



# The New AI-Augmented Buyer:

## Six Structural Shifts in B2B Buying – What Sales and Marketing Leaders Must Do Now



### Executive Summary

- **AI is reshaping B2B buying** – expanding competitive fields, compressing evaluation cycles, increasing pricing transparency, reducing early-stage sales influence, and increasing the demand on sales reps to provide value-added domain expertise.
- **Our multi-industry survey identifies six behavioral shifts that create four imperatives for CROs and CMOs:** redesign content for AI discovery, accelerate sales responsiveness and technical fluency of sales reps, deploy AI-powered buyer tools, and future-proof pricing models for the AI-enabled buyer.
- **CROs and CMOs that adapt quickly will shape buying journeys in their favor;** those that do not risk being excluded before conversations ever begin.

Over the last 18 months, AI has dramatically rewritten the rules of B2B purchasing. Buyers are not just researching differently; they are evaluating and shortlisting differently and increasingly deciding before your reps ever enter the conversation.



Our multi-industry survey confirms what many commercial leaders have sensed anecdotally—traditional sales motions are being displaced by an AI-accelerated, increasingly self-service buying process.

The implications for Chief Revenue Officers and Chief Marketing Officers are profound. Sales teams are losing early-stage influence. Pricing power is shifting. Vendor differentiation is happening algorithmically, and the top of the funnel is tightening rapidly.

Below, we outline six structural shifts and the four actions CROs must take now to catch up with the rapidly evolving AI-Augmented buyer, supported by data from our study and reinforced with third-party research.

## About the survey:

Blue Ridge Partners recently conducted a survey to better understand how AI is reshaping vendor discovery, evaluation, and seller interactions. We gathered insights from over **150 buyers** at companies with revenue between **\$50 million to \$2 billion** across the **technology, manufacturing, healthcare, and financial services industries.**

### Is Your Commercial Model Ready for the AI-Augmented Buyer?

Blue Ridge Partners offers a complimentary, proprietary AI-Augmented Buyer Readiness Assessment to help sales and marketing leaders evaluate gaps across content, pricing, sales execution, and AI enablement. See page 8 for details.

## 1. Autonomous Discovery: Buyers are educating themselves independently more than ever before – and AI is accelerating the shift

One of the clearest findings: buyers are showing up later, smarter, and with more fully formed opinions than ever.

- 60% of buyers use AI moderately or extensively when researching potential solutions.
- AI-generated summaries and recommendations are now the top three information sources for more than one-third of buyers, including a combination of generative AI, third-party research or AI agents, internally developed AI tools, and standalone AI procurement platforms.
- 43% of buyers say AI has saved 30% or more of their time in discovery and qualification.

This goes beyond simple digital research: it is AI-enhanced vendor identification, feature comparison, strength and weakness analysis, market news scanning, shortlisting, and preliminary rankings. Buyers can now locate all information about your product, company, and competitors across the digital world and provide a clear synthesis of reviews, product comparisons, analyst content, and user feedback in minutes, not weeks.

The result: vendors are being eliminated before a rep ever sends an email, based purely on AI-driven assessments of “fit.”

### Implications for CROs and CMOs:

Your content is no longer just for human buyers; it is training data for AI systems that summarize, compare, and recommend vendors. Buyers increasingly rely on AI tools to cast a wide net, research vendors, compare offerings, and form initial perceptions, eliminating vendors early in the sales cycle. This means marketing content, brand positioning, and digital footprints play a more critical role than ever before in shaping the consideration set. A company's entire digital footprint should be optimized for AI ingestion and analysis.

Companies that have focused on AI discovery have found that LLMs can account for up to 70% of lead flow. Ask the key question: "What will an LLM say about us to a buyer evaluating options? How do I make sure they have it right and allow us to put our best foot forward?"

## 2. Vendor Expansion: AI is enabling smaller vendors to gain access never before possible

At the same time, buyers are discovering more potential vendors than ever before.

- 58% identified a top benefit from AI as the ability to identify vendors they previously "did not know existed."
- 76% believe that AI enables them to identify better-fit vendors.

### Buyer Perspective<sup>1</sup>

"Vendors need to understand that advantages they had in the past will be more open to everyone. It will be easier to find other sources and suppliers."

This marks a sharp break from the past, when large brands dominated discovery, and suggests AI is fundamentally lowering barriers to entry. We are already seeing smaller vendors generate LLM-driven inbound interest within days of product launches.

