



ePublishing

The State of AI in the Publishing Industry

The Publishing Industry is at a Crossroads

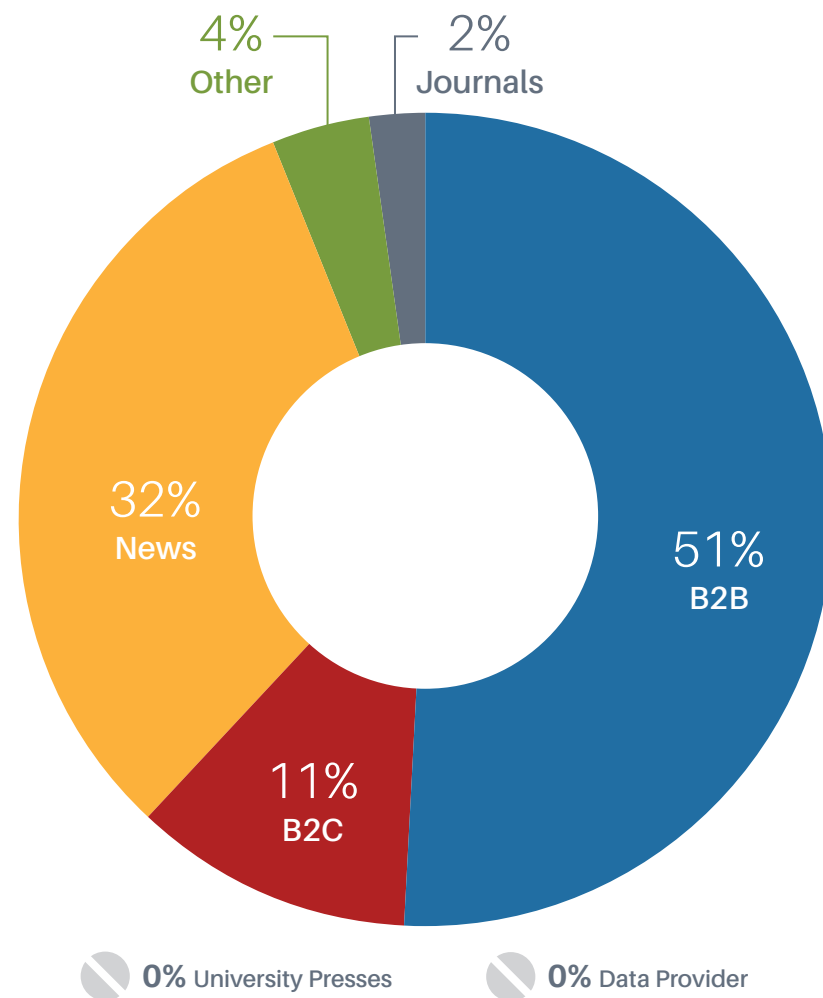
Artificial intelligence (AI) may play a significant role in the direction the industry takes in the years ahead. That makes it vitally important to understand how publishers are currently using AI, their expectations for the technology, and what worries them about its adoption and impact.

Our goal in conducting this survey was to gain a deeper understanding of the answers to these questions — and to uncover the challenges this technology poses to publishers.

For this report, ePublishing surveyed 47 publishers ranging from news organizations and trade publications to consumer-focused publications and academic journals. We also heard from companies that publish and sell data. This survey was completed in June 2024.

We did not find a uniform response to AI: Some publishers were resistant but open to specific functional use cases; others were already heavily leveraging AI to speed up high-volume repetitive processes. One publisher we talked to spoke highly of AI's power in adding significant value to its data products. This report shares our findings.

