Microsoft

Creating smarter customer journeys:

A blueprint for the successful application of data and Artificial Intelligence in improving the customer experience

Accelerate performance in the era of customer-centric marketing

Industry transformation is happening at a frenzied pace. Digital disruption and the proliferation of connected devices are generating rich opportunities for marketers to understand and engage with customers on a deeply personal level.

But this same transformation also presents new challenges.

The adoption of technology across the buyer journey is reshaping consumer expectations. Today's consumers expect more than just relevance. They want seamless, non-disruptive experiences. They want highly personalized interactions that deliver tangible value. And when it comes to their data and privacy, they rightly demand that it be protected.

Marketers face increasing pressure to meet these consumer mandates while balancing the art and science of short-term sales and long-term brand development. Those who succeed are sprinting ahead of their competitors.

These top-performing marketers are focused on a better understanding of the customer decision journey (CDJ) and improving their marketing based on that understanding, making more informed decisions, and improving customer engagement through a data-driven approach. They are relying on agencies and cloud solution providers as well as dedicated leads who combine skills in IT and data analytics to protect market share, fuel growth, and delight customers in innovative ways.

High Performers and the Customer Experience Quotient

We recently conducted a series of comprehensive interviews and an online survey of marketers and agencies across companies of all sizes and industry verticals.* As part of our study, we established a baseline to assess marketers' customer-focus maturity, in order to define a blueprint for success.

Specifically, we examined the top-performing marketers—or "High Performers"—who are mastering two key aspects of creating a better customer experience:

1. **Understanding the buyer journey**
2. **Improving marketing performance based on that understanding**

Marketers' maturity in these two aspects is what we call the **Customer Experience Quotient (CXQ).** High CXQ Performers are those who responded that they have an excellent understanding of their customer's journey and are achieving excellent ROI from their marketing efforts based on that understanding.

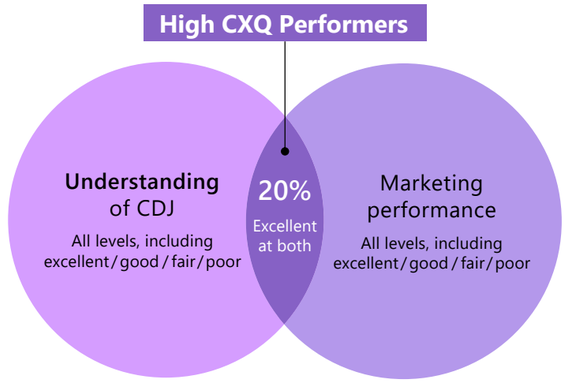
Only 20% of our survey respondents qualified as High Performers—and they share many common attributes.

In this eBook, you'll discover exactly what makes a High Performer and get a blueprint for marketing success that will help you elevate your game and join their ranks.

Blueprint for success

Customer Experience Quotient (CXQ) =

Understanding the buyer journey +
Marketing performance based on that understanding



Data-driven marketing is democratic

The good news is that effective, data-driven marketing is democratic—which means that being a High CXQ Performer is not limited by company size, marketing objectives (brand or performance), or industry. We found examples across all size companies and types of industries.

Comparing profiles of High Performers vs. all others suggests the ability to be an effective data-driven marketer is democratic.

	High Performers	Low Performers
ADVERTISING FOCUS	55% Brand 45% Performance	56% Brand 44% Performance
COMPANY SIZE (BY # EMPLOYEES)	72% <1,000 20% 1,000–5,000 8% 5,000+	45% <1,000 35% 1,000–5,000 20% 5,000+
CATEGORIES REPRESENTED	Auto, QSR, Home, Retail, Parenting, Tech, Education, CPG, Telecom, Travel, CE, Apparel, Pharma, FinServ, Entertainment, Beauty & Health, Alcoholic Beverage	Pharma, FinServ, Apparel, Auto, Education, Beauty & Health, Retail, Home, Tech, Telecom, QSR, CPG, CE, Alcoholic Beverage, Parenting, Travel, Entertainment

Improving your CXQ comes down to a few key things: right talent, prioritization of resources, and application of data and technology.

Right talent

High Performers have appointed an officer to lead the effort. Agencies should make this their primary champion and stakeholder.

86% of High Performers have a lead designated to oversee efforts to understand and market to the CDJ. The remaining 14% plan to hire someone to lead their CDJ strategy within 12 months.

Only 48% of Low Performers have this role in their company.

