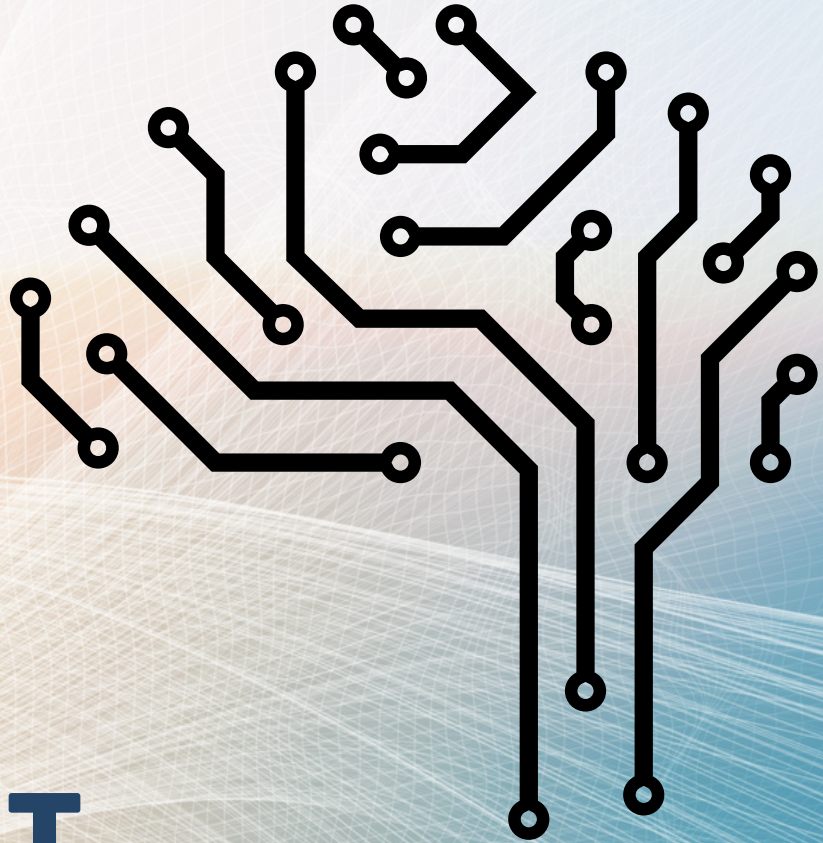


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## THE SKYNET'S **THE LIMIT**

**HOW WINNIPEG'S ADVERTISING  
INDUSTRY IS USING AND  
THINKING ABOUT AI**

An Industry Report



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# Introduction

AI is changing the way advertisers do their work, and the industry is sitting at a crossroads. The creative sector has traditionally been all about human talent, and the integration of technology has always been in a supportive and passive role – but there’s a shift happening with AI. Professionals in the industry – including Manitoba’s vibrant advertising sector – are weighing their options: should they stick with tried-and-true methods or incorporate AI into their processes?

## AI on the rise.

A study by Botco.ai investigated how marketers across North America use AI. Botco.ai is an award-winning leader in conversational AI and has been recognized for their innovative marketing approach, earning the SAAS Startup of the Year and Innovator of the Year from the Arizona Technology Council. The study revealed that 73 per cent of marketing professionals are now incorporating AI tools into their workflow. Tools like ChatGPT are used for generating initial drafts and messages for audiences, and visual apps like DALL-E and Adobe Sensei are gaining popularity for automating tasks like layout design and colour selection.[1].

Industry reports from groups like The Boston Consulting Group[2], show that generative AI is evolving from writing emails to helping brainstorm digital content and graphics for social and digital campaigns. This shift is becoming significant to the strategic and creative process.

## How does Manitoba’s advertising sector fit into these patterns?

Advertisers in Winnipeg and across Manitoba are actively adapting to AI. This paper explores AI’s impact and ethical implications on creativity and strategy in Winnipeg’s advertising industry by analyzing industry interviews, surveys, journals, and reports,



# Key Findings

Five things stand out from my research about how the advertising sector in Manitoba is thinking about and working with AI:

## Key Findings

### 1 Advertisers are already using AI, a lot.

Most respondents have already used AI in advertising, primarily in digital marketing. Advertisers in Manitoba are mainly using AI to enhance online strategies, data analysis, and targeting efficiency.

