

State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships

Key Findings Summary

Summary of the Benchmark Survey of AI Awareness, Adoption, Usage,
Impact, and Barriers Across Marine Dealerships

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Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence adoption within marine dealerships is increasing but remains early and fragmented. While awareness is established, practical application and organizational integration are still developing. Experimentation leads, with many dealerships testing AI or using it at an individual level, but only a small minority have achieved full dealership integration.

A defining pattern is the disconnect between interest in AI and structured implementation. Most usage is driven by individual initiative rather than formal strategy, with very few dealerships having a defined roadmap. At the same time, lack of internal expertise is the primary barrier, indicating that capability, not intent, is the key constraint.

Current usage is concentrated in lower-risk, marketing-oriented applications, particularly social media content generation, while more advanced operational use cases remain limited. As a result, AI is being applied tactically rather than embedded into core business processes.

Across key performance areas, measurable impact has not yet been clearly established. Many dealerships report it is still too early to determine results, and a significant portion see no measurable impact in areas like service retention. While adoption is growing, consistent and proven business outcomes have not yet materialized.

Despite these limitations, forward momentum is evident. Many dealerships expect to expand AI usage in the next year, though fewer view it as absolutely critical to long-term success, highlighting uneven prioritization. This gap between expected growth and strategic urgency suggests the industry remains in a transitional phase.

The path forward is clear: transitioning from individual, ad hoc usage to coordinated, organization-wide implementation will be essential to unlocking meaningful value from AI.

Introduction

Study Introduction

Artificial intelligence is becoming increasingly relevant for marine dealerships as they evaluate opportunities to improve operational efficiency, customer engagement, and overall performance.

This study examines how AI is currently understood, adopted, and applied within dealership operations, as well as how its impact is being perceived across key business functions.

The purpose of this benchmark research is to provide dealership leaders with a clear view of current industry patterns, including where adoption is occurring, where gaps remain, and how organizations are approaching future use. Drawing on perspectives from professionals across roles and dealership types, the study reflects how AI is evolving within the marine retail environment.

Methodology

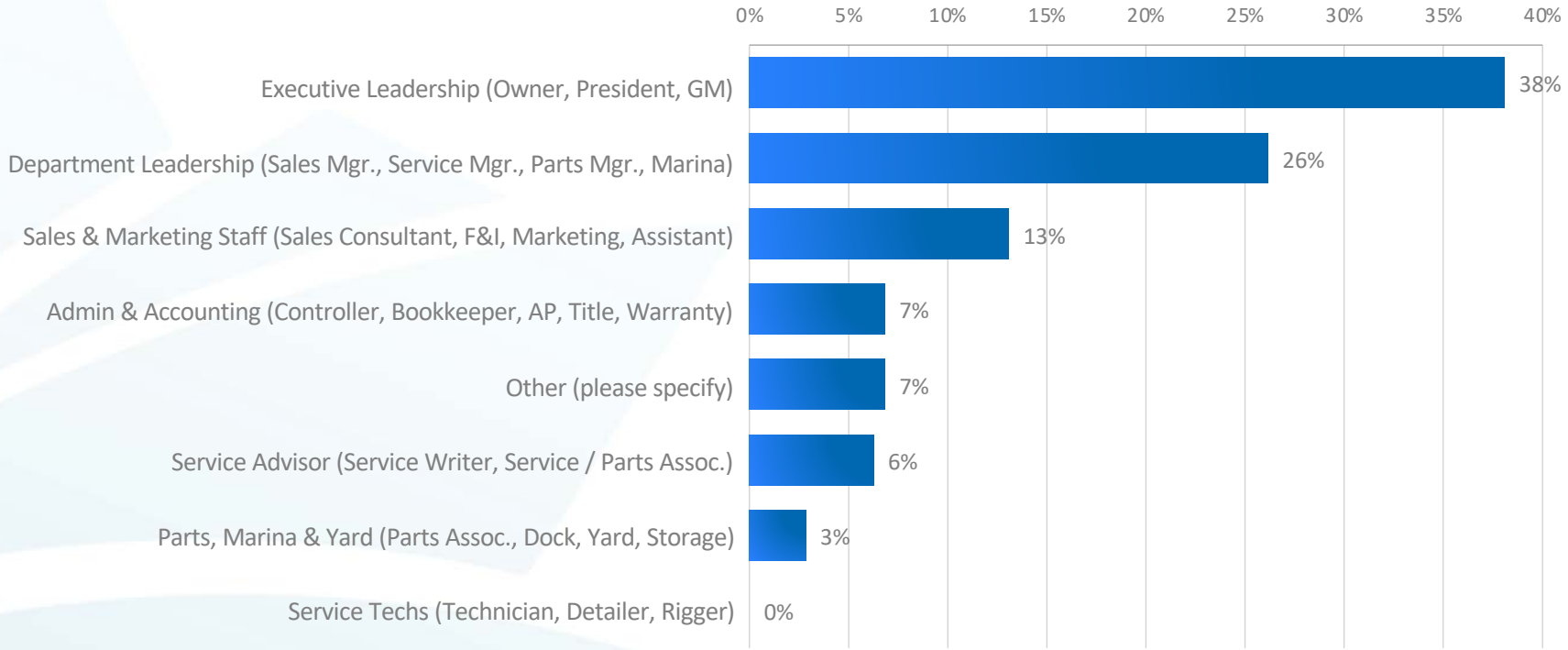
This study is based on a survey of marine dealership professionals representing a range of roles, departments, and dealership structures. A total of 147 respondents participated in the survey, with base sizes varying by question depending on response rates.

All results are reported as percentages of respondents for each question, based on validated data tables. Each percentage reflects a single response option and is presented exactly as reported, without recalculation, aggregation, or estimation.

Respondent Profile: Roles

Leadership roles make up the majority of respondents, with 64% in executive or department leadership positions. Frontline roles are less represented, highlighting a strategic rather than operational perspective.

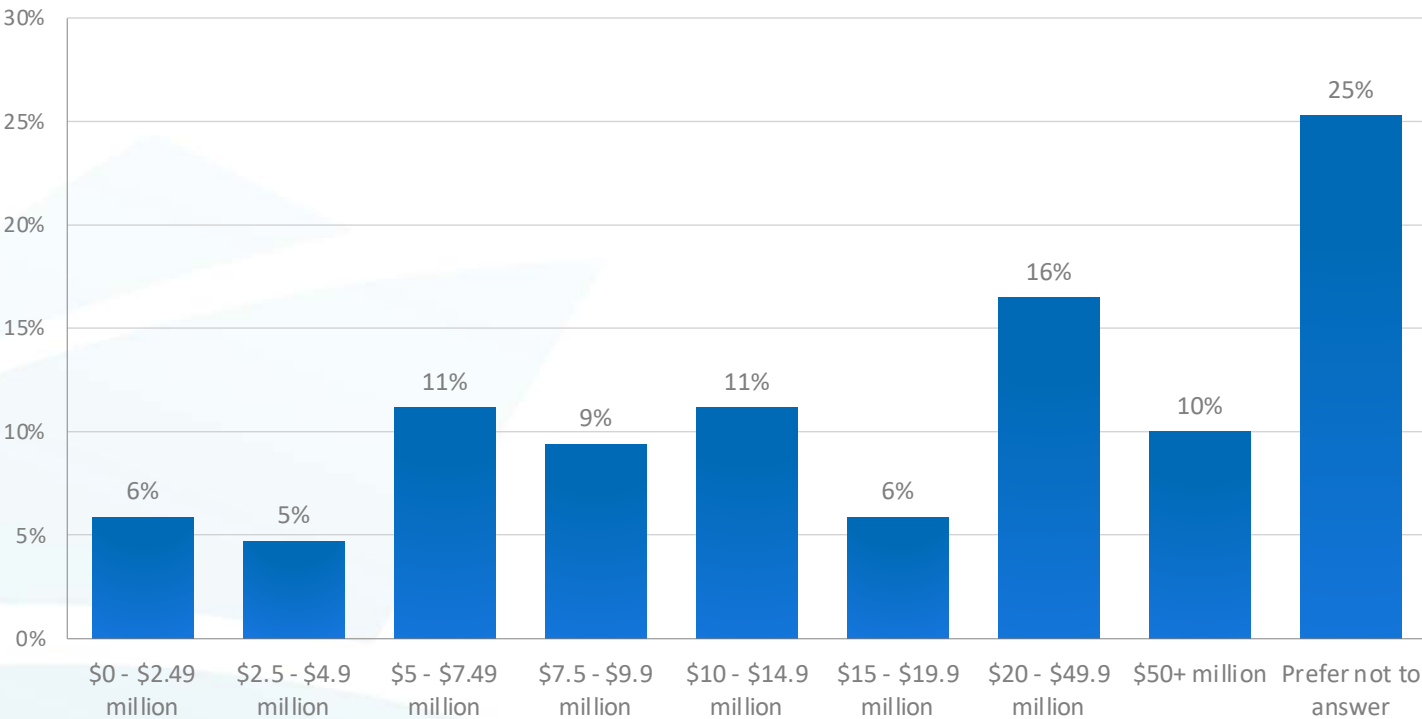
Q3: Which of the following best describes your role at your marine dealership?



