EXECUTIVE RESEARCH BRIEFING / 2027

YOUR BUYERS HAVE AI. WHY DO THEY STILL NEED YOU?

How to Win More Business Before AI Reduces Your Value to Price and Specs.

B THE BUYER, AT THE FIRST MEETING

"I have to tell you, AI has made this whole buying process so much easier. I'm not sure why we'd need to spend weeks meeting with salespeople anymore."

THE COMPETITIVE QUESTION

If buyers can compare your specifications and prices instantly with AI, how will they understand why your solution is worth more than your price?

FOUR QUESTIONS THAT SHAPE THE NEW BUYING DECISION

02–03 WHAT CHANGED?

04–05 WHAT IS AT RISK?

06–07 HOW DO WE WIN?

08–09 WHAT COMES NEXT?

WALT MELCHER | BOLD VALUE PARTNERS

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Buyers want independence. They still need confidence.

AI makes buyer research faster. It also raises the standard for what makes a sales conversation worthwhile.

Our opening buyer arrives with a supplier shortlist, a comparison scorecard, and a preferred path forward. They are proud of the work AI helped them complete, and rightly so. Research that once required several meetings may now be accomplished before a salesperson is involved.

Gartner's 2026 research reveals the tension behind these numbers. Buyers want fewer supplier interactions, yet many still turn to salespeople to validate AI summaries at critical moments. The opportunity is to test assumptions, establish business relevance, and build confidence, not repeat information the customer has already found.

Many customers are accomplished leaders in their own businesses without being expert purchasers of a particular solution. They may know the immediate problem but not every question about ownership costs, implementation risk, stakeholder needs, or longer-term implications. A valuable salesperson builds on their research rather than disputing it.

67%

prefer a buying experience **without salesperson involvement**.

69%

prefer **validating AI-generated insights** with salespeople.

45% used generative AI in a recent purchase.

THE PARADOX, RESOLVED

Buyers don't need salespeople to give them more information. **They need salespeople to help them ask better questions, compare the right things, and make better decisions.**

SOURCE 1 Gartner, May 20, 2026. Survey of 645 B2B buyers (Aug-Sep 2025).

What if AI makes your business look interchangeable?

When the initial comparison centers on what is easy to tabulate, meaningful differences can go unrecognized.

Many smaller and midsized companies compete through personal service, customer-specific flexibility, technical expertise, and trusted relationships. Those advantages can be valuable precisely because they help customers avoid problems and accomplish goals that standard specifications do not reveal.

Yet an AI-generated supplier shortlist comparison can only be as complete as its criteria and available evidence. A buyer may compare purchase prices and features without evaluating total cost of ownership, the economics of service response, implementation risks, or the needs and personal stakes of each decision-maker.

This is not an argument that AI ignores those factors. AI can help evaluate them when prompted with the right questions and reliable information. The responsibility is twofold: make your strengths discoverable before engagement, then help buyers verify what those strengths are worth in their business.

FROM THE SHORTLIST
TO THE COMPLETE BUSINESS CASE

1 PRODUCT / FEATURE
Total cost of ownership

2 DELIVERY TIME
Service economics and uptime

3 SPECS AND FIT
Technical expertise and risk

4 ACQUISITION PRICE
Stakeholder needs and strategic goals

> **Your competitive advantage is not simply what makes your business different.** It is the value those differences create for customers.

SOURCE 2 Anderson, Narus & van Rossum, Harvard Business Review (2006); AI-comparison risk is our analysis.

AI makes everyone faster. But who creates more value?

Time savings are measurable. The commercial test is whether they improve the quality of customer decisions.

4.8 HOURS / WEEK

Average time AI tools save salespeople, according to Gartner.

72%

of sales organizations report low reinvestment into higher-value activities.

Salespeople can research accounts, draft outreach, and prepare presentations faster than ever. But those activities do not necessarily equip them to understand the buyer's business more deeply or reveal a stronger reason to choose their solution.

At the same time, AI-assisted buyer research can accelerate requests for a demo, pricing, and a proposal. When the salesperson simply follows that pace, important conversations about risk, trust, and differentiated value may never happen.

HOW A HIGH-VALUE OPPORTUNITY BECOMES TRANSACTIONAL

1. **AI SHORTLIST** — Faster comparisons
2. **DEMO REQUEST** — Buyer says: move on
3. **PROPOSAL** — Salesperson complies
4. **PRICE FIGHT** — Value stays hidden

THE AI SPEED TRAP

A potential strategic business partnership can be reduced to a single price-based transaction.

