

Picking Ideas Is Now the Hardest Part of Digital Strategy



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Not long ago, the hardest part of any digital strategy was executing it. Integrating systems, shipping releases on time, and getting people to use what was built were persistent challenges for engineering, product, and UX teams alike.

Today, that reality has changed.

Execution is still complex, but it is no longer the primary constraint. With AI now embedded across the enterprise, teams can build, test, and launch faster than ever before. As a result, a new bottleneck has emerged, one that sounds simple, but is far harder in practice: choosing which ideas to bet on.

Many organizations are still making those decisions in the old-fashioned way, often based on opinion and hierarchy. But that approach becomes risky, especially when you need to scale your ideas beyond small pilots.

The Cost of Getting It Wrong

For a DX leader, this shows up quickly. Every weak idea takes **time, budget, and attention** away from work that could actually improve your business. Teams get pulled into pilots and side projects that sound promising but don't lead to anything meaningful, and over time priorities start to blur and investment gets spread too thin.

That's why choosing what to take forward is such an important part of digital strategy.

To get this right, stay focused on a small number of problems and keep a clear line of sight between what you build and the outcomes you need. Always ask yourself:



Is this solving something that **actually matters?**



Can you realistically **deliver it well?**



And in the end, will it **make a real difference?**

You can see the same pattern in AI.

Forrester's State of AI, 2025 finds that while more than

70%

of firms have AI in production somewhere, relatively few can point to clear, sustained financial impact from those deployments.



In other words, organizations are great at starting AI projects, but far less disciplined about choosing which ones deserve to scale.

Why Opinion-Driven Ideas Keep Winning

If the evidence is so clear, why do organizations still choose ideas the way they do?

Because the default is easy.



A senior leader comes back from a conference excited about a use case.



A vendor pitches a shiny AI solution with a polished demo.



A competitor announces something in the press, and suddenly there is anxiety in the boardroom.



From there, the project gathers momentum almost by itself. No one wants to be the person who slows things down, so the project gets funded.



What's missing is friction.

It is structured pushback that asks: do we have evidence this is the right problem, the right user, the right moment, and the right way to create value?

Without that friction, teams lean too heavily on:



A false sense of urgency to move fast because something feels urgent, not because it matters.



Internal anecdotes, like "I heard from one major client that..."



Tech novelty, as in "we need a GenAI story" instead of "we need to solve this specific customer problem."

In a world where AI can make almost anything look impressive in a demo, this bias becomes dangerous. Demos are cheap; durable outcomes are not.

Across industries, the pattern is consistent. Organizations are excellent at launching AI experiments, but only a minority turn them into scaled, business-critical outcomes.



BCG reported in 2025 that of companies were seeing minimal financial gains from AI despite significant investment, while only about 5% had reached the level of maturity associated with strong value creation.

McKinsey's **State of AI 2025** survey, spanning 1,993 respondents across 105 countries, found that **88%** of organizations now use AI, yet only

39%

report any enterprise-wide EBIT impact.



From Big Bets to Better Bets

You don't have to give up ambition or swap strategy for dashboards and A/B tests. The aim is to go with ideas that stay bold but are backed by evidence, experiments, and good judgment.

Three shifts help you turn progress into results, instead of just collecting pilots.

1. Start with a Decision, Not a Roadmap

Most digital strategies ask, "What should we build?" But a better place to start is, "What decisions do we need to make, and what evidence will help us make them well?"

For example:



Which customer journeys, if improved, would materially move revenue, cost, or risk in the next 12 to 24 months?



Which parts of those journeys have enough data, operational readiness, and stakeholder ownership to support an AI-powered solution?



What would have to be true for this idea to be worth scaling?

If you frame your strategy as a series of decisions, things get clearer.

Instead of thinking about "AI for customer service," you can ask, "Should we invest in automating password resets and account queries over the next two quarters? And when would it make sense to double down?"

That's a much easier question for you to test.

2. Treat Ideas Like Hypotheses, Not Commitments

In science, you test a hypothesis, you don't defend it. But many companies do the opposite: once an idea is on the roadmap, the focus shifts to protecting it instead of questioning it.

A stronger approach sounds different:



Instead of saying, "We're building an AI assistant for sales," you say, "We think an assistant that drafts proposals will cut proposal time by **30%** for top-tier accounts."

Rather than a big, all-or-nothing program, you define a quick, small test: "In six weeks, with one region and ten reps, can we get even a **10%** reduction? If not, do we stop or change course?"

This approach makes you more honest. Teams ship smaller, learn faster, and drop weak ideas before they turn into costly commitments.

The pattern shows up in enterprise AI research. **McKinsey's State of AI 2025** found

88%

of organizations use AI, but only

38%

have scaled it across operations.

The rest get stuck in pilots. The ones that break through give themselves permission to stop, which helps them start bolder.

3. Balance Evidence with Human Judgment

You rarely have perfect data, especially with new AI or unknown customers. If you wait for certainty, quicker competitors will beat you.

A better approach is to find the right balance:



Use enough evidence to size up the odds—problem size, target segment, feasibility, and rough economics.



Run small experiments to quickly create new data where it's missing.



Use your judgment to read early signals, especially when results are mixed.



The best digital leaders aren't the ones with the most dashboards. They're the ones who can say: "The numbers look good but are early, here's the risk, here's what to expect in 90 days, and here's when we'll stop."

This balance is even more important as AI spending grows. The global AI market may jump from \$255 billion in 2025 to over \$1.2 trillion by 2030—a fourfold increase. Leaders who blend evidence and judgment will be better at investing in use cases that actually deliver results.



Building a Better Idea Funnel

What does this look like in practice for a DX or AI portfolio?

A strong funnel has a few key traits:



Be clear about the problem.

Every idea should focus on a pain point or opportunity, with an owner and a clear business metric, not just "AI should be used here."



Use time-boxed experiments.

Every funded idea starts with experiments that have clear stop, pivot, or scale criteria. A pilot isn't a parking lot—it's for structured learning.



Set standard entry criteria.

Ideas get funded only if they pass simple checks: a defined user, measurable outcome, and realistic data and process readiness—not just because a senior person suggested them.



Keep the portfolio transparent.

Leaders should always know if an initiative is exploring, testing, scaling, or retiring. The question becomes, "Is this earning its place?"

When you manage portfolios this way, you usually have fewer initiatives, more that scale, and a clearer link between AI spending and business outcomes. **BCG found top AI companies focus on 3.5 use cases on average, while underperformers spread investment across 6.1**, weakening results. The funnel becomes a portfolio of bets that earn the right to grow.

What This Asks of Leaders

If picking ideas is the hardest part of digital strategy, the real work shifts to leadership culture, not only tools and frameworks.

It asks leaders to:



Be clear about the few outcomes that matter most in the next 12–24 months.



Ask, “What would make this a great bet?” before, “How fast can we launch?”



Reward teams for ending ideas that don’t work.



Keep a few big bets visible, funded, and protected from constant changes.

Technology will keep moving fast. The advantage comes from consistently choosing better ideas for it. For that, you need to be clear about what to take forward—and what to leave behind.



References

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Bet on the Right Ideas

Strengthen your DX by choosing the ideas worth building and seeing them through with us.

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