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DIGITAL ENGINEERING

ROAD TO AI MATURITY

The CIO's Strategic Guide for 2025

The AI hype is fading.
Now it's time to show the value.

Axis / The pivot point for business strategy.

Engineered by InclusionCloud.

Executive Summary

In 2025, the AI honeymoon is over. CIOs are dipping a toe into the next stage of AI maturity, where experimentation gives way to integration, and all strategic efforts must deliver measurable value for business stakeholders.

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AI + Purpose = Business Impact

IT budgets are expected to rise again this year, with Gartner projecting global IT spending to hit **$5.75 trillion,** a 9.3% increase from the previous year. Yet, this isn't a blank check. Much of this growth will be offset by rising costs linked to AI's ripple effects: infrastructure upgrades, talent acquisition, complex integrations, and new tools demanded by business leaders.

The ball is in the CIOs' court. They must ensure that IT departments are not seen as mere cost centers by leadership. With only **36% of CEOs expressing confidence in IT's ability to deliver basic services, and less than 30% of digital initiatives meeting their expected outcomes,** the pressure is mounting for IT leaders to prove that technology is far more than just an expensive problem-solver.

They need to step up and show that their departments do more than keep the lights on.

IT has the potential to innovate, creating new revenue streams, building integrated systems where data, processes, and people come together seamlessly. These efforts, when aligned with business goals, can transform IT from a support function into a strategic enabler of sustained ROI.

The New Old Debate: IT vs. Business

It's time to revisit an age-old debate about the role of IT. Does IT's job end when the new app icon appears on employees' desktops? Or does success come only when the app is actively used to solve problems and create new opportunities?

The growing proliferation of generative AI tools has created a pressing issue: app sprawl. Many organizations now face bloated tech stacks filled with overlapping AI tools, adopted during the initial hype. This sprawl increases complexity, inflates costs, and hinders efficiency. In fact, **72% of CIOs report concerns over redundant applications.**

To address this, IT departments must go beyond deployment. Training users and fostering adoption are critical steps to bridge the tech literacy gap and unlock the full potential of technology investments.

Without this alignment, even the most advanced AI tool will fail to deliver meaningful ROI.

Worldwide IT Spending Forecast
(Millions of U.S. Dollars).

|	2024 SPENDING	2024 GROWTH (%)	2025 SPENDING	2025 GROWTH (%)
DATA CENTER SYSTEMS	318,008	34.7	367,171	15.5
DEVICES	735,764	6.2	805,722	9.5
SOFTWARE	1,087,800	11.7	1,239,779	14.0
IT SERVICES	1,587,913	5.6	1,737,754	9.4
COMUNICATION SERVICES	1,530,299	2.0	1,596,890	4.4
OVERALL IT	5,259,784	7.2	5,747,317	9.3

Key Findings

36%
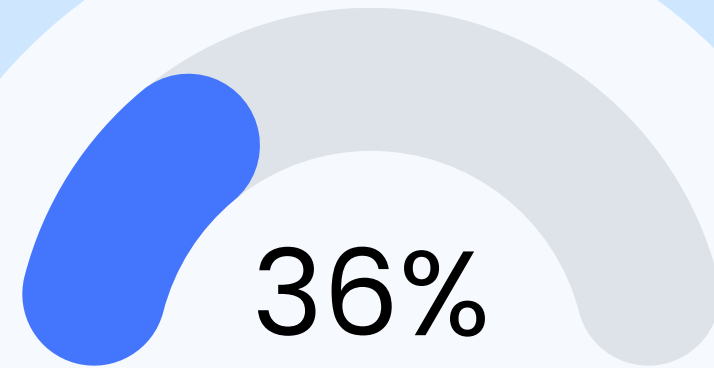
of CEOs trust IT to deliver basic services, signaling a trust gap.

72%
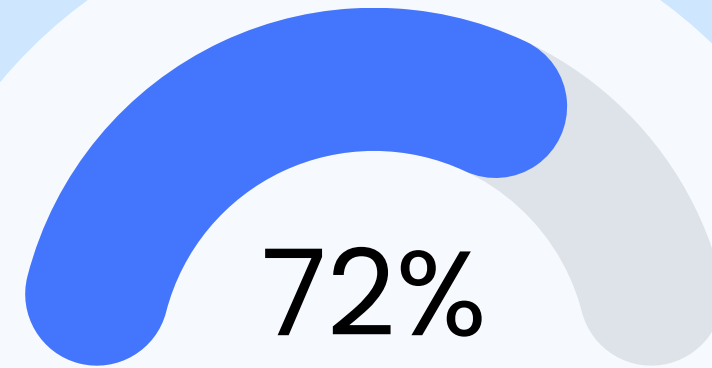
of CIOs cite app sprawl as a major efficiency challenge.