Prioritization of resources

High Performers are investing in the right resourcing. While they understand the importance of expanding in-house expertise and solutions, they also recognize that partnerships accelerate speed-to-market while reducing costs and risks.

High Performers use agencies at **nearly twice the rate** of Low Performers to accelerate their CDJ marketing aptitude.

High Performers are also adopters of emerging media.

High Performers are more heavily investing in digital media, spending about $20 million more annually than Low Performers.

Application of data and technology

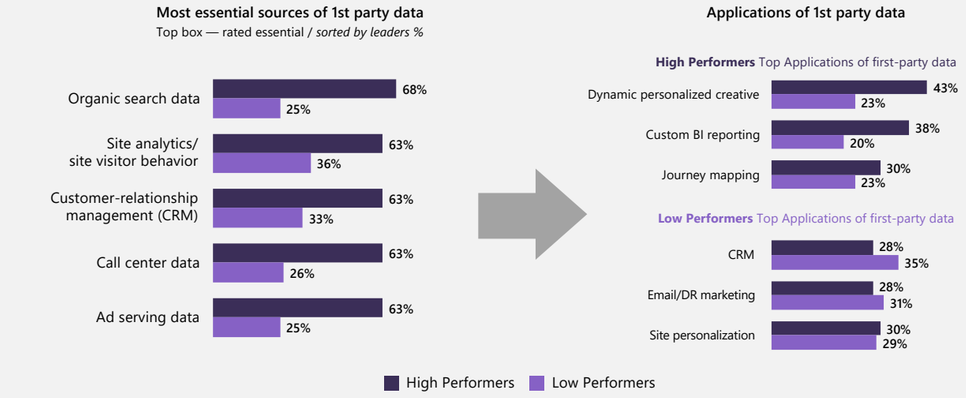
A shared characteristic of High Performers is an emphasis on the collection, unification, and analysis of first-party data. High Performers are also augmenting and closing gaps with third-party data, viewing it as essential.

95% of High Performers are giving significant first-party data access to their agencies to support data unification and extract more value out of the partnership.

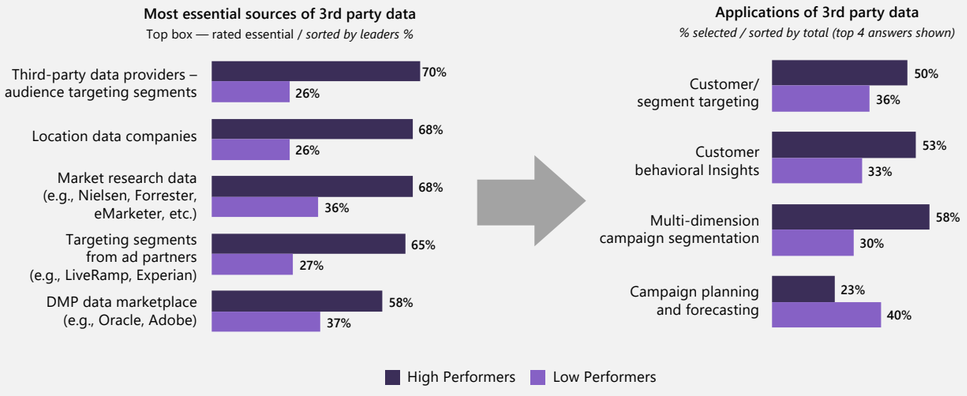
78% of High Performers say that combining first- and third-party data is a top priority. By contrast, only 40% of Low Performers say that they are prioritizing the combination of first- and third-party data.

> "Our agency is tasked with mapping the journey for the client because they don't have that insight, as they're not executing at a detailed level. Nor do they have the tools or in-house expertise to interpret the data."
>
> – SR. DIRECTOR OF MARKETING SCIENCE WITHIN AN AGENCY

Among High CXQ Performers, first-party data helps power personalized creative and journey mapping, with search data the gold standard



High CXQ Performers are more likely to view multiple third-party data sources as essential, helping power multi-dimension campaign segmentation and behavioral insights



Cloud solutions can help you improve your CXQ

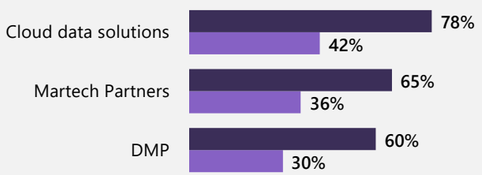
High Performers are using cloud solutions to collect, manage, and unify first-party data. Cloud solutions offer significant benefits, such as delivering a better understanding of consumer data, speeding time-to-market, and boosting ROI. Moving to the cloud and starting to track data delivers huge benefits in enabling a better understanding of the CDJ.

