Acquia

State of the Marketer:

Creating Compelling Customer Experiences in Challenging Times

Customer Experience (CX) Trends Report

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State of the Marketer: Creating Compelling Customer Experiences in Challenging Times

Executive Summary

In today's crowded digital landscape, marketers struggle to break through with digital customer experiences (CX) that are productive and frictionless for the user.

The rapid pivot to digital that many organizations executed during the pandemic is projected to cause a durable shift in the way consumers and businesses make purchases, with even more commerce projected to move online through at least 2025, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

To succeed in this environment, it's imperative that marketers find ways to differentiate their organizations and break through the digital cacophony. They must be able to create and bring to market compelling, productive digital experiences across all areas of the buying and customer service cycle.

- Marketers should be able to deliver these experiences intuitively. **Speed to market** with compelling websites, commerce sites, mobile applications, digital signage, portals, or intranets for employees, students, or patients is mandatory as marketers experiment and iterate — particularly with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI).

- A **clear customer journey**, powered by an organization's customer data and content, is also critical and should enable interaction with the brand in a consistent manner **across digital channels**. It should also drive toward the desired outcome for the customer and the brand.

- Finally, digital experiences must be human-centric. To reflect preferences and human factors such as culture – as well as protect trust in the brand – the digital experiences an organization delivers should be **accessible, usable, and safe.**

About the Survey

To gain a perspective on these topics, we worked with Vanson Bourne to collect the views of 3,000 consumers and 300 marketers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States in September 2023.

Participants were evenly split across the three countries. The survey explores shifts in expectations from marketing decision makers and consumers about customer experience, AI and marketing technology, and consumer data privacy. As we examine these research findings and implications, we'll discuss how brands are adapting to the changing landscape and key lessons learned.

Please note that the global CX trends report we published in 2022 includes survey response data from consumers and marketers in the U.K. and the U.S. only. In areas where we compare year-over-year trends in this report, in 2021 and 2023 respondents from Australia were included, but not included in 2022 data.

Section 1

Marketers Strive for Excellence as the Ground Shifts Beneath Them

83%

of marketers say their organization is under pressure to deliver marketing content differently to ensure they stand out when representing their offerings to customers and prospects.

Marketing decision makers are constantly rewriting their playbooks as they grapple with uncertainty around budgets, the economy, consumer preferences, and more. Nearly all (99%) report that they have changed their digital CX strategy over the past 18 months.

Content is at the heart of digital CX, and marketers who are working to create better experiences and respond quickly to a changing marketplace understand they can't keep doing the things they have done in

the past. They also know they can't necessarily count on big budget increases to support their ambitious plans.

Indeed, many marketing teams are being asked to do more with less. In May 2023, Gartner reported that 71% of chief marketing officers believed they didn't have adequate budget to implement their strategies. The researchers also found that marketing budgets, as a percentage of company revenue, were essentially flat this year.

Annual 2023 Budgets for Digital Marketing and CX Tools Vary Greatly Among Our Respondents

The question asked in the survey was:

What is your organization's annual 2023 budget for digital marketing and customer experience tools in USD?

Category	Value
Less than $10,000 (please specify in full)	0%
Between $10,000 - $50,000	0%
Between $50,000 - $100,000	5%
Between $100,000 - $250,000	6%
Between $250,000 - $500,000	11%
Between $500,000 - $750,000	19%
Between $750,000 and $1 million	24%
Between $1 million and $5 million	20%
Between $5 million and $10 million	14%
More than $10 million (please specify in full)	1%

only
64%
expect a budget increase

Looking ahead, the budget picture isn't encouraging. Forrester reports that only 64% of CX leaders expect a budget increase for CX initiatives in 2024 and 16% expect to spend less overall than this year. In addition, only 54% expect to spend more on headcount, indicating that while costs will increase, budget owners will be expected to do more with the same budgets.

Section 2

Content Creators Prioritize Capabilities That Move the Needle for CX

Even marketers with healthy budgets need to focus on where to place their bets. Marketing decision makers must focus on the initiatives that have the greatest impact on digital CX and can't afford to put time and resources into efforts that don't yield results.

Teams should focus on strategies that leverage their customer data and content to build experiences that increase customer engagement, boost revenue, and produce other desirable outcomes — while creating operational efficiencies whenever possible.

