maze

The Future of User Research Report: Trends for 2024 and Beyond

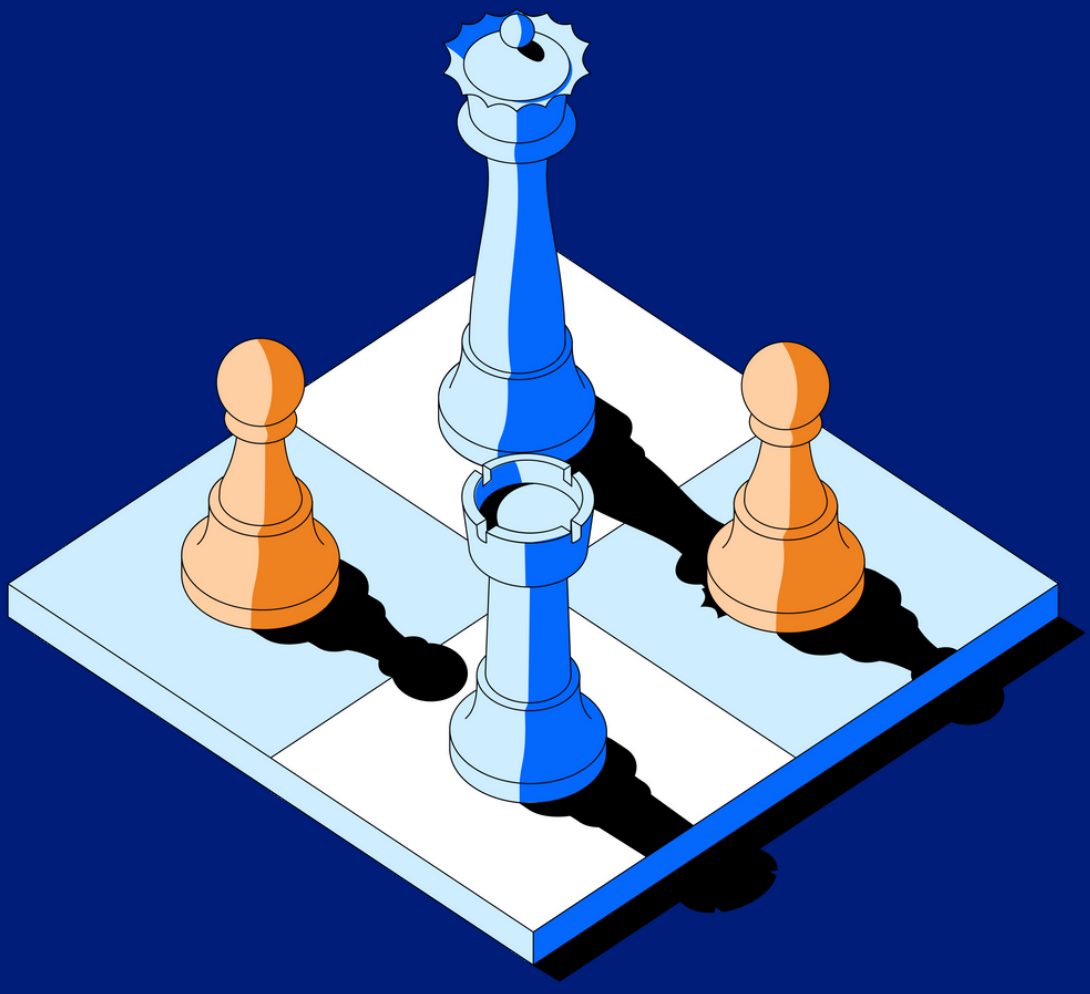


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The evolving role of user research

Today, every company is a software company. As technology removes barriers to product development, a company's ability to build products is no longer a differentiating factor. The key now lies in a company's ability to build the right product faster than competitors. To win in this world, organizations need to learn from their users every step of the way—and research is the power behind all this.

Maze surveyed over 1,200 product professionals to explore how product teams conduct research to make effective decisions. The data revealed there's a growing demand for user insights, with research allowing organizations to make more confident decisions and fuel business success during uncertain times.

While scalability remains a key challenge, empowering different teams to take the reins and leverage new technologies, like AI, will allow organizations to learn from users like never before.

In this context, the role of the UX researcher is evolving from a technical role into an indispensable strategic pillar of the organization. The macro trends highlighted in this report reveal how product teams can grow their research practices and, ultimately, shape the future of the user research industry.

Meet our subject matter experts:



Dalia El-Shimy
Director of UX Research at Wise



Kate Pazoles
Head of Flex User Research at Twilio



Daniel Soranzo
Lead User Researcher at GoodRX



Morgan Mullen
Lead UX Researcher at User Interviews



Emma Craig
Head of UX Research at Miro



Phoebe Dyloco
Research Lead at Asana



Janelle Ward
Founder of Janelle Ward Insights

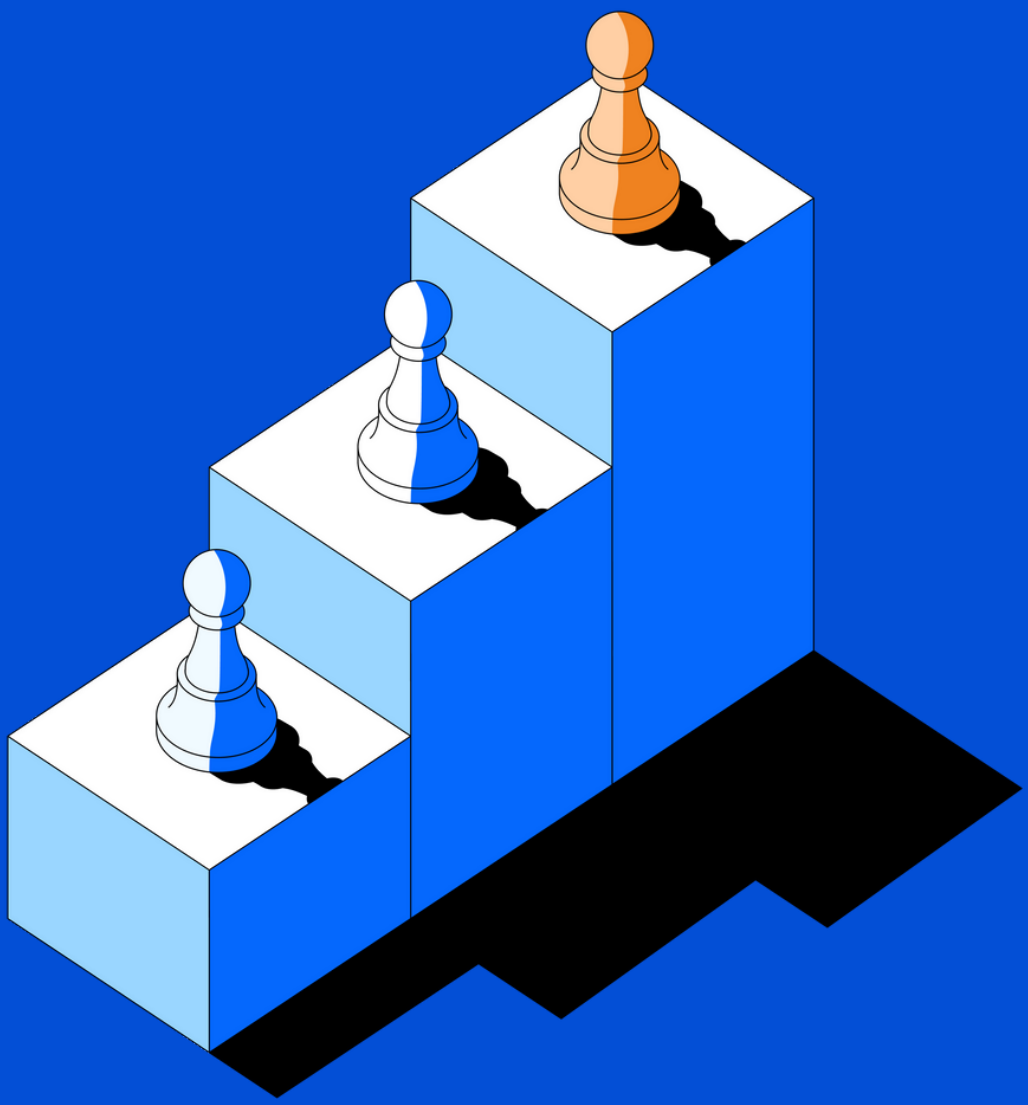


Roberta Dombrowski
Research Partner at Maze

TREND #1

The demand for user research is growing

Discover how product teams plan to scale research to address the growing appetite for user insights and drive better business outcomes.