Respondent Profile: Total Annual Revenue for 2025

The largest revenue segment is **\$20 - \$49.9M** (16%), followed by **\$5 - \$7.49M** and **\$10 - \$14.9M**, both at 11%.

Q4: What was your dealership's approximate total annual revenue for the 2025 fiscal year?

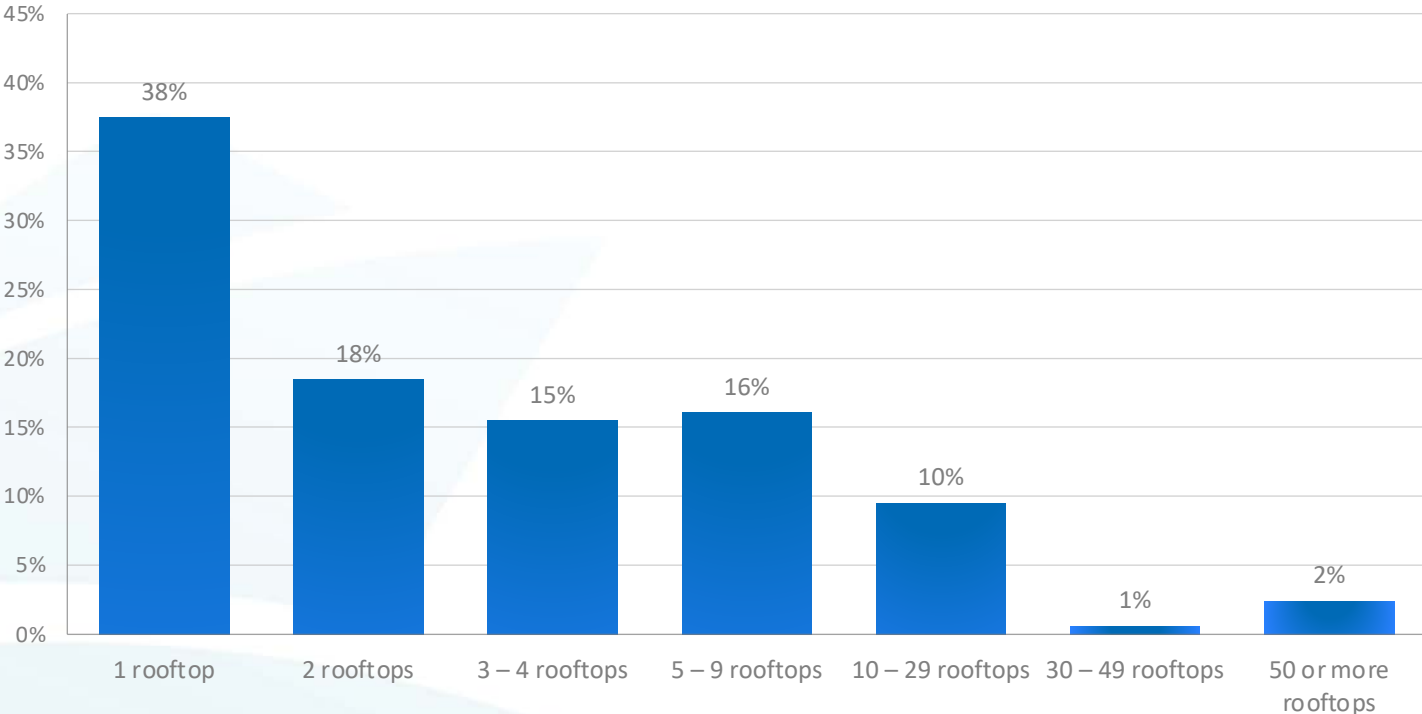


Source: MRAA State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships Survey 2026

Respondent Profile: Physical Rooftops

Slightly more than a third of survey takers are in single-rooftop dealerships; 71% of respondent dealerships have 9 rooftops or fewer.

Q5: How many physical rooftops does your dealership operate?

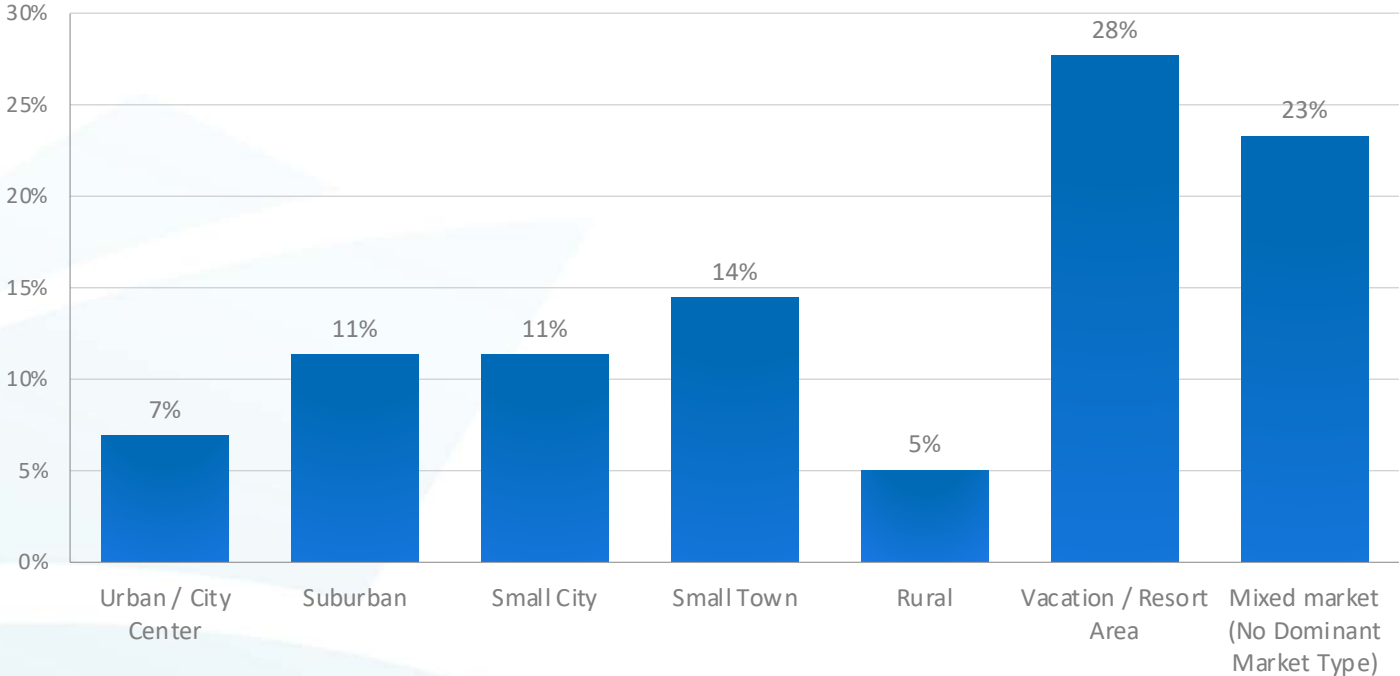


Source: MRAA State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships Survey 2026

Respondent Profile: Primary Market

Vacation/resort markets lead (28%), highlighting a strong leisure-driven industry, and nearly a quarter (23%) operate in mixed markets, indicating diverse customer bases.

