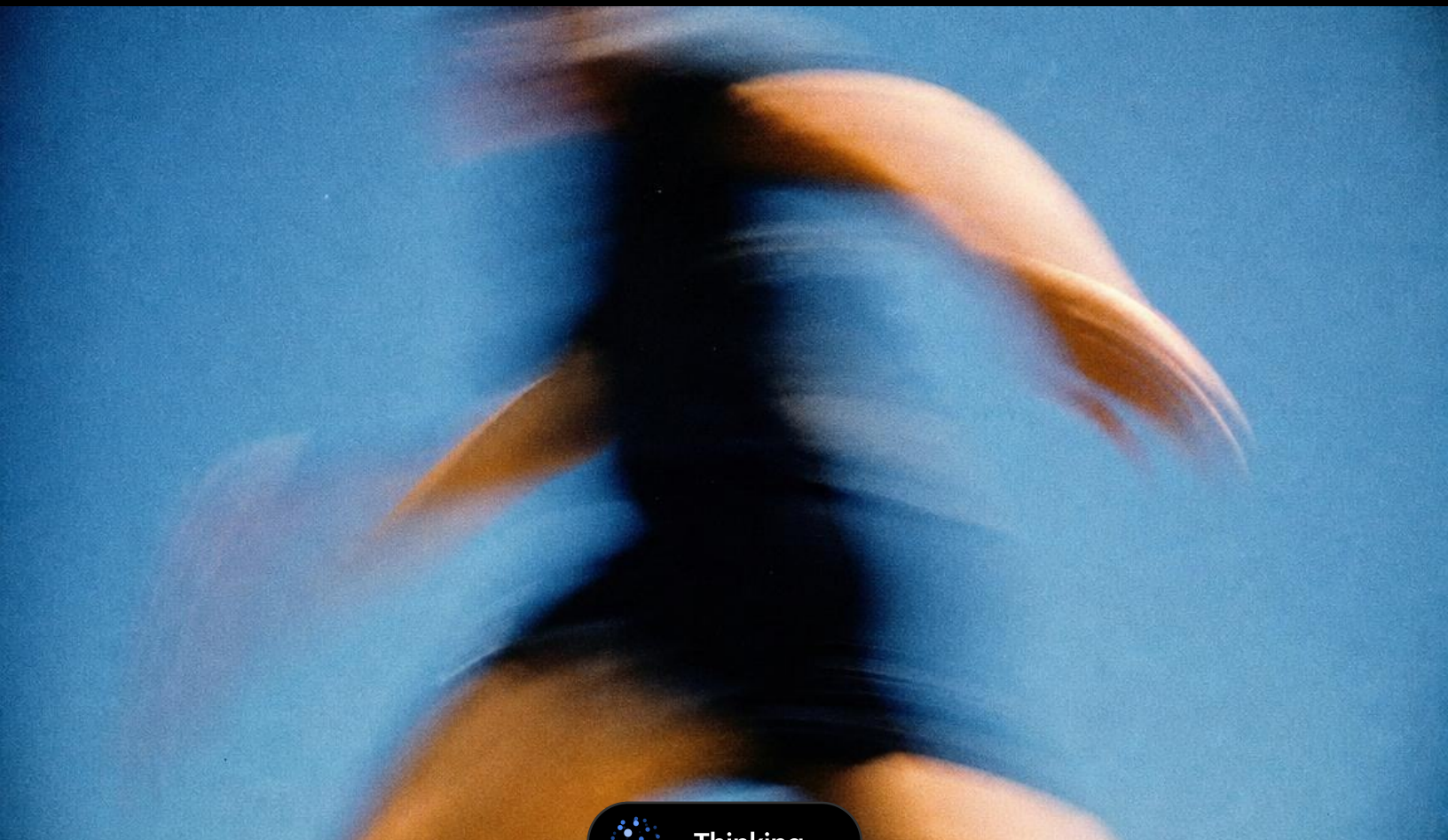


The State of Creative Professionals *and AI: 2026*

AI is already part of creative work.
Now comes the harder part.



Thinking...

Content

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The question isn't whether. It's where.

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About Luma.

The question isn't whether. It's where.



Creatives settled the "Should I use AI?" question a while ago. Eight in 10 have already released content made with AI.

The harder question now is, where does the tech belong in the creative process?

That means:

Where does AI make the work better?