62% of respondents say the demand for user research has increased in the past year

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62%) report that the demand for user research is growing. Industry trends like continuous discovery and research democratization could be influencing this growth. "Letting more people participate in the research process is fueling enthusiasm for more research," says Janelle Ward, Founder of Janelle Ward Insights.

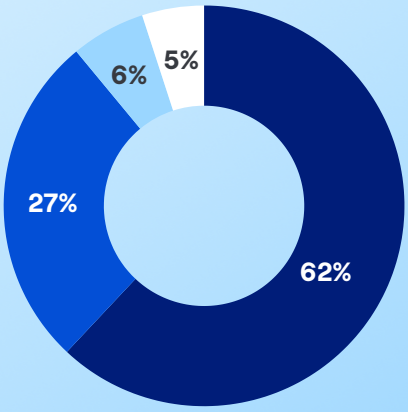
In the current climate of macroeconomic uncertainty, we also see teams that are asked to do more with less, a consequence of recent layoffs and reorganizations in the tech industry. Yet, as Janelle points out, "it's encouraging to know that companies feel the need for research." As we'll see throughout the report, more and more organizations recognize the value of user insights to inform product decision-making and drive business growth.

Roberta Dombrowski, Research Partner at Maze, shares, "Businesses are trying to put themselves in a position to stay afloat given the midst of changes over the last few years. Research can be a key value driver in making sure that's happening. It can help mitigate risk and clarify the strategy of the business, product, and services."

> Organizations are operating in increasingly uncertain times—economically, geopolitically, environmentally—and under increasing pressure to beat the competition. I've sensed a shift towards more risk-averse attitudes, where organizations feel they need to "get it right" the first time.
>
> In this uncertainty, increasing our speed of learning and anticipating the changes that could come will help us be more resilient. This is where people creating, curating, and socializing knowledge become fundamental, which would explain why the demand for research is increasing.
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> 
> **Emma Craig**
> Head of UX Research at Miro

For your team, how has the demand for user research changed in the last 12 months?

- 62% - Increased
- 6% - Decreased
- 27% - Stayed about the same
- 5% - Not sure



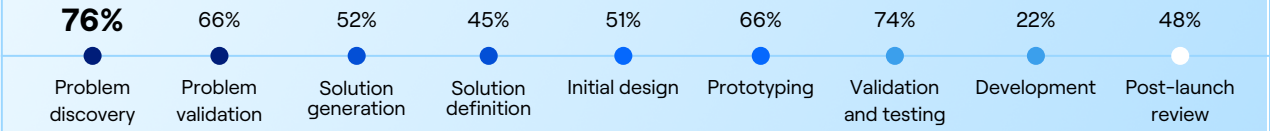
Organizations are leveraging research to make decisions across the entire product development lifecycle

Product teams are engaging with customers continuously throughout the product development process. In particular, 76% conduct user research at the problem discovery stage, 74% at the validation and testing stage, and 66% at both the problem validation and prototyping stages.

Design (86%) and product (83%) teams are the main consumers of research. Yet the entire organization is relying on research to inform their decision-making—from marketing (35%), executive teams (27%), and engineering (27%) to data (17%), customer support (16%), and sales (12%).

> On some teams, I've seen demand increase as the organization's research maturity level increases. Once they better understand how to leverage research at different phases of product development, they're more proactive about requesting research support. This is especially true when leadership sees the value of research, and structures the team so that research is embedded rather than a centralized service.
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> **Kate Pazoles**
> Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

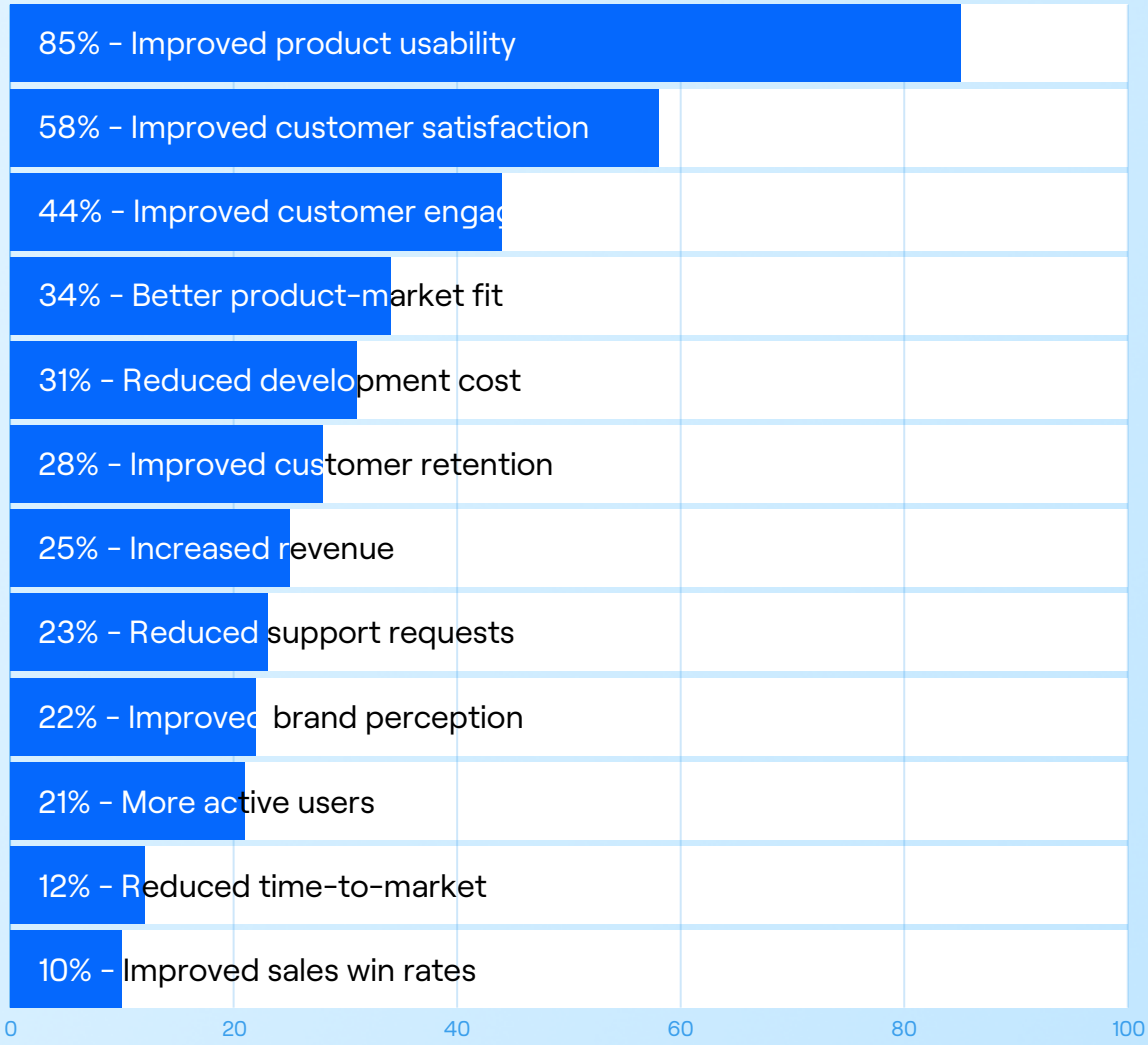
At what stages of the product development process does your team gather insights?



