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# digital advertising & ad tech industry talent review

# about the industry review

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## why?

First conducted in 2021, this annual research addresses the gap in available workforce data for Australia's digital advertising industry. Aggregated findings inform training, support and diversity programs across the sector.

## how?

IAB members were invited to provide quantitative and qualitative data relating to their Australian business in May 2026. All responses are confidential and presented in aggregate form, supported by unattributed quotes.

## who?

Data was gathered from 54 ad tech and media owner organisations

# executive summary

## state of the market

The market is divided. Growth & contraction are almost evenly matched with 42% of organisations growing, 37% contracting. Large global platforms are rationalising under cost pressure, restructuring and AI-driven efficiency programs.

The vacancy rate has fallen to 2.4%, the lowest on record. The roles that do exist overwhelmingly require 6+ years experience. Entry-level hiring has nearly stalled.

Salary increases are moderating. The median increase was 3.5% with Australian-HQ companies paying notably more than their global counterparts to attract and retain talent in a tight market.

AI has not yet driven significant local headcount reductions, but the direction of travel is clear. Ad operations, manual reporting and junior analytics roles are flagged for automation within 12–24 months.

## reasons for optimism

Australian-HQ companies and scale-ups grew headcount more than mature global business. The local ad tech ecosystem is demonstrating genuine resilience and confidence in the market.

AI is creating new opportunities. Companies are reporting faster client work, richer insights and more time for strategic thinking. Roles are evolving not simply disappearing.

Gender parity is improving across most functions. Marketing, commercial and research/analytics are at or near parity. Female representation improved in several traditionally male-dominated functions including Product and Tech & Engineering, while Research/Analytics reached parity. Commercial teams also remain balanced overall.

Demand for experienced talent is strong. Senior commercial leaders, technical account managers, developers and measurement specialists are all in shortage creating real leverage for skilled individuals.

## what you can do

**For individuals:** invest in AI fluency now it is no longer a differentiator, it is an entry requirement. Pair technical skills with strategic thinking, storytelling and commercial acumen. Seek lateral exposure across functions.

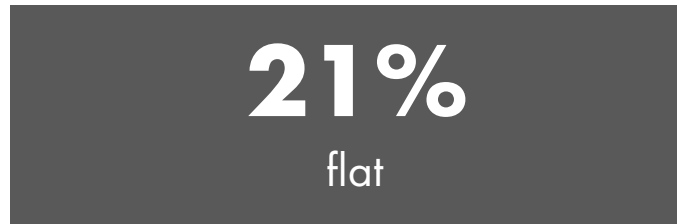
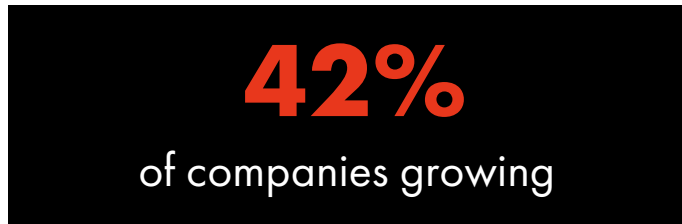
**For hiring managers:** widen the talent lens. The best candidates may come from adjacent industries. Invest in mid-level leadership development this is the biggest capability gap in the market.

**For organisations:** build graduate and internship pipelines before they become critical the entry-level shortage will compound. Formalise AI governance and upskilling before external pressure forces it.

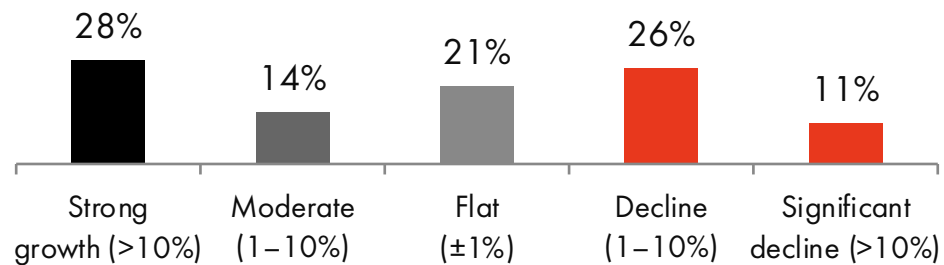
**For the industry:** advocate for more AU-based training pathways. Vertical industry knowledge, measurement capability and AI-for-advertising courses are the most requested additions to IAB Australia's programs.

