



THE SPARK REPORT —AI IN AGENCIES

FROM ACTIVITY TO ADVANTAGE

SPRING 2026



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Spark AI works with agencies, creative teams, and brands who want to build organisation-wide AI capability and workflows that change not just how your team works – but what your organisation is capable of.

Our programmes are built on the same AI Maturity Model, research, and methodology that underpin this report. We've worked with over 70 agencies, from independents to global networks, and our approach is informed by real delivery, not theory.

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WELCOME

Agencies have never been so active with AI, but is that activity translating into real competitive advantage?

That's what we set out to answer in this report, and without wanting to spoil the surprise, we found that most agencies are leaving all the value on the table right now. 89% of agency staff are saving time with AI every week. But the hours aren't being reinvested – they're disappearing back into emails, meetings, and doing more of the same, faster. The efficiency is real. The return on it, for most agencies, is not.

83% of your people will tell you they're capable AI users. But our data says only 15% are operating at the level that actually shifts how an agency works and competes. The majority have plateaued at competent prompting – and the organisation, not the individual, is what's holding them there.

This matters commercially. Acquirers and investors are now evaluating AI maturity as a valuation factor. Clients expect formal governance as a procurement baseline, yet 75% of agencies haven't updated their contracts to reflect AI usage in client work. And 52% of all AI activity across agencies remains informal – people innovating without guardrails, carrying the agency's legal and ethical exposure on their own shoulders.

A widening gap is emerging too. Not like before, between one agency and the next, but now it's inside yours. Our data shows the divide between the most and least active AI users within a team is now wider than the gap between one agency and another. That's a two-speed workforce that's difficult to manage, impossible to standardise around, and a risk to consistent client delivery.

None of this is a reason to panic. It's a reason to take deliberate action.

How we've framed this edition

We've built this report around the Spark AI Maturity Model™ – the same framework we use with clients to map where they are and build their roadmap forward.

Part 1 sets out the state of AI in agencies – what the data actually shows across productivity, governance, confidence, internal adoption, creative value, and sustainability.

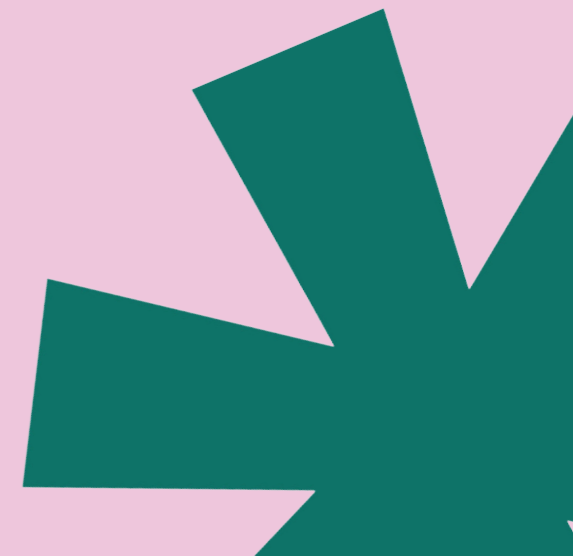
Part 2 gives you the practical tools to do something about it – a 90-day plan, seven real use cases agencies are deploying now, and a clear picture of what the agencies pulling ahead have in common.

We've packed it with case studies from agencies doing this well, and we haven't shied away from the findings that are harder to hear.

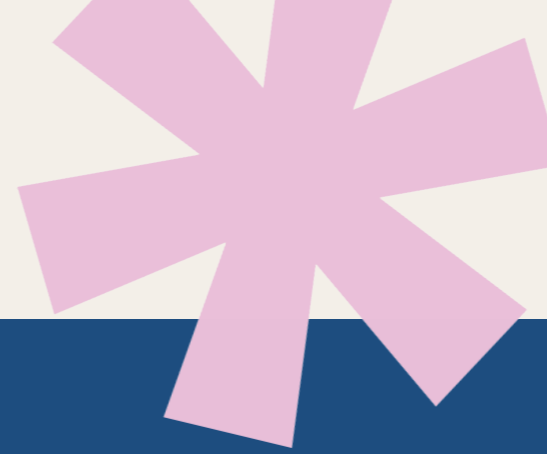
We always love hearing from you – let us know what landed and what you'd find useful next time. And if this report leaves you wanting to learn more – grab a copy of our book [Shift - AI for Agencies](#) or shoot us an email.

Jules & Emma
Co-Founders, Spark AI
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 **spark**



KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

89%

Saving up to 10 hours per week

But recovered hours are vanishing back into admin, and not being reinvested.

52%

Operating without formal governance

Staff using AI without guardrails, policies, or approved tools in place.

83%

Say they're capable

Self-reported confidence – but the data tells a different story

15%

Can build AI workflows

Of people moved beyond simple prompting to creating real repeatable workflows

47%

Using AI in creative

Up from 20% in six months – the commercial model is shifting

50%

Surge in demand for governance

Interest in IP and risk management has grown 50% in six months – staff want the guardrails

The efficiency is real – and it is being wasted. 89% of agency staff are now recovering between one and ten hours per week through AI. The recovered time, however, is being reabsorbed into doing more of the same at greater volume rather than reinvested into deeper capability or strategic thinking.

Shadow AI is the new Shadow IT. 52% of AI activity in agencies is still informal. As you would expect, as staff push the boundaries of AI competence, their interest in IP and data risk management has surged by 50% compared to 6 months ago, backing up the need for formal oversight by agency leadership.

The confidence gap remains. 83% of staff report themselves as being capable AI users. But we found that only 15% are doing the things we would expect of the level of AI fluency required today – the majority have plateaued at one-off competent prompting.

Adoption within agencies is happening at two speeds. The gap between the most and least active users inside a single agency is now wider than the gap between agencies. This creates a two-speed workforce that's difficult to manage, impossible to standardise around, and a risk to consistent client delivery.

The commercial model is shifting. AI use in creative generation has surged from 20% to 47%. Agencies are now actually testing (rather than talking about) moving from time-based to outcome-based pricing and building proprietary tools that create competitive advantage.

Environmental anxiety is becoming an increasing adoption barrier. In our surveys, 13% of people raised unprompted concerns about AI's environmental impact, despite evidence that individual usage has a negligible footprint.

METHODOLOGY

Since 2024, Spark AI has conducted anonymous rolling surveys across our client base, tracking how AI adoption evolves across agency teams over time. This edition draws on perspectives from every level – from founders and directors to creative teams, client services, and operations. Surveying across the full organisational structure, rather than leadership alone, gives a more accurate picture of how AI is actually being used, not just how it's being talked about. In-depth interviews with agency leaders bring the numbers to life. Secondary research adds further context, situating these findings within the broader agency landscape.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

Throughout this report, we reference the stages of the Spark AI Maturity Model™, which is built on our observations across the 70+ agencies we have worked with over the past two years.

Each chapter in this report maps its findings against the Maturity Model. At the top of each chapter, you'll see what the four stages look like for that specific theme – use it to locate where your agency sits right now.

THE SPARK AI MATURITY MODEL™

	STAGE 1 Experimentation	STAGE 2 Adoption	STAGE 3 Optimisation	STAGE 4 Innovation
	INCREASING MATURITY			
People	Individuals experiment in isolation	Shared training and language	Role specific application	AI-native team culture
Process	No standards or governance	Acceptable use policies in place	AI embedded in workflows	Continuous process innovation
Data	No structured data use	Basic data literacy across roles	Data informs decisions	Predictive, real-time data use
Tools	Scattered, personal tool use	Approved tool stack defined	Tools integrated into delivery	Custom builds and automation
Strategy	No AI strategy exists	AI on leadership agenda	AI drives commercial decisions	AI is a competitive differentiator



“AI has given our team members with dyslexia a ‘superpower,’ providing them the confidence to write and express themselves in a way that works for them.”



Tez Humphreys,
Analogue

THE PRODUCTIVITY PARADOX

AI MATURITY: PRODUCTIVITY

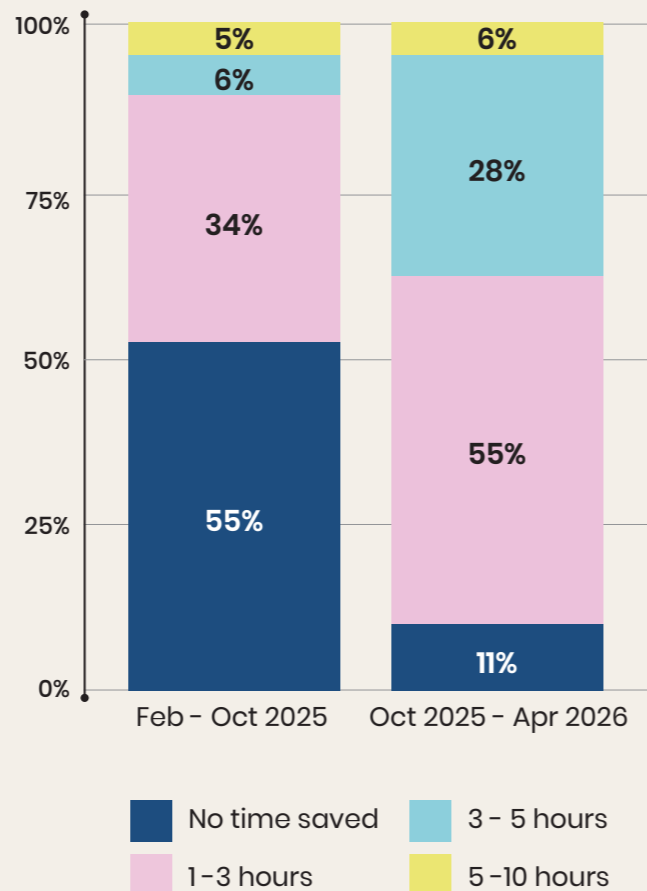
STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
Individuals save time on isolated tasks	Time savings consistent; saved hours begin to be reinvested into AI development.	Reinvestment is deliberate and protected for strategic work & capability building	AI-driven efficiency reshapes what the agency produces and how it's priced

Most agencies sit between Stage 1 and Stage 2 on productivity. The efficiency gains are real - 89% of staff are saving time every week - but without deliberate reinvestment, those hours disappear back into the delivery machine.