Research leads to improved product usability, customer satisfaction, and engagement

Conducting research on a continuous basis positively impacts critical business metrics and leads to improved product usability (85%), customer satisfaction (58%), and customer engagement (44%). As companies rely on user research to inform decision-making, this allows them to better understand their audience, build the right products, and drive business growth.

What impact has research had on your organization?



At its core, research is about learning. We learn to ensure that we're building products and services that meet the needs of our customers. The more we invest in growing our research practices and team, the higher our likelihood of meeting these needs. In the long run, this leads to greater revenue, satisfaction, and less waste across organizations due to half-baked bets.



Roberta Dombrowski
Research Partner at Maze

The primary reason companies should invest in growing research practices is to mitigate risk. The job of UX research is to test hypotheses and prevent common product development mistakes. The worst-case scenario is having to roll back on a feature because it has an adverse effect on metrics and the user experience, which could have been easily prevented by early-stage testing.



Phoebe Dyloco
Research Lead at Asana

73% of product professionals track the impact of their research—but connecting research to business outcomes remains a key challenge

Most respondents in the audience we surveyed (73%) say they measure the impact of their research. In particular, product professionals report tracking the influence on product decisions, such as product changes and strategy updates based on research (42%), and monitoring performance metrics like KPIs and OKRs (41%).

Other prevalent methods include tracking stakeholders' feedback, such as team members' excitement, knowledge, and appreciation for research (39%), and assessing the demand for user research through metrics like the number of research requests and studies conducted (29%).



While there's a growing awareness around the importance of measuring research impact, one of the main challenges product teams face in user research is connecting research insights to business outcomes, as reported by 41% of respondents.

Additional significant challenges include time and bandwidth constraints (62%), participant recruitment (60%), budget constraints (39%), and storing and communicating research findings effectively to stakeholders (34%).

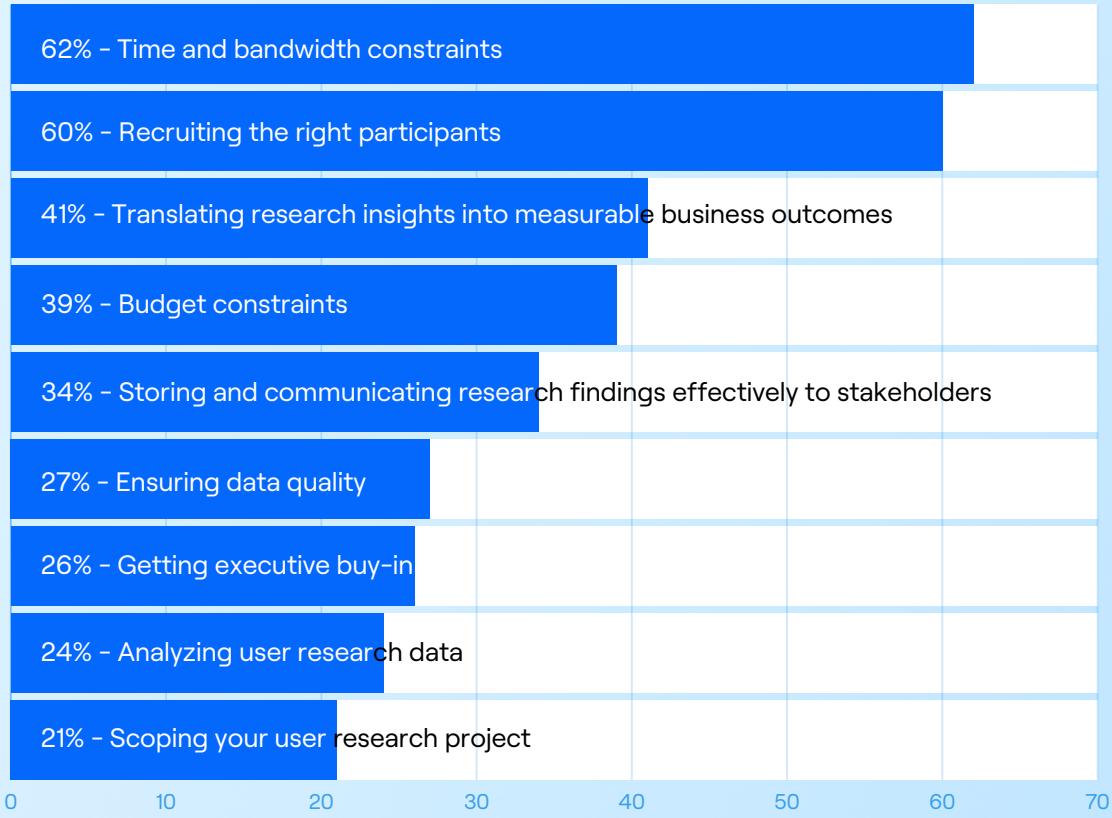
I've found many decision-makers want hard numbers. Get three inputs from your stakeholders on your research projects: what decisions were made, their perceptions on the size of the impact, and the metrics they are reporting as an outcome of the decisions made.

Having those outcome metrics gives UXRs a stronger hand to play when illustrating their impact or trying to get buy-in for resources and headcount.



Morgan Mullen
Lead UX Researcher at User Interview

What are the biggest challenges you and your team face when it comes to user research?



On the broader design team, people are encouraged to fill out what's called a 5-15 every Friday—it takes 15 minutes to complete and five minutes to read. It's a way of documenting how the week went and includes achievements, aspirations, and challenges. It helps keep the team motivated and excited about what they've accomplished.



Dalia El-Shimy
Director of UX Research at Wise

As researchers, we have a unique role in uncovering insights that the product team may not have anticipated. Separating tactical from strategic insights has helped me identify which ones led to impact. Tactical insights are easier to measure and typically come from specific questions that were defined at the beginning of the study. Strategic insights may be harder to quantify, but they can shape product direction and strategy.



Phoebe Dyloco
Research Lead at Asana

Evaluate where you are now, set ambitious but realistic goals, and be proactive about tracking progress. If you want to see where research is impacting product decisions, make sure you know where those decisions will show up and how you'll know if the change was a result of research.

It might look like 'a recommendation made in a report was added as a feature in the next release,' but it also might be less quantitative, such as, 'the user need we uncovered sparked an important prioritization discussion among the leadership team.



Kate Pazoles
Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

75% of respondents plan to scale research by increasing the number of research studies, leveraging AI tools, and providing research training

As the demand for research grows, product teams need to find sustainable methods of expanding their research programs and initiatives. 75% of respondents say they plan to scale research next year. In particular, they intend to do so by increasing the number of research studies, leveraging AI tools, and providing training to promote research democratization.



The key benefit to growing research practices is that an organization will grow a research mindset in tandem. Not only will external benefits like competitive advantage come into play, but employees inside the organization will also better understand how and why important business decisions are made, resulting in more transparency from leadership and a happier and more thriving work culture for everyone.