SOURCE 3 Gartner, May 19, 2026 (survey of 210 sales leaders). Speed Trap: Bold Value Partners analysis.

AI is reshaping the challenges behind every deal.

Attention, alignment, and differentiation are connected problems, not separate stages of a sales process.

The attention crisis. Buyers are managing extraordinary communication volume, and AI-assisted inbox tools can summarize or prioritize what deserves attention. A clever subject line cannot rescue a message with no business substance. Ask: if AI reduced our email to one sentence, would the buyer see a reason to respond?

Multi-stakeholder friction. Once the opportunity is active, finance, operations, technical specialists, and executives may use AI to examine the same investment through different lenses. Faster analysis does not guarantee shared conclusions. The salesperson's contribution is helping stakeholders surface competing assumptions, business objectives, and personal decision risks.

Demand for strategic value. When a comparison emphasizes specifications and acquisition price, a superior solution can look interchangeable. The task is to establish the measurable value of service, flexibility, expertise, and reliability, then connect those results to leadership's priorities before the buyer reaches a final decision.

1 **INBOX TRIAGE**

An AI summary can compress outreach into a single sentence. Does business value survive?

2 **STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS**

Different criteria and assumptions can create conflicting interpretations.

3 **SUPPLIER COMPARISON**

Specs and price may crowd out service economics, risk and strategic contribution.

117 EMAILS / DAY

153 TEAMS MESSAGES / WEEKDAY

AI makes information easier to organize. It does not make the value of your business easier to recognize. Salespeople must earn attention, facilitate a shared business case, and establish why their solution is worth choosing.

SOURCE 4 Microsoft Work Trend Index/Copilot (2025-26); Gartner (2025); HBR (2006).

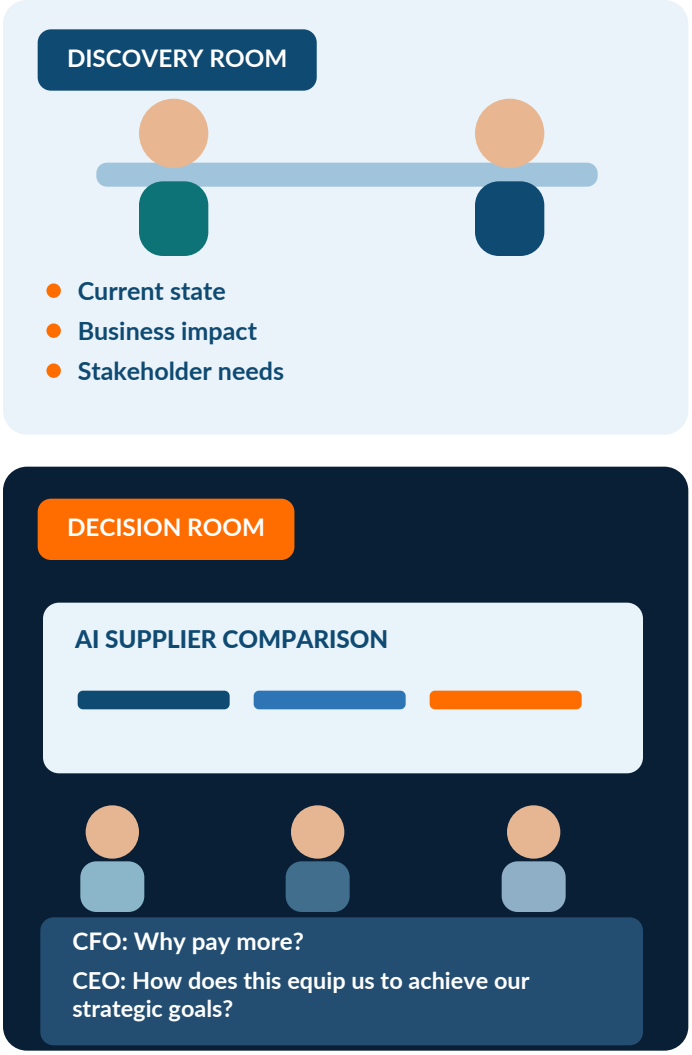
AI is already in the Decision Room. You aren't.