> "The cloud allows new technology to be built off of old principles and gives flexibility that allows for greater accuracy in activation and attribution."
>
> – VP DIGITAL MARKETING, FINANCIAL SERVICES

High CXQ Performers almost 2X more likely to use cloud solutions

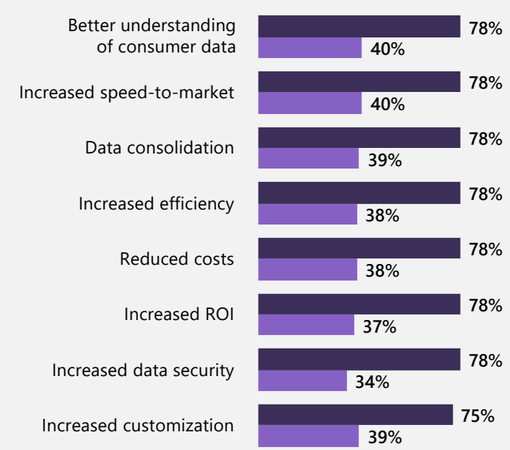
Resources used to overcome CDJ marketing barriers

Sorted by High Performers %



Realize significant benefit of cloud solutions

Rated some/significant benefit



Benefits of high-performance CXQ marketing

High Performers leverage data with increased sophistication and have greater visibility into the journey touchpoints that drive revenue. They also excel at marketing based on their understanding of the CDJ in numerous ways.

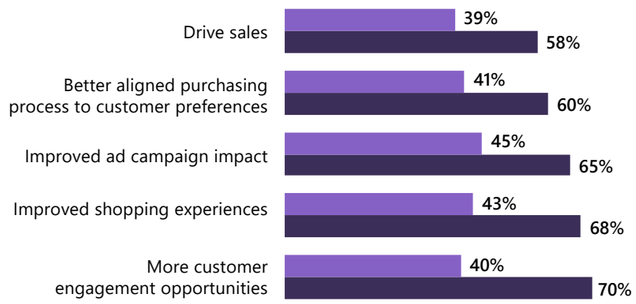
High CXQ Performers see a +45% incremental lift in ROI/ROAS for a typical campaign.

Having a higher CXQ maturity offers clear benefits

- More opportunities for customers to engage with brands
- Campaigns that better speak to customer needs
- Improved ad campaign impact
- Improved shopping experiences
- Better aligned purchasing processes to customer preferences
- Offers aligned to customer personas
- Personalized future customer decision journeys

Better CDJ understanding means better marketing performance

Top benefits experienced from understanding customer decision journey



+45%

incremental lift in ROI/ROAS

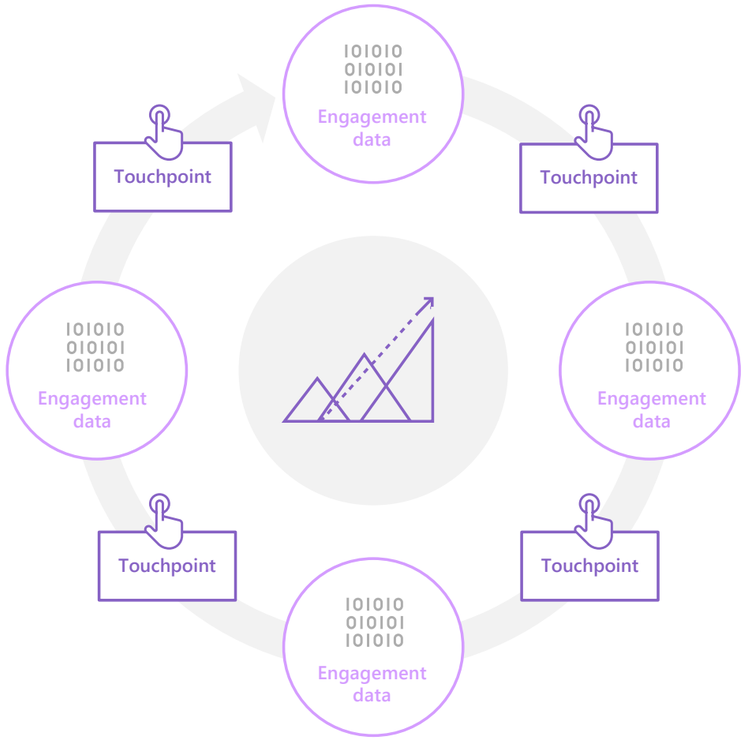
for a typical campaign among High Performers

Fueling the customer experience flywheel

Many of the experts we interviewed talked about the flywheel effect, which hinges on a solid understanding or ability to map the customer journey in service of increasing touchpoints. In fact, increasing the number of customer touchpoints was the top benefit cited by High CXQ Performers.