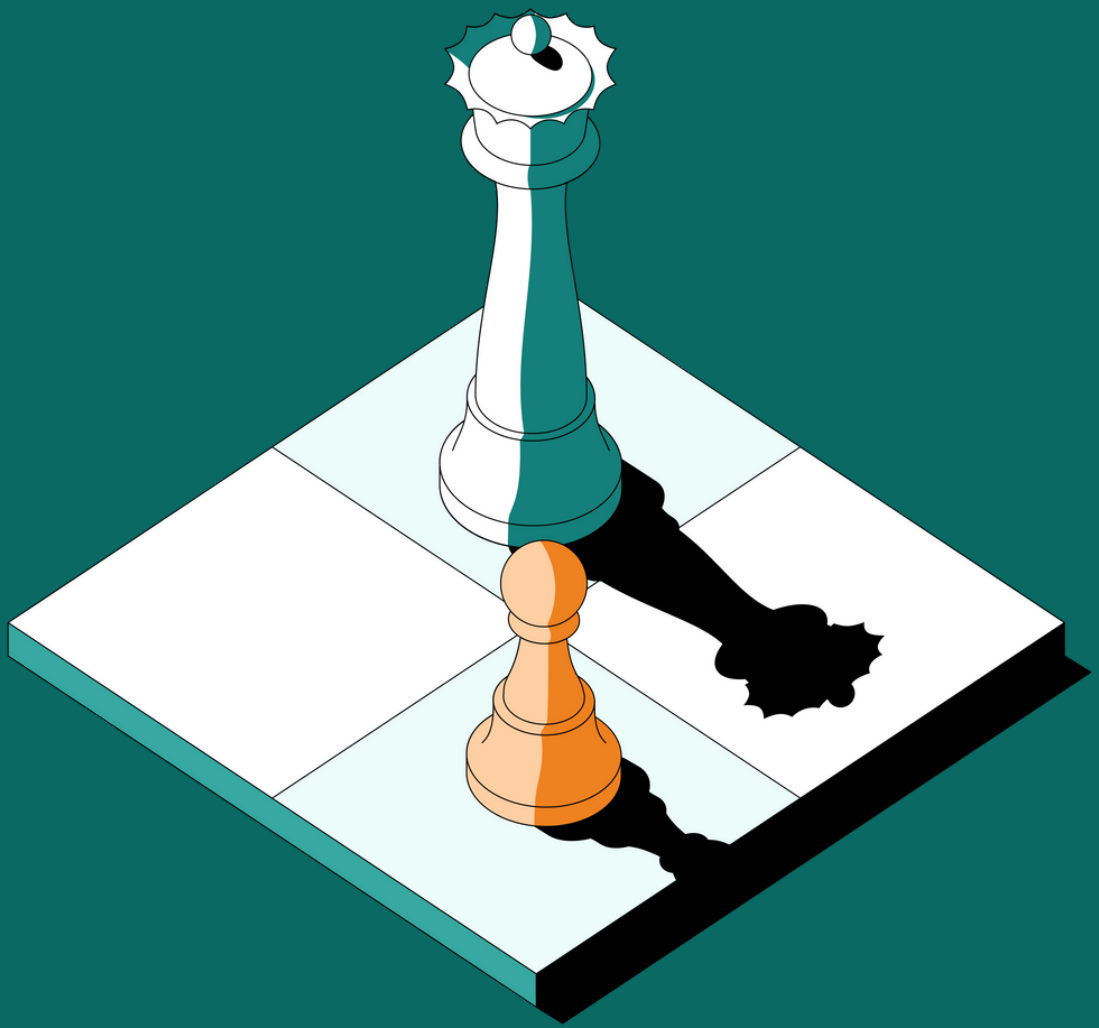


Janelle Ward
Founder of Janelle Ward Insights

TREND #2

Research democratization empowers stronger decision-making

Learn how organizations are scaling research by empowering different teams to engage in research—and how this shift influences the role of the researcher.



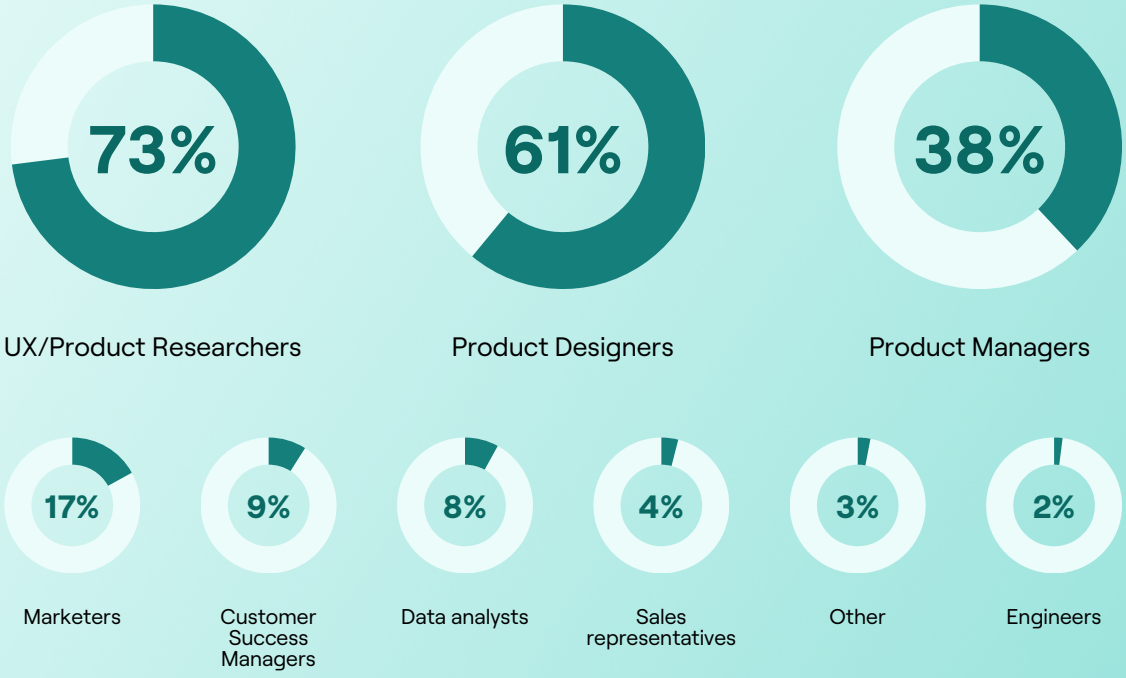
Teams across the entire organization conduct research

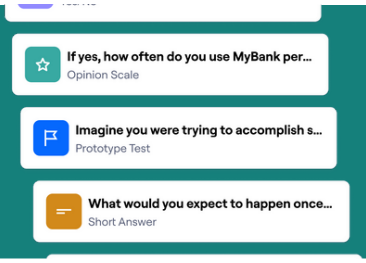
To meet the growing appetite for user insights, companies are amplifying the impact of research by empowering more teams in the organization to access, collect, and consume user feedback and make more informed decisions.

According to the audience we surveyed, in addition to researchers, product designers (61%), product managers (38%), and marketers (17%) conduct user research at their companies.

> Research impact is expressed in improvements to organizational intuition, sharpened judgment, and increased confidence as decision-makers.
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> 
> **Emma Craig**
> Head of UX Research at Miro

Who is conducting user research at your company?





Get the insights you need to build better user experiences, with Maze's suite of user research solutions.
Learn more

User interviews and usability testing are the most frequently used research methods

Product teams are turning to various research methods to gather user insights throughout the product lifecycle. User interviews (89%) are the most used research method among respondents. This is followed by usability testing (85%), surveys (82%), and concept testing (56%).

According to Morgan Mullen, Lead UX Researcher at User Interviews, a couple of factors influence the research methods teams use. One factor is the type of projects teams are conducting. Most teams don't change their information architecture regularly, which requires tree testing or card sorting. But they're likely launching new features often, making usability testing a more popular research method.

The other factor is comfortability. "Collectively, more people are running interviews, usability tests, and surveys, so this is what people see and hear about most often," Morgan says. This may discourage some from trying new methods due to perceived difficulty and fear of making mistakes. "As research coaches, we need to be aware of it. We don't want people choosing the wrong method because they were scared or thought it'd take too long to try a different approach."