### 2 Creatives do not think AI can replace them.

Despite most respondents being in creative roles, there's notable skepticism about AI's ability to replace human creativity. This sentiment is critical in an industry that values originality and human touch.

### 3 Advertisers aren't sure which tools to use, or how to use them.

There's a noticeable gap in awareness of AI tools specifically designed for advertisers. This gap is an opportunity for growth and education.

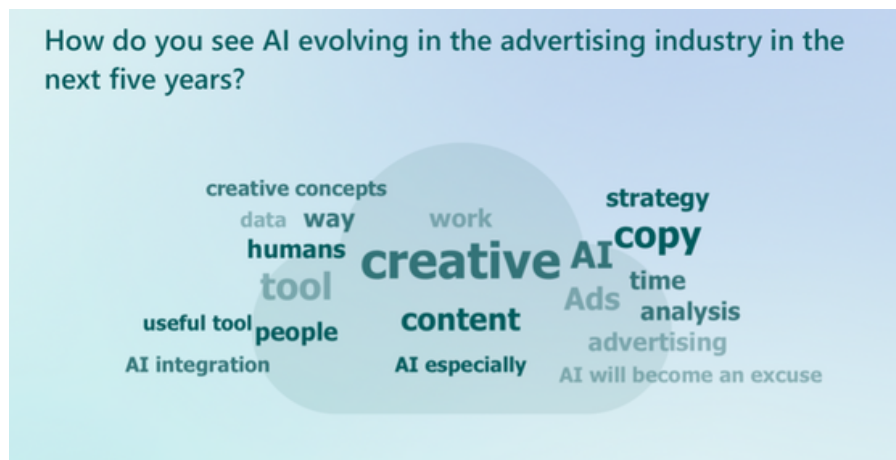
### 4 AI needs a lot of rules.

Most respondents believe in the necessity of AI regulation and are concerned about data privacy. This reflects a broader industry trend of working toward balancing technological advancement with ethical considerations, particularly in handling consumer data.

### 5 There is cautious optimism about what this means for work.

Most respondents see AI as becoming a standard tool and are open to collaborating with AI in creative processes. This interest in AI training suggests a forward-looking industry keen to evolve alongside technological advancements.

**Understanding the implications of these key points could help you and your team redefine your strategy and workflow.**



- Taken from "AI in Winnipeg's Advertising Landscape" survey

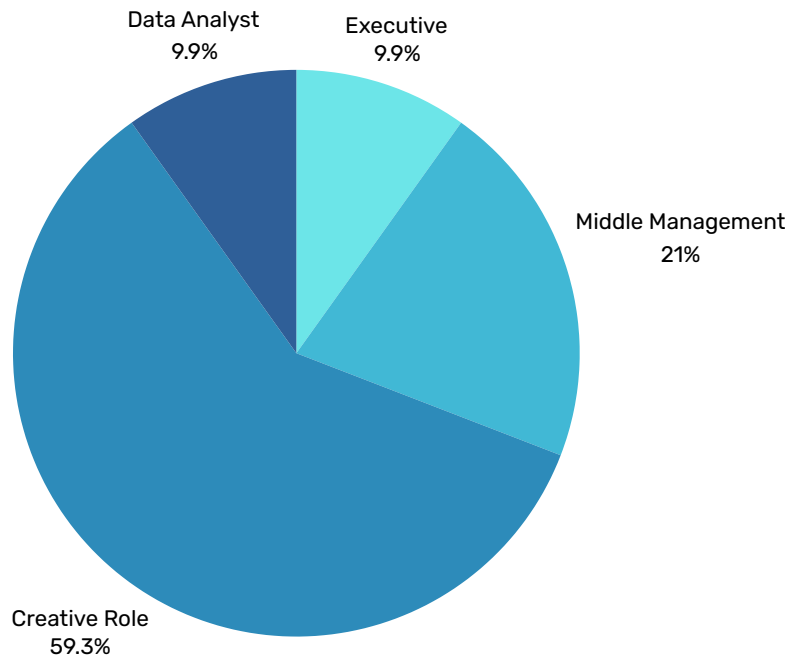
# Methodology

This paper's foundation is a survey designed and developed with assistance from ChatGPT to balance hard data and candid, thoughtful responses.

