

Block Club

2026 Research Report

The Influence of AI on the Martech Buyer's Journey

We surveyed 30 U.S. marketing leaders from mid-market and enterprise companies to learn how they use AI when researching, evaluating, and buying martech solutions.



What we found



AI is now the second most-used research channel, ahead of review sites, peers, and analyst reports. For the marketing leaders we surveyed, AI is a critical source of information playing a major role in martech buying decisions.



Showing up in AI results is now important for getting into the sales cycle. 60% of respondents said that whether a vendor appears in AI-generated results shapes their view of that vendor. Not appearing can send a strong negative signal and affect long- and short-listing.



Traditional search is still the top information source, but AI often comes first in the research process. This shows how important AI is for shaping early impressions.



The final decision is still made by people. All respondents said they verify AI outputs and that demos, peer conversations, and direct talks with vendors are what really drive the final purchase decision.



AI is most commonly used at the start of the buying journey and again when building a business case. Nearly everyone we surveyed uses AI for initial discovery, but usage drops during shortlisting and due diligence, then rises when making an internal case. In other words, AI helps with early evaluation and internal advocacy.



To verify what AI tells them, almost all buyers go to vendor websites. 93% of respondents visit a vendor's website to confirm what they learned from AI. This means vendor websites are now used to confirm and expand on what buyers already know, not just to introduce the product for the first time.

Where AI enters the picture

THE NEW MARTECH BUYING JOURNEY

Our survey of 30 U.S. marketing leaders from mid-market and enterprise companies found that **97% use AI tools when buying martech solutions**. This makes AI the second most-used information source, just after traditional search and ahead of all other channels.

