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AI's ROI Reality Check: Are Companies Measuring What Matters?

Forbes Research

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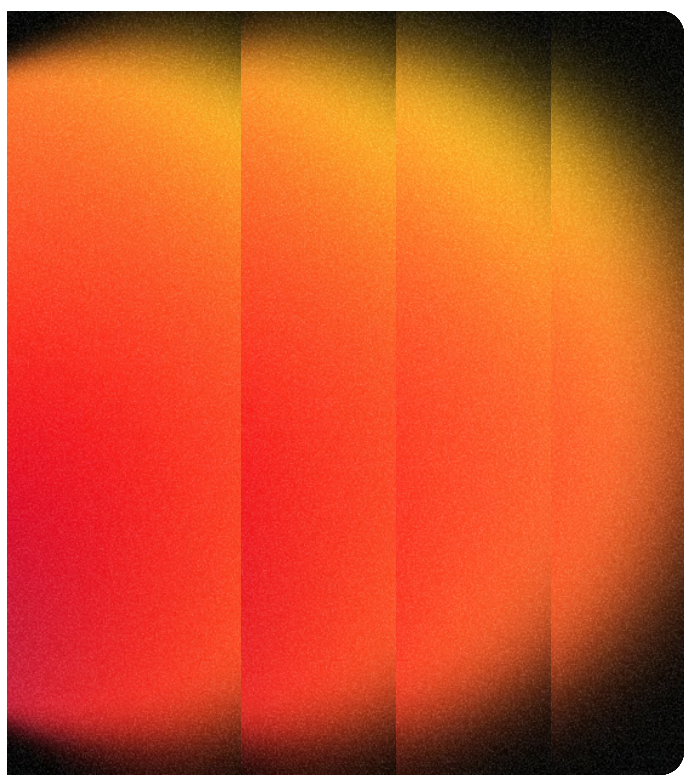
for Forbes Research

Three years after artificial intelligence went mainstream with the release of ChatGPT, executives say their companies have yet to see a dramatic financial return from investments in the technology.

The **Forbes Research 2025 AI Survey** found that less than 1% of the 1,075 C-suite members polled had seen a significant ROI, defined as a 20% or more increase in profitability or cost savings. Only 3% report a substantial ROI of 10-20%, while the majority (53%) reported a limited ROI of 1-5%.

The primary metric they use to measure ROI is improved operational efficiency (64%), which encompasses factors such as reduced cycle time and increased throughput. That's followed by data quality improvements (50%) and employee productivity gains (48%).

However, given that **the vast majority of executives surveyed say AI is delivering positive impacts in enhanced decision-making (85%), operational efficiency (84%) and better product and service quality (81%)**, why is the reported ROI so low?



One answer may lie in how ROI is calculated; **more than a third (39%) of global executives report that measuring ROI and business impact is one of their primary challenges**.

Multiple executives we polled wrote that many of AI's benefits are indirect and hard to quantify in dollar terms. One said, "Due to the indirect and long-term nature of AI advantages, ROI measurement is challenging, and budget justification is challenging." Another added that factors such as the greater potential for innovation "are sometimes overlooked in ROI estimates." A third pointed out that it is difficult to strike a balance between quantitative and qualitative ROI measurements.

Less than half of respondents say their company's senior leadership understands the challenge of uncertain ROI. For chief financial officers responsible for calculating this ROI, utilizing AI could provide an edge, as only 12% of respondents currently employ AI extensively to measure the ROI of AI investments across their organization.

While there may still be details to be ironed out in accurately calculating ROI, our survey found some **clear bottom-line-enhancing use cases**. Chief marketing officers, for example, report high or extremely high ROI from AI's role in enhanced customer segmentation (81%), real-time feedback analysis (76%) and customer journey mapping (73%).

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By Canva, BRANDVOICE | Paid Program

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INTRODUCTION

For all the ways technology is changing how we create, Canva chief marketing officer Zach Kitschke still believes that creativity is an inherently human exercise. Speaking at the 2025 Forbes CMO Summit, he shared that the democratization of AI tools will only continue to enhance and expand human-centered creativity, just as other mediums — such as smartphones with cameras — have throughout history.

Kitschke says that Canva's philosophy is to view creativity as a competitive edge. This means removing obstacles to experimentation and empowering people to create and share their ideas.

“That's really what we all need to be focusing on … creating organizations that are free to be creative,” he says.

Below, explore Kitschke’s insights on how innovation is evolving in the age of AI and how leaders can enable their people to flourish amid technological change.

KEY TOPICS & QUOTES

For more insights from this year's Forbes CMO Summit, read the takeaways from the event here.

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