30%
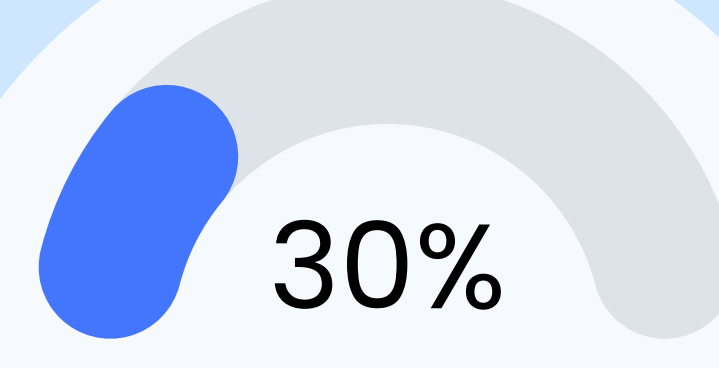
of digital initiatives achieve their expected outcomes.

Why the Honeymoon Is Over?

Leadership is no longer content with potential—they demand measurable impact in their GenAI investments.

→ **The Hype Is Passing. The Hard Questions Remain.**
The GenAI boom led to app sprawl, but now, leadership wants proof: Are these investments solving problems or creating value?

→ **Rising Costs, Rising Pressure.**
AI Infrastructure is driving up costs. With budgets under scrutiny, CIOs must tightly align AI initiatives to measurable business outcomes to justify investments.

→ **Stakeholder Trust Is on the Line.**
Confidence in IT is slipping. With only 36% of CEOs trusting IT to deliver basic services, the pressure is on CIOs to align AI initiatives with business goals.

→ **The Tech Literacy Gap.**
IT's job doesn't end with an app on every desktop. Upskilling remains a hurdle, with 31% of organizations citing it as their biggest challenge.

→ **Shadow IT: A Double-Edged Sword.**
Uncoordinated GenAI adoption fuels shadow IT, bypassing oversight and integration. This fragmented approach compounds challenges like building data infrastructure (25%) and balancing AI ownership (25%).

The Stages of AI Maturity

We'll explore the different phases on the road to AI maturity, focusing on recommended priorities, key challenges, commitment levels, and dominating trends.

Basecamp:
The Exploration Stage

Every climb starts at Basecamp. Here, businesses explore AI's potential, test tools through small-scale pilots, and address foundational challenges like data silos and skill gaps. It's about preparing for the climb ahead by choosing the right tools, setting measurable goals, and building confidence through quick wins.

Commitment Level: Foundational

Focus: Experimentation, resource assessment, and pilot projects.

Why It Matters: A strong foundation ensures readiness. Without preparation, the climb gets steeper.