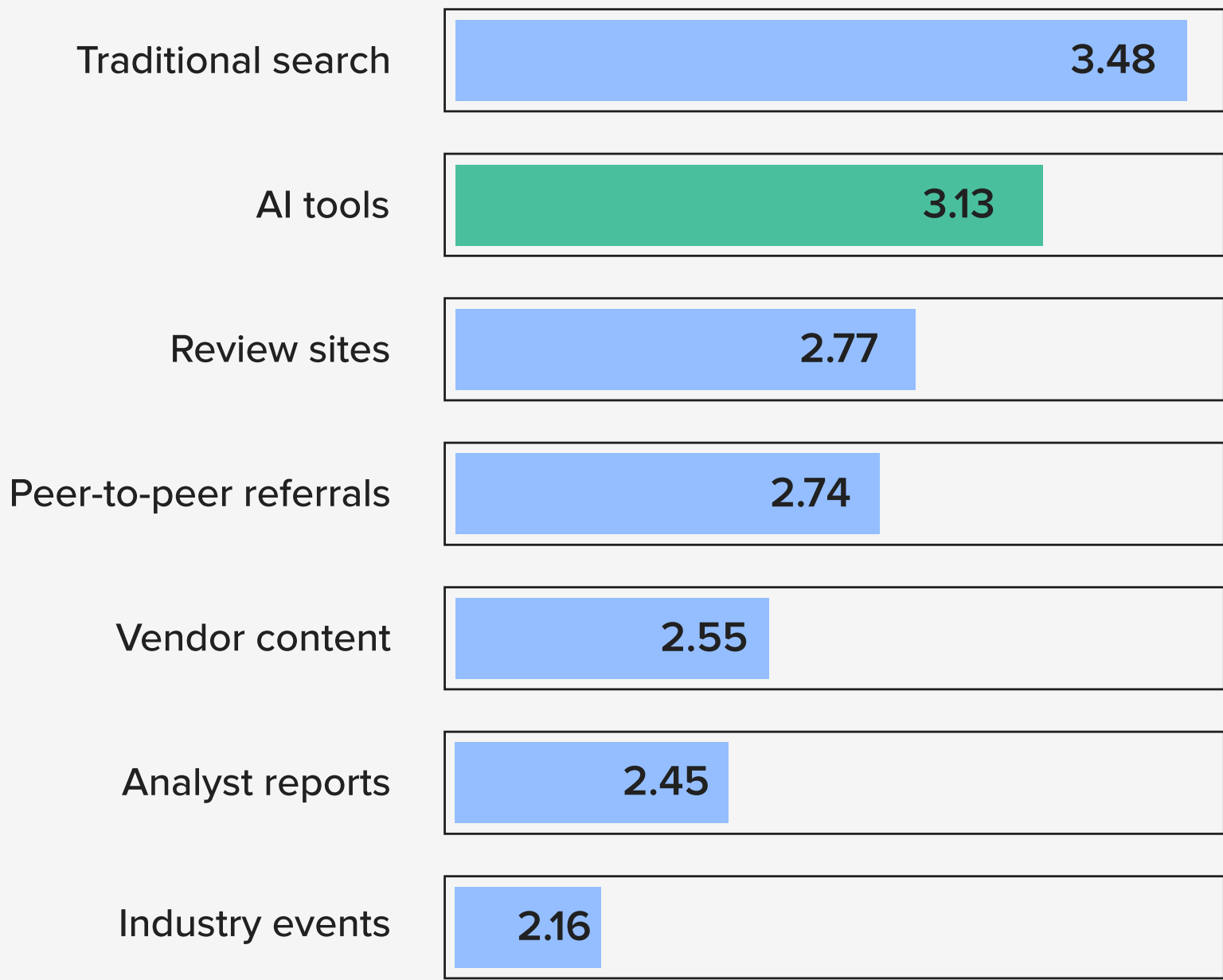
Traditional search 1st

AI tools 2nd

Other channels 3rd

This suggests that using AI for martech research is now standard, and vendors need to make sure they are visible on generative AI platforms.

How often do you use the following sources to inform your martech research and evaluation process?



