



5 Steps to Artificial Intelligence Marketing Adoption

Contents

5 Steps to Artificial Intelligence Marketing Adoption

03 Introduction

04 The AI wave is mounting

05 Getting past choppy waters

06 5 steps to AI marketing adoption

07 Step 1

Ask questions and understand what you want to achieve

09 Step 2

Make a business case, investigate solutions,
research vendor options

10 Step 3

Involve IT, do RFPs, and see product demos
Throw a rope to IT
Choosing your direction: all hands on deck
The RFP

12 Step 4

Decide on, invest in, and implement
the right solution

How long until we start making money?
Embracing smooth sailing: give it time
Clean your engines: using quality data

14 Step 5

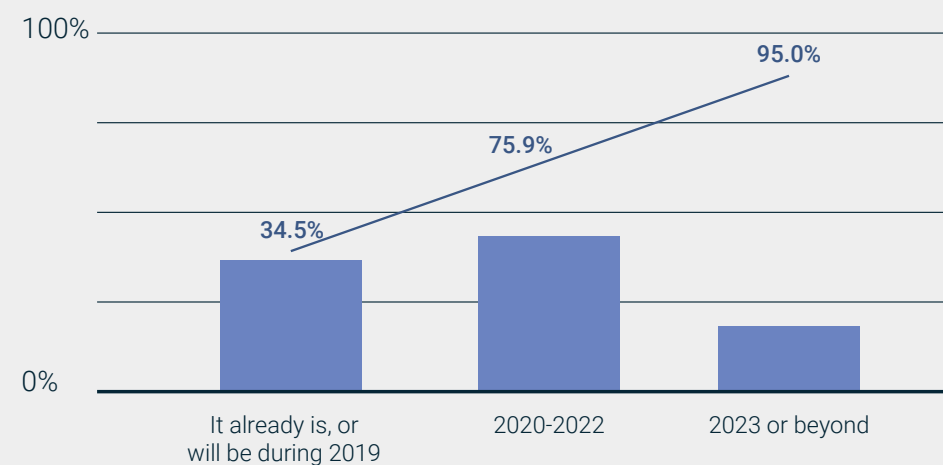
Scale, expand, and grow
Email
Mobile
Web

15 Arriving in 2020

AI innovation and adoption has grown exponentially within enterprise businesses over the past several years, and there is no sign of this trend stopping.

Attitudes about AI are also shifting dramatically across the enterprise. A 2019 report by Cray found that there is a high level of educational interest in AI as the fear begins to dissipate.

When do you think AI will become critical to your business?



Source: [The State of Enterprise AI Adoption, Cray, 2019](#)

But, when it comes to pinpointing struggles and implementing a solution to solve them, many marketers have no idea where to even begin — as the now-infamous [Martech 7,000](#) reaffirms, choices abound, and as marketers know, obstacles (e.g., [overcoming AI misconceptions](#)) remain persistent.

Enterprise brands face unique challenges when thinking about how to incorporate intelligent systems to transform their marketing outputs at scale. But their sheer size — including employees, customers, data, marketing channels, communications and campaigns — may be their biggest advantage.

If you've been thinking, even reluctantly, about building, boarding, and braving the AI ship, you're not alone.

As your co-captain, we're here to help navigate the choppy waters. In this comprehensive e-book, we've simplified and broken down an easy-to-use 5-step plan for enterprise AI adoption.