Where does it make the work faster?

Where does it get in the way?

And where should judgment stay with creative professionals themselves?

To see how today's creatives are navigating these decisions, we surveyed 760 creative professionals across agencies, brands, production companies, and freelance work. They shared how they're using AI, what's working, where they're getting stuck, as well as their concerns.

The results show AI is already part of creative work. The benefits are real. But adoption is not the same as integration.

And that's creating problematic gaps. Gaps we have a stake in getting right.

Where does the tech belong in the creative process?

The question isn't whether. It's where.

Luma builds AI tools that earn their place in creative work. That also means knowing when to get out of the way of everything that should remain with the creative: taste, authorship, and the human call on what's landing.

That's the standard we hold our products to. It's also the standard we want this benchmark to help the industry think about.

This report is the first edition of an annual benchmark to track this shift. Each year, we'll ask the same questions and see what changed, what didn't, and where creative teams are headed.

This isn't a report about the technology. It's about what happens when AI becomes part of how we create, and the decisions that remain ours to make.



AI is in the work, but not deeply

AI has clearly moved into creative work. But its role varies widely across the creative process.

42%

use AI for image generation

38%

for video editing assistance

23%

for moodboards

20%

for background replacement

No single creative task has crossed 50% adoption.

The 9 Truths

1. AI is already making the work

81% of creative professionals have released AI-generated content.

2. The benefits are winning out

71% say AI creates more benefits than drawbacks for productivity.

3. Creatives want a partner, not a replacement

40% say AI improves both efficiency and creative quality.

4. Human judgment still matters

62% are concerned about over-relying on AI at the expense of human creativity.

5. The tools arrived before the playbook

72% say access to AI tools is good or excellent, but training and integration lag.

6. Businesses are speed-dating AI tools

6.1 new tools were evaluated, **4.3** adopted, **2.9** dropped on average in the past 12 months.

7. AI adoption is uneven

21% believe their company is Leading with AI, while **26%** consider themselves Laggards.

8. AI Leaders are going big on video

78% of Leaders have released AI-majority video, vs **11%** of Laggards.

9. AI is changing the agency equation

55% of agencies expect to raise fees, **53%** of brands expect to reduce agency spend due to internal AI capabilities.

Individually, each truth tells us something about how creatives are using AI. Together, they reveal five forces shaping what happens next.

What the 9 Truths reveal

AI can help, but it can't take the wheel

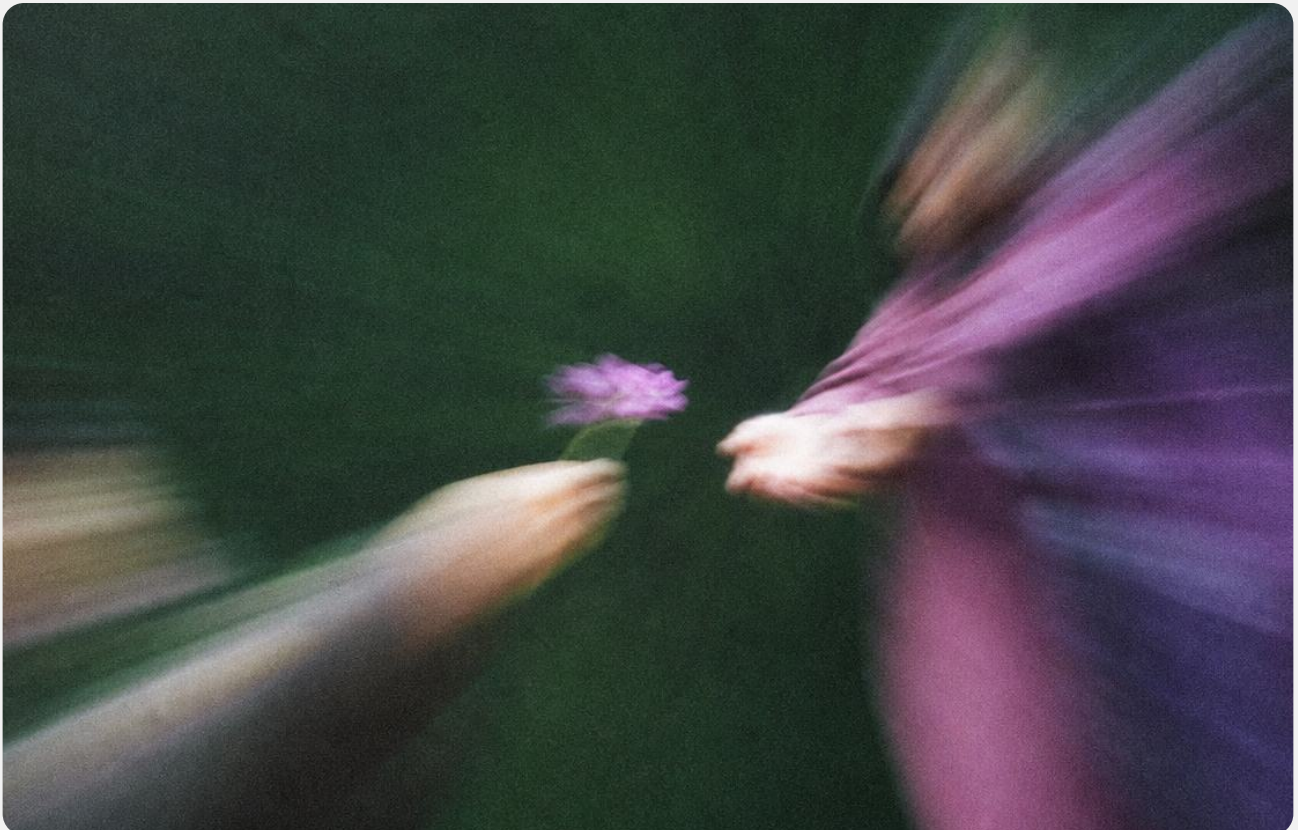
Four in 10 creative professionals say AI improves both efficiency and creative quality. For many, AI is a way to explore more possibilities, break through a creative block, or take on work that slows a team down.