They described a virtuous cycle, where more touchpoints yield more opportunities for engagement. More interactions yield more data. More data yields more robust models. More robust models yield greater personalization, engagement, and ROI. Understanding the journey and marketing to the journey are foundational to one another.

> "It's the marketer's responsibility to produce interactions that produce data, so that we can make better decisions."
>
> – VP DIGITAL PLATFORMS & STRATEGY, TECH



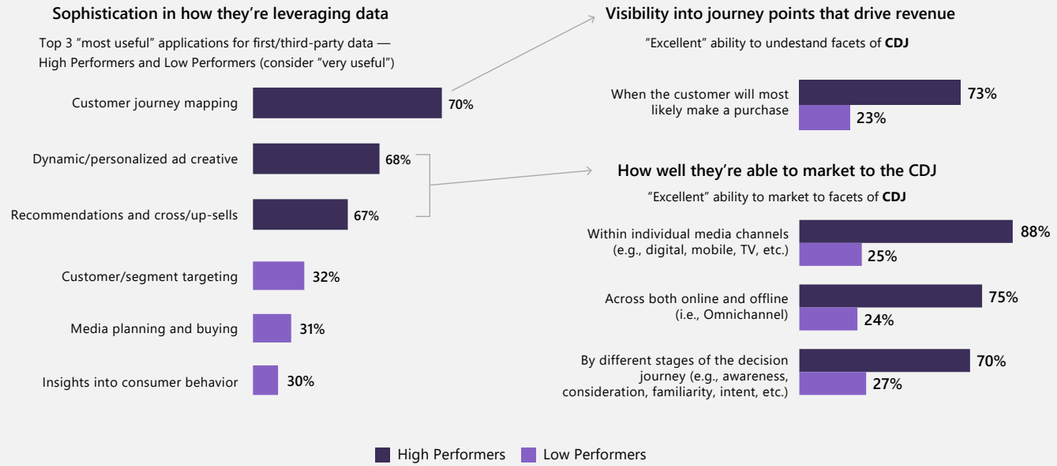
The expanding leadership gap

As High CXQ Performers fuel the customer experience flywheel, accelerating momentum and success, Low Performers are falling further behind.

High Performers are embracing intelligent technologies that enable them to map the customer journey, tailor and serve up dynamic ads, and deliver highly relevant recommendations and cross-selling opportunities. They are advanced in their ability to identify consumer intent and next best action and are able to apply these insights to drive higher conversion and ROI.

Meanwhile, Low Performers are still learning. They are focused on technologies that provide targeting, media planning and buying, and behavioral insights. Low Performers need to prioritize their customer decision journey understanding, so they can shift to actioning on the data. The blueprint for success provides guidance for immediate steps they should take.

Biggest gaps between High Performers and Low Performers



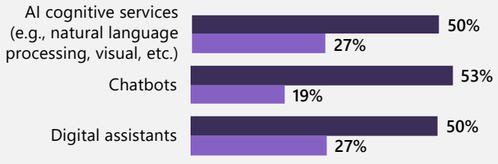
Unlocking the value of data

The use of technology from Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning is fundamental to customer-focused marketing success in this new era. These are the key technologies that High Performers leverage that can improve your improve CXQ.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

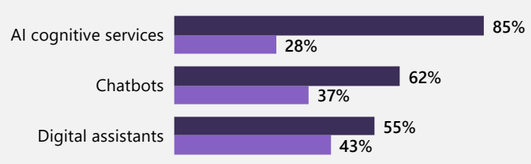
AI technologies, including chatbots, digital assistants, and cognitive services, offer numerous benefits. High Performers are more than three times as likely to use AI, with cognitive services such as natural language processing and visual recognition yielding the greatest improvement to customer engagement. Use AI to build more interactive experiences that engage with customers in a natural and more human way.

