

# The path to AI ROI: Why a secure, scalable platform is critical

New research reveals the AI practices and priorities that drive business value.



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For years, enterprise leaders have been told that artificial intelligence (AI) would transform the way their organizations work. But many CIOs and CTOs are now asking: How do we move beyond pilots and experiments to real, measurable returns?

A new survey of senior IT leaders offers a glimpse into the answer. It shows that companies achieving business value from AI are doing so by treating it less like a collection of flashy tools and more like an integrated platform strategy.

Some of the AI best practices identified in the research include:

- **Using an AI platform with capabilities that address security, data privacy, contextualization of data, support for multiple AI models, and centralized AI agent management**
- **Leveraging autonomous AI agents, as well as reactive AI assistants**
- **Identifying and targeting benefits that most suit the business's needs**

The study (see About the Research) found that organizations embracing these strategies can deliver a strong return on investment (ROI) for AI initiatives.

## **From pilots to platforms**

The survey found that just one-third (33%) of enterprises have

operationalized AI across multiple business units or embedded it throughout their organization.

Most are still in pilot or early-stage deployments. What separates the leaders from the laggards? The answer is a platform approach.

“Platforms enable a system that's highly adaptable and augments the productivity of everyone in the organization,” says Sandhya Simhan, head of customer marketing at Glean.

Instead of relying on siloed tools, platform adopters consolidate capabilities — such as data privacy, grounding of AI responses, and multi-model support — under a unified framework. That foundation not only makes it easier to scale but also builds trust across the enterprise.

Indeed, 68% of AI platform users in the study say it's very or somewhat easy to prove ROI, compared with far fewer among those using standalone tools.

A secure, scalable platform can also help organizations overcome AI challenges such as supporting multiple AI models, unifying siloed or fragmented enterprise data, and centralizing AI outputs for different users and roles.

## Agents that act, not just react

To accelerate business benefits such as productivity and ROI, platforms should be supported by autonomous capabilities, including:

- **Contextualization, which uses enterprise-specific data and knowledge to shape accurate, relevant, and reliable AI responses**
- **AI agents, which use that context to reason and act autonomously about a user's query**

While most companies today lean on assistants or copilots that react to user prompts, fewer than one in five have deployed agents that can reason and act autonomously.

The difference is significant:

Organizations that combine contextual data with autonomous agents are more likely to describe their AI responses as reliable and grounded in enterprise knowledge.

“Feeding the AI tool the right context is what makes it useful,” says Simhan.

Many organizations are not quite there. Sixty-five percent of IT leaders say they're using AI assistants or copilots, which are merely reactive to users' requests – and only 19% have deployed autonomous agents.

However, the 33% of enterprises with broad AI adoption are more likely to

use contextualization and agents – applying them in multiple business functions and reaping the benefits. Among this group, the majority (67%) say responses from their AI agents and tools are reliable and based on organizational data. None of the early-stage AI adopters cite this benefit.

In addition, broad AI adopters are more likely to report ROI on their AI tool investments (see Figure 1). For example, 67% of this group has achieved value by using AI agents or assistants in their IT helpdesk/support teams.

### Figure 1: Broad use of AI agents results in greater ROI

Areas with the greatest ROI from use of AI assistants

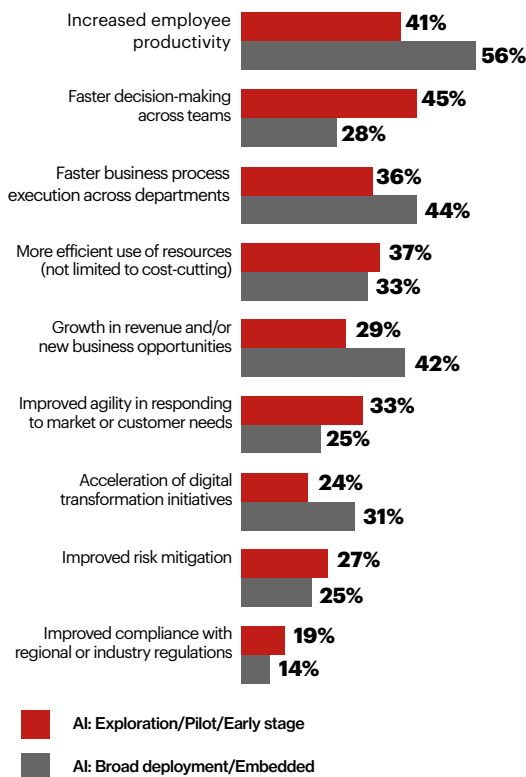


Source: Foundry

## Business value is the north star

The most mature adopters are not chasing every AI trend. Instead, they are aligning AI deployments with clear business goals – whether that’s increasing employee productivity, accelerating processes across departments, or driving new revenue streams. Research shows these organizations are more likely than early-stage adopters to achieve measurable benefits (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Benefits increase as AI adoption broadens across the enterprise**



\* Respondents could select up to 3 benefits

Source: Foundry

“You have to know what you want to use AI for,” says Simhan. “This is the hard part for a lot of organizations. You need to be very clear about what business outcomes AI should deliver.”

That clarity pays off. Broad adopters are significantly more likely to report improvements in productivity, agility, and revenue growth than their peers. The lesson is clear: AI should not be deployed for its own sake, but with outcomes in mind.

## The qualities that matter most

When IT leaders were asked which features matter most in an AI platform, the answers were not about speed or flash. They were about resilience:

- Data privacy and security
- Accuracy and grounding of AI responses
- Support for multiple models and cloud environments
- Centralized agent management

These qualities reflect the realities of operating at scale. Security and trust are non-negotiable. Accuracy and grounding determine whether employees can rely on AI. Multi-model support ensures flexibility as the technology evolves. And centralized management prevents agent sprawl.

## A playbook for IT leaders

For IT executives navigating this landscape, three imperatives stand out:

1. Treat AI as a platform, not a patchwork of tools. Consolidation drives scale and trust.
2. Invest in context and autonomy. ROI materializes when agents can understand enterprise data and then act on it.
3. Tie AI directly to business outcomes. Start with productivity and process improvements, then expand to revenue and compliance.

Mature AI adopters are shifting toward platform-based approaches that provide data security, centralized control, autonomous capabilities, and the ability to operationalize AI for scale. They are finding that by building trust through contextual relevance and leveraging AI agents in ways that target specific business benefits, their organizations are on an accelerated path to ROI.

See how Glean's Work AI Platform can drive business value for your organization by requesting a [\*\*free online demonstration\*\*](#).

## About the research

Foundry conducted an online survey, on behalf of Glean, of 111 senior IT decision-makers in the United States. Respondents work at companies ranging in size from 500 to 10,000 employees, and 43% hold a C-level title. The survey took place in July 2025.