# headcount nearly flat but change varies widely

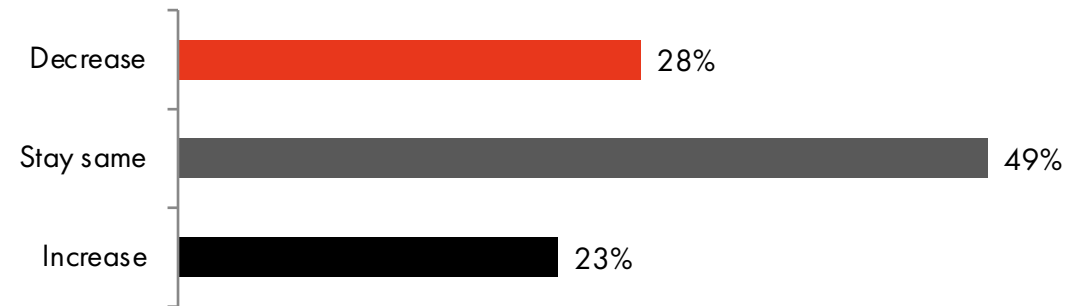
The 2026 data reflects a market in transition. Growth and contraction are almost evenly matched, 42% of organisations are growing, 21% are flat, and 37% are contracting. Locally-headquartered tech companies, emerging ad tech firms, and global players still establishing their Australian presence are broadly in growth mode. Contraction is concentrated among large, established global platforms where AI efficiency programmes and global restructuring are driving leaner local teams.



what happened: headcount outcome distribution



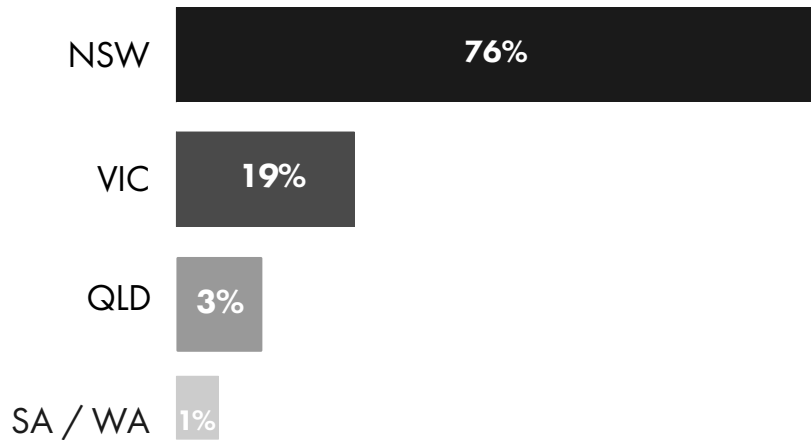
what's planned: hiring intent next 6 months