Use of AI technologies



Improvement to customer engagement

Sorted by High Performers %

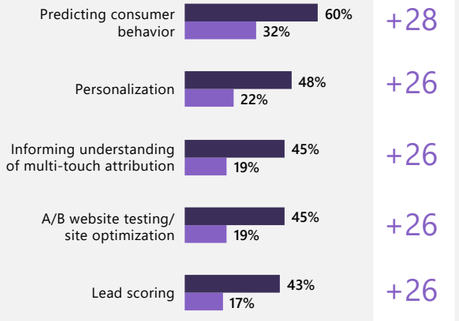


Machine Learning (ML)

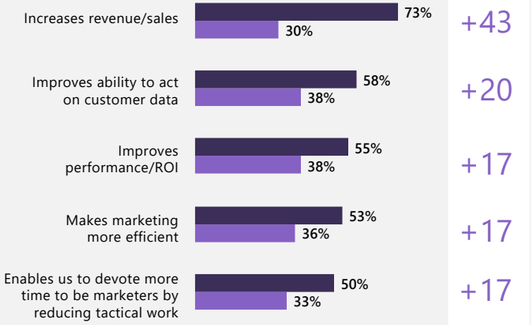
Machine Learning is a subset of AI that uses algorithms to learn from data to make a prediction or determination about something. Use Machine Learning to anticipate consumer behavior and create smarter, more personalized advertising experiences. When Machine Learning is used, High Performers achieve **2.4 times greater** sales in addition to other benefits such as an improved ability to act on customer data and increased ROI.

> "With Machine Learning, I can consolidate a lot of relevant insights, making my systems smarter with every interaction…reducing manual labor, cost, and time."
>
> – VP, STRATEGY, AGENCY (US)

Ways ML is used



Strategic benefits gained



Safeguard trust, privacy, and data security

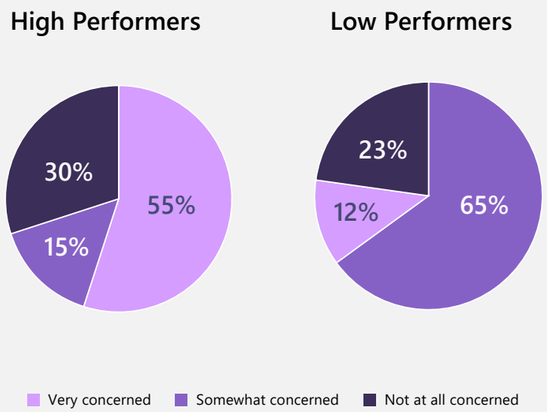
Trust, privacy, and data security are top concerns for our Microsoft Advertising clients and often carry equal weight with performance when choosing a search provider. So, it's no surprise that these are key concerns for High Performers.

High Performers know that brand health hinges on the ability to protect consumer privacy and use data respectfully. Although High Performers are much more likely to use customer data than Low Performers, they are also more likely to be transparent about usage and put appropriate safeguards in place to secure customer data.

High CXQ Performers are 4.5X more concerned about consumer backlash

Even while respecting privacy concerns and safe-guarding data, High Performers are much more concerned about consumer backlash (which may help explain their focus on respect and safeguarding).

Level of concern about consumer backlash over how company handles first-party data

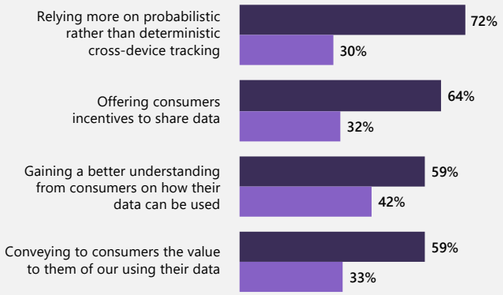


High CXQ Performers use these best practices to protect data

At the same time, High Performers are aware that they must get smarter about advancing customer-focused marketing without crossing the line when it comes to data collection and use. High Performers are relying less on deterministic modeling — the reliance on personally identifiable information — and more on probabilistic models that are informed by applying ML to anonymous data points to build an identity graph of their customers. Here are some best practices High Performers are using. They are more transparent and they strive to deliver better value to customers while protecting their privacy, and engage them on data-related issues.

Response to privacy concerns

Ways of overcoming new restrictions



High Performers Low Performers

The blueprint for marketing success

So how do you increase your Customer Experience Quotient? By combining the right strategy, the right data, and the right technologies.

High CXQ Performers have a unified view of customers and their journeys, which often requires looking across multiple data sets and applications. By blending that integrated data with AI and Machine Learning, leaders extract richer customer and market insights, improve effectiveness of customer acquisition, and create more touchpoints through more personalized customer experiences.

