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Insights 2025

The State of AI in the Print Industry: Business Operations

2025

Executive Summary

Print companies are experimenting with generative AI, but value delivery remains fragmented and inconsistent. Adoption is high in some business functions [*90% marketing teams & 90% design teams report experimentation*] with mixed results.

Marketing average seven revisions per AI-generated asset, and only *28% of design outputs use AI in final client work*. Finance and management lag far behind, with just 5% of finance departments and 15% of managers using AI in daily workflows.

Sales teams struggling to move beyond trials	**Design teams experiment but rarely scale.**	**Scattered, low-value AI adoption in finance**
Marketing teams burning time on rework	**Online platforms underused for insight**	**Management blind spots on AI literacy and governance**

A workflow-first approach, anchored in the TIME framework, highlights where AI can free capacity and improve measurable outcomes. *Scattered adoption is widespread [60%], but effective adoption is limited to just 15%*. Shadow AI is common, with *85% of companies informally using tools without governance*.

Field Context

This report is grounded in anonymised engagements across digital print companies of varying size and maturity based both in the UAE and UK.

While the print floor workforce remains the largest by headcount, our analysis focuses on business operations - the functions shaping sales, design, finance, marketing and management.

- **Finance teams** rely on Google Workspace, Microsoft Office and mid-market ERPs, with *only 5% applying AI in workflows*.
- **Sales teams** show high experimentation [85%] but *only 45% continue to use AI due to inconsistent outputs*.
- **Design teams** are testing image generation [90%] but *adoption into final client work is limited to 28%*.
- **Marketing teams** are the most advanced adopters [90%] yet rework levels remain high, *averaging seven revisions per AI-generated draft*.
- **Online platforms** like Shopify are widely used [60%], though only 5% actively extract and analyse data with AI.
- **Management teams** have a significant literacy gap: *60% report not understanding GenAI,* while only 15% use it daily.

Where measurement is unavailable, we apply qualitative T-shirt impact sizing [Low/Medium/High] and confidence tags [High/Medium/Low] based on repeated engagements.

All numeric claims are explicitly noted as derived from observed data points.

The objective is practical.

Translate observed workflow patterns into AI first interventions that free capacity, improve efficiency and enable more competitive, sustainable print businesses.

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Key Findings

1 **Scattered, Low-Value AI Adoption in Finance**

- Finding: **Only 5% of finance departments use AI and just 3 of 42 teams apply it for reporting or forecasting. ERP adoption is common [75% mid-market], but workflows remain manual.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **High**
- Confidence: **High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **% of finance reports generated with AI assistance**

2 **Sales Teams Struggle to Move Beyond Trials**

- Finding: **85% of sales teams have attempted AI use, but only 45% continue. Manual processes dominate 75% of interactions. Output quality undermines trust and slows adoption.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **High**
- Confidence: **High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **Time to generate a sales proposal or estimate**

3 **Design Teams Experiment, But Rarely Scale**

- Finding: **90% of design teams experiment with AI, but only 28% use outputs in client work. Around 80% of design workflows remain manual, limiting impact.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **Medium/High**
- Confidence: **High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **% of design outputs incorporating AI-generated elements**

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Key Findings

4 Marketing Teams Burn Time on Rework

- Finding: **90% of marketing teams use ChatGPT or Gemini, but 85% report heavy rework, averaging seven revisions per asset.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **Medium/High**
- Confidence: **High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **Avg. number of revisions for AI-generated marketing content**

5 Online Platforms Underused for Insight

- Finding: **60% of companies use Shopify or similar platforms, but only 5% extract data for AI analysis. 80% assume AI features exist but don't know how to use them.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **Medium**
- Confidence: **Medium/High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **% of companies generating insights from e-commerce platforms using AI**

6 Management Blind Spot on AI Literacy

- Finding: **60% of managers do not understand AI, only 15% use it daily, and 85% of companies show ungoverned shadow adoption.**
- Impact [T-shirt]: **High**
- Confidence: **High**
- Suggested KPI [example]: **% of management completing baseline AI literacy training**

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Executive Overview

1. Finance Scattered, low-value AI adoption

Problem: Finance workflows remain largely manual, limiting speed and insight. Reporting, reconciliation and forecasting live in spreadsheets and ERP data is under leveraged for decision support.

Evidence: Only 5% of finance teams actively use AI; just 3/42 apply it for reporting, reconciliation or forecasting. ERPs skew 75% mid-market, with little to no AI in the loop approaches.

Strategic implication: Missed automation and shallow forecasting keep Finance as a cost centre, not a strategic driver.

Executive ask: Pilot AI-assisted monthly close variance + AP reconciliation; track % time saved and error rate reduction.

