

# DOES AI HAVE A HALO WITH B2B BUYERS?

What marketers need to  
know about B2B buyers  
and users when positioning  
AI-powered software

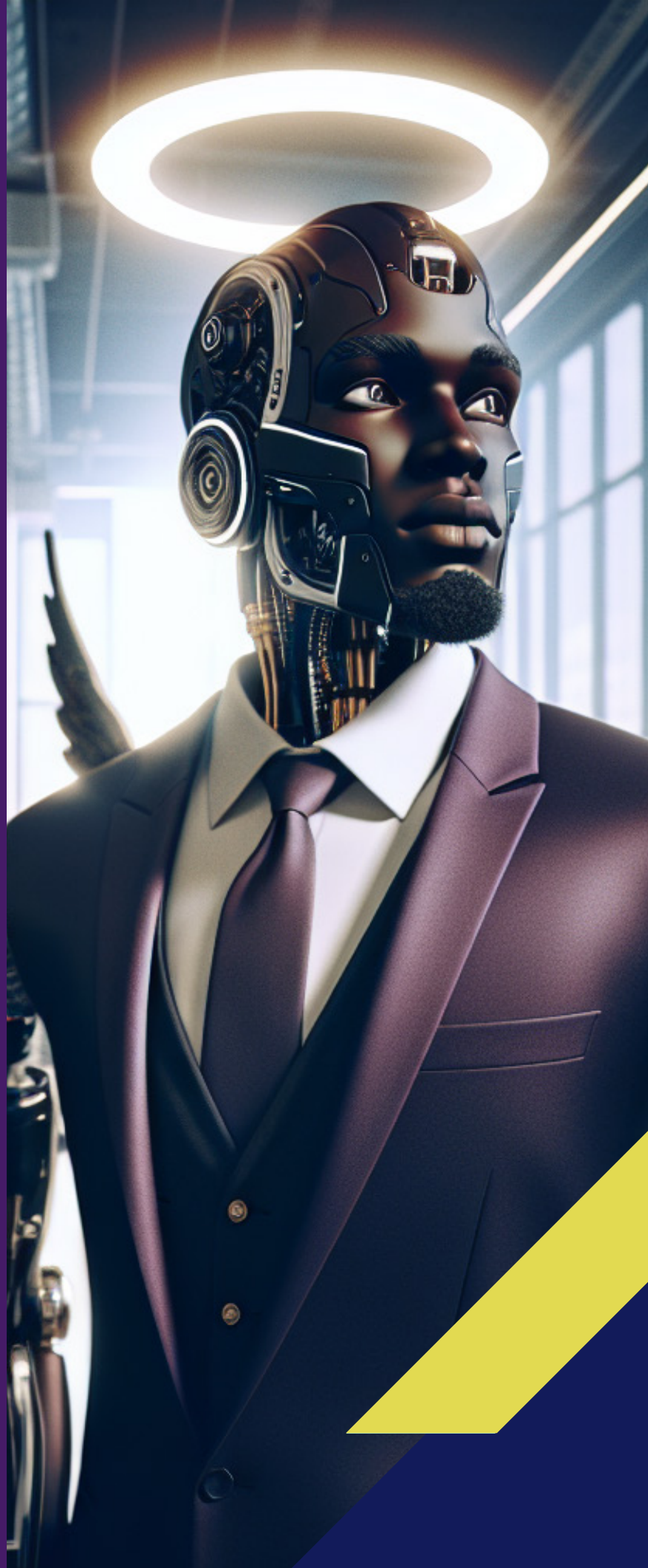
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## KEY FINDINGS:

- 1.** In many cases, B2B software users and software buyers are different audiences with different levels of familiarity with AI, and different perceptions toward its value in software.
- 2.** Transparency is critical: 69% of B2B software users say they want to know if products they use at work contain AI, according to Ipsos polling.
- 3.** More than four out of five people who already use AI-powered software feel that it's innovative, indicating the value is there — if software companies can get new customers to try it.
- 4.** Target audience research and content testing can ensure your creative messaging around AI lands well with prospects.



