How sales leaders are using Al today

Our survey of leaders in sales about their use of AI shows that nearly 20% say their companies are not yet using Al—and more than half think their companies are adopting AI too slowly. In order to increase their capabilities, these leaders most often say they are developing talent internally.



Separate surveys explored the perspectives of chief people officers; chief marketing officers; chief legal officers; chief strategy officers; chief supply chain and operating officers; chief digital, technology, or information officers; and chief AI officers. Other survey reports and other insights on leadership and AI can be found on heidrick.com.

Usage is widespread—but most leaders want to move even faster

nearly 20% say that their companies are not yet using Al—a higher share than most peers. Using Using it in

The majority of sales executives say their companies are using AI in at least some capacity, though

Not yet using Al Piloting

19%

it in some functions or business units

it in some functions or business units

most or all functions or business units

And more than half of sales executives say their companies are adopting AI too slowly, which is similar to most peers.

37%

Too fast Don't know Too slowly

At the right speed

A focus on internal use

Currently In 2 years' time

54%

38%

6%

11%

66%

60% 70%

and productivity gains Two-thirds of sales leaders say they Internal use

for external use with customers, higher than most other functional leaders and tied with marketers...

...with nearly two-thirds seeking

sales, and strategy officers, content

opportunities to support their internal functions. Across marketing,

are focused on AI for internal use,

similar to peers, but more than half

External use with customers 51% External use with suppliers and partners 16% Other Don't know

10%

20%

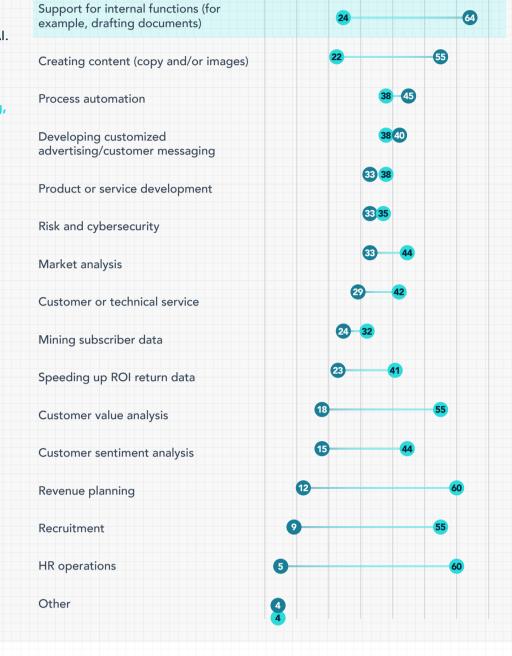
30%

40%

50%

creation was also a frequent use for Al. Looking two years ahead, notable shares of sales leaders expect the biggest increases in the function's use of AI will be in revenue planning, HR operations and recruitment, and

customer value analysis.



Despite the hype about AI and how quickly companies are adopting it, sales leaders, as well as most of their peers

across functions, indicate that their

Measuring ROI

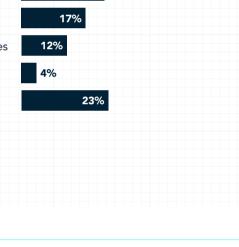
companies aren't investing just to keep up with peers: they are measuring success based on their goals, as they would any other investment.

Increased market share Improved customer engagement scores Other Don't know

Improved productivity

Faster time to market

Cost reduction



22%

38%

Across functions, the person who is most often cited as owning AI strategy is the chief information, technology, or

the lead?

Who's taking

in setting AI policies, and just over 60% say the digital leader is involved. There's little consistency among survey respondents in who else is involved, though general counsels and chief information security officers are cited

more often than most other leaders by

digital officer. About 10% say it's the

CEO. And just over 10% say no one.1 Forty percent say the CEO is involved

leaders across functions.



mostly because expertise remains

Spending too little time Spending too much time

21%

Seeking input from executives about AI's development and opportunities

As for the board, 44% of sales leaders do not think the board is spending enough time on Al. This share is similar across most functions.

Overseeing as part of their normal oversight of strategy and risk Asking for special reports on AI policies

Spending enough time

Asking for special reports on Al's risks

Asking for special reports on Al's effect on strategy

Collaborating with external technology partners or vendors

14%

Seeking input from external experts about Al's development and opportunities

Don't know

Engaging consultants

Other 3% 17% Developing internally, including upskilling or reskilling existing workforce

58%

hard to find. Most functional peers' Hiring full-time leaders views are similar. 11%

available

Lack of interest among

Engaging on-demand talent Other 3% We aren't trying to build AI expertise 10% Don't know 3% Sales leaders most often say there are too few people with AI expertise available at any level, and that there are also too few leaders available who can combine AI and business expertise. Too few leaders who Too few leaders with We have other Too few leaders who priorities for ai expertise have run a large Al business expertise available investing in talent program available

to define roles leaders at our company build AI expertise expertise are less related to Al in developing Al interested in our industry than others expertise themselves

We don't know how

Too few people with

ai expertise

available at any level

Our compensation for AI talent is not competitive



We aren't trying to



Don't know

People with Al

No specific

challenges

As leaders seek to use AI for a broadening range of tasks and projects—eventually rewiring business processes across the enterprise—we expect high demand for Al-specific expertise at all levels to continue for three to six years. In the long run, it seems likely demand will follow a pattern similar to that in earlier waves of computing innovation, from

Considerations for leaders



personal computing to cloud, in which specific technical expertise was in high demand during the transition, but then declined as the relevant knowledge became a part of every person's role. In other words, we expect that basic working knowledge of Al will be as fundamental an expectation for senior leaders as being digitally savvy is today. That said, we also expect every enterprise will have a senior leader responsible for the AI strategy and for AI platforms and tools. This executive may or may not have a chief AI officer title.

Across functions, it's still hard for companies to find the AI talent they need.

 1 Notably, only 31% of the respondents who said no one owns the AI strategy also said their company is not yet using AI; 39% said their company is piloting, and another 29% said their company is using it in some areas.

About the research

401 executives in human resources; 153 executives in legal; 335 executives in marketing; 93 executives in sales; 90 executives in strategy; and 304 executives in supply chain and operations. This survey had a global reach; respondents represent the full range of industries, company revenue levels, and various company ownership structures.

In spring 2024, we surveyed 1,894 executives: 518 executives in finance;

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