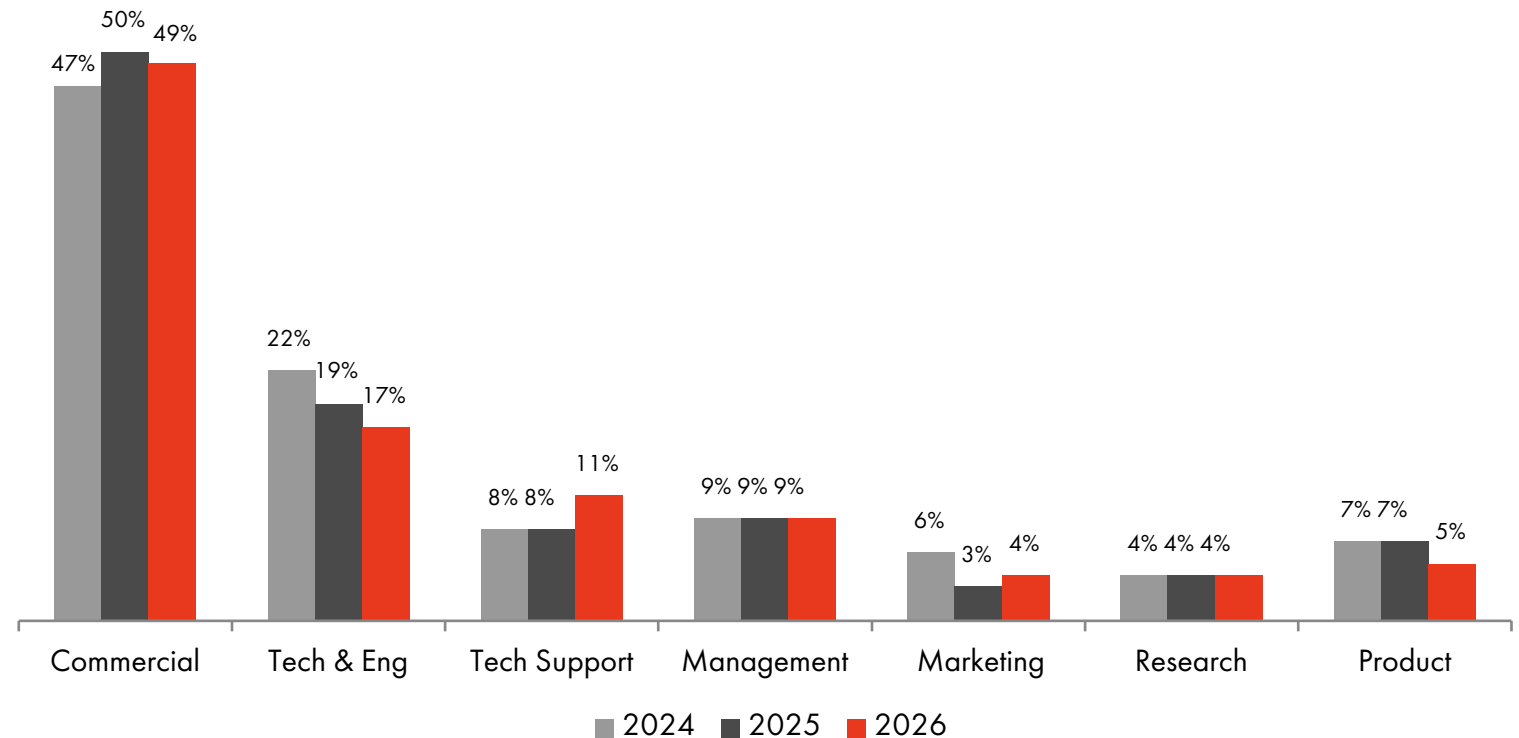
# commercial roles dominate and NSW holds 3/4 of all jobs

50% of the workforce is in sales and client service. 76% are based in NSW. Both have been consistent since 2021, reflecting the Sydney-centric nature of digital advertising's commercial infrastructure.

workforce by state



role distribution % 2024 → 2025 → 2026



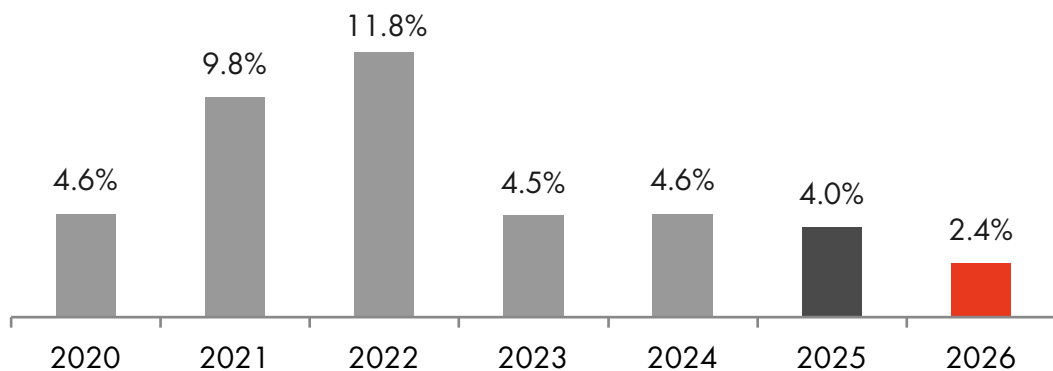
# low vacancy rate and limited entry level options

The vacancy rate fell to 2.4% in 2026 the lowest since tracking began, down from a COVID peak of 11.8%. Only 40% of companies have any open roles. Where vacancies exist, the experience bar has risen sharply: 49% of roles now require 6+ years, while standard entry-level roles have near-disappeared at 1%.

