

HumanMade +  VIP

Are you ready for AI?

AI READINESS REPORT



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Executive Summary

AI is rapidly transforming how enterprises create, manage, and deliver content. This report, based on insights from 99 senior digital leaders, shows that while enthusiasm for AI is near universal, organizational readiness lags behind. The data reveals strong intent, growing investment, and clear barriers that define what it will take to move from experimentation to full-scale adoption.

Key Takeaways

AI is now essential to success.

Almost every respondent (94%) says effective AI adoption is vital or important to their organization's future success. Leaders now see AI as fundamental to competitiveness, not an optional innovation.

Architecture is the main barrier.

65% of leaders describe their CMS as only partially structured and 22% as fully structured. Without modular, interoperable content, AI's potential for automation and personalization remains limited.

Security and integration slow adoption.

Around 50% of respondents cite security, privacy, and compliance concerns, and 40% identify integration challenges. Skills and strategy gaps add further friction to enterprise adoption.

Investment focus is shifting to enablement.

63% of organizations are prioritizing AI workflow integration, ahead of cost reduction (38%) and analytics (39%). This marks a move from pilot projects to operational transformation.

Efficiency is the leading payoff.

When asked what AI readiness would deliver, 69% point to more efficient use of resources, 55% to faster production, and 52% to improved personalization. Enterprises are chasing measurable gains in speed and performance.

Enterprises are moving decisively from curiosity to capability. Those that modernize their content systems, strengthen governance, and empower AI-literate teams will be best placed to turn potential into lasting competitive advantage.

1 Introduction

Artificial intelligence is no longer an abstraction, something for the future. It's here, now, in our pockets, and on our desktops, and it's changing things at a remarkable rate.

In enterprise organizations across the globe, people are embracing AI, using it to streamline workflows, generate ideas, and enhance their productivity. Encouraged to do so by their employers, a huge 97% of the leaders surveyed for this report are using AI at work either daily or weekly.

And yet, when the focus pulls back from the individual to the organizational level, a very different picture emerges. Progress is slow; caution and uncertainty abounds.



Research overview

This is a collaborative project delivered by Human Made and WordPress VIP.

Research was carried out in September and October 2025, with input from 99 senior marketing and technology decision-makers from enterprise organizations.

Participants responded to both open text and multiple choice questions, and all responses were anonymized before being analyzed and included in this report.

This AI readiness paradox isn't perhaps a huge surprise - after all, it's way easier to embrace new technology as an individual in a sandbox than it is to transform huge corporations' workflows overnight. But sitting as we are, at the beginning of the AI era, a company's ability to upskill, become decisive, address sluggish implementation and adapt quickly, will soon become a major competitive advantage.

This report, produced after analyzing the responses garnered from a comprehensive research project surveying digital leaders from enterprise organizations, explores why individual and collective enthusiasm towards AI isn't translating into demonstrable progress at the company level. We throw the spotlight on the barriers to progress, as well as the opportunities waiting for those that successfully navigate this period of uncertainty.

With a specific focus on content, digital strategy, and the evolving role of the CMS, we highlight where leaders should be placing their bets, upskilling and investing resources in order to capitalize on the incredible new opportunities awaiting AI-literate business.

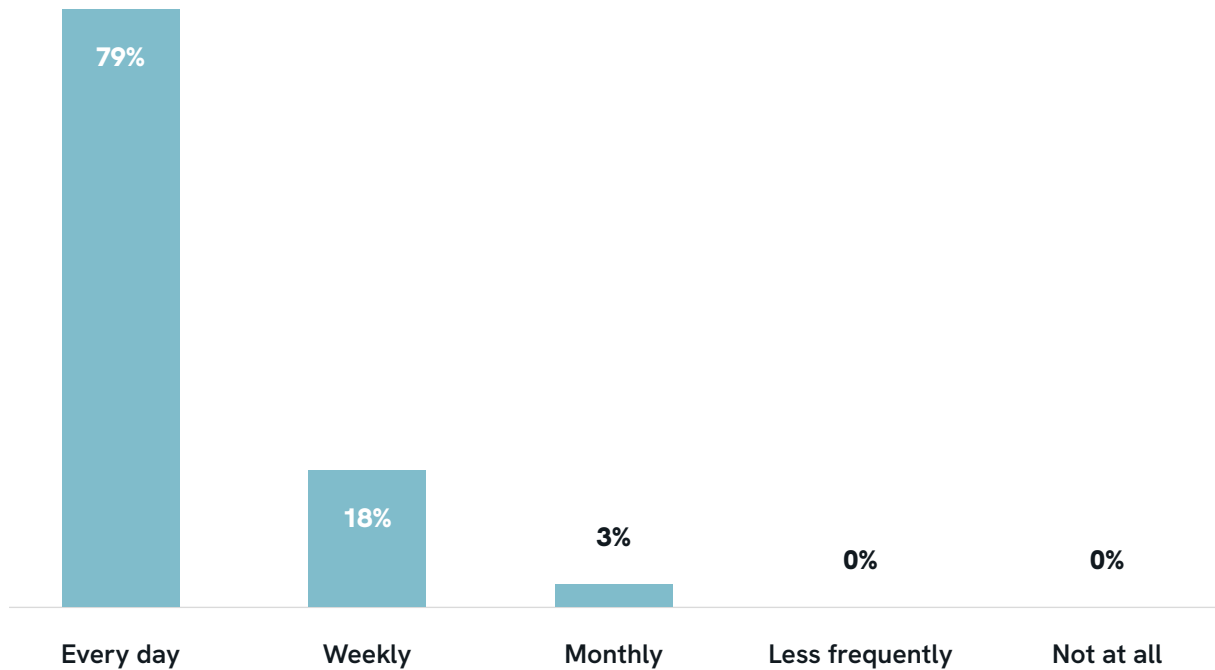
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The AI readiness paradox

A revolution is happening in enterprise organizations, but it's not taking place in the boardroom. This shift is playing out on the screens of individual employees. Our research confirms the worst kept secret in digital: professionals are embracing new ways of working and handing over chunks of their to do lists to Artificial Intelligence.