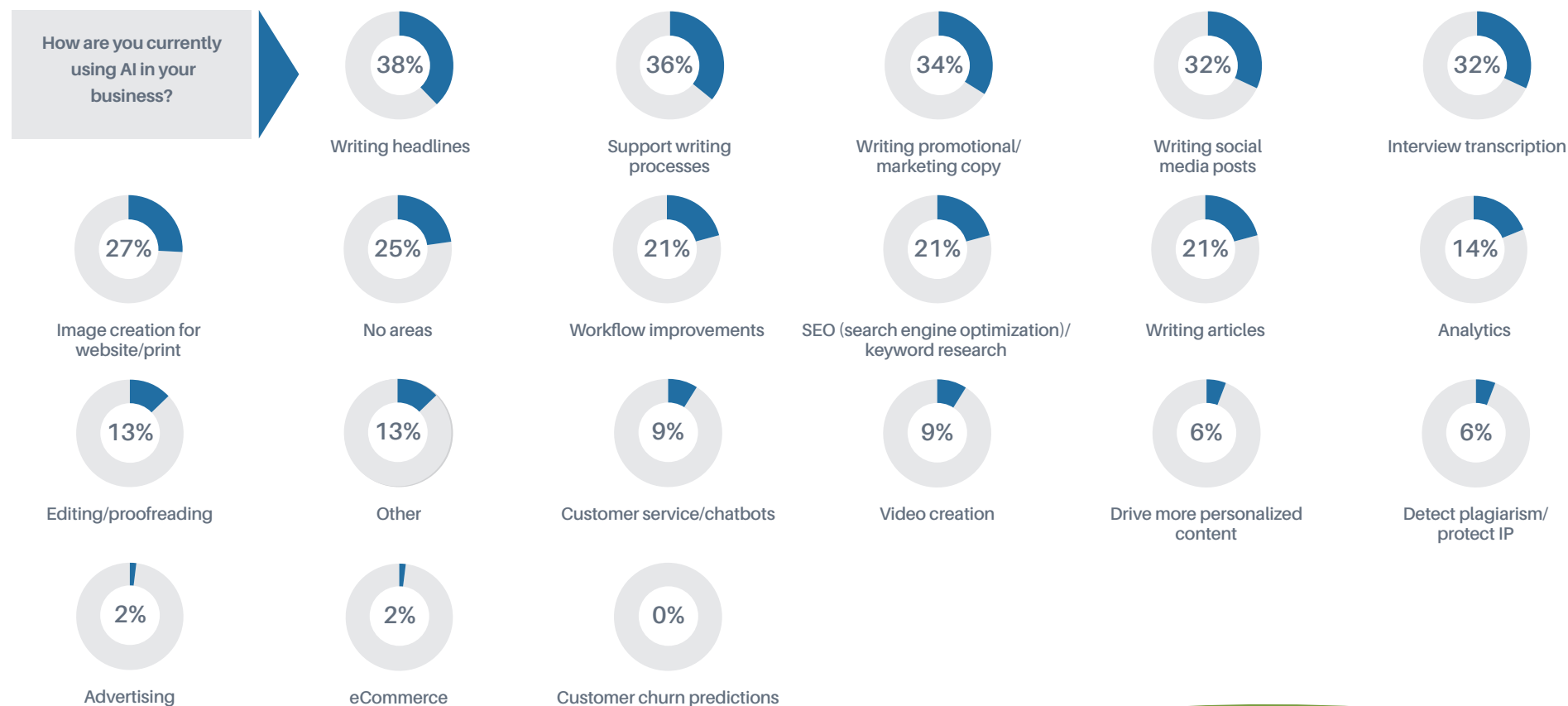
Respondent Profile: Publisher Types



How Are Publishers Currently Using AI?

Most publishers aren't ready to hand over the task of writing long-form expert-driven content to AI — and certainly not without careful oversight and supervision. Rather, most of those publishers who have begun to implement

AI are using it in a supporting role: to assist with tasks like generating headlines (38%) and transcribing interviews (32%), or to support the writing process with research, outlines, and topic ideas (36%).



AI for Content Creation

That said, publishers are willing to trust AI with some forms of writing more than others. Writing promotional and marketing copy (34%) or social media content (32%) are considered less of a risk than writing articles for publication, which only 21% of publishers are ready to try.

Image generation is another area where publishers are taking a cautious approach, with only 27% currently using AI for this purpose. And the vast majority aren't ready to embrace AI for video creation, with only 9% taking the plunge so far.