I tapped into my personal and professional networks to target the survey's distribution. Key local agencies like UpHouse, Honest Agency, Brandish, and Show and Tell participated. I also made an effort to capture in-house and corporate departments. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, more specific corporate names are unavailable.

I analyzed the data through a hybrid of AI and human insight. Microsoft Forms was vital in providing insights by identifying patterns and categorizing responses. From here, I reviewed and synthesized these insights before loading them into a custom GPT I built for this white paper. This model was programmed to contextualize the survey data and provide guidance and insight into where it would be most relevant in the paper.

## “What is your current role in the advertising industry?”



## “What type of organization do you work for?”



# How AI helped make this paper.

From the onset, AI helped frame the survey to ensure the questions were well structured and accounted for various responses. More crucially, it played a key role in helping analyze the answers. AI, like ChatGPT, can quickly analyze complex data sets and highlight important patterns that risk being overlooked.

In the interview stage, I used ChatGPT to structure questions and parse through responses. This involved giving AI a brief bio and background of the interviewees before constructing questions for them. AI helped me anticipate their answers and build follow-up questions.

In the secondary research phase, AI reduced the workload by filtering through academic libraries and databases of industry reports by using plugins like ScholarAI. Plugins allow ChatGPT to access knowledge bases outside of its training. It leverages machine learning to cut down on time searching individual keywords and reading through abstracts while looking for relevant material to include. AI's ability to quickly process large volumes of data was valuable.

AI also played a role in visualizing the data I collected. Using the data analysis function available in ChatGPT, I was able to generate the data into the visuals you see in this white paper. It proposed effective ways to present the data and helped consolidate multiple data points into single, engaging images.

## AI's Limitations

Where AI struggles is context. AI can radically leap in logic depending on what data you feed it and needs somebody with knowledge of the subject to keep their hand on the wheel. AI is always trying to give you the answer you want to hear, even if it's not always the right one. If you don't know enough about a subject beforehand, AI can mislead with well meaning, but incorrect data.

## Secondary Research

I conducted secondary research focused on reputable and timely academic journals and industry reports that offered hard data to offer a grounded comparison with my primary research. The goal was to pick sources that balanced academic weight and industry relevance and avoid superficial takes that echo the recent AI boom.

## REAL People

I also conducted interviews with local advertising professionals and experts. Callum Beattie, a partner at Honest Agency, Jolene Olive, a seasoned freelance advertiser, and Kenton Larsen, an advertising instructor at Red River College Polytechnic, all provided insightful perspectives on AI and its increasing relevance for current and future players in the industry. I designed these interviews to complement the survey data and offer a more nuanced discussion about the trends that emerged in the survey.

## Advertisers are already using AI, a lot.

A report from McKinsey and Company, a global consulting firm, suggests[3] that AI is reshaping the industry from the ground up – from enhancing creative processes to refining management strategies.

According to my survey, 75 percent of respondents (30 out of 40) have already incorporated AI into their workflows, a trend backed by Botco.ai's study. Of the people who answered this question, 45 percent described their proficiency with AI as intermediate[4]. This level typically involves using AI tasks for social media copy, SEO content, and blog posts.

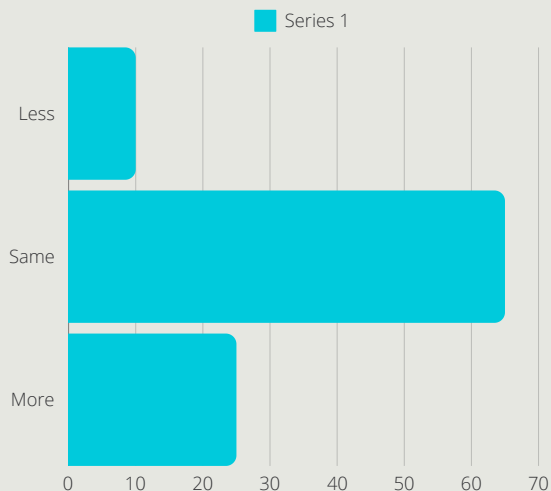
**"Humans will always have a place in advertising and will always bring humanity to the creative. AI will be a tool to assist, but it will be up to humans to use it properly and use it well."**

Survey respondent, "AI in Winnipeg's Advertising Landscape."