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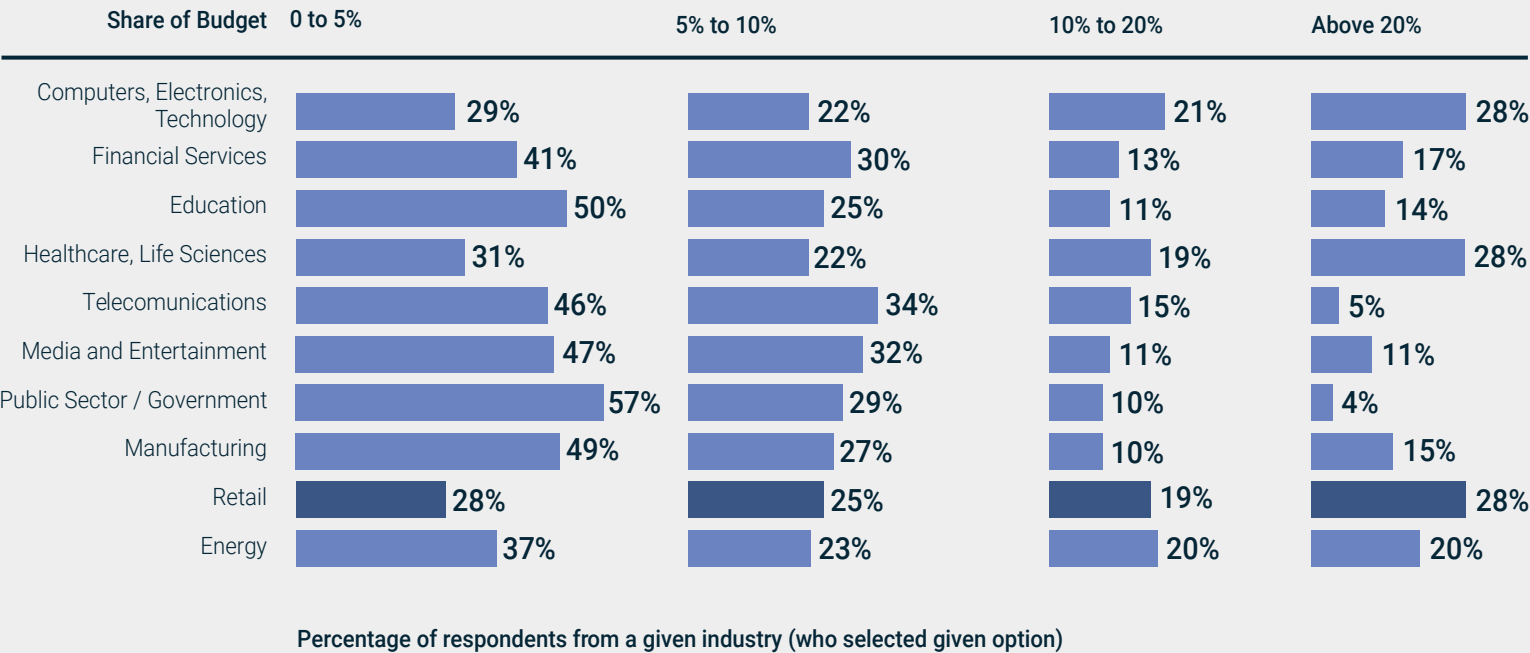
The AI landscape has rapidly evolved in the last few years, and the technology is ready to deliver true value today. In the next three years, many enterprises are aiming to advance beyond initial, functional deployments towards true scale and scope... AI has quickly moved from a 'technology to watch' to a 'technology to deploy'.”

— KPMG, [AI transforming the enterprise: 8 key AI adoption trends](#).

The AI wave is mounting

A [2019 study by O'Reilly](#) showed that 81% of respondents work at brands that are already implementing AI. It also found that the retail sector is among the leading verticals planning to invest in AI.

During the next 12 months, how much of your IT budget do you expect to commit to AI projects?



Source: [AI Adoption in the Enterprise, O'Reilly, 2019](#)

Some 90% of marketers are already using AI to improve the customer journey, augment interactions with customers and deliver more compelling experiences, according to a recent survey of global executives by BCG.

McKinsey found 52% of retailers say they are using AI in marketing and sales (compared with 29 percent of all respondents) in a recent [study](#).

And, the majority of CMOs plan to add AI and machine learning to their cargo over the next three years (Duke CMO survey).

2018 [McKinsey research](#) found that:

- ▶ 30% of organizations are conducting AI pilot programs.
- ▶ 47% of companies have embedded at least one AI capability in their standard business processes, compared to 20% in 2017.
- ▶ AI opportunities can be found across the enterprise, but only 21% report using AI across multiple business functions.
- ▶ AI investments are still relatively small.
- ▶ 58% of respondents said less than 1/10 of their digital budgets goes toward AI, while 71% expect that AI investments will increase significantly in the coming years.