(Scale: 1 = Never/rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Always)

THE NEW MARTECH BUYING JOURNEY

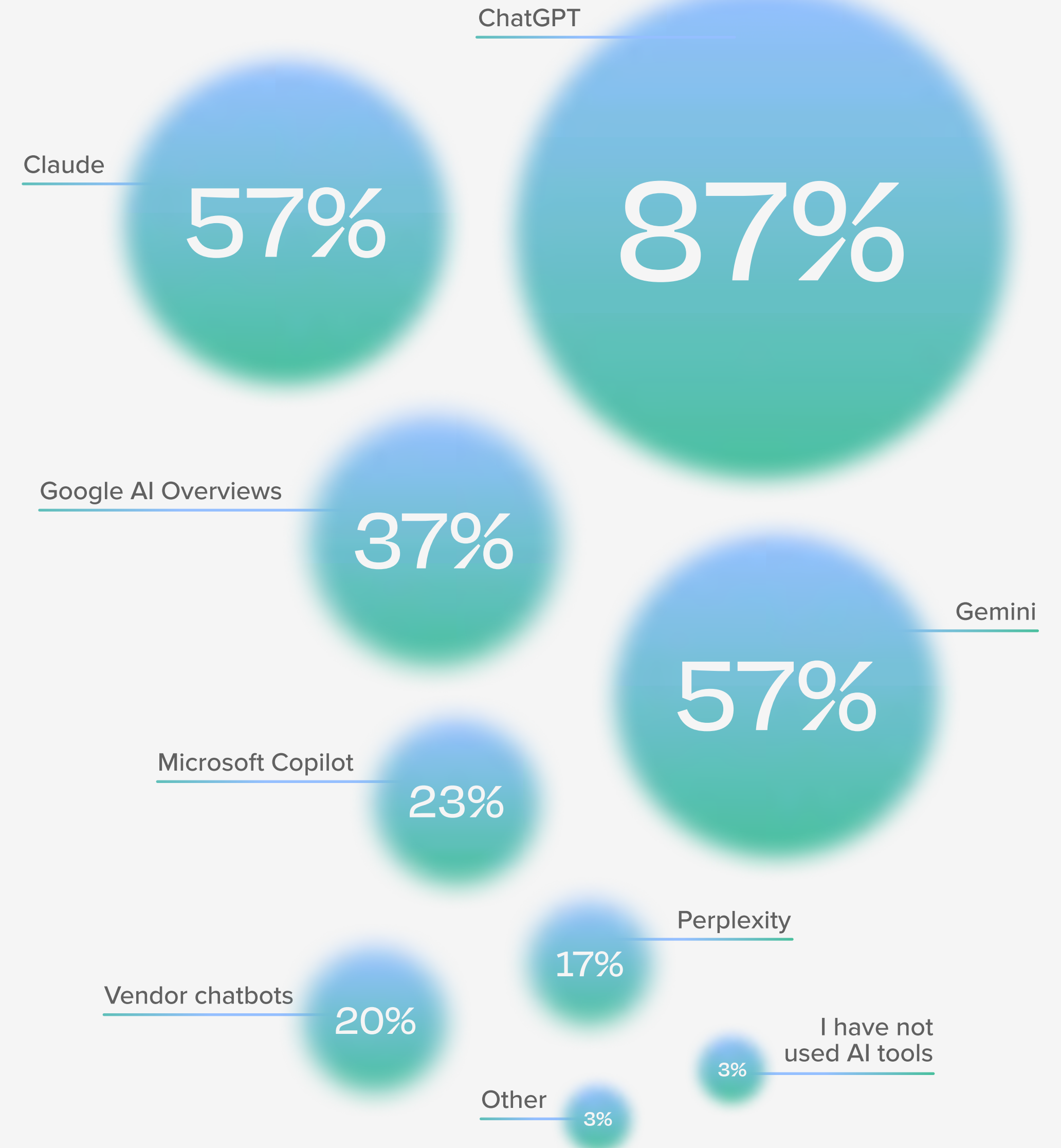
But not all AI tools matter equally for visibility. In this study, buyers used ChatGPT most for martech research, followed by Gemini, Claude, Google AI Overviews, Microsoft Copilot, and Perplexity.