## How should software marketers talk about AI?

AI is rapidly becoming an integral component of business software, from enterprise workflow and CRM solutions to professional design and cloud development tools. Familiarity with these products powered by AI is growing — and so is the demand for innovation from software company clients. But what do software users and buyers really think when a new application claims to be powered by AI? Are the genuine innovative developments getting drowned out, or suffering from comparison to, simple ChatGPT wrappers that claim the AI mantle? Is talking about the underlying technology a draw for buyers, or does it distract from the benefits the software delivers? Does talking about AI create a halo effect with your target audience?

To provide marketers with a baseline understanding of the topic, Ipsos surveyed 586 B2B software buyers and users to learn how they feel about AI. The study was conducted between Aug. 29-30, 2023, and included U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work. Respondents were interviewed online in English.

## Software decision makers at work

Software users and software buyers are not always the same people when it comes to the corporate world. Countless self-service software options have hit the market in recent years and individual users can easily buy tools that help them do their job for a few dollars a month without going through an IT process.

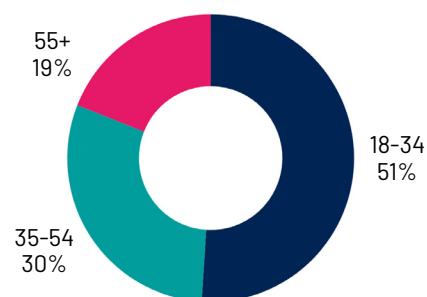
But with efficiency and security at top of mind for America's increasingly remote and digital workforce, many users must now get software approval, even for small purchases — and larger, multi-user software decisions require even more vetting and review. So, marketing B2B software to both the user and the decision-maker is critical for adoption. But who are the software users and decision-makers that marketers must persuade?

Though they skew urban and younger, AI software users are split evenly by gender and are seen in similar proportions across all income segments. This means that to convert potential users to your product, you need to understand a wide range of perspectives on AI and how it is valued in a software platform.

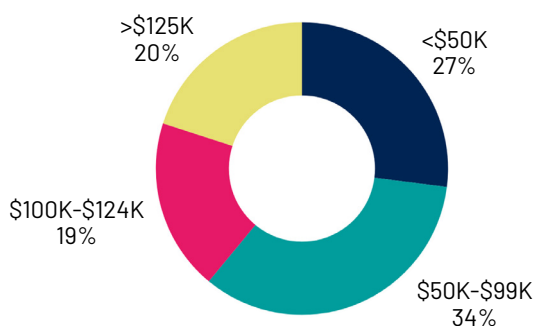
Software users by gender



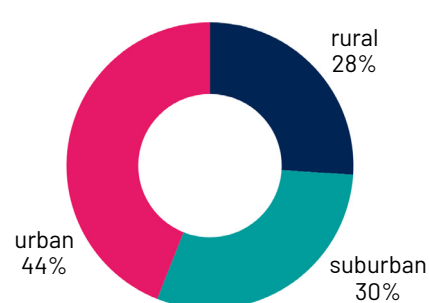
Software users by age



Software users by income



Software users by location



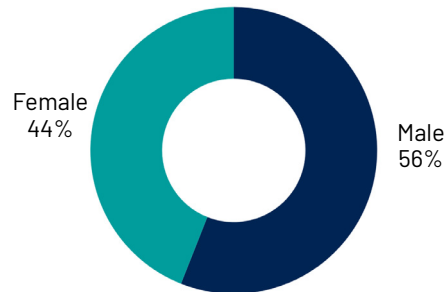
Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023

Software decision makers, on the other hand, are more distinct. Over half have a household income over \$100K, and they skew more male than AI software users in general. Decision-makers live in slightly more diverse locations than AI software users, who cluster in cities. The most distinctive thing about decision-makers, however, is their age. While over half of AI software users are under 35,

