

[Study]

AI IN PRICING & SALES

2026



[Study Results, 02/2026]

Executive Summary

Between November and December 2025, EbelHofer Consultants surveyed approx. 200 companies across a broad range of industries to assess the current state and adoption of artificial intelligence in pricing and sales. This paper aims to provide insights into how companies are using AI technologies, the maturity of adoption across industries, key application areas, and the main challenges encountered. The key implications are outlined below.

Key Insights

01

AI adoption

79% of companies already use AI in pricing or sales or plan to do so.

02

Industry patterns

AI adoption remains more defensive in Chemicals and Manufacturing compared to other industries.

03

Use cases

Price optimization is the most common AI use case, used by 54% of all surveyed companies, followed by lead scoring at 40% and demand forecasting at 38%.

04

Technologies

LLMs (56%) and Machine Learning (55%) are the most widely used AI technologies.

05

Multi-Functional Use of AI

LLMs are used across more business functions than any other AI technology, supporting use cases from pricing and sales to operations and administration.

06

Challenges

Key adoption challenges are data quality & integration and lack of internal know-how.

» The majority of companies either experiment or already use AI or Machine Learning in pricing and sales

Overall, AI adoption in pricing and sales is at an early but advancing stage (Figure 1). While 8% of companies have already embedded AI into their pricing and sales processes, a much larger share (45%) is currently experimenting with AI in selected use cases. 26% plan to introduce AI in the future but have not started with implementation yet. In contrast, 1 out of 5 companies report that AI adoption is not on their agenda.

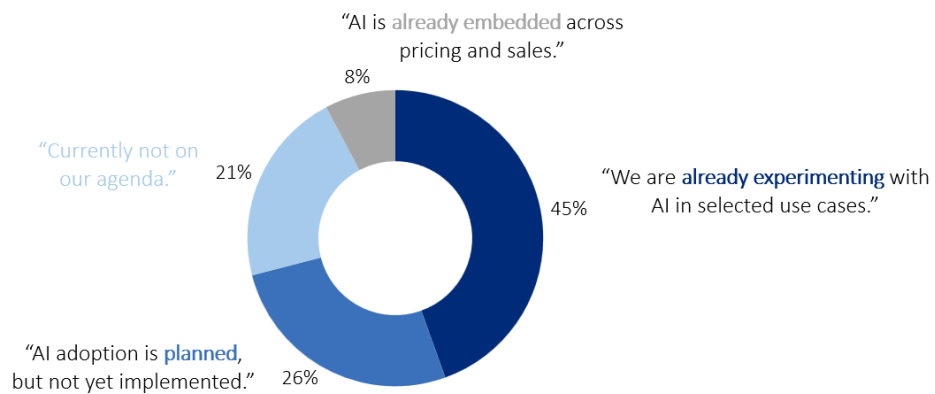


Figure 1: AI adoption status in pricing and sales

AI adoption levels vary significantly across industries, highlighting distinct stages of maturity in the use of AI across pricing and sales functions (Figure 2). *Software / IT / Technology* and *Professional Services* stand out as the most advanced industries, with around 65% and 85% of companies respectively already using AI at least partially in pricing and sales. The *Automotive* sector shows comparatively slower adoption with only 50% of companies using AI at least partially. *Chemicals / Materials / Energy* and *Manufacturing* showcase the slowest adoption pattern, with only 41% and 34% reporting partial or comprehensive AI use, and comparatively high shares still in the planning stage or without concrete adoption plans.

