CallRail

The 2025 outlook for marketing agencies

In 2025, marketing agencies face a turning point. AI is automating tasks that once required entire teams, consumer expectations are evolving at breakneck speed, and competition is tighter than ever. It's a challenging landscape—but also one filled with immense opportunity for those ready to adapt.

To better understand the opportunities and challenges ahead, we've gathered insights from over two dozen marketing agencies on the industry's direction. Their perspectives highlight the trends, challenges, and strategies that will define success in 2025, from leveraging AI-driven tools to diversifying content strategies and building stronger client relationships.

This guide combines their expertise with actionable insights to help agencies stay competitive in a rapidly changing world. Whether you're looking to refine your approach or gain a strategic edge, this is your roadmap to thriving in 2025.

Key findings

#1 Marketing agencies are prioritizing building their businesses.

76% want to focus on business development

66% are prioritizing client retention

#2 **Agencies would like better lead intelligence data to help clients meet their 2025 goals.**
More than half would like these types of data:

79% source attribution

59% conversion funnel insights

55% repeat customer identification

#3 **Marketing agencies get most of their clients through referrals.**
They're finding new ones via:

83% Referrals

52% Social media

45% Paid search advertising

#4 **AI is a big focus for agency marketers.**

62% of agencies are planning to implement AI in 2025

#5 **The top services offered by marketing agencies focus on search.**

83% SEM/paid search advertising

76% SEO

Snapshot of agency respondents

Approximate number of employees

Of those who responded to our inquiry, 62% say their agency has fewer than 20 employees.

62% 1 - 19 employees

38% 20 - 99 employees

Number of clients serving

More than half of respondents said their agencies currently have 25-99 clients.
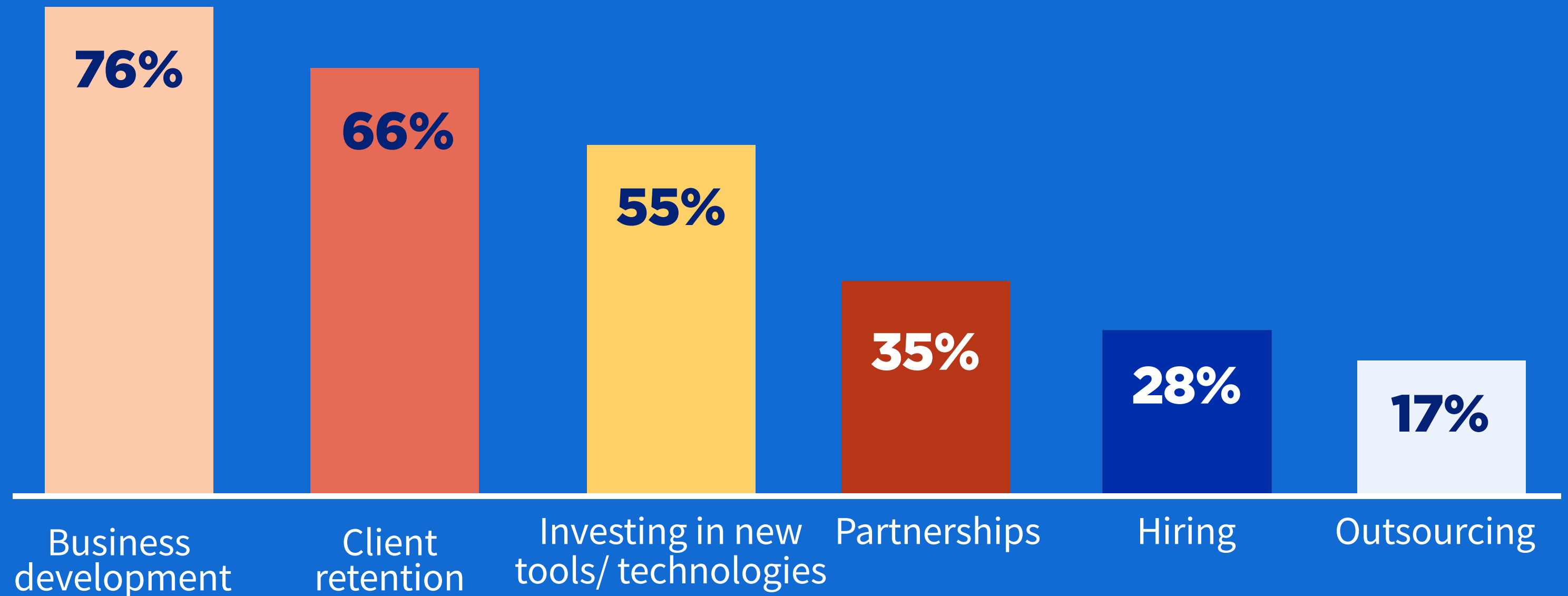
27% 1 - 24

52% 25 - 99

21% 100 +

Marketing agencies set their sights on growth for 2025

Agencies are focusing on business development in the new year (76%), as well as ways to retain clients. Client acquisition can be costly, so retention and partnerships are worthwhile investments for most agencies.

Marketing agencies also plan to invest in their own businesses in the new year, and that includes purchasing or subscribing to new tools to stay competitive (55%) and hiring (28%). These investments aim to drive efficiency and improve outcomes.

Top marketing agency priorities for 2025

Business development	Client retention	Investing in new tools/ technologies	Partnerships	Hiring	Outsourcing
76%	66%	55%	35%	28%	17%

3

Reasons agencies reported not meeting revenue goals

Of the marketing agencies that didn't meet their revenue goals in the last year, the respondents offered a variety of reasons. The key factor was the economy (44%), while a quarter cited high client turnover.

44% Economic impacts

25% High client turnover

19% High employee turnover

19% Lack of adequate budget for new tools and technology

13% Lack of ability to prove value to clients

# Agencies are working hard to find and keep clients

Agencies rely heavily on referrals to gain clients, though many are willing to pay for advertising in search and on social media. Some also look to others in their industry with whom they can partner or network at events. More than half the respondents noted that they keep those clients for three years or longer.