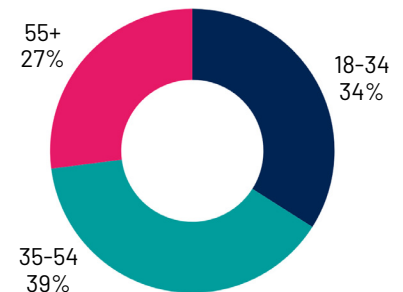
two-thirds of software decision makers are 35 or older, reflecting the longer careers that have allowed them to grow into a decision-making role. This age variance is critical for marketers to understand, as older adults are less familiar with AI in general. Thus, selling to more seasoned buyers may mean that more education on AI needs to be baked into your content plan.

A deep knowledge of what your audience thinks about AI is critical to determining how and where the technology should be centered in your messaging. Alex Jasin, Co-founder and CMO of Refine Packaging, a leading custom packaging manufacturer, emphasizes the value of spending time on customer understanding:

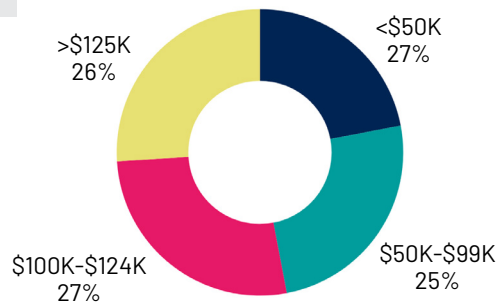
**Software users by gender**



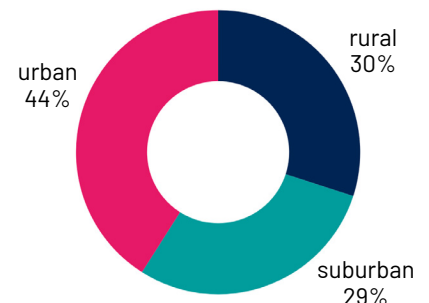
**Software users by age**



**Software users by income**



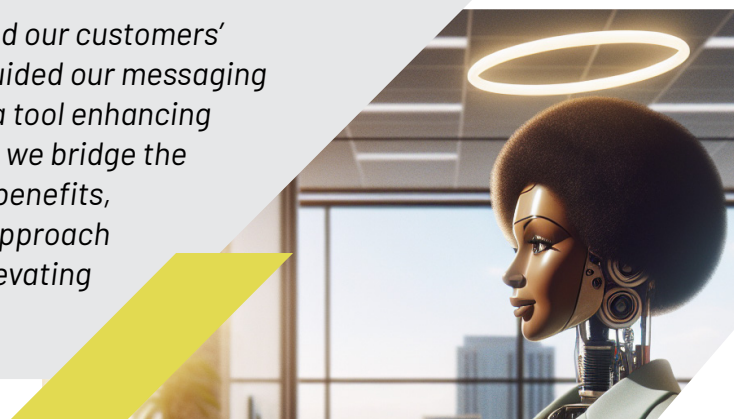
**Software users by location**



Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023



*We've researched to understand our customers' perceptions of AI, which has guided our messaging strategy. By highlighting AI as a tool enhancing efficiency and personalization, we bridge the technical aspect with tangible benefits, fostering a customer-centric approach that aligns with our ethos of elevating brand presentation.*





69%

of corporate software  
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software they use at  
work contains AI

Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023

## Users want transparency around AI

Disclosing that your software contains AI has benefits for all audiences, whether they are a user or a decision maker. Professional users expect transparency around AI, with 69% agreeing that they want to know if software they use at work contains AI, according to our survey. Some companies are betting their entire company messaging on AI by centering their company name on the technology. In fact, the use of the .ai domain has **effectively doubled** since the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 and serves as an upfront marker that a company is powering its solutions with AI. In this case, the use of the technology is obvious, but the specifics of how it impacts customers using the product can still be nuanced. David Howard, VP of Marketing at BuzzBoard.ai, an AI-powered sales enablement platform for companies that sell to small business, explains that qualitative research is still needed:



*For our AI platform, we did extensive meetings and interviews between members of our exec team, and actual users of our product at pre-existing customer companies.*

Many software companies today are not wholly meeting the market desire for transparency however, as most software users are in the dark about AI around them. **58% of people say they don't know if the software they are using at work contains AI**, according to our survey. For brands that now use AI to power their products, disclosing it is critical, even if it's not a core part of the messaging overall. Not disclosing it means either you're missing an opportunity to sell to AI enthusiasts, or you're failing to build rapport and trust with AI skeptics.

While it seems AI would provide a strong benefit to end-users, people do have some concerns about its use. In **Ipsos polling from December 2023**, only 41% of American consumers believed AI would protect their personal data, while over half (53%) said they believe AI will profoundly change their life in the next three to five years. With worries about AI potentially taking jobs as well, 69% of Americans supported the government “developing strategies to reduce the potential harm and maximize the benefits of AI for workers,” in **Ipsos polling from November 2023**. American employees want to understand when AI is used in the tools around them so they can mitigate potential challenges this new technology may bring, alongside its benefits.

Phil Portman, CEO of Textdrip, an automated SMS marketing software (SaaS), explains their approach to transparency and education:



*Our choice to proactively talk about AI stems from our commitment to educating our users. We believe in empowering our customers to understand how AI improves their experience. Through video tutorials, blog posts, and user guides, we offer straightforward explanations of how AI algorithms analyze data to generate targeted texts, saving businesses valuable time and enhancing their communication effectiveness.*

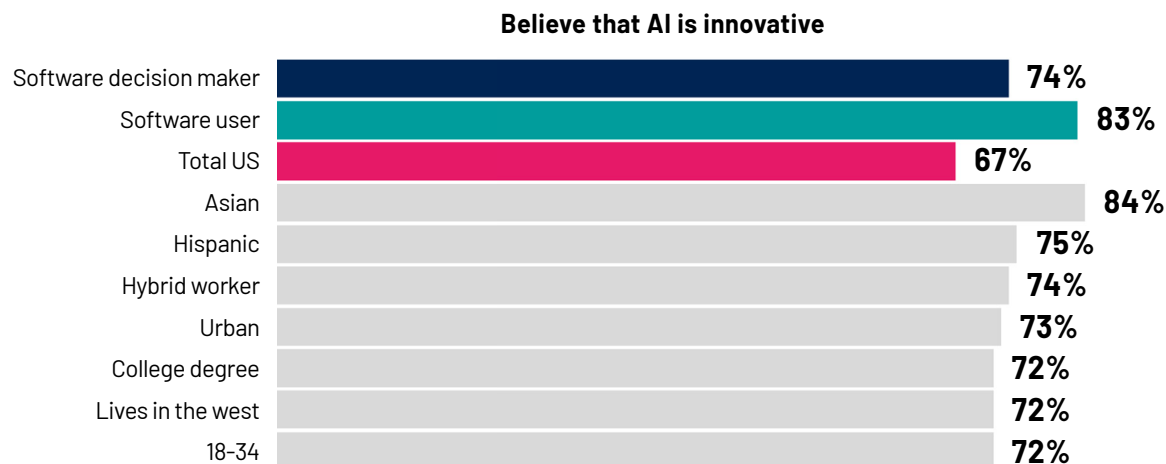




## Many view AI as innovative – but it's not a must-have for everyone yet

Two-thirds of Americans see AI-powered software as innovative. Some groups, however, are even more likely to see the power of this new technology. More than four out of five people who already use AI-powered software feel it's innovative – a positive sign for AI integrations, and a clear opportunity for software marketers. In addition, by leaning into case

studies and testimonials from these current users, marketers can learn how to educate groups who are less familiar with the benefits of AI. For example, Hispanics and Asians are more likely to see AI as innovative, so if your software targets these groups, leaning into innovation in your messaging is likely to be seen as credible.