Marketers were asked what they believe to be the single most important factor affecting digital CX over the past 18 months:

Ability to gather enough data about consumer preferences to create productive digital experiences — **35%**

Ability to create enough content that is sufficiently personalized for customers — **24%**

Ability to move seamlessly between delivering online and offline experiences — **21%**

Rising consumer expectations for quality of online experiences — **19%**

98%

say their organization's return on investment (ROI) for martech tools has improved in 2023.

Of course, marketers need the right tools in their martech or digital experience platform (DXP) to successfully accomplish their goals, and many aren't relying on IT to choose solutions for them. More than two-thirds (69%) say that the decision maker sits within marketing and only 21% with IT.

These tech-related decisions appear to be paying off. Almost all marketers (98%) say their organization's return on investment (ROI) for martech tools has improved in 2023.

Some technologies are shining particularly bright, including AI for content creation. Nearly half (45%) of marketers say generative AI such as OpenAI's ChatGPT is one of the top technologies having a positive impact on CX.

Marketers are also reaping benefits from their content management systems (CMSs). These tools store many content types, manage that content through its lifecycle, and publish it to an organization's website and other digital channels.
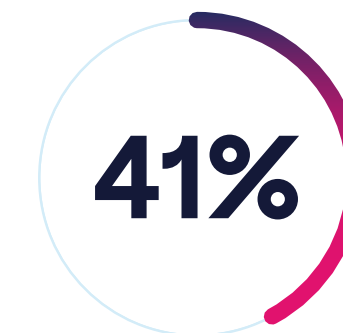
41%

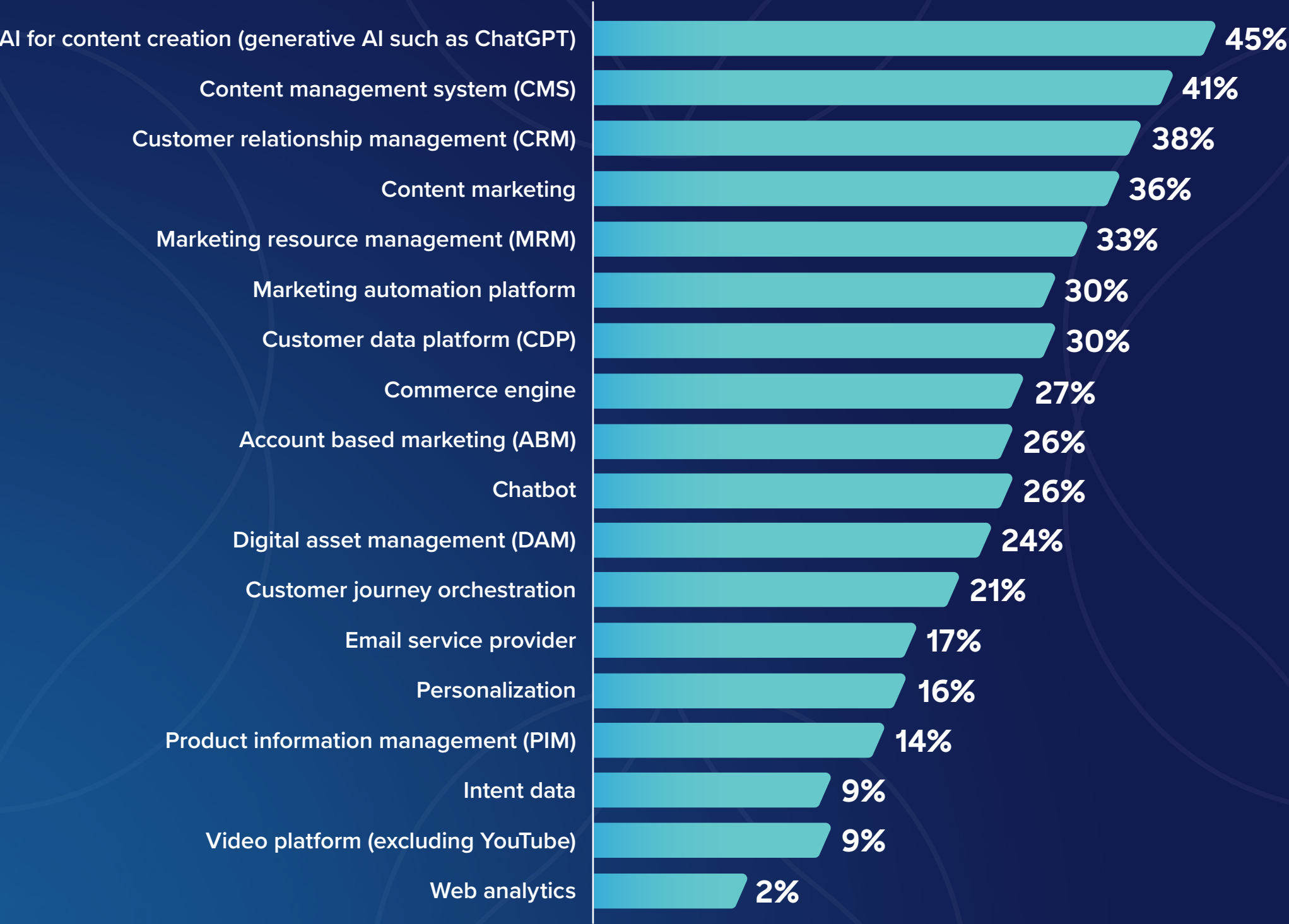**of marketers identify CMS as a top-ranked tech having a positive impact on CX.**