There are still a few leading media and ad tech organisations that offer internships primarily for engineering and technology graduates annually. These programs are standout models for investing and developing talent for their own organisations as well as the industry at large.

The average salary increase over the last year was 3.5% with 3% being the most common increase.

vacancy rate 2020–2026



**2.4%**

vacancy rate  
2026

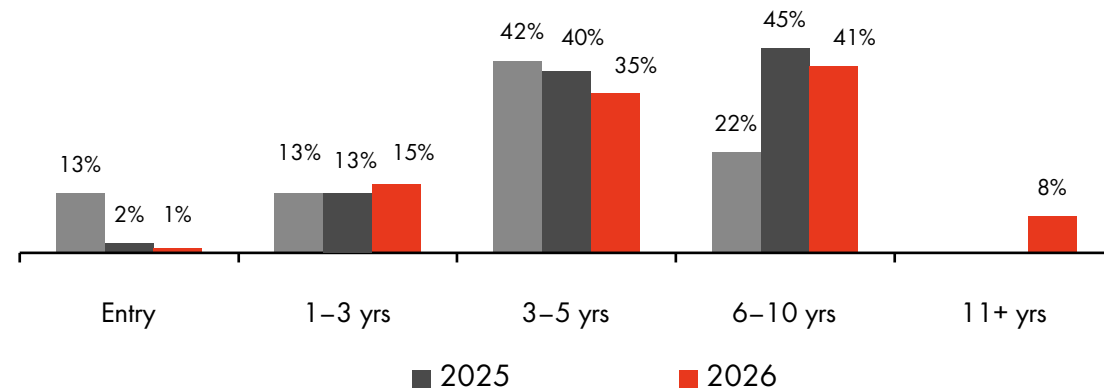
**40%**

companies with any  
open roles

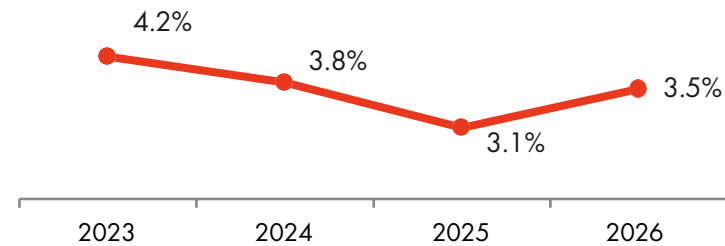
**1%**

of vacancies are  
entry-level

experience required % - trend



industry salary increase trend



# offshoring up & most AU ad tech teams carry regional responsibility

1 in 4 companies increased offshoring in the past 12 months, although this increase is down on last year it build from a high base. At the same time, ~47% of the workforce also covers NZ and ~31% covers APAC. Large tech platforms have more workers on work visas than the rest of the industry.