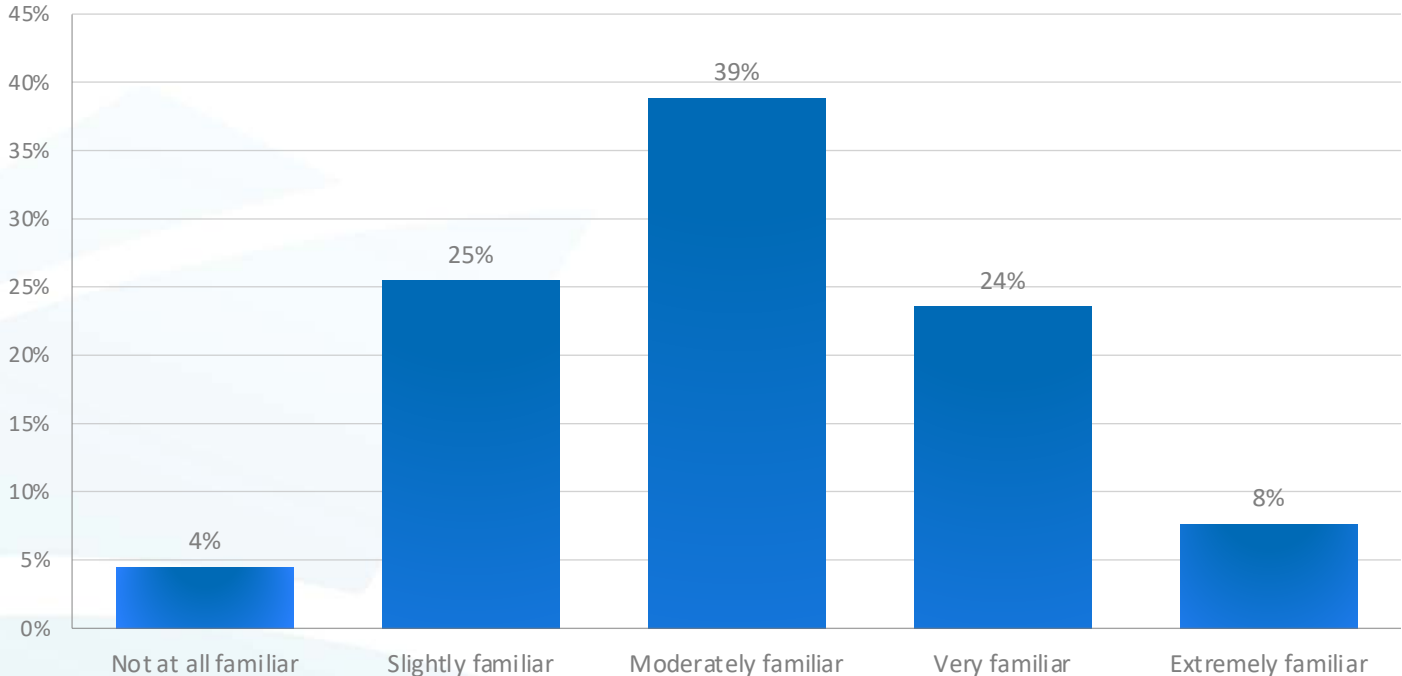
Q8: Which best describes your dealership's primary market?



AI Awareness Is Established, but Deep Expertise Is Still Limited

Most respondents are moderately familiar with AI (39%), with an additional 25% reporting only slight familiarity. Less than a third are very or extremely familiar (32%), indicating developing expertise.

Q10: How familiar are you with artificial intelligence (AI) technologies in general?

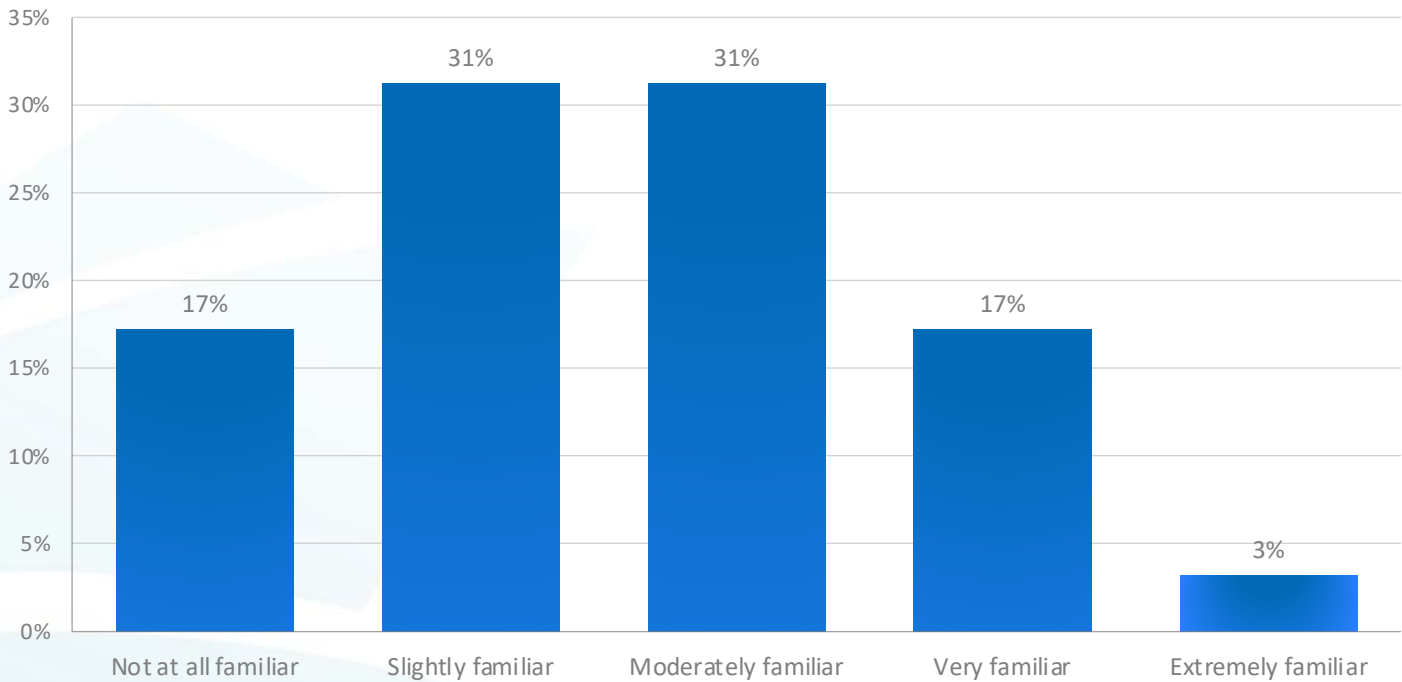


Source: MRAA State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships Survey 2026

Dealership-Specific AI Knowledge Lags Behind General Awareness

Most respondents report some familiarity with AI tools in a dealership setting (62%). Only 20% are highly familiar, while 17% have no familiarity at all.

Q11: How familiar are you with AI tools used in a dealership setting?