### Implication for CROs and CMOs:

Strong brands alone no longer protect incumbents. AI levels the playing field by surfacing emerging competitors and niche challengers. CROs should assume that one to two new, previously unknown entrants are now present in most deals – often with differentiated value propositions and aggressive price points. This puts a premium on anticipating those new competitors and enabling the sales team with key messages that play to your strengths, such as service, support and economic stability, along with competitor battle cards that cover a broader set of new entrants.

1. Quotes from survey respondents

### 3. Compressed Buying Cycles: Accelerated research speeding decision velocity, especially among younger buyers

AI-driven efficiency is accelerating decisions, not just shortlist creation:

- 57% of buyers aged 25–35 make decisions in 2–4 weeks.
- Older buyers remain slower, but 65% now complete evaluations in 1–3 months.
- 72% expect reps to deliver faster responses with higher accuracy because of AI.

This significantly compresses the window for sales influence and dramatically raises the penalty for slow or low-value follow-up.

At the same time, for technology products we see a split in later stages: faster movement to proofs of concept (POCs), but slower progression to enterprise agreements, as more stakeholders evaluate how a product's AI capabilities align with broader enterprise-wide AI strategies and data-security requirements. In fact, some Private Equity firms are directing portfolio companies to only sign 1-year agreements because AI is moving so fast they do not want to be locked in.

#### Implication for CROs and CMOs:

Speed is no longer just about responsiveness – it is speed to insight and relevance. Reps must deliver value in the first interaction, not simply manage the buying process. In complex technology deals in particular, reps must proactively develop scenarios showing how their AI-enabled product integrates with multiple enterprise-wide AI strategies and address both governance and security considerations early in the process.

### 4. Pricing Compression: AI is providing more visibility into pricing - and putting downward pressure on price

Buyers are more informed about pricing and pricing models, and increasingly believe AI-driven transparency will reduce final prices.

- 65% of buyers say AI is forcing vendors to be more price competitive.
- Among those 54% report seeing price reductions of 5–10%, and 25% report reductions of 10–20%.
- 12% of buyers now say they have full transparency into vendor pricing models, benchmarks, and cost drivers across most purchases.
- 65% believe AI tools help validate or benchmark pricing in many cases.

#### Buyer Perspective<sup>1</sup>

“Be transparent from the get-go, because if you aren't AI will expose it.”

AI is enabling 54% of buyers to purchase at lower prices, likely due to the expanded competitor set and deeper pricing knowledge when entering negotiations. Often buyers arrive with pricing estimates, inferred cost models, high-level competitive benchmarks, and detailed attribute comparisons. Opaque pricing and discount-heavy tactics are rapidly losing effectiveness.

### **Implication for CROs and CMOs:**

Modernize pricing approach for the AI-enabled buyer by making pricing structures, bundles, add-ons, and services transparent – without publishing prices. Equip reps with AI derived ROI models, payback calculators, and total-cost narratives that stand up to scrutiny. Improve value-based positioning highlighting competitive advantages, including service, reliability and economic stability. Future-proof pricing metrics and structures for the AI-augmented buying environment.

## **5. Shifting Value of Sales Reps: Buyers rely less on reps for information but expect more expertise**

Our data shows a nuanced shift: buyers still want people, but only for higher-value contributions.

- 79% rely on reps less because of AI.
- 60% are less reliant on vendor-provided materials.
- 66% prefer a hybrid mix of virtual and in-person engagement.

Buyers no longer need reps for– product overviews, pricing explanations, generic demos, and broad competitive comparisons.

What they do expect: domain and market expertise, deep technical fluency, consultative guidance, tailored value cases, and fast, accurate answers to complex questions, and insights on how to capture the value.

### **Implication for CROs and CMOs:**

Reps must evolve from “explainers” and “managers of the process” into trusted advisors who translate product capability into business outcomes. For complex offerings, bring SMEs into the sales process earlier to establish credibility and accelerate buyer confidence.

### **Buyer Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

“Human relationships are important, but don’t waste my time. Keep the human but augment them with AI.”

## 6. Vendor Readiness Gap: Buyers believe vendors are not prepared for AI-enhanced procurement

Buyers see a widening gap between expectations and vendor readiness.

- Only 30% believe vendors are prepared for AI-driven procurement.
- 88% expect to significantly increase AI in their buying process over the next 1–2 years.
- 68% already use AI analysis to forecast supplier performance or risk.

This mismatch creates a clear strategic opening for companies that move faster than competitors.

### Buyer Perspective<sup>1</sup>

"Vendors need to leverage AI to make the process more efficient and easier for buyers to buy. For example, AI-driven demos tailored to my use case would be glorious."

### Implication for CROs and CMOs:

Companies that become AI-ready across content, tools, enablement, and pricing will win a disproportionate share of shortlists and improve win rates.

