓ Communicate AI's purpose to your team before launch
- ✓ Use natively integrated tools — avoid new data silos

QUICK WIN
Deploy AI call summaries + CRM auto-sync. Expect 30–45 min/agent/day saved within 30 days.

SCALING

Compound Your Gains

- ✓ Connect support + sales AI to one customer record
- ✓ Add agent-assist to highest-volume call queue
- ✓ Launch monthly AI feedback loops with frontline
- ✓ Consolidate to 1–2 AI platforms, retire point tools
- ✓ Build AI competency track in L&D curriculum

BENCHMARK GOAL
Target 80%+ FCR and sub-5 min avg handle time by Q2.

MATURE

Lead and Differentiate

- ✓ Invest in predictive AI that prevents issues before customers call
- ✓ Develop proprietary AI training data from your interaction archive
- ✓ Implement real-time sentiment routing for VIP accounts
- ✓ Run AI-vs-human experiments to refine handoff thresholds
- ✓ Share AI ROI publicly to attract talent and build credibility

HORIZON
Proactive AI that reaches out before customers know they have a problem — 2026 is the year to pilot it.

CONCLUSION

The Window Is Open — But Not Forever

AI adoption in customer-facing teams has crossed the mainstream threshold. The question is no longer *whether* to adopt, but *how fast* and *how well*.

Teams at maturity are pulling ahead across every metric — resolution speed, cost efficiency, CSAT, and revenue per rep. They're also accelerating faster, creating a compounding advantage that gets harder to close with each quarter.

The gap is still closeable. What used to require a data science team now ships as a checkbox in your phone system settings.

78%
already using AI in CX

19%
at true maturity — the gap to close

> *"Don't start with the AI — start with the problem instead. The teams that win found one painful, repetitive decision and made it smarter."*
>
> ALOK THAKUR · COFOUNDER, BEATROUTE INNOVATIONS

> *"Use AI wisely — as an option, not a dependency. Apply your mind first, rather than blindly trusting that AI will solve all problems."*
>
> RAHIL SULTAN · CBO, SMARTLABS BY UNICLOUD

Research Methodology

Primary Survey

1,200+ respondents across Sales, Support, and Customer Success. Conducted January–February 2026. Companies with 50+ employees across North America, Europe, APAC, and MENA — 14 industry categories.

Secondary Research

McKinsey Global AI Survey 2025, Gartner 2025, Salesforce State of Service (6th Ed.), Deloitte AI in the Enterprise 2025, IDC AI Market Tracker Q4 2025, Nextiva CX Trends 2025. **Expert Contributors:** Rahil Sultan, Alok Thakur, Ajay Mian.

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