Global Marketers Are Using a Mix of Technologies to Improve Their CX

The question asked in the survey was:

Which technologies in your organization's marketing technology or digital experience platform have the biggest positive impact on customer experience?

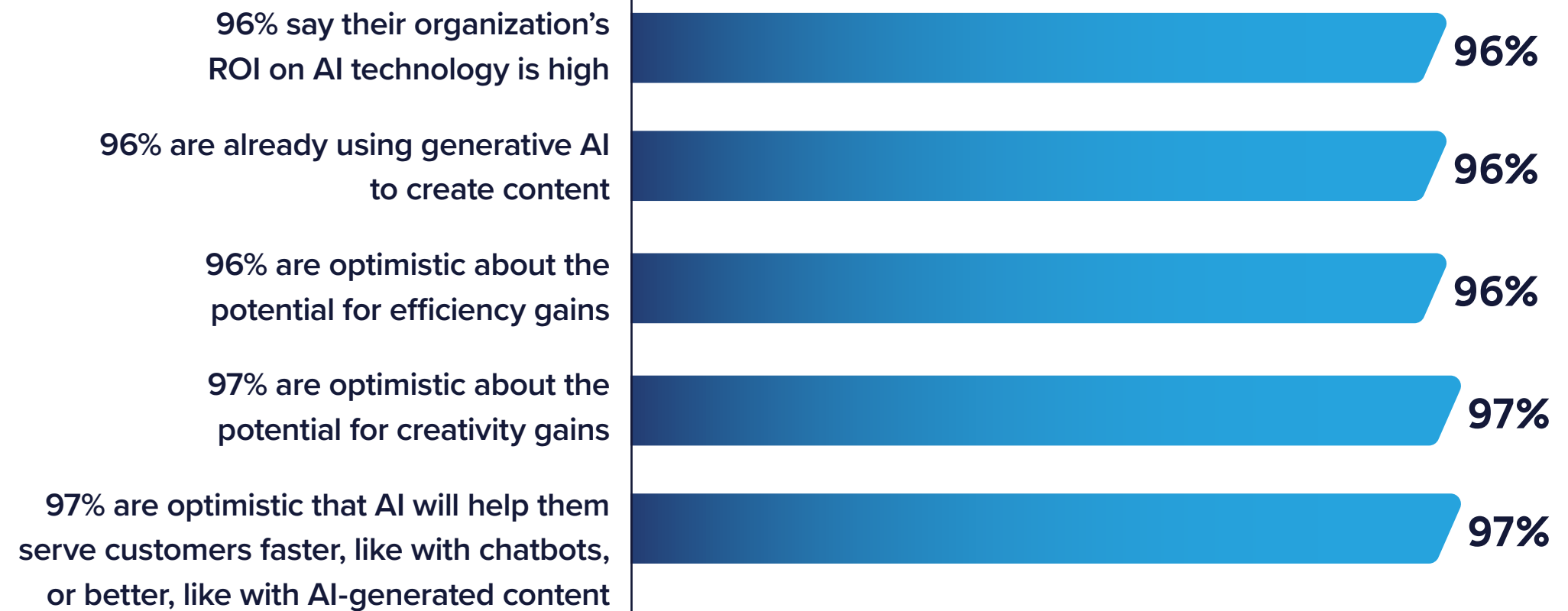| Technology	%
AI for content creation (generative AI such as ChatGPT)	45%
Content management system (CMS)	41%
Customer relationship management (CRM)	38%
Content marketing	36%
Marketing resource management (MRM)	33%
Marketing automation platform	30%
Customer data platform (CDP)	30%
Commerce engine	27%
Account based marketing (ABM)	26%
Chatbot	26%
Digital asset management (DAM)	24%
Customer journey orchestration	21%
Email service provider	17%
Personalization	16%
Product information management (PIM)	14%
Intent data	9%
Video platform (excluding YouTube)	9%
Web analytics	2%

