



TO: The Owner-Led Agency Community
FROM: Chip Griffin, SAGA
DATE: May 5, 2026
SUBJECT: The state of AI in owner-led agencies

This report summarizes the results of an agency AI survey conducted by SAGA Agency Growth Advisors. The survey received 62 responses, with a small number of skipped answers on some questions. Percentages are calculated from those who answered each question and may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Sentiment and outlook

Overall view of AI's impact on the agency industry

A slim majority (51%) view AI as more opportunity than threat, while 43% see it as equal parts both, and only 7% lean toward viewing it primarily as a threat.

- Mostly a threat: 0%
- More threat than opportunity: 7%
- Equal parts threat and opportunity: 43%
- More opportunity than threat: 28%
- Mostly an opportunity: 23%

Change in feelings about AI's impact over the past 12 months

52% say their view of AI has become more positive over the past year, while just 7% have grown more negative.

- Become more positive: 52%
- Stayed about the same: 41%
- Become more negative: 7%

Expected change in agency AI use over the next 12 months

89% expect their agency's AI use to grow over the next 12 months, with no respondents anticipating any decrease.

- Increase significantly: 45%
- Increase somewhat: 44%
- Stay about the same: 11%
- Decrease: 0%
- Unsure: 0%

AI adoption and usage

Current level of AI usage

89% report regular or widespread AI use, with no respondents saying they aren't using AI at all.

- Not using AI at all: 0%
- Experimenting only: 5%
- Limited use by a few people: 6%
- Regular use in several areas: 60%
- Widespread use across the agency: 29%

Length of meaningful AI use

Half of respondents (50%) have been using AI meaningfully for over a year, and just 13% are within their first six months.

- Not using meaningfully yet: 5%
- Less than 6 months: 8%
- 6 to 12 months: 36%
- 1 to 2 years: 39%
- More than 2 years: 11%

Personal frequency of AI use for agency work

74% personally use AI tools for agency work daily, and another 21% use them at least weekly.

- Never: 0%
- Less than monthly: 0%
- A few times a month: 5%
- A few times a week: 21%
- Daily: 74%

Self-perceived position relative to peers

How advanced respondents believe their agency is in using AI compared to other agencies like theirs

53% believe their agency is somewhat or far ahead of peers, while just 13% see themselves as behind.

- Far behind: 2%
- Somewhat behind: 11%
- About average: 34%
- Somewhat ahead: 38%
- Far ahead: 15%

Weighted average: 3.52 on a 5-point scale.

Where AI is being used

Areas of current use (multiple responses permitted)

Research (89%), brainstorming (82%), summarization (82%), and drafting or editing content (74%) lead the list, while specialized applications like media monitoring (24%) and SEO (35%) trail.

- Research and background gathering: 89%
- Brainstorming and ideation: 82%
- Summarizing meetings or documents: 82%
- Writing first drafts (blog posts, press releases, social copy, etc.): 74%
- Editing or revising content: 74%
- Proposal, pitch, or RFP support: 66%
- Internal operations and admin: 58%
- Client reporting or data analysis: 47%
- New business prospecting: 42%
- Image or visual content creation: 39%
- SEO or content optimization: 35%
- Media monitoring or sentiment analysis: 24%
- We are not currently using AI: 0%

Single area where AI has delivered the most value

Writing and editing (26%), brainstorming (23%), and research (21%) together account for 70% of where AI has delivered the most value, while no respondents named creative and design.

- Writing and editing: 26%
- Brainstorming and ideation: 23%
- Research: 21%
- Operations and admin: 13%
- Reporting and analysis: 10%
- New business and sales: 8%
- Creative and design: 0%
- No meaningful value yet: 0%

Tools in use

AI tools currently in use (multiple responses permitted)

ChatGPT and Claude tie as the most-used tools at 76% each, followed by Gemini at 56%, while marketing-specific AI tools like Jasper see only 5% adoption.

- ChatGPT: 76%
- Claude: 76%
- Gemini: 56%
- Perplexity: 31%
- Copilot (Microsoft): 23%
- Other: 23%
- Midjourney, DALL-E, or other image generation tools: 16%
- Jasper or other marketing-specific AI tools: 5%
- None: 0%

AI knowledge

Personal knowledge of AI as it applies to agency work

84% rate their personal AI knowledge as moderately or very knowledgeable, with no respondents reporting no knowledge at all.

- Very knowledgeable: 19%
- Moderately knowledgeable: 65%
- Slightly knowledgeable: 16%
- Not at all knowledgeable: 0%

Team knowledge of AI as it applies to agency work

61% rate their team as moderately or very knowledgeable, while 24% say their team is slightly or not at all knowledgeable.