How agencies find new clients:

83% Referrals

52% Social media

45% Paid search advertising

31% Conferences / industry events
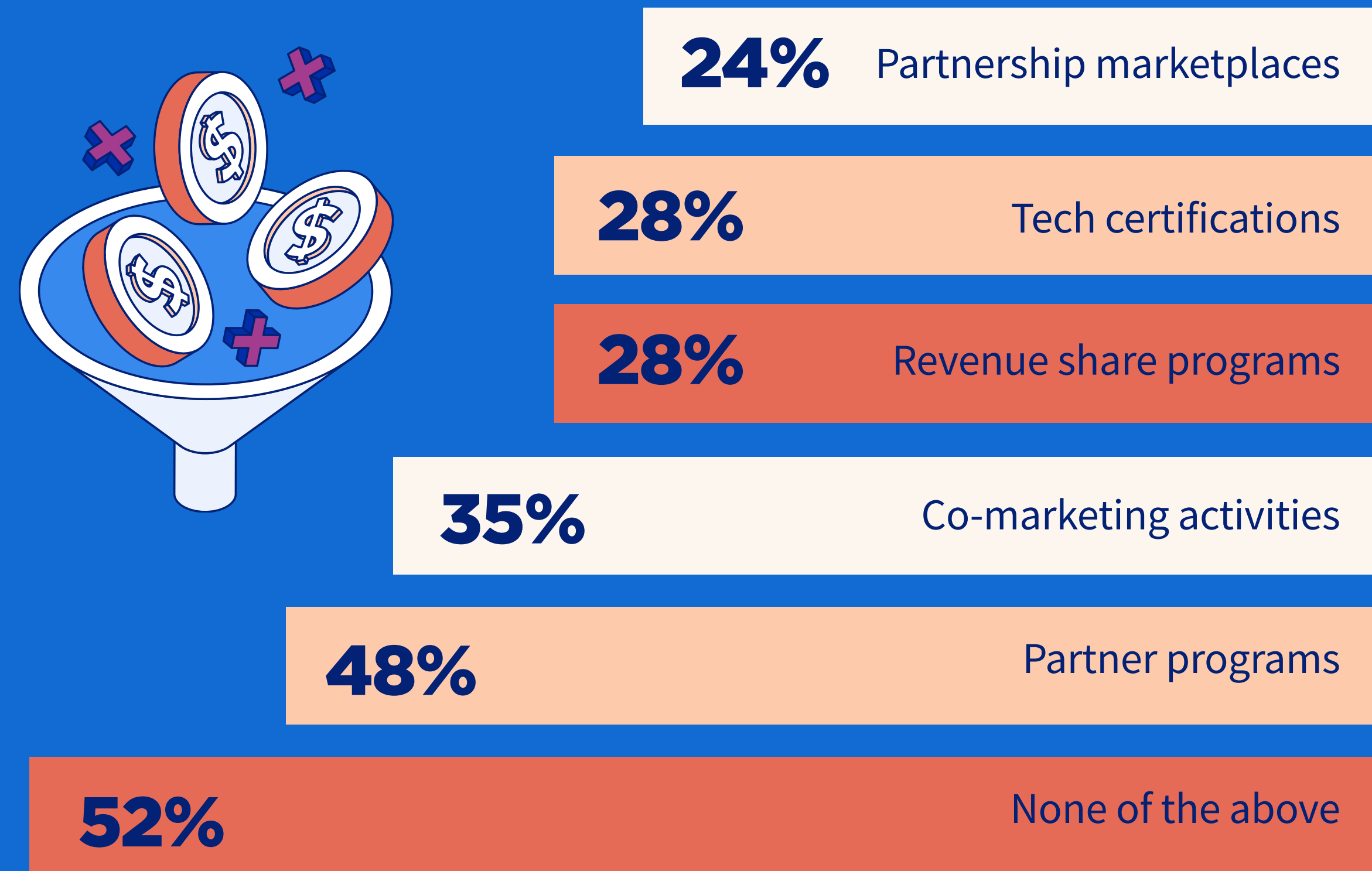
31% Tech partnerships

14% Directories

4

Average client lifespan

While 62% of agencies say their average client lifespan is 24 months and up, nearly 7% don't know how long their clients stick around.

