

2 0 2 6

Customer Engagement Review

SPOTLIGHT

How data can bridge
the AI perception gap

Table of contents

ABOUT THIS REPORT	02
INTRODUCTION	03
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	04
• BRIDGING THE MARKETER/CONSUMER PERCEPTION GAP	05
• ADDRESSING MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR BETTER DATA MANAGEMENT	06
• BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT WITH DATA MATURITY	08
HOW MARKETERS CAN WIN THE FUTURE	09
• SHOWCASE THE VALUE OF SHARING DATA	10
• EMBRACE DATA UNIFICATION	11
• PRIORITIZE ACCURACY IN YOUR DATA EFFORTS	12
CONCLUSION	13
METHODOLOGY	14

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In our annual Global Customer Engagement Review, we explore the marketing and consumer trends shaping the way that brands connect with their customers. Now, building on the insights, we're taking a deeper look at the **ROLE THAT DATA PLAYS** in complicating—and upleveling—modern customer engagement in the **AGE OF AI**



From exclusive insights to real-life customer stories, let's explore the challenges and opportunities facing customer engagement teams when it comes to data and AI.

There's always been a tension between what consumers expect and what marketers can provide, a tension that's being amplified today by the rise of AI. While it's nothing new for people to want value, convenience, and reliability from brands, AI has significantly expanded what's possible in each of these areas, and consumer expectations have expanded with them.

Consumers expect brands to meet their needs wherever and whenever they engage, and to do so in ways that feel relevant, valuable, and human. Marketers can meet (even exceed!) those expectations, but only if they first build a solid data foundation for AI. Our research has found that while most brands are bullish on the ways they're using data and AI to anticipate customer needs, there's a lingering perception gap on the consumer side. Many marketers are struggling to get what they need to bridge that gap, in terms of data and tech—but for those who do, the future looks very bright.



Challenges and opportunities

Our analysis found three distinct challenges and opportunities when it comes to leveraging data and AI to support better marketing outcomes:

1 Bridging the marketer/consumer perception gap



2 Addressing missed opportunities for better data management



3 Building a foundation for exceptional customer engagement with data maturity



Bridging the marketer/consumer perception gap

Truly understanding your customers is an aspiration for marketers and has been for about as long as there's been marketing.

Achieving this vision is challenging, and it has historically gotten harder as companies scale. After all, understanding a regular customer as you engage with them in person is one thing; understanding ten million website visitors as they browse is quite another.

Used effectively, AI makes this much easier, and can even open up the ability to predict and anticipate consumer needs. Our research suggests that marketers are very aware of this potential and are working to achieve it—but the gap between what marketers think they're uncovering and what consumers are experiencing is stark.

The fact that more than 50% of consumers say brands are accurately predicting their wants and needs is great, and something worth celebrating. But the 40-point perception gap between marketers and consumers showcases a real have-and-have-nots divide among brands when it comes to successfully leveraging data and AI to understand and effectively serve customers. What does it look like when marketers aren't able to get it right? Just ask the 16% of consumers who say that no brand has ever accurately predicted their needs and wants.



93%

The infographic consists of two overlapping circles. The larger circle on the left is purple and contains the text '93%'. The smaller circle on the right is red and contains the text '53%' with 'but only' written above it. A vertical line connects the bottom of the purple circle to a text box, and another vertical line connects the bottom of the red circle to another text box.

of marketers say AI helps them understand their customers wants and needs more accurately

but only
53%

of consumers say brands are accurately predicting their wants and needs

Addressing missed opportunities for better data management

Even for brands that are getting the data they need, the picture isn't necessarily rosy.

Only 55% of surveyed marketers say that their brand is updating and leveraging the information at their disposal in real time. When brands rely on archaic systems built on batch processing instead of a modern data streaming architecture, they can introduce latency and context-specific inaccuracies to their data, potentially undermining the positive impact that AI can have on their efforts to anticipate and meet consumers' needs.

Another common issue? Lack of access to the data needed to power effective personalization. Our research found that more than a quarter of consumers refuse to share any data with AI agents, and that a majority of consumers are unwilling to share demographic, purchase, browsing, or location data with brands. While what information you need will depend on your goals and the solutions you're leveraging, this reluctance can make it challenging to access and act on the right data.

