Block Club

2026 Research Report

The Influence of AI on the Enterprise AI Buyer's Journey

We asked 30 business and technology leaders from U.S. mid-market and enterprise companies how they use AI to research, evaluate, and buy enterprise AI solutions.

What we found

Everyone in our study uses AI tools to research enterprise AI solutions, but they are careful about trusting the results. They stop short of making decisions based only on AI outputs and always look for independent verification.

Traditional search and AI tools are co-equal starting points. Most respondents now start their research with either AI tools, traditional search, or both. They use AI for many tasks, including discovery, mapping the landscape, comparing vendors, and preparing business cases.

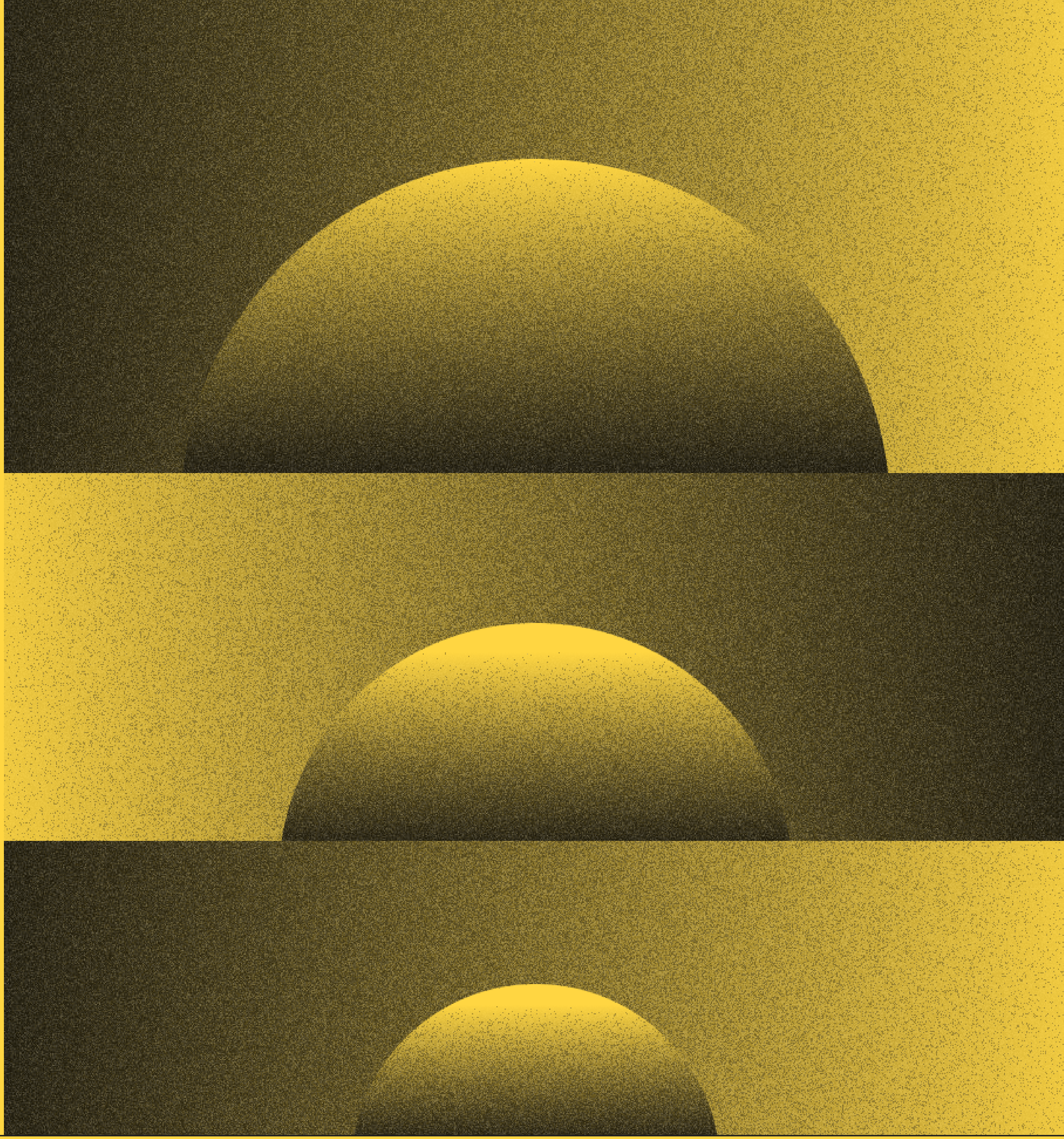
AI use is highest at the beginning of the buying journey, then drops significantly through the middle stages. Usage peaks during initial discovery (90%), drops during longlisting and shortlisting, then rises again for due diligence (47%) and business case building (50%) before falling again. This shows that respondents mainly use AI to get oriented and synthesize information, not to make decisions.