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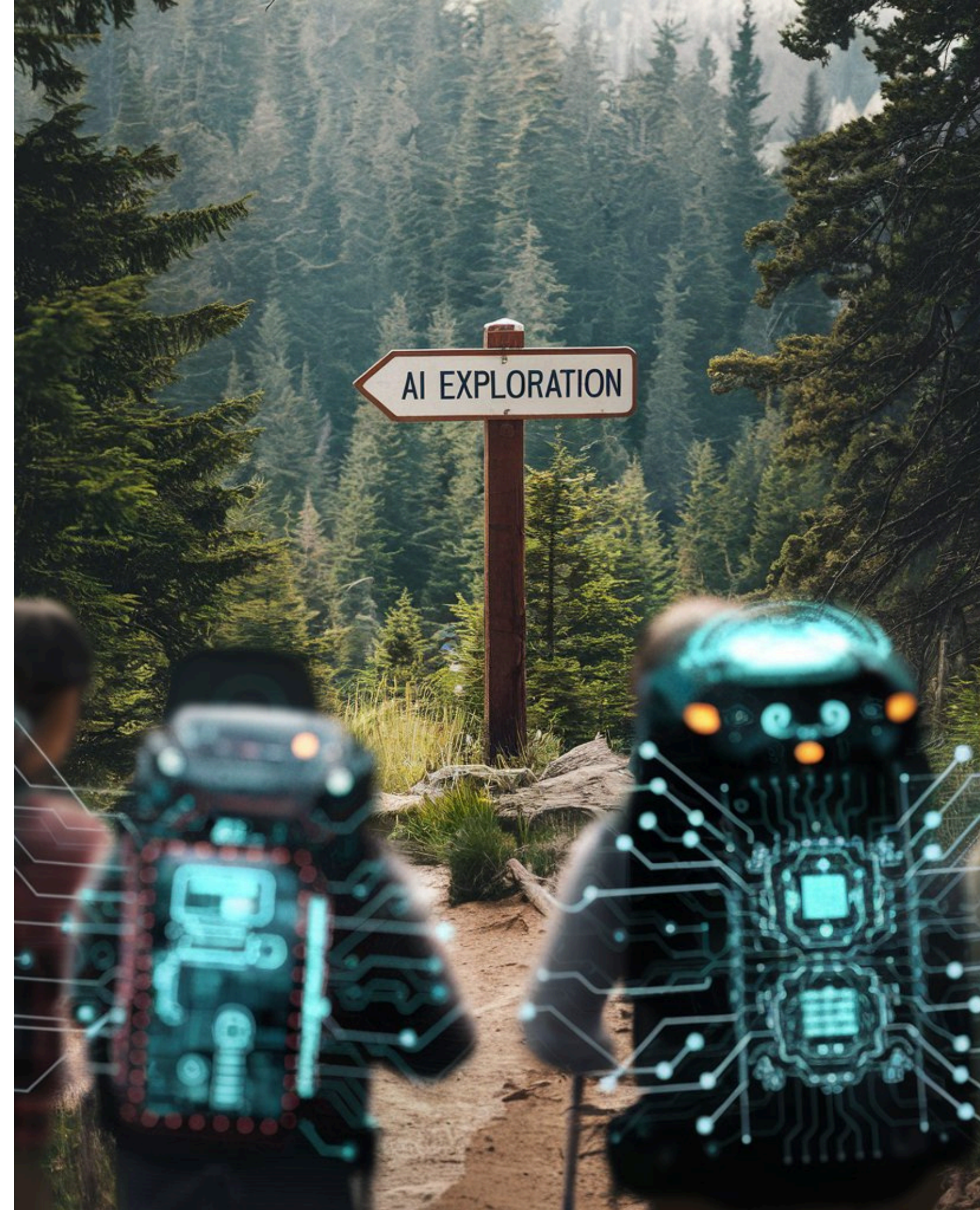
Key Trends

1. Generative AI Moves Beyond the Hype

Generative AI has moved past inflated expectations, and leadership demands proof of its value. CIOs must demonstrate ROI through productivity gains, accelerated processes, or higher-quality outputs, shifting from testing to delivering real business impact.

2. Taming the GenAI App Sprawl

The initial hype led to a flood of AI tools, many of which overlap or fail to add value. App sprawl increases costs and operational complexity. It's time for organizations to clean up redundant apps, prioritize scalable tools, and remember that the job isn't done after deploying the app. They must work with the business to ensure adoption.

3. Combating Synthetic Misinformation

One highly recommended measure in these times is preparing your people for the era of synthetic media, AI fake news, and AI false information. These aren't just buzzwords—they represent a new wave of risks for organizations, including deepfake phishing, synthetic misinformation, and more.

To give you an idea of the scale of these threats:

- **Email phishing costs U.S. businesses an average of $4.91 million.**

- **Deepfake fraud attempts rose by a staggering 3,000% in 2023.**

Mountain Lodge:
The Integration Stage

The Mountain Lodge stage transforms AI from a shiny new tool into a fully integrated part of the organization. By embedding AI into workflows and prioritizing governance, businesses unlock new revenue opportunities. However, this stage also brings challenges, such as ethical risks and the critical need for cross-department collaboration.

Commitment Level: Intermediate

Focus: Embedding AI into workflows and scaling operations.