If all that isn't enough proof of AI's missile-like trajectory in enterprise businesses, investors have offered up more than \$5B into 1,400+ AI-enabled marketing platforms and tech vendors to meet the growing demand.

Getting past choppy waters

Even still, fears, myths, misconceptions, and underlying confusion about what AI really is and what it can do is pervasive across too many marketing organizations. In reality, lack of skills and lack of data are the two biggest factors hindering enterprise AI adoption ([O'Reilly](#)).

While you can be successful with a lack of technical AI skills, you will need good data. The more and better quality data you have, the better AI will work for you.

When it comes to figuring out whether an AI investment is right, there's an almost infinite amount of questions that marketers are asking, including:

- ▶ Are we identifying the right issue? Is AI going to help... and how do we know?
- ▶ Do we need AI-enabled technology to help — and what if we pick the wrong technology?
- ▶ How can we predict and prove expected outcomes of a machine?
 - ▶ Does that “unknown” outweigh the risk of adoption?
- ▶ What steps need to be taken to prepare for implementation?
 - ▶ How long will it take, how much will it cost, how will end users work with it, and how will our customers benefit?
 - ▶ Will it jive with other platforms?
- ▶ Once implemented, then what? Where do we rely on AI and where do we take charge?

The following five steps will help you find the answers to these questions as you collaborate with colleagues, peers, and the right partner.

5 steps to AI marketing adoption



Step 1: ask questions and understand what you want to achieve

Invariably, the very first thing you need to do is to understand what you hope to achieve with AI and [whether you actually need AI](#) in the first place.

Here is the single biggest mistake marketers make with AI (and it has nothing to do with implementing it at all): **they start with the wrong question or adopt for the wrong reasons.**

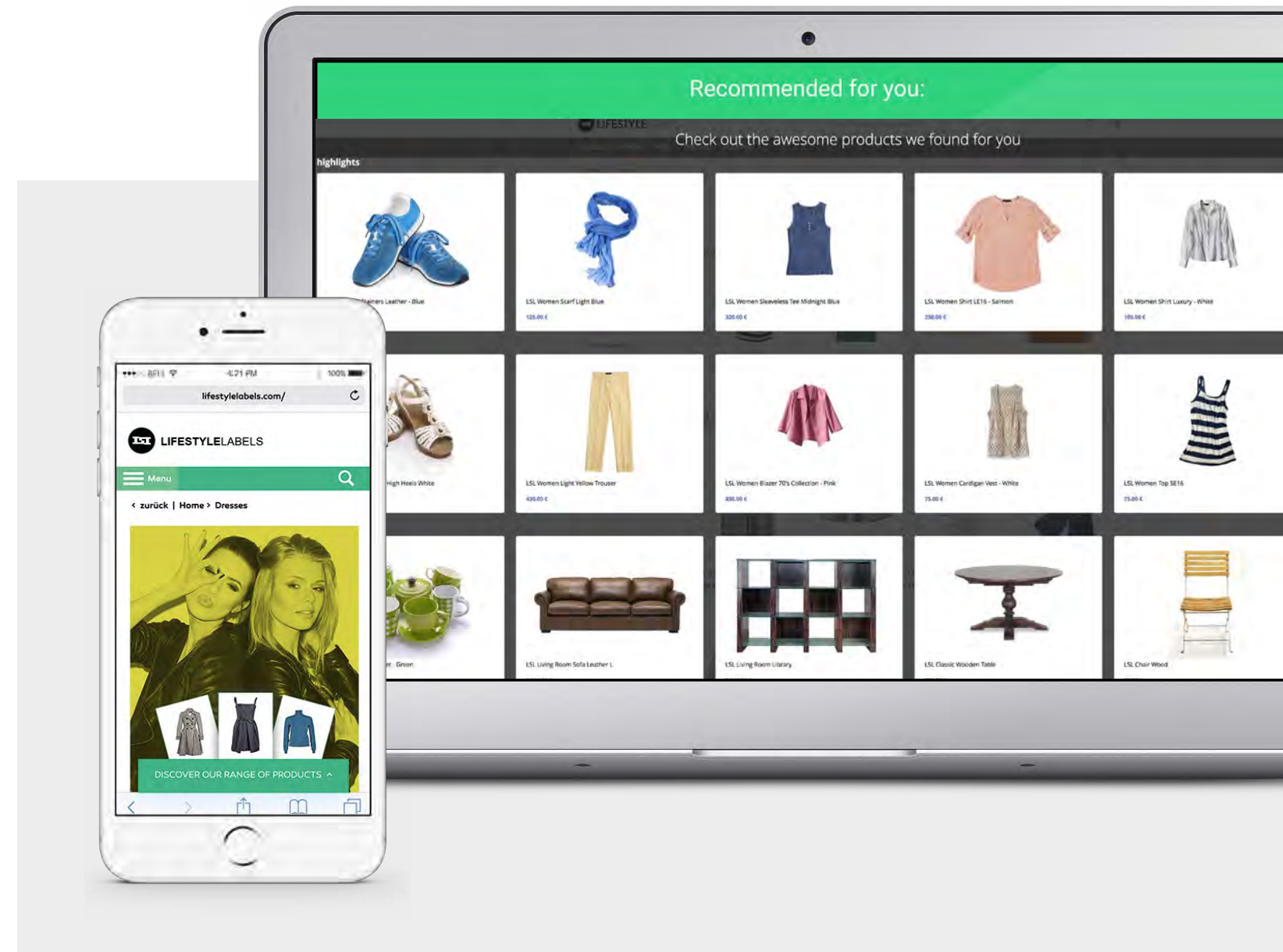
You shouldn't choose to adopt AI because:

- ▶ It's trendy and shiny
- ▶ Your competitors did
- ▶ You think it would be cool to try

While these considerations may indeed be true, they fall under the category of "wrong reason for adoption." Instead, start by asking the questions that lie at the heart of your customers' every day experience with your brand. Ask what your buyers are trying to do, how you can help them do it, and what objectives you want to achieve.

Other examples of indicative questions include:

- ▶ How can I increase customer retention with multi-touch, cross-channel win-back campaigns in 6 months?
- ▶ How can I understand the probability of specific segments making a purchase in the next month, how much they'll spend, and whether they need a discount? How can I automate communications based on likelihood of action, at scale?
- ▶ How can my marketing team start doing more meaningful work like content creation, and reduce time spent on manual tasks?
- ▶ How can I employ dynamic pricing, incentive management, and dynamic content across my database?
- ▶ How can I optimize email subject lines for each individual, ensure up-to-date content is populated at time of open, and send emails at the best time for each recipient?



It's important to remain customer-centric during this process. Asking questions that put the customer (or the goals of your marketing team) at the forefront will help you determine if AI will actually be a useful technology for you. From a customer experience standpoint, questions that may help you make this determination include asking if your customers can:

- ▶ Take advantage of product recommendations when browsing online?
- ▶ Open emails from your brand on any device, complete with geo-based content, and open-time (up-to-the-minute) experiences?
- ▶ Count on your brand to introduce personalized offers they didn't even know they might find useful?

Are you or your team:

- ▶ Able to present upsells and cross-sells automatically and at scale on an individual level?
- ▶ Manually sorting data, organizing contacts in a CRM database, or spending too much time creating email segments and campaigns?
- ▶ Feeling a general sense of frustration or inefficiency within your marketing process?

Marcia Riefer Johnston, Technical Writer at Amazon recommends prioritizing people and processes over technology. "When you need technology as part of the solution, address process issues and pain points before you move over to new tools," writes Johnston.

This is the crux of AI adoption: do it to enhance processes, meet marketing objectives, and/or better customers' lives. If you determine that an AI-enabled solution can be a means to an end that you want to achieve, it's time to get your team on board and make a business case.

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When you need technology as part of the solution, address process issues and pain points before you move over to new tools.”