This distribution matters to vendors because it affects content and discoverability. **Each AI platform retrieves and surfaces information differently**, so treating AI visibility as a single optimization problem is likely to produce suboptimal results. The key is determining which platforms your audience uses most, and **optimizing visibility** for those platforms accordingly.



AI is a simple and straightforward path to creating a short list and aggregating pros/cons and external perspectives. It is much simpler to ask ChatGPT to aggregate POV from G2, YouTube, Reddit, etc. and give me a holistic view on tools to solve my problem, rather than Googling and going to company websites one at a time.

- Director, Product Marketing

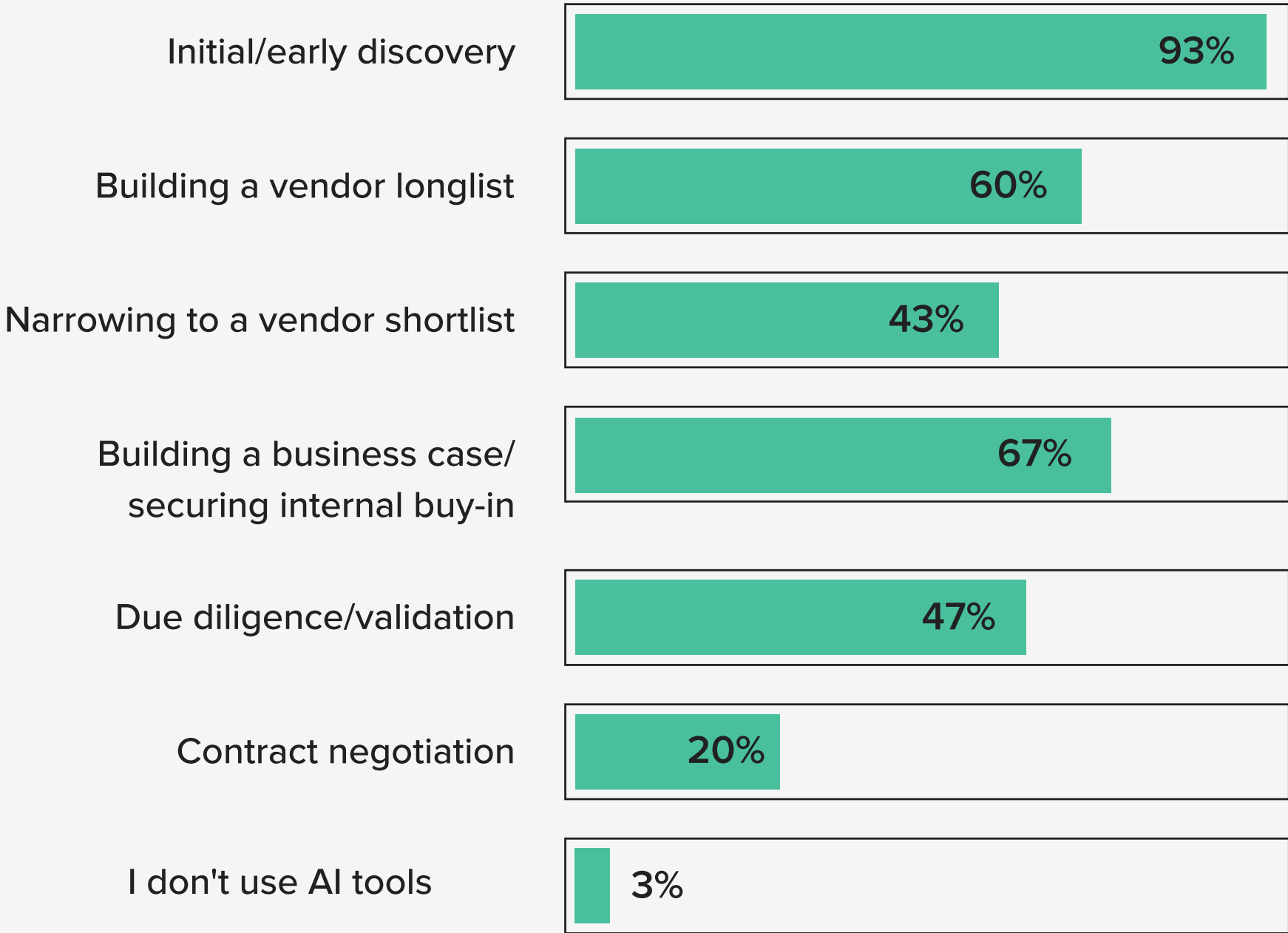


How martech buyers are actually using AI

AI use is near-universal at initial discovery (**93%**), then drops significantly as evaluation gets more specific, falling to **43%** for shortlisting. But it rebounds notably at the business case and internal buy-in stage (**67%**), before declining again through due diligence (**47%**) and contract negotiation (**20%**).

This shows that AI plays two main roles in the buying journey. Early on, it helps with **discovery and comparison**. Later, **it helps buyers make the case internally**. The stages where AI use drops are the ones where people say human judgment is most important.

When do you use AI tools to bring new marketing technology solutions to your business?



Not just when, but how

In the survey’s open-ended responses, additional AI usage patterns emerged:

Side-by-side comparison and feature analysis

A third of respondents said they ask AI to make pro/con lists, compare solutions, or evaluate options based on set criteria. This means martech vendors are often judged by AI-generated comparison tables that leave out nuance and detail.

“I often will ask AI to put together a matrix of strengths, weaknesses, costs, etc. I always ask for the best recommendation based on x, y, and z criteria. From there, I will do a bit of research on my own to pressure test the responses.”

Reputation scanning and sentiment aggregation

A smaller group said they use AI to gather and sum up public opinions from Reddit, G2 reviews, and other community forums. They use this as a quick way to check a vendor's reputation before spending more time on evaluation.

“Sometimes I will get AI engines to specifically crawl Reddit to see what people have been saying in the last 3 months. If the sentiment is overwhelmingly negative, I will move [it] out of [the] consideration set.”