Publishers not only want to keep a close eye on any work generated by AI, they don't consider it ready to accurately evaluate the work of human writers, either — only 13% of publishers find it useful for partial or full editing.

Other Uses for AI

Non-creative uses for AI range from workflow improvements (21%), SEO keyword research (21%), and analytics (15%) to customer service chatbots (9%) and personalized content recommendations (6%).



“Production takes a large portion of budget. Any way we can minimize production resources to fuel content resources is a win.”

How Is AI Benefitting Publishers?

Saving time was one of the obvious and most-cited attractions, as respondents noted “quicker turnaround” and “acceleration of the content creation process.”

Also highly valued was the ability of AI to conquer writer’s block and move the process forward: It “gets us started,” assists with “idea generation,” and “can sometimes help with headlines when we aren’t able to come up with anything.”

Some publishers have also found that AI is adept at tasks like writing SEO-optimized headlines, click-worthy email subject lines, and short summaries for longer print stories.

Boosts in efficiency, productivity and accuracy were mentioned by

“Publishing winners will be those who can leverage AI to increase productivity, market share and margins. It will be very tough.”



“Are we missing the point?”

That’s the question that one publisher asked. He thinks more publishers need to be thinking about how they can use AI to enhance their offering. For this publisher, that means putting an AI front end on a data product, resulting in larger licenses (and more revenue). So, instead of customers pulling the data out of the ecosystem into a third party for analysis, they’re staying put. “We’re trying to manage the entire workflow our customers do.” Similarly, a local news publisher said they were exploring the idea of leveraging AI for smarter search. “There’s no reason not to delve into that with a Large Language Model to allow us to generate a synopsis on a topic for a subscriber.”

multiple respondents, as well. One publisher noted the rewards in terms of removing friction from the publishing process:

“It has helped in streamlining certain aspects of our workflow that were tedious, and has given us time back for more important tasks.”

Another publisher told us that the ability to automate low-level production tasks had already paid off in the ability to devote more resources to the process of creating quality content.

What Are Publishers Worried About?

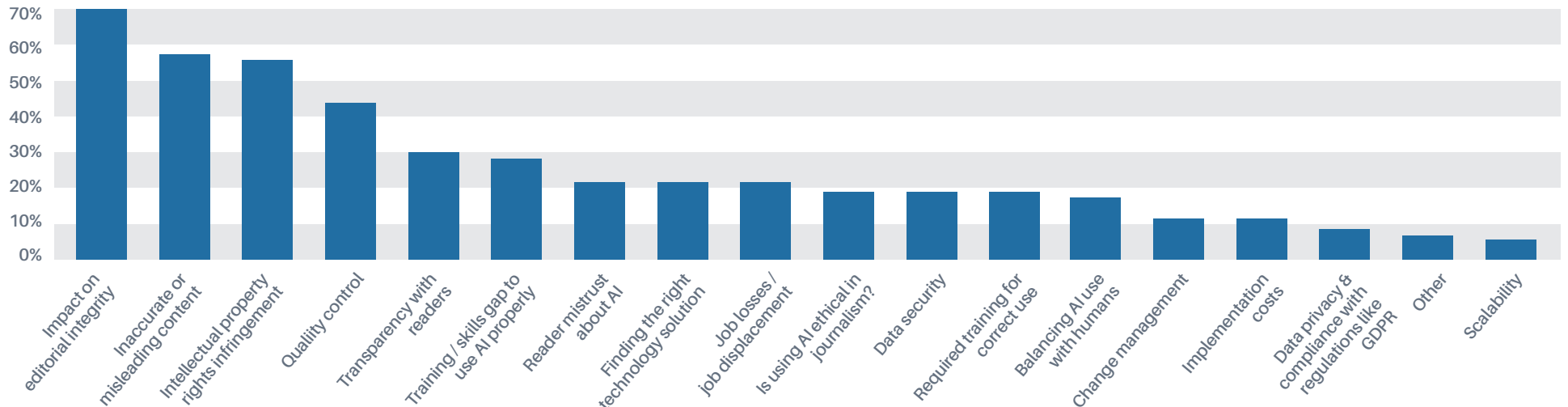
Despite the ways that AI is already helping them, publishers have their eyes wide open about the risks and potential pitfalls — and they're choosing to keep AI on a short leash for the foreseeable future.