Why It Matters: Effective integration elevates AI from a tool to a strategic enabler, delivering tangible outcomes

Key Trends

1. Put Data to Work with Knowledge Graphs

GenAI is highly reliant on context, accuracy, and data integration. Knowledge graphs take on the central role of structuring the hundreds (or even millions) of data points to help AI models better understand the context.

This is a central step in the AI strategy for CIOs because embedding this technology into many business functions relies on trust in AI outputs. That trust drives user acceptance of the technology. If half the time an employee asks a copilot for help it hallucinates, they'll probably stop using the tool. This impacts adoption rates and the productivity of those who aren't leveraging GenAI to accelerate task execution.

2. One Model Isn't Enough: Composite AI and Hybrid Approaches

Composite AI it's a fusion of different techniques working together to solve problems that single AI models couldn't tackle on their own. When you combine different approaches like ML, NLP, computer vision, and even rules-based systems, you're creating hybrid AI models that are greater than the sum of their parts.

And this is especially valuable for functions that involve a lot of variables and require nuanced decision-making. In supply chain management, for instance, it can analyze weather patterns, inventory levels, and shipping costs simultaneously to optimize delivery schedules.

AXIS / The pivot point for business strategy.

Key Trends

3.

### AIOps: Optimizing AI Lifecycles and Governance

Managing AI doesn't stop at deployment. AIOps (Artificial Intelligence for IT Operations) combines human intelligence with algorithms to enhance IT processes, sustain operations, and establish reliable governance frameworks.

With SaaS proliferation and complex IT environments, AIOps is essential for 2025. It keeps systems running smoothly, prevents shadow IT, and ensures secure, compliant AI operations. By 2028, the AIOps market is projected to soar from $11.7 billion in 2023 to $32.4 billion, reflecting the growing need for efficient, scalable IT infrastructure.

Platforms like Dynatrace, Splunk ITSI, and ServiceNow ITOM predict issues, automate fixes, and minimize costly downtime during peak traffic, ensuring AI remains a trusted, impactful tool.

Artificial Intelligence for IT Operation Platform Market
Size, by Offering, 2020-2030 (USD Billion)