**"I don't think there is a way to avoid using AI in this day and age. It will only become bigger, so it is important to understand how it works and how it can benefit it in specific ways. I think AI should be used as a tool, rather than something to fear."**

Survey respondent, "AI in Winnipeg's Advertising Landscape."

**"How much do you feel you know about AI, compared to your peers?"**



The Harvard Business Review points out[5] that effective integration of AI tools goes beyond mere usage. You need to understand how AI can be strategically applied to get the most out of it. The intermediate level of AI proficiency suggests the local industry is on the cusp of a deeper transformation. As local knowledge grows, so will the sophisticated applications of AI in strategies, like incorporating enterprise-level or Team-based GPTs into their company structure.

There are plenty of ways that AI can be integrated into workflows. AI, like ChatGPT, excels at handling repetitive tasks like data entry, scheduling, and routine emails. It helps eliminate busy work to free up time for creativity and strategy. AI can also process large amounts of data faster than people, identifying trends and patterns crucial in strategic planning. AI is also skilled in adapting written content and turning articles and reports into targeted messages that can be distributed on social platforms.

# Creatives do not think they can be replaced.

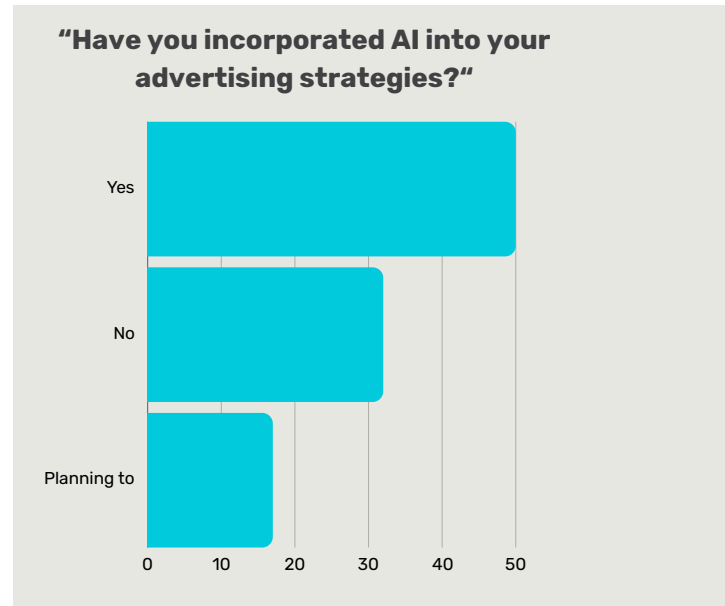
The survey showed a balanced view of AI emerging among Winnipeg’s advertising industry professionals. Half the respondents (20 out of 40) viewed AI positively and acknowledged its potential to innovate current advertising practices.

Creatives are turning to AI for inspiration, yet they face the critical question: does this risk the authenticity and originality of their work? Jolene Olive[7] has worked in Winnipeg’s advertising industry for over a decade and is a seasoned freelancer. Her portfolio includes small business branding, brochure and ad design, and website creation for local names like Cornell Creme, Zorba’s, and River East Scholars Nursery Network. She has been cautious about how AI has made it harder to determine what a person can create independently. This is particularly difficult in the hiring process, where context is limited, and first impressions are important.

**“Now, as I start hiring people, I’ll have to think, is this AI-generated?”**

**-Jolene Olive**

There is also the issue of relying too heavily on AI for creative outputs, which Jolene warns could breed complacency. “Just like generative texting makes people lazy about spelling and grammar, you’re just not using that part of your brain as much if you’re using a computer to generate your ideas.” A problem here is that most people’s interaction with AI is a one-way street. They give direction and either accept or reject what the AI can generate. If ChatGPT or similar programs are prompted to be inquisitive and seek collaboration, this problem could be resolved. Creative ideas and strategies risk becoming uninspired if they’re simply inputted into AI tools without engaging in a dialogue that includes peer feedback, client input, and team collaboration.