Maze and Hotjar are the most widely used research tools

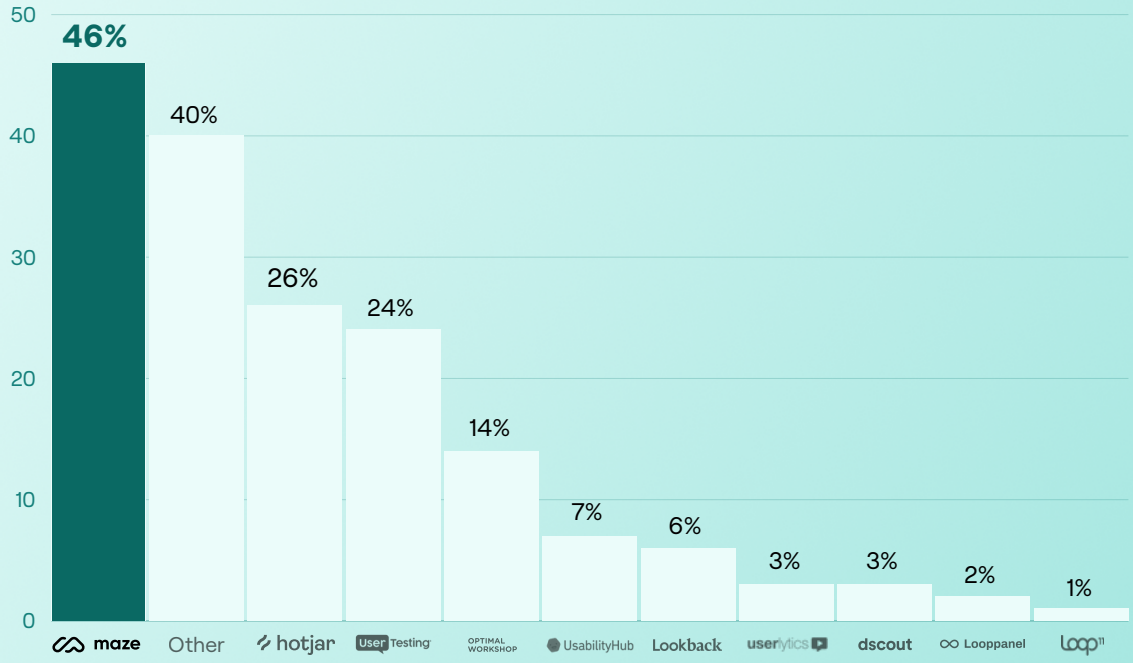
While respondents leverage a variety of research tools, the chart below shows that Maze (46%), Hotjar (26%), and UserTesting (24%) are the most widely used research solutions. The audience we surveyed wrote in additional tools, including generic tools like Google, Teams, and Zoom (13%), survey tools like Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey (5%), Dovetail (5%), and Useberry (4%).

UX tools enable researchers to perform research more efficiently and help other teams get the insights they need to make informed decisions.

Emma Craig shares how having the right research tools was key to empowering everyone to run research at Miro:

"We've prioritized making sure everyone in the organization feels empowered and has the tools they need to get closer to the voice of the customer. This includes a third-party tool for unmoderated testing, 'UXR Playbook' for self-serve study design, semi-automated recruitment and compensation workflows, and office hours for anyone needing hands-on guidance."

What specialized research tools do you or your team use to conduct user research?



Note: While there may be some bias due to Maze conducting this survey, we included non-Maze users to ensure a comprehensive representation of the overall market.

Teams with a democratized research culture report a greater impact on decision-making

To better understand how organizations use research to inform their decisions, we asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements on a scale from 1 to 5.

Teams that have embraced a democratized research culture are 2x more likely to report that user research influences strategic decisions, 1.8x more likely to state that it impacts product decisions, and 1.5x more likely to express that it inspires new product opportunities.

Organizations with a democratized research culture are:

2x
more likely to state that research influences strategic decisions

1.8x
more likely to report that research impacts product decisions

1.5x
more likely to say that research inspires new product opportunities

Organizations without a democratized research culture	Organizations with a democratized research culture
27% of respondents believe strategic decisions are based on user research findings (agreement score = 2.8/5)	54% of respondents believe strategic decisions are based on user research findings (agreement score = 3.5/5)
37% of respondents believe product decisions are based on user research findings (agreement score = 3.2/5)	66% of respondents believe product decisions are based on user research findings (agreement score = 3.8/5)
45% of respondents believe user research findings inspire new product opportunities (agreement score = 3.5/5)	67% of respondents believe user research findings inspire new product opportunities (agreement score = 3.9/5)

The role of the UX researcher is more important than ever to successfully scale research

For companies with a democratized research culture, empowering different teams to engage with users is associated with increased research capacity, improved decision-making, and enhanced collaboration. At the same time, some UX professionals highlight challenges such as ensuring data quality and accuracy.

I'm most excited to see the role of the user researcher be better understood by key stakeholders and partners. As more leaders see the value of user research for unlocking new opportunities and driving innovation, we'll see researchers being brought into product development as true strategic partners.



Kate Pazoles
Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

Benefits of research democratization	Challenges of research democratization
"Having others involved in the research process helps with buy-in and shared understanding. Having developers and marketers contribute to research has been a great team activity that brings us together around a common goal." **Product Design, Director**	"Although many people in our organization conduct research, it is not uniform or organized to the point where information is shared broadly." **Product Designer, IC**
"Democratizing research has allowed our team to delegate tactical research (such as usability testing) to designers, allowing us to focus on more complex research initiatives. This has increased decision speed." **Product Researcher, IC**	"Sometimes people end up working in silos and duplicating work because there isn't a centralized location for research findings." **Product Manager, Team Leader**
"Our UX research team is small compared to the size of the organization. Product designers and managers can promptly obtain user feedback and improve product features in an agile manner." **Product Researcher, IC**	"Testing, research, and improvements can be made across the organization. The downside is training and ensuring all that research is good research and experimentation." **User Researcher, Team Leader**

Democratizing research doesn't mean anyone can do any type of research. You'll need the proper checks and balances to allow everyone to participate in research responsibly and effectively.

In this context, the role of the UX researcher is shifting from a purely technical role to an educational role responsible for guiding the organization in its learning. On the one hand, researchers can take the reins into making research available to every product team. On the other, they can focus on more strategic and foundational research—helping organizations answer key questions about what to build, who to target, and how to win as a business.

Keep reading for best practices on how to democratize research and empower teams to conduct their own studies while maintaining high-quality research practices.

> Learning and seeking insights is everyone's responsibility. Every team should be able to gather information or feedback on what they're building. Rather than act as gatekeepers, we can instead play a role as facilitators to make sure that we can trust the insights that are uncovered.
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> 
>
> **Dalia El-Shimy**
> Director of UX Research at Wise

Encourage others to take part in research

"The simplest method I've found to promote democratization is to say no to requests as they come in. If you know the person is capable of conducting the research themselves, you can push back and suggest that they take on the project. If you're always available, then you don't have time for the bigger, strategic projects. You have to protect your own time."
Daniel Soranzo, Lead User Researcher at GoodRX

Train partners to think like a researcher

"The best way to learn is through experience. Have partners shadow a researcher during a project. Let them lead some user interviews with a researcher, hold mock interviews with internal participants, and lead collaborative analysis workshops. This will provide them with meaningful hands-on experience before they embark on their own projects."
Kate Pazoles, Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

Focus on creating a culture that prioritizes knowledge

"If you're democratizing research, you should also be working with the people doing research (PWDRs) on how to intentionally increase everyone's knowledge with each study, not just their own expertise. We should be measured on the depth and quality of everybody else's knowledge."
Emma Craig, Head of UX Research at Miro

Invest in professional development

"With democratization, more UXRs are being asked to coach others in research, which is a unique skill. Investing in professional development around educational strategies to distill information and scaffold others is a valuable investment for every UXR right now."
Morgan Mullen, Lead UX Researcher at User Interview

TREND #3

New technology allows product teams to significantly scale research

The rise of AI technologies offers product teams a virtual research companion that can streamline workflows, enhance efficiencies, and enable researchers to focus on more strategic projects.