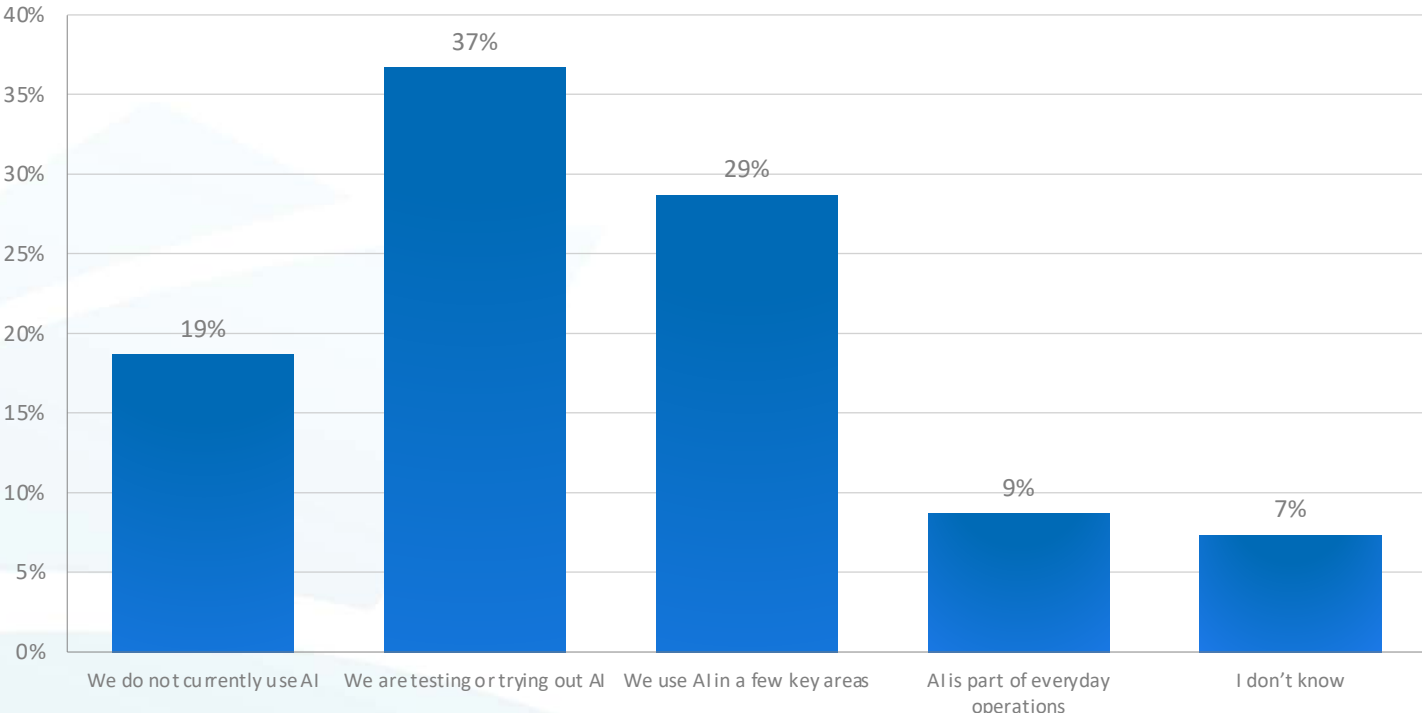


Source: MRAA State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships Survey 2026

Most Dealerships Are Still in the Testing Phase of AI Adoption

AI adoption is primarily in the testing phase (37%). AI maturity reflects how widely AI is adopted in your dealership, how well it is integrated into everyday workflows, and how strategically it is used to drive results.

Q12: How would you rate your dealership's AI maturity?

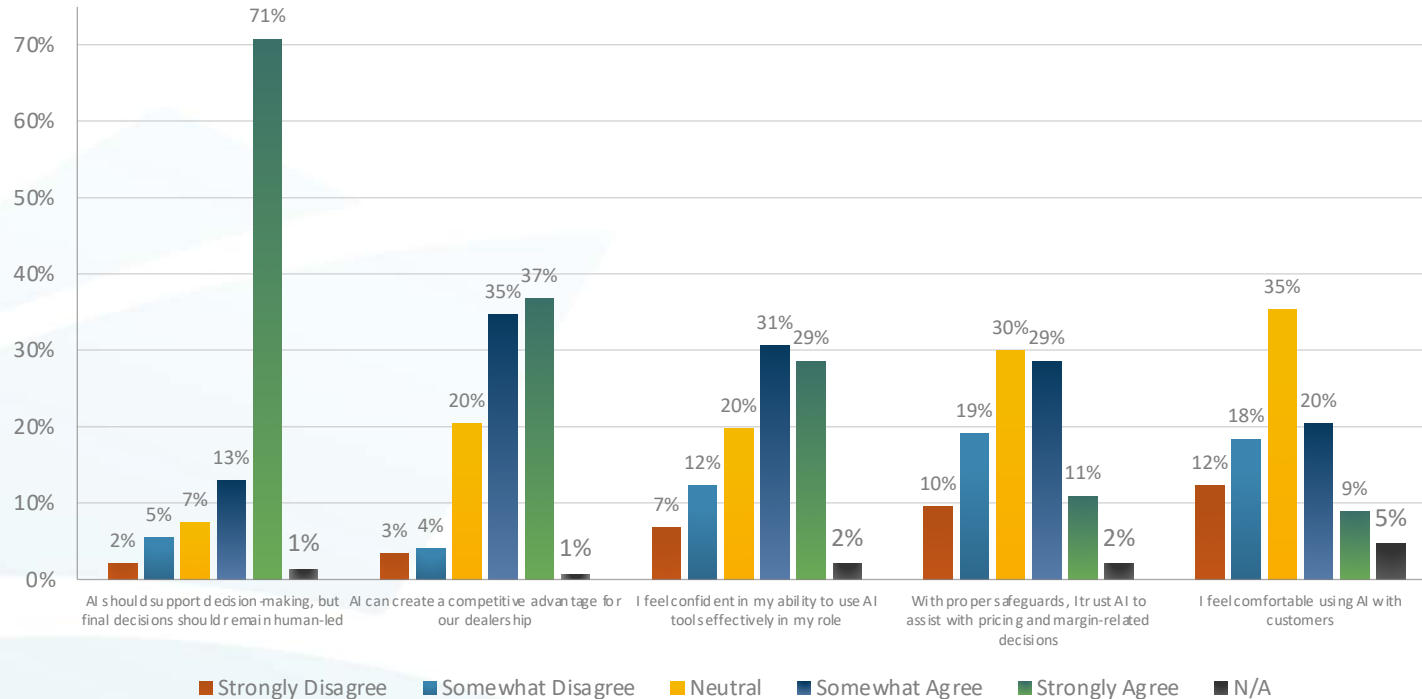


Source: MRAA State of AI Usage in Marine Dealerships Survey 2026

Confidence in AI Is Moderate, but Trust Drops in High-Stakes Use Cases

Most respondents believe AI should support decision-making but not replace human judgment, with 71% strongly agreeing. Confidence and comfort with AI are moderate, with responses focused on neutral and somewhat agree.

