HPE GreenLake

How to break out of the "AI-as-experiment" mindset and speed time to value

These six tactics can help your organization move confidently to the next phase of AI.

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to rapidly evolve, organizations across all industries are realizing the urgent need to stay ahead of the competition by harnessing its potential. But in a recent study that surveyed where tech leaders are on their AI journey, 44% reported they were still in the technology's early pilot phases.[1]

While conducting small-scale AI experiments is valuable, it's easy to get stuck in the exploration loop, leaving measurable business results an elusive goal. How do you get out of the sandbox and advance your AI projects with confidence?

"We're at an interesting point over the last year where the visibility of generative AI systems has raised the sense of urgency across the board," says Katy Evertson, director of AI verticals for Hewlett Packard Enterprise. "The pressure is even more intense than it was a couple years ago to get through the proof-of-concept cycle and improve time to value."

[1] "The artificial intelligence journey: Stories from the trenches," HPE, February 2024

According to Joe Fuchs, worldwide AI vertical lead for the financial services and insurance division at HPE, security and compliance concerns are a big reason many companies, especially those in the financial services sector, are reluctant to take their AI experiments to the next level. Instead, they are holding back and waiting to see what everyone else is going to do.

While a certain level of caution is understandable, Fuchs says those holding back run the risk of being left behind. "Taking a cool experiment to actual production is achievable with a clear plan, the right toolset, and the right cross-functional team," says Fuchs.

Here are six strategies you can use to help break out of a small-scale, experimental mindset and turn AI into a core part of your business.

Identify your organization's pain points

The first step is to home in on business needs, says Fuchs. For many organizations, the primary drivers for AI adoption and subsequent experimentation are related to increasing efficiency, optimizing productivity, and accelerating business growth.
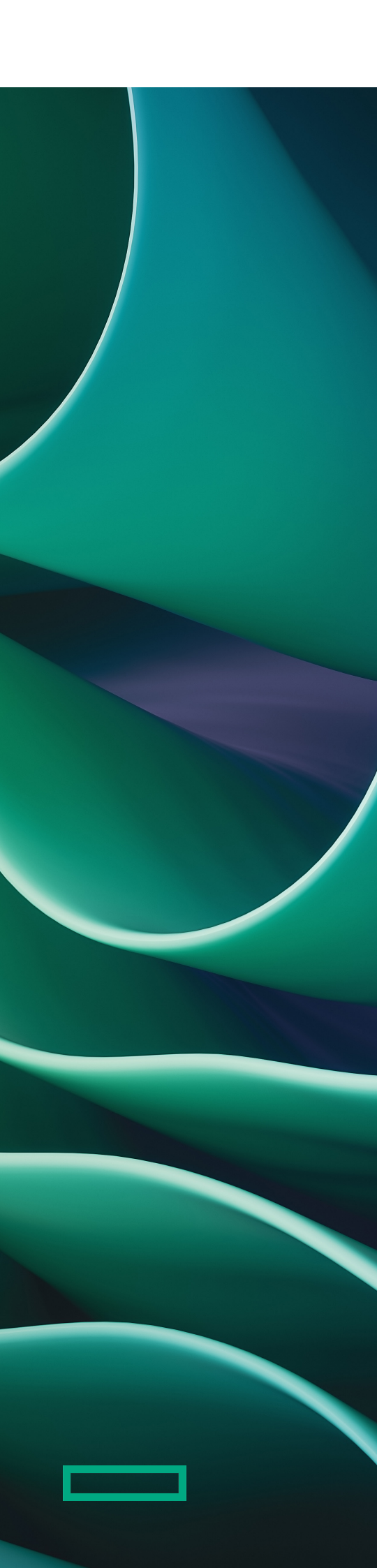
"You want to cherry-pick those first use cases where you know you're likely to get great business value at low risk," says Fuchs. "Some of the highest value use cases are being held up due to risk and regulations. From there, you'll need to consider technical feasibility, resources, potential risks, scalability, and how it aligns with key performance indicators."

As your business needs evolve, so will your AI initiatives. Adaptability is key as your business navigates potential market changes, regulatory changes, customer expectations, and technological advances.

Build a team that bridges tech and business

To move beyond experimentation to more complex use cases, you need an advanced AI team that possesses more than just tech savvy. Whether you build your team internally or work with an external partner, a successful AI team requires cross-functional collaboration among IT, business units, and AI/ML experts, wherever they reside. Teams must combine data-specific AI expertise with deep industry knowledge to maximize their value.