— Marcia Riefer Johnston, Technical Writer, Amazon

Step 2:

Make a business case, investigate solutions, research vendor options

↓ **Download**

Get your Toolkit

How to Convince Your Boss to AI Marketing



It's time to plant the seed. All great conquests have started with an idea — a brave soul who chose to go navigate waters yet unsailed and challenge the status quo or advocate for something new.

How, might you ask, can you begin?

Dan Faggella, Founder & CEO at Emerj Artificial Intelligence Research recommends the following:

- ▶ Have a good vision and understanding of the AI options in your vertical to know what's viable.
- ▶ Know the precedence and relevant use cases within your space.
- ▶ Talk to other brands who have adopted similar applications and get a sound idea of the work required to get up and running yourself.
- ▶ Consider business-imperative “strategic initiatives” and major goals. Consider benchmarks you have to hit, the tech that can help you get there, and the most pressing areas for further innovation.

A few ways to get started in building your list of potential vendors include:

- ▶ Organizing your thoughts, questions, and use cases that you must address prior to investing in new technology.

- ▶ Talking with industry colleagues to get a sense of their struggles, strategy, and solutions/partners.
- ▶ Familiarizing yourself with vendors who solve for your particular use cases using legitimate and unbiased third party technology firms like Capterra, Gartner, and Forrester.
- ▶ Soak up information and educational material from companies like [Marketing AI Institute](#), [emerj.com](#), [earley.com](#).

You're pushing for more than technology implementation – you're advocating business transformation that, if done right, will grow revenue.

If the ultimate goal is [to convince your boss to invest in AI](#), it will be vital to set a defined goal of what you're hoping to attain by using AI. It doesn't have to be perfect; but having a defined business goal (and an idea of how the tech will help achieve it) will serve as the North Star that all your technology, people, and processes can follow.

So, once you start to get the groundswell brewing and heads turning, it's time to go beyond sharing and start lobbying and planning. This is where you want to be more adamant and deliberate in learning about the details of specific solutions.

Step 3:

Involve IT, do RFPs, and see product demos

According to Peg Miller, B2B Marketing Academy Cofounder, “Marketers love to bring in new technologies and break things. We know how to market, not how to buy and implement technology.”

Most marketers share this sentiment. And it’s true — marketers aren’t schooled in how to [vet technology vendors](#) or pick from a myriad of potential solutions.

Bonus Tip

During this stage, you’ll want to identify how the project may be managed by getting an understanding of who will own what. At this point, you’re starting to move forward from informal discussions to potentially adopting the new technology. Who will headline the effort? Will it be your entire marketing team, a core group of 4-5 members, or maybe just you and your manager? It may be best to include a few people in marketing and undoubtedly a couple on your IT team to have both a strategic and technical perspective.

Throw a rope to IT

Roping in IT is crucial at this juncture if you don’t want to go capsized and end up on a lonely island.

Your IT team will be able to take a more technical perspective on how well new technology will jive with your existing systems. And, if they’re smart, they’ll appreciate your consideration to include them. [Shadow IT](#) and growing tech stacks pose serious threats, so involving IT early on is the right move.

Once you do that, eventually you and your marketing team will need to familiarize yourselves with the best solutions to suit your needs.

Choosing your direction: all hands on deck

The evaluation and decision process can be time-consuming and difficult in large companies. There’s often a dozen stakeholders and a lot of red tape to go through when introducing a new technology.

Once you’ve narrowed your list to a core few, it’s time to test the waters, and get some feedback from vendors.

The RFP

The process of adopting new technology almost always involves a request-for-proposal process, so you’ll need a set of informational questions prepared. Most retailers tend to cast a pretty wide net in the research phase as they narrow down to 2-4 core vendors who they submit RFPs to in the selection phase.

Bonus Tip

Request a Service Level Agreement (SLA). An SLA is a document which should expressly outline what a SaaS vendor will provide to you, and what to expect. It will also outline what “consequences” the provider will face if they neglect to see their obligations through. Get this set in stone before signing any contract. SLAs help to reduce confusion and uncertainty in the future.