AI MATURITY: PRODUCTIVITY THE EFFICIENCY IS REAL

Today, 89% of agency team members say they are recovering as much as 10 hours every week after they have completed just half a day of AI training, up from 45% in late 2025. The chart opposite shows the sharpest growth sits within the 3- to-5 hours saved per week category, where the proportion of staff reporting those gains has risen from 6% to 28%. On average, that puts agencies at Stage 2 on our Spark AI Maturity Model™ - Adoption. AI has moved from occasional supplement to something embedded in daily work. The numbers tell an encouraging story, but what agencies do with those saved hours is another matter.

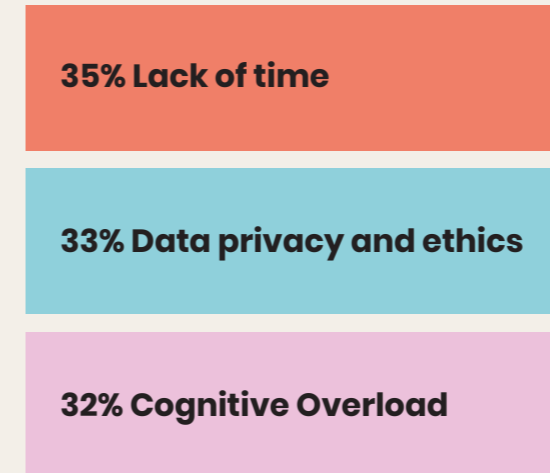
Weekly Agency hours reclaimed by AI
% of respondents by hours saved per week



RECOVERED TIME IS DISAPPEARING

Like all our previous research since 2024, 35% of staff still cite a lack of time as a primary obstacle to deeper AI adoption. If AI is saving up to ten hours a week, that raises an obvious question: where is the time going?

Primary barriers to AI Adoption

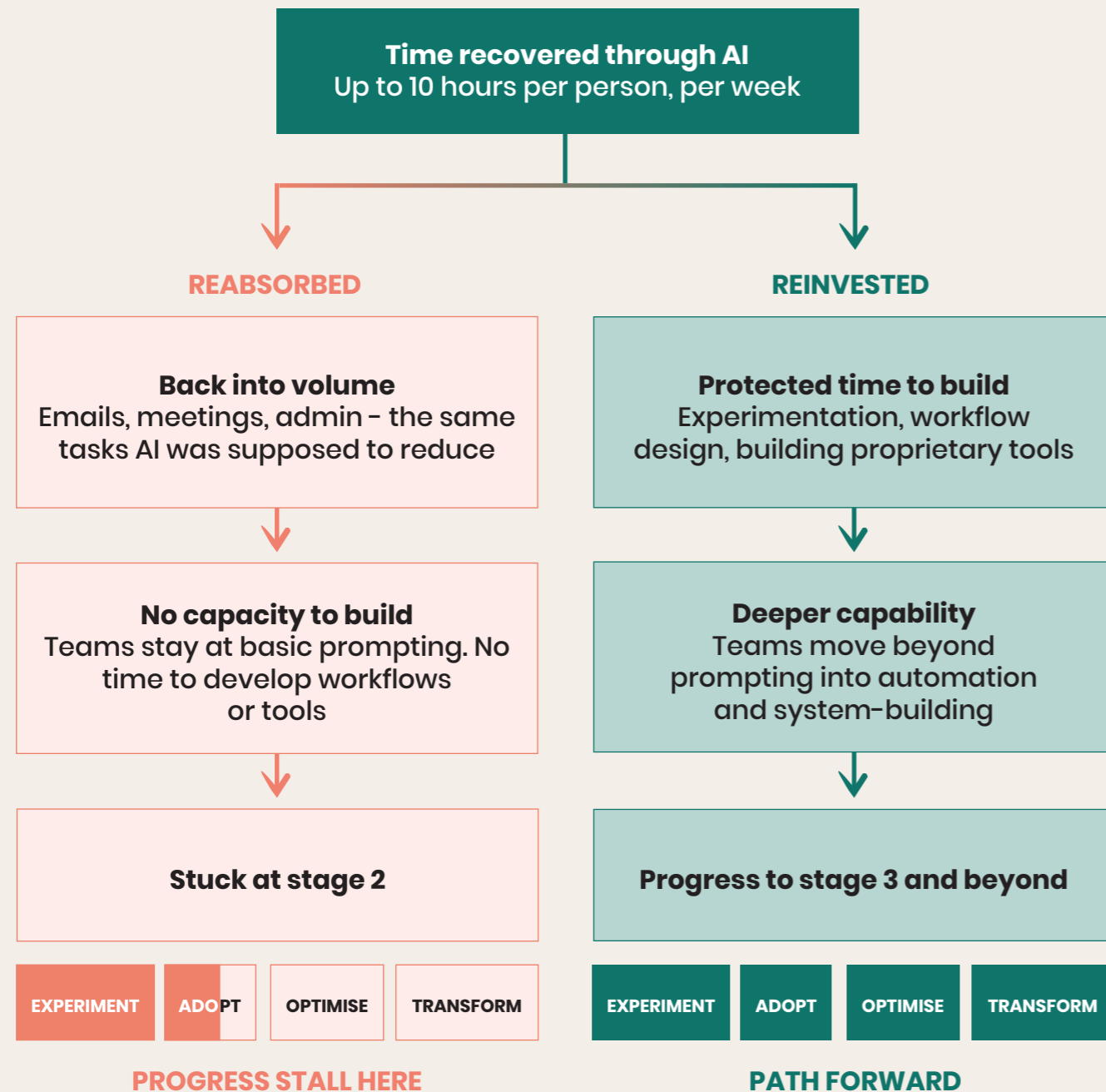


Recovered hours are being immediately swallowed by the usual administrative burdens like emails and meetings, the same tasks that AI was supposed to reduce. So your agency may be seeing the results of Stage 2 (Adoption) while still stuck in the habits of Stage 1 (Experimentation). This is a frustrating place for your team to be. When there is no protected room for deep thinking or strategic exploration, the reward for working faster simply becomes a higher volume of work and the risk of a race to the commercial bottom.

Building the tools and workflows that create real competitive advantage for your agency requires dedicated time. That time never materialises if efficiency gains are absorbed back into the delivery machine.

As Steve Parks put it in his Agency Espresso newsletter: 'Stop doing more stuff and start doing stuff more.' That's exactly what the data shows. Agencies are trialling tools, running prompts and experimenting across departments. Very few are investing deeply enough in any single area to shift the needle.

WHAT HAPPENS TO RECOVERED TIME?



CHANGE FATIGUE IS COMPOUNDING THE PROBLEM

Beyond time management, our data showed that nearly a third of the workforce is struggling with the mental weight of constant technological change. Significant efficiency gains count for too little if teams are too exhausted to apply creative judgement to the outputs. The pace of tool releases, platform updates, and capability changes over the past twelve months has been relentless. When an agency

doesn't provide structure – no approved tools, no clear workflows, no defined expectation – every AI decision becomes an individual burden. That is a burnout risk that most agencies haven't yet foreseen, and one that makes progression through the stages of AI maturity significantly harder to sustain.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

Treat recovered time as an asset to be invested. This requires an active leadership decision: ringfence hours, protect non-billable experimentation time, and measure what saved time enables. This exercise helps agencies understand how, and where, AI can raise the standard of the work itself.

Take a recent client project and map it from brief to delivery across five stages: research, strategy, creative development, production, and client management. For each stage, ask two questions:

- Could AI have enhanced this?
- What would the team have explored differently with more capacity?

Pay particular attention to the work that happens before the final output. AI's real leverage tends to sit upstream: in research, ideation, and the operational layer that keeps projects moving. For each stage flagged, apply a simple lead test. Where the task is analytical or information-heavy, AI leads with a human overseeing. Where it demands judgement or creative direction, the human leads with AI in a supporting role.

From everything the agency identifies, start by choosing only three to prevent overwhelm. Those become the agency's reinvestment priorities.

QUANTIFY WHAT THE TIME DIVIDEND IS WORTH

Once the agency knows where the time should be going, track those hours. Shift from counting hours saved to documenting what those hours made possible – such as exploring more territories or deeper research. When agencies only track hours saved, clients will expect lower fees. Documenting what that time enables instead builds the evidence base for value-based pricing conversations, and gives leadership a clear view of where AI is generating strategic return rather than just operational speed.

IN PRACTICE: CANVA

Dedicated AI time – whether a dedicated morning or a monthly sprint – creates the conditions for genuine proficiency to develop. This example from Canva demonstrates that the return on that investment can be transformative.



Canva dedicated a full week to company-wide AI exploration. Meetings were cancelled. Output expectations were suspended. In their place: structured tool access, role-specific workshops, and cross-departmental sessions where teams built working prototypes together. Employees set their own goals within that framework, giving them both direction and genuine ownership of the process.

The outcomes were immediate and tangible. Sales teams built custom AI assistants. Design teams found workflows that

cut production time in half. Product teams used synthetic data to test new features in ways that had previously required significant resources.