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55%	More than 36 months
17%	12 - 24 months
14%	0 - 12 months
7%	24 - 36 months
7%	Don't know / not sure
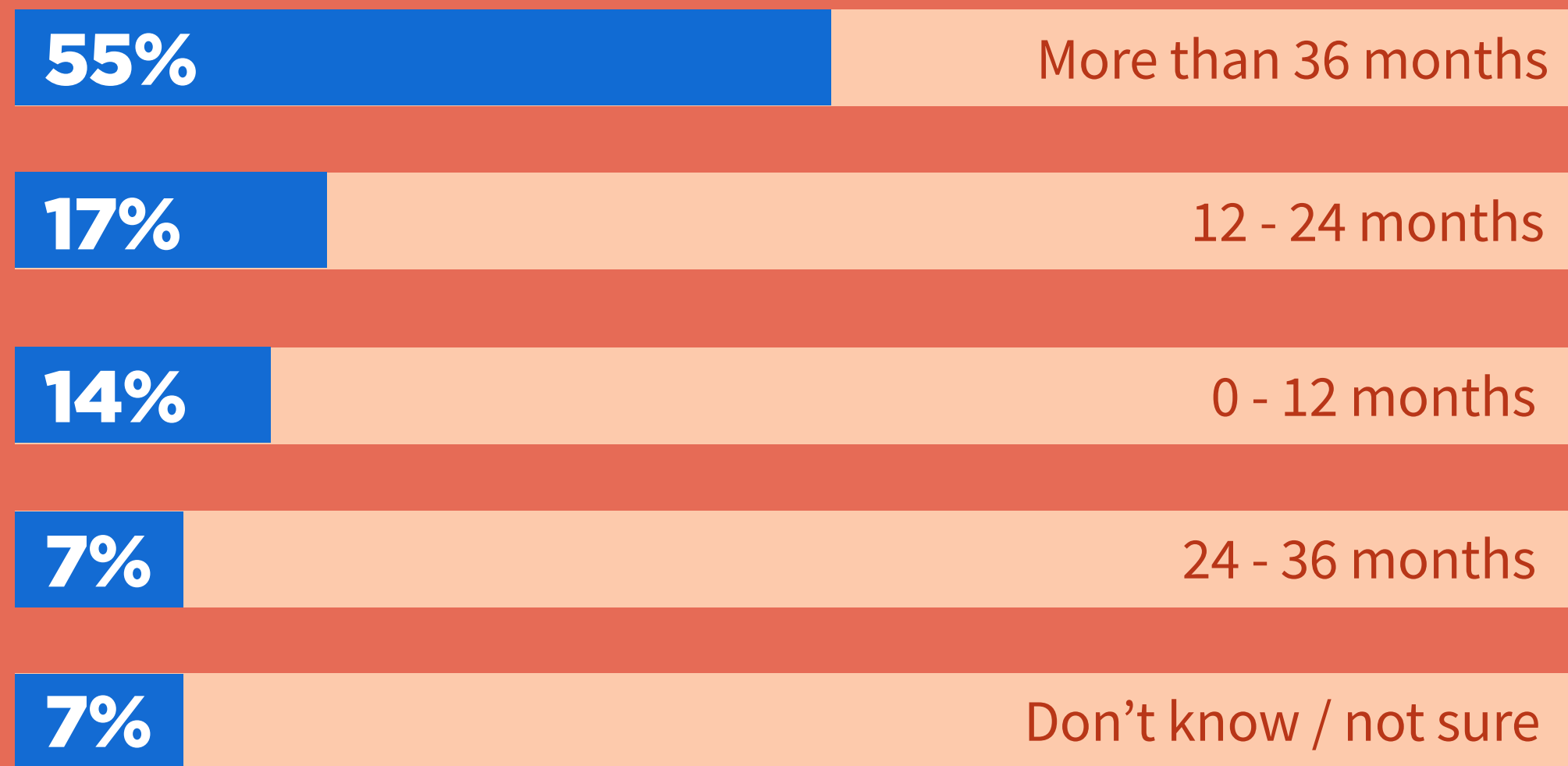
Ways agencies generate business

Gaining clients is tied closely to business generation, but there are partnerships and offerings that can increase agency income. Respondents had tried various approaches, while more than half were using none of these tactics.

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24%	Partnership marketplaces
28%	Tech certifications
28%	Revenue share programs
35%	Co-marketing activities
48%	Partner programs
52%	None of the above

# Measures agencies took to retain clients in 2024

Agencies need clients to stay in business, and since it's easier and more cost-effective to retain them than to find them, agencies put significant effort into retention over the past year. The biggest focus (more than two-thirds) of agencies was on improving relationships and communication with their current clients. Additionally, more than half said they offered new services and increased reporting.
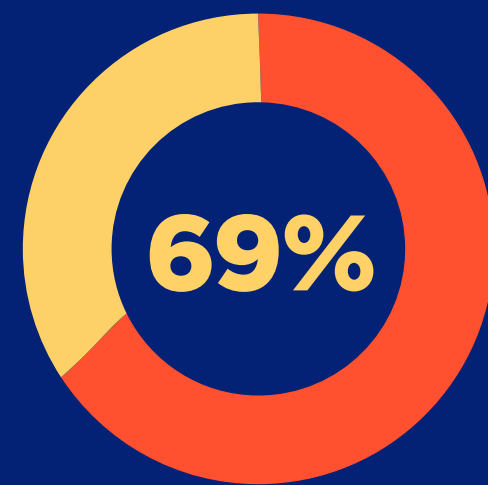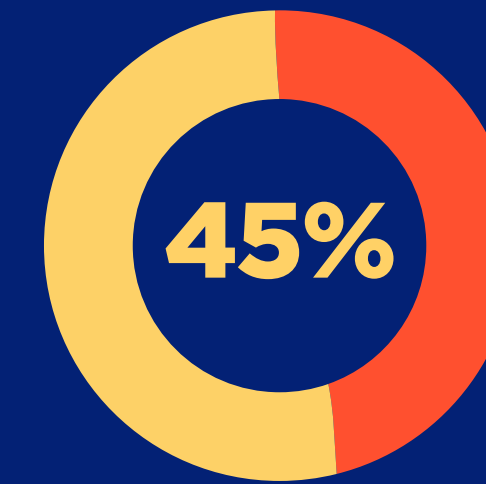
69% Increased communication/ transparency with clients
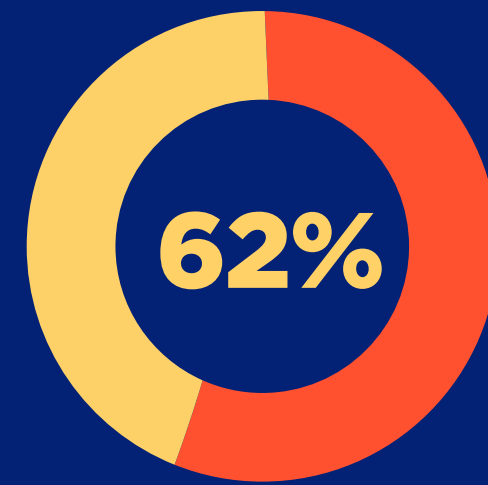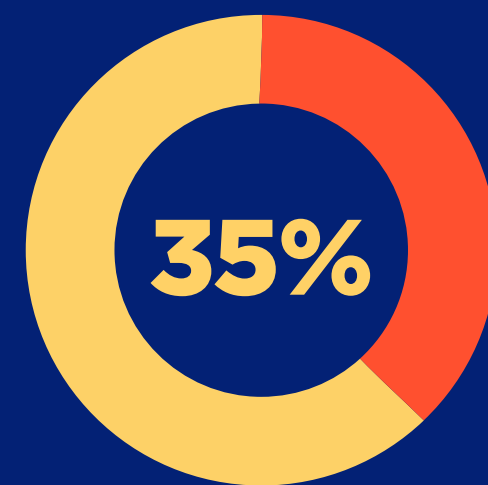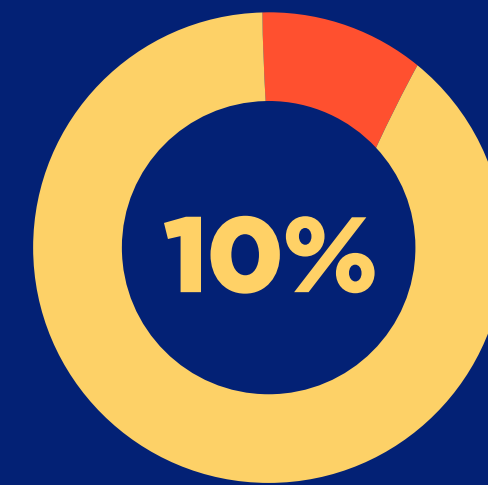
62% Added new service offerings
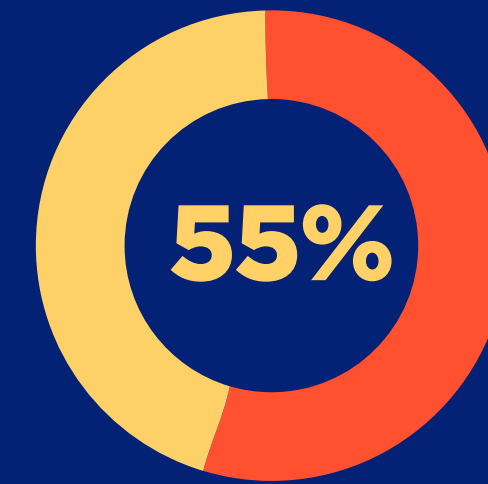
55% Increased reporting offerings