BRAND EXPERIENCE

27%

of consumers refuse to share any data with AI agents to support a better brand experience

DEMOGRAPHIC/PURCHASE DATA

only
26%

of consumers are willing to share demographic or purchase data

LOCATION DATA

only
14%

of consumers are willing to share location data

BROWSING DATA

only
21%

of consumers are willing to share browsing data



Younger generations are more likely to share data (and are more open to AI)



58% of Gen Z say that AI recommendations often surprised them with products they didn't know they wanted (compared to 40% of all consumers).



48% of Gen Z and Millennials are willing to share more personal data with AI agents if it meant that products and ads were tailored to their needs and wants.



Adoption of modern data management tools lags significantly in some countries



Only 53% of brands are successfully leveraging data from cloud warehouses for customer engagement at scale via zero-copy techniques.

Americas

EMEA

APAC

53%

56%

49%

TOP-PERFORMING COUNTRY

Germany

62%

9 points above global average
and 6 points above EMEA

LOW-PERFORMING COUNTRY

Indonesia

40%

13 points below global average
and 9 points below APAC

Building a foundation for exceptional customer engagement with data maturity

Modern customer engagement is built on data. Marketing organizations that prioritize data maturity (i.e. the ability to effectively leverage the information at their disposal) and the tools and tactics needed to achieve it are going to be better positioned not just to take advantage of AI but also to carry out effective customer engagement in general.

Investing in your organization's data maturity can pay off in meaningful, concrete ways—in fact, our research found brands that were top-performers in terms of data and orchestration maturity were 7% more likely to exceed their revenue goals.



Data maturity is associated with maturity in other aspects of customer engagement



41%

Brands that demonstrate high data ingestion maturity are 41% more likely to have high maturity in connection with AI personalization.



51%

Brands that achieve high maturity in both data and orchestration have a 51% chance of demonstrating high AI maturity.



13%

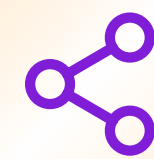
Brands that show high data activation maturity (e.g. acting effectively to leverage data for marketing) are 13% more likely to achieve high experimentation maturity.

How marketers can win the future

As AI reshapes marketing, brands need to achieve data maturity to amplify, accelerate, and elevate their customer engagement efforts. A significant portion of consumers are not yet seeing the benefits when it comes to their customer experience, something that can be a competitive disadvantage for companies who aren't yet getting it right.

Here are three areas of focus where marketers can help to move the needle.