But the benefits aren't enough for creatives to hand over the wheel.

One in five professionals say AI improves efficiency while reducing creative quality. Creatives also see AI falling short when it comes to judgment, emotional nuance, storytelling, and productive collaboration.

40%

of creatives say AI improves efficiency and quality



What the 9 Truths reveal

AI Concerns

62%

are very or extremely concerned about becoming too reliant on AI at the expense of human creativity

54%

are very or extremely concerned about losing creative skills they've spent years developing

52%

are very or extremely concerned that AI-assisted work makes what they create feel less authentically theirs

Then there's the question of recognition

54% are very or extremely concerned that AI-generated work could win awards over work created by humans.

Nearly the same amount (53%) are very or extremely concerned about being undervalued if AI can do what they do.

Top concern

62%

are very or extremely concerned about becoming too reliant on AI at the expense of human creativity

"The entire purpose of my company is Creative Design so to have a computer do that takes away the personal effect."

— One survey participant, summarizing AI's role

The Implication:

Don't measure AI's value by how much creative work it can take over. Ask what it makes possible that wasn't practical before.

What the 9 Truths reveal

Having more tools isn't enough

At a time when creatives are asked to do more and faster, access to AI tools is a must. But access is the easy part: **72%** of creatives rate their access to AI tools as good or excellent.

The harder part is turning access into results. That means answering three basic questions: Which tools should we adopt? How should people use them? And where do they fit in the workflow?

The first question is still largely unresolved.

More than half of creatives say their organization lacks a structured, enforced way to evaluate and approve AI tools.

One in three say AI adoption is driven by individual employees.

52%

of organizations lack a structured, enforced way of evaluating and approving AI tools

Aperture: AI-Powered Creative Drives 9x More Client Spend

Aperture, a growth marketing agency, tripled in size in 12 months. But growth was putting pressure on its creative team as clients wanted more ad variants, delivered faster.

The agency needed to increase creative output without adding headcount or relying on costly outside vendors. More importantly, the team needed to keep creative judgment so the work performed.

Aperture realized adding another AI tool wouldn't solve the problem. It needed to build AI into the way the team already worked.

So it integrated Luma into the agency's operating system, Aperture OS. Strategists review and approve briefs before Aperture OS calls the Luma API to generate the creative. When human judgment is needed, the team works directly in Luma's board.

The results: **CPA fell more than 75%** for one client. The consistently high-performing creative gave the client confidence to **increase ad spend 9x**.

What the 9 Truths reveal

The next two questions aren't much easier. When creatives rate their organization's AI readiness, training and enablement and workflow integration rank as the weakest areas.