INDUSTRIALISING INNOVATION

The proof is all around us. Companies that industrialise innovation – from Canva to Lego to Google – follow the same recipe. They set aside dedicated time for experimenting and building, giving their teams clear objectives, then share and evaluate what's been created.

SHADOW AI AND GOVERNANCE

AI MATURITY: GOVERNANCE

STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
No formal AI policy; usage is entirely individual	Acceptable use policy in place; approved tools defined	AI governance embedded in delivery processes; data partnerships and client transparency formalised.	Continuous governance review; AI risk managed as a core business function

52% of AI activity across agencies remains informal, placing the majority firmly in Stage 1 on governance – even where individual capability has moved well beyond it. The gap between what people are doing with AI and the structures around them is the defining risk in this chapter.

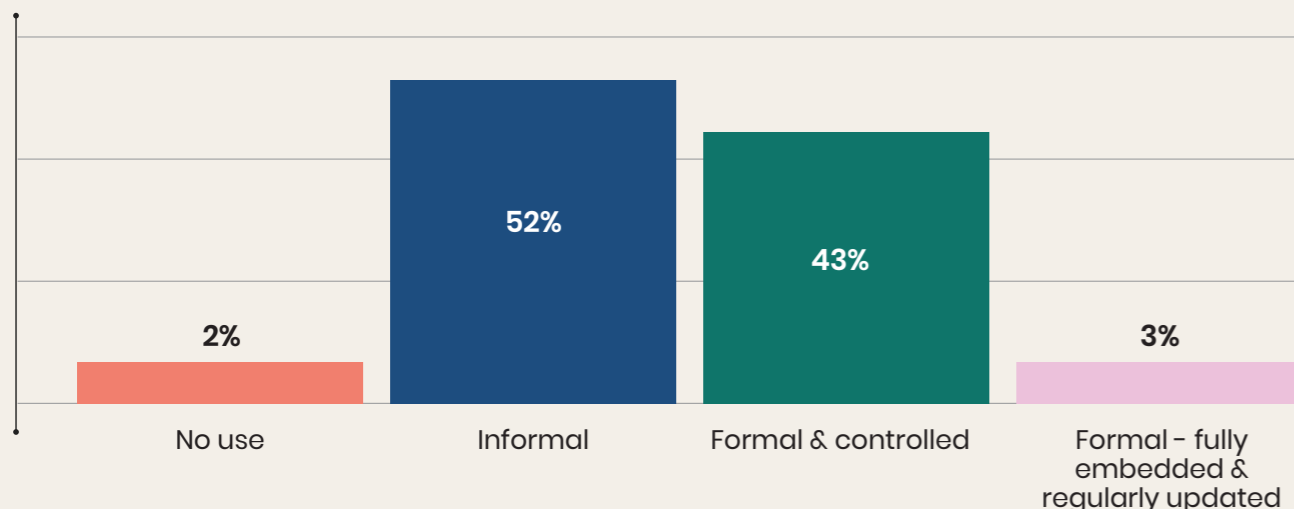
CLIENTS ARE RAISING THE BAR

6 months ago, we described how general curiosity about AI was being replaced by contractual demands to use AI. That shift has fully landed. Having a formal AI policy is now a baseline client expectation.

INDIVIDUALISM IS OUTSTRIPPING STRATEGY

84% of the surveyed workforce uses AI, yet the way it is managed tells a different story. Our latest findings show that 52% of AI activity is classified as informal – driven by individual curiosity

Maturity of AI use (ranked by governance guardrails)



with no company-wide use standards. What we saw 6 months ago was lots of experimentation with AI, this has now given way to something closer to normalised shadow AI. Confident AI users are innovating without any guardrails around them.

This is a clear data security and IP risk for your proprietary data and your clients'. It also creates a more specific IP risk. When a team member develops a custom prompt chain or an automated process in isolation, that capability stays with the individual. If they leave, the efficiency and the institutional knowledge leave with them. If you're preparing for growth or eventual acquisition, this is a structural weakness that buyers will identify immediately.

ANXIETY IS GROWING ALONGSIDE CONFIDENCE

Staff are pushing technical boundaries while feeling legally and ethically exposed. We found that interest in learning about risk management and IP has grown by 50% in the last 6 months. The frameworks to protect you and your client's business from accidental copyright infringement or data leaks simply do not exist within their organisations. When we are in the room with our clients, the most frequently asked questions now centre on ethics, privacy, and what is legally safe.

This is the paradox at the heart of Shadow AI. The very confidence that's driving adoption is also driving risk. The more capable staff become, the

25%

of agencies have updated their legal contracts to reflect AI usage in client work, leaving...

75%

exposed to contractual ambiguity.

deeper they move into territory where the rules haven't been written. In the absence of those rules, individuals are left carrying the full weight of the agency's legal and ethical exposure. Progress through the Maturity Model means moving that responsibility from the individual to the business.

The data from **The Wow Company's Benchpress report data** reaffirms the urgency. Only 25% of agencies have updated their legal contracts to reflect AI usage in client work, leaving 75% exposed to contractual ambiguity. Agencies that build these structures will be better placed to satisfy increasingly demanding client requirements and to demonstrate the kind of operational maturity that acquirers and growth partners look for.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

CREATE A GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK THAT ENABLES EXPERIMENTATION.

Start by creating a one-page, regularly reviewed, AI policy that covers four things:

- Approved tools
- Data boundaries (what can and cannot be processed through AI)
- Human oversight requirements
- Disclosure standards for client work

Alongside this, build a simple traffic light system across the project management tools. Green is for AI-friendly work, amber for internal use only, red for confidential briefs where no AI is involved. This takes the decision off the individual and makes it an organisational standard.

TURN INDIVIDUAL WORKFLOWS INTO SHARED AGENCY CAPABILITY.

When you've identified areas where AI can add value to your processes - like improving consistency, quality, or reducing time - build AI assistants (custom GPTs, Gemini gems, Copilot agents, Claude projects or agents) to embed that new way of working in your workflows. This turns individual discovery into collective expertise. It is increasingly a factor in M&A due diligence, as buyers want to see systematised IP.

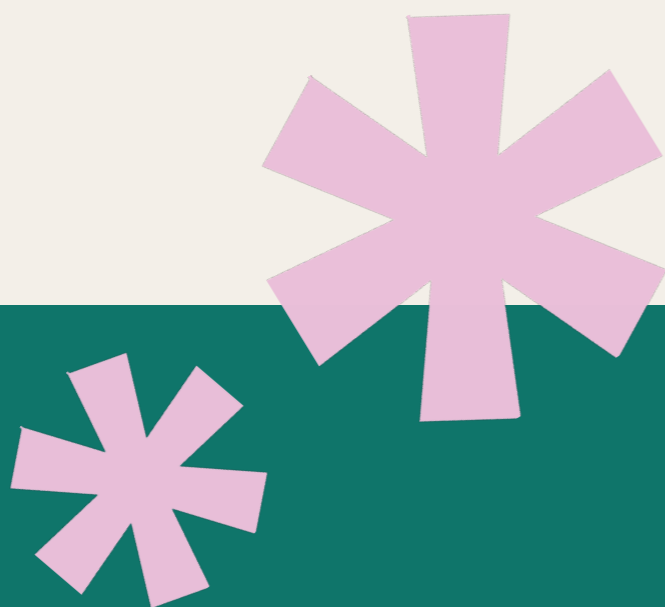
**CLIENT STORY: OMNE**

Omne is a niche B2B marketing agency serving food and drink brands in the hospitality sector, a business built on 25 years of specialist expertise. Following a private equity investment, the agency entered a period of rapid growth. The challenge became how to democratise that expertise across a growing team, so the knowledge lived in the agency, not just in the people who had been there longest.

Working with Spark AI, Omne built frameworks for AI usage across the agency, focusing on guidance, tools, and mentorship. That approach centralised years of specialist knowledge. Senior leaders could reinvest their time into strategy and growth, rather than being pulled into foundational delivery. Omne also established a strong AI policy, putting them on the front foot for client conversations as expectations around AI continue to evolve.

“The frameworks to guide your thinking, the structure, the tools – it was an absolute night-and-day game changer.”

Anna Massey,
Strategy Director, Omne



THE CONFIDENCE GAP

AI MATURITY: CONFIDENCE AND CAPABILITY WITH AI

STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
Basic awareness; occasional use with inconsistent results	Competent prompting; useful outputs from familiar tools	Role-specific AI application; tools shaped to the work	AI-native thinking; capability continuously evolving with the technology

66% of agency staff sit squarely at Stage 2 – competent but plateaued. Only 15% have moved beyond it. The ceiling, as our data consistently shows, is organisational rather than individual.

Across every edition of the Spark Report, we've seen the same pattern: people feel more confident with AI than their actual usage justifies. 6 months ago, we identified personal confidence as the primary differentiator between agencies dabbling with AI and those using it strategically. Confidence has surged since then. The gap, however, has shifted. We are seeing that people's AI fluency is reaching an artificially low ceiling and there's potential for agencies to unintentionally suppress their team's AI advancement.

The middle 66% represents Stage 2 (Adoption) on our AI Maturity Model™. Reaching this point marks real progress from where the sector was 12 months ago, but it should not be mistaken for arrival. Stage 2 is where the shared baseline is established.

THE ILLUSION OF MASTERY

The workforce is currently concentrated in a middle ground of self-reported AI skills.

- **15% Advanced:** They can build custom GPTs, training image models, and have embedded AI across their entire workflow.
- **66% Competent:** They can write structured prompts and consistently produce useful outputs.
- **19% Needs Assistance:** They struggle to apply AI and often require help to achieve what they need

The skills that genuinely transform how agencies operate and compete belong to the stages beyond. Getting beyond Stage 2 requires continued investment in learning.