Section 3

A Deeper Dive Into a Transformative Technology

For marketers, traditional AI has been a boon for years. Customer data platforms (CDPs) that are powered by AI, for example, give users the power to understand the desires and preferences of millions of individuals at the level required to personalize content.

Marketers are excited about how the newest form of AI may change – and for many is already changing – the ways they create digital experiences:

96% say their organization's ROI on AI technology is high — **96%**

96% are already using generative AI to create content — **96%**

96% are optimistic about the potential for efficiency gains — **96%**

97% are optimistic about the potential for creativity gains — **97%**

97% are optimistic that AI will help them serve customers faster, like with chatbots, or better, like with AI-generated content — **97%**

46%

of marketers plan to invest in AI for content creation next year.

Still, while fervor is running high, many marketers know there's a lot they don't know about AI. Over one-third (39%) cite "understanding how to use AI" among their biggest martech or digital experience challenges.

In addition, 88% say they are concerned about the potential impact on privacy or security of using AI in marketing.

There's another big hurdle to overcome: Getting consumers, the ultimate arbiters, on board with AI-powered CX. Consider that only 48% of consumers say they like using a chatbot on a brand's website to get answers to some of their questions.

How open consumers feel toward this sort of technology appears to vary to some degree by age, with 62% of Gen Z respondents saying they like using AI chatbots. The numbers steadily decrease to 57% of Millennials, 42% for Gen X, and an even lower percentage of Baby Boomers, at 29%.

AI tools promise to speed content creation and to deliver innovative digital experiences. Marketers should ensure that the content and experiences still support the brand essence and that the user experience remains carefully orchestrated.
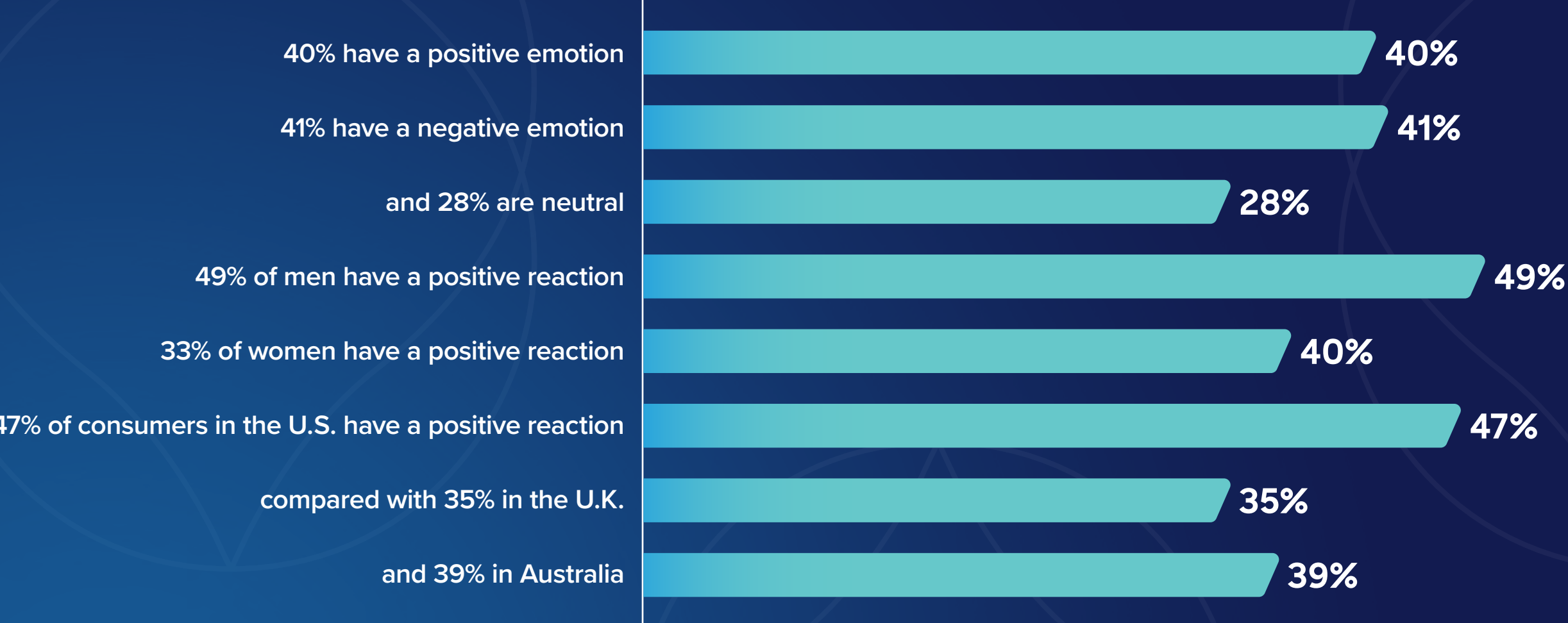
No Matter How You Slice it, There's An Enthusiasm Gap Between Marketers and Consumers About AI-Crafted CX