Peer recommendations are still very important. Respondents often turn to peers as their primary source for verifying information and trust them more than AI, especially when making decisions later in the process.

Showing up in AI results matters, but not universally. Half of the respondents said that seeing a vendor in AI results shapes their opinion. The other half were skeptical, pointing out that newer or niche solutions might not be picked up by AI yet.

Procurement may be getting more complicated. For buyers in regulated industries or large enterprises, AI purchases may start to involve AI governance committees. This could extend the buying process and introduce new stakeholder audiences that enterprise AI vendors need to reach.

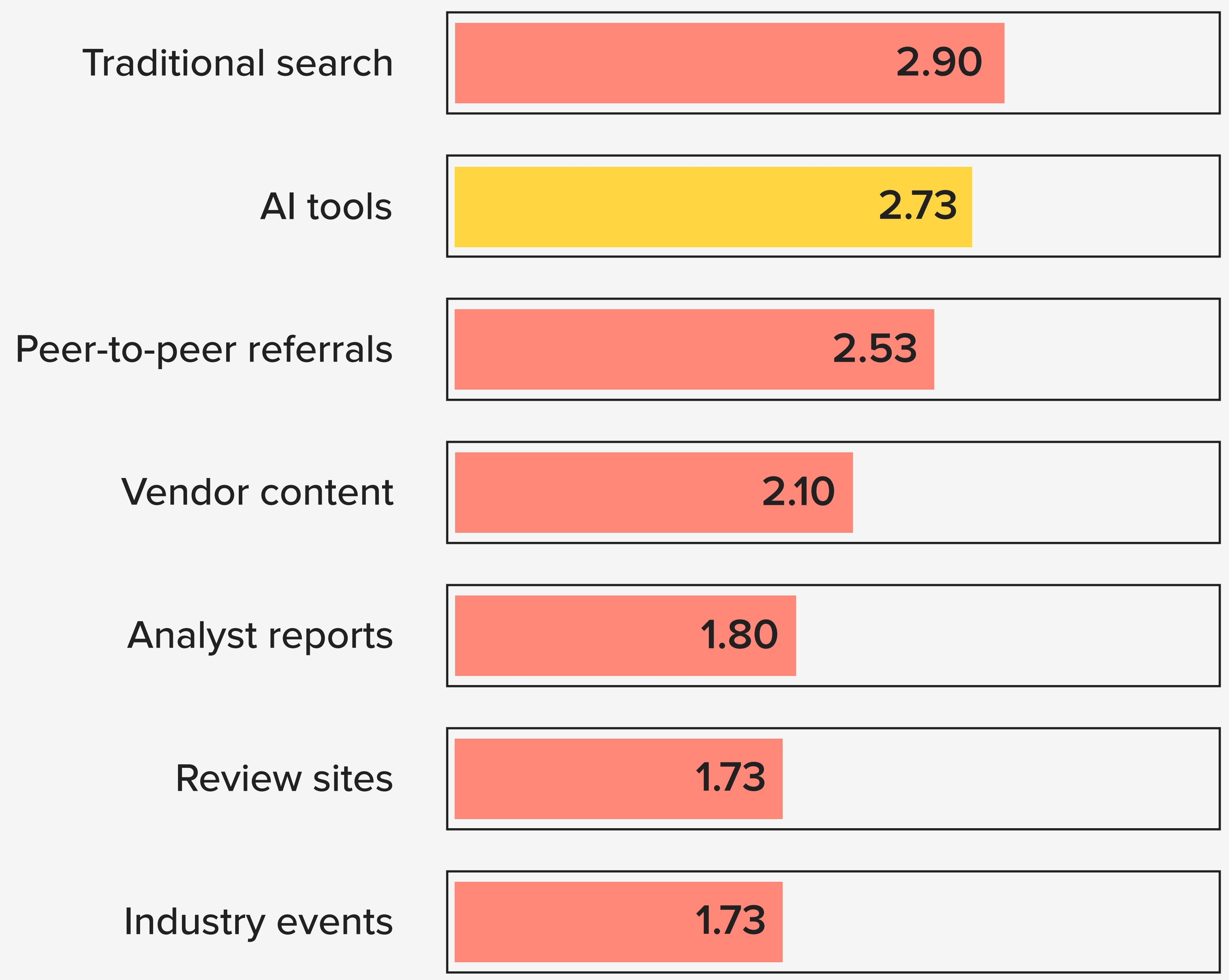
The enterprise AI buying journey



In our survey of 30 U.S. business and technology leaders from mid-market and enterprise companies, every respondent said they have used AI tools to evaluate enterprise AI solutions. Overall, they use AI almost as often as traditional search engines.

> Nowadays, we rely mostly on ChatGPT and other AI tools in the same way we used to use Google. Google search still solves many traditional problems, but ChatGPT and similar applications help us conduct research and focused studies."
>
> — **Engineering Director**