45% Adopted new metrics / reporting tools to prove ROI to clients
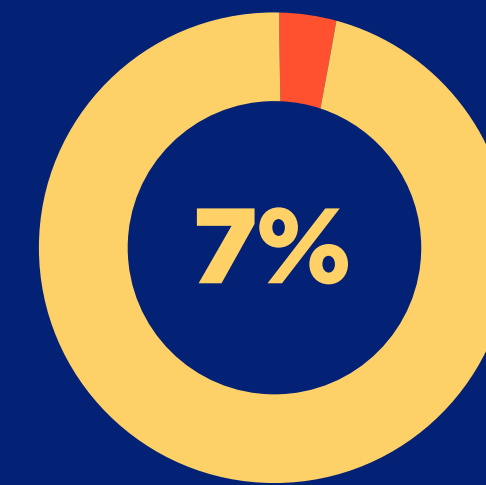
35% Increased touchpoints with clients

10% Offered discounts
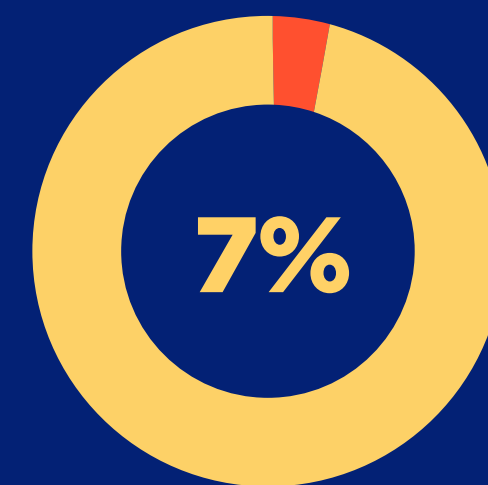
7% Added flexible payment options

7% None of the above / my company didn't take extra measures to retain clients

Tools and strategies agencies are betting on for 2025

Last year, agencies found that integration issues and budgets – both their own and clients' – held them back from investing in new tools. Economic worries and client hesitation were tied to cost concerns, which meant that getting buy-in was tough. Fortunately, marketing agencies say they and their clients are ready to add new tools and even test new tactics.