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Executive Overview

2. Sales
Trials that don't stick

Problem: Sales teams are under pressure to deliver faster proposals and estimates, but poor quality outputs from AI tools and lack of integration into CRM systems have driven most back to manual workflows. This slows responsiveness, reduces competitiveness and keeps sales reliant on repetitive processes.

Evidence: Although 85% of sales teams attempted AI for proposals, estimates, or CRM analysis, only 45% continue to use it. Manual work dominates, with 75% of quotes, proposals and follow-ups still handled without AI support.

Strategic implication: Delayed proposals and inconsistent messaging reduce win-rates, while workflow inefficiencies cap revenue growth and erode margin.

Executive ask: Pilot AI-enabled proposal and estimate templates integrated into CRM; track time to proposal and first pass client acceptance rate as measures of adoption & impact.

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Executive Overview

3. Design High experimentation low production use

Problem: Design departments are among the most experimental with AI but quality, brand fit, and client trust issues limit adoption. AI is used more for inspiration than production, leaving most workflows dependent on manual effort and slowing delivery cycles.

Evidence: Although 90% of design teams experiment with AI image generation, only 28% use outputs in final client work. 80% of the workflow remains entirely manual, consuming valuable creative capacity.

Strategic implication: Turnaround times remain long, design resources are tied up in repetitive tasks instead of higher-value creative work. Client-facing adoption is low, leaving productivity gains unrealised.

Executive ask: Standardise AI for mockups, resizing and templating supported by brand libraries; track average design cycle time and first-round client approval rate as proof points.

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Executive Overview

4. Marketing
Time lost to rework

Problem: Marketing departments are the heaviest adopters of AI tools, but instead of creating efficiency, outputs often require heavy rework. Copy generated by ChatGPT or Gemini rarely matches brand tone on the first pass, wasting valuable time in revision cycles.

Evidence: Although 90% of marketing teams use generative AI for campaign copy, 85% report that outputs require significant editing. Drafts average 7 revisions before approval, eroding productivity gains & delaying time to market.

Strategic implication: Campaign speed & consistency suffer as teams lose more time fixing AI drafts than save generating them.

Executive ask: Introduce effective upskilling to guide AI outputs; track average number of revisions per draft and time to publish to evidence improvements.

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Executive Overview

5. Online platforms
Insight left on the table

Problem: E-commerce platforms such as Shopify and WooCommerce are widely used in print for order capture but companies rarely leverage AI for deeper data analysis. As a result, valuable customer intelligence and demand signals remain underutilised.

Evidence: Although 60% of companies use Shopify or similar platforms as their main sales channel, only 5% actively extract and analyse data with AI. Around 80% believe AI features exist but admit they do not know how to use them effectively.

Strategic implication: Failure to leverage sales & customer data limits opportunities for pricing optimisation, cross-sell, and retention. Insights remain reactive.

Executive ask: Pilot an AI augmented customer insights dashboard connected to platform exports; track monthly insight adoption rates and uplift in repeat or cross sell revenue.

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Executive Overview

6. **Management** Literacy & governance gap

Problem: Leadership teams show low generative AI literacy, creating a gap between frontline experimentation and strategic oversight. Without executive understanding, adoption remains scattered and ungoverned, leaving risks unmanaged and wins invisible to decision makers.
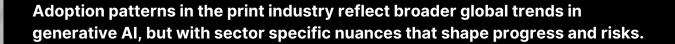
Evidence: 15% of managers use AI daily for emails & report drafting, 60% openly admit they do not understand generative AI. Governance is largely absent, with 87% of companies lacking formal frameworks & 85% showing shadow adoption without leadership awareness.

Strategic implication: Without leadership literacy and oversight, adoption stays fragmented and risky, stalling the move from experiments to enterprise value.

Executive ask: Pilot an AI-enabled customer insights dashboard connected to platform exports; track monthly insight adoption rates and uplift in repeat or cross sell revenue.

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Cross-cutting Analysis

How GCC practice aligns with global trends

Adoption patterns in the print industry reflect broader global trends in generative AI, but with sector specific nuances that shape progress and risks.

Global alignment: Print mirrors the global reality of scattered experimentation with limited effectiveness.

Pilot to production friction is common, with enthusiasm at the team level failing to translate into scaled, organsiation wide value.

Shadow AI adoption is widespread, as employees bypass governance to trial tools informally.

This aligns with international surveys showing adoption energy but limited integration into structured workflows.

Print-specific divergences: The print industry faces unique challenges that intensify these patterns.

Legacy systems are entrenched but poorly integrated with AI, leaving finance and operations under-served. Online platforms like Shopify are central to sales, yet most companies lack the skills to exploit their AI capabilities.

Design teams are early experimenters but stall at client-facing use due to brand trust and quality concerns.