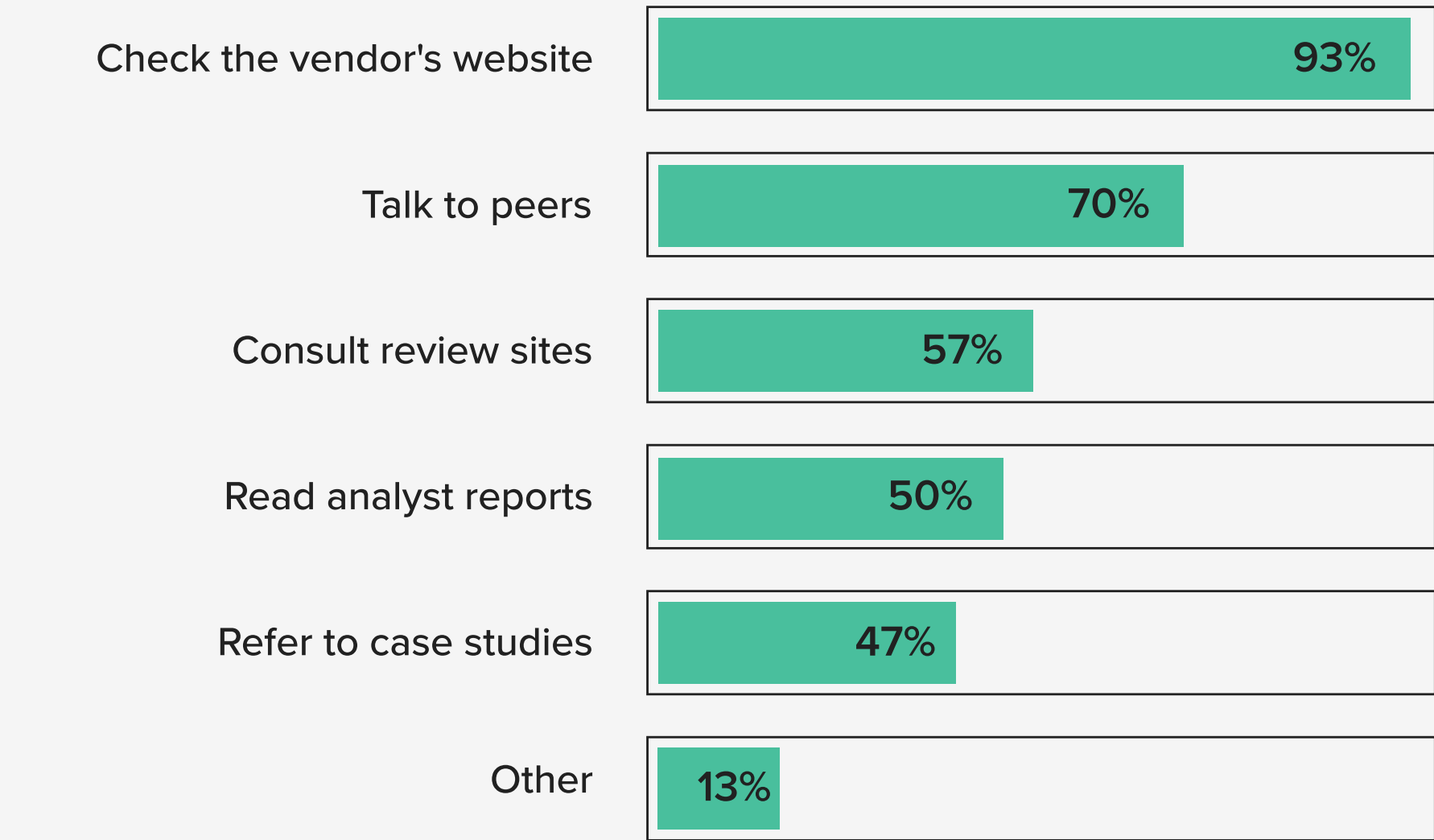
This is important because it means the difference between what a vendor claims and what customers say is now easy to spot. As a result, negative reviews that aren't addressed may be hard to overcome, no matter how strong the vendor's owned content is.