Why marketing agencies held back from adding new tools in 2024

45%	35%	24%	24%	10%	10%
Integration issues with current tools	Client budget constraints	Agency budget constraints	Staffing constraints	Client hesitation	Economic hesitation
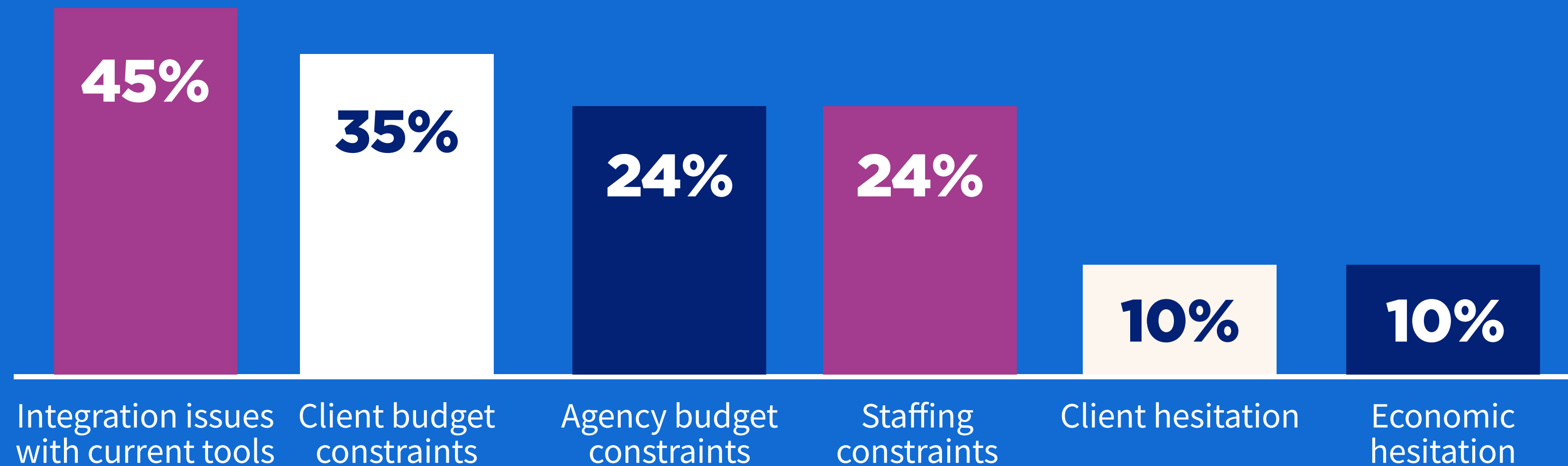
Marketing agencies are eyeing AI for 2025, with 62% saying they plan to implement it in the new year. They also want to work on localized SEO and short-term video content, but industry changes in search and content mean agencies need to figure out what will work. There are many other tactics agencies say they're willing to test to see results for their clients.

Marketing tactics agencies will test in 2025

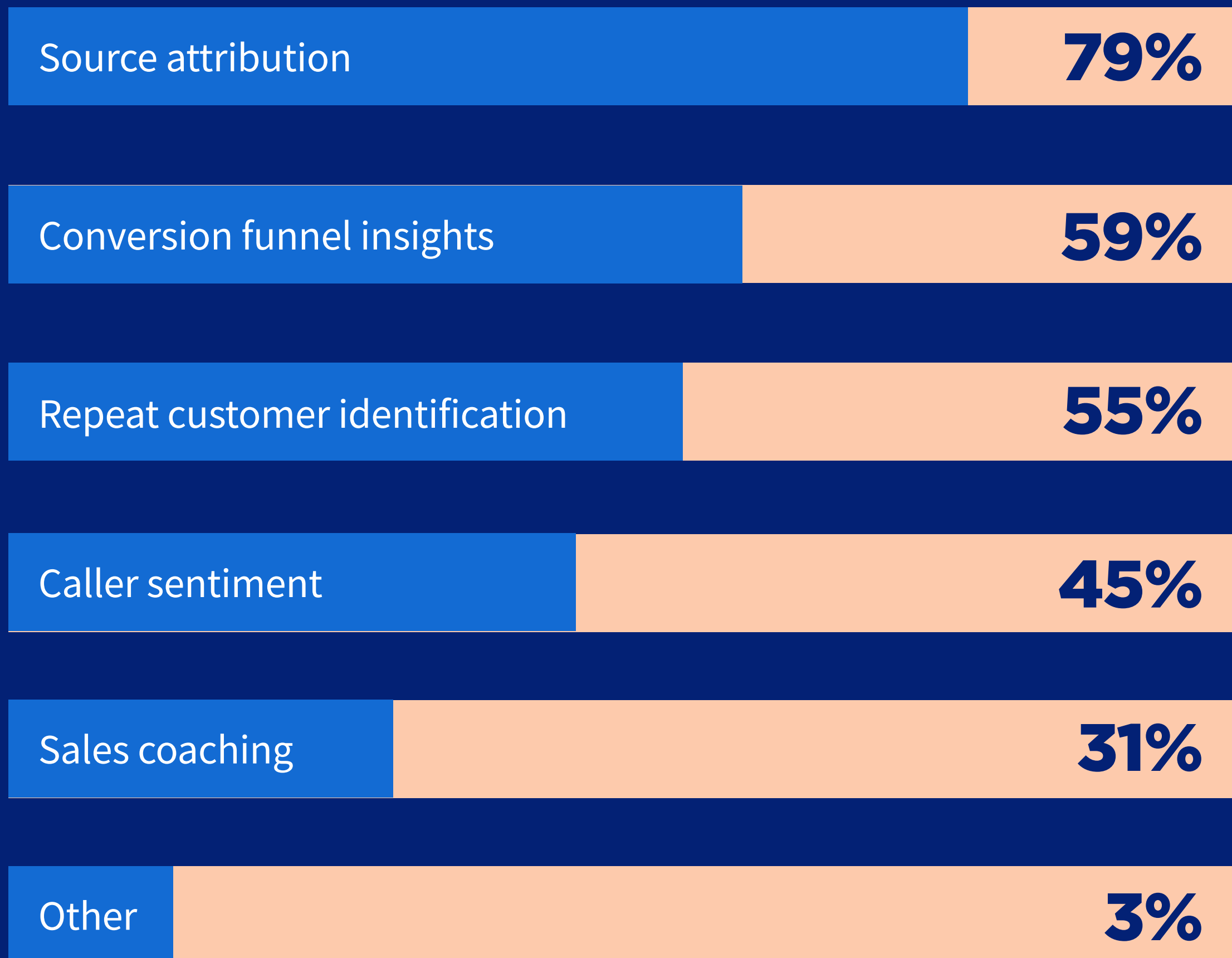|			
62% AI	**41%** Localized SEO	**41%** Short-form video content	**28%** Visual search
17% OTT Advertising	**17%** Personalization	**17%** Zero-click searches	**10%** Audio content
10% Customer communities	**10%** Gamification	**10%** Voice search	**7%** Metaverse marketing