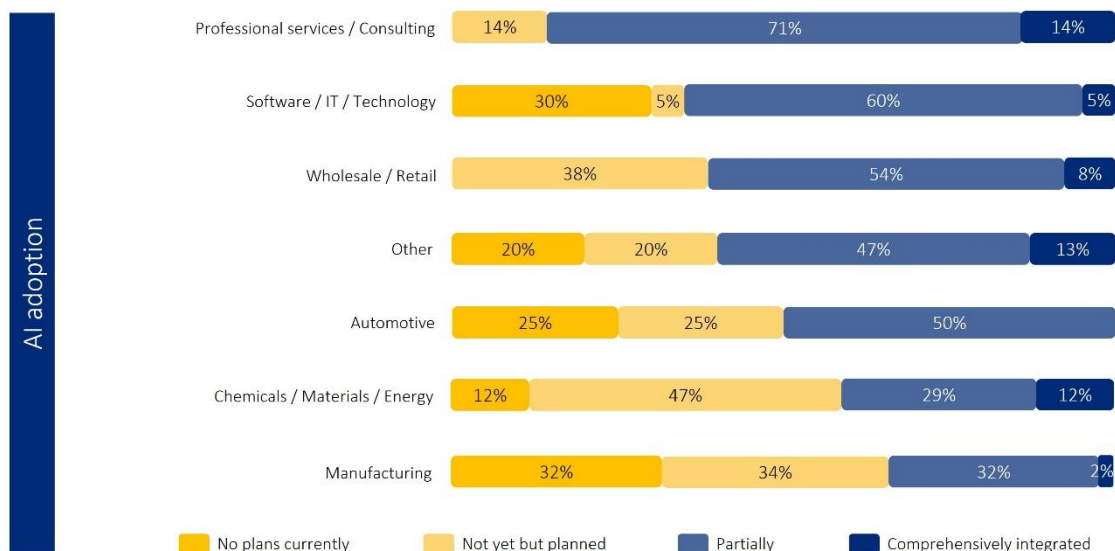


Figure 2: AI adoption status pricing and sales by industry

» Price optimization represents the primary application area for AI across surveyed companies

Across surveyed companies, pricing stands out as the primary application area for AI. The majority of companies are hereby already applying or actively planning AI-driven price optimization. Furthermore, AI is frequently used for sales-related applications such as lead scoring and pipeline management, as well as demand forecasting, highlighting the strong focus of sales on data-driven support. Marketing automation and sales enablement show solid but clearly secondary adoption. Within customer segmentation and cross- or upselling, AI plays only a limited role, suggesting that these areas are not a priority for AI application yet (Figure 3).

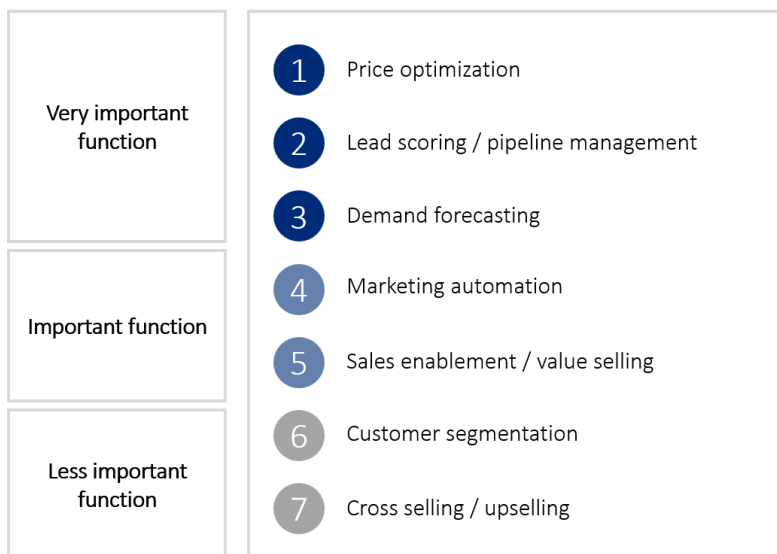


Figure 3: Primary AI use cases in pricing and sales, ranked by importance

» Current AI usage is driven by LLMs and Machine Learning

In terms of AI technologies in use, respondents point to a clear concentration: Large Language Models and Machine Learning are by far the most commonly used technologies and form the foundation of most current AI initiatives (Figure 4). Overall, the pattern indicates that companies rely primarily on established technologies that can be deployed across multiple use cases, rather than on a wide range of specialized architectures.