Buyers' AI boundaries

One thing is clear: Buyers do not fully trust AI. All respondents said they always do extra research to verify what AI tells them.

That research is sourced most often from vendor websites, followed by peer conversations, review sites, analyst reports, and case studies.

What do you do to verify or pressure-test what AI tells you about a vendor?



BUYERS' AI BOUNDARIES

Martech vendors should pay special attention to their website in light of this finding. Most B2B websites are designed to introduce the product, establish credibility, and capture visitors encountering the brand for the first time. But now it seems many visitors are visiting a website with an AI-informed perception that they are looking to challenge or confirm.

This means vendors should review their websites for how well it helps buyers verify information. For example:

- Can a buyer who just read an AI-generated summary of your product find precise feature documentation?
- Can they find integration depth that goes beyond a logo wall?
- Can they find case studies and proof points analogous to their own situation?
- Can they find clear, honest answers to the questions AI is likely to have raised?

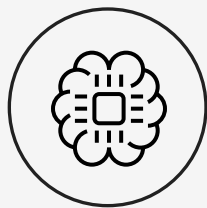
What puts martech vendors at risk?

Buyers described three factors that can lead them to remove a martech vendor from their consideration set.

01	Comparison-driven elimination
Many respondents described deprioritizing vendors after AI-facilitated comparisons revealed feature gaps, poor fit, or another shortcoming. In other words, AI enables faster, more structured comparisons that expose weaknesses more quickly. Vendors whose feature documentation is incomplete or whose positioning is vague will be most vulnerable to this risk. "I was able to compare solutions side by side easier and faster with AI. The solution that was deprioritized was missing something I needed, or it was part of the other solution at a lower cost." — Senior Director, Personalization & Experimentation	

02	Negative review signals
Around 10% of respondents said they have deprioritized vendors after AI found negative signals on review sites and public forums. Some of these respondents qualified their response by explaining that they verify any negative sentiments AI uncovers through additional research. Still, martech vendors should actively address negative reviews, either through direct responses or through owned content. "AI summaries of bad product reviews are a turnoff for any product. I'm not sure I'd rule it out completely, but it does color my initial opinion during the research phase." – Principal Performance Marketing Manager	

03	A vendor's AI visibility
60% of respondents agree that whether or not a martech vendor appears in AI-generated results influences their perception of that vendor. The implication: Not showing up can be seen as evidence of a weak market presence, poor marketing, or an immature product. "If the martech solution does not show up in any AI generated overviews at all — that is telling of how popular and well tested that martech solution is." — Senior Growth Manager	



When asked how AI will change their evaluation process in the future, a few expectations came up consistently.

- About a third of respondents **expect AI to keep doing what it does now, but faster and more thoroughly.** Buyers think the research and shortlisting process will get even quicker, with AI taking over even more of the comparison work.
- Another third of respondents believe that **demos, peer feedback, and direct talks with vendors will still be essential.** AI will not replace the human judgment needed for final purchase decisions.
- A smaller group, **about 25%, expect to use AI for more than just discovery and list-building.** They mentioned things like analyzing RFP responses, benchmarking prices, and helping with contract negotiations.

About this research

This research shows that AI has sped up the start of the martech buying journey and become a main research channel. It also means vendors who aren't visible to AI tools are at a disadvantage. While buyers still verify, demo, and talk to peers—and a good sales call still matters—now your product must show up in AI results and do well in AI comparisons to get that far.

This study was designed and analyzed by Block Club using Wynter, a B2B panel and research platform. Responses were collected in March 2026.

There were 30 total respondents, all U.S. marketing professionals in leadership positions ranging from director to C-suite, and from enterprise (1,000+ employees) or mid-market (200–999) companies. Their job functions include marketing operations, product marketing, demand generation, social media, content, brand, and CX.

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