1 Showcase the value of sharing data



2 Embrace data unification

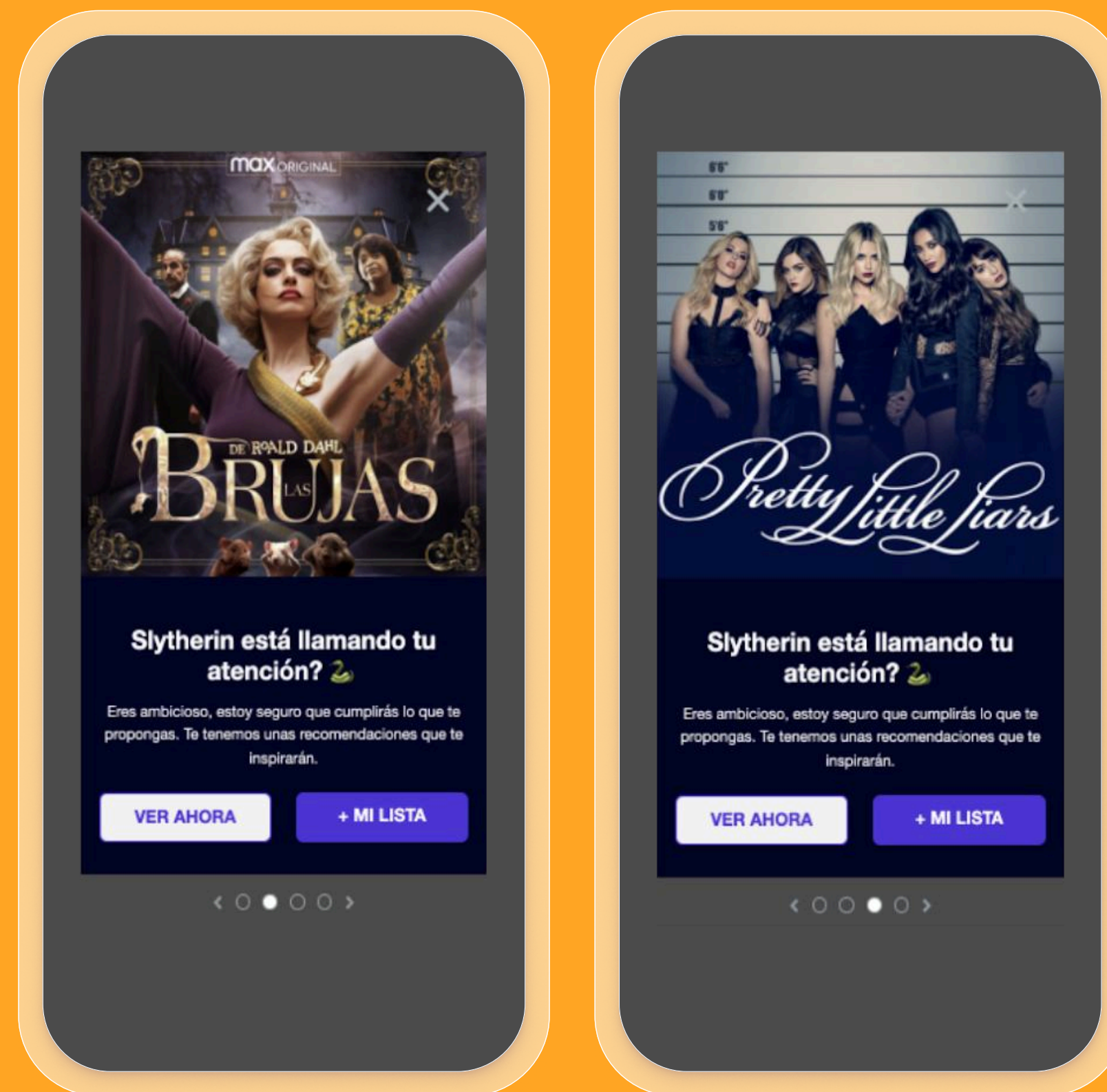


3 Prioritize accuracy in your data efforts



Showcase the value of sharing data

If you want your customers to share information with you, you have to explain to them why it's worth their while. So take a page from our [push priming efforts](#) by focusing your efforts on that reachable chunk of your audience. Use surveys and preference centers to give customers control over what data they share and how it's used, then clearly explain how providing data will be used in concrete ways to improve their experience.

The HBO Max logo is displayed in a large, bold, black font. The 'HBO' part is in a standard sans-serif font, while 'max' is in a lowercase, rounded sans-serif font. The logo is centered within a large, light blue speech bubble that has a soft gradient and a slight shadow, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The background of the slide is a solid light blue.

Real-life brands making it happen

THE BRAND

[HBO MAX](#)

THE INDUSTRY

Media and entertainment

WHAT THEY DID

Expanded their zero-party data collection to support messaging and personalization.