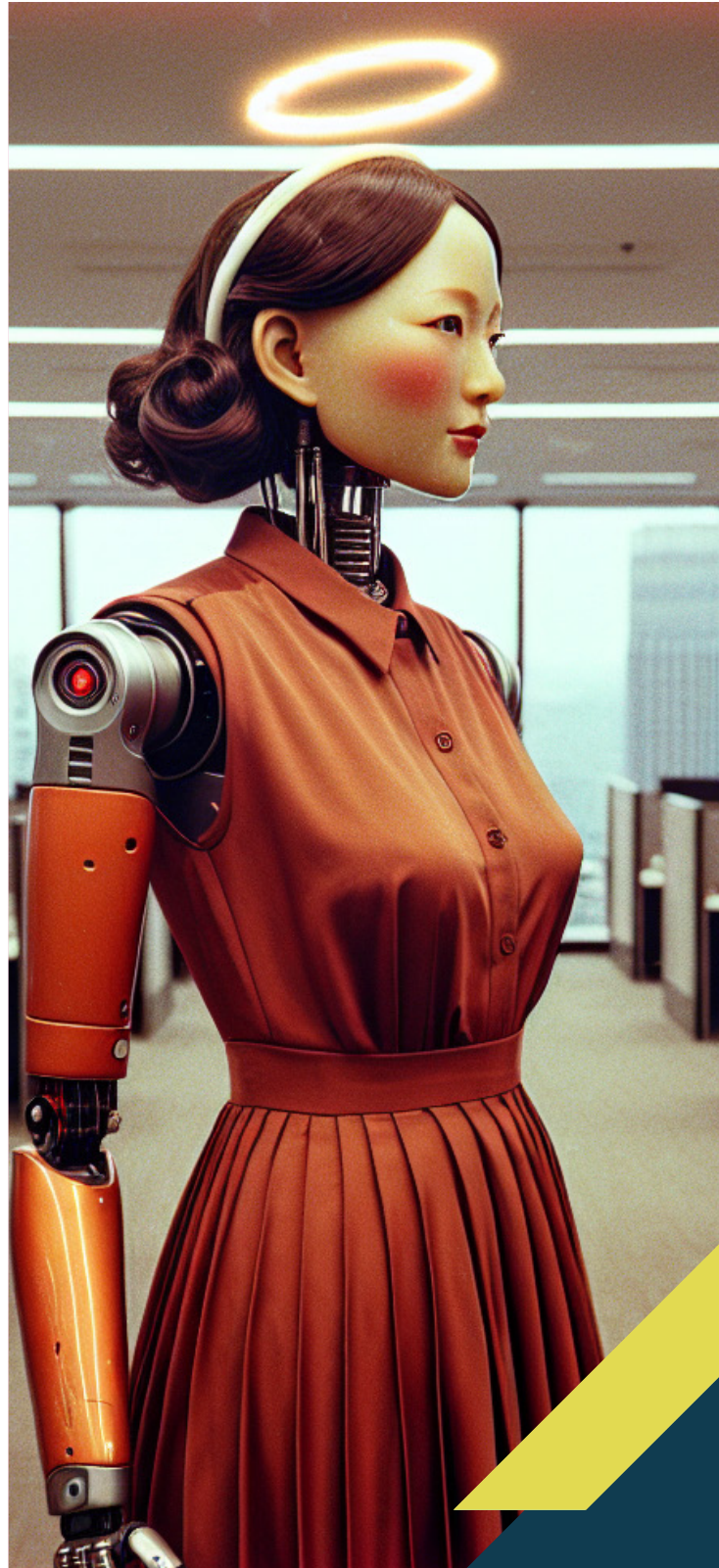


Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023

There are some groups, however, for whom AI software is not considered innovative. Marketers targeting these groups should take care when relying on innovation messages around AI, as they may be a harder sell. In these cases, focusing on the benefits to the user, rather than the technology itself, may be more effective. A quarter of white men and people who work entirely from home, as well as 27% of independent voters, disagree that AI is innovative, according to Ipsos research. If your software targets groups (for instance, rural farmers) who skew heavily in these categories, AI may have huge benefits – but leading with AI messaging tailored to the wrong audience could derail your sales efforts before they even consider your offer. Rohit Maheswaran balances this tension in his role as Chief Product Officer at Lifesight, a unified marketing measurement platform:



*Having AI in your software is now a must and should be an integral part of any software product roadmap. But AI shouldn't be added just for the sake of adding but instead should serve a seamless purpose and be fully integrated into the user experience. Customers want to continue working with your software the same way and not let AI do everything for them. It has to enhance their ability to better use the software and not take over completely.*





Not only do some people see AI as innovative, but many people see it as better than software without AI. While slightly fewer than half of Americans think software containing AI is better, almost three out of five decision makers feel this way, and nearly-two thirds of AI software users agree, according to the Ipsos survey. This indicates that current marketing messages highlight the benefits of AI, and word of mouth from early adopters, is proving the advantages of AI technology – but this message has yet to penetrate the general population to the same degree. If your software is aimed at people who don't yet use AI in a beneficial way in other areas of their work or life, leading with AI may not be as strong a message.

#### Believes software that contains AI is better than software without it



Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023

In fact, people who use and choose AI software want more of it. While less than a third of Americans want more AI in their software, current AI software users and general software decision makers are far ahead of the general population in expecting AI in their tools. There is gap between people who use AI, love it and want more available to them, and people who haven't yet knowingly tried it and seen the benefits. When communicating with current users group, it's certainly valuable to mention that your software contains AI, as this is a feature they specifically are looking for.

#### Wants more AI in their software



Source: Ipsos survey of 586 U.S. adults who use or purchase software at work, conducted Aug. 29-30, 2023