The concern that respondents noted most often came down to one word: trust. Work generated by AI needs to be closely vetted for accuracy and relevance. Sourcing of information is a key concern, as well. Seventy percent of publishers surveyed named editorial integrity as a top concern.

The need to be transparent with readers, an awareness of readers' mistrust of AI and ongoing questions about the ethics of using AI in journalism were top of mind, as well.

Some publishers are worried about the investment needed to get up and running with AI — in terms of the necessary training and skills, the effort of finding the right technology and the costs of implementation.

What are your top concerns about AI?





Keeping It Real

Preserving authenticity is important to publishers. One respondent wrote of the need to make sure that “our readers know that we are human beings making connections to our followers and subscribers — rather than just copying and pasting what AI provides.”

On a creative level, voice matters. AI-generated writing may feel generic, unnatural, lifeless or lacking in the human touch — requiring additional work from staff to fine-tune it, add warmth or personality, and make sure it rises to the necessary standards.

One news publisher wrote that they weren’t willing to embrace AI for content creation. “AI is simply an algorithm at this point, and cannot replace human minds for unbiased, local news reporting.”

They noted that the trust of their readers was paramount, and that their staff had “impeccable integrity” when it came to sticking with proven facts. For that reason, they felt that editing and proofing AI content for accuracy would be more time-consuming than writing articles from scratch.

Internal Resistance — And Fear of Displacement

These trust issues go hand in hand with trepidation about how AI will affect the industry on a big-picture level. Some publishers note the resistance of team members in terms of the need to learn new technology and techniques, like writing prompts.

Some worry that jobs will be threatened, and that human talent will be crowded out: “Our editors create great content, and now we have to compete with AI.” Another respondent put it frankly: “I don’t want it to be so great it will put me out of a job.”

Getting support and buy-in from management may be a hurdle: One publisher mentioned “a lack of support and understanding about how it will help (or hurt) the business.”

“A reader’s trust is paramount, and editing/proofing (AI’s) accuracy and truthfulness would prove more time-consuming than writing the article from scratch. I could not trust its facts.”





The Serious Business of Truth

For academic, scientific and medical publishers, the consequences of getting it wrong can have an impact on lives. Understandably, many of these publishers are resistant to the idea of AI playing any role in content creation. Their contributors are often already the leading experts in their fields; in fact some say that when they've tested AI, they've found their own work being tapped for the tool's response. One editor of a magazine, a registered dietician with nearly a half century of experience in food and nutrition, said that he has a no-tolerance policy for AI from his writers, many of whom have PhDs in the subject area. The risk with AI in the niche he serves, he said, comes when a writer doesn't have that background. "If they don't have enough background, enough experience, they're not going to know when AI spits out perpetuated myths. I look at AI as a massive step backwards in this kind of reporting."

Ethics Matter

Some publishers say they aren't comfortable using AI for image, video or content generation because "the copyright issues are not yet clear" and the work of AI is "much harder for us to fact check." One publisher worries that AI could result in publishing "inaccurate information that could have big legal repercussions."

For that reason, some publishers may feel that AI should be seen as "not a content generator, just a content optimizer."

"There is a lot of unknown and yet a lot of 'noise' about AI being revolutionary. It will affect this business, but how much and how fast? Can a traditional media company change fast enough?"

Data and IP Protection

A majority of respondents named the risk of publishing inaccurate or misleading content, as well as the danger of intellectual property rights infringement, as top concerns.

One publisher wrote bluntly: "I don't want to feed it our information." Publishers naturally worry about the extent to which AI may be "ripping off" their own IP.

Also fueling distrust: Some publishers worry that the use of AI in search engine results could adversely hurt their traffic.