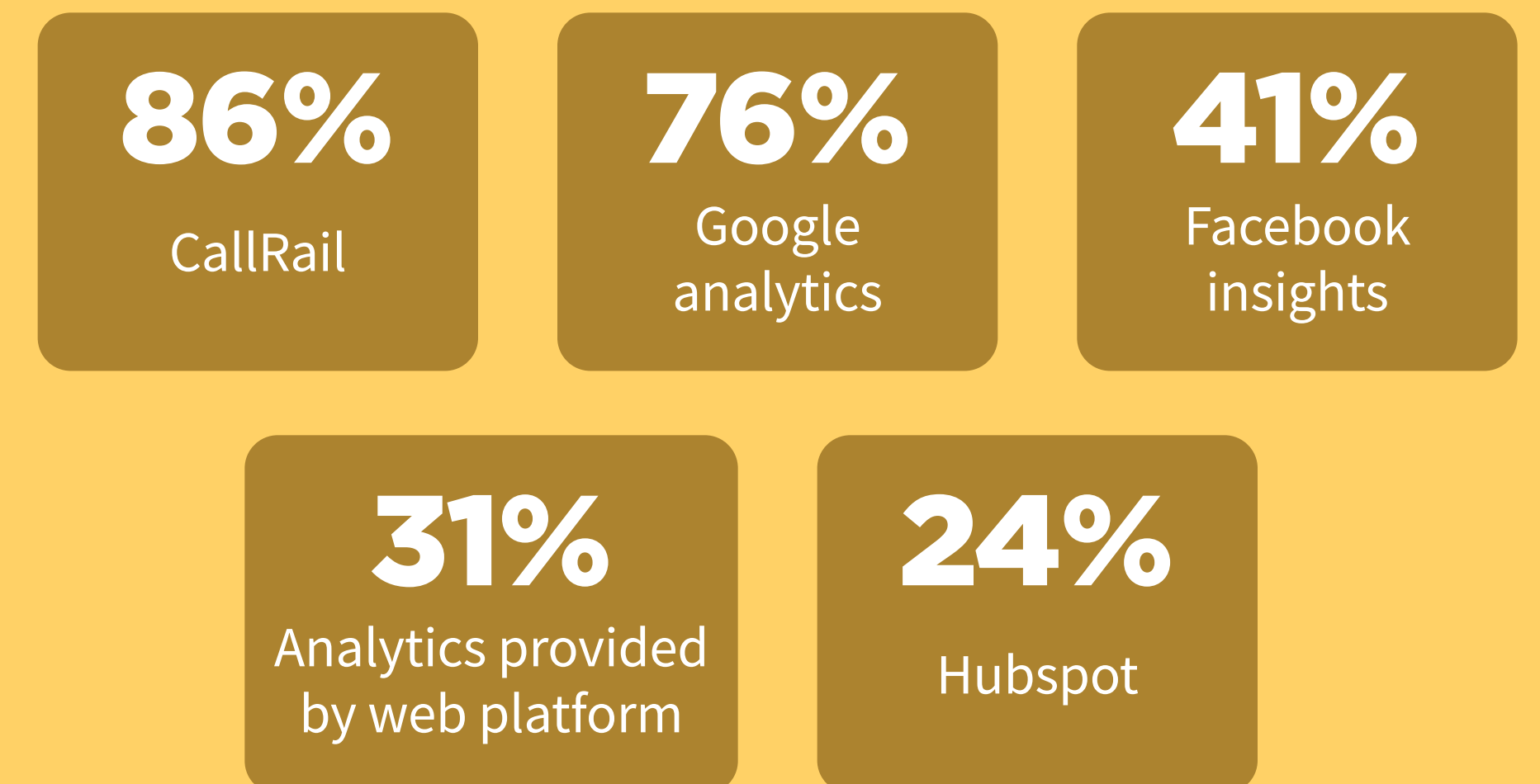# Types of lead intelligence agencies find valuable in helping clients

Data analysis is the driving influence in marketing decisions, but marketing agencies would like even better lead intelligence to help their clients meet their 2025 goals.

Source attribution	**79%**
Conversion funnel insights	**59%**
Repeat customer identification	**55%**
Caller sentiment	**45%**
Sales coaching	**31%**
Other	**3%**

Reporting tools marketing agencies adopted in 2024

Since some of the respondents viewed better reporting as a way to retain clients, it's understandable that agencies would want to use the most effective reporting and analytics tools. While many agencies have made the switch to sophisticated reporting platforms, nearly a third (31%) of agencies are still stuck creating reports manually via spreadsheets or similar methods.

Of those that modernized their efforts, these are some of the platforms they chose to track campaign ROI and other metrics.