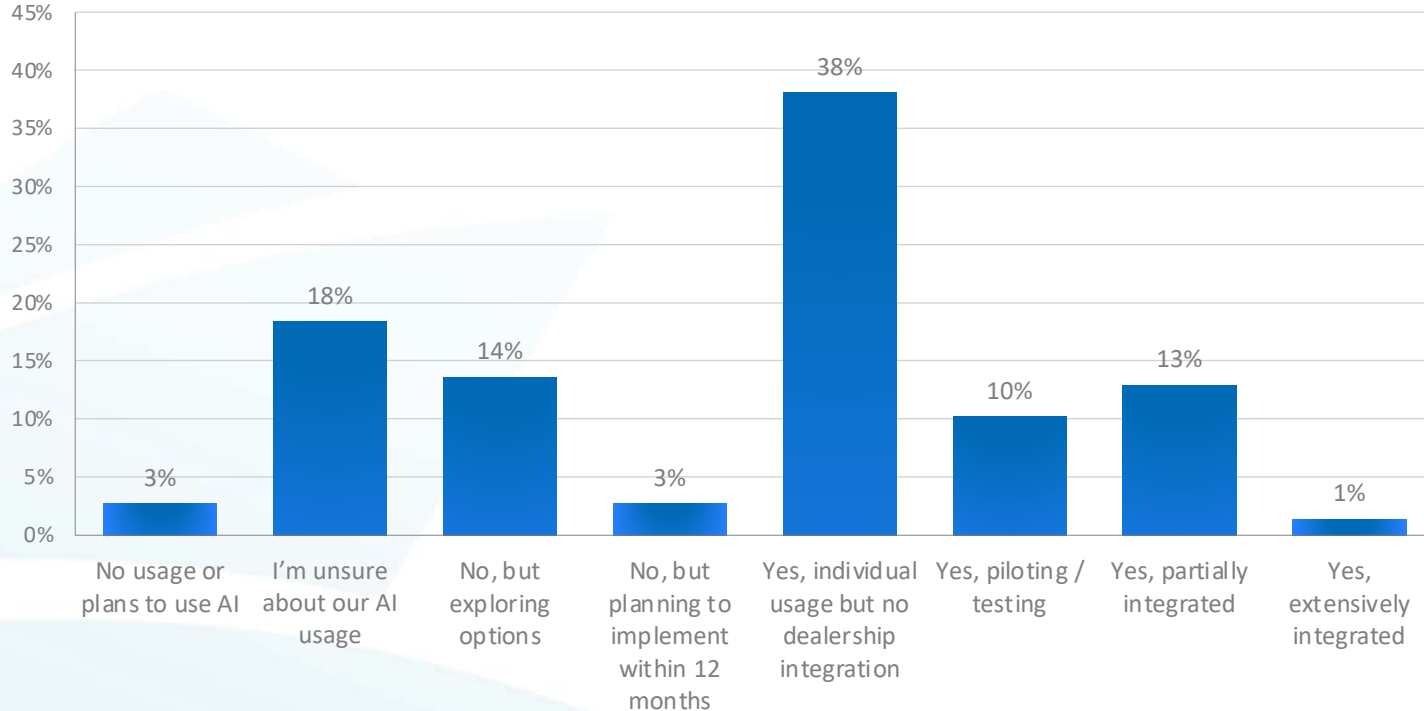
Q14: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about AI in your dealership.



AI Usage Is Common, but Mostly Individual and Unstructured

AI usage is common but largely informal, with 38% reporting individual use without dealership integration. Fully integrated adoption remains rare, with only 1% reporting extensive implementation.

Q15: Is your dealership currently using AI-powered tools in any capacity?



AI Usage Is Common, but Mostly Individual and Unstructured

Strategic Insights

AI Usage Is Predominantly Individual Rather Than Organizational

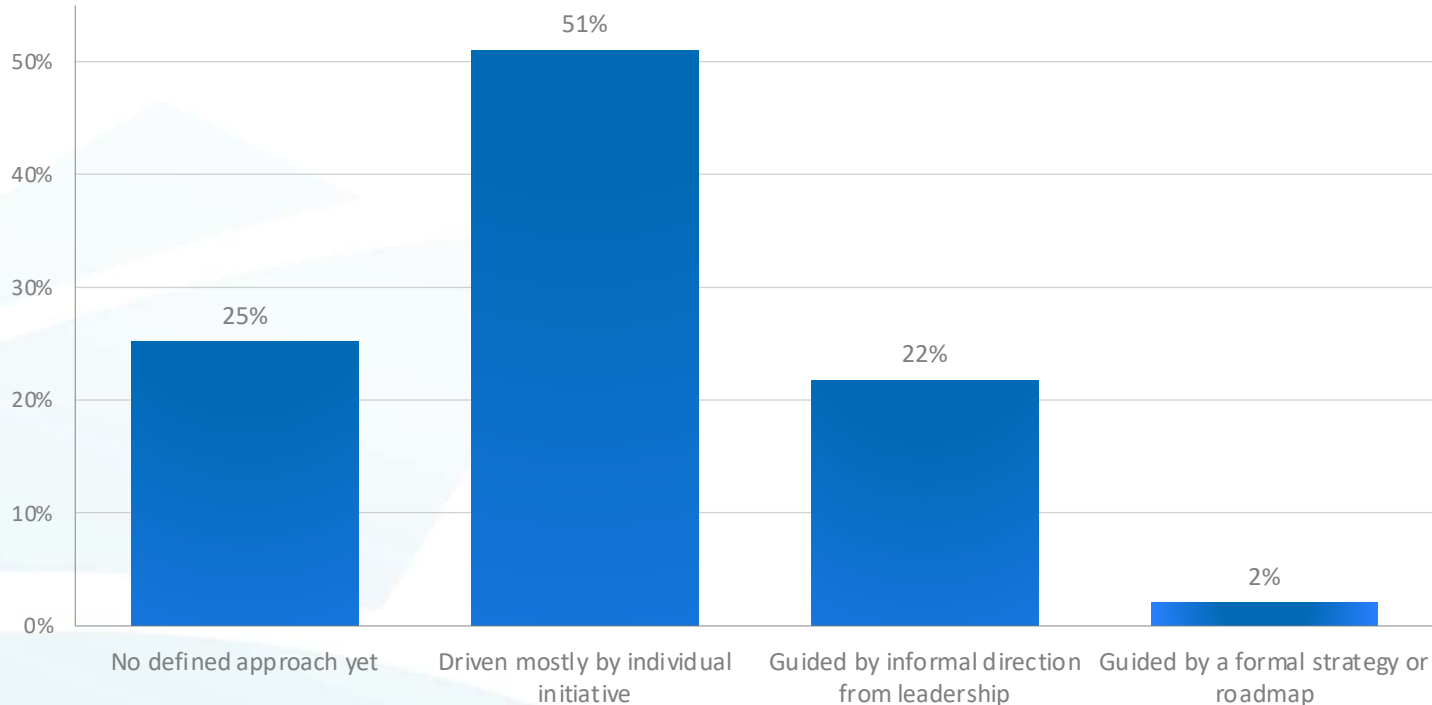
- 38% report individual AI use without dealership integration
- Only 14% report any level of structured integration
- Just 1% report extensive, organization-wide adoption

Most dealerships are experimenting with AI, but few have operationalized it.

AI Efforts Are Driven by Individuals, Not a Defined Strategy

AI efforts are primarily driven by individual initiative (51%). Formal strategy is rare, with only 2% reporting a defined roadmap.

Q16: How would you describe your dealership's approach to AI use?