## Smart marketers test their AI messages

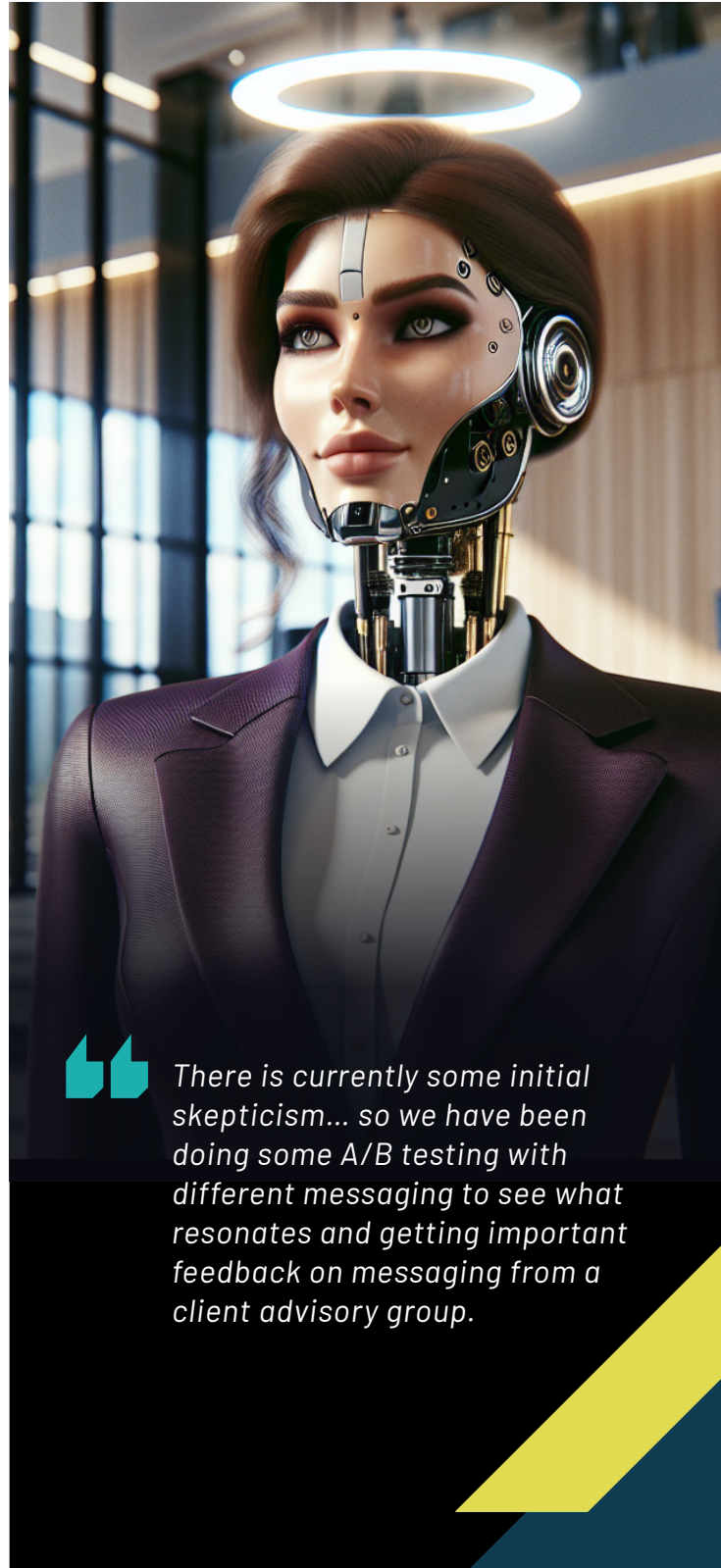
A few years ago, few software buyers were even considering AI in the evaluation process for new tools. But today, AI features have become major variables when making significant software investments. Because the AI space is changing so rapidly, the smartest approach is to implement a framework for message testing that lets you adapt and stay ahead of your specific market. Senior software marketers strongly recommend research and message testing. Aleassa Chambers, Chief Marketing Officer at Seerist, a threat and risk intelligence solution, is using a combination of AI messaging tests and “human in the loop” assurances to showcase the AI capabilities of her platform:

## Putting recommendations into action

A good content testing program can evaluate your B2B messaging through the entire product lifecycle, from early-stage messaging and positioning verification to optimizing final creatives with professionals who are in your specific target audience. The top B2B brand marketers are also using analyses by Ipsos’ **Creative Excellence** to test their content, from website copy, to ads, to sales collateral, in this rapidly evolving messaging environment. Establishing a cadence of message testing (for example, pre-launch, and then quarterly thereafter as the market and product evolves) allows companies to tweak verbiage to attract customers who may or may not be distracted by AI claims.

In addition, working with experts such as those in Ipsos’ **Market Strategy & Understanding** team can deliver guidance on exactly what your prospects think about AI – whether they are IT decision makers, healthcare practitioners, small business, marketers or any other business professional. By doing up-front research on how your buyers and users perceive AI before launching new campaigns, you will be confident on how much to emphasize the technology – and how much to let the practical benefits take center stage.

No matter what approach you take to your AI messaging, human intelligence about your target audience is required to ensure your positioning provides a halo to your brand.



*There is currently some initial skepticism... so we have been doing some A/B testing with different messaging to see what resonates and getting important feedback on messaging from a client advisory group.*

## Author:

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## Sources:

The following people were interviewed for their perspectives on marketing AI-powered software as part of this report.

- David Howard, VP of Marketing at BuzzBoard.ai
- Alex Jasin, Co-founder and Chief Marketing Officer at Refine Packaging
- Phil Portman, Chief Executive Officer at Textdrip
- Rohit Maheswaran, Chief Product Officer at Lifesight
- Aleassa Chambers, Chief Marketing Officer at Seerist

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