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

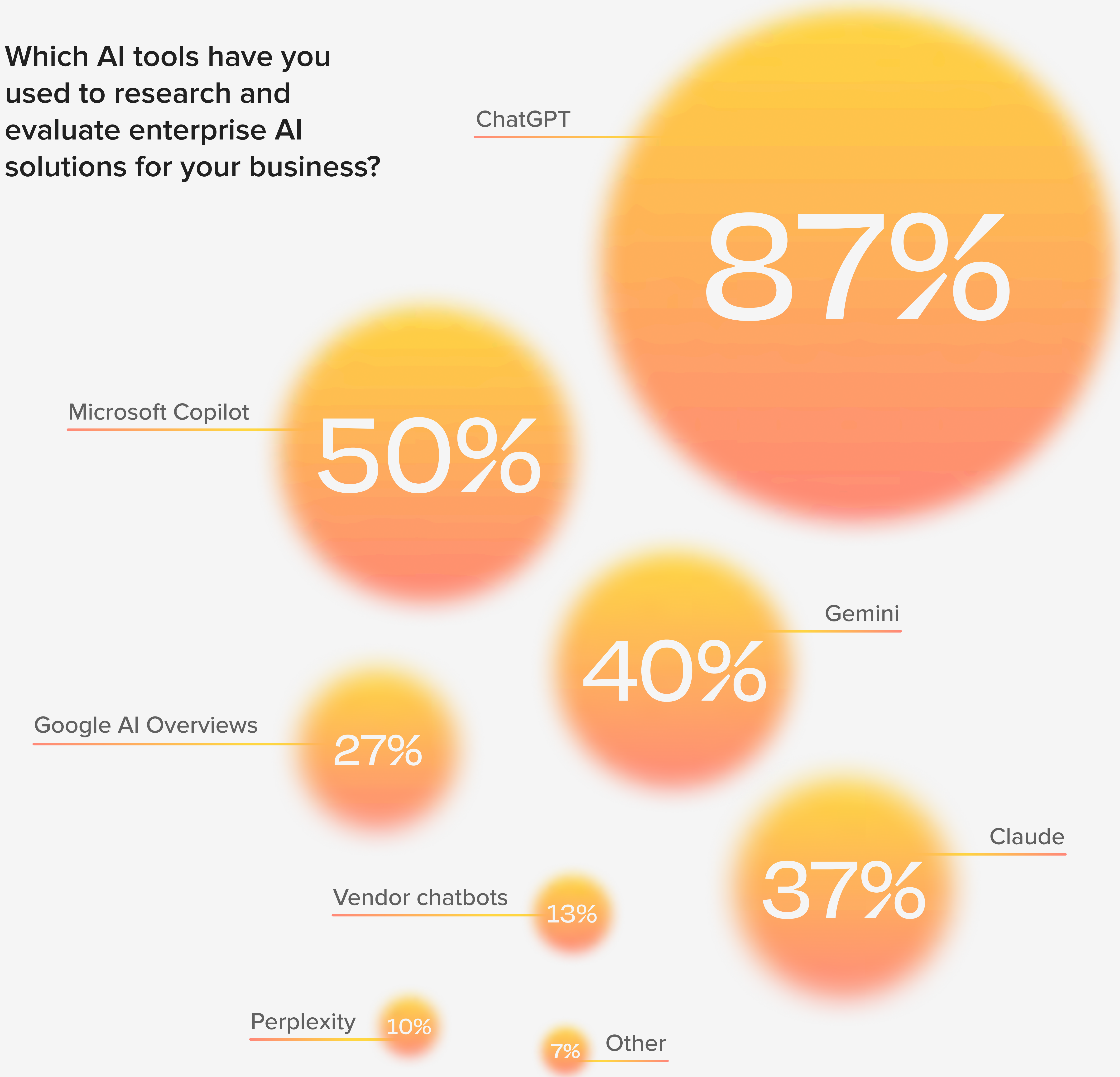


(Scale: 1 = Never/rarely 2 = Sometimes 3 = Often 4 = Always)

But not all AI tools are used equally. ChatGPT leads, followed by Microsoft Copilot, Gemini, Claude, Google AI Overviews, and Perplexity. Two respondents mentioned tools outside the mainstream. One cited Dust, an enterprise AI platform, and another described using an in-house AI tool built on a less common model.