While RFPs differ among retailers based on specific needs, one of the most important things when choosing AI technology is to find a tangible solution that goes beyond the hype, and can offer concrete use cases and evidence of how their product works.

Most quality marketing automation solutions are built to serve enterprise businesses, and therefore have a lot of different offerings, capabilities, and features. Get familiar with these and empower yourself and your team to see how each could help move you closer to that end goal.

After the RFP process, you will want to decide on a couple vendors to do in-depth demos with so you can take a granular look at how the software works and get a good idea of the UI, campaign blueprints, integrations, and more. Depending on your timeframe this can be as quick as a couple of weeks to a couple months.

↓ Bonus Download

Get your **Marketing Platform RFP Guide + 150-Question Check-List** and save time, hassle, and doubt involved in creating your own!



Step 4:

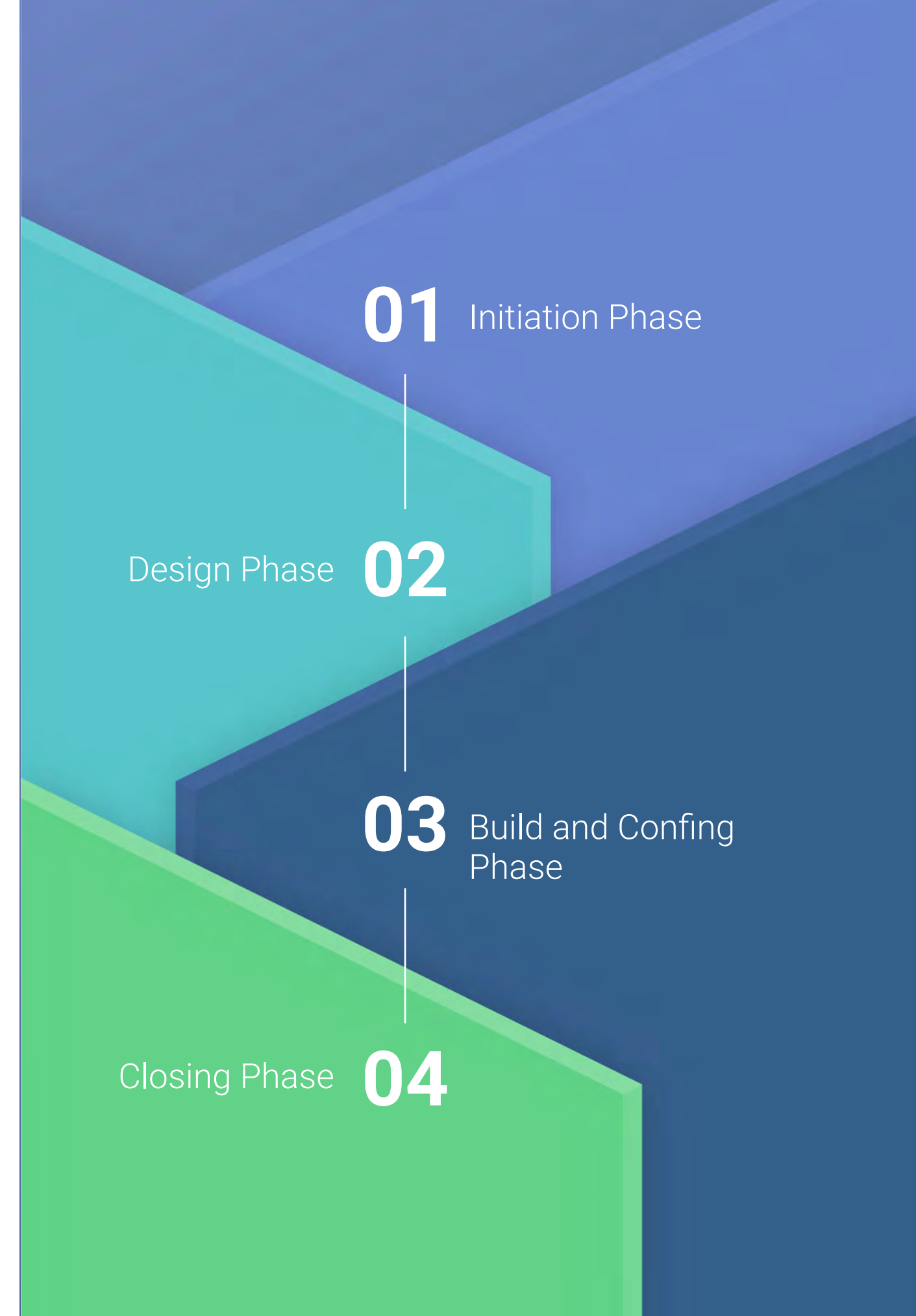
Decide on, invest in, and implement the right solution