HOW THEY DID IT

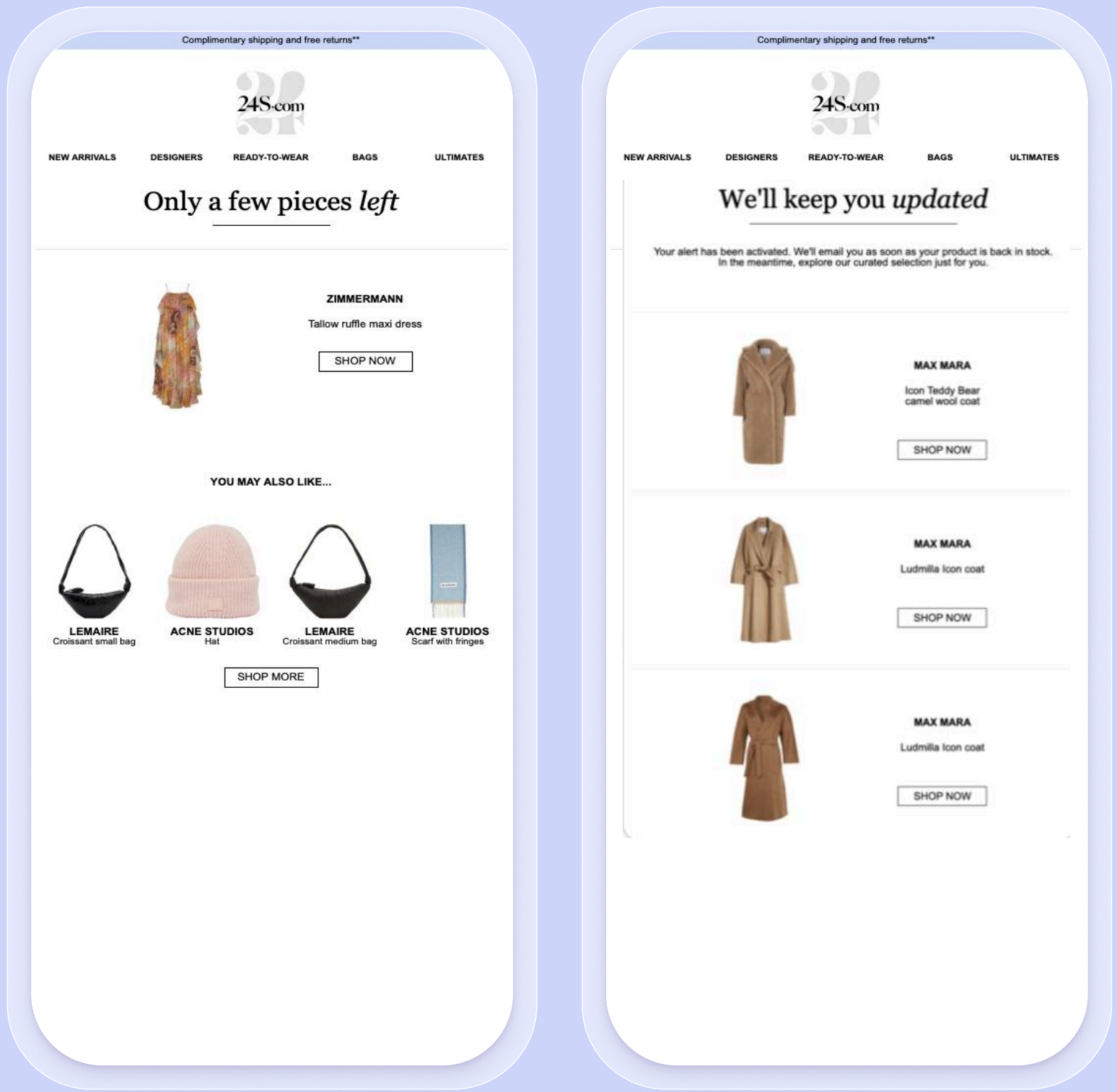
Used in-app message surveys and follow-up messaging to encourage viewers to share information on the fandoms that mattered to them.

THE IMPACT

40% increase in CRM comms performance.

Embrace data unification

Not every data gap is caused by reluctant users. In fact, gaps in your tech stack can do just as much to undermine your team's ability to fully understand and act on the context surrounding each customer. Our research found that nearly half of surveyed brands operate without seamless integrations between their data single source of truth, commonly a cloud data warehouse, and their customer engagement platform, something that could undermine their AI agent's ability to access and effectively leverage the data at their disposal. By embracing composability in your marketing tech stack, you can make it easier to use the data you do have effectively to support AI and overall customer engagement success.



Real-life brands making it happen

THE BRAND	THE INDUSTRY
24S	Retail and eCommerce

WHAT THEY DID

Integrated data from their in-house product listings into their customer engagement platform.

HOW THEY DID IT

Leveraged [Braze Catalogs](#) to harness their list of products to personalize campaigns and used Liquid operators to assess inventory levels to dynamically send notifications.