QUIET DISENGAGEMENT

The data across this report consistently points to a gap that sits with your business, rather than your people. The picture that emerges is one of quiet disengagement – and it's being driven from both sides. Your enthusiasts feel unsupported: they're pushing ahead but without approved tools, clear governance, or visible backing from leadership. Your sceptics feel vindicated: the absence of structure confirms their suspicion that AI is a fad or a distraction. And by staying silent, leadership is accidentally reinforcing both positions. The enthusiasts burn out or leave. The sceptics dig in. The middle majority – the 66% who are competent but could go further – read the room and decide it's not worth the effort. That's the real cost of organisational silence on AI.

HIRING FOR APTITUDE

The hiring data tells a similar story. 65% of agency leaders now prioritise aptitude over specific technical AI skills when recruiting. In a landscape shifting as rapidly as this one, the ability to learn and adapt holds more long-term value than any fixed specialism. We are starting to see this with the rise of hybrid agency roles. The watch-out is that aptitude brought into the organisation will not sustain itself without the right environment. The curiosity and drive that made someone a strong hire can stall just as quickly if the structures to support them are not in place.

For a deeper analysis of how AI is reshaping agency talent and skills requirements, [download our report on AI Skills and Hiring from Nov. 2025](#).



WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

CREATE VISIBLE MOMENTUM THROUGH SHARED LEARNING.

Most agency teams have the capability to go further but lack the motivation and social proof. The agencies breaking through this are making AI progress visible: dedicating regular slots in team meetings for sharing what's working, running monthly challenges that encourage teams to solve real workflow problems with AI, and recognising people who build tools or processes that others adopt. In practice, this can be as simple as a 10-minute slot in your Monday standup where one person demos an AI workflow they've built that week. The goal is to create the social conditions where pushing further feels expected rather than optional.

STOP EXPECTING INNOVATION ON THE SIDE OF THE DESK

We see agencies expecting their workforce to learn how to use AI brilliantly on top of their billable hours. This keeps people trapped as basic users because they never get the deep, focused time required to build tools. It's the same principle as the productivity paradox in Chapter 1: if agencies don't ringfence the time, the capability never develops. Carve out dedicated experimentation time – whether that's a monthly hackathon afternoon or a protected two-hour block each week. Name it, put it in the calendar, and make attendance non-negotiable.



CLIENT STORY: NOT ACTUAL SIZE

Not Actual Size is a creative and strategy agency based in London. When AI arrived, the agency focussed on creating the right conditions for their staff to receive it. Open sessions gave individuals the opportunity to talk honestly about what AI meant for their craft and their sense of professional identity. Psychological safety came before skill development, and that order mattered.

From that foundation, the work evolved quickly. Not Actual Size partnered with their long-term client to develop a proprietary AI copywriting tool, drawing on deep institutional knowledge of the client's tone of voice. The team's role shifted from writers to editors, with the agency moving upstream into more ideas-led, strategic work.

Hiring criteria shifted in parallel, with aptitude and curiosity becoming

the primary qualities sought in new candidates ahead of technical proficiency. Agencies that invest in the human dimension of AI adoption before pushing for productivity tend to build faster, and build better.

“Could not be more relevant and such an important thing to educate ourselves in, considering the world we now live in. We only risk our own jobs if we don't embrace AI and learn how we can utilise it to improve our output as an agency.”

Account Manager, Not Actual Size

THE TWO SPEED AGENCY

AI MATURITY: ADOPTION GAP

▼ 40% of staff ▼ 45% of staff

STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
Usage varies wildly; no shared baseline	Shared training and common language in place across the team	Shared standards and workflows across the team	AI use consistent, measured and continuously improved org-wide

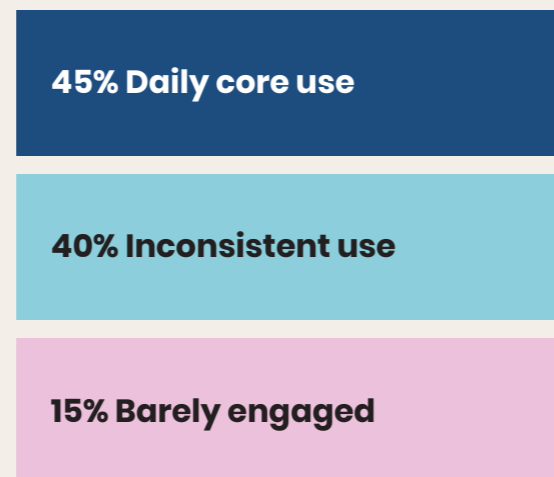
The previous chapter examined why individual capability stalls. This one shows what happens when it stalls unevenly. Within a single agency, 45% of staff use AI daily while 40% dip in and out – meaning most agencies have Stage 1 and Stage 2 operating side by side under the same roof.

The confidence gap explained why people plateau. This chapter is about what happens when they plateau unevenly. When there are no shared frameworks or common training baseline, people develop at their own pace – and the gap inside a single agency becomes wider than the gap between one agency and another. The result is a workforce operating at two distinct speeds inside the same business.

Our data shows that within a single agency, 45% are using AI daily as a core part of how they work, while 40% dip in and out without consistency. The remaining 15% barely engage at all. In many cases, the internal divide is wider than the difference between

one agency and another. AI requires frequent engagement. The more individuals use it, the better they understand how to collaborate with it effectively.

Average AI use within a single agency



Mapped onto the Maturity Model, the problem is obvious. Daily users have moved into Stage 2 (Adoption) and inconsistent users are still circling Stage 1 (Experimentation). Without structure, standardising processes and maintaining consistent quality becomes difficult.

CULTURAL RISK

The cultural risk is just as real. The AI adopters may feel frustrated that the organisation isn't keeping pace with them. Those not engaging with AI as often may feel left behind. As the gap grows, so does the barrier to entry, making them less motivated to start. Without visibility into how tools are actually being used, you can't make informed decisions about where to invest in training.

The agencies closing this gap are treating it as an organisational challenge – and you can too: mapping where people actually are, addressing the specific barriers each group faces, and creating the conditions for the middle group to move forward. Enthusiasm at the top is not enough on its own.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

DESIGN INTERVENTIONS FOR THE MIDDLE, NOT THE EDGES.

The 40% using AI inconsistently are the group that will determine whether your agency advances. Focusing on this segment is where the greatest leverage lies. They need practical, role-specific guidance that connects AI to the work they are already doing, delivered in a way that respects their time pressures. A strategist needs to see how AI improves their research process. A creative needs to see how it accelerates concepting. The closer the guidance is to their actual work, the more likely it is to stick. Start by pairing each inconsistent user with a daily user in their department for a two-week buddy system. Set a single, specific task – not ‘use more AI’ but ‘build one repeatable workflow for your most repetitive weekly task.’ The barrier for the middle group is usually a clear first step.

MAKE ADOPTION VISIBLE AT THE LEADERSHIP LEVEL

Fragmentation tends to persist because leadership lacks the data to act on it. When AI usage is informal and ungoverned, as we have found it is in over half of agencies right now, there is no organisational picture of who is using what, or how. Moving to team-level subscriptions (rather than individual accounts) gives leadership a single dashboard showing which tools are being used, by whom, and how often. The agencies closing the gap fastest go further, treating AI adoption as a standing item in leadership meetings, departmental reviews, and performance conversations. That visibility becomes the basis for understanding where the organisation actually sits on the Maturity Model and where targeted support is needed most.

**CLIENT STORY:
MARK-MAKING***

mark-making* is a B2B brand strategy and creative agency, helping organisations define their position and build memorable identities. With a small, close-knit team, the priority was to build genuine AI literacy across the business and get everyone aligned on what AI could do for them.

Through the Spark Accelerator programme, the team developed a shared language around AI that allowed them to feel more confident

using it. A key shift was learning that AI works best as a collaborator, one that needs proper context and briefing to deliver useful output. They put that knowledge to work in strategic planning and research, improving the quality of their services. To sustain that learning, mark-making* introduced an internal training programme dedicated to experimental challenges, with the goal of embedding AI fully into everyday workflows.

“Strategic thinking improved so we can explore more options faster. It helps us ask better questions, not just deliver better answers.”

Steve Turner, Co-Founder and Managing Director, mark-making*

CREATIVE VALUE AND COMMERCIAL SHIFT

AI MATURITY: COMMERCIAL SHIFT

	▼ majority	▼ top performers	▼ top performers
STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
AI used to speed up existing deliverables	AI integrated into production; efficiency gains visible	AI reshapes service offering; pricing begins to shift	AI is a competitive differentiator; new revenue models built around it

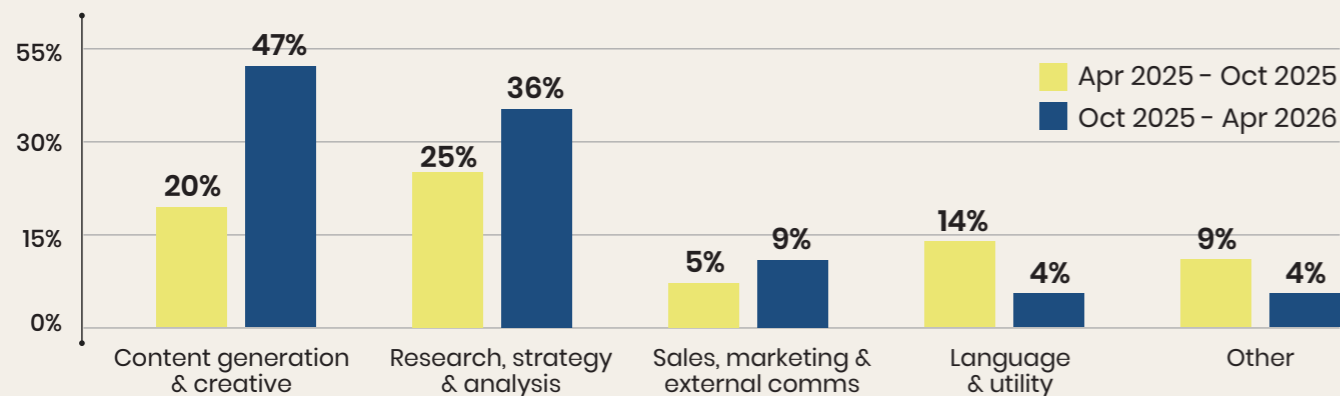
AI use in content and creative generation has surged from 20% to 47% in six months, signalling a move from Stage 1 into Stage 2 for most agencies. But the commercial opportunity – and the market split now emerging – belongs to those pushing into Stage 3 and beyond.