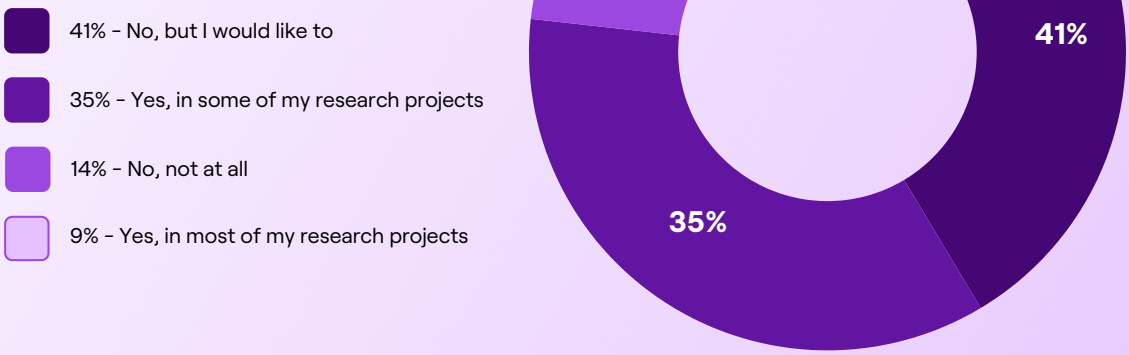


44% of product teams are adopting AI tools to conduct research

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing the way we build products, speeding up processes across a wide variety of product development practices—and UX research is no exception.

More than four in 10 product teams (44%) are using AI tools to run research, with 35% using AI in some research projects and 9% using AI in most research studies. An additional 41% say they don't currently use AI tools but would like to adopt them in the future.

Do you or your team use AI tools to conduct user research?



AI is taking over the tactical aspects of research

We wanted to learn how product teams are using AI to conduct research. More than 60% of respondents said they're using AI to analyze user research data, followed by transcription (54%), generating research questions (48%), and synthesis and reporting (45%).

I use AI for analysis and to transcribe interviews. It saves me a ton of time and helps me get an unbiased review of responses. However, whenever I use AI, I go through it to ensure I'm not missing anything—the one-off answers that AI disregards can be just as important as the answers from the masses.



Daniel Soranzo
Lead User Researcher at GoodRX

How are you using AI tools to conduct user research?

- **62%** Analyzing user research data
- **54%** Transcription
- **48%** Generating research questions
- **45%** Synthesis and reporting
- **41%** Planning and drafting research studies
- **34%** Generating content*
- **30%** Note-taking
- **17%** Streamlining workflows
- **12%** Providing predictive insights
- **3%** Recruiting research participants

* E.g., creating design prototypes, visual, and text content for user interfaces

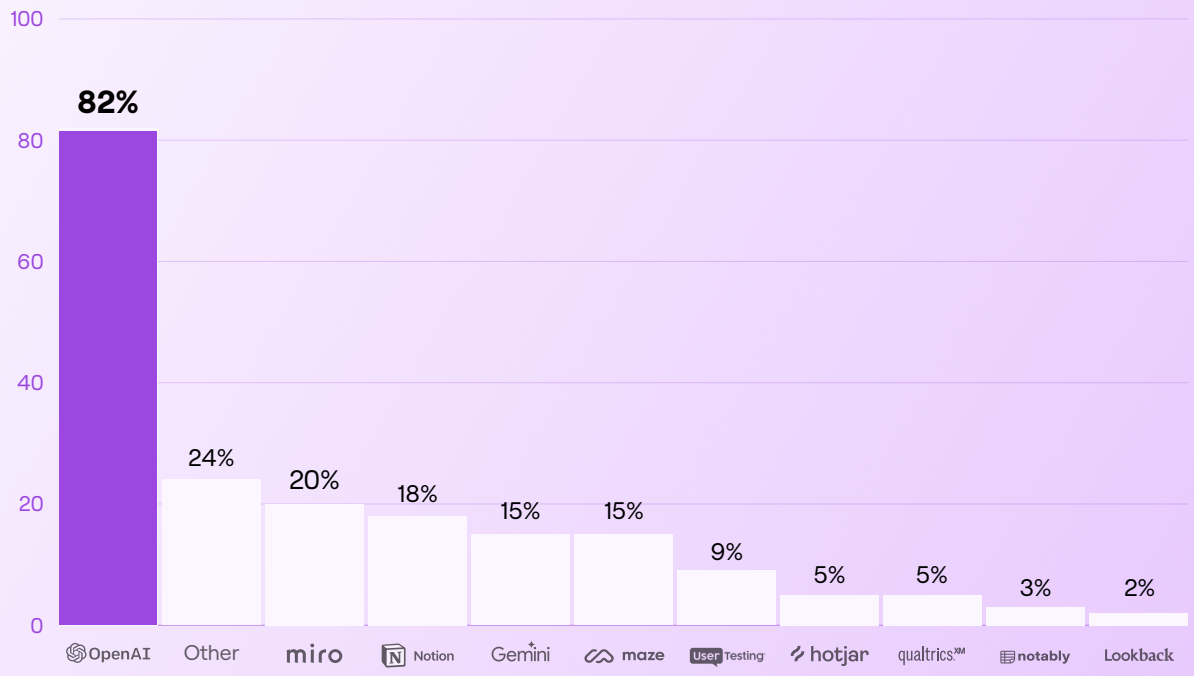
ChatGPT is the most widely used AI tool for conducting research

The majority (82%) of the audience we surveyed is using OpenAI's chatbot, ChatGPT, to conduct research. This is followed by visual collaboration software, Miro AI (20%), note-taking software, Notion AI (18%), and Google's conversational AI chatbot, Gemini (15%).

The most commonly used research tools with AI features are Maze AI (15%), UserTesting AI (9%), and Hotjar AI (5%).

> I see AI as one of the many tools at my disposal. It's a thought partner at different stages of my work to get started on an idea or polish my work before I get it out the door, as opposed to something that will do the work for me.
>
> 
> **Phoebe Dyloco**
> Research Lead at Asana

What AI tools do you or your team use to conduct user research?



AI is improving efficiency, allowing teams to collect insights faster and unlock time for strategic projects

When we asked our audience about the benefits they've experienced using AI tools, respondents reported that AI improves team efficiency (56%), allows teams to conduct research more quickly (50%), optimizes workflows (37%), and provides respondents more time to focus on strategic user research projects (35%).

If we look at this data, it's no surprise that 31% of respondents are planning to leverage AI to scale research next year. By taking on manual, time-consuming tasks, AI is alleviating the workload for research and UX professionals—allowing them to focus on the strategic aspect of research.