Try to think about AI as an extension of your thoughts. Callum Beattie[8], partner and director at Honest Agency, pointed out AI’s potential to help with organizational thinking. “You could hop on ChatGPT, but it’s more about using it as a tool, not a crutch.” Callum felt AI was better suited as a creative and strategic development launching point. “ChatGPT is really good for, maybe, something that frames things in a certain way or organizes your thoughts better than you could initially.” A typical use of ChatGPT among advertising professionals is to take notes from a meeting, identify key points, and organize the document into something more than a stream of consciousness.

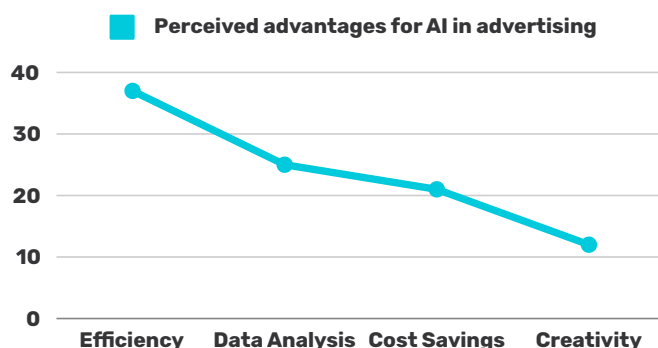


# Advertisers aren't sure which AI tools to use or how to use them.

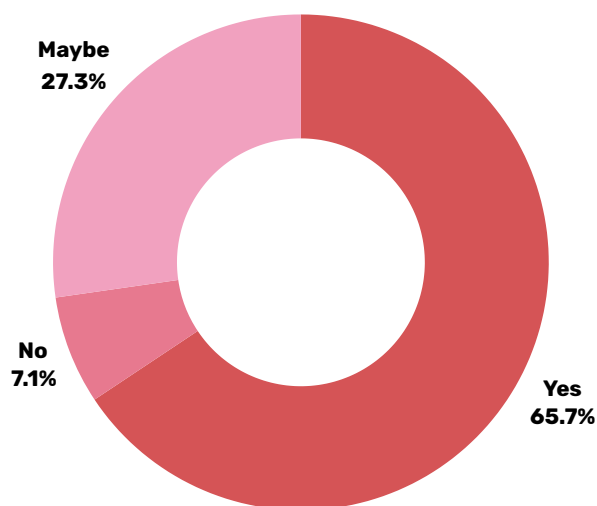
While there's optimism about AI in advertising, choosing the right tools is still challenging. 51 percent of respondents said they weren't aware of any tools designed specifically for their industry. That means some people use AI tools in their current strategy that might not be the best ones for the job.

Furthermore, 57.5 percent of respondents (23 out of 40) identified significant knowledge gaps as a major challenge, indicating a need for more training tools. The industry needs to figure out how to train its employees. Right now, everyone is in their silo, learning about AI on their own. The industry needs to set some guidelines for AI use. People need to learn when and where it makes sense to use AI, whether assisting in SEO or helping choose a typeface.

One thing that makes AI training difficult is that it's in a constant state of flux. OpenAI regularly rolls out larger context models, which can answer more complicated questions or perform more complex tasks. When this paper was initially conceived, ChatGPT was a text-based chatbot. At this point of writing, ChatGPT can read and analyze documents, pictures, and audio, with video currently available through plugins. Major players like [Microsoft](#)[11], [Apple](#)[12], and [Amazon](#)[13] are all looking into how AI can be integrated into their core products. The intellectual and monetary capital behind the rise of AI is overwhelming, and it's reasonable to assume that their ROI would be as well.



## “Would you be interested in training programs focused on AI in advertising?”



## Who benefits from the increased efficiency AI brings?

Twenty-three respondents see AI becoming a standard in advertising, but there's concern it could make human roles redundant. This fear could hinder embracing AI, as workers might worry about pricing themselves out of a job. The industry needs to clarify whether AI will replace or augment human work.