Platform Service
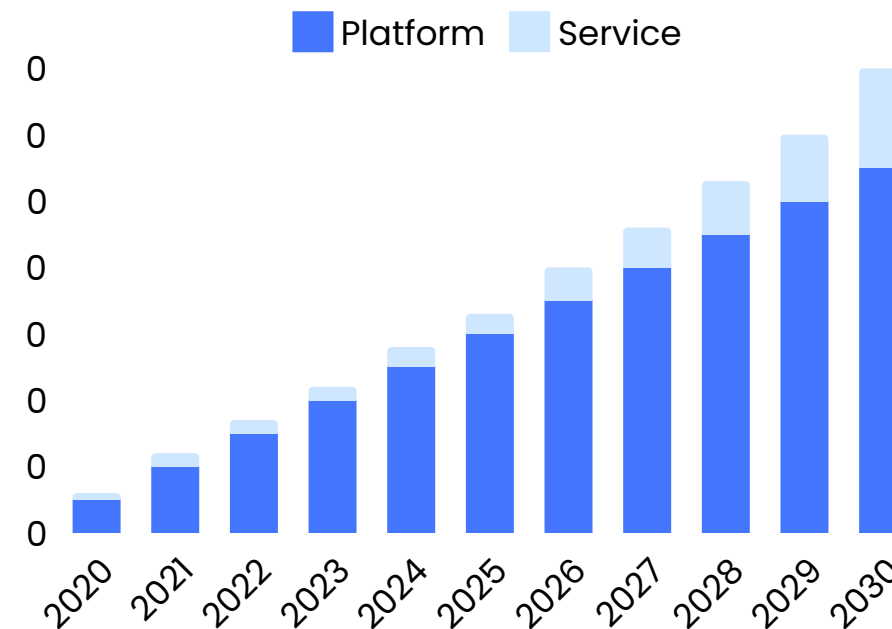
15.2%

Global Market CAGR, 2025 - 2030

Source: **Garner**
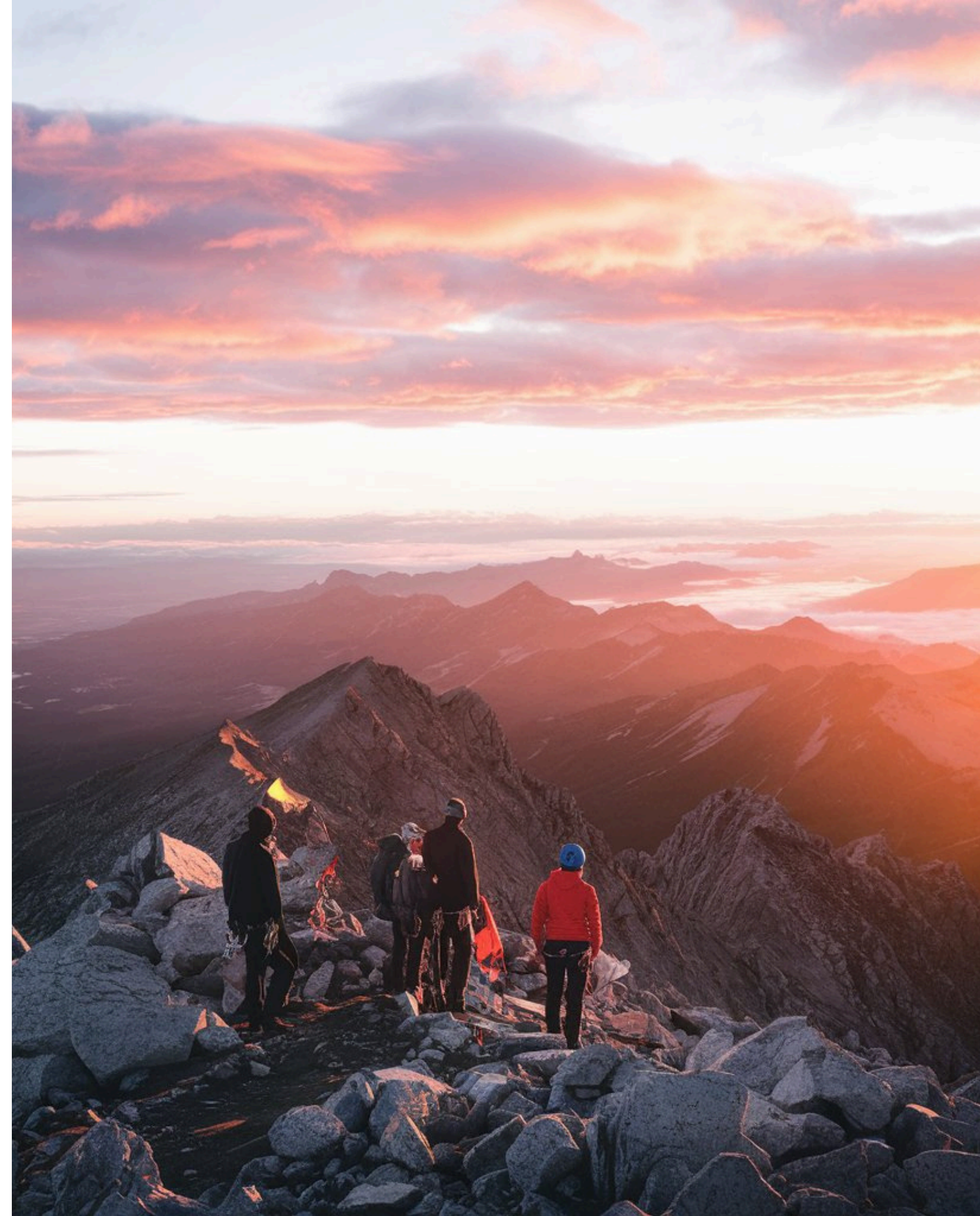
Top of the Mountain:

The Future Readiness Stage

At the summit, businesses prepare for what's next by experimenting with cutting-edge technologies and envisioning long-term strategies. This stage is about maintaining competitive advantage by staying on top of emerging trends.

Commitment Level: Advanced

Focus: Exploring next-gen technologies and strategic innovation.

Why It Matters: Staying at the forefront ensures a competitive edge in a rapidly evolving landscape.

Key Trends

1.

Multiagent Systems: The New AI Workforce

At the Top of the Mountain phase, businesses that have reached AI maturity are now exploring next-gen technologies to shape the future—and multiagent systems (MAS) are leading the way.
So, what are multiagent systems? MAS are networks of autonomous agents—AI systems or programs—that collaborate to solve complex problems or achieve shared goals. Each agent is designed to make independent decisions while coordinating with others in the system. They communicate, share knowledge, and synchronize actions to optimize outcomes, much like a team of specialists working together seamlessly on a shared project.