Sustainability reporting also looms larger in print, with data collection and compliance obligations creating added pressure to digitise and automate workflows.

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Cross-cutting Analysis

Implications for scaling

Without executive literacy and governance, adoption risks remain high and productivity gains go uncaptured. The gap between marketing led experimentation and lagging finance or management adoption exposes companies to inefficiency, inconsistent messaging and stalled growth.

For print companies, success depends on connecting experimentation to structured pilots, activating latent data in online platforms, and addressing the leadership blind spot that currently blocks safe, strategic scaling.

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Playbook: pick, train, govern, orchestrate

Durable adoption begins with teaching work, not tools. The aim is simple: identify high-impact routine work that, when done differently with AI, frees strategic time. Upskill people to do their real tasks with AI in practical, repeatable ways and then enable safe, fast scale through proportionate governance and composable orchestration.

Upskilling

Find the right candidate workflows & champions

Start with a short discovery to identify a small number of candidate workflows and the mindset champions who will drive them.

- **Selection filter:** Score each workflow on Frequency, Current Time spent, Decision Impact, and Data Availability.
- **Prioritise**
  - **Sales:** quotes/estimates, proposal drafting, order confirmations.
  - **Design:** mock ups, resizing/variants, templating for common formats.
  - **Finance: r**econciliation, monthly close variance notes, invoice triage.
  - **Marketing**: campaign copy, social posts, product sheets.
- **Champions:** Practitioners who perform the task, are open to experimenting, and can communicate wins.

Why this matters: The right workflow + right person produces visible, repeatable wins: faster quotes, fewer design revisions, cleaner reconciliations.

Immediate Actions

Training is not feature lists - it's doing the work.

- **Task recreation**: Convert the selected workflow into a short, applied exercise: current artefact > AI-enabled steps > desired artefact.
- **Upskilling workshops**: task contextualised upskilling, followed by coached, hands on workshops where participants complete real tasks using the current technology stack.
- **Reinforcement**: Weekly clinics, paired working, and verification rubrics to cement practice and reduce the 7-revision loop seen in marketing.
- **Program design**: Run as a capability programme [modules + clinics + hands on verification] with cohort chat for peer help.

Outcome: Fast skill transfer into daily print business tasks. Measurable gains in time to proposal, design cycle time and close preparation time.

Playbook: pick, train, govern, orchestrate

Communicate Wins

Lightweight, evidence-led storytelling

Capture before/after evidence without overloading cohorts.

- **Use** the discovery baseline [e.g. average time to proposal, average design revision count, days to compile variance notes] as the "before".
- **Collect** lightweight post-pilot measures: short survey + 10/15 minute champion interview [designer, sales coordinator, AP analyst].
- **Produce** a concise before/after document, note highlighting: time freed, revisions reduced, decision speed, and one champion quote; attach a screenshot of the final artefact where possible.

Why: Short, shareable case notes accelerate adoption, give management proof, and create momentum across teams that spend most time on the print floor.

Governance

Lightweight, enabling AI Council

Create a minimal but effective governance enabling pilots, not blocking them.

- **AI Council**: Monthly cadence; cross-functional reps from management, design, sales, finance, operations.
- **Responsibilities**: Prioritise pilots; maintain playbooks, run a fast-track lane for low risk pilots [**design/marketing**]; make scale/no scale decisions using pilot results.

Principle: Protect sensitive client data, pricing models, while keeping low risk experiments moving quickly.

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Playbook: pick, train, govern, orchestrate

Measurement & Decision Rules

Keep measurement simple & aligned to Koshima TIME Framework

Examples

- **Choose** 1 primary Koshima Time framework focused indicator [north star] + 1 Experience indicator [staff satisfaction] + 1 Implementation indicator [effort].
- **Print-specific signals**: CRM timestamps [time to proposal], artwork version counts, ERP close duration, Shopify order to ship interval and survey sentiment.
- **Declare** pass/fail criteria before launch [e.g. ≥20% time saving + positive satisfaction]. Graduated pilots move to scale; others are re tooled or stopped.

Technology & Partnerships

Orchestrate, don't replace
Match tooling to enterprise platforms and favour composable orchestration.

- **Primary technology stack**: Align to Microsoft 365 + Copilot or Google Workspace + Gemini
- **Business systems**: Integrate ERP/MIS, CRM, and e-commerce [e.g. Shopify] via approved connectors; avoid one off silos.
- **Composable approach**: Use Copilot Studio style orchestration to chain prompts, data pulls and approvals into reliable workflows.
- **Tool mix**: Accept a simple mixed model/tool ecosystem [Copilot + ChatGPT + specialist apps] but enforce an approved tool list.