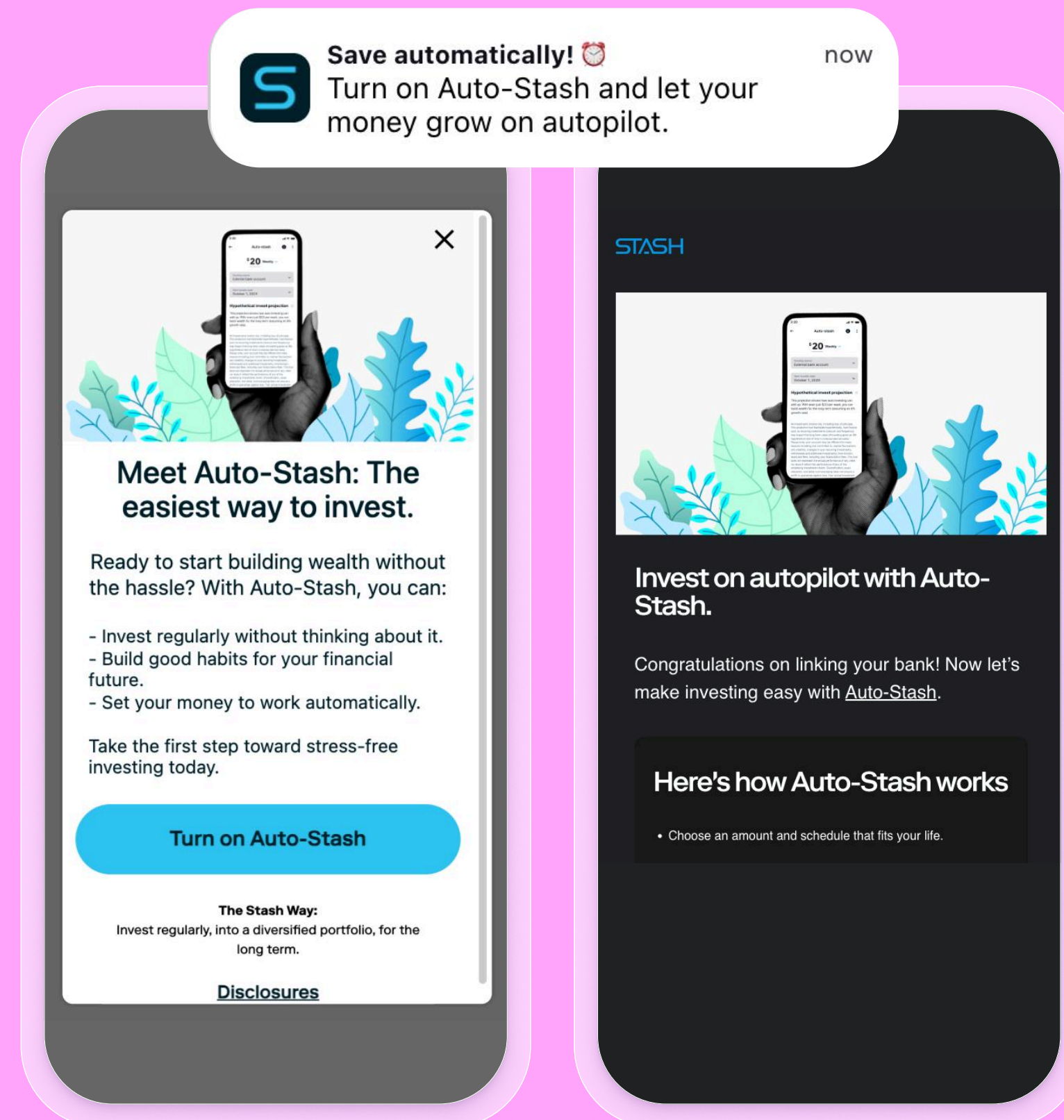
THE IMPACT

35% increase in purchase conversion rate (3-day purchase) in the last 6 months.

Prioritize accuracy in your data efforts

The predictive insights and the deeper understanding of individual users' context that AI makes possible can be an across-the-board gamechanger for marketers. Even consumers agree! When a brand accurately predicts a consumer's wants and needs, 30% of consumers are more likely to be loyal, 29% are more likely to engage with that brand's content, 26% are more likely to recommend the brand, and 25% are more likely to make a purchase. While not every consumer will be swayed, this findings suggests that embracing AI to deepen your team's understanding of your customer base has the potential to positively impact everything from activation, monetization, and retention.