By 2028, it's projected that at least 15% of day-to-day business decisions will be made autonomously through agentic AI.

These agents can process text, images, audio, and video, making them versatile tools for tackling real-world challenges. For example, an autonomous agent in customer service could analyze a video of a defective product, cross-reference it with the inventory database, and automatically initiate a replacement order—all without human input.
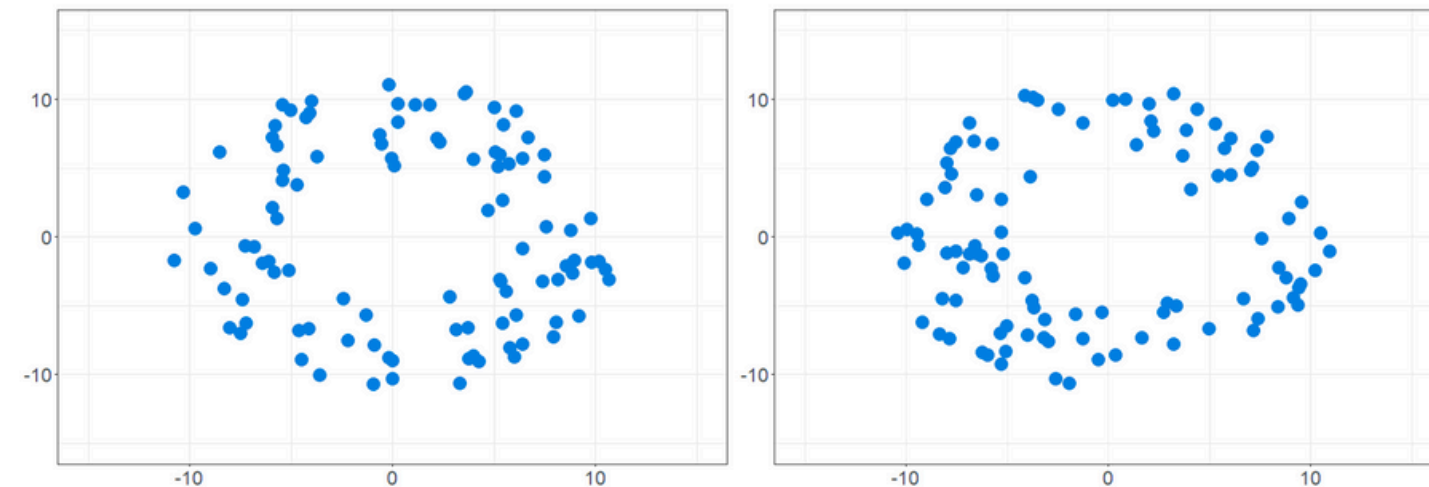
Key Trends

2. Synthetic Data: Training AI Without Compromising Privacy

As privacy regulations tighten and accessing real-world data becomes increasingly difficult, synthetic data is stepping in to bridge the gap. By mimicking real-world scenarios without relying on sensitive information, it provides businesses with a scalable way to train and test AI systems while remaining compliant.

What are the benefits for businesses? Synthetic data enables companies to simulate millions of customer interactions or niche events—such as rare fraud cases—without the limitations of traditional datasets. This is particularly valuable in industries like healthcare and finance, where privacy regulations are even stricter.

Looking ahead, synthetic data is projected to surpass real data as the primary source for AI training by 2030.