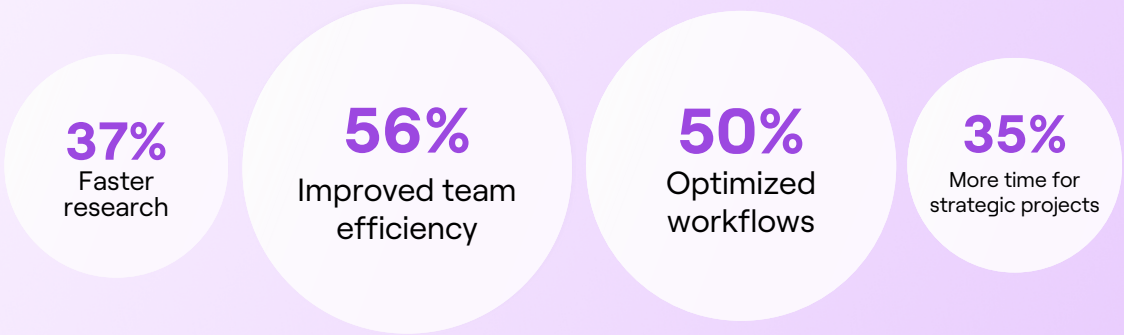
"AI will be able to support the entire research process, from data collection to analysis," says Jonathan Widawski, Co-founder & CEO at Maze. "With automation powering most of these tactical aspects, a company's ability to build products fast is no longer a differentiating factor. The key now lies in a company's ability to build the right product—and research is the power behind all this."

Think of AI as an assistant, not a replacement for a skilled researcher. AI can speed up your workflow by processing large amounts of raw data and identifying trends. But it can't replace the contextual knowledge and expertise that allow researchers to connect the dots and uncover meaningful insights and recommendations.



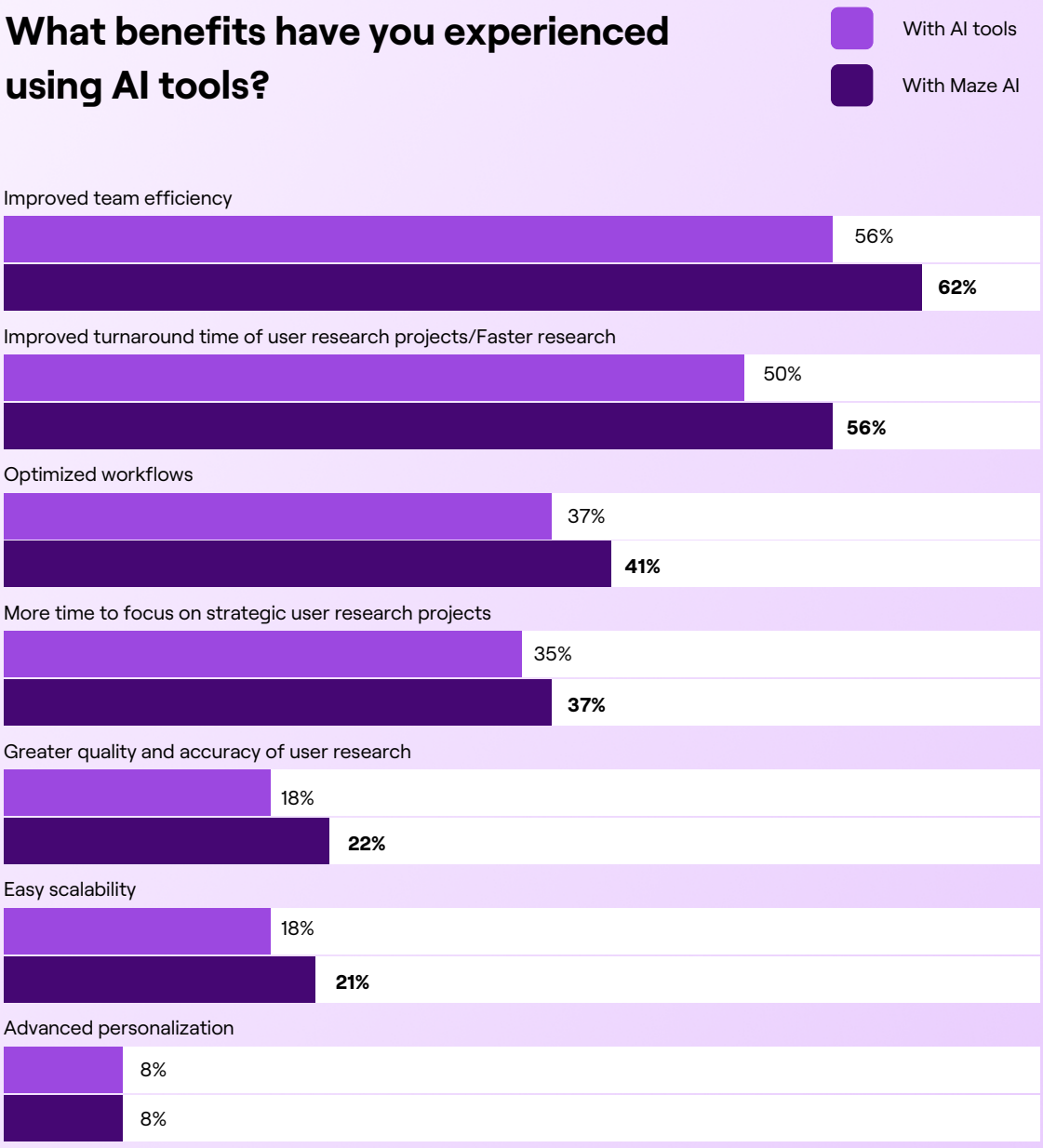
Kate Pazoles
Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

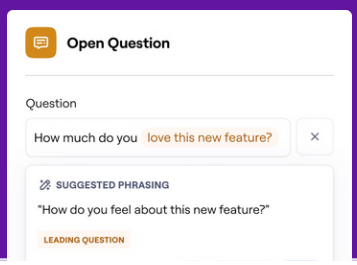
What benefits have you experienced using AI tools?



Product professionals that leverage Maze's AI tool features reported even greater success, with 62% improving team efficiency, 56% increasing research speed, 41% optimizing workflows, and 37% focusing on more strategic research.

What benefits have you experienced using AI tools?





Maze AI gives you the tools to harness the voice of the user at scale through product development.

Learn more

AI is poised to shift how fast and how often we get access to user insights, but it's not changing the indisputable value of research. User researchers offer an intimate understanding of users and their needs as well as the ability to analyze insights with a level of nuance and understanding that only they possess.

As AI becomes more central to our daily experiences, the winning organizations of tomorrow are the ones embracing the opportunities AI presents. Keep reading for best practices from industry leaders.

Focus on the work that requires strategic thinking

"We need to have a point of view as researchers if we want to show up in conversations where we can have an impact on the rest of the business. Without the full context, AI can't make the same connections and analysis as we can. If you're not sitting with your data and, instead, having AI write on your behalf, you aren't spending the time creating that point of view, with the risk of losing the thing that makes research really interesting."
Dalia El-Shimy, Director of UX Research at Wise

AI requires thoughtful execution

"Remember that garbage-in, garbage-out applies to AI tools too—you still need to be thoughtful about the questions you ask and the data you collect in support of your research objectives. And of course, work with your legal and privacy teams to be sure that any AI tools or features which will process data from your customers are compliant with your TOS."
Kate Pazoles, Head of Flex User Research at Twilio

Let AI do the heavy lifting

"I recommend viewing AI as an extension of your work that can enable you and your team to do more with your time. It's like having a third hand, which can help you get more done around the house."
Daniel Soranzo, Lead User Researcher at GoodRX

Looking ahead: Research as a strategic partner

The role of the user researcher is expanding into a strategic partner for the organization—someone who can help teams and leaders identify solutions and build products that take the organization to the next level. The adoption of both a democratized research culture and AI tools will help user researchers grow into the role of strategic partner by not only opening up time for research to focus on more complex projects, but also socializing the knowledge and value of research to all corners of the organization.

As AI begins to unlock opportunities to accelerate access to information, I see a fork in the road where organizations either become overly dependent on the now frictionless individual retrieval of stand-alone insights, or invest in a culture of shared knowledge that supports organizationally appropriate innovation.

The surfacing and socialization of knowledge is crucial to innovation. Researchers are best positioned to pluck out, transform, and turn siloed expertise into a shared knowledge that informs every decision.