The question asked in the survey was:

Which of the following emotions do you experience when you encounter an organization using AI on their digital platforms? (For example, organizations using a chatbot on their website.)

40% have a positive emotion	**40%**
41% have a negative emotion	**41%**
and 28% are neutral	**28%**
49% of men have a positive reaction	**49%**
33% of women have a positive reaction	**40%**
47% of consumers in the U.S. have a positive reaction	**47%**
compared with 35% in the U.K.	**35%**
and 39% in Australia	**39%**

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Section 4

Marketers Experience Wins and Setbacks in Creating Engaging Customer Journeys

43%

of marketers say working effectively with other internal teams to create digital experiences is one of their organization's biggest martech or digital experience challenges.

Content creators appear to be making strong gains in some noteworthy areas of CX.

Nearly all (98%) say they can, to at least some extent, deliver a consistent experience to customers across their website, mobile site, call center, email, and other channels. That's advantageous since 79% of consumers say they expect brands to have a consistent message and appearance across all the digital platforms they interact with them on.

In addition, 37% of marketers can create digital CX with little or no IT help compared to 25% in 2022. These empowered respondents may be using low-code or no-code tools with user-friendly interfaces that make it easy to build campaigns, update websites, and do other important tasks.

However, many teams are faltering in other important areas. Similar to last year, 78% of marketers say they struggle to create content that can be rapidly released across all of their organization's digital platforms in one go.

Additional findings highlight opportunities for improvement among marketers:

43%

Only 43% "slightly agree" that their organization knows how to use customer data to create digital experiences.

39%

Only 39% "slightly agree" that their organization knows how to create the type of content they need to support digital customer experiences. (A mere 29% of respondents at the largest organizations say the same despite presumably having larger teams.)

41%

Only 41% "slightly agree" that their organization knows how to bring together or integrate their marketing technologies in a way that allows them to create the digital CX they want to deliver.

Regional Differences May Point to Lack of Access to Tools

The question asked in the survey was:

To what extent does your organization's marketing technology hold you back from being innovative?

To a great extent

U.S. **33%**

U.K. **33%**

Australia **58%**

To some extent

U.S. **33%**

U.K. **42%**

Australia **31%**

As marketers work to create more productive, frictionless customer experiences, lack of access to tools may at times prevent them from being able to rapidly deliver on their vision.

Digital Experiences Must be Human-Centric

63%

Accessibility is a top priority for just 63% of companies with revenues of more than $500 million.

Creating digital experiences that are designed for everyone to use, regardless of their abilities, is not only required from a standards and compliance standpoint, but adds real business value. In 2023, the World Health Organization estimates that 16% of people globally live with a disability. In the U.S. alone, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that at least one million people are blind.