So teams keep experimenting. Over the past year, the average organization evaluated **6.1** AI tools, adopted **4.3**, and stopped using **2.9**. Agencies churn even faster: **6.5** evaluated, **5.1** adopted, and **3.5** stopped using.

That experimentation has a cost. Every new tool takes time to evaluate, learn, and fit into the workflow. Time and resources that could otherwise go toward the work itself.

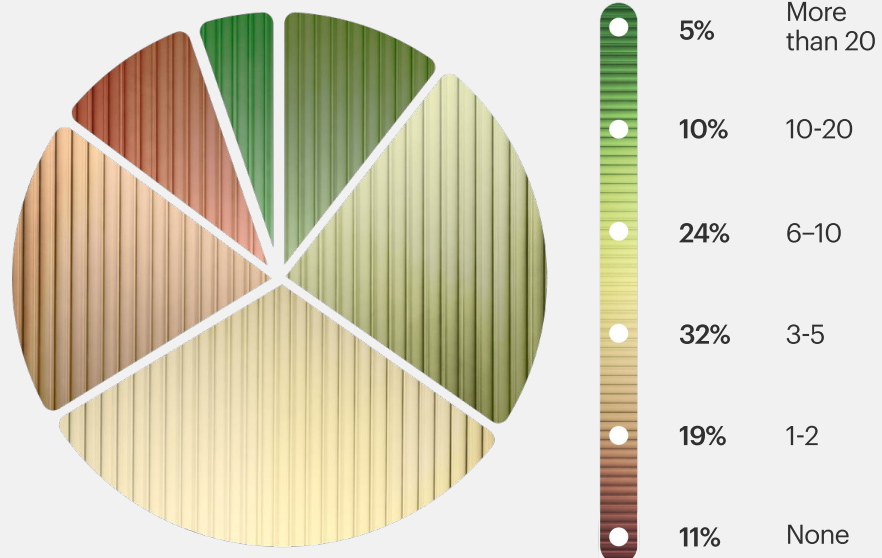
What all this shows is access isn't adoption. And adoption isn't integration. Teams need a way to choose the right tools, learn how to use them, and make them part of the work.

Businesses are evaluating AI tools

On average, creative professionals **evaluated 6.1 AI tools** in the past year.

They **adopted 4.3** AI tools.

They **stopped using 2.9** AI tools.



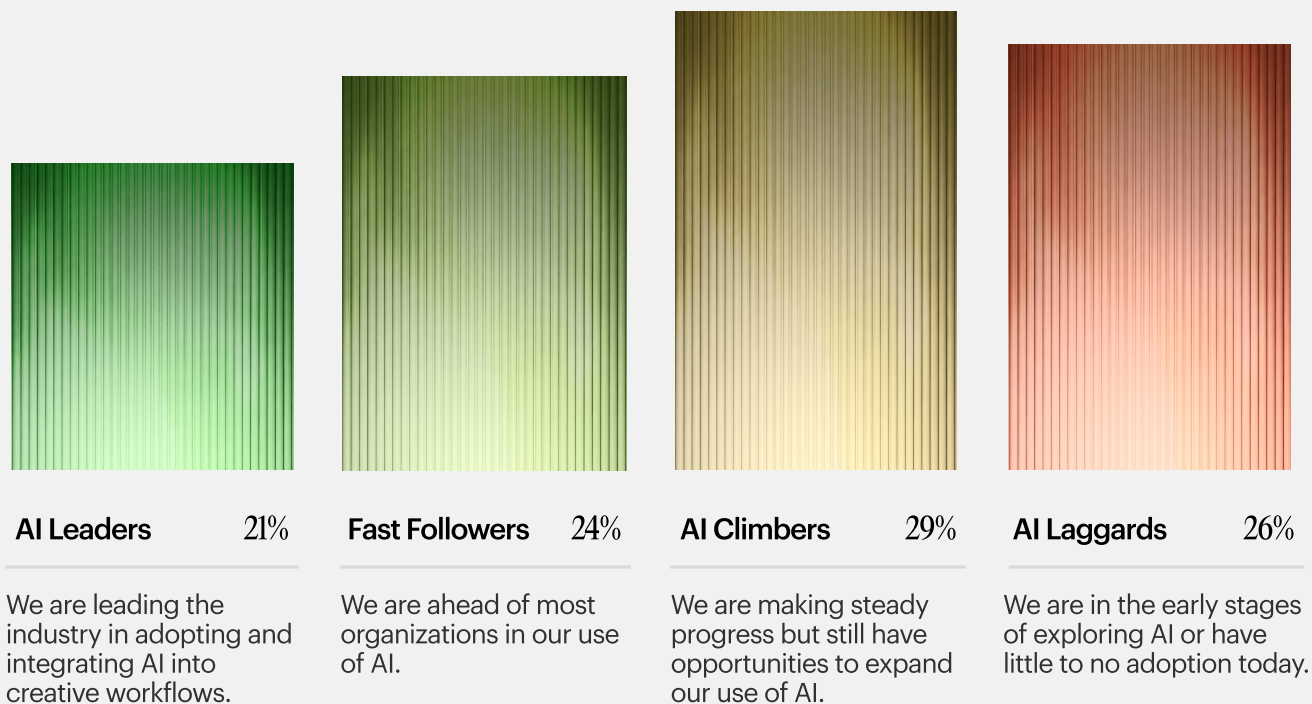
The Implication:

The tool is only the starting point. The real value comes when teams know where it belongs, know how to use it, and build it into the way they work.

What the 9 Truths reveal

Four levels of AI readiness

When asked to rate their organization's readiness to use AI for creative work, respondents fell into four groups:



Leaders stand out by going deeper

Leaders use more AI tools than Laggards on average: **6.5 vs. 2.9**. But the bigger difference isn't how many tools they use. It's how much AI makes its way into the finished work.

The gap is the starkest in AI video generation.

78% of AI Leaders have released video in which AI created the majority or all of the content. Just **11%** of Laggards have.

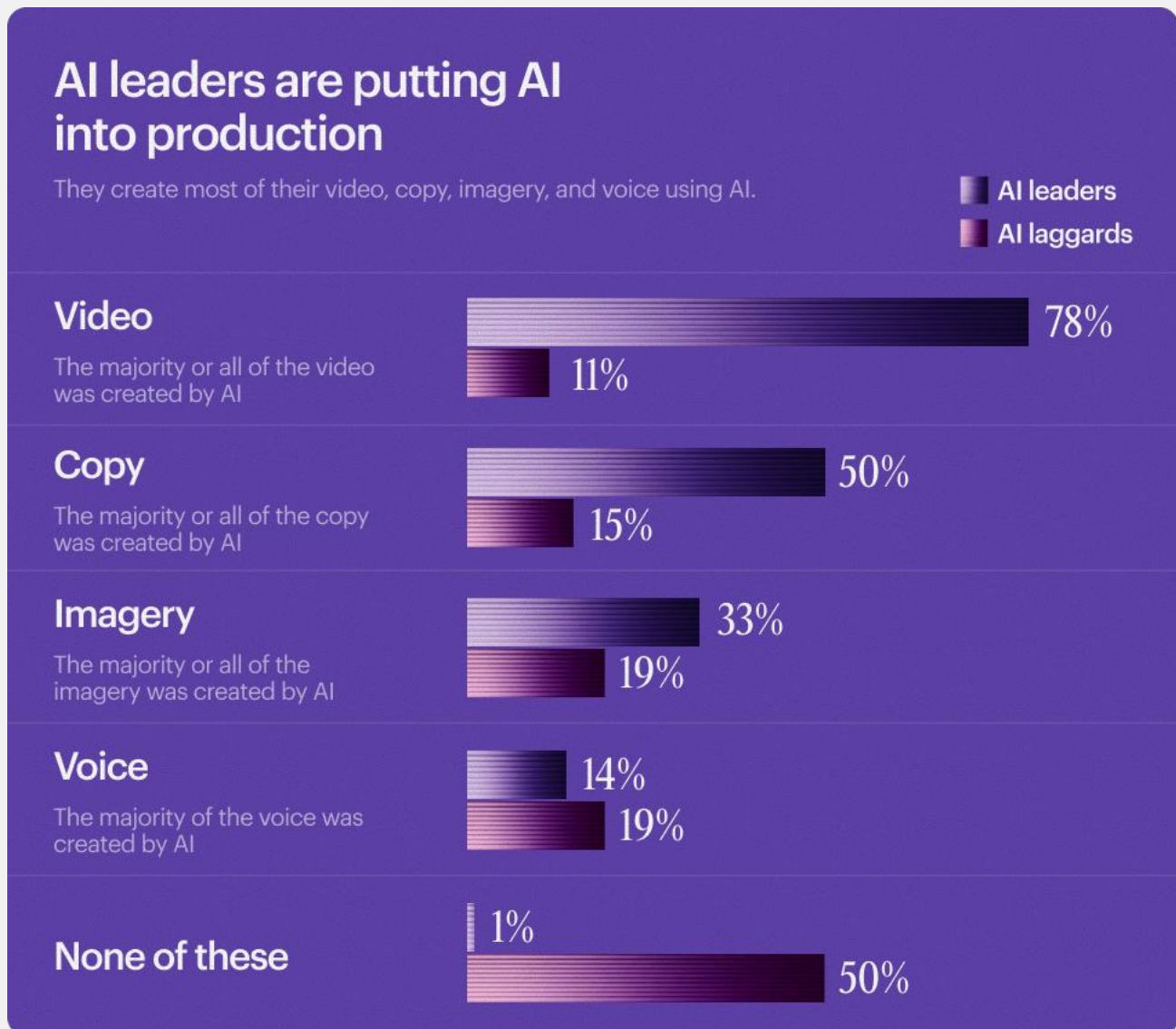
78% vs. 11%

AI Leaders are 7x more likely to release AI-majority video compared to AI Laggards

What the 9 Truths reveal

The pattern extends to other formats, too. Half of Leaders have released AI-majority copy, compared with **15%** of Laggards. For imagery, it's **33% vs. 19%**.

Leaders aren't just trying more AI tools. They're giving AI a bigger role in what actually gets made.



The Implication:

The leaders aren't winning by adding more tools. They're finding more places for AI to do the work while keeping creative judgment in human hands.

What the 9 Truths reveal

AI's impact on agency economics

How creative professionals expect AI to affect agency economics

55%

agency creatives

expect their fees to increase as a result of AI adoption.

53%

brand creatives

anticipate spending less with agencies due to internal AI capabilities.

AI is changing the agency equation

AI is changing more than how creative work gets made. It's changing how agencies and brands think about what that work is worth. And they're seeing the economics differently.

More than half (55%) of agency creatives expect their fees to increase as a result of AI adoption. On the brand side, **53%** expect their organizations to decrease agency spend because of internal AI capabilities.

Agencies see AI as a reason their work could be worth more. Brands see internal AI capabilities as a reason they may need less agency support.

What the 9 Truths reveal