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Playbook: pick, train, govern, orchestrate

Quick launch checklist [first 30 days]

1. **Run short discovery;** score workflows via Koshima TIME framework
2. **Select top 3 workflows and recruit champions.**
3. **Create hands on upskilling exercises**
4. **Schedule a coached workshop + weekly clinics.**
5. **Notify AI Council;** request fast track approval where needed.
6. **Collect baseline measures;** run the pilot; gather post-pilot survey + champion interview.
7. **Produce 1 page before/after note and share internally.**

Risks & mitigations

- **Wrong workflow selection** > strict TIME framework filter and early stop criteria.
- **Training decay** > programmatic clinics and paired work to reinforce.
- **Governance friction** > fast-track lanes and limit council cadence.
- **Tool fragmentation** > mandate standard connectors and an approved tech list.

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Case Examples

Sales
Faster, More Effective Proposals

A mid sized digital print company struggled with long turnaround times for client proposals. Drafting quotes and estimates was manual, involving multiple spreadsheets and approval loops. Sales velocity was slowed, reducing win rates.

Interventions
- Ran a 3 day discovery to baseline proposal cycle time [average 3.5 days].
- Introduced AI assisted proposal templates leveraging Microsoft Copilot 365
- Delivered an upskilling workshop where sales staff recreated a live proposal with AI support.

Outcome
- Proposal turnaround dropped from 3.5 days > 1.5 days [≈55% faster].
- First-pass client acceptance rates improved by 12%, with sales teams reporting higher confidence in proposal consistency.
- Proposal turnaround time expected to continue to reduce as proficiency with tool and processes increases.

Faster, more consistent proposals mean quicker decisions, higher client trust, and improved win rates in a competitive print services market.

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Case Examples

Design
Reduced Revision Cycles

A design department supporting digital print campaigns spent excessive time on resizing, templating and generating design mock ups. Most work was manual, and client facing adoption of AI outputs was limited.

Interventions
- Baseline showed average of 9 revisions per customer asset.
  - Piloted AI augmented workflows for design boards, mock-ups and concepts.
- Built proficiency with Design Thinking leveraging ChatGPT, together with Leonardo AI for image design.

Outcome
- Design cycle time shortened by 30%
- Average revisions dropped from 9 to 4 per customer asset.
- Designers reported they could scale to handle a greater number of customer asset design requests.

AI shifts effort away from low value, manual design tasks, helping print companies deliver faster without sacrificing quality or client trust.

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Summary

Print industry companies face six recurring challenges. Scattered adoption in finance, stalled sales pilots, under scaled design experiments, marketing inefficiencies, underused online platforms and leadership literacy gaps. These bottlenecks keep adoption fragmented, with 60% experimenting but only 15% achieving effective, structured use.

Strategic Implications

1. Finance is manual & costly without automation in reconciliation & forecasting.
2. Sales velocity drops with slow proposals; poor adoption cuts competitiveness.
3. Design loses capacity to repetition, slowing delivery and client-facing AI use.
4. Marketing adoption gains are erased by rework. Speed and consistency suffer.
5. Online platforms hold untapped data; not using AI limits growth.
6. Management illiteracy blocks safe scaling. Shadow AI raises risk without ROI.

Recommendations

- **Workflow first lens:** Apply Koshima TIME framework to prioritise where AI can free measurable capacity [e.g. proposals, design, accounts reconciliation].
- **Hands on upskilling**: Recreate sales, design, and finance tasks as exercises so staff practise real work with AI tools.
- **Champion model**: Identify open, credible staff as role champions to anchor pilots and share wins.
- **Light governance**: Create an AI Council with a fast-track lane for low-risk pilots while safeguarding sensitive data and pricing.
- **Communicate wins**: Share concise before/after notes [e.g. 2x faster proposals, >30% shorter design cycles] to accelerate adoption and build confidence.

Executives should act now by sponsoring short discovery phases, backing role specific upskilling pilots and empowering lightweight governance.

Early visible wins build confidence, speed adoption, and position print companies to scale AI responsibly and competitively.

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Work with Us

At Koshima, we help organisations move beyond hype and achieve measurable results with AI.

Our focus is practical: identify high-value workflows, free capacity, and build confidence through contextual, hands-on upskilling. We believe incremental gains lead to transformation, and every pilot should prove immediate value.

Our approach is simple - think big, start small, start now. By re-creating real tasks as learning exercises, we show teams how to deliver outcomes, not just use tools.

Executives sponsor clear priorities, employees learn by doing, and governance stays light so adoption never stalls.

Partnering with Koshima means embedding AI where it matters most: amplifying strategy, accelerating decisions, and improving stakeholder experiences.

If you're ready to unlock practical results & build momentum step by step, we'd be delighted to work together with you.

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