Microsoft Copilot's popularity reflects the enterprise context of these buyers. Many work in Microsoft environments where Copilot is already part of their workflow. For enterprise AI vendors, being visible on Copilot is not a niche case—it is a key channel to focus on.

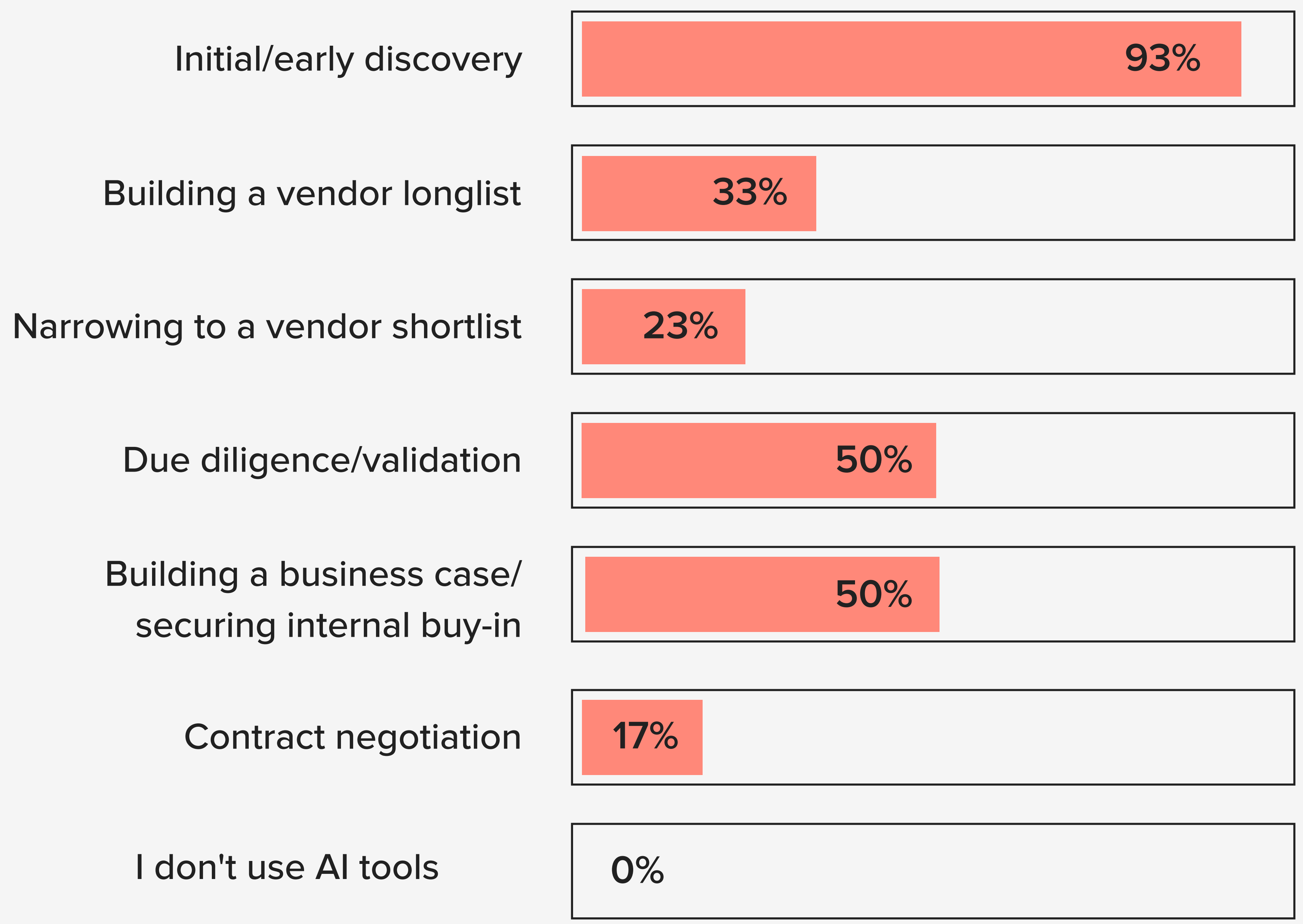
Which AI tools have you used to research and evaluate enterprise AI solutions for your business?