Safety First: Putting Up Guardrails

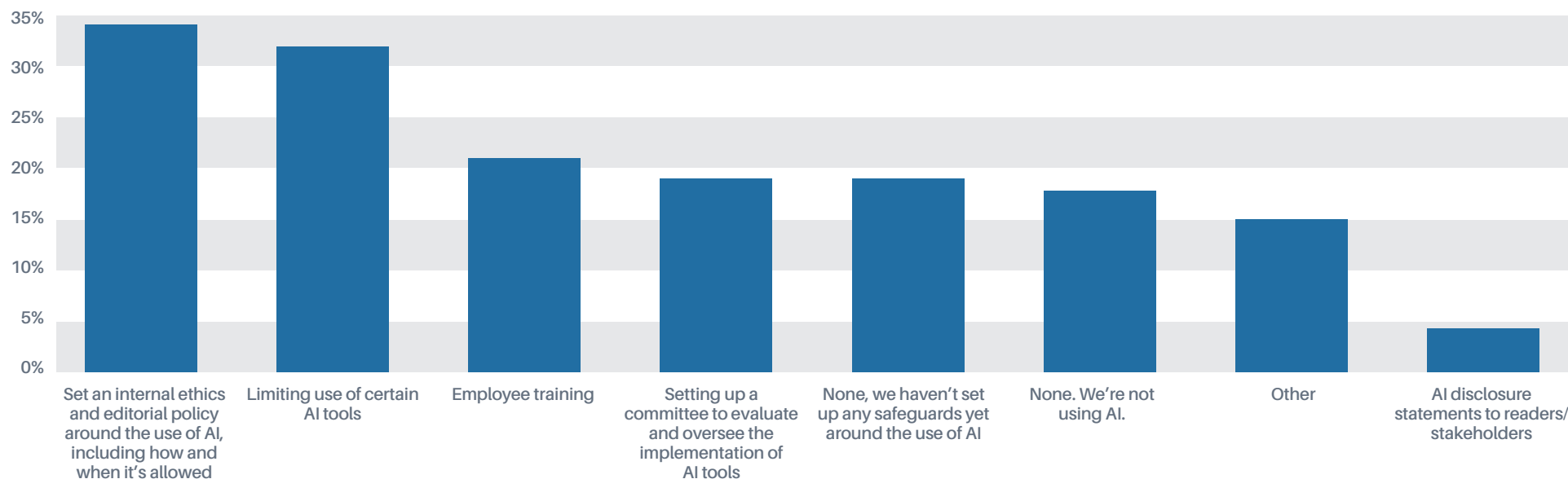
As part of their cautious approach to AI, publishers are making sure they've got guardrails in place. Less than 20% indicated that they weren't setting up any special safeguards for the use of AI.

Precautions most commonly noted included setting limits for the use of certain AI tools, as well as putting in place internal ethics and editorial

policies around the use of AI — including how and when it's allowed.

Creating a committee to evaluate and oversee implementation of AI tools was a common approach. Respondents also noted the importance of emphasizing employee training.