It's easy to see why.

For agencies, AI can increase what they can deliver: more ideas explored, work produced, and ways to execute for clients.

Agencies are also further along in adoption: **36%** are AI Leaders, compared with **17%** of brands. That suggests agencies may be further ahead in putting AI to work across the creative process.

For brands, the equation looks different. If internal teams can use AI to produce more creative work themselves, they may need less outside support.

Neither finding tells us where the market will land, but the tension is visible.

Agencies see AI as a reason their work could be worth more. Brands see internal AI capabilities as a reason they may need less agency support.

The Implication:

"Our agency uses AI" won't be enough to justify higher fees. Agencies will need to show clients the value AI creates: better work, more creative options, faster execution, or work that wasn't practical before.

OneDay: Bringing a 30-Year-Old Idea to Life

The idea was Adrenaline Junkies, a character-driven daredevil story culminating in four or five characters and a dog riding a snowcat. For nearly 30 years, the concept sat on the shelf, deemed too expensive and unproducible.

The directors at OneDay saw a way to bring Adrenaline Junkies to life with AI. But they didn't start by generating images. They spent weeks with the original creators developing the characters, backstories, tone, and visual language.

Then they brought that creative foundation into Luma, working alongside actors, sound designers, and session musicians.

Luma carried that creative and visual context throughout production, allowing the team to direct and refine shots without starting from scratch each time.

The result: An 85-shot film, built by a full human creative team around an idea that had once been considered impossible to produce.

What the 9 Truths reveal

The adoption gap isn't just organizational

Free and low-cost tools make AI easy for creatives to try. But, as we've seen, access alone doesn't create value. Getting more from AI takes infrastructure to evaluate tools, integrate them into workflows, measure their impact, and optimize their usage.