AI Efforts Are Driven by Individuals, Not a Defined Strategy

Strategic Insights

AI Approach Is Largely Informal and Decentralized

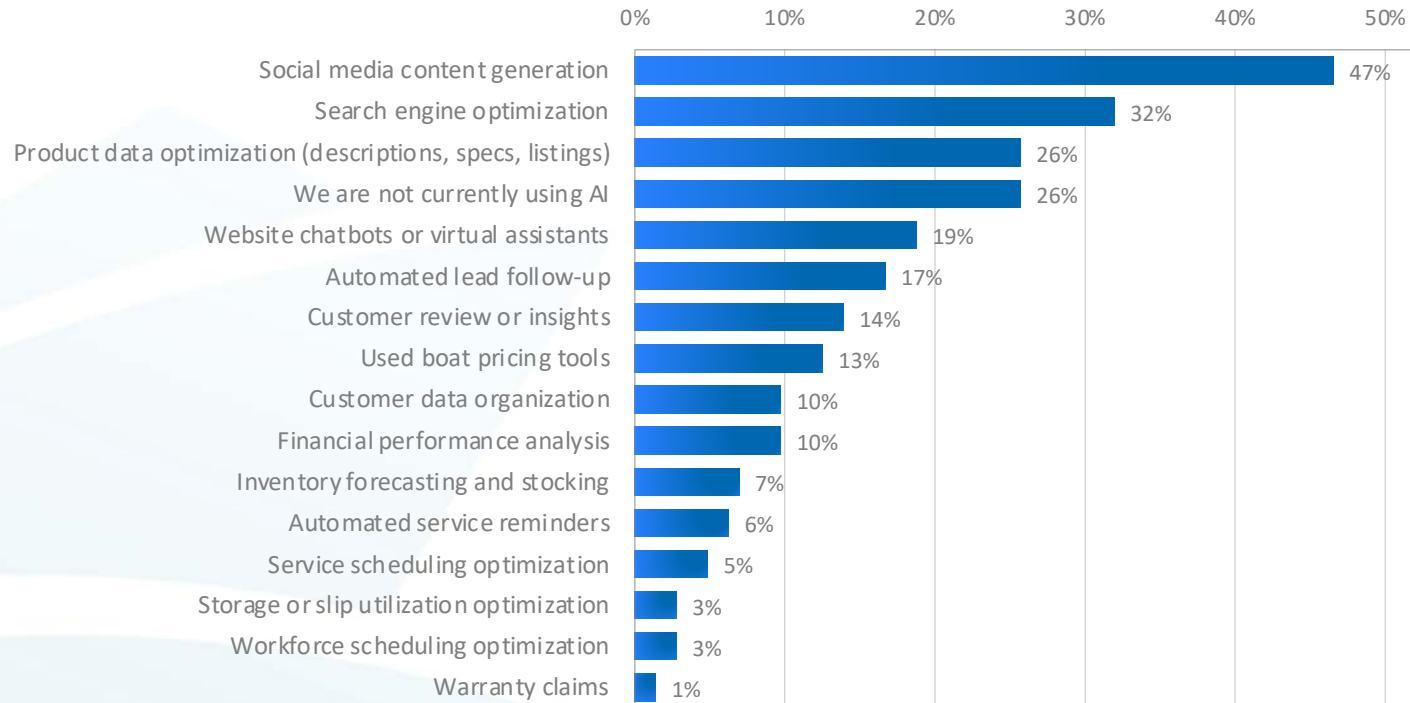
- 51% driven primarily by individual initiative
- 25% report no defined approach
- 22% guided by informal leadership direction
- Only 2% have a formal strategy or roadmap
- Most dealerships lack a coordinated AI approach
- Indicates early-stage, unstructured adoption

AI is happening, but without coordination, ownership, or scale.

AI Use Is Concentrated in Marketing, Not Core Operations

AI use is concentrated in marketing activities, with social media (47%) and SEO (32%) most common. Adoption drops off sharply in operational areas, where most use cases remain under 20%.

Q22: In which areas does your dealership currently use AI? (Select all that apply)



AI Use Is Concentrated in Marketing, Not Core Operations

Strategic Insights

AI Usage Is Concentrated in Marketing Functions

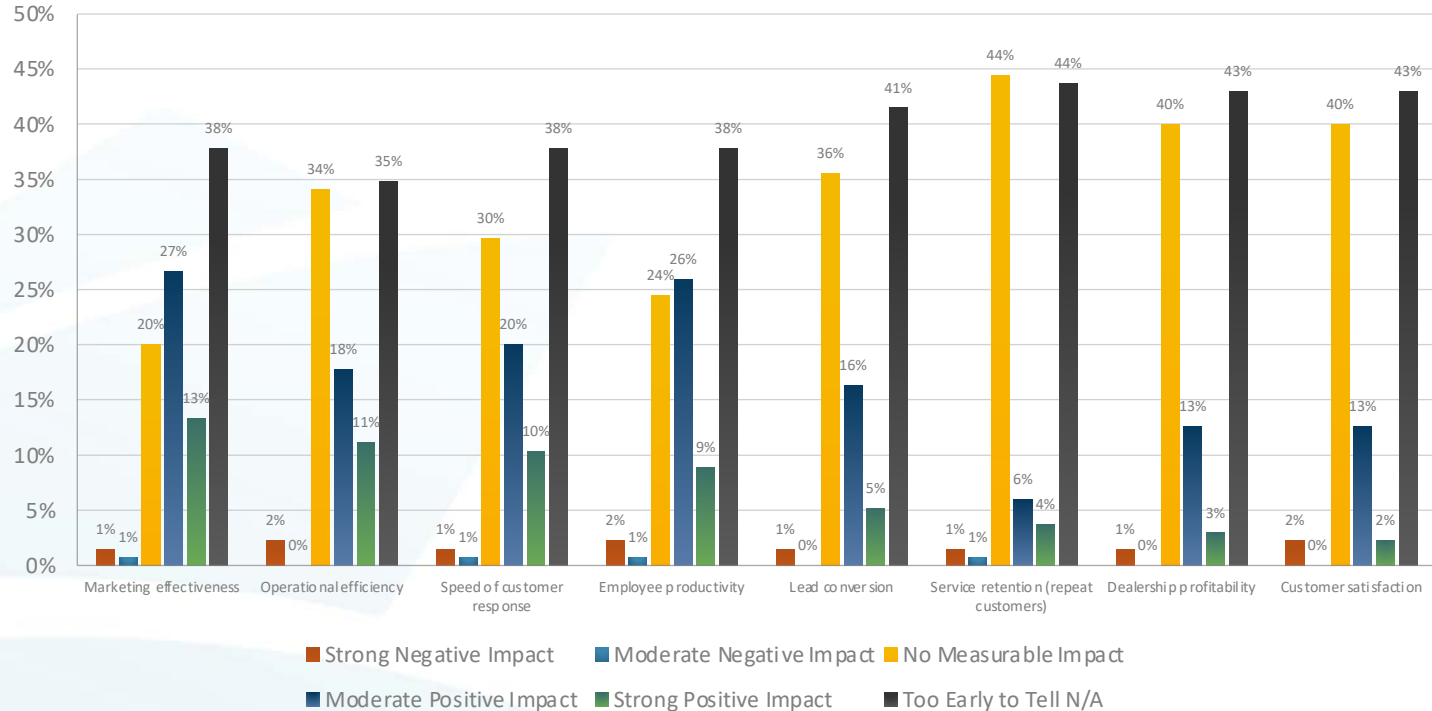
- 47% use AI for social media content generation
- 26% report no current AI usage
- Dealerships are prioritizing low-risk, easy-to-implement applications
- Adoption is focused on visibility and digital engagement
- Operational areas like service, inventory, and customer lifecycle are underutilized
- Broader adoption is needed to unlock full business impact

Dealerships are starting with low-risk use cases, not high-impact ones.

For Most Dealerships, It's Still Too Early to See Measurable Impact

AI benefits remain uncertain, with “Too Early to Tell” dominating across all areas. Reported gains are generally moderate, with transformational contributions still uncommon.

Q24: Rate AI's impact on the following areas in your dealership.