How buyers are actually using AI

AI usage is highest at the start of the buying process, then drops sharply in the middle stages. Only about a third use it for longlisting, and even fewer for shortlisting. Usage rises again for due diligence and business case building, but falls to 17% at contract negotiation.

When do you use AI tools to research and evaluate enterprise AI solutions for your business?



HOW BUYERS ARE ACTUALLY USING AI

The pronounced drop through the middle stages suggests that **as evaluation gets more specific, buyers turn to sources they trust** more for depth and accuracy, such as peers, analyst reports, direct vendor conversations, and technical documentation.

The partial recovery at the due diligence and business case stages reflects something else. At this point, AI is used more for preparation and synthesis than for research. Several respondents said they use it to organize their thoughts, summarize findings for stakeholders, or help build internal presentations.

> The quick turn ability to generate relatively deep research is game-changing. The ability to then turn that research into viable educational information for the RFP and enterprise is invaluable."
>
> **— Head of Digital IT**

HOW BUYERS ARE ACTUALLY USING AI

Not just when, but how

Open-ended survey responses show several specific ways buyers use AI at different stages.

Landscape orientation and rapid longlisting

Many respondents use AI as a research assistant. They explain their problem and constraints, then ask AI to generate an initial list of options. This turns hours of manual searching and site review into minutes.

> **AI tools like ChatGPT and Claude have become the new starting point for software/vendor solutions, whether they're AI or conventional. I used to start with a Google search and G2, compile my research findings, such as product features, services, pricing, and fit for purpose. That took a lot of time and effort, and prompting AI with what I am looking for in a platform or service provides a much faster, more comprehensive starting point for my research and often surfaces solutions I may not have otherwise considered. I then have to validate all of the answers and reasoning provided by generative AI, but it still quickly shows me where to look and what to look for.”**
>
> **— Director of content Marketing**

Structured comparison and feature analysis

Several respondents said they ask AI to build comparison matrices, rank vendors by specific criteria, highlight pros and cons, or point out feature gaps. One person described uploading RFP responses into an internal Copilot tool to spot differentiators and issues across submissions.

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."

— Director of Strategic Pricing and Proposals

Business case preparation and stakeholder communication

Multiple respondents said they use AI not just for research, but also to help with internal communication. They use it to polish executive summaries, structure presentations, and frame the case for a purchase. Here, AI acts more as a writing and synthesis tool than an information source.