Now it's decision time! The next phase is to select your partner, and implement. This process is a project, and can take anywhere between three to six months. So as not to gloss over this vital part of adopting new tech, it includes: educating and training end users on the platform, setting up programs and campaigns, transferring/loading content and data, and making integrations.

At Emarsys, this project management phase usually works like this:

- 01** Once signed, a client will be introduced to their Implementation Consultant and/or Project Manager who will then configure a project kick off. The kickoff call will cover further explanation of what the entire implementation process will look like. A client will then gain access to training programs to ensure needed background information about the solution is provided. Thus begins the **Initiation phase**.
- 02** The **Design phase** is the most critical, and includes a call with the technical team where we will conduct a "data workshop." Our team will meet with your marketing and IT team to make sure we're accounting for everything bought. More in-depth conversations are had here about what was bought, what you're doing today, what kind of data you have, what you want to do, and how to most effectively do it.
- 03** The **Build and Config phase** follows, and this is where everything is set up including data, campaigns, and content. This is a joint initiative between our team and yours.
- 04** In the final **Closing phase**, project completion will be reviewed and a formal project closing and handoff process will take place. Our Client Success team will take over the account having been transferred from the IC. Now you're ready to start driving revenue.

Our team works to get things up and running as quickly as is needed. The vendor you choose should ultimately drive true partnership between your marketing and IT team and their team for most efficient adoption.



Embracing smooth sailing: give it time

Personalizing every aspect of your marketing doesn't happen overnight. It's based on the location, viewing habits, device, preferences, and previous browsing/purchase behavior of individuals. The more someone engages with your brand, the more relevant messaging becomes. So, you'll provide a more individualized experience for an active, six-month customer than a first-time browser because the machine knows them better.

Clean your engines: using quality data

Customer data is to an AI engine as sails are to a ship. The more there is, the stronger the impact. AI tech flourishes with larger amounts of information to process, and the more quality data you feed the machine, the smarter the algorithms become in their hypotheses, performance, and output. But it takes time to generate ["big data."](#)

The optimization stage is crucial in terms of data collection and use. During this stage, the AI machine is developing algorithms to get smarter. But without quality customer data, it'll be like an 18-cylinder engine with no gasoline to run on. From here, you'll be able to prime your technology so its machine learning capabilities can take over.

Once the infrastructure is in place, the technology has been launched within your process, and end users are in the tool, it's time to make AI an integral part of your e-commerce strategy and let it transform your customers' browsing, shopping, and ongoing brand experiences.

It's time to scale, expand, and starting driving value.

How long until we start making money?

Like buying stocks, adopting AI-technology is an investment which accrues in value over time. Patience is key.

Most enterprise brands require an average of six months to get completely implemented; and will begin seeing real dividends within a year. Looking for ROI within a couple weeks isn't plausible.

Most e-commerce companies want to use AI to do some variation of "hyper-personalization," and this generally takes 10-12 months to be effective, driving steady revenue. While some brands do see some striking results in as little as three months, others drive incremental value over a year or more before their bell curve spikes.

Your time-table will depend upon your commitment to optimizing the technology. Optimization requires two things: time and clean, [first-party data](#).

Step 5:

Scale, expand, and grow

Now it’s really time to set sail and conquer the high seas of AI. At this point, you’ve committed your e-commerce strategy to an AI-powered platform, and given it some time to start to work.