STASH



Real-life brands making it happen

THE BRAND	THE INDUSTRY
Stash	Financial services

WHAT THEY DID

Embraced experimentation to pressure test the resonance of their personalized campaigns.

HOW THEY DID IT

Implemented Experiment Paths to test content variants, while also ensuring that message content highlighted benefits and features best aligned to the next step in each user's process.

THE IMPACT

20% conversion rate for deposit completions.

Conclusion

Customer engagement has never stood still—but the rise of AI has driven a tectonic shift, creating unprecedented innovation at startling speeds. Without the ability to effectively manage and process data, seamlessly connect with other systems, and customize brand experiences in real time, even the most effective customer engagement program can come up short. So don't lose sight of these foundational elements as you evolve your strategy; they're going to play an essential role as you work to scale your customer engagement efforts and double down on your use of AI.

Get all the insights

Dive deeper into this year's other major customer engagement trends by checking out the full [2026 Global Customer Engagement Review](#).



Put your plans in action

Make your customer engagement vision a reality with the 50+ tried and true marketing case studies contained within the [Braze Inspiration Guide](#).



Methodology*

WAKEFIELD SURVEY DATA*

Wakefield Research conducted research among 2,200 marketing executives with a minimum title of VP, working at B2C companies with an annual revenue of at least \$10M across 17 countries in 3 global regions: the Americas (Brazil, Canada, Mexico, and the US), EMEA (France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, the UAE, and the UK), and APAC (Australia, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, and Thailand). The survey was conducted November 18–December 1, 2025, using an email invitation and an online survey.

ONEPOLL CONSUMER DATA

OnePoll conducted a survey of 4,000 adult consumers in the UK and US from November 21–December 2, 2025; participants were nationally representative on the basis of age/gender/region.