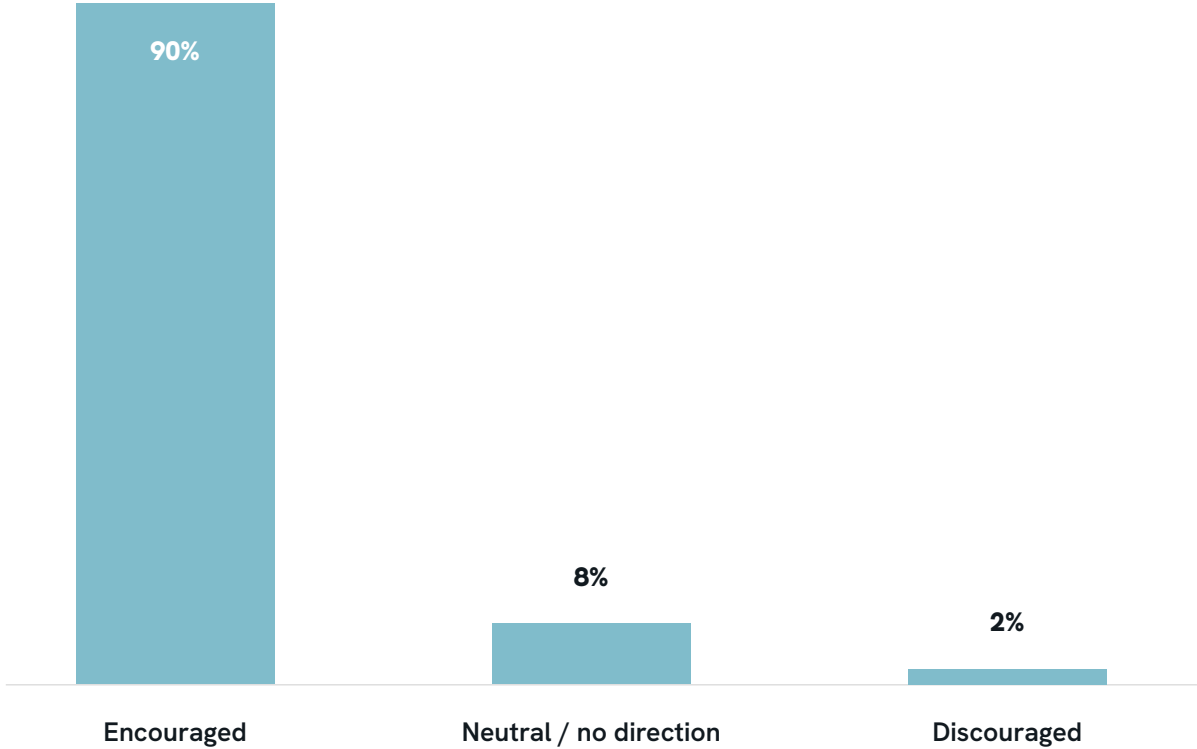
An overwhelming 97% of the digital leaders we surveyed are using AI in business-as-usual work, with the majority using it every single day. They are proactively exploring its potential, automating routine tasks, and bringing new efficiencies to their roles.

Q1: To what extent are you personally using AI at work?



From the top, this adoption is broadly encouraged. Aware, at least on a theoretical level, of the myriad benefits AI promises, most organizations have given their teams a green light to experiment with the raft of new tools now available.

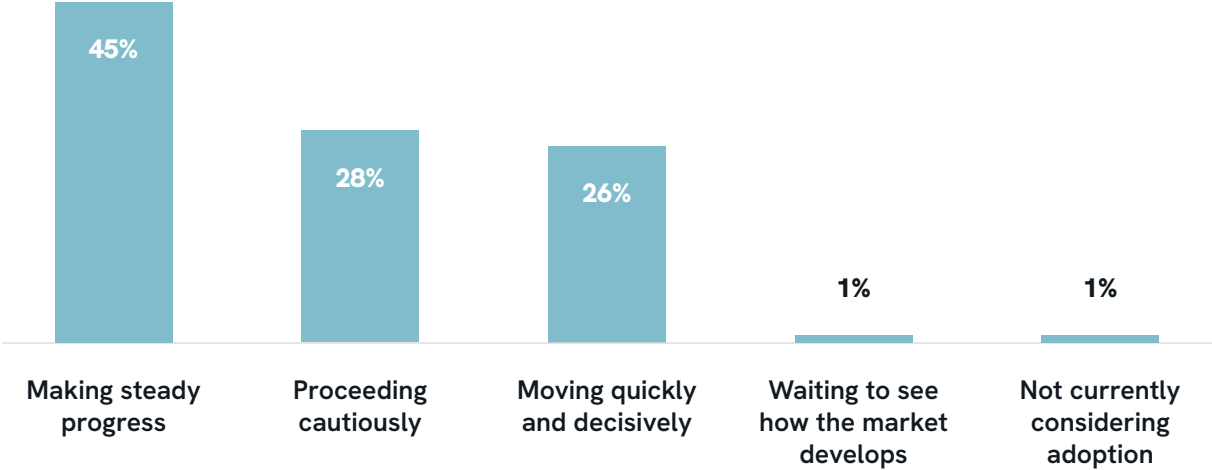
Q2: To what extent has your organization encouraged employees to embrace AI in their day-to-day activities?



We're sitting at the start of an exciting new era of innovation. Yet, this grassroots enthusiasm is running headfirst into a wall of corporate caution, and that's where we meet a major challenge. Despite the widespread use of AI at the individual level, there's way less movement to point towards at the macro level.


When asked to reflect on the pace at which their organizations as a whole are moving on AI, the same early-adopting digital leaders describe a far slower, less impactful situation.

Q3: Which best describes the pace at which your organization is moving toward AI adoption?



Of course, it's understandable that large corporate entities are moving more slowly than individual people are able to. And it's also likely that not every single task farmed out to AI agents by eager workers is delivering maximum value for the companies involved. The more interesting discussion doesn't come from focusing on the fact that individuals are more dynamic and flexible than large organizations, it's about investigating the underlying reasons for caution and slow progress. Here the data paints a very clear picture.

Notably, we're not looking at a scenario where too much convincing needs to be done. Everyone seems fairly well-bought-in to the idea that AI promises to usher in an era of new advantages in the enterprise setting (even if questions persist around how to demonstrate this as fact). The C-suite and digital leaders alike see the potential. The problems appear to reside in execution, with uncertainty around security and compliance, and questionmarks around how to actually move forward both featuring prominently.



Alongside the quantitative findings, the open-text responses reveal how digital leaders in enterprise organizations are defining “AI readiness.” For most, it is not only about adopting tools but about building the right foundations for meaningful adoption.