The final step is integrating the technology within every piece of the marketing mix: your website or e-commerce hub, mobile app and SMS, social media channels, and email channel. At this juncture in your journey, AI has become as much a part of your business as your crew, channels employed, and customers.

Instead of pushing, interrupting, and bombarding customers with mass sends, AI (in any capacity) will be creating a better journey that helps customers find everything they might need. Now, it’s time to expand across your main channels. How can you do this?

With a marketing solution that has AI woven into the fabric and a strategic dashboard that shows you which new tactics to implement, it’s easy to add new programs into the mix whenever you’re ready.

Email	Mobile	Web
<p>Most brands begin with email at the core. Now it’s time to start innovating. If you’ve been optimizing subject lines and send times, you can start using AI to send different, live content (with the same e-newsletter) at different times for contacts who demonstrate differing engagement levels, preferences, and behavior.</p>	<p>Let’s say you began using AI only with email, but you know that customers actively use your mobile app. You can set up triggered in-app notifications and timely push notifications for specific segments whenever there’s a price drop, for example.</p>	<p>If you’re using AI on your website to do advanced product recommendations, you know that it’s realistic to start to see ROI from web recs/predictions within about 2-4 months. Once you’re ready to amp it up, you can employ AI to prompt different visitors with different content based on purchase/engagement history. You can suppress or target “highly likely to visit,” churning, or disengaged web visitors on different channels, too.</p>

“The goal is to make things easier for the user – to reduce the cognitive load... the recommended answer, or recommended product, is presented based on understanding something about the user that can inform the algorithm. That might be the user’s past purchase, interests, the pattern of site interactions, or other signals.”

— [Seth Earley](#), Founder & CEO, Earley Information Systems

“

In the upcoming year, we can expect enterprises to make a clear drive to better address the human emotions and interactions as a way to improve AI adoption in business. We will also see humans work more closely with AI systems than before, which will result in more human-like AI that is more explainable, empathic, accountable and ethical.”

— Dr. Michael Wu, Chief AI Strategist at PROS

Arriving in 2020

Steering a corporate ship into new and untested waters can be a tricky and strenuous task.

And recalibrating the e-commerce strategy of your enterprise falls into the same bucket. But AI investment will be well-worth it.

With advancements happening nearly daily, AI systems and the algorithms and data that power them are becoming more efficient, bringing us into a new age entirely. What lies ahead? A [“people/customer-first AI”](#) mentality is taking center stage. Sentience, emotional capacity, and humanization of AI systems are coming into play.

That’s why it’s more important than ever to get started now. The results of an omnichannel AI-powered marketing approach will speak for themselves as AI enables your brand to entice buyers with more appealing bait, reel them in more effectively, and convert and retain them.



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SVP of Artificial Intelligence

About the Author

Raj Balasundaram is SVP of Artificial Intelligence at Emarsys, where he helps leading brands leverage their digital platforms and data to out-manuever competitors and achieve superior financial results. Raj has delivered presentations and talks at a variety of global conferences and road shows including #DMWF Expo Global, evangelizing the art of data intelligence-based marketing. Prior to Emarsys, Raj worked at both Oracle and ExactTarget.

About Emarsys

Emarsys is the largest independent marketing platform company in the world and the only marketing platform that knows your industry. With embedded, industry-specific turnkey solutions, our software enables truly personalized, one-to-one interactions between marketers and customers across all channels — building loyalty, enriching the customer journey, and increasing revenue. This enables companies to scale marketing decisions and actions far beyond human capabilities.

With more than 1,500 customers and 4.8 billion contacts, our AI-driven platform has the ability to predict what any of your customers will be doing over 360 days.

Using engagement scores, purchase history data, and behavioral patterns, Emarsys is able to predict a contact's potential lifetime value, as well as their likelihood to purchase or churn, in a given time frame. Emarsys AI natively provides channel propensities at a one-to-one level for emails, mobile, web, or in-store. Products, content, and incentives are automatically tailored to each individual, for each use case and across all channels, while taking their engagement probability, purchase probability, and next cart value into account.

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