That's where freelancers face a particular challenge.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) are AI Laggards, and they're more than twice as likely to report having no formal process for evaluating and adopting AI tools. They also lag in training and enablement, workflow integration, and measuring AI's impact.

Freelancers face bigger gaps in AI readiness

Freelancers are less likely than the overall creative population to have the systems and support needed to adopt AI more deeply.

■ Total (All Creatives)
■ Freelancers

Training & enablement

Freelancers are less likely to rate training and enablement as good or excellent



-22
Point gap

Ability to measure AI's impact

Freelancers are less likely to rate their ability to measure AI's impact as good or excellent



-28
Point gap

Don't have a process for evaluating or adopting AI

Freelancers are more than twice as likely to lack a formal process



+24
Point gap

Freelancers can experiment with many of the same tools as larger teams. But they may have fewer resources to test advanced capabilities, experiment with different tools, and build AI into their workflows.

The result may be a ceiling on how deeply freelancers can integrate AI into their work.

What the 9 Truths reveal

Then there's another adoption gap worth watching.

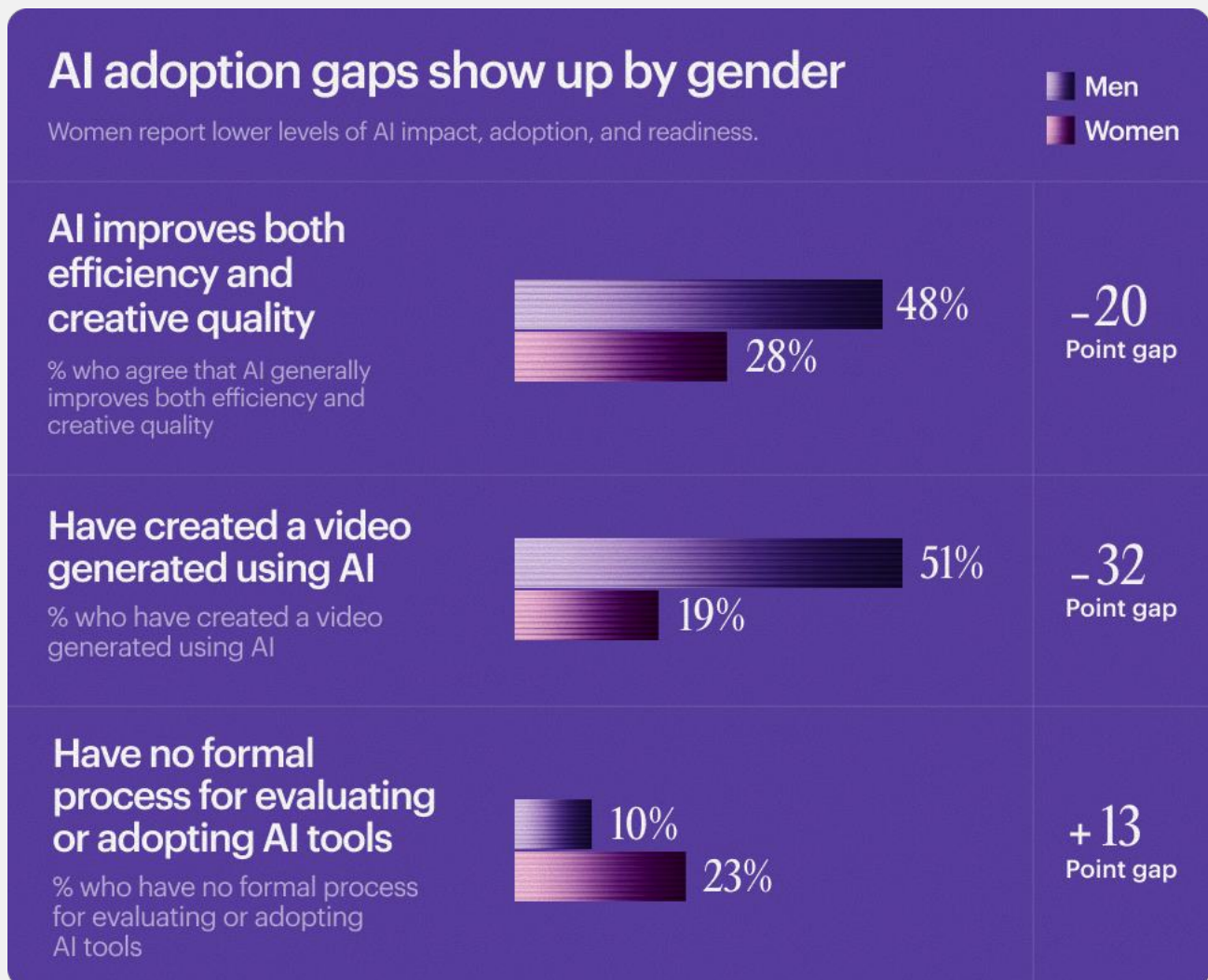
Women in the study are significantly less likely than men to say AI improves both efficiency and creative quality (**28% vs. 48%**). They're also more than twice as likely to report having no formal process for evaluating or adopting AI tools (**23% vs. 10%**).