It means having our data structured in a way that allows AI to digest and consume it, having our data in systems that AI can even talk to to begin with, as well as having employees who are at least somewhat AI-literate and know the basics about how AI works, what tools are available, how to use them securely.”

This definition captures a recurring theme in our research: readiness starts with infrastructure and literacy, not just enthusiasm. Without reliable systems and informed teams, ambition risks running ahead of capability.

At the same time, caution is still a strong undercurrent. One respondent told us:



The current landscape is full of fly-by-night offerings making us cautious to commit to a vendor that may not have the most secure underlying stack.”

Leaders are aware of the speed of change but wary of making the wrong call in an uncertain vendor landscape. Balancing innovation with risk management is proving to be one of the toughest challenges for enterprise organizations.

Others, however, are taking a different view, seeing readiness as a call to move faster and experiment boldly.



Being AI-ready means being ahead of the curve. If you’re reacting, you’re too late. Being ready means experimenting and working with it every day.”

This mix of urgency and caution sits at the heart of the AI readiness paradox. Enterprise leaders know the opportunity is real, but legacy systems, risk sensitivity, and the complexity of scale continue to slow the pace of change.

We’ll dive into the specifics later in the report. For now, it’s clear that alongside security, privacy, and compliance concerns, our survey found that critical skill and knowledge gaps and a lack of vision are further barriers to progress. The ambition to integrate AI is clear but the roadmap is blurry.

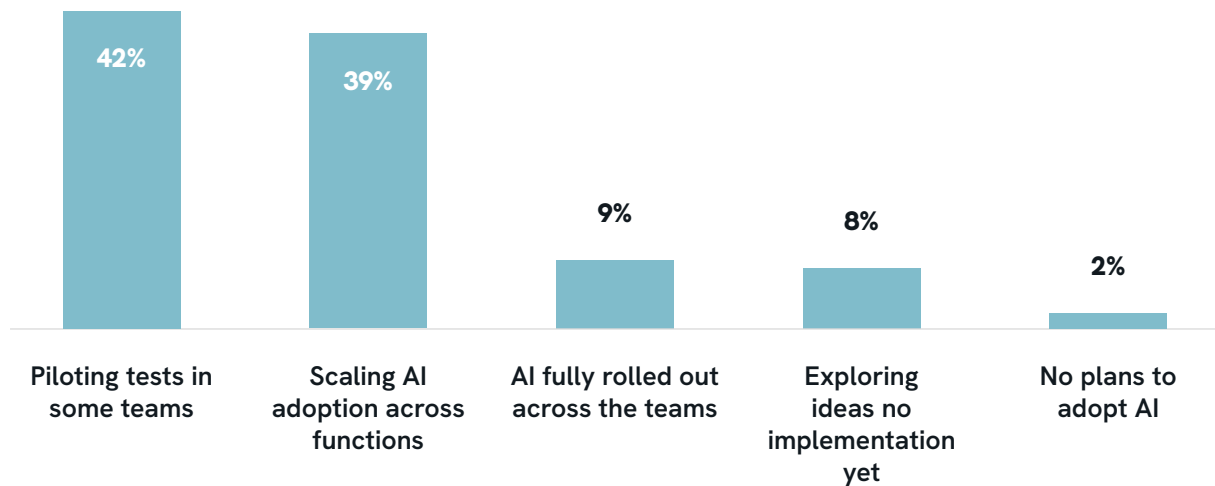
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The role of the CMS in the AI era

As enterprise organizations begin to experiment with AI, attention inevitably turns to the systems that support content creation and delivery. The CMS sits at the centre of this picture, acting as the engine that connects data, workflows, and customer experiences. Yet, for many businesses, that engine is not yet built for the AI era.

Across our research, digital leaders described a clear intention to integrate AI into their content strategies. Forty percent report scaling adoption across functions and 42% are piloting tests in some teams. Only 9% have rolled AI out fully, while 8% are still exploring ideas and 2% have no plans to adopt. The intent is real, but maturity is uneven.

Q5: How would you describe your organization's current approach to AI in content and digital experience?

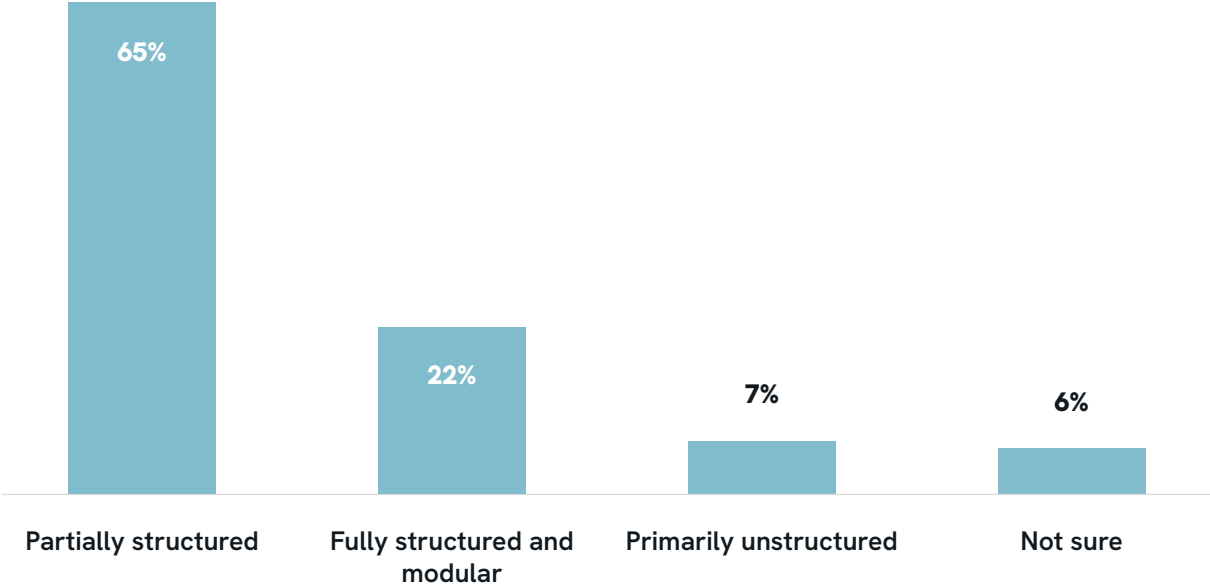


The foundations of the content layer show that many organizations are still in transition. 65% of respondents describe their CMS architecture as partially structured, suggesting that most are midway through the shift toward more modular, connected systems. A smaller but meaningful group — 22% — report being fully structured and modular, indicating a growing cohort with mature, AI-ready content infrastructure. As organizations move toward an AI-native web, content must be structured and connected enough to be understood by both humans and machines.