86% CallRail

76% Google analytics

41% Facebook insights

31% Analytics provided by web platform

24% Hubspot

How agencies plan to use AI in their marketing

AI was an agency focus in 2024 and will continue to be one in 2025 as well. Marketers plan to use the technology for a wide range of purposes in the new year, from content creation and automated reporting to lead management and customer messaging. Agencies aim to use AI to grow their clients' and their own businesses.
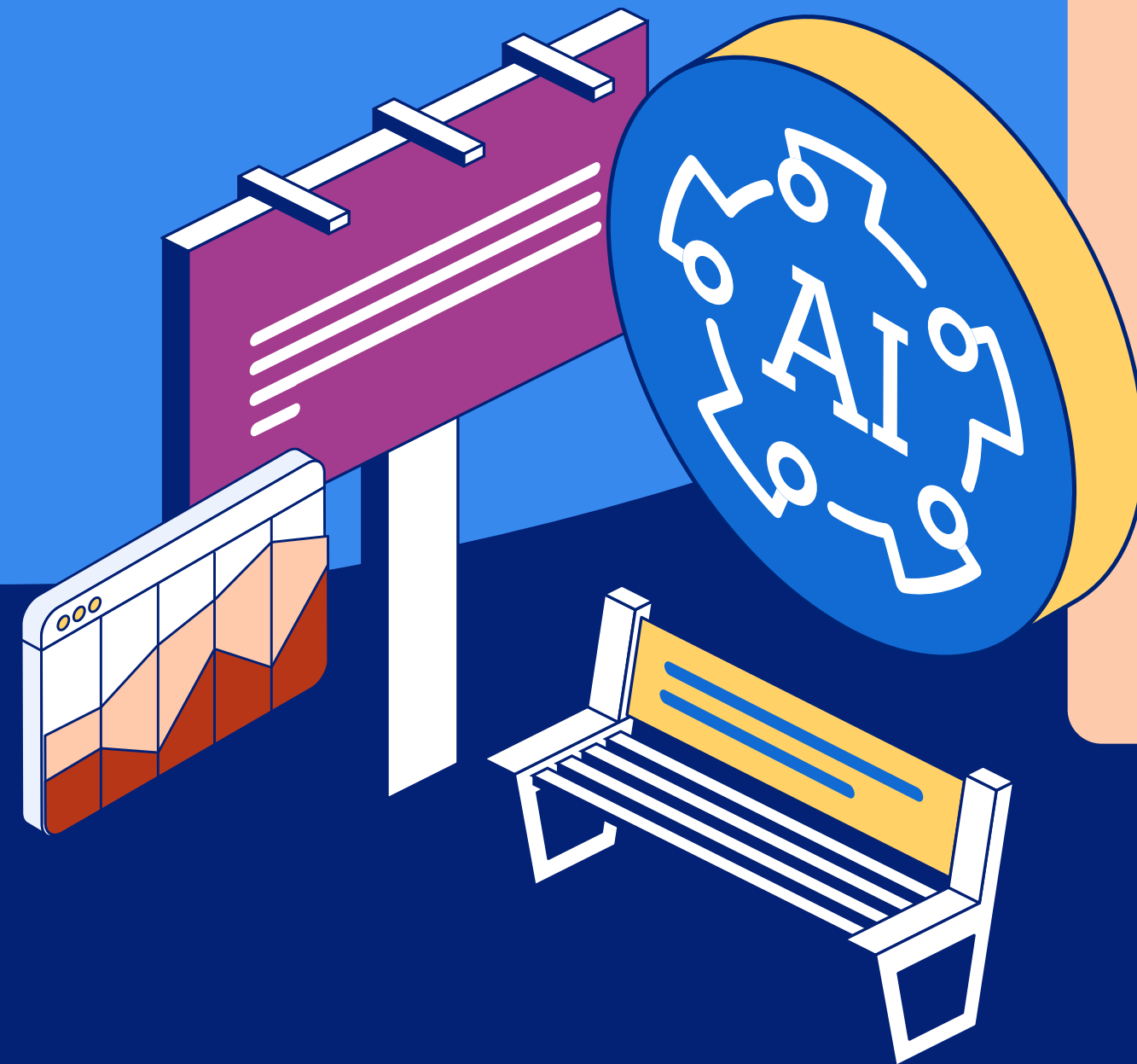
"2025 is going to be all about diversification. We're seeing a shift away from organic traffic as a primary traffic source and a drop in organic social visibility. More than ever, you need to diversify your content types to include video and audio as well as your traditional text content and will need to make sure that you're increasing visibility for your brand across multiple channels. Building all this new content is going to be a lot easier than ever with the help of AI, but make sure you're editing it to add in your unique perspective and expertise so that you can differentiate from other AI-created content."

Tanya Wigmore, Chief Growth Officer & General Manager, Cronyx Digital

AI-driven tools agencies believe will help scale their agencies in 2025

Agency marketers are betting big on AI to improve processes, maximize efficiency, gain customer insights, and generate results for clients. Data was the main focus, aimed at both customer and lead intelligence and analytics. Tools for automation and content creation were two more of the top solutions agencies said they were considering.

Customer data analytics platforms	**62%**
Lead intelligence software	**62%**
Marketing automation	**62%**
Content creation	**52%**
Lead management software	**45%**
SEO + AI-management chat/client interactions	**45%**

AI offerings agencies plan to adopt in the new year

We asked agencies which AI offerings they were looking to adopt in 2025, and the most common answer revolved around reporting. Agencies want to improve reporting through automated summaries and reporting on calls, budgets, and integrated tool data like source tracking. They also want AI to help analyze that data so they can make better decisions and help answer client questions about their marketing results.

The second most frequently mentioned AI offering was for content creation. Agencies plan to use the technology to help with video production and writing. Respondents mentioned brainstorming, writing outlines, and developing copy.

"We're using AI to generate content deliverables for clients and to organize long-form information internally," explained one agency marketer.

Besides creative uses, another commonly mentioned application was lead and campaign management. Agency marketers want to streamline processes and automate lead qualification and campaign management. Respondents also said they want to use AI to help with customer interactions in the new year, including helping clients automate calls, scheduling, follow-ups, and customer service responses.

Other AI applications respondents referenced included coding, chatbots, real-time feedback, coaching, and performance monitoring for internal teams, as well as automating transcriptions, summaries, classifications, and meeting annotations.

Though there were a handful who said they don't know or haven't considered which AI offerings they'll be looking into for 2025, there were also some agencies that said they'll be adopting AI tools for many uses across their agencies. Some have already gone all in with AI and are already using it for several purposes. "We have 5 different AI models we use for different parts of the business," said one respondent. "We've been using AI for more than 4 years."

Another agency respondent said, "We build chatbots, use AI for content outlines, assistance with code, and other processes. We use a variety of tools to meet these needs."

"I think the biggest trend marketers should explore are these new AI Agents like the one from Anthropic that is able to complete full tasks for you through a desktop interface. This is also how we will be using AI in the near future. Imagine automating repetitive tasks like installing a Google Ads container in WordPress! For us in the SEO space, there's the potential to automate things like citation building and internal linking that will have a direct impact on the costs of SEO services very soon."