## What CROs and CMOs Must Do Now

Based on the survey findings, four commercial imperatives demand immediate action:

### 1. Engineer Your Digital Footprint for AI Discovery

If AI can't interpret you clearly, it won't recommend you.

- Restructure websites, case studies, pricing pages, and technical documentation so AI systems can easily ingest, analyze, and synthesize them – including proprietary research, named frameworks, and proof points.
- Make positioning explicit and declarative. Remove ambiguity in how you describe your category, differentiation, and ideal customer profile.
- Strengthen authority signals through consistent thought leadership, backlinks, and AEO driven formatting to increase AI citation likelihood.
- Conduct quarterly AI mystery shopping to assess how generative engines describe you versus competitors and close narrative gaps immediately.

**Executive test: When an AI summarizes your category, does your perspective shape the answer?**

## 2. Win the First Five Minutes

In an AI-accelerated buying cycle, speed and substance determine inclusion.

- Redesign lead management to achieve best-in-class response times (five minutes or less) – with real-time measurement and accountability.
- Ensure the first human interaction adds insight, not friction. AI-sourced leads expect expertise, not qualification scripts.
- Equip SDRs with AI tools to instantly contextualize the buyer, personalize outreach, pre-qualify intelligently, and route precisely.
- Elevate frontline technical fluency through training and revised coverage models; introduce SMEs earlier where it materially accelerates trust and deal velocity.

**New standard: The first touch must advance the buyer's thinking.**

## 3. Remove Friction from the Buying Experience

If buyers can research faster, they expect to purchase faster.

- Compress internal decision cycles – streamline pricing approvals, legal review, and contract negotiation.
- Simplify packaging, terms, and onboarding to reduce perceived risk and time-to-value.
- Deploy interactive ROI models, configurators, and AI-driven demo walkthroughs – now table stakes in competitive categories.
- Audit every stage of the buying journey for latency, redundancy, and unnecessary internal complexity.

**Commercial reality: Speed and simplicity are increasingly competitive advantages.**

## 4. Make Pricing AI-Resilient and Strategically Defensible

AI is increasingly interpreting and comparing your pricing model before a rep ever engages.

- Clarify competitive advantage and differentiation in ways that are explicit, structured, and machine-interpretable.
- Simplify pricing architecture to ensure it is benchmark-aligned, value-backed, and easy to explain – both by sellers and by AI systems.
- Evaluate outcome-based or hybrid pricing structures where they reinforce strategic positioning.
- Align pricing tightly to your core value drivers; ambiguity will be exposed and commoditized.

**Board-level question: If AI explains your pricing to a buyer, does it reinforce your premium – or undermine it?**



## The Future of Buying Is AI-First, and Sales Must Follow

AI has abruptly and fundamentally reshaped the B2B buying journey. Buyers research more, shortlist differently, evaluate faster, expect transparency, and require higher-value interactions from reps. Sales organizations that respond proactively, redesigning content, tools, pricing, and capabilities, will thrive. Those that do not will increasingly lose deals before conversations ever begin.

Blue Ridge Partners works with CEOs, CROs, CMOs, and private-equity-backed leadership teams to help commercial organizations adapt their go-to-market models for AI-driven buying behavior. Are you ready for the AI-Augmented buyer? Contact us to schedule a complimentary, proprietary **AI-Augmented Buyer Readiness Assessment** and receive a tailored evaluation of your commercial model. Learn more at [www.blueridgepartners.com](http://www.blueridgepartners.com) or contact us directly at [info@blueridgepartners.com](mailto:info@blueridgepartners.com).

## Why Blue Ridge Partners?

At Blue Ridge Partners, we focus exclusively on helping companies accelerate profitable revenue growth – the #1 driver of value creation. We've earned high marks from private equity firms by delivering material, rapid, and cost-effective results for their portfolio companies.

Our work spans value creation planning, commercial model transitions, strategic pricing, sales effectiveness, and commercial due diligence. Our Managing Directors combine top-tier strategy consulting and operating experience, and we're known for rolling up our sleeves, taking a pragmatic, hands-on approach, and focusing on the "how" of execution to drive measurable P&L impact.

Increasingly, we help clients leverage Commercial AI to accelerate growth. Through our Commercial AI Center of Excellence (CoE), we guide AI investments toward real business problems and commercial metrics – not just tools – to ensure tangible results.

Since 2002, we've partnered with over 130 top-tier PE firms and 1,300 companies worldwide to create lasting value across the investment lifecycle.

For further information please contact us at [info@blueridgepartners.com](mailto:info@blueridgepartners.com) or visit us at [www.blueridgepartners.com](http://www.blueridgepartners.com).

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