At the other end of the spectrum, 7% say their CMS remains primarily unstructured, and 6% are unsure of its current state.

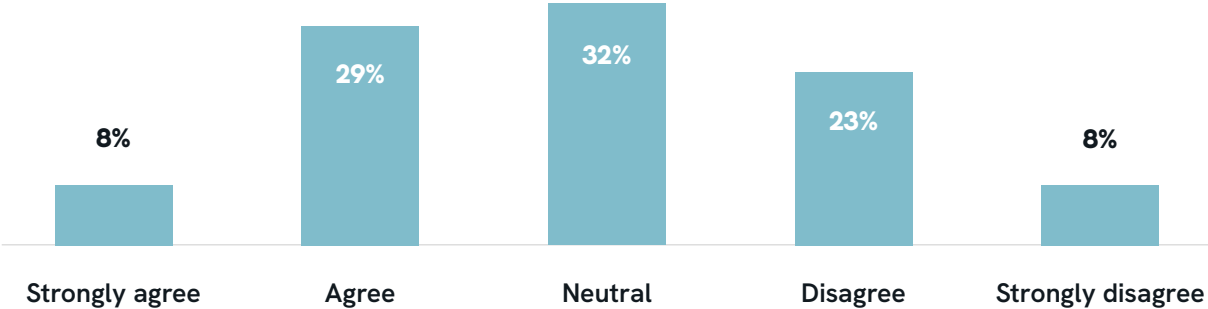
This data highlights a clear divide: while a subset of leaders are laying strong foundations for AI-driven orchestration, the majority are still operating within partly modernized systems that limit how far automation and integration can extend today.

Q7: How would you describe the current state of the content architecture within your CMS?



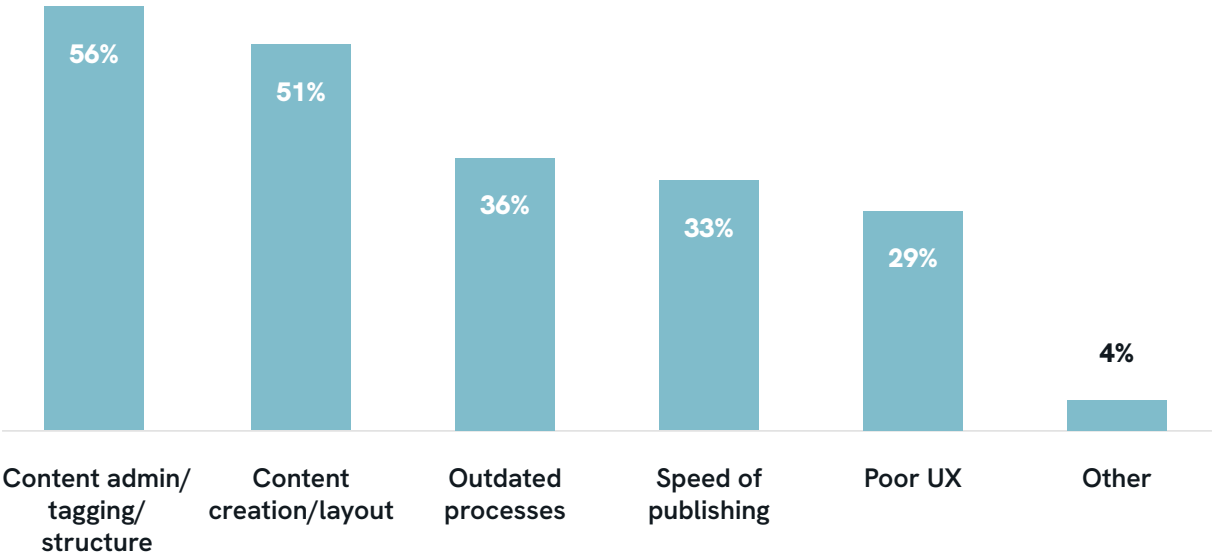
This distinction matters. When asked whether their CMS is designed to act as a content orchestration layer rather than just a publishing platform, about four in ten agreed, nearly a third were neutral, and roughly a quarter disagreed. The results point to teams that understand the target state yet have not consistently turned structured content into true orchestration.

Q9: To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Our current CMS is designed to act as a content orchestration layer not just a publishing platform."



Operational pain points reinforce the challenge. Respondents point to slow publishing, outdated processes, and complex workflows as common frustrations. These issues are not unique to AI, but they grow more acute when automation is layered on top of inefficient systems.

Q10: Thinking about your CMS today what areas cause the most frustration or roadblocks for your team?