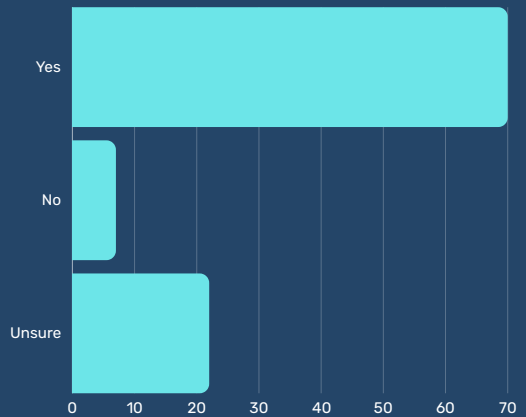
## AI needs a lot of rules.

Developing ethical guidelines, ensuring transparency in AI-driven decisions, and investing in AI literacy are critical steps in navigating the challenges of integrating AI into people’s workflows. In the survey, only three respondents didn’t feel AI needed to be regulated in the advertising industry[i]. The successful integration of AI in advertising hinges on building effective frameworks for understanding and working with AI. Whether these frameworks are innovative and responsible will influence AI’s adoption and use.

The rise of AI in advertising isn’t just theoretical; it’s practical, and you might even hear it before you see it.

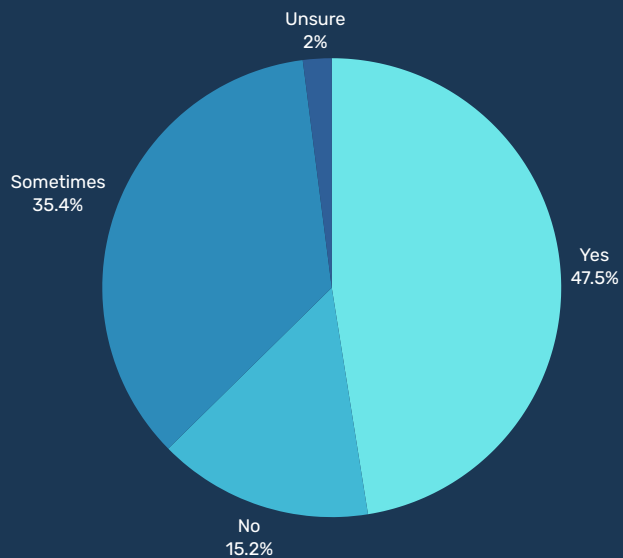
Wendy’s has already integrated it into their drive-thrus[14]. SAG-AFTRA signed a deal[15], allowing voice actors to digitize their voices and opening the door for AI voices in commercials and movies. AI applications extend to more nuanced areas like customer engagement and personalized advertising. With 32 out of 40 surveyed professionals in Winnipeg favouring public disclosure when AI is used, the challenge intensifies in the absence of firm rules from bodies like Advertising Standards Canada, the CRTC, and the Competition Bureau Canada.

“Do you believe AI should be regulated in the advertising industry?”



**The advertising industry should take the lead in AI regulation, crafting its own rules to prevent overreach by larger bodies. This self-regulation and basic consumer protection guidelines can safeguard public trust without extensive government intervention.**

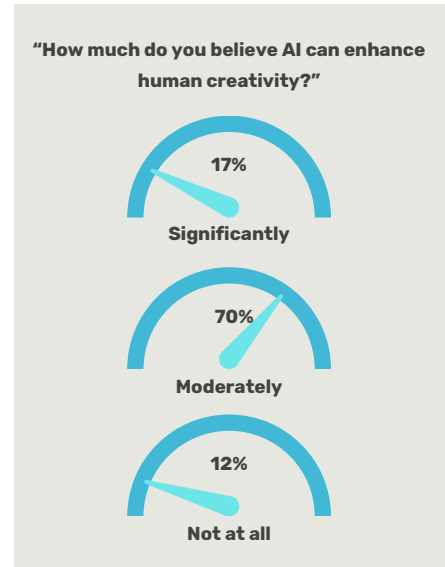
“Should companies disclose when AI is used to generate content?”



# Advertisers are cautiously optimistic about AI's impact on work.

Professionals in the industry are grappling with the notion that AI, while a powerful tool for efficiency and preliminary creative processes, should not and cannot replace the nuanced, emotional depth that human creativity brings.