Alongside the rise in staff confidence, a further 5% of team members now report that AI helps them innovate. This signals that creatives are increasingly seeing these tools as partners in the process. When teams move beyond the fear of displacement, they start to explore the true potential of AI.

THE SHIFT TOWARDS HIGH-VALUE WORKFLOWS

AI use in content and creative generation rose from 20% to 47% in six months. That is more than a usage spike – it reflects AI becoming part of the creative process itself. Research, strategy, and analysis has grown from 25% to 36%, pointing to a parallel shift toward more substantial, insight-led work.

The six month Shift: Evolution of Agency Tasks



BREAKING THE HOURLY MODEL

The shift in pricing model we discussed in our last report remains a defining trend. Agencies are now adopting impact based pricing models. This means aligning your fees directly with client outcomes and measurable growth. Agencies should charge for what the idea makes possible, not how long it took to produce.

Each archetype represents a deliberate choice about where an agency competes, with AI proficiency built around that positioning. For agencies unsure which category they belong in, that is the first strategic conversation worth having.

The starting point is understanding what clients are actually buying when they award work. If it is speed and

scale, the agency is building a volume model, and AI should be optimising the production engine. If it is thinking and IP, the agency is building for innovation, and AI should be creating capabilities competitors cannot replicate. If it is craft and human judgement, the agency is a craft specialist, and AI investment should protect the time and space people need to do that work brilliantly.

There's no wrong answer. But there is a wrong approach: trying to be all three at once. The agencies spreading AI investment across everything it can theoretically do, rather than concentrating it on what makes them genuinely distinctive, are the ones most vulnerable to being squeezed from both sides.

THE FOUR AGENCY AI ARCHETYPES

In our work with 70+ agencies, we noticed the diverse perspectives of agency leaders on the shift towards AI adoption.

An anthropologist on our team synthesised the trends we were seeing, and mapped them against the specific needs, wants, and fears

of our client base.

Because we find that real transformation starts by diagnosing your specific commercial pressures and the cultural barriers unique to your business model. We identified four agency AI archetypes.

Which one is steering your agency?

You might see yourself in all of them, but you'll have a dominant trait. And that trait shapes everything: your priorities, your transformation approach, your pricing – ultimately what success looks like.



01. THE CREATIVE DIFFERENTIATOR

You protect the craft. Your business model relies on bespoke “thinking” and high-value judgment.

The Focus: Using AI to handle the “blank page” delay and administrative drudgery.

The Methodology: Reclaiming time to cover more high-level creative territories and testing more “what if” scenarios.

The Fear: Losing the unique creative DNA or compromising data security.



02. THE OPERATIONAL REALIST

You are fixing the plumbing. You view AI as a “superior assistant” to handle the immediate mechanics of the business.

The Focus: Standardising the “messy middle” – SOPs and clear workflow integration.

The Methodology: Solving specific bottlenecks to move from “experimenting” to “adopting.”

The Fear: The tension between automating for survival and breaking your internal culture.



03. THE SYSTEMS ARCHITECT

You are rewriting the business model. You recognize that the era of selling billable hours is ending.

The Focus: Building proprietary AI tools and IP to transition from service provider to technology company.

The Methodology: Moving from billing for “how long it took” to selling “what it achieved”.

The Fear: The radical structural shift required to bring a legacy workforce along.



04. THE PERFORMANCE ENGINE

You value high-volume, 24/7 production. AI is your engine for global scale and compliance.

The Focus: Treating AI as a commercial necessity to manage global content at speed.

The Methodology: Using objective performance metrics to drive margin resilience and operational leverage.

The Fear: A workforce that resists a shift prioritising speed and volume over traditional roles.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

START WITH THE OPERATIONAL, THEN BUILD UPWARDS.

Progress begins with applying AI to high-friction, low-stakes administrative tasks. This may be structuring messy briefs or producing first-draft meeting summaries. The work itself may be unremarkable, but the process of doing it builds the technical confidence and workflow-design thinking that more complex, high-value creative tools require. Moving directly to custom AI products without this operational foundation risk producing impressive prototypes that fail to achieve meaningful adoption.

MAP THE WORK ACROSS THREE HORIZONS

Agencies creating lasting advantages are deliberate about where to focus their AI application. At Spark, we use our AI Strategy Canvas approach to map agency functions across three categories:

- **Adoption** (enhancing human work – the baseline)
- **Automation** (machines handling tasks – where commoditisation risk lives)
- **Innovation** (entirely new AI-enabled services – where premium value sits)

The canvas approach helps identify where an agency is most vulnerable to commoditisation and where the real commercial opportunity lies.

IN PRACTICE: S4 CAPITAL MONKS

S4 Capital's Monks is among the first major agency groups to move decisively away from the billable hour. In early 2026, they began transitioning to a subscription structure, giving clients ongoing access to senior talent, AI-powered workflows and institutional knowledge. The agency is targeting 25% of revenue from subscriptions by the end of 2026.

The model is built to compound. As AI systems become faster and more capable, Monks can produce greater volume within the same fee structure. The emphasis shifts from tracking time to tracking output quality, with unused capacity rolling into the following quarter rather than being written off.

For independent agencies, the Monks example is less a model to copy and more a signal of where the market is heading.

source: Digiday, February 2026

IN PRACTICE: TUNCARP

Production agency, Tuncarp, restructured their entire delivery model around AI-enabled roles, spanning strategy, operations, creative and engineering. They create high-end video work that previously cost £20k in traditional production but now costs around £5k to deliver. By pricing per asset rather than by the hour, they are maintaining margins of 70 to 80%.

Publicis subsequently appointed them as their dedicated AI content studio, serving as a clear signal that boutique specialists with the right capability can win work directly from global networks.

“You need people who are willing to go down rabbit holes. Curiosity is the real skill now.”

Chris Murphy, MD and Founder, Tuncarp

The Tuncarp example demonstrates what becomes possible when AI investment is concentrated on a specific, clearly defined positioning.

THE SUSTAINABILITY QUESTION

AI MATURITY: APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY

STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION	STAGE 2 ADOPTION	STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION	STAGE 4 INNOVATION
Environmental anxiety present but unaddressed by leadership	Evidence - based understanding of AI's footprint shared across the team	Sustainable AI behaviours actively practised across the team	Proactively embedded in AI strategy, continuously reviewed, and confident client conversations

13% of staff raised environmental concerns unprompted in our surveys. Most agencies haven't addressed this at all, placing them at Stage 1. The evidence shows that individual AI usage has a negligible footprint - but leadership silence is turning a manageable concern into an adoption barrier.

13% of respondents raised environmental concerns about AI unprompted - asking about energy consumption, water usage, data centre footprints, and whether using AI aligns with their company's sustainability values. That number will grow. The fact that people are asking these questions is a sign of maturity, not resistance. The job for agency leaders is to meet that concern with evidence and channel it productively.

The evidence tells a nuanced story. We published a (free) detailed analysis of this topic in 2025. The findings were: individual AI usage has a negligible environmental footprint compared to most other things your agency does.

8 prompts a day for an entire year uses the same energy as running a space heater for two hours total. 50 ChatGPT queries a day, for the rest of one's life, emit less CO2 than an hour-long commercial flight. At this scale, individual AI usage is not where the environmental story lives.

The real concern sits at the infrastructure level. Consumer chatbots account for around 3% of AI's total energy consumption. The remaining 97% is embedded inside platforms and services we all use every day - digital advertising, streaming services, social media, SaaS platforms, fraud detection, content personalisation. These systems have been running long before generative AI entered the conversation.

This is a picture that could shift quickly. The pace of model development, the scale of data centre construction, and the growing energy demands of training next-generation AI systems mean the environmental footprint of AI is a moving target. What's negligible at

an individual level today may not stay that way as usage scales across entire organisations and industries. Treat the current evidence as reassuring but not permanent - and keep sustainability on the agenda as the technology evolves.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

LEAD WITH EVIDENCE, NOT AVOIDANCE

When 13% of your staff are raising concerns unprompted, the question is already in the room. If you don't address it, people will fill the gap with whatever they've read in the headlines. Share the evidence proactively - an internal briefing based on today's data takes 30 minutes to prepare and removes a real barrier to adoption.

APPLY THE "THINK, PROMPT, THINK" DISCIPLINE

Don't jump to AI before doing your own thinking. Before opening a model, establish a clear intention. Prompt to expand or test that thinking. Then think again before using the output. This produces higher-quality outputs and means fewer wasted prompts, less unnecessary compute, and a lighter environmental footprint. This has as a dual benefit: sharper thinking and lower environmental impact.