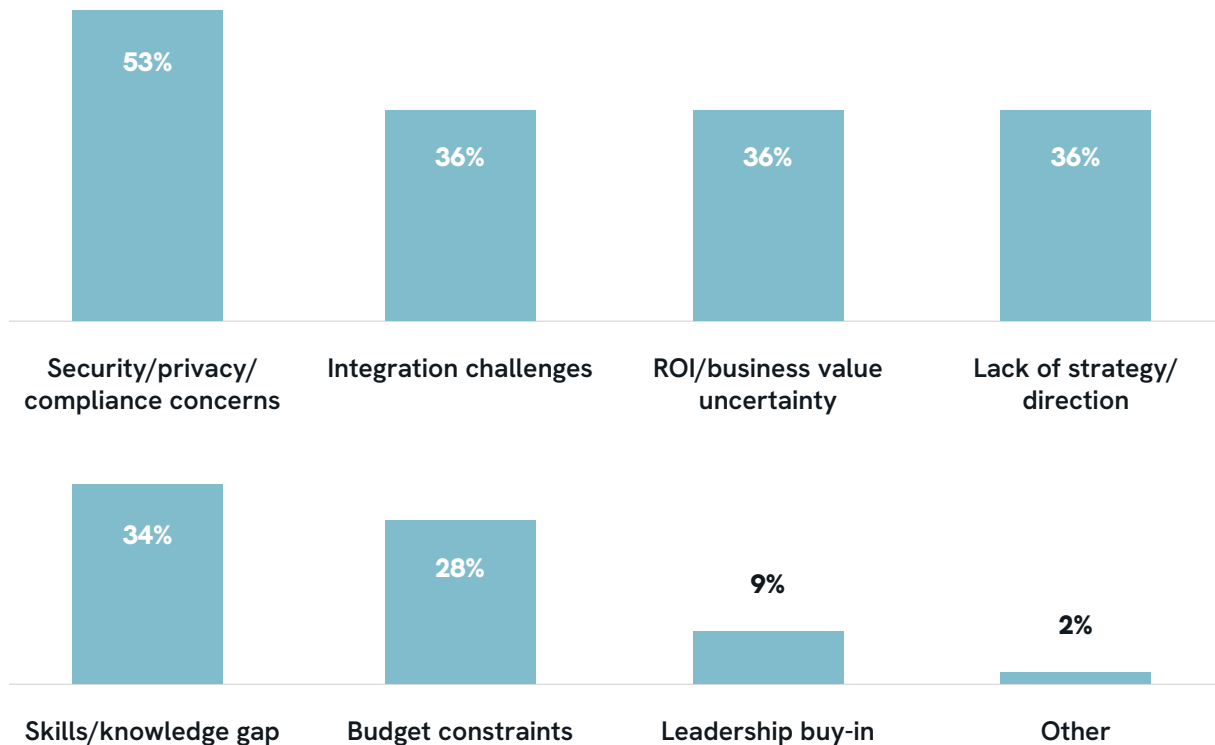


Security, privacy, and compliance concerns emerged as the most significant barriers to AI adoption, cited by 53% of respondents. Integration challenges, ROI, skills and lack of strategy/direction were all selected by just over a third of respondents.

These findings highlight the need for open, extensible systems that connect data and workflows across the organization.

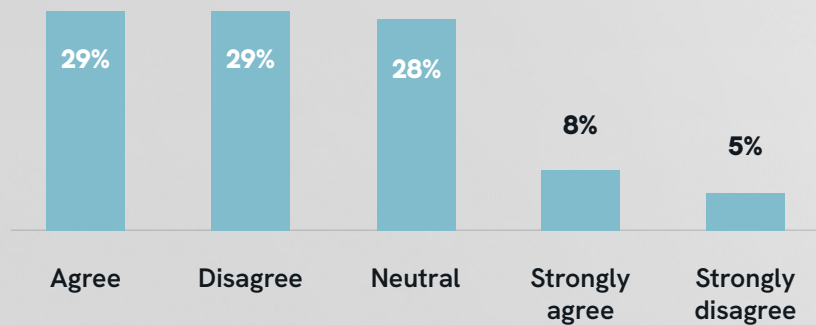
These overlapping issues explain the measured pace of enterprise progress: enthusiasm is strong, but implementation is slowed by the need to maintain control over sensitive data, ensure compliance, and bridge technical and cultural gaps before moving at scale.

Q12: What are your organization's biggest challenges in adopting AI for content and within your CMS?



When asked whether their CMS and content infrastructure provide a competitive advantage for adopting and scaling AI, roughly one third responded positively while the remainder disagreed or were unsure. For many, the CMS has not yet evolved into the strategic layer required to unlock AI's potential.

Q14: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Our CMS and content infrastructure give us a competitive advantage in adopting and scaling AI."



Even so, the direction of travel is clear. Leaders recognise that becoming AI-ready requires modern, flexible systems that treat content as structured data to be connected, analyzed, and reused at scale. The CMS sits at the centre of that shift, moving from publishing platform to orchestration engine for the AI era.

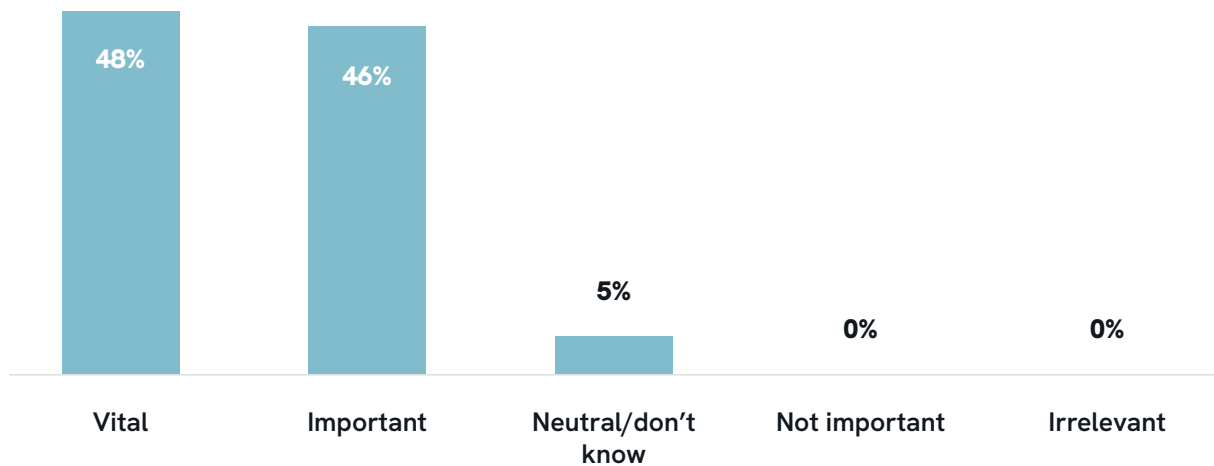
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What now?

Despite the challenges outlined earlier, including technical debt, skill shortages, and the pace of change, enterprise leaders are clear that AI is a strategic must. It's here, it's already delivering value, and those that adapt fastest stand to gain the most. The data suggests that a tipping point is approaching, with investment priorities shifting decisively from experimentation toward enablement.

When asked how important the effective adoption of AI-powered technologies and practices will be to their organization's future success, the response was near-unanimous. Ninety-four percent of digital leaders said it is either "vital" (48%) or "important" (46%). Only 5% were neutral or unsure, and none viewed AI as unimportant. This overwhelming consensus underscores that AI is now seen not as a speculative opportunity but as a strategic imperative for enterprises today.

Q16: How important do you believe the effective adoption of AI-powered and AI-adjacent technologies and practices will be to the future success of your business?