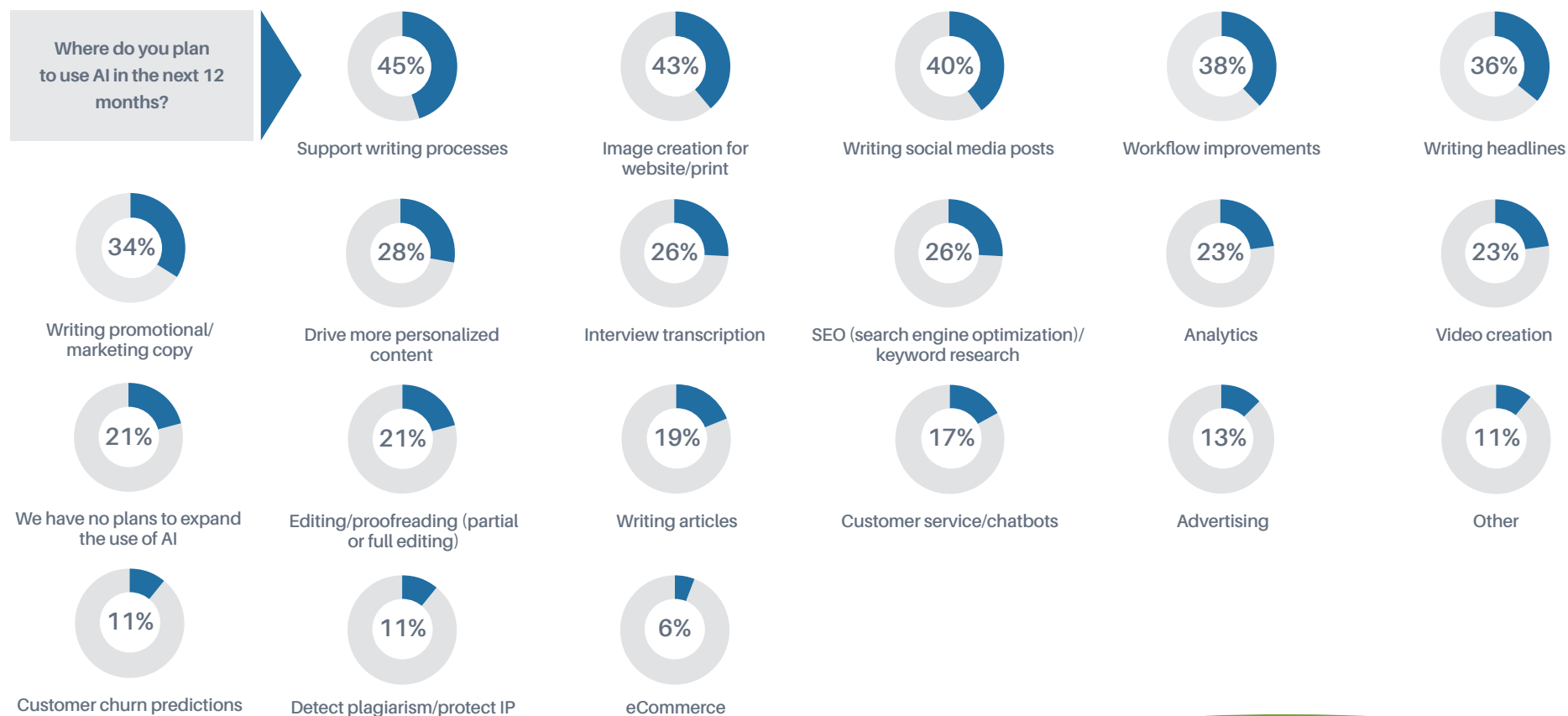
What safeguards have you implemented to ensure responsible use of AI?



The Road Ahead: Looking to the Future

Despite their concerns, most respondents seem to feel that AI is here to stay and will play a growing role in their futures.

Just 21% said they didn't have any plans to expand the use of AI in their organization in the next 12 months.



Staying the Course

Most respondents indicated that they planned to continue using AI in the ways they're already experimenting with. Writing headlines, social media posts, and promotional or marketing copy remain the applications publishers feel most comfortable, as well as providing support for writing processes.

A smaller segment feels ready to explore using AI for article writing and other content creation in the year ahead.