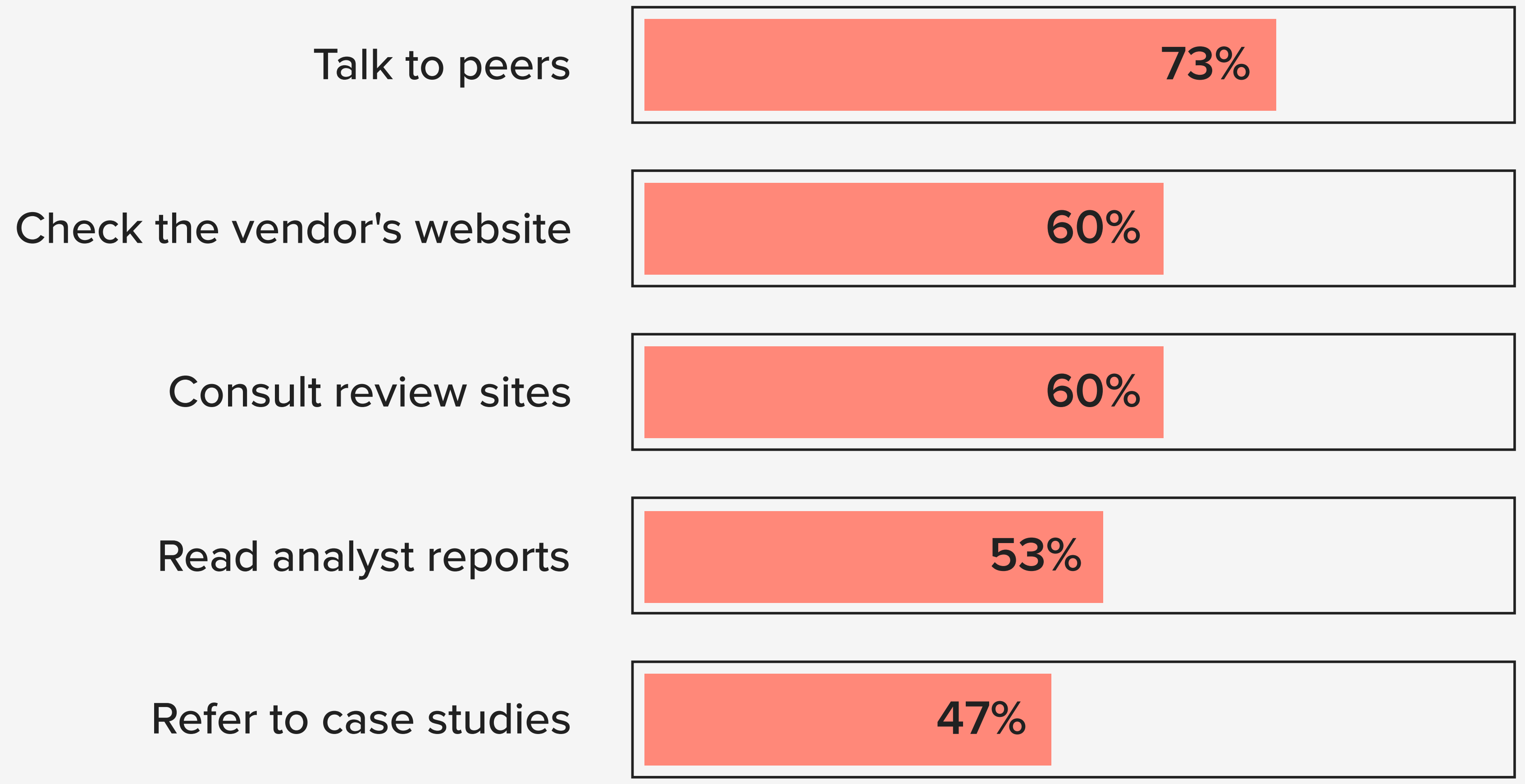
I use AI to help me compile sources/find leads that would otherwise take me a lot of manual effort. Since AI, I've also used it to automate/streamline some respective processes like note-taking and formatting my work in a standardized manner."

— Finance Manager

The trust ceiling

Enterprise AI buyers agree: **They use AI, but do not fully trust it.** Every respondent said they do extra research to verify what AI tells them. Talking to peers is the most common way to check, followed by checking vendor websites and review sites, then analyst reports and case studies.

What do you do to verify or pressure-test what AI tells you about an enterprise AI solution?