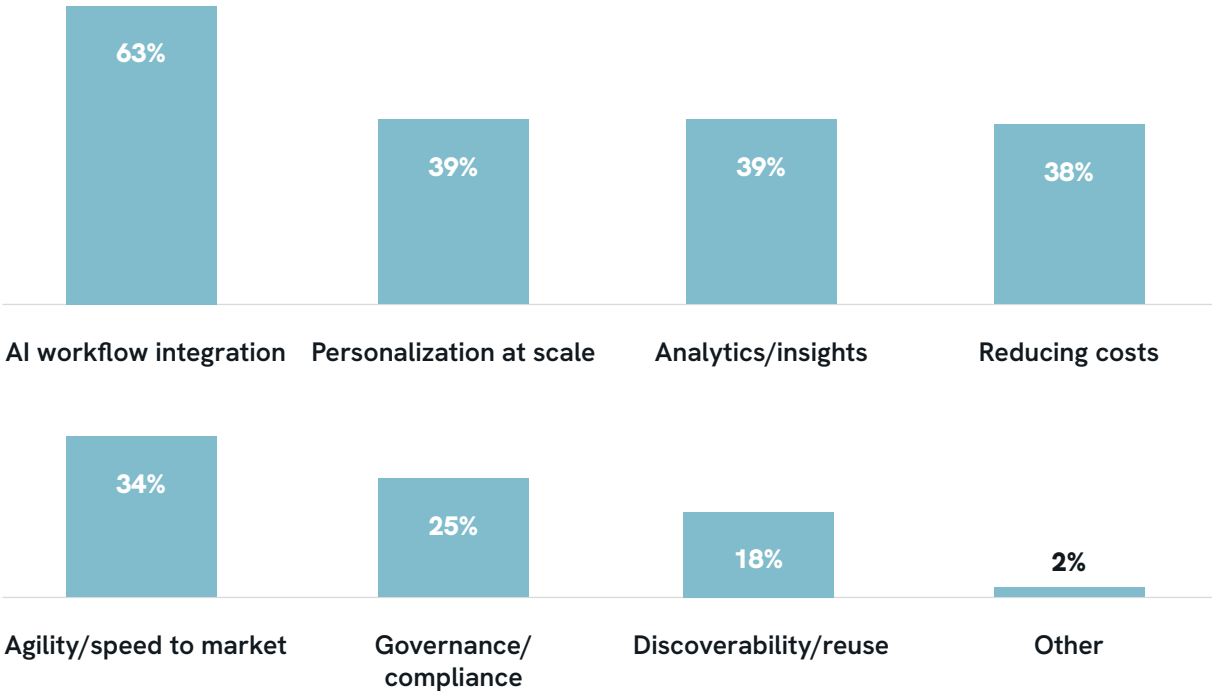


That conviction is reflected in clear investment intent. When leaders were asked about their top priorities for content technology over the next 12 to 18 months (Q13), AI workflow integration stood out as the leading focus, chosen by 63% of respondents. This points to a strong emphasis on turning AI from pilot projects into everyday processes that drive efficiency and scale.

A second cluster of priorities includes reducing costs (38%), analytics and insights (39%), and personalization at scale (39%), showing that many organizations are pursuing a balance between automation, intelligence, and customer experience. Leaders are beginning to build intelligent workflows, where insights and automation are connected directly to content creation and publishing. Agility and speed to market follow closely at 34%, reflecting the growing need to deliver and adapt content more quickly.

Lower-ranked but still meaningful focus areas include governance and compliance (25%) and discoverability and reuse (18%). These reflect a growing maturity in how organizations are approaching content operations, moving from reactive problem solving to long-term ecosystem design. Together, these priorities show a shift from experimentation to structured investment, marking a new phase of enterprise AI adoption.

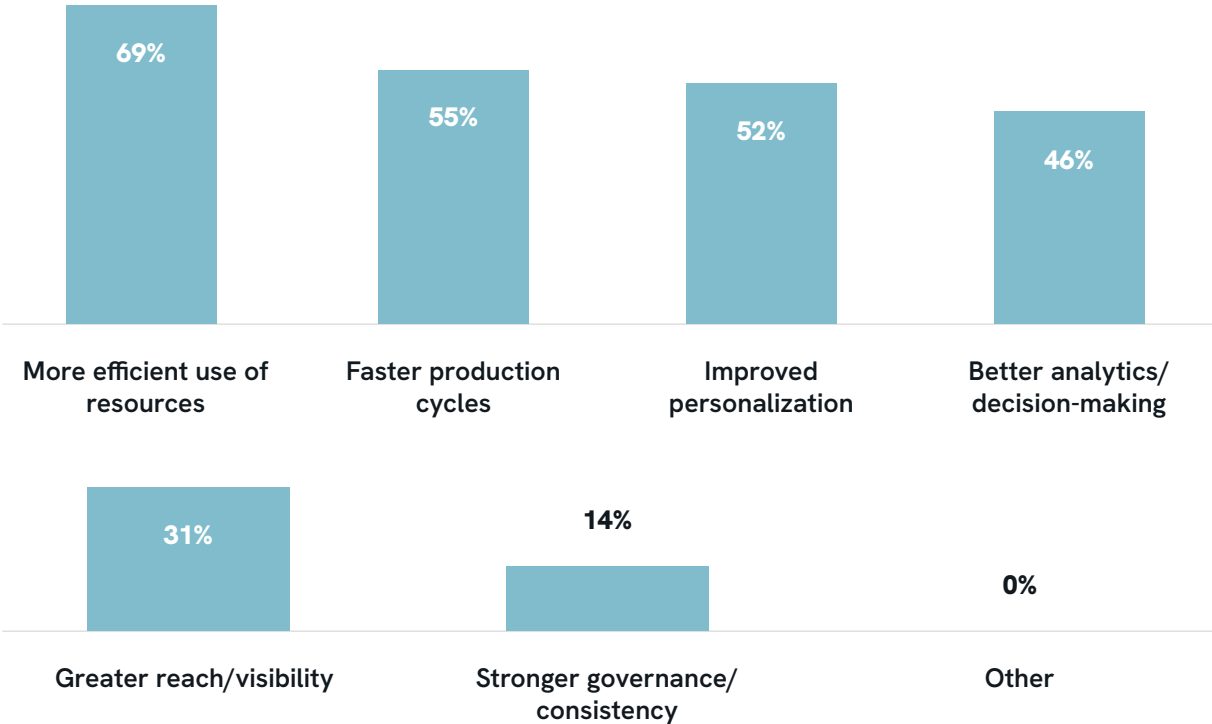
Q13: What are your top priorities for investing in content tech over the next 12-18 months?



The benefits leaders expect to gain from these investments reinforce this direction. When asked which outcomes would have the greatest impact on their organization if they were fully AI-ready, more efficient use of resources led by a clear margin, selected by 69% of respondents. Faster production cycles (55%) and improved personalization (52%) followed closely, highlighting a strong focus on productivity and audience connection.