Inclusive design experiences build positive brand interactions and drive improvement in conversions and engagement. However, marketers may not feel they have the tools or processes to create digital experiences for all users.

Accessibility is a top priority for 68% of marketers in the U.S., 64% in Australia, and only 40% in the U.K. The majority of remaining respondents say they "try to make our experiences accessible when we can," pointing to a potential way for many marketers to reach customers and users.

The biggest organizations could also improve in this area of inclusion. Accessibility is a top priority for just 63% of companies with revenues of more than $500 million and for 65% of those with 3,000 or more employees.

Section 5

Build Trust With Consumers to Earn the Data That Fuels Effective Digital CX

2021
2022
2023

The percentage of marketers who "strongly agree" that their organization is fully prepared for the cookieless future has risen to 45% from 35% in 2022 and 2021.

The countdown to the complete phase-out of third-party cookies in 2024 can now be referenced in months, not years. Consumers, who spend an average of three hours a day browsing websites, appear ready to bid farewell. Three in four (76%) expect their data will be more private when web browsers stop tracking users with third-party cookies.

In addition, 66% of consumers say they get frustrated when brands suddenly appear to market to them because they searched about them or a similar brand online.

Marketers understand that first-party data is increasingly vital for creating a personalized CX. It's become common wisdom that this owned data can provide insights to better understand target audiences, like the topics that interest them, the channels they prefer, and the purchases they've made.

The majority (93%) of marketers say gathering first-party data is more important to their organization than it was two years ago.

There is however still the debate as to whether personalization is welcomed by everyone.

Only 58% of consumers say they like it when brands seem to know their interests or preferences.

More granular findings reveal that a higher percentage (67%) of consumers in the U.S. feel good about brands knowing this

information (compared with 54% in both the U.K. and Australia). In addition, 61% of men are more positive on the matter compared with 56% of women.

Consumers also have concerns about the data they themselves share. One question asked, "To what extent do you trust that your personal data is secure with organizations when inputting it into their digital platforms?" Only 17% say they think their data is "very secure."

58%
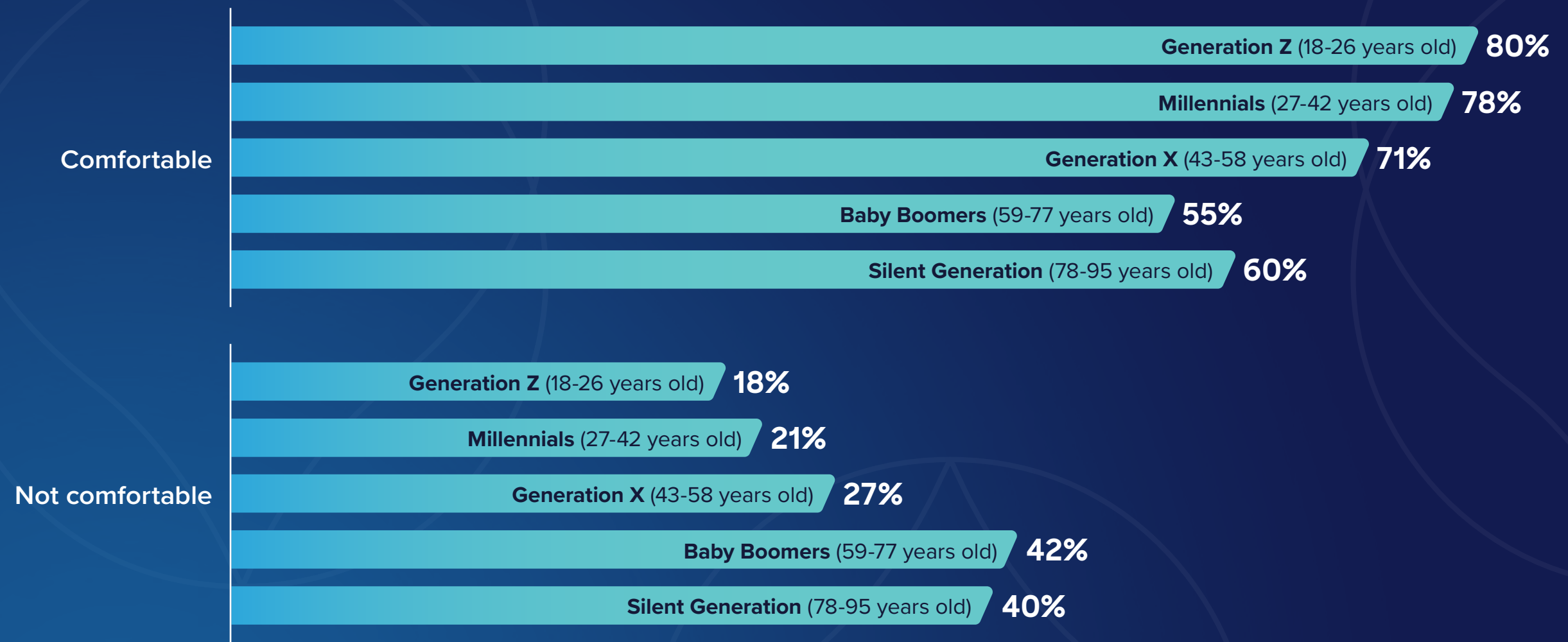of consumers say they like it when brands seem to know their interests or preferences.