For the full analysis, see [Spark AI's The Environmental Impact of AI report \(2025\)](#)



PART 2:
MOVING FORWARD
WITH AI IN YOUR AGENCY





WHAT MOVING FORWARD ACTUALLY LOOKS LIKE

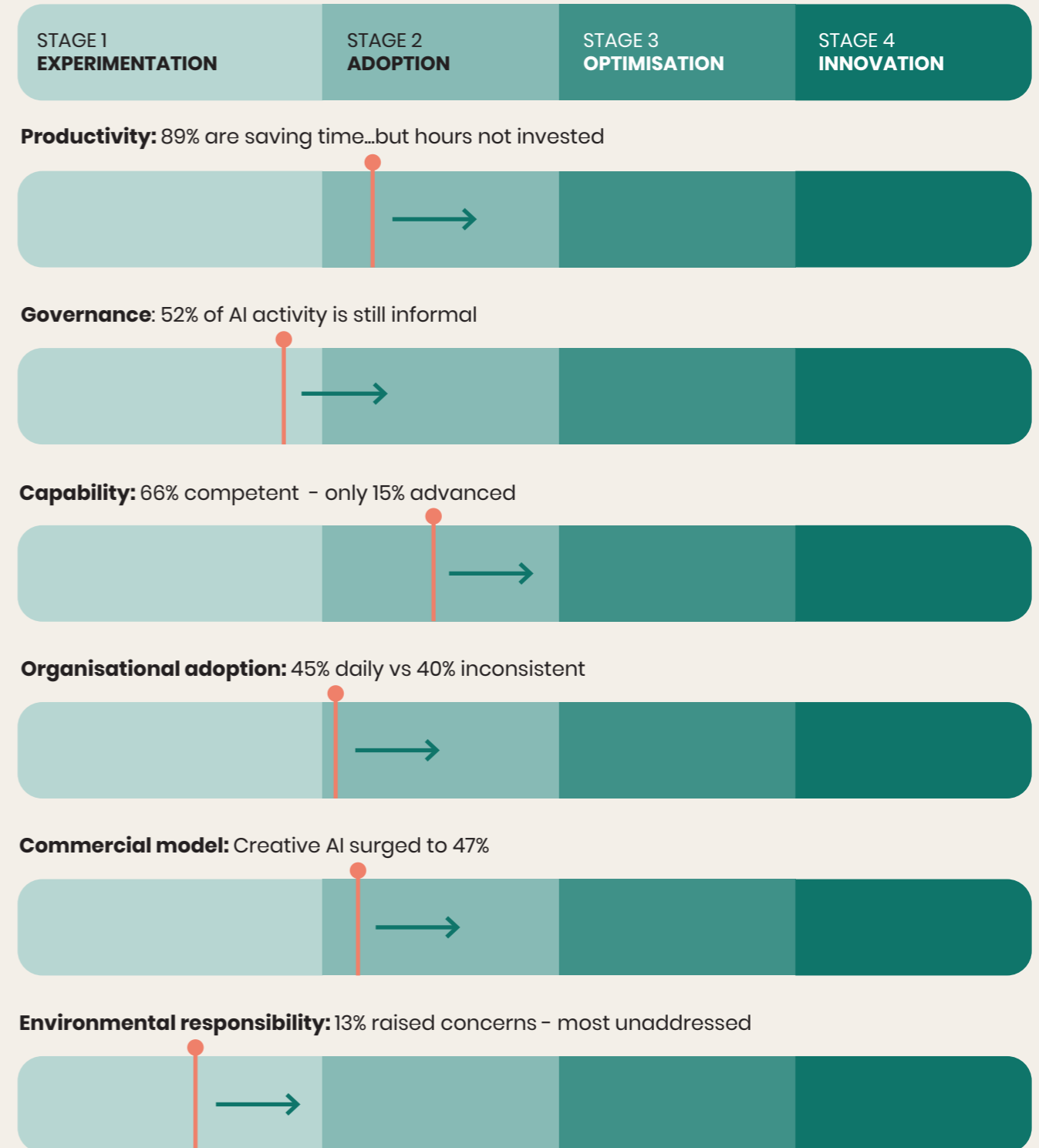
Part 1 of this report mapped six dimensions of AI adoption across UK agencies. The picture is consistent: real progress on activity, but a structural gap between what people are doing with AI and what agencies are building from it.

The graphic opposite brings that picture together in one view. It shows where most agencies sit today across each dimension, and the direction of travel needed to move from activity to advantage.

WHERE AGENCIES SIT TODAY

Average AI maturity position across six dimensions, based on Spring 2026 data

Where most agencies sit today → Direction of travel needed



Productivity: 89% are saving time...but hours not invested

Governance: 52% of AI activity is still informal

Capability: 66% competent - only 15% advanced

Organisational adoption: 45% daily vs 40% inconsistent

Commercial model: Creative AI surged to 47%

Environmental responsibility: 13% raised concerns - most unaddressed

90-DAY PLAN FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO STRUCTURE

Most agencies reading this aren't starting from scratch. Your team are already using AI – the data in this report makes that clear. The problem is that it's happening unevenly, informally, and without the structures that turn individual activity into organisational capability. This 90-day plan is about bringing order to what's already happening and building the foundations to go further.

It's built around three things we see missing in almost every agency we work with:

1. Clear ownership
2. A consistent rhythm for sharing what works
3. A system for capturing learnings before they disappear

The first three weeks consolidate your team at Stage 2 of AI Maturity (Adoption) – establishing the shared foundations that allow everyone to move forward together. The final weeks create the conditions for Stage 3 (Optimisation), where AI becomes a shared organisational practice rather than a collection of individual habits. This isn't a strategy document that sits in a drawer. Each phase has a defined output and a clear marker of progress.

WEEKS 1–3: SET THE RAILS

Define your goal. Establish what AI is for in your agency. Is it efficiency, new services, better work? Write it down in a single sentence and share it with your team.

Build foundational fluency. Invest in agency-specific AI training that gives people the skills to build AI Assistants supporting real work.

Assign ownership. Appoint one AI Lead with protected time and genuine authority. Without a named individual driving progress, momentum tends to stall.

Choose three initiatives. Identify familiar workflows where AI could make a measurable difference, one each for client services, strategy, and creative. Map each step by step. Identify where AI Assistants can support specific tasks and define what success looks like: faster turnaround or greater consistency in output quality.

WEEKS 4–6: BUILD YOUR RHYTHM

Create a sharing ritual: Establish a recurring slot for learning, such as a 10-minute segment in the Monday meeting or a dedicated Slack channel. Share and test out a clever prompt technique, a new feature someone's discovered, or an unexpected application that saved hours. Consistent repetition signals that learning is a cultural expectation.

Build and test: Develop one AI Assistant for each of your three workflows. Assign each build to someone in the relevant team. If they build it, they own it and they'll use it. Get them to present their AI Assistant at the next team meeting.

WEEKS 7–9: SCALE WHAT WORKS

Turn experiments into SOPs. A proven workflow is a template for change. Document your successful processes in enough detail that a new joiner could follow them on day one.

Prepare your client story. Shape how your agency talks to clients about AI as a capability that improves the quality of work. Client services teams should be able to answer the question "How are you using AI?" with clarity and confidence.

Review your governance. Audit AI policies and review contracts with clients and partners. Confirm compliance questions can be answered and verify that AI tools are on enterprise-grade plans. A one-page Responsible AI statement, suitable for website and proposals, is worth preparing at this stage.

WEEKS 10–12: COMMERCIALISE

Update your proposals. Lead with how you solve your client's business problem. Show your AI edge: additional creative routes, deeper research, faster iteration. That is the differentiator worth communicating.

Tier your value. Consider how AI changes your offer, whether that means faster delivery, more detailed research, or systems that generate outputs rather than individual deliverables. Outcome-based or subscription pricing may suit certain types of work.

Publish your approach. A Responsible AI page on your website, outlining how you use AI, what guardrails are in place, and why it improves your work, builds measurable client confidence. Agencies that discuss their AI approach openly report significantly stronger client trust.

Ninety days is enough time to move from fragmented experimentation to a functioning, governed AI capability. What comes after is just as important. The agencies making the most progress treat AI development as an ongoing discipline, building on what works and adjusting as the tools and work continue to evolve.



SEVEN AI USE CASES AGENCIES ARE DEPLOYING NOW

Where early AI adoption was characterised by isolated tool use, we now see the deliberate integration of AI into day-to-day agency processes.

This chapter sets out seven use cases we are seeing agencies deploy in practice, each with an entry point for immediate implementation and a more advanced configuration for those at a later stage of maturity.

1. THE GROWTH DIRECTOR: PUNCHING ABOVE YOUR WEIGHT

Business development demands deep market analysis, which can be very time consuming. Progressive agencies are addressing this by deploying AI agents, often called “Growth Directors”. They are trained to analyse an Ideal Customer Profile, identify prospects, and source the right contacts for outreach. At Spark, we apply this to our sales cycle. We use all the questions that come up in our sales calls to power a Gem that assists with web copy, brochures, proposal emails, and it even supports the team live during a pitch. Post call, we link our Gem to the transcript to generate first draft emails in our specific brand voice. It is simple, but it guarantees instant follow ups and prevents any detail from being overlooked.