Better analytics and decision-making was cited by 46%, showing the continued importance of data-driven strategy in enterprise growth. Fewer respondents selected greater reach and visibility (31%) or stronger governance and consistency (14%), suggesting these are either already mature capabilities or secondary benefits expected to follow once efficiency and integration are achieved.

Q15: Which benefits would have the biggest impact on your organization if you were fully AI-ready today?



Taken together, these findings show an enterprise landscape that is moving from curiosity to conviction. Organizations are learning quickly, investing strategically, and aligning AI initiatives with long-term business goals rather than short-term experimentation.

In leaders' own words

Across open responses, a few clear themes emerged. Leaders see AI-readiness as a fundamental shift in how work gets done, from manual to automated, reactive to predictive, and siloed to connected. The language of the responses is forward-looking and pragmatic, showing optimism grounded in real operational challenges.

1. Efficiency, scale, and productivity

Many respondents spoke about AI as a means to do more with less, freeing teams from repetitive tasks and speeding up production without increasing headcount.



It would allow us to scale the time-consuming work we are doing now and better allocate resources to the areas that drive the greatest growth."



We would be able to move some back office processes to AI or automated workflows and reduce staff pressures."



Being 'AI ready' would put our organization in a place to reduce the burden of repetitive or mundane tasks, speed up documentation, and help our workforce become more efficient."



Once we have policies and governance in place, we'll be able to serve our teams better and progress along the maturity model."

These responses show that efficiency is not just a by-product of AI adoption but a central motivation. Enterprises are looking to recapture time and redeploy it toward higher-value work.

2. Smarter decisions and deeper insight

Another major theme centres on better use of data and faster, evidence-based decision-making.



It would enable us to have a better understanding of our data and use it to uncover insights, suggest decisions, and analyse performance.”



We would make decisions faster based on analytics and expand our reach through personalised customer experiences.”



Faster, data-driven insights and decision-making that pulls from a range of relevant data sources.”

Respondents clearly view AI-readiness as a way to overcome analytical bottlenecks that currently slow enterprise decision-making.

3. Personalization and customer connection

AI-readiness is also seen as key to unlocking relevance and responsiveness at scale.



Deliver faster, with greater personalization and customization, at a reduced cost."



Personalization at scale, effective use of resources, a competitive edge in audience targeting and campaign optimization."



Being AI ready would enable faster content personalization, predictive insights, and automated workflows that transform a static CMS into an intelligent system."

The emphasis on personalization aligns closely with earlier quantitative findings, where 52% of respondents cited improved personalization as one of the most impactful outcomes of AI.

4. Agility and competitive advantage

Several leaders described AI-readiness as a competitive necessity, enabling faster responses to market shifts and more adaptive operations.



To competitively and quickly adapt to market trends in a way that is compliant but also personalised for our customers."



Being AI-ready will help us be even more competitive and quickly pivot based on changing needs."



It would help us move forward collectively and with greater speed. As an organization, we are focusing on AI but progress feels bureaucratic and slow."

AI is viewed here not as a technology project but as a capability that enhances responsiveness and resilience.

5. Creativity and innovation

Finally, a number of respondents spoke about AI's potential to unlock new ways of working and thinking.



It would enable our employees to focus on more meaningful work and help identify areas of improvement."



Allow creative teams to focus on designing effective assets while AI translates them into templates and variations."



AI-ready would allow us to take advantage of AI in a tangible and meaningful way, not just talk about using it ad hoc."

These responses show that AI is seen not as a threat to creativity but as a way to elevate it by removing routine friction.

Across every industry represented in the research, the message is consistent. Being AI-ready is about speed, scale, and strategy; doing more with existing resources, making smarter use of data, and staying competitive in a fast-changing landscape. Respondents understand that readiness is not a one-time milestone but an organizational capability that blends technology, process, and mindset.

The direction of travel is clear. Enterprises that invest now in structured content, intelligent workflows, and confident, AI-literate teams will not only improve efficiency but also unlock new creative and strategic potential. The next stage of readiness will be about scale, embedding AI into the core of digital operations, and turning the CMS into a true orchestration layer for the intelligent enterprise.

The next step for digital leaders is understanding what readiness looks like in practice. To translate these insights into action, we've developed the AI Readiness Framework, a practical model for assessing and advancing AI maturity.

5

The AI Readiness Framework

The findings from this research make clear that becoming AI-ready is not only about adopting new tools. It's about building the right foundations across systems, content, and culture. Many organizations are already experimenting with AI, yet the pace of change is often slowed by fragmented systems, unclear ownership, or a lack of strategic direction.

To help digital and marketing leaders move from awareness to action, we have developed an AI Readiness Framework. It provides a structured way to assess readiness across the five critical dimensions that underpin successful AI integration into enterprise content systems. This model can guide conversations within leadership teams, shape digital strategy, and inform the design of practical tools such as readiness assessments, workshops, and diagnostics.

The Five Pillars of AI Readiness

Each pillar represents an essential area for focus. Together they create a holistic picture of what it means to be AI-ready, grounded in what digital leaders told us about their systems, priorities, and challenges.

1. Content Architecture

The foundation of AI readiness lies in how content is structured and stored.

- Is your content modular, semantically rich, and reusable?
- Can your CMS support headless delivery and metadata-driven models?
- Is your taxonomy designed to help large language models understand and surface content effectively?

What the data says: Only 22% of respondents describe their content architecture as fully structured and modular, while 65% say it is partially structured. A further 7% operate in an unstructured state. These figures show that most enterprises are still transitioning toward the kind of structured, interoperable content architecture that AI depends on.

The takeaway: AI requires well-structured content inputs to deliver reliable outputs. A clear architecture allows for automation, enrichment, and precise personalization.

2. Platform Flexibility

Technology stacks must be designed for evolution.

- Is your CMS open, extensible, and API-first?
- Can you integrate AI tools for generation, enrichment, or workflow automation without vendor lock-in?
- Are you ready to experiment and adapt your stack over time?

What the data says: When asked whether their CMS acts as a content orchestration layer rather than just a publishing platform, only about 37% of respondents agreed, with nearly 32% neutral and 31% disagreeing. This suggests that while organizations aspire to build connected ecosystems, most platforms are not yet composable or open enough to support continuous AI experimentation.

The takeaway: Composable, flexible platforms enable continuous AI experimentation and long-term scalability.

3. Governance and Control

AI success depends on responsible management as much as innovation.