The difference is most pronounced in video. Just **19%** of women report having released AI-generated video, compared with **51%** of men.

The data can't tell us whether the gap reflects role, organizational culture, access, or something else. Those are questions for further research, not conclusions we should draw from this study.

But the gap is significant enough to watch. An annual benchmark can show whether it narrows, persists, or grows.

The implication: As AI adoption deepens, creatives with less support to experiment and adapt may find it harder to keep pace.



What this means for creatives



Creatives have access to AI. What they have less of is the training, workflow support, measurement and experience to put it to work. It's time to shift from questioning “What AI should we use?” to “Where does AI make the work better?”

For creative leaders:

Build the conditions for better work

Access doesn't automatically create capability.

For in-house teams, invest in the parts of AI adoption that are easy to overlook:

- Training
- Workflow integration
- Clear approval processes
- Ways to measure whether AI is improving the work

For agencies:

Show where AI strengthens the work

Saying you use AI isn't a differentiator anymore. You must show clients where AI strengthens the work that matters most:

- Strategy
- Creative judgment
- Storytelling
- Knowing what should be made in the first place

What this means for creatives

For individual creatives:

Keep your judgment in the loop

Individual creatives have real concerns about AI. More than half worry about losing creative skills, being undervalued, or seeing AI-generated work win awards over human-created work.

Those concerns are worth taking seriously, but they don't have to mean sitting AI out.

A more deliberate approach is to decide where AI earns a place in the creative process. Use it to explore more directions, get past a blank page, remove production friction, or move faster when speed matters, so that the creative solutions still belong to the creative.

For tool builders and buyers:

Earn a place in the workflow

Creative teams are trying a lot of tools. Many don't stick.

To earn a lasting place in the stack, a tool has to fit the way they actually work. And make its value clear enough to justify staying.

Freelancers face an additional challenge. They usually have less access to training and weaker processes for evaluating and adopting AI. Your opportunity may be making it easier for them to move from experimentation to finished work.

AI adoption doesn't equal AI value

Creative professionals have the tools. What many still lack is the training, workflow integration, measurement, and experience to put those tools to work in meaningful ways.

The teams pulling ahead are integrating AI more deeply into the creative process.

They're finding where it can make the work better, where human judgment matters most, and how the two can work together.

Where that balance lands will keep changing as AI becomes a more established part of creative work.

Methodology

This study was developed in collaboration with **Michele Madansky Consulting** and is based on an online survey of **760 U.S. creative** professionals, conducted in **July 2026**.

Respondents work in marketing or creative and design roles and are responsible for creative strategy, development, or execution.

Sample composition

33%	33%	15%	13%	6%
Agencies	Brand or in-house	Production Companies	Freelance	Other

Working environment

The sample also spans different working environments: **51%** work in a mix of remote and in-person settings, **25%** work primarily remotely, and **24%** work primarily in person.

Findings throughout this report are based on the full sample unless otherwise noted.

Company size & age

The respondents represent a range of company sizes, from organizations with **fewer than 10** employees to companies with **5,000 or more**. **56%** are age 35 or older and **44%** are 18–34.

Put AI to work with less work

Luma helps creative teams turn briefs into finished work.

AI Agents research, plan, generate, and refine across video, image, audio, and text, keeping the creative context together from the first idea to the final cut.

Luma takes on the boring, mind-numbing, painful parts of creative work. So you get more directions to explore, more versions to test, and a brand that stays consistent through it all.

*See what your team can
create with Luma.*



Luma's behind some of the fastest creative teams



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