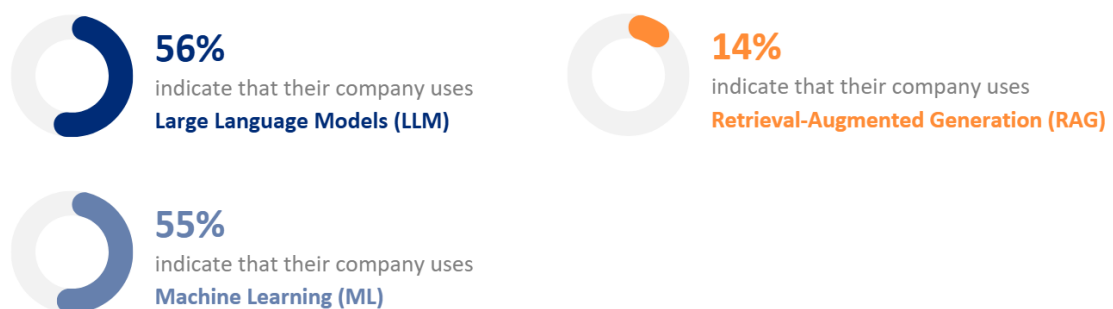


Figure 4: Distribution of AI technologies currently in use

AI technologies are applied differently across pricing and sales functions, reflecting the specific requirements of each application area. **Machine Learning (ML)** is primarily used in analytically intensive domains such as *Pricing & Revenue Optimization* and *Forecasting & Analytics*, where robust models are needed to analyze demand patterns, price elasticity, and sales performance. These areas rely heavily on structured data and predictive capabilities, making ML the most suitable core technology.

Among AI technologies, **Large Language Models (LLMs)** show the widest application across business functions and play a leading role in interaction- and process-oriented functions. They are widely used in *Sales & Marketing Enablement*, *Quotations, Proposal & Documentation*, *Process & Operational Efficiency*, and *Administrative Support*, where they support content creation, automate documentation, and enhance internal workflows.

In contrast, **Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG)** is mainly applied in *Data Intelligence (Internal and External)*. By combining language models with internal or external data sources, RAG enables fact-based insight generation from diverse data sets. However, its adoption remains limited so far, suggesting that RAG is still an emerging technology and not yet widely implemented across companies (Figure 5).

Application area	Machine Learning	Large Language Models	Retrieval-Augmented Generation
Pricing & Revenue Optimization includes price setting, margin management, demand elasticity	●		
Forecasting & Analytics includes demand forecasting, sales analytics, performance analysis	●	○	
Sales & Marketing Enablement includes sales support, marketing content, deal guidance		●	○
Quotations, Proposal & Documentation includes offer creation, proposals, reporting, documentation		●	○
Customer Management & Interaction includes customer segmentation, interaction, service, retention	●	○	
Process & Operational Efficiency includes process automation, workflow optimization, efficiency gains		●	
Data Intelligence (Internal and External) includes data aggregation, enrichment, insights generation		○	●
Administrative Support includes administrative assistance, coordination, internal support		●	

● Major technology ○ Supportive technology

Figure 5: Overview of Technologies and their Application Areas

» AI adoption is mainly constrained by data and capability limitations

Challenges in adopting AI in pricing and sales consist particularly of data-related and capability factors. Data quality and integration affect a clear majority of organizations and represent the most frequently cited barriers. In addition, almost half of respondents point to a lack of internal know-how, resulting in capability constraints. Technical complexity further slows progression. In contrast, data protection / compliance concerns and unclear ROI expectations are mentioned as less frequent challenges. Similarly, acceptance within sales management is not a major issue, suggesting that structural issues outweigh organizational resistance (Figure 6).