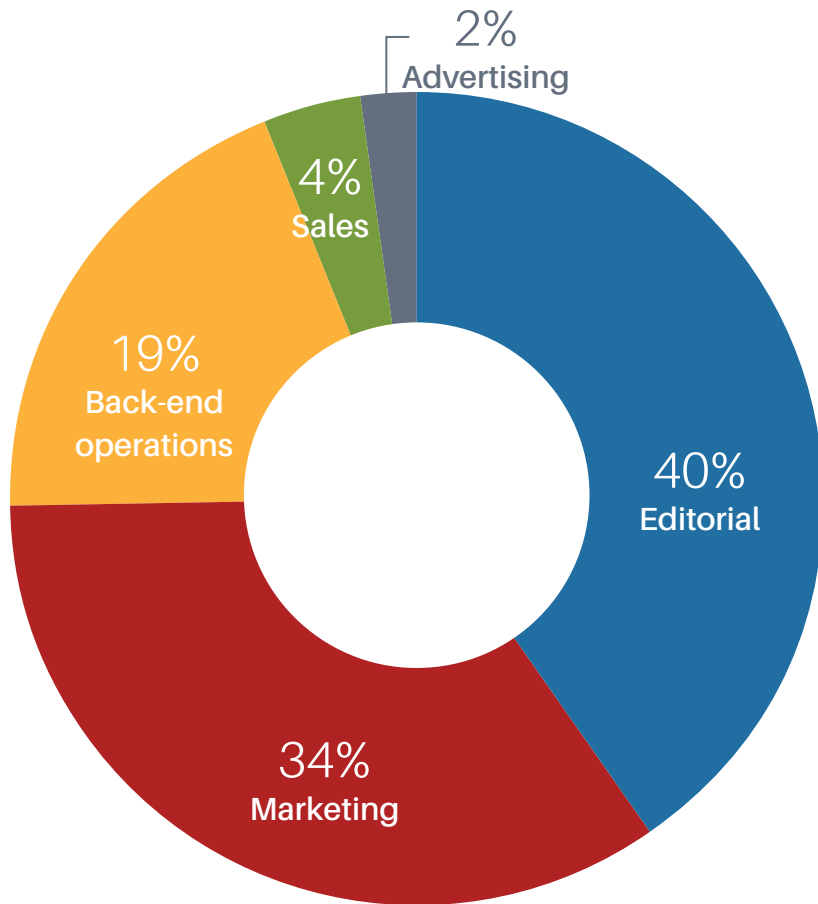
Understanding Readers Better

One of the greatest areas of expected growth is in the use of AI for recommendations and targeted content on their websites. More than a quarter of respondents intend to implement this in the coming year, as opposed to the 6% who have already done so.

“There is potential for its use throughout media. It will have a great effect on content, but we need to make sure we remain the subject matter experts.”



What department do you see the greatest potential for the use of AI in your organization?



Short-Term Potential

When asked where they saw the greatest potential for AI use within their organization, publishers focused on editorial applications, with marketing functions running a strong second. Back-end operations like finances were on the radar for some publishers, as well.

That said, few publishers expected that the use of AI would substantially shift tasks or responsibilities within their organization during the coming year.

Bringing AI In House

At least one publisher indicated that they were interested in taking greater ownership of the project by developing a “proprietary LLM (Large Language Model) of our content, not using third parties.”

Examples of how bringing AI in house would work include using AI to enhance data products and developing a more robust internal search function for their readers.

Extending the View: Three Years Out

We asked publishers how they saw the role of AI evolving in the next three years.

The Pessimistic View

Some feared that AI would exacerbate the “dumbing down” of the industry, and wind up causing misinformation to circulate among readers who don’t take the time to vet content for accuracy — resulting in a “tsunami of untrustworthy content” that’s been recycled from poor sources.

One publisher worried that as AI content increased and human-generated content decreased, it would lead to a “self-defeating loop” of content being published “with no actual foundation or fact behind it.”

The Optimistic Take

More optimistic publishers are hopeful that it will allow reporters and other content creators to put more of their focus on writing, as AI relieves them of repetitive tasks and assists them with research.



Publishers hope to benefit from AI’s ability to help them with marketing and social media, as well as analyzing reader habits and content consumption to provide useful insights and add value to their products.

One respondent summed it up by saying that the winners of the AI revolution would be those publishers “who can leverage AI to increase productivity, market share and margins.” But they took a realistic view of the challenges involved, adding: “It will be very tough.”

ePublishing

Drive more revenue, productivity and engagement with our modern media tech stack powered by AI. Our efficient and collaborative publishing tools (and their “enter once, distribute anywhere” data flow) unify editorial workflow, DAM, CMS, ecommerce and audience management to save publishing organizations countless hours each month.

We’ve infused AI functionality into our Continuum and Ellington platforms to boost productivity, drive creativity and increase visibility with better SEO. With the touch of a button, users can find inspiration for articles, generate unique images, or add keywords and eye-catching headlines. We aren’t stopping there. We’ll continue to release new AI features to build reader engagement and make your website more valuable for your audience, while generating more revenue.

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