Many organizations are adding a chief AI officer role to lead their AI team and oversee AI strategy to make sure it aligns with business goals.

"In AI, where breakthroughs happen at the intersection of technology and creativity, a strong leader is like a compass, setting the direction, aligning the team toward common goals, and instilling a sense of purpose that transcends mere coding tasks," says Evertson. "AI leaders understand that success isn't just about algorithms and models. It's about interpreting patterns, envisioning possibilities, and adapting swiftly to the ever-changing needs of the business."

Get aligned on tools to maximize productivity and minimize costs

When it comes to the AI sandbox, everyone has their tool preferences, which has led to fragmentation, confusion, and duplicated effort in many organizations. While this approach is probably fine for small experiments, it's neither efficient nor cost-effective as AI efforts mature.

When determining whether to invest in in-house AI models or outsource, organizations will need to face many considerations. For example, when it comes to data, does it have to stay in a data center because of privacy or governance issues? Could it be moved to the public cloud? What safeguards need to be in place?

"In a larger organization, it can be very challenging to keep track of the many AI experiments and the hardware and software involved in each," says Fuchs. "The data starts to resemble spaghetti."

Providing domain experts with a standard set of tools and prebuilt models makes it easier and faster for them to refine the AI during the testing process so that it can reach production. "The sooner you're able to get them involved, the faster you'll likely get there," says Fuchs.

Take it from the sandbox to production

Once you have clear objectives, the right team, and alignment on tools, it's time to take your AI initiatives out of the sandbox and get validation in a production environment.

"You could have an experiment within the research team, and it's working great," says Fuchs. "But they're probably not domain experts in your individual lines of business."

The only way to know if your AI model is really going to work in the broader enterprise is by putting it in the hands of those with day-to-day knowledge of the company's business processes.

To speed your time to value, Evertson adds that it's helpful to clearly communicate your business objectives and benefits to the users. You also want to provide user-friendly and intuitive tools, training and support, and feedback channels that remove as much of the complexity from AI programs as possible.

Get buy-in from stakeholders

To speed your time to value, having executive leadership support is key. Management will look closely at the risks, regulations, and costs associated with AI initiatives, so AI leaders must be prepared to address these concerns.

Fuchs says the best way to get buy-in is by demonstrating that your AI solution is built with components and vendors you've worked with before, can provide enterprise support, work within your IT policies, and help expedite the lengthy certification process for new hardware and software.

"In the interest of improving time to value, you want to demonstrate how you will leverage existing interfaces and data," says Fuchs. "Or, if you need to build something new, you need to show how you will do that in a strategic way, so you don't have to start from scratch again down the road."

To secure the right budget and resources, you'll need to be smart about how to scale. Some AI initiatives may require a capital investment in internal compute resources, whereas pay-as-you-go models often work better if your goals are more modest.

Consider a partner approach

AI requires a huge amount of compute power, and not every company has the resources or desire to build these technologies themselves. Edge-to-cloud providers are increasingly offering AI-at-scale products that help organizations efficiently maximize their AI initiatives, optimize infrastructure costs, and ensure data is reliable and secure no matter where they are in their AI journey.

For example, one European automaker partnered with HPE to manage the data it processes in its quest to build the safest AI-powered self-driving cars on the planet. Autonomous vehicles require vast amounts of data to train an AI brain capable of driving a car safely. The automaker was collecting gigabytes of data every second from its test cars, generating more than 50 terabytes per car per day. The data needed to be validated for accuracy to make sure the AI was learning the right behaviors, a significant computing challenge.

A cloud-based AI solution developed by HPE gave the automaker the ability to process all that data quickly and securely, allowing it to stay ahead of the competition without having to invest in on-premises AI resources. It also provided the flexibility and scalability it needed to grow as the global market for autonomous vehicles expands.

No risk, no reward

The speed at which AI is advancing can be exhilarating or overwhelming, depending on how prepared you are to harness its potential. While some companies are just starting their AI journey, many others have fully integrated AI into their business strategy. To stay ahead of the competition, companies can no longer afford to dabble endlessly in small experiments.

"To win at business today, using AI is not just an option; it's a strategic imperative," says Evertson. "Companies that confidently embrace and harness the power of AI are not just beating the competition; they're shaping the future of business as we know it."

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