Younger Generations are the Most Comfortable Sharing Personal Data to Receive a Better Experience

The question asked in the survey was:

How comfortable are you in giving brands your personal data in exchange for an improved experience (such as perks like freebies or more personalized offers, etc.)?

Comfortable

Generation Z (18-26 years old)	**80%**
Millennials (27-42 years old)	**78%**
Generation X (43-58 years old)	**71%**
Baby Boomers (59-77 years old)	**55%**
Silent Generation (78-95 years old)	**60%**

Not comfortable

Generation Z (18-26 years old)	**18%**
Millennials (27-42 years old)	**21%**
Generation X (43-58 years old)	**27%**
Baby Boomers (59-77 years old)	**42%**
Silent Generation (78-95 years old)	**40%**

Marketers are perpetually optimistic about their role as guardians of data. About eight in ten (84%) think their customers trust their organization's use of their personal data more this year compared to last. That finding has also been roughly consistent since 2021.

Consumers continue to tell a somewhat different story, however, with only 56% saying they trust that all brands will handle their personal data properly.

This issue of trust, or lack of trust, isn't new. This finding has been roughly consistent since 2021.

The trust gap that Acquia has been monitoring for years appears to still be present.

This indicates an opportunity for marketers to be more transparent with consumers about how their data will be used, and not used.

84%
think their customers trust their organization's use of their personal data more this year compared to last.

Summary and Takeaways

There have never been more tools or platforms available to CX professionals.

Yet, in these times of constant change, many marketers still struggle to quickly deliver exceptional digital experiences that maintain brand consistency and appropriate data governance.

One way to maximize the value of your martech stack is to consolidate and integrate. Connected solutions will enhance the overall customer journey. Look for open, interoperable platforms to ensure value from all best of breed solutions.

Ask yourself, in terms of:

- **Organization:** Do you have strategic alignment that drives business outcomes and digital experience goals, matched with the talent requirements to deliver a productive customer journey?

- **Data:** Can you leverage data relevancy for decisioning, attribution and findability, combined with reporting and analytics to achieve a productive, compliant digital experience?

- **Content:** Have you defined brand governance through an omnichannel content strategy, structure, and lifecycle to support the creation and completion of the digital experience?

- **User Experience:** Have you identified the required martech capabilities for an optimized, accessible, and safe digital experience?

- **Processes:** Do you have a repeatable set of procedures and operations designed to realize each stage of an experience lifecycle?

Now, let's get started.

Brands need a partner committed to supporting them as they accelerate their digital transformation and deliver complete experiences that engage, convert, and drive results in every channel.

Learn why Acquia is that company, and explore the world-class partners we work with to create tailored solutions and accelerate results.

Learn More

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About Acquia

Acquia empowers ambitious digital innovators to craft productive, frictionless digital experiences that make a difference to their customers, employees, and communities. We provide the world's leading open digital experience platform (DXP), built on open source Drupal, as part of our commitment to shaping a digital future that is safe, accessible, and available to all. With Acquia DXP, you can unlock the potential of your customer data and content, accelerating time to market and increasing engagement, conversion, and revenue.