And It's poised to become a cornerstone in developing the next generation of AI autonomous systems, which demand unprecedented levels of precision. Of course, the first step toward this future is building a robust data infrastructure.
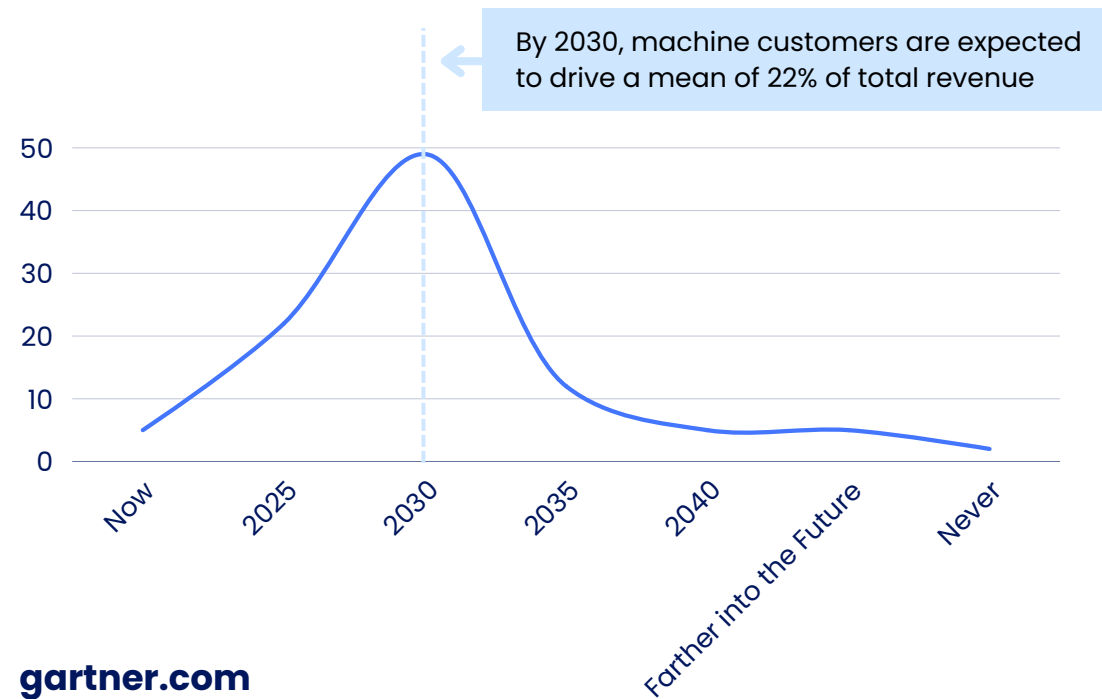

Original Data   **Synthetic Data**

The synthetic data retains the structure of the original data but is not the same

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Key Trends

3. Preparing for Machine Customers

As AI agents gain autonomy, they are becoming active participants in the market, acting as "machine customers." These agents can research, negotiate, and transact, reshaping digital service models. Businesses must adapt their systems to interact seamlessly with these new types of customers, ensuring integration, security, and efficiency.

By 2030, machine customers are expected to drive a mean of 22% of total revenue

50
40
30
20
10
0

Now | 2025 | 2030 | 2035 | 2040 | Farther into the Future | Never

gartner.com
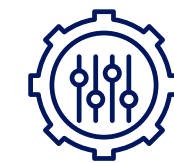
The Three Cs to Understand Machine Customers:

Connectivity
Ensure systems can integrate smoothly with AI agents for seamless interactions.

Cybersecurity
Safeguard data and systems as machine customers engage in transactions and interact with services.

Customization
Adapt your services to meet the distinct needs of machine customers, just as you would for human users.

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Ready to Reach the Summit of AI Maturity?

Each step of the journey, whether you're at Basecamp, the Mountain Lodge, or the Top of the Mountain, requires strategy, innovation, and a focus on AI governance, security, and scalability.