- Can you ensure content quality, brand consistency, and compliance at scale?
- Do you have human-in-the-loop review processes for AI-generated or AI-assisted content?
- How are you managing data privacy, bias mitigation, and content provenance?

What the data says: Governance and risk management emerged repeatedly across responses. Around 53% of respondents cited security, privacy, and compliance concerns as a major challenge, while roughly 36% named integration issues and 34% identified skills and knowledge gaps. These concerns underline the need for robust governance frameworks and oversight mechanisms before scaling AI adoption.

The takeaway: AI readiness is also risk readiness. The ability to innovate safely is what separates early adopters from sustainable leaders.

4. Operational Capability

AI demands new workflows, skills, and ways of working.

- Do your teams have the training to use AI responsibly?
- Are your editorial and publishing processes AI-augmented but still human-centered?
- Can you measure the impact of AI-powered content in real time?

What the data says: Across the research, respondents highlighted operational limitations as a key barrier to progress. Integration challenges, ROI, and lack of strategy/direction were identified as almost equally challenging issues. At the same time, 63% of leaders identified AI workflow integration as their top investment priority, showing clear intent to modernize operations and empower teams to work alongside AI effectively.

The takeaway: AI is not a technology solution alone. It represents an organizational shift in how teams create, collaborate, and measure success.

5. Strategic Alignment

The final pillar connects everything back to purpose.

- Is AI embedded in your wider content strategy rather than treated as a bolt-on experiment?
- Are your AI investments tied to clear business outcomes such as agility, reach, or insight?
- Do stakeholders share an understanding of both the opportunities and the risks?

What the data says: Nearly 94% of respondents said that effective AI adoption is either vital or important to their organization's future success. Yet only about one third believe their current CMS gives them a competitive advantage in adopting and scaling AI. This gap between belief and capability highlights why alignment between leadership, systems, and strategy is so critical.

The takeaway: The most successful teams treat AI as a strategic driver, not a tactical tool. Alignment ensures that technology decisions support long-term value creation.

6

AI Readiness Maturity Matrix

This matrix translates the five pillars of AI readiness into an actionable diagnostic.

Leaders can use it to assess where their organization sits today and identify which areas require focus to progress toward true AI maturity.

Each pillar moves along a continuum from Emerging to Optimized. Few organizations will score uniformly across all pillars, but understanding the pattern of strengths and gaps provides a clear path forward.

Pillar	 Emerging	 Developing	 Established	 Optimized
1. Content Architecture	Content is siloed and unstructured. Limited metadata and reuse. AI tools struggle to interpret content.	Some structure and taxonomy in place but inconsistently applied. Headless or modular design under consideration.	Content is modular, tagged, and partially reusable across channels. Integrations with AI tools possible but not seamless.	Content is fully structured, semantically rich, and API-ready. The CMS supports dynamic reuse, metadata enrichment, and LLM optimization.
2. Platform Flexibility	CMS operates as a closed publishing system with limited integration.	APIs exist but are difficult to extend. AI integrations are ad hoc.	The CMS supports multiple integrations and allows controlled experimentation.	CMS and supporting platforms are composable, API-first, and future-proof. AI tools integrate seamlessly and can be swapped or scaled.
3. Governance and Control	Limited policies for AI or content governance. Security and compliance handled reactively.	Early governance models in place but inconsistently applied. Human oversight exists but lacks clear standards.	Governance and brand standards defined. Human-in-the-loop review applied to most AI workflows.	Governance is embedded. Provenance, compliance, and auditability are automated. Risk management and ethics frameworks are mature.
4. Operational Capability	Teams have minimal AI literacy. Processes remain manual and time-intensive.	Some automation introduced but workflows are fragmented. Early training programmes underway.	AI tools are embedded in key workflows. Teams are confident using them. Impact measurement begins.	AI is fully integrated into daily operations. Teams are skilled, confident, and supported by continuous learning. Performance data drives optimization.
5. Strategic Alignment	AI viewed as experimental or isolated from wider business strategy.	Early adoption in pockets of the organization. Strategic direction still forming.	AI linked to defined business goals and supported by leadership. Clear accountability established.	AI embedded in strategic planning and innovation. Measured against long-term outcomes such as agility, reach, and insight. Organization-wide buy-in achieved.

How to Use This Matrix

- **Step 1:** Score your organization in each pillar from **Emerging (1)** to **Optimized (4)**.
- **Step 2:** Identify where maturity is strongest and where gaps remain.
- **Step 3:** Prioritize improvement efforts across pillars, starting with architecture and flexibility as foundational enablers.
- **Step 4:** Revisit the assessment regularly as AI capabilities, teams, and governance evolve.

Most organizations today fall between Developing and Established, mirroring the research data. For instance, 65% of leaders describe their content systems as only partially structured, and just 37% agree their CMS functions as a content orchestration layer.

Progress is underway, but there is still a significant journey ahead before enterprises reach the Optimized stage – significant competitive advantage awaits those who get there first. True AI readiness depends on openness and adaptability: the ability to integrate new tools, connect data sources, and evolve as technology changes.

7

Human Made Comment



This research confirms what every digital leader is feeling: a deep disconnect between individual ambition and organizational reality.

The “AI readiness paradox” isn’t a failure of vision, but a failure of foundations. The data is clear, most organizations are trying to build a high-performance AI engine on top of a “partially structured,” decade-old architecture.

This is the hard truth of the AI era: your AI strategy is only as good as your content architecture.

The path forward isn’t to buy another “AI-powered” tool. It’s to do the foundational work. It’s about re-platforming your thinking from a publishing system to an orchestration engine. This means prioritizing structured content, API-first flexibility, and a human-centered governance model .

The Maturity Matrix in this report is your starting point. It’s a tool to move from “what tools can we buy?” to “what foundational work must we do?”

The organizations that win this decade won’t be the ones that experimented with AI first. They will be the ones that built the intelligent, composable, and open foundation necessary to scale it.”

Noel Tock,
CGO, Human Made

8

WordPress VIP Comment



This research confirms what we're seeing across the enterprise landscape: teams that treat AI as a foundation, not a feature, are moving faster and creating more impact. AI readiness isn't about replacing human creativity; it's about amplifying it through structured, connected, and intelligent systems.

The future belongs to organizations that build on strong foundations and think openly and intelligently, where content, data, and technology work together to fuel continuous learning and innovation."

James Giroux,

Technical Account Manager, WordPress VIP