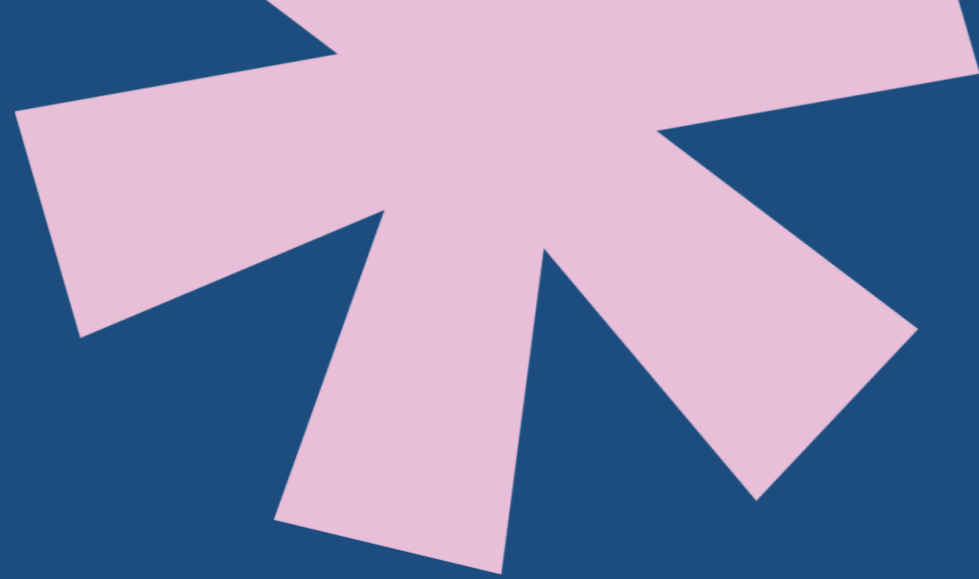
Why it matters for your business

model: The Growth Director assistant example is a revenue play and the sales call support standardises team wide consistency.

Start here: Build a custom GPT (in ChatGPT) or Gem (in Gemini) or a Project (in Copilot or Claude). The name varies by platform, but the function is the same. Feed it your ICP data, past winning proposals and brand voice guidelines. In the instructions, consider the job you want the assistant to do and how you want the outputs to look. Use it to draft personalised outreach and pressure-test your messaging before it goes out.

Scale to this:

Use Copilot Studio or Google Workspace Studio to automate pre-meeting briefings. Set it to look in your calendar for sales meetings, and 24 hours before, have it identify the domain name of the external people attending the meeting. Then, have an agent or Gem look up their website and summarise their company and market positioning, gather trends in their industry, create a briefing for the meeting, and post it to your email or to your Teams or Google Chat.



2. THE VIRTUAL STAKEHOLDER: STRESS-TESTING BEFORE IT LEAVES THE BUILDING

Creative work can fail to land for reasons unrelated to its quality. It might be due to a priority buried in a quarterly report, a procurement manager's KPIs that never surfaced in the brief, or a strategic shift the account team missed. Agencies are mitigating the risk by building synthetic personas to stress-test work before it leaves the building.

The configurations vary by need. Some agencies use an "Executive Creative Director" persona, informed by brand constraints and previous call transcripts, to identify conceptual weaknesses early in the development process. Others build "Client Sounding Boards" by loading a client's website, stated values and strategic documents into a persona designed to simulate their perspective.

In one case, a synthetic persona successfully identified a shift in client strategy from a previous workshop that the human team had overlooked, helping a presentation land where otherwise it would have missed.

Similarly, a business development lead used a persona to refine a cold outreach. The AI told him his note was "too focussed on culture" rather than sales metrics. He rewrote it, and it landed.

Why it matters for your business model: Fewer revisions, better pitching, better client confidence.

Start here: Build a persona simulator for your most critical stakeholders. They can be individual clients, or archetypes like a CFO or CMO. Ground the persona by uploading relevant documentations: correspondence, project briefs, annual reports and public statements. Ask it to critique your proposals and identify what resonates and what will frustrate.

Scale to this: Build a panel of synthetic stakeholders that review work in sequence. For example, have a procurement persona, a sustainability lead, a CMO, and an end-consumer all reviewing the same brief. Link them together using a simple workflow in Google Workspace Studio or Copilot Studio, and post the feedback as an email or chat in Teams. Make it a routine step before every deliverable.

3. THE BRAND BRAIN: INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY ON DEMAND

Onboarding a new creative to an account takes weeks. Agencies are compressing that timeline by moving from static file archives to interactive "Brand Brains". They are dedicated client workspaces loaded with briefs, SOWs, research, meeting notes and call transcripts. Teams can use them to onboard new members quickly and also generate ideas that are grounded in the brand from the outset.

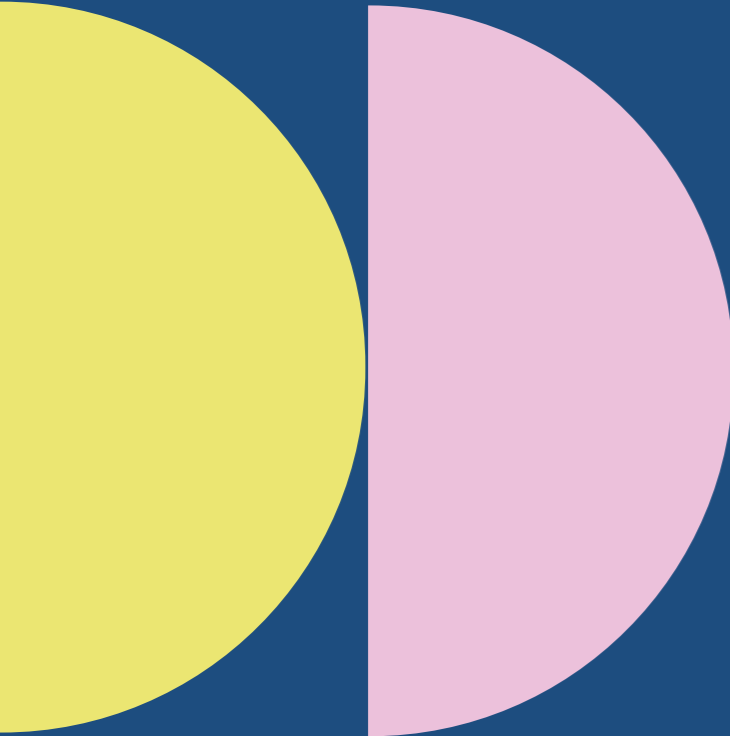
A related application is the TOV coach. A copywriter pastes a draft and receives a critique against brand guidelines, with an explanation of why something is off-brand and how to improve it. This keeps human judgement in the process while accelerating the learning curve for junior writers.

Many agencies now set up a NotebookLM for every client project, keeping teams aligned asynchronously alongside dedicated Gems loaded with strategy, messaging and positioning.

Why it matters for your business model: This reduces dependency on senior memory holders and makes brand stewardship tangible. It is a scaling and margin lever.

Start here: Create a project workspace for one key client. Google NotebookLM or Microsoft Notebook are perfect for this as they can handle hundreds of documents, and ground their answers only in the data you've given them. Use it to test your work, but also to onboard new staff: "Read these documents and explain the brand's core values to me as if I were a designer joining the account today."

Scale to this: Build your brand brain into your content production workflow. When a creative submits a draft, it's automatically checked against brand guidelines, with feedback returned before a human reviewer ever sees it. Integrate it with your DAM (digital asset management) so it can reference approved assets and past work when generating new concepts.



4. HYPER-SPEED ADMIN

Fee-earning talent spends too much time on non-billable work. Proposals, pitches, case studies and awards entries are significant drains on capacity. Agencies are converting these into structured AI workflows. For awards, feeding an AI the judging criteria, previous winning examples and a summary of the work produces a strong first draft in a fraction of the time.

Why it matters for your business model: More output with the same team, higher win rates, margin protection.

Start here: Assemble templates for your common outputs: pitches, proposals and case studies. Next, pull out five examples of each that you think represent your best work. build a GPT or a Gem trained on those examples that helps you turn your notes into a draft or critique the draft you've made yourself.

Scale to this: Build an end-to-end awards workflow. When a project is marked complete in your PM tool, trigger an automation that pulls the brief, results data, and team credits, then drafts submissions against the specific criteria of different awards.

5. THE BRIEF INTERROGATOR: PERFECTING THE INPUT

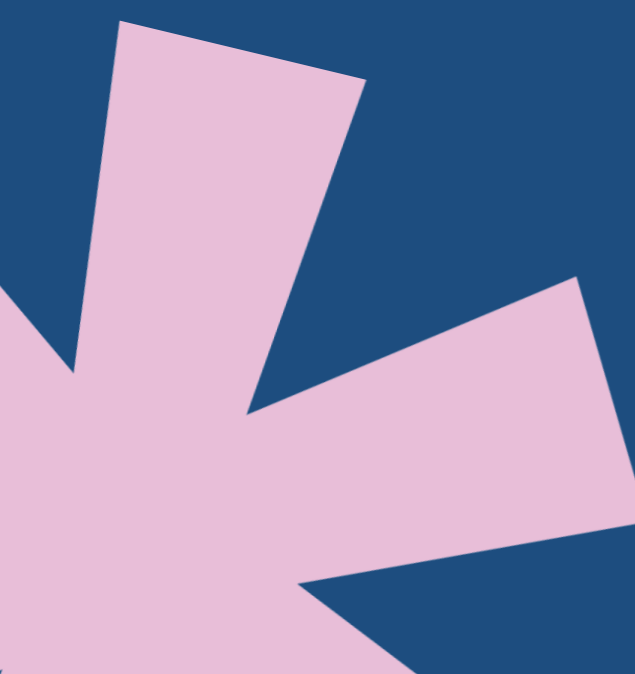
Vague briefs are expensive. They waste creative time, require rounds of revisions and eroded margins. Agencies using AI as a gatekeeper at the brief stage are reclaiming that cost.

When a brief arrives by email, AI immediately critiques it and drafts a reply requesting clarification on missing elements – budget, timeline, target audience, and anything else your briefing template requires. A related application is pre-call preparation: AI reads the briefing document and generates a targeted set of questions for the kickoff call, delivered automatically to the team in advance.

