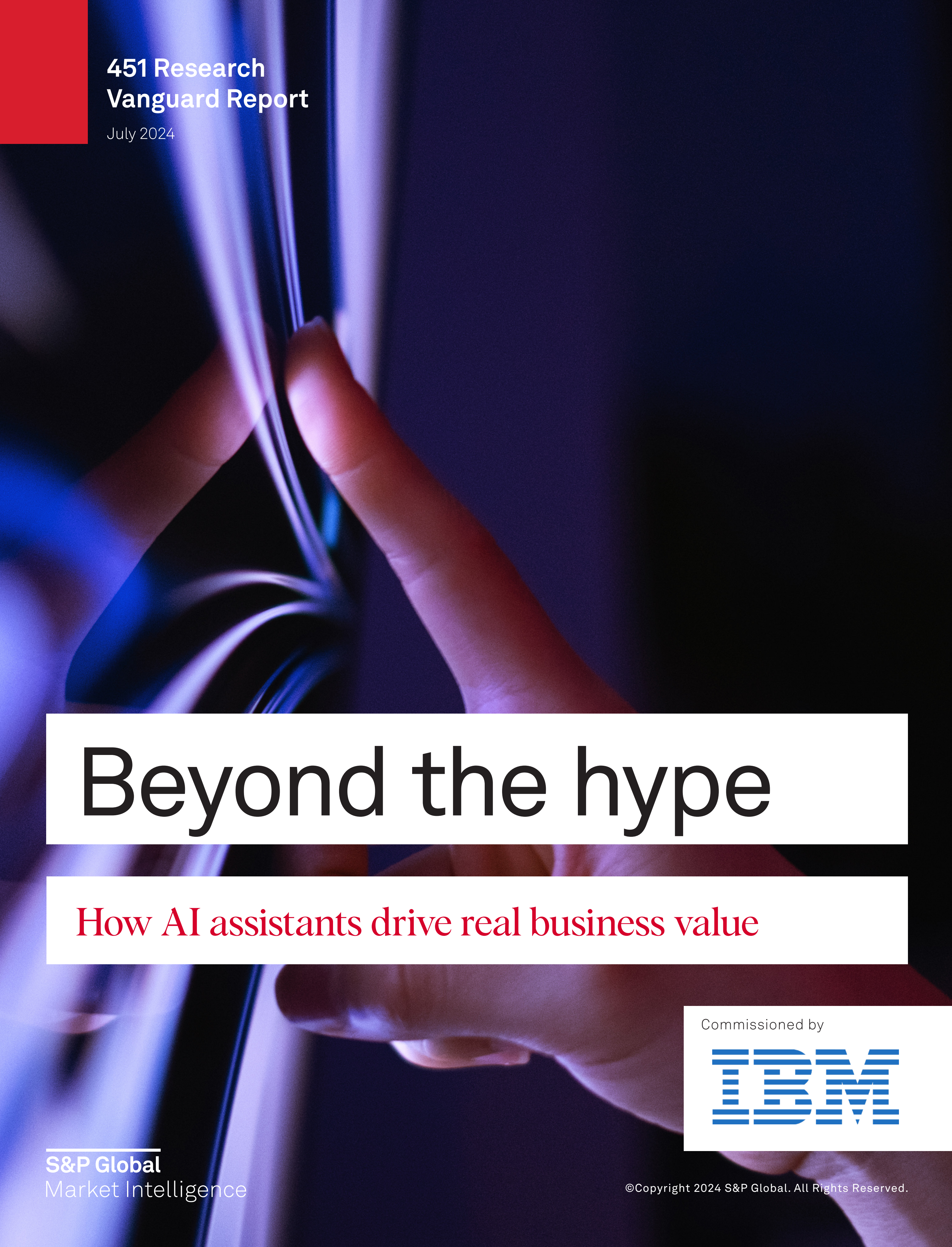

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Beyond the hype

How AI assistants drive real business value

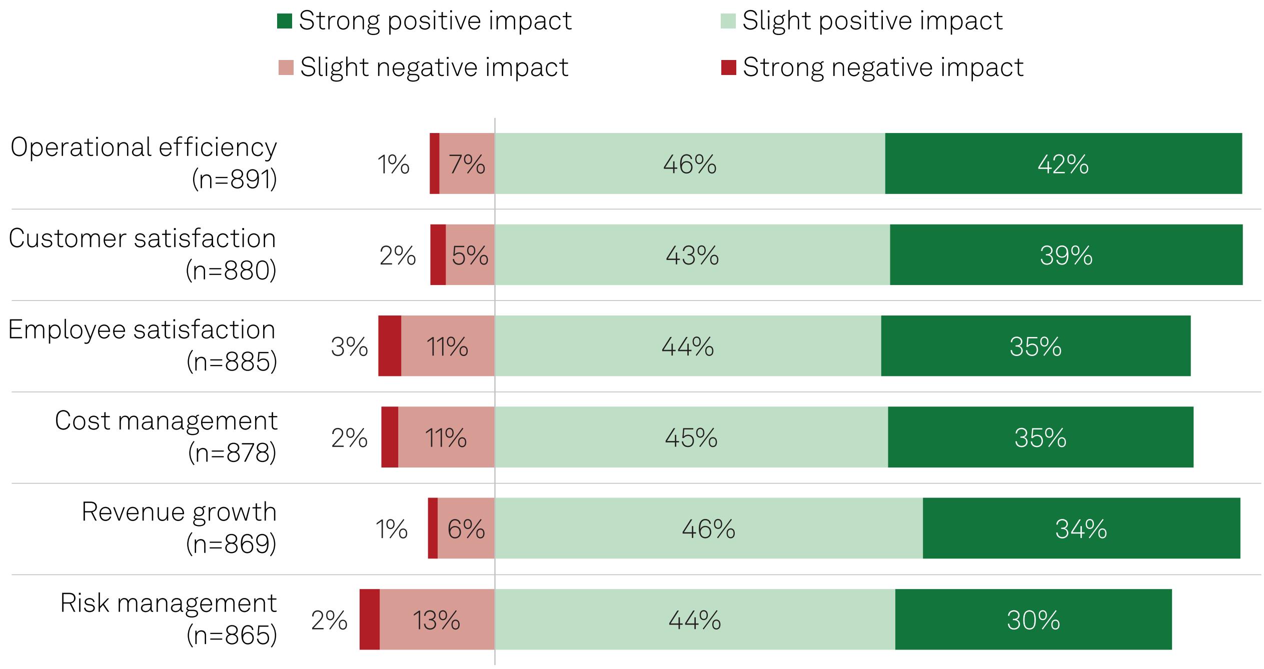
Commissioned by IBM

S&P Global
Market Intelligence

Introduction

The generative AI landscape is evolving rapidly, transitioning from the experimental phase to becoming a driving force for productivity enhancements across organizations. As illustrated in Figure 1, intelligent AI assistants are at the forefront of this transformation, catalyzing positive outcomes across multiple departments. This report focuses on the use of AI assistants for sales, marketing and customer experience use cases, but the opportunity extends across the business, with coding assistants an early area of investment.

Figure 1: Impact of generative AI on organizations



Q. How has Generative AI affected your organization's performance in the following objectives?
Base: Organizations that use generative AI in some capacity.
Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: AI & Machine Learning, Use Cases 2024.

AI assistants can automate repetitive tasks, generate creative content and facilitate data-driven decision-making. As such, they are emerging as the critical link between the transformative potential of generative AI and tangible business success. Their ability to streamline processes and augment human capabilities positions them as key enablers of efficiency and innovation in the modern workplace. However, each organization is different and needs assistants tailored to its specific needs and challenges.

Scaling AI assistants effectively requires a two-pronged approach. First, there needs to be broad employee access to these tools, democratizing the benefits of AI across the organization. Second, the assistants must be adapted to specific domains and use cases within the company. This level of customization and widespread implementation calls for involvement beyond the traditional software development team. For example, domain experts, such as clinicians for a medical assistant, may be needed to provide real-world knowledge. In addition, ethics specialists could help ensure responsible AI development. And if training data needs to be created, that could involve any number of domain experts, content specialists and prompt engineers across departments in a large organization.

This collaborative effort is important to ensure AI assistants are integrated into the fabric of the organization and aligned with its strategic objectives.

The Take

AI assistants are poised to become an integral part of the workplace landscape over the next few years. As these technologies continue to advance and proliferate, it is likely that virtually all employees will have access to multiple AI assistants. This shift toward AI-powered support systems will likely transform how employees accomplish tasks and interact with technology in their professional lives. Rather than relying on a single, general-purpose assistant, workers may find themselves collaborating with a suite of specialized AI tools, each optimized for specific functions or areas of expertise.