Emma Craig
Head of UX Research at Miro

Due to Covid, there was a big boom for user researchers because everything shifted online and companies needed more user researchers to validate their decisions. It's great that teams and organizations are finding the value in what we do. But, I feel like we're still in an adolescent phase, seated at the kids table and we're working our way to the adult table. We're getting closer and I hope we'll soon be there, influencing strategic decisions for the organization.



Daniel Soranzo
Lead User Researcher at GoodRX

We're at a bit of an impasse, thinking about our role and impact should not be taken for granted. We hold knowledge and knowledge is power. And we can use our roles to continue connecting knowledge from across the organization, and connecting people to that knowledge.



Dalia El-Shimy
Director of UX Research at Wise

I'm really hopeful in how research can help influence businesses especially as we are going through these crazy times. It can be like a light that guides us through a dark cave. We have the opportunity to really meet the moment and use our craft and collaboration skills to influence what comes next.



Roberta Dombrowski
Research Partner at Maze

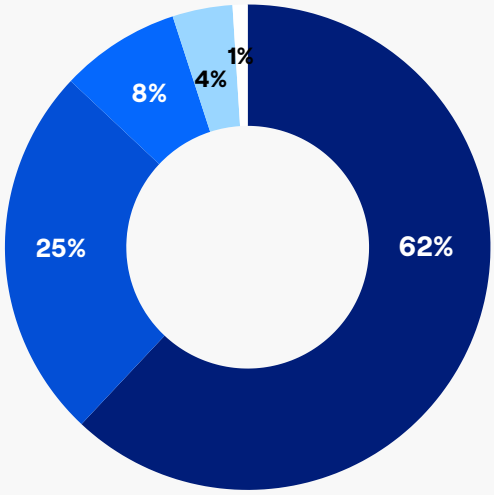
Methodology and audience insights

The report survey was created using Maze and distributed between December 20, 2023 and January 16, 2024. During that time, Maze collected 1,234 responses from a variety of research-focused roles: 43% UX/Product Researchers, 39% UX/UI/Product Designers, 9% Product Managers.

The respondents worked at a mixture of enterprise organizations (60%) and small-medium businesses (40%). Survey respondents were located in multiple regions around the world, including 40% in Europe, 32% in North America, 9% in Asia, and 8% in Latin America.

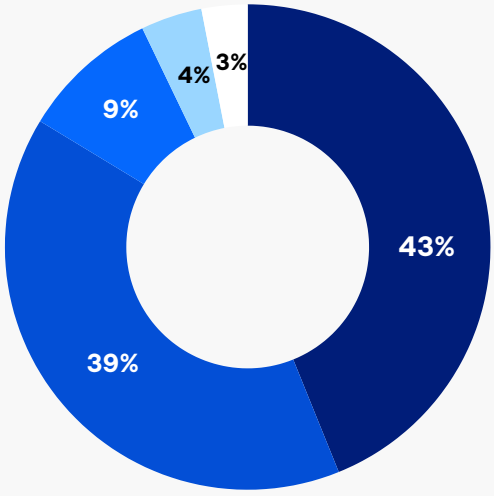
Which of the following most accurately describes your role?

- 62% - Individual contributor
- 25% - Team Leader or Manager
- 8% - Director/Head of/VP
- 4% - Other
- 1% - CEO/C-suite/Executive management

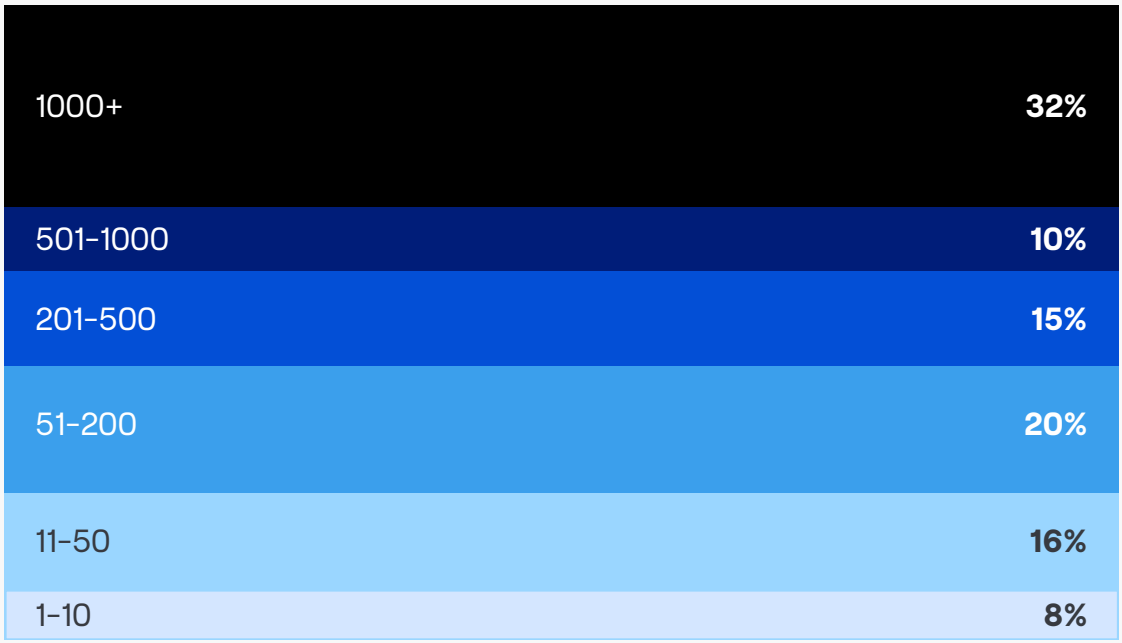


Which of the following titles describes you best?

- 43% - UX/Product Researcher
- 39% - UX/UI/Product Designer
- 9% - Product Manager
- 4% - Other
- 3% - Research Ops

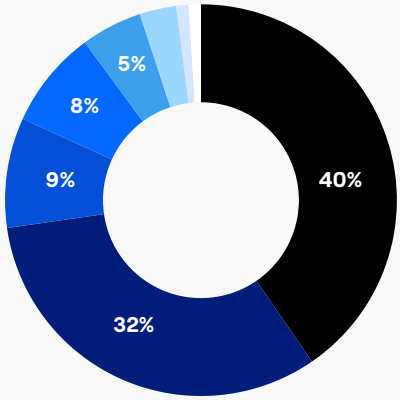


How many people work at your company?



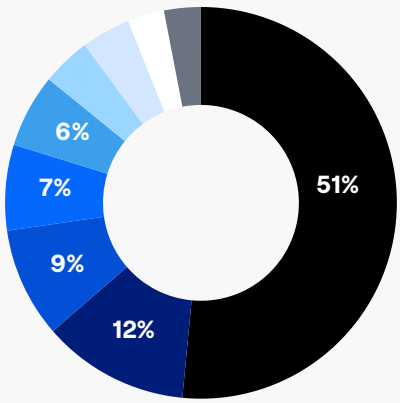
In which region is your company based?

- 40% - Europe
- 32% - North America
- 9% - Asia
- 8% - Latin America
- 5% - Entirely remote company
- 3% - Oceania
- 1% - Middle East
- 1% - Africa



In which industry does your organization operate?

- 51% - Tech and software
- 12% - Financial services, banking, and insurance
- 9% - Other
- 7% - Education, government, and non-profit
- 6% - Retail, e-commerce, or sales
- 4% - Healthcare
- 4% - Creative and media
- 3% - Business consultancy, management, and HR
- 3% - Manufacturing, construction, management, and real estate



About Maze

Maze is the user research platform that makes products work for people. Maze empowers any company to build the right products faster by making user insights available at the speed of product development. Built for ease of use, Maze allows designers, product managers, and researchers to collect and share user insights when needed most, putting them at the center of every decision.

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