For Most Dealerships, It's Still Too Early to See Measurable Impact

Strategic Insights

AI Impact Still Early and Uneven

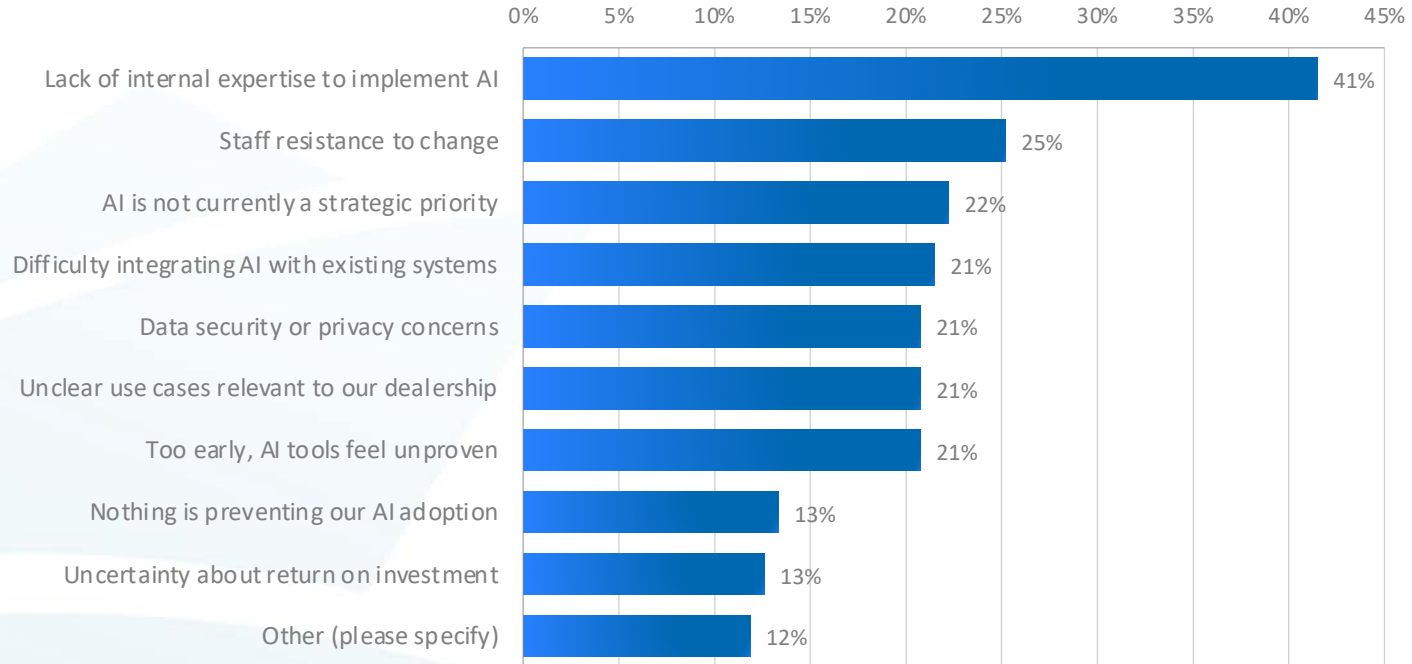
- “Too early to tell” dominates across all areas
- Customer experience shows the strongest early gains
- Lead conversion is an emerging bright spot
- Efficiency gains are modest, not transformative
- Marketing impact remains limited
- Profitability impact is still unclear

AI is being explored across dealerships, but measurable impact remains limited and inconsistent, with most still in a wait-and-see phase.

Lack of Internal Expertise Is the Primary Barrier to AI Adoption

AI adoption is constrained primarily by a lack of internal expertise (41%). Organizational and strategic barriers, including resistance, low prioritization, and unclear use cases, further slow progress.

Q25: What are the primary factors limiting your dealership's adoption or expansion of AI tools? (Select up to 3)



Lack of Internal Expertise Is the Primary Barrier to AI Adoption

Strategic Insights

Multiple Barriers to AI Adoption

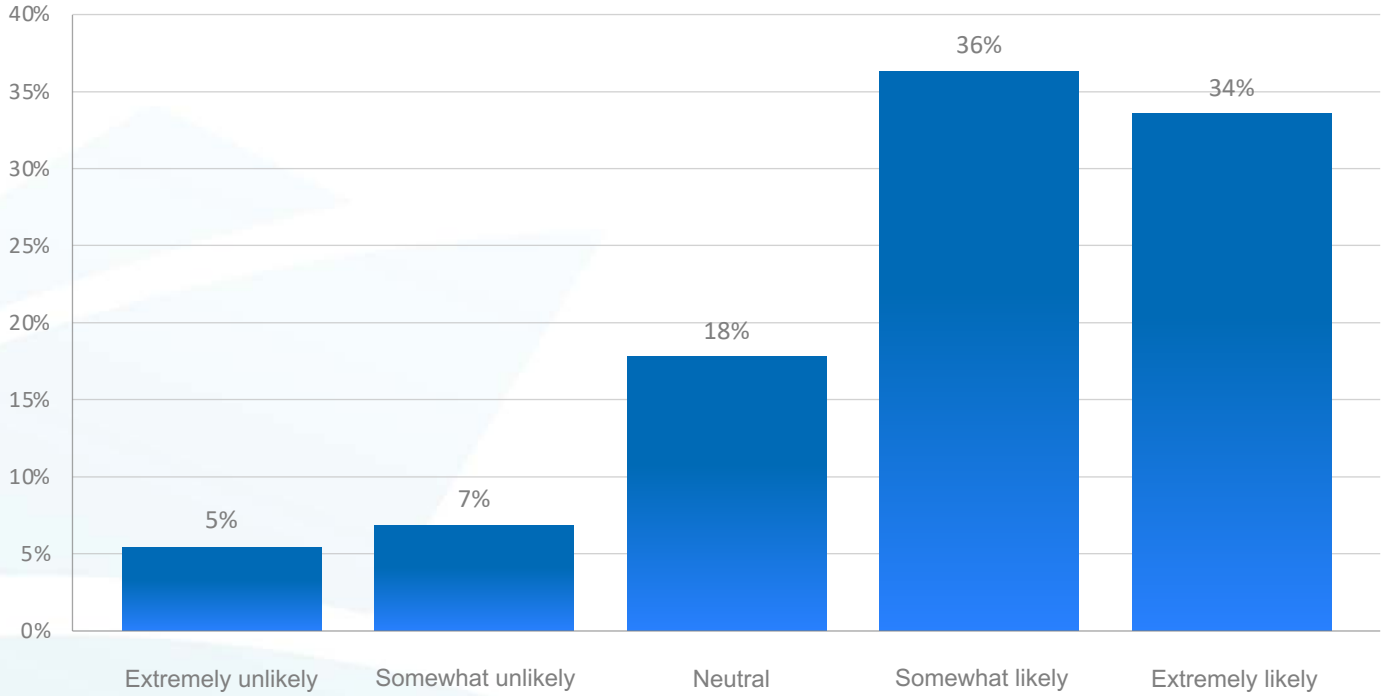
- 41% cite lack of internal expertise
- 25% report staff resistance to change
- 22% indicate AI is not a strategic priority
- 21% cite integration challenges with existing systems
- Internal readiness is the key limiting factor
- Perception that AI tools are still unproven persists

The issue isn't awareness; it's capability and execution.

Most Dealerships Expect to Expand AI Usage in the Next Year

Most dealerships are leaning into AI, with 70% likely to increase use in the next year. Only a small group remains hesitant, with 12% unlikely to expand adoption.

Q21: How likely are you to integrate even more AI into your work over the next year?