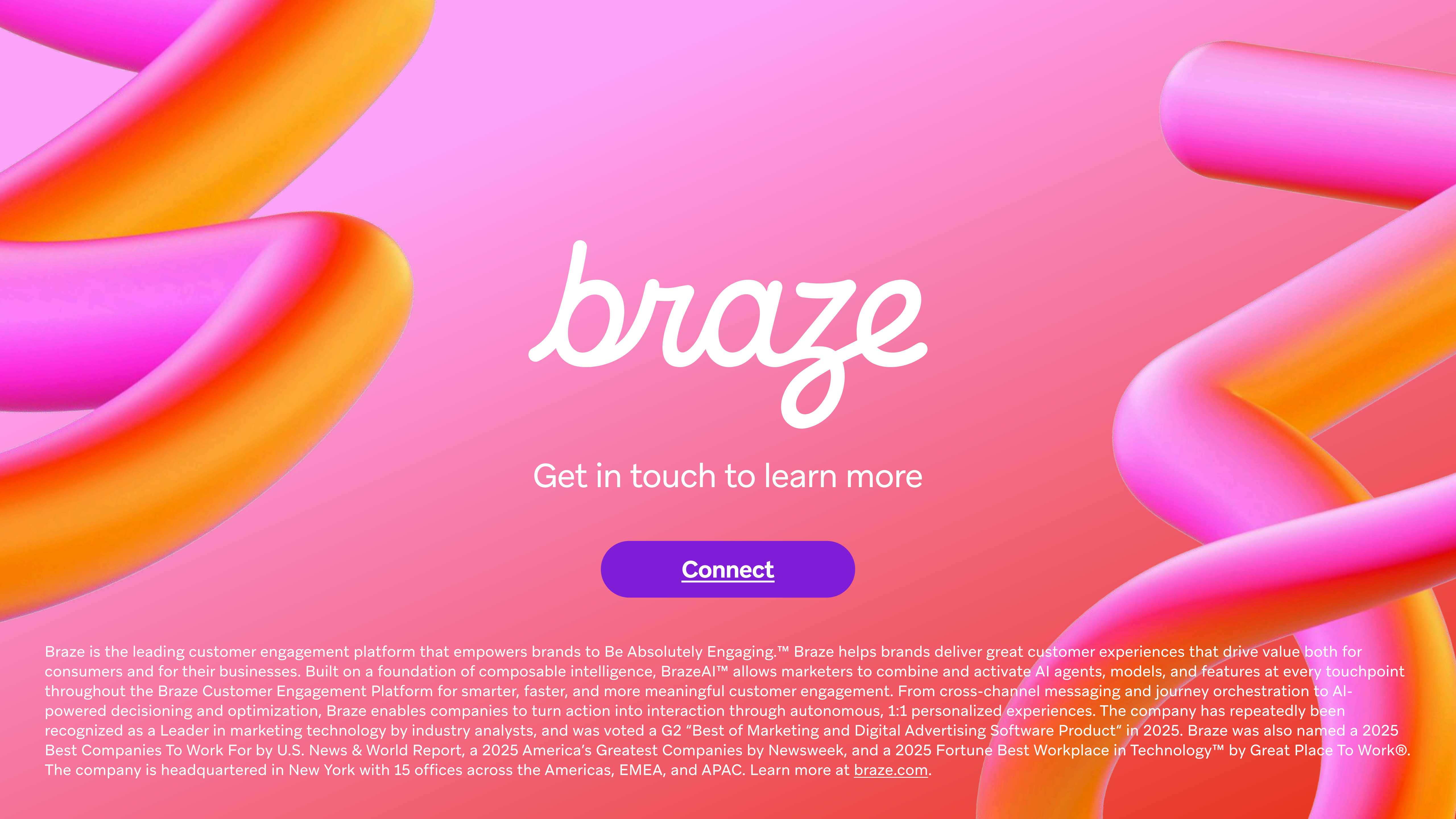
BRAZE CUSTOMER DATA

For this analysis, Braze examined anonymized and aggregated behavioral data from 779 Braze customers across our Americas, APAC, and EU clusters to analyze app activity, message engagement, and purchasing trends by industry. These statistics span January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025 and include data from 6 billion user profiles and 24 sub-industries. The raw data has been cleaned using volume and company count checks so that no one brand or group of brands is over-represented. For all purchase- and messaging-related stats, only brands tracking the relevant information have been included so as not to skew the analysis. All uplift figures greater than 100% are rounded to the nearest decimal point, and all uplift figures below 100% are rounded to the nearest whole percent. When comparing two rounded numbers, percent change metrics are calculated as the difference between the two numbers after rounding.

BRAZE-RELATED ACE DATA

The Braze Ace Impact metrics were measured by selecting the top 50th percentile of Braze customers compared to the full data set (and within a given industry in the report’s industry-specific sections) in terms of likelihood of a user making a purchase, likelihood of a buyer making a repeat purchase, average sessions per user, average user lifetime, and message engagement for the period of January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. All industries had message engagement used as a criteria to select Ace brands. For industries where purchase behavior is less often used as a key performance indicator, purchasing metrics were not included in Ace brand selection process. For industries where purchasing activity was more often associated with brand success, purchasing metrics were included, while session engagement and user lifetime were excluded.

*NOTE: The Braze Customer Engagement Index was updated this year to reflect the growing use of AI for customer engagement; accordingly, the Activate, Accelerate, and Ace results in this report have a different composition than in previous years.



braze

Get in touch to learn more

[Connect](#)

Braze is the leading customer engagement platform that empowers brands to Be Absolutely Engaging.™ Braze helps brands deliver great customer experiences that drive value both for consumers and for their businesses. Built on a foundation of composable intelligence, BrazeAI™ allows marketers to combine and activate AI agents, models, and features at every touchpoint throughout the Braze Customer Engagement Platform for smarter, faster, and more meaningful customer engagement. From cross-channel messaging and journey orchestration to AI-powered decisioning and optimization, Braze enables companies to turn action into interaction through autonomous, 1:1 personalized experiences. The company has repeatedly been recognized as a Leader in marketing technology by industry analysts, and was voted a G2 “Best of Marketing and Digital Advertising Software Product” in 2025. Braze was also named a 2025 Best Companies To Work For by U.S. News & World Report, a 2025 America’s Greatest Companies by Newsweek, and a 2025 Fortune Best Workplace in Technology™ by Great Place To Work®. The company is headquartered in New York with 15 offices across the Americas, EMEA, and APAC. Learn more at braze.com.