Many surveyed individuals went even further to say that they believe AI could enhance creativity – with only five respondents outright saying it doesn't. When asked if they would be open to collaborating with AI during the creative process, only four said they wouldn't. Even people who do not believe AI enhances creativity directly see the potential merit in its use. Finally, when asked if they would recommend the use of AI to colleagues, over half (27) answered "somewhat to very likely," and only five responded with "somewhat/very unlikely."



**There is evident enthusiasm among Manitoba's advertisers for how AI can offset undesirable work, but at the same time, there is a concern when it crosses the line into creative work.**

**The survey results show clear anticipation among professionals for how AI could improve work:**

**87.5%**

thought it could further boost efficiency (35 mentions)

**60%**

of respondents said it could enhance data analysis (24 mentions).

**50%**

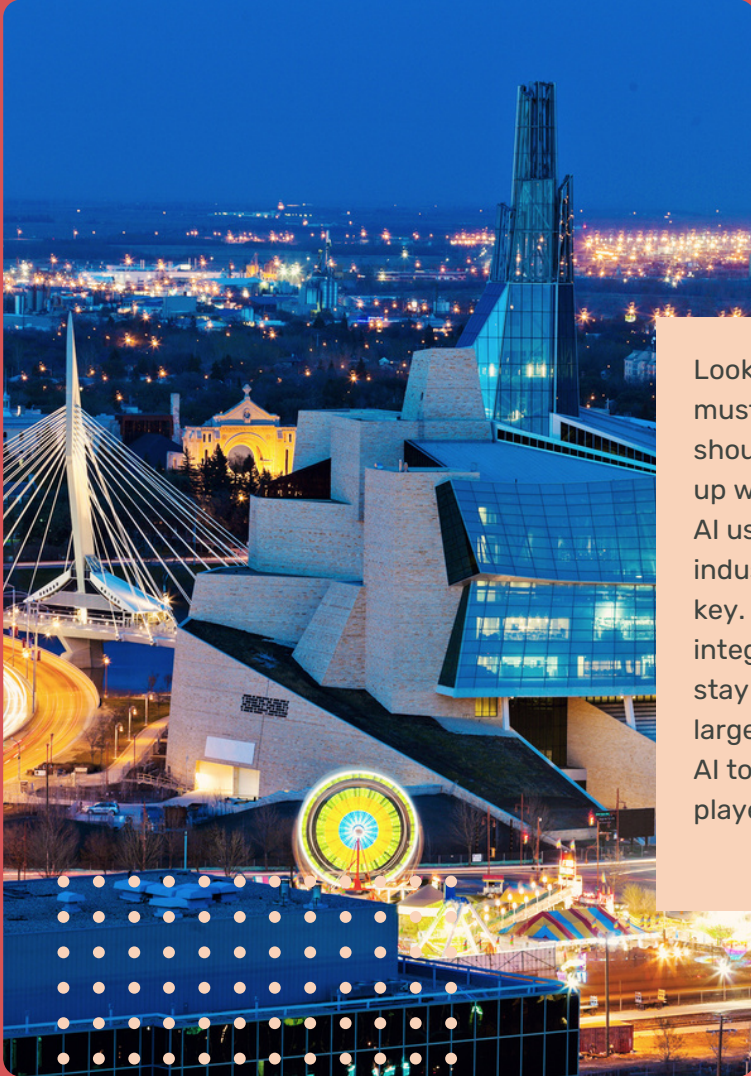
thought it could bring cost savings (20 mentions[i])

**These results mirrors insights from The Journal of Business Research[i], emphasizing AI's critical role in programmatic advertising and personalized ad planning.**

**"No, AI won't replace human creativity, but creative humans who know how to use AI may."**

**- Survey respondent, "AI in Winnipeg's Advertising Landscape."**

# The future is collaborative.



Looking ahead, Winnipeg's advertising pros must embrace AI collaboratively. Creatives should get hands-on with AI tools to keep up with trends. Managers need to set clear AI usage policies for their teams. And as an industry, pushing for smart AI regulation is key. Winnipeg's advertising scene should integrate AI where it can and leverage it to stay competitive within the industry at large. Between new at-home solutions and AI tools, the playing field is accessible for players at all levels to jump in.

## Thank you for reading.

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