At Inclusion Cloud, we're here to help you climb toward AI maturity with the latest methodologies, cutting-edge technologies, and robust security approaches.
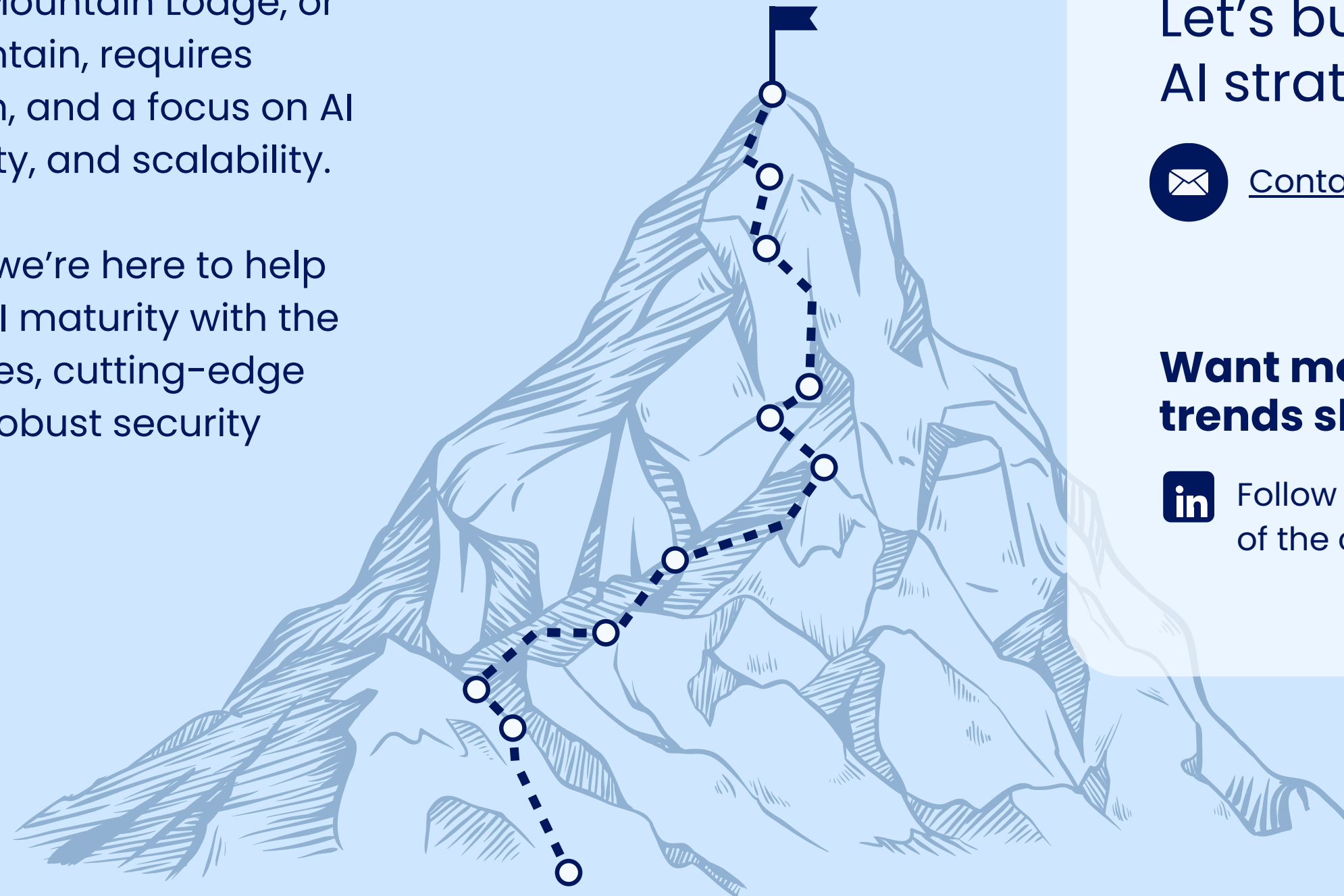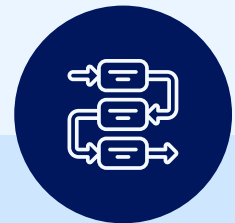
Let's build your next-gen AI strategy together.

✉ Contact us today!

Want more insights on the tech trends shaping 2025?

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Methodology

This report is based on surveys conducted with IT leaders across platforms like LinkedIn and Reddit, gathering insights from a diverse range of industries and organizational sizes. Our research aims to reflect the current challenges, opportunities, and priorities CIOs face as they navigate the path toward AI maturity.

Disclaimer

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on survey data and should be interpreted within the context of the participating respondents. While we strive for accuracy and inclusiveness, the insights may not universally represent all industries or regions. Inclusion Cloud is not responsible for any decisions or outcomes resulting from the use of this report.

About Us

Inclusion Cloud specializes in transforming businesses by connecting people, processes, and platforms through seamless technology integration. Through our **partnerships with leading platforms like ServiceNow, Salesforce, Oracle, and SAP**, we leverage the latest tools and resources to maximize ROI and sustain growth. Whether your organization is at the exploration stage, embedding AI into workflows, or experimenting with cutting-edge technologies, Inclusion Cloud provides the expertise and integration solutions needed to succeed at every stage of AI maturity.

Discover more about our solutions at **inclusioncloud.com**.