The business case must travel through the conversations your salesperson will never attend.

The **Discovery Room** includes the conversations where salespeople and buyers investigate the current state, test assumptions, identify consequences, and establish the value of change. It is also where they can demonstrate expertise and build the trust needed for a lasting relationship.

The **Decision Room** is different. Your buyer may present an AI-generated shortlist to finance, operations, and the CEO. The CFO asks why one supplier deserves a 12% premium. Operations raises implementation risks. The CEO wants to know whether the investment advances a strategic growth commitment.

A buyer needs more than enthusiasm to answer those questions. Gartner found unhealthy conflict in 74% of surveyed buying teams. LinkedIn/Bain research identified defensibility if the choice went wrong as the leading driver of extreme decision confidence (34%). A customer who helped develop the evidence can champion it more convincingly.



The deal isn't won only in the room you're in. Your customer must be prepared to explain the business impact, answer objections, and champion the value when you're not there.

SOURCES 5-6 Gartner (May 2025); LinkedIn B2B Institute/Bain, Buyability (34% result).

Make the business case worth championing.

The Full Value Gap™ connects the customer's **Current State** to the **Immediate Results** of solving the problem and the **Strategic Goals** leadership is accountable for achieving.

A / CURRENT STATE

$350K

Quarterly losses

Four shutdowns monthly create outsourcing, overtime, inspection and rework costs.

B / IMMEDIATE RESULTS

Up to $1.4M

Annual avoided costs

Gross potential if all losses are prevented, before the costs and timing of results.

C / STRATEGIC GOALS

$20M

3-year revenue goal

Recovering capacity may support expansion. This goal is not project value to add.

THE CFO ASKS

Why pay a 12% premium? Establish the **incremental value** of this solution compared with alternatives.

THE CEO ASKS

How does recovered capacity help leadership **achieve** its expansion goal?

IMMEDIATE VALUE + STRATEGIC VALUE

= BOLD VALUE THAT WINS

Illustrative only. $1.4M is gross annual avoided cost and $4.2M would be gross avoided cost over three years if all losses were prevented. Do not add the $20M customer goal to project value.

Is your team ready for AI-informed buyers?

Select one current opportunity. Mark each statement Confirmed, Partial or Unknown using buyer-supported evidence.

THE DECISION ROOM READINESS CHECK

		Confirmed	Partial	Unknown
1	We ask how AI influenced the buyer's research, shortlist and evaluation criteria.	○	○	○
2	Our outreach gives this customer a credible business reason to engage.	○	○	○
3	We test criteria beyond specs and price: ownership cost, service, risks and value.	○	○	○
4	We understand major stakeholders' business needs and personal decision risks.	○	○	○
5	The case connects Current State, Immediate Results and leadership's Strategic Goals.	○	○	○
6	Our champion can explain and champion differentiated value without us in the Decision Room.	○	○	○

THE MOST IMPORTANT NEXT STEP

Choose the weakest area. Identify the next buyer conversation, evidence or stakeholder needed to strengthen the decision.

Turn AI productivity into profitable growth.

Your next competitive advantage is not simply faster selling. It is making differentiated value visible, credible, and meaningful to buyers.

01

ASK BUYERS

Ask recent customers how they used AI before your first conversation: prompts, source information, shortlisted suppliers, and decision criteria.

02

TEST ONE OPPORTUNITY

Apply the Full Value Gap and Decision Room assessment to a stalled, discounted, or high-stakes opportunity.

03

EQUIP YOUR TEAM

Give salespeople impartial buyer-facing AI prompts and coach them to lead better, more complete evaluations.

BRING THIS DISCUSSION TO YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

Explore how AI-informed buying is changing win rates, margins, and the business value your salespeople must create.

RESEARCH SOURCES | CLICK TO OPEN

01 Gartner, May 2026
AI buyer research and validation

02 HBR, March 2006
Customer Value Propositions

03 Gartner, May 2026
Time saved and reinvestment gap

04 Microsoft, June 2025
Infinite Workday: email and Teams

05 Gartner, May 2025
Buying-team conflict and consensus

06 LinkedIn B2B Institute/Bain
Buyability and decision defensibility

07 6sense, 2025
Buyer shortlist and first contact

08 Microsoft 365 Copilot
AI-assisted inbox prioritization

Research populations vary. All financial and supplier examples are illustrative.

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