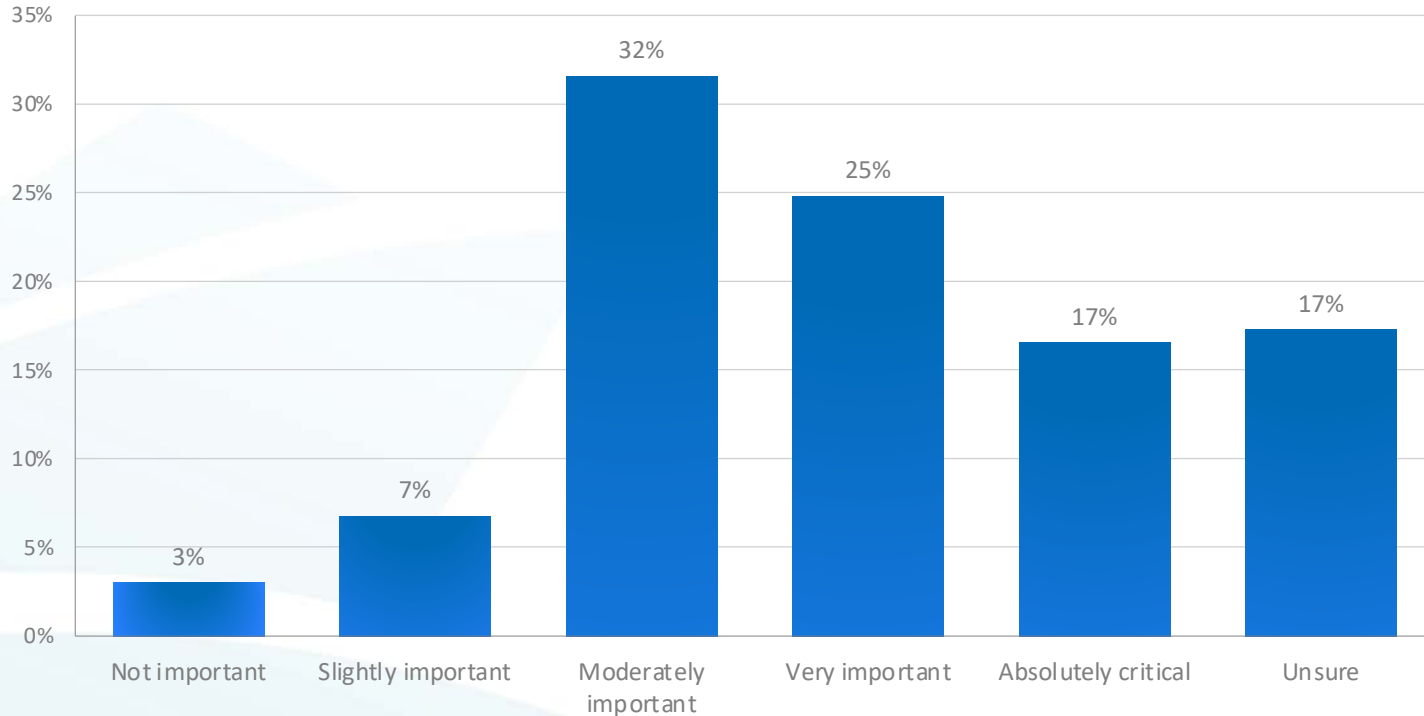


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AI Is Seen as Important, but Not Yet a Top Strategic Priority

AI is broadly seen as important, with most respondents rating it at least moderately important. However, only 17% view it as pivotal, revealing hesitation, uneven strategic focus, and competing priorities.

Q27: How critical will AI adoption be to your dealership's long-term success?



What this Means for Marine Dealerships

AI Adoption is Advancing, but Still Structurally Immature

Current adoption reflects widespread experimentation without corresponding organizational structure. With 38% reporting individual usage without integration and 51% indicating AI efforts are driven by individual initiative, most dealerships remain in an uncoordinated phase. This suggests the industry is progressing but has not yet established the systems and leadership alignment required for scaled, repeatable AI deployment.

Strategic Belief Has Not Yet Translated into Operational Priority

While 37% strongly agree that AI can create a competitive advantage, only 17% view it as essential to long-term success. This gap indicates that AI is recognized as valuable but not consistently treated as a foundational strategic driver. For dealership leaders, this reflects a transitional stage where interest is high, but prioritization and resource commitment remain uneven.

The Industry is Moving from Awareness to Application, but Capability is Lagging

General familiarity with AI is established at 39% moderate familiarity, yet 31% report only slight familiarity with dealership-specific tools. Combined with 41% citing lack of internal expertise as a barrier, this points to a capability gap that is slowing progress. The implication is that many dealerships understand AI conceptually but are not yet equipped to operationalize it effectively.

What this Means for Marine Dealerships

Early AI Use is Biased Toward Low-Risk, Tactical Applications

With 47% using AI for social media content generation and 30% expressing neutral trust in AI for pricing decisions, adoption is concentrated in lower-risk use cases. This reflects a cautious approach where dealerships test AI in areas with limited downside exposure. As a result, higher-impact operational and financial applications remain underutilized.

Measurable Business Impact is Not Yet Established

Across key performance areas, uncertainty dominates, with 38% reporting it is too early to determine impact on marketing effectiveness and 43% indicating the same for profitability. In addition, 44% report no measurable impact on service retention. This indicates that while adoption is increasing, consistent and proven outcomes have not yet been realized at scale.

Momentum is Building, but Commitment Remains Uneven

Forward intent is evident, with 36% somewhat likely to expand AI usage, yet only a limited portion of dealerships treat AI as mission-critical at 17%. This reflects an industry moving in the direction of greater adoption, but without uniform urgency. For dealership leaders, this suggests that competitive differentiation may emerge between those who accelerate adoption and those who remain in a wait-and-see position.

Strategic Recommendations For Marine Dealerships

Establish a Formal AI Strategy and Ownership Model

Relevant Data Pattern

51% of dealerships report AI usage is driven by individual initiative, and only 2% indicate a formal strategy or roadmap.

Strategic Opportunity

AI activity is occurring without coordination, creating inconsistency and limiting scalability across the organization.

Recommended Action

Define a clear AI strategy that outlines priority use cases, assigns ownership, and establishes guidelines for how AI should be implemented and governed across the dealership.

Invest in Internal AI Capability and Training

Relevant Data Pattern

41% of dealerships cite lack of internal expertise as a primary barrier, while 31% report only slight familiarity with dealership-specific AI tools.

Strategic Opportunity

Capability gaps are limiting the ability to move from experimentation to effective, repeatable use of AI.

Recommended Action

Develop internal training programs focused on practical AI applications within dealership operations, ensuring teams can confidently apply tools in their specific roles.

Strategic Recommendations For Marine Dealerships

Move Beyond Individual Experimentation to Operational Integration

Relevant Data Pattern

38% report individual AI usage without dealership integration, and only 1% report extensive integration.

Strategic Opportunity

AI is being used in isolated ways that do not translate into broader operational efficiency or consistency.

Recommended Action

Identify successful individual use cases and standardize them into dealership-wide processes, integrating AI into workflows where it can deliver repeatable value.

Expand AI Use Beyond Marketing into Essential Operations

Relevant Data Pattern

47% of dealerships use AI for social media content generation, while only 12% use it for pricing-related tools.

Strategic Opportunity

AI adoption is concentrated in lower-impact areas, leaving significant opportunity in operational and revenue-driving functions.

Recommended Action

Evaluate opportunities to apply AI in areas such as pricing, inventory management, and service operations to drive measurable business impact.

Strategic Recommendations For Marine Dealerships

Prioritize Use Cases That Deliver Measurable Outcomes

Relevant Data Pattern

38% report it is too early to determine AI's impact on marketing effectiveness, and 43% report the same for profitability.

Strategic Opportunity

Unclear results are limiting confidence and slowing broader adoption of AI across dealerships.

Recommended Action

Focus on implementing AI use cases with clearly defined success metrics and track performance to demonstrate tangible value and build organizational confidence.

Build Trust Through Controlled, High-Impact Applications

Relevant Data Pattern

30% of respondents report neutral trust in AI for pricing decisions, indicating hesitation in higher-stakes use cases.

Strategic Opportunity

Limited trust is restricting adoption in areas where AI could have a significant financial impact.

Recommended Action

Introduce AI in controlled environments with defined safeguards, allowing teams to build confidence in outputs before expanding into more critical decision-making areas.

Strategic Recommendations For Marine Dealerships

Align AI Adoption with Long-Term Strategic Priorities

Relevant Data Pattern

36% are somewhat likely to increase AI usage, while only 17% view AI as essential to long-term success.

Strategic Opportunity

Momentum is building, but inconsistent prioritization may limit long-term competitive advantage.

Recommended Action

Position AI as a strategic initiative within business planning processes, aligning adoption efforts with long-term growth, efficiency, and customer experience goals.



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