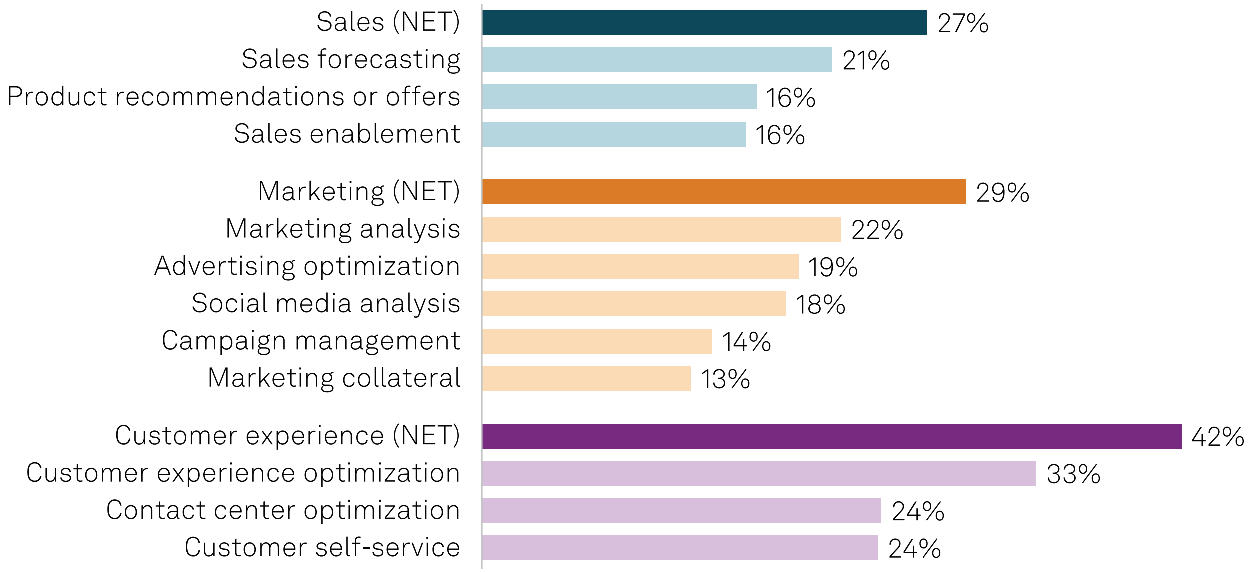
A critical aspect of this evolving workplace dynamic will be the ability for employees to customize and fine-tune these AI assistants to meet their unique needs and preferences. This level of personalization will need to occur without intervention from software developers or IT specialists. Empowering employees to tailor their AI assistants independently will foster a more agile and responsive work environment. It will also allow for rapid adjustments as tasks evolve, ensuring that the AI support remains relevant and effective. Moreover, this approach democratizes the benefits of AI across the organization, enabling employees to optimize their personal productivity toolkits. By providing employees with the means to shape their AI assistants, organizations can tap into the collective intelligence and domain expertise of their workforce. This not only enhances the effectiveness of the AI tools but also promotes a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.

As we move toward this AI-augmented workplace, organizations will need to invest in user-friendly interfaces that seamlessly integrate with business processes and applications and provide intuitive customization tools. An investment in empowering employees to harness AI technology will be crucial in realizing the full potential of these advanced tools and driving organizational success in an increasingly AI-driven business landscape.

Use cases

Generative AI is a general-purpose technology, meaning it can be applied to all sorts of use cases. But some of the earliest and most successful ones have been where organizations meet their customers — such as in sales, marketing and customer experience situations (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: AI use cases for revenue and growth



Q. In which of the following areas – if any – has your organization purchased or implemented machine learning solutions? Please select all that apply.
Nets are aggregated bins. Similar response categories are combined into a single bar.
Base: Purchased or implemented ML (n=947).
Source: 451 Research's Voice of the Enterprise: AI & Machine Learning, Use Cases 2024.

Sales relies on AI for forecasting and recommendations

AI assistants are revolutionizing the sales landscape by combining advanced AI with automation technology. In sales departments, these assistants are primarily focused on sales forecasting (21%) and product recommendations (16%). This combination allows for more than just data analysis; it enables proactive, intelligent action.

For sales forecasting, AI assistants can continuously analyze vast amounts of historical and real-time data, including market trends, customer behavior and economic indicators. They can then automatically generate accurate predictions and adjust forecasts as new information becomes available. This dynamic forecasting ability helps sales teams to strategize more effectively, allocate resources efficiently and identify potential opportunities or risks well in advance.

In the realm of product recommendations, AI assistants can integrate customer data from multiple touchpoints, analyze purchasing patterns and even factor in external influences such as seasonal trends or competitor actions. These assistants can then automatically tailor product suggestions for individual customers, presenting them at optimal times through the most effective channels. This level of personalization and automation significantly enhances the likelihood of successful sales while reducing the manual workload on sales representatives.