- Very knowledgeable: 15%
- Moderately knowledgeable: 46%
- Slightly knowledgeable: 21%
- Not at all knowledgeable: 3%
- N/A (solo or no employees): 15%

Reported impact

Impact on agency productivity

88% report a positive impact on productivity, with no respondents reporting any negative impact.

- Significant positive impact: 32%
- Somewhat positive impact: 56%
- No real impact: 5%
- Somewhat negative impact: 0%
- Too early to say: 6%

Impact on the quality of agency work

79% report a positive impact on quality, though 15% see no real impact and 2% report a negative impact.

- Significant positive impact: 27%
- Somewhat positive impact: 52%
- No real impact: 15%
- Somewhat negative impact: 2%
- Too early to say: 5%

Impact on staffing decisions

68% report no staffing impact from AI, but 21% have either avoided hiring or reduced headcount at least partly because of it.

- No impact on staffing decisions so far: 68%
- Avoided hiring we otherwise would have made: 13%
- Reduced headcount partly because of AI: 8%
- Hired or plan to hire specifically for AI-related roles: 3%
- Not sure: 8%

Client-facing practices

How AI is used in client-facing work

98% use AI in some form connected to client work, most often within deliverables that get human review (58%) or strictly internally to support client work (29%).

- Used in deliverables with human review before delivery: 58%
- Used only internally to support client work: 29%
- Used openly with client knowledge and approval: 10%
- Offered as part of specific client services: 2%
- Not used in client-facing work at all: 2%

How AI use is disclosed to clients

92% disclose AI use to clients in some form, but only 13% include it in written agreements or contracts.

- Disclosed informally or verbally when it comes up: 53%
- Proactively informed as a matter of practice: 26%
- Included in written agreements or contracts: 13%
- Not disclosed to clients: 8%
- N/A, AI not used in client work: 0%

Pricing and monetization

Client requests for lower fees due to AI

88% have not had any clients request lower fees due to AI, while 12% report at least one client raising the issue.

- Yes, multiple clients: 2%
- Yes, one or two clients: 10%
- No: 88%

Direct charging for AI-enhanced services or deliverables

15% currently charge clients directly for AI-enhanced services, while 61% have no plans to do so.

- Yes: 15%
- No, but planning to: 13%
- No, and not currently planning to: 61%
- Not sure: 11%

Concerns and barriers

Concerns about AI in the agency (multiple responses permitted)

Accuracy and hallucinations (82%) tops the list of concerns, followed by quality control (63%), data privacy (61%), and client trust (52%); only 6% report no major concerns.

- Accuracy and hallucinations: 82%
- Quality control challenges: 63%
- Confidentiality and data privacy: 61%
- Client trust and perception: 52%
- Staff overreliance on AI: 50%
- Legal and copyright issues: 40%
- Lack of training or knowledge: 39%
- Cost of tools and subscriptions: 26%
- Lack of clear ROI: 13%
- No major concerns: 6%

Single most limiting factor for adoption or expansion

Lack of time to learn and implement (42%) is by far the most cited barrier to expanding AI use, while 24% report no major barriers at all.

- Lack of time to learn and implement: 42%
- No major barriers: 24%
- Concerns about quality or accuracy: 21%
- Lack of knowledge or skills: 5%
- Cost: 3%
- Ethical or legal concerns: 3%
- Client concerns or resistance: 2%
- Don't see enough value: 0%

About the respondents

Role

Respondents were almost entirely owners and senior agency leaders, with 79% identifying as owner or founder.

- Owner or founder: 79%
- Co-owner or partner: 10%
- President, CEO, or managing director: 6%
- Other agency leadership: 5%
- Non-leadership employee: 0%

Number of full-time employees (including the respondent)

64% of respondent agencies have five or fewer full-time employees, including 27% who are solo operators.

- 1: 27%
- 2 to 5: 37%
- 6 to 10: 15%
- 11 to 25: 15%
- 26 to 50: 6%
- More than 50: 0%

Approximate fee-based annual revenue

71% of respondent agencies report fee-based annual revenue below \$1 million.

- Below \$1 million: 71%
- \$1 million or more: 29%

Primary focus

Public relations or communications (37%) and digital marketing (18%) together account for 55% of respondents.

- Public relations or communications: 37%
- Digital marketing: 18%
- Integrated or multi-discipline (including PESO model): 16%
- Other: 15%
- Branding or creative: 10%
- Content marketing: 3%
- Advertising or media: 2%

Revenue trend over the past 12 months

48% report growing revenue over the past 12 months, while 52% report flat or declining revenue.

- Growing modestly: 45%
- Flat: 26%
- Declining: 26%
- Growing rapidly: 3%