The main reasons for skepticism are that AI tools are only as reliable as their sources, and that they can sometimes make mistakes or provide inaccurate information.

> I have stopped using some AI platforms for my research/needs after seeing it hallucinate multiple times even after proper prompting. I also discontinued it because I can tell it wasn't able to take the role of a subject matter expert in my industry of choice when crafting its responses."
>
> — Finance Manager

What puts enterprise AI vendors at risk?

Buyers mentioned several reasons that might cause them to deprioritize or remove a vendor from consideration:

01 Comparison-driven elimination

The most common reason for deprioritizing a vendor was not a negative report, but a structured comparison that revealed a gap.

> 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. Typically it's the comparison that kicked one out—not so much that AI said one was better than the other."
>
> — Director of Strategic Pricing and Proposals

Vendors with incomplete documentation, unclear positioning, or missing features may be especially at risk of being eliminated during comparisons.

02 Compliance and governance signals

For buyers in regulated industries, AI purchases face extra scrutiny compared to most other software. Gaps or unclear areas in a vendor's security, compliance certifications, data handling, or regulatory alignment can end consideration before a formal evaluation starts.

> **Our own technology is FedRamp High certified, which means we have certain requirements that need to be met in order to maintain our FedRamp certification. If an AI tool doesn't meet those standards, we'll likely not purchase it."**
>
> **— Director of Customer Success**

This is important for enterprise AI vendors' content strategy. Compliance documentation, certification listings, and security information need to be easy to find, not hidden in PDF whitepapers or behind demo requests. AI tools can only show what they can access, and buyers in regulated industries will look for this information early.

03 AI visibility—and absence

50% of respondents said that whether a vendor appears in AI-generated results influences their perception of that vendor.

If the enterprise AI solution does not show up in any AI generated overviews at all—that is telling of how popular and well tested that solution is."

— Senior Growth Manager

If a vendor does not show up, it can be seen as a sign of weak market presence, limited adoption, or an immature product.

The procurement complexity problem

For some enterprise buyers, AI purchases have added a new layer of institutional scrutiny. One respondent described a buying process that now includes an AI governance committee, making an already complex, multi-stakeholder review even more complicated.

> We now have an AI governance committee that works in conjunction with Procurement, DPO, Cybersecurity, and Legal. Overall, it's made buying software harder—but rightfully so."
>
> **— Sr. Manager of Revenue Operations**

This respondent's experience may reflect a broader change in how large enterprises handle AI procurement. As AI regulatory pressure grows, vendors who focus only on champions and not on governance stakeholders may be considered early but lose out later in the process.

Enterprise AI buyers' predictions

ENTERPRISE AI BUYERS' PREDICTIONS

When asked how AI will change their buying process in the future, respondents focused on a few common themes.

- **About a third expect the early stages of the process to keep speeding up**, with faster research, quicker shortlisting, and less time spent on manual comparisons.
- **A smaller group thinks AI will play a bigger role deeper in the process**, such as analyzing RFP responses, flagging contract risks, automating compliance reviews, and eventually running comparisons with less human involvement at each step.
- **A notable minority suggested that AI could reduce their need for third-party vendors.** As AI coding tools get better, some respondents expect more internal builds to become real alternatives to buying solutions.

> I think in the future it may eliminate third-party vendors as we launch more internal AI-coded projects to suit our exact needs, but it is still early to tell."
>
> **— Director of Technical Support**

Same destination, new first mile

This research shows that enterprise AI buyers have adopted AI tools as a central part of how they research and evaluate vendors—but with enough skepticism to keep human judgment firmly in the loop.

For enterprise AI vendors, being visible in AI-generated research is becoming table stakes for serious consideration, and how you're represented matters as much as whether you appear.

About this research

This study was designed and analyzed by Block Club in partnership with Wynter, a B2B panel and research platform. All interviews were conducted in April 2026.

There were 30 total respondents, all business and technology professionals in leadership positions ranging from manager to director level, from enterprise (1,000+ employees) or mid-market (200–999 employees) companies. Respondents span a range of functions, including engineering, operations, finance, IT, digital transformation, revenue operations, data and analytics, and customer success, and a range of industries, including SaaS, financial services, healthcare, retail, manufacturing, and logistics.

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