Marketing leverages AI for analysis and management

In marketing departments, AI assistants are proving invaluable for analysis, particularly in marketing analytics (22%) and advertising optimization (19%). The integration of AI and automation in these areas is transforming how marketing teams operate and make decisions.

For marketing analytics, AI assistants can automatically collect, process and analyze data from multiple sources in real time. They can identify patterns and insights that human analysts might miss, and continuously update their findings as new data becomes available. These assistants can also automate the creation of comprehensive reports, saving time and ensuring that marketing teams always have access to the latest insights.

In advertising optimization, AI assistants can automatically adjust campaign parameters based on performance data, audience behavior and market conditions. They can manage complex, multichannel campaigns, automatically allocating budget to the best-performing channels and adjusting targeting criteria for optimal results. This level of automation and intelligence allows marketing teams to run more efficient, effective campaigns with less manual intervention.

In social media analysis (18%), AI assistants can monitor social media platforms in real time, automatically identifying trends, sentiment shifts and potential PR issues. They can provide automated alerts and recommendations, allowing marketing teams to respond quickly to emerging opportunities or challenges in the social media landscape.

Optimization reigns supreme in customer experience

In the realm of customer experience, AI assistants are primarily focused on customer experience optimization (33%), contact center optimization (24%) and customer self-service (24%). The combination of AI and automation in these areas is significantly enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of customer interactions.

For general customer experience optimization, AI assistants can analyze customer journeys across multiple touchpoints, identifying pain points and opportunities for improvement. They can automatically generate personalized experiences for individual customers, adjusting website layouts, product recommendations and communication strategies in real time based on customer behavior and preferences.

In contact center optimization, AI assistants are transforming operations through intelligent routing, real-time agent assistance and predictive analytics. These assistants can automatically direct customers to the most suitable agent based on their issue and the agent's expertise. During calls, they can provide agents with real-time suggestions and information, enhancing the quality and efficiency of customer interactions. Additionally, they can predict call volumes and customer needs, allowing for proactive staffing and preparation.

For customer self-service, AI assistants can power intelligent chatbots and virtual assistants that understand and respond to complex customer queries, automatically updating their knowledge base as new information becomes available. These assistants can also personalize self-service portals for individual customers, presenting the most relevant information and tools based on the customer's history and likely needs.

Conclusion

AI assistants present a promising solution to the productivity challenges confronting modern organizations. By streamlining routine tasks and processes, AI can significantly reduce time spent on mundane activities, allowing employees to focus on higher-value, creative work. This shift not only boosts overall productivity but also opens up new avenues for innovation and problem-solving, enabling workers to approach their roles in more strategic and impactful ways.

Generative AI reframes the automating scope of AI, and this innovation is filtering through in areas such as:

- Sales: AI assistants are being applied to sales forecasting and product recommendations, enabling proactive, intelligent action.
- Marketing: Marketing analytics, advertising optimization and social media analysis are early application areas for AI assistants, identifying insights that teams may otherwise miss.
- Customer experience: To enhance customer satisfaction and improve efficiency, AI assistants have been applied to optimize customer experience and contact centers, as well as to enable customer self-service.

To fully capitalize on the potential of AI assistants, organizations must adopt a comprehensive approach that empowers both technical and non-technical staff. By providing tools and platforms that allow employees across all departments to create and customize AI assistants, companies can foster a culture of innovation and adaptability. This democratization of AI development ensures that applications are tailored to specific needs and challenges across the organization.

Relying solely on developers to implement AI assistants can lead to significant limitations. Not only does this approach create potential bottlenecks in scaling the technology, but it also risks creating isolated pockets of AI usage within the organization. To truly harness the transformative power of AI assistants, it's crucial to involve a diverse range of employees in their development and deployment. This inclusive strategy ensures that AI applications are comprehensive, integrated and aligned with the organization's broader goals and objectives.

About the author

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Alex Johnston is a senior research analyst on the 451 Research Data, AI & Analytics team at S&P Global Market Intelligence. He focuses on emerging technologies and how they can be applied in business contexts. Alex's primary coverage areas are artificial intelligence, distributed ledger technology and event stream processing.

Alex's recent areas of concentration include monitoring the emerging generative AI market, tracking the evolution in blockchain use cases and investigating real-time architectures.

Before joining S&P Global Market Intelligence, Alex was a principal analyst at Procurement Leaders, leading much of the research on procurement and supply chain. His specialty focus was procurement and supply chain technology markets, advising chief procurement officers on digital roadmaps and building out a suite of diagnostic tools. He has a background in qualitative and quantitative research and has significant data science experience. Alex holds a history degree from the University of Warwick.

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