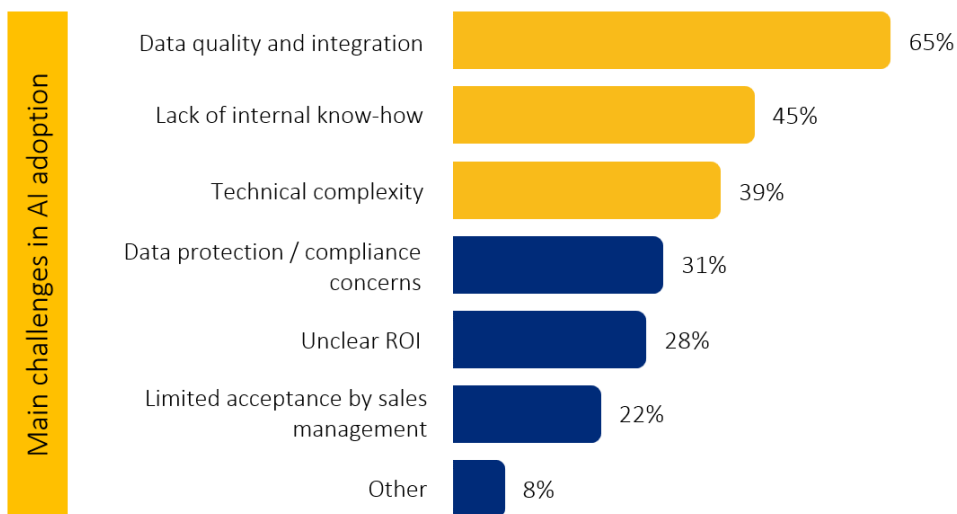


Figure 6: Key challenges of AI adoption

Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicate that AI has moved beyond a purely exploratory topic and is increasingly becoming part of pricing and sales activities across many companies. While full-scale integration remains limited, a large share of organizations already applies AI in selected use cases or plans near-term adoption, particularly in areas such as price optimization, forecasting, and sales support. At the same time, adoption levels differ markedly across industries, reflecting varying degrees of maturity and readiness. Data-related challenges and capability constraints continue to slow broader implementation, highlighting that successful AI adoption depends not only on technology availability but also on data foundations and organizational capabilities.

Company Profiles

of the approx. 200 surveyed companies

Company Size (Revenue 2025)

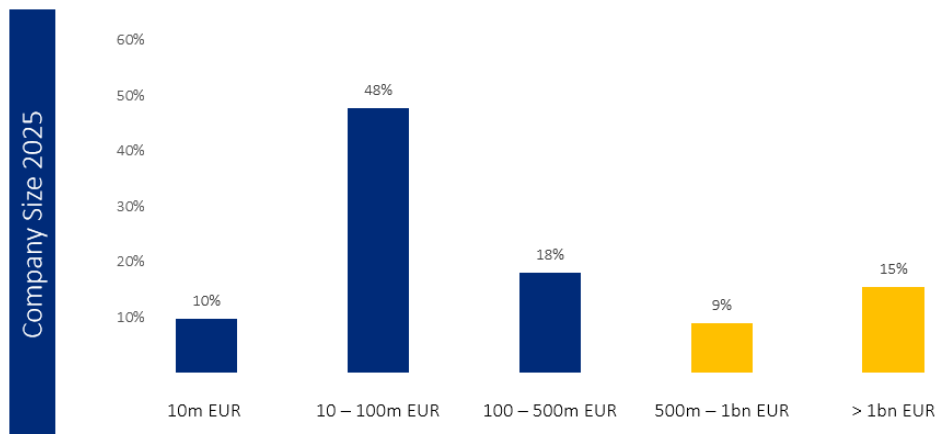


Figure 7: Clustering of surveyed companies by revenue made in 2025

Industry

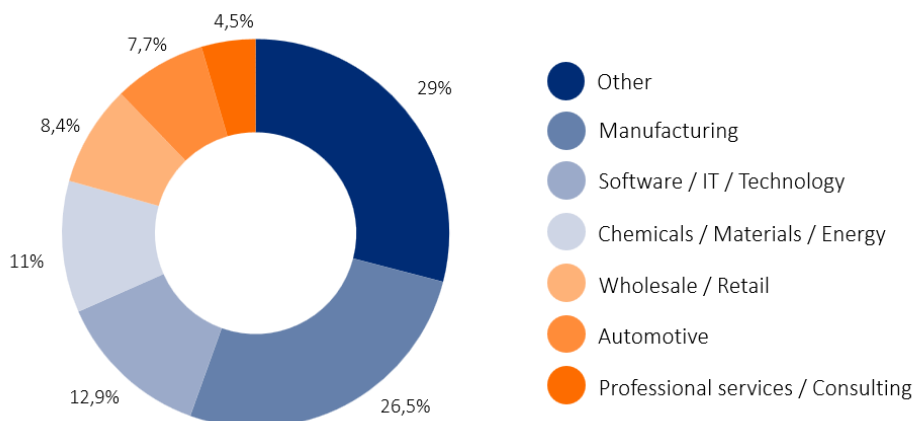


Figure 8: Clustering of surveyed companies by industry

About the authors:

DR. RAINER SCHLAMP
Partner
rainer.schlamp@ebelhofer.com



DR. BENEDIKT NEUFANG
Partner
benedikt.neufang@ebelhofer.com



EMILIA VON PETERFFY-ROLFF
Consultant
emilia.rolff@ebelhofer.com



SIMON MACKEPRANG
Associate Consultant
simon.mackeprang@ebelhofer.com



EbelHofer Consultants support their clients to realize opportunities for profitable growth on the market side. We specialize on the optimization of price management as well as sales management and have an international project track record with various industry-leading companies. For more information, please reach out to us.

EbelHofer Strategy & Management Consultants GmbH
An der Wachsfabrik 10
50996 Cologne
+49 (0)2236 38383 0