Why it matters for your business model: Better inputs mean fewer revisions, clearer scope, and protected margins.

Start here: Create a “Brief Interrogator” GPT loaded with your standard briefing template. Give it a prompt to identify any missing information, make sure that you're thinking one step ahead, and draft a polite email asking for these specific details.

Scale to this: Connect your email to a Google Workspace Studio or Microsoft Copilot Studio automation. When a brief arrives, AI parses it against your template, scores its completeness, and either routes it to the account team (if complete) or automatically sends a clarification request back to the client. Write a row into your new biz opportunities sheet and log everything to your PM tool so nothing falls through the gaps.



6. HR AND CULTURE: THE SAFE SPACE KNOWLEDGE BASE

People are often afraid to ask “stupid” questions or sensitive HR queries (maternity leave policies, for example), creating friction and anxiety. Agencies are creating simple HR assistants loaded with employee handbooks and benefits packages, allowing staff to ask sensitive questions privately.

Why it matters for your business

model: An AI HR tool removes the social friction around sensitive queries, meaning staff get accurate answers faster and managers spend less time fielding routine policy questions.

Start here: Upload your Employee Handbook and policy documents to a secure, enterprise-grade AI instance. Instruct it: “You are a helpful HR assistant. Answer queries based ONLY on the uploaded documents.”

Scale to this: Deploy an internal chatbot via Slack or Teams that staff can query anonymously. Connect it to your HRIS so it can answer personalised questions such as remaining holiday entitlement or pension contributions.

7. ASSET INTELLIGENCE: FINDING THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK

Agencies accumulate vast archives of work. Retrieving specific assets from those archives is time-consuming when it depends on rigid file-naming conventions and manual search. Natural language search changes that entirely. Teams can query for visual concepts, such as “logo with sans-serif text” or “images of beer bottles”, and surface relevant assets immediately.

The same principle applies to operational history. By analysing historical project data from platforms like Synergist or Float, agencies are identifying the specific variables that cause projects to exceed budget or timeline. Predictive scoping improves quoting accuracy and protects profit margins.

Why it matters for your business

model: Faster retrieval, better quoting, reduced waste.

Start here: Export your project history to a CSV and upload it to an LLM. Ask it which client accounts have the lowest profit margin and which project types run over budget most often. In ChatGPT, enable Agent mode for best results.

Scale to this: Implement an AI-enabled DAM with visual search and auto-tagging. Connect it to your PM and finance tools so you can query across systems. Use the patterns to inform pricing and resourcing decisions.

Start where you are. Pick one strategy, try the entry point tomorrow, then scale when you're ready.



THE AGENCY OF THE FUTURE

This report has tracked a sector in paradox. Confidence is high. Capability is uneven. Environmental anxieties are rising. Pricing models are shifting. What connects all of this is simpler than it sounds: the agencies moving forward have stopped treating AI as a problem to solve and started treating it as a practice to develop. The commercial stakes are real. The agencies embedding AI as an organisational capability are winning new clients, keeping existing ones, and building teams that want to stay.

THE MARKET IS REORGANISING

The market is not waiting for agencies to catch up. The Cactus 2025 M&A report included operational AI readiness as a valuation metric. BDO has stated publicly that AI maturity is becoming a market differentiator. Buyers are looking for systematised IP, documented governance, and evidence that AI capability sits with the agency rather than with individuals who could leave.

The financial data supports this.

The Wow Company's 2026 Benchpress survey

– the UK's largest agency benchmarking study – revealed that agencies embedding AI in their client delivery and operations grew faster than those using it only in sales and marketing. In a year where growth was hard to come by, the agencies investing in how they deliver work, rather than only in how they win it, were the ones pulling ahead.

WHAT THE NETWORKS ARE BUILDING

For context on the scale of investment reshaping the competitive landscape:

- WPP is spending £300 million annually on AI, with 27,000 monthly users on its Open platform and custom “Brains” fine-tuned on client data across brand strategy, audience insight, and media planning.
- Publicis has invested €300 million, building its agentic AI platform in partnership with NVIDIA.
- S4 Capital's Monks reports 50% reductions in delivery hours through its Monks.Flow agent ecosystem.

These are beyond just experiments, now infrastructure investments designed to lock in competitive advantage.

But scale cuts both ways. The networks are investing hundreds of millions into platforms that still have to serve thousands of people across dozens of markets. Independent agencies don't have that budget – but they don't have that complexity either.

A 30-person agency can move from idea to implementation in weeks rather than quarters. It can build proprietary

AI capability tightly around its distinctive positioning in ways a global network structurally cannot. And it owns the client relationship at a depth that a network sub-brand rarely matches. The agencies in this report that are genuinely pulling ahead – Tuncarp winning Publicis's AI content studio brief, Not Actual Size moving upstream into strategy, mark-making* building role-specific workflows across a team of 12 – are all independents. That's not a coincidence. It's the advantage.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT?

The agencies that will define the next era of creative work share a set of characteristics – and this report has given you the tools to build every one of them.

They ringfence recovered time for strategic investment. Their governance frameworks enable innovation rather than restrict it. They have moved their teams beyond basic prompting and are

evolving their commercial models away from the billable hour.

None of this requires a multi-million pound budget. It requires leadership clarity about where the agency is heading, structural commitment to getting there, and the discipline to focus AI investment on what makes the agency genuinely distinctive.



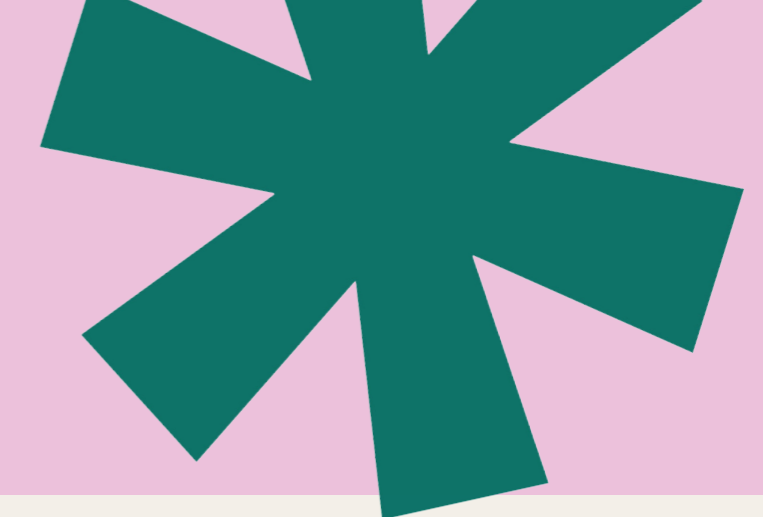
“Working with Spark has transformed how our team works. We're able to visualise ideas faster, experiment more freely, and present richer concepts to clients much earlier in the process.”

Layla Holland, Event Concept



YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE. HERE'S HOW TO MOVE.

This report is built around the Spark AI Maturity Model™ – and by now, you'll have a good sense of where your agency sits. The next step depends on where that is.



STAGE 1 EXPERIMENTATION

STAGE 2 ADOPTION

STAGE 3 OPTIMISATION

STAGE 4 INNOVATION

AI FOUNDATIONS WORKSHOP

AI ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME

SPARK SOLUTIONS

STRATEGIC COACHING

AI FOUNDATIONS WORKSHOP

If you're at Stage 1 – Experimentation

Your team is using AI, but it's scattered. You need a shared language and a shared starting point. AI Foundations is a half-day, hands-on workshop that gets your entire team to a common level of capability – practical, role-relevant, built around real agency work. It's the fastest way to get everyone on the same page.

From £4,000+VAT.

AI ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME

If you're between Stage 1 and Stage 2 – ready to build real capability

AI is already being used across your agency. But without a clear strategy, tools multiply, quality varies, risk builds – and your team's effort doesn't lead to impact. The real challenge isn't 'adopting AI' – it's making the leap from fragmented use and siloed experimentation to organisation-wide capability.

The Spark AI Accelerator is designed to bridge that gap. It combines hands-on training for your whole team with role-specific, focussed streams for leadership, creative, client services and strategy teams, including practical workflows and live build days to embed AI in the way you operate.

From £8,000+VAT for an individual stream or from £25,000+VAT for the full programme.

SPARK SOLUTIONS

If you need something built

Custom AI tools and workflows designed for your specific positioning and delivery model. We build what your team needs, grounded in your data and your way of working, refined from working with 70+ agencies on their AI transformations.

STRATEGIC COACHING

If you want to go deeper on your own terms

Ongoing support for agency leaders who want a thinking partner as AI keeps moving. Structured check-ins, tailored to where you are and where you're heading. **Let's scope it: hello@wearespark.ai**

Spark AI works with agencies, creative teams, and brands who want to build organisation-wide AI capability and workflows that change not just how your team works – but what your organisation is capable of.

Our programmes are built on the same Maturity Model, research, and methodology that underpin this report. We've worked with over 70 agencies, from independents to global networks, and our approach is informed by real delivery, not theory.



ABOUT SPARK AI

We are a transformation partner to agencies and brands building real AI capability.

70+ agencies and creative teams transformed

#1 bestselling book: Shift – AI for Agencies by Jules Love

Teaching at Oxford University's Saïd Business School

Backed by **Innovate UK Creative Catalyst**

Both co-founders in the **BIMA 100**

National AI Awards **finalists**

The Spark Report: tracking AI adoption across the UK agency sector since 2024

We don't just train teams on tools. We build the strategy, governance, skills and tools infrastructure that turns AI from a set of individual experiments into a lasting competitive advantage. From role-specific coaching to boardroom strategy, from AI policy frameworks to proprietary AI workflows – we work alongside leadership teams to build the engine that changes what your organisation is capable of.

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