> "Of course, first-party information is super important, but a lot of the interaction the customer is doing is in the world outside of our channels—which is where third-party comes in."
>
> – GLOBAL MARKETING DIRECTOR, RETAIL

Blueprint for success to increasing your CXQ

Unify data in the cloud	Ensure high quality of data	Consolidate 1st & 3rd party data	Predict audience intent	Boost engagement & performance with AI
High Performers use cloud solutions, DMPs, and agencies. • Unify and secure data in the cloud, breaking down silos across marketing, sales, and services organizations. • This enables you to better understand consumer data, boost speed-to-market and efficiency, lower costs, and increase ROI, data security, and customization.	**High Performers rely on high-quality 1st & 3rd party data.** • Take advantage of search data around what consumers are buying, what they're doing on your digital channels, and what their journey looks like. • Without good quality data, applying AI and ML is ineffective. • Employ best practices around privacy and data protection.	**High Performers prioritize data from multiple sources.** • Leverage trusted third-party data sources to help illuminate the blind spots. • Make it a top priority to establish a single platform with one view of the customer. Be alert for issues around quality, provenance, duplication, and timeliness of third-party data.	**High Performers focus on predictive outcomes.** • Evolve performance measurement from activity-level, static-funnel metrics towards predictive metrics that align to business outcomes. • Extract insights around the brands customers are considering, the products they're looking for, and when they're most likely to convert. • Use prescriptive guidance to dynamically adjust engagements based on next best action recommendations to optimize results.	**High Performers connect activities to revenue KPIs.** • Use AI and cognitive services to enhance customer engagement and create more touchpoints. • Use Machine Learning to facilitate predictive modeling, personalization, and lead scoring to drive sales and improve efficiency.

Advance marketing impact with Microsoft Advertising solutions

Understanding and marketing to the customer journey enables you to align your brand in more relevant ways to drive awareness, sales, and loyalty. But you don't have to do it alone.

Microsoft Advertising solutions are designed to help you increase your CXQ and performance. To learn more about how we can partner with you to achieve your marketing objectives, visit our *Contact us* page or reach out to your Microsoft Advertising Account Representative.

Unify data in the cloud	Ensure high quality of data	Consolidate 1st & 3rd party data	Predict audience intent	Boost engagement & performance with AI
• Leverage Microsoft cloud technology to increase data understanding and innovation. • Azure provides a rich platform for analytics, insights, and AI modeling and enables private and secure data sharing.	• We provide insights based on search data to help you understand the customer journey and connect diverse data sets that enable you to market to the customer journey. • Because this journey changes every day, our insights help you learn how to predict future behaviors.	• With our Custom Audiences solution, you can use your existing customer data to create custom remarketing lists. • You already have deep intelligence about your customers—their last purchase, their status tier, or even their customer lifetime value. Custom Audiences lets you bring this data to Microsoft Advertising via your data management platform (DMP) to customize your campaigns and enhance your existing audience targeting lists. • Supported DMPs include Adobe Audience Manager, LiveRamp, and Oracle BlueKai.	• Microsoft has one of the largest indexes of exclusive consumer intent data. • The Microsoft Graph contains rich consumer understanding from search and web activity as well as Microsoft demographic and LinkedIn professional profile information to create a unique dataset with deep knowledge of consumers' interests and preferences. • Our advertising solutions, including audience targeting products, are anchored in the understanding provided by this graph—and it is constantly evolving. • We offer audience targeting solutions that are powered by AI such as In-Market audiences that reach people that are ready to buy and Similar audiences that automatically generate audience lists based on your remarketing lists, with similar behaviors and attributes.	**Microsoft AI Services** • Create natural and friction-less customer interactions while easing strain on customer service departments through chatbots. • Build interactive apps that help you interact with people in a more natural and human way through visual search or voice engagement. **Media Optimization** • Through the Microsoft Advertising solutions, you can take advantage of embedded intelligence to set your search strategy and allow algorithms to optimize with new AI-infused products. • Save time and increase campaign performance through automated extensions, dynamic search ads, automated bidding, and shared budgets. **Smart Tools** • The Microsoft Advertising platform harnesses the power of AI to provide personalized recommendations for your campaigns using Machine Learning and the Microsoft Graph. Join the thousands of clients who take advantage of the helpful suggestions curated and tailored just for their ad campaigns.

**Microsoft and Advertiser Perceptions study of 213 marketers and agencies in the US & UK*, December 2018–January 2019

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