Blake Akers, CEO, Webology, LLC

Marketing agency service offerings

Many agencies have diversified and expanded their offerings to increase revenue and adapt to changes in digital marketing. Most of those who responded to our questions said they offer SEM/paid search advertising (84%) and SEO (76%). Other top responses included analytics/reporting, paid social, website design and development, full-service digital, and content services.

83% SEM/paid search advertising	**76%** SEO	**72%** Analytics/ reporting
69% Paid social	**69%** Website design & development	**62%** Full-service digital

52%
Content services

48%
Organic social

45%
Email marketing

41%
Branding services

41%
Media buying and planning

38%
Creative services

24%
Other print marketing

17%
Direct mail

10%
Sales training

"Agencies may increasingly focus on training proprietary AI models with optimized content to enhance brand visibility within AI-driven search experiences. This proactive approach can help brands become the go-to source for specific topics or queries"

Patricia Walterick, CEO, Open Space Digital

How marketers are keeping up with industry trends

As technology and tools evolve in digital marketing, agencies have to pay attention to trends or risk losing clients to more adaptable competitors. Nearly 80% said they stay informed by reading industry blogs, newsletters, and articles. More than half reported consuming vendor and partner communications. Other favored information sources include marketing podcasts, competitor content, industry events, and online courses. A small number said they join marketing associations and Slack communities.

79% Read industry blogs/ newsletters articles

55% Vender/Partner communications

48% Listen to marketing podcasts

38% Keep up with competitor offerings

35% Attending industry events

14% Join marketing associations

35% Take online courses

14% Join Slack communities

It's a new era for marketing agencies

Marketing agencies have recently experienced drastic changes in channels and digital marketing tools, which has compelled them to change their search strategies, adopt AI tools, improve reporting practices, and focus more on customers.

Agencies can make their work easier in 2025 by investing in a platform that consolidates all these efforts and more. A solution like CallRail offers AI-driven capabilities to increase quality leads and improve marketing analytics for agency clients. CallRail's AI platform has helped thousands of businesses generate 10% more high-quality leads at 20% lower cost. Our agency customers have rated CallRail 4.5/5 on average for ease of use.
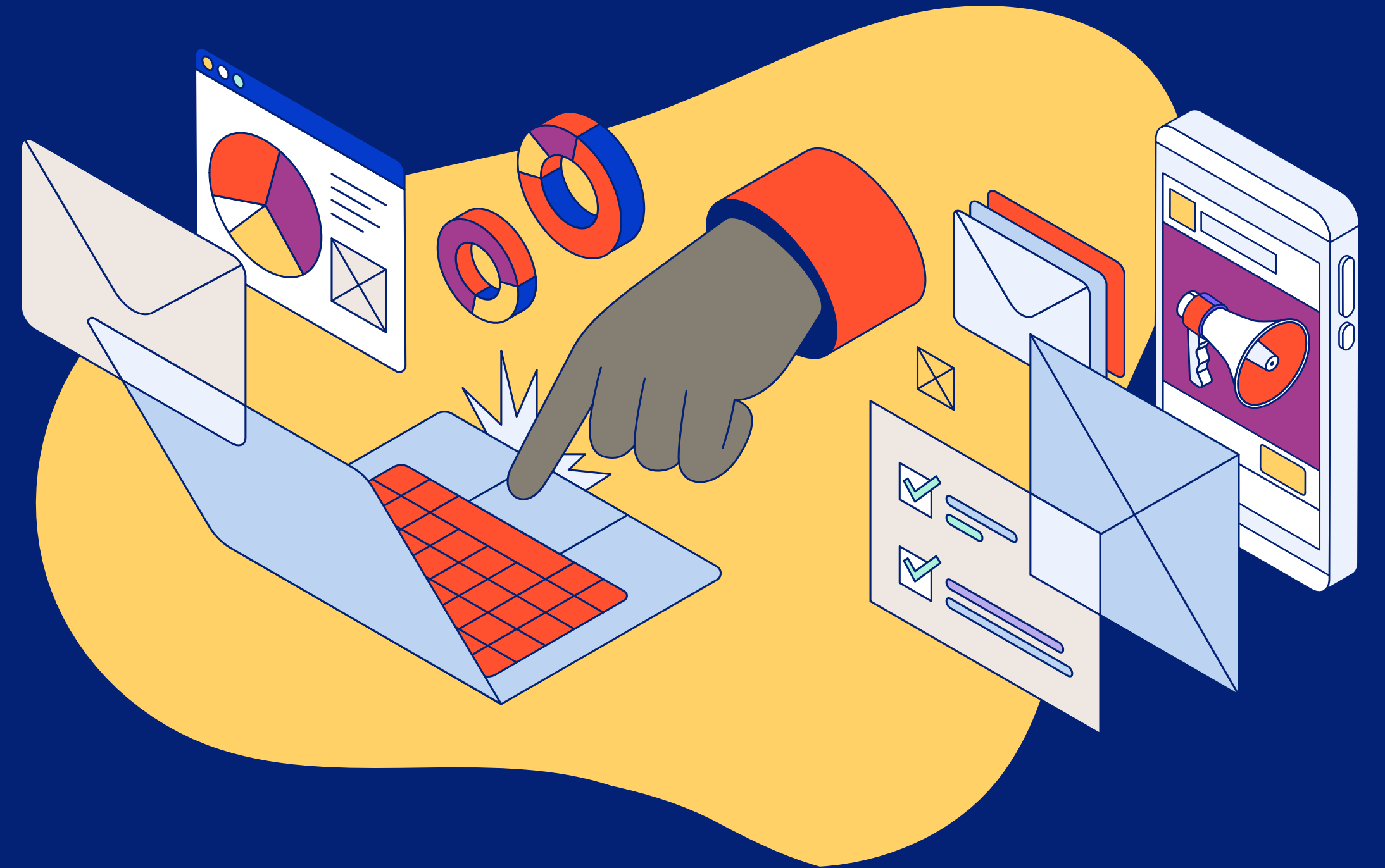
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