**25%**

increased  
offshoring

**~5%**

on work  
visas

**15%**

increased  
contractors

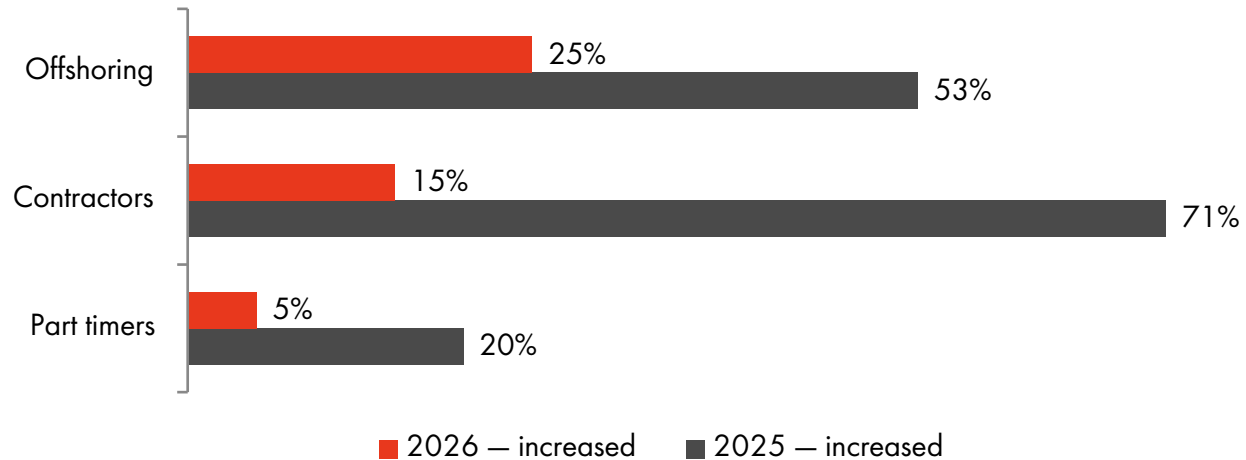
**~47%**

also cover  
New Zealand

**~31%**

also cover  
APAC

## workforce changes 2025 vs 2026 (% of companies reporting increase)



## the regional reality

Most ad tech AU-based digital advertising roles carry responsibility beyond Australia ~85% of companies have some NZ coverage, and ~70% cover wider APAC.

For smaller organisations, the Australian team IS the NZ and APAC team. Global companies tend to have more defined regional structures, with a smaller proportion of AU staff carrying cross-border responsibility.

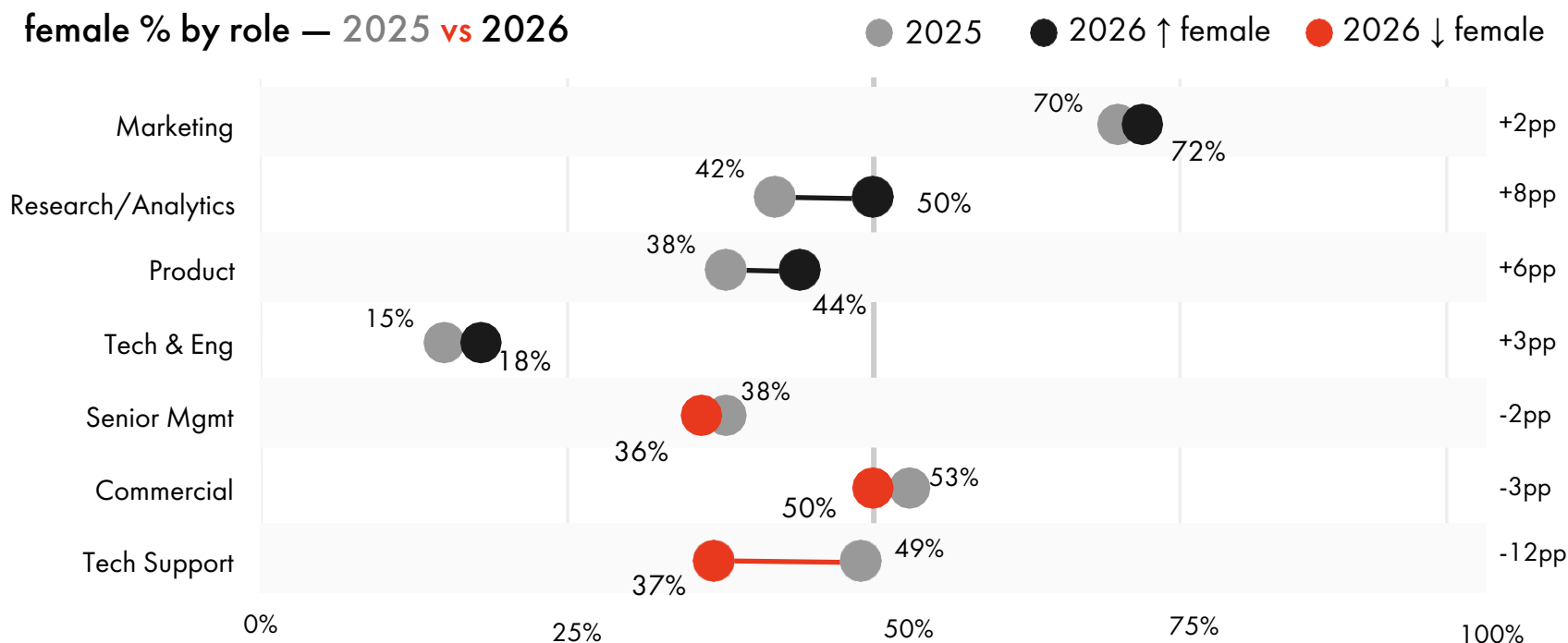
This regional remit adds complexity to workloads and should be considered when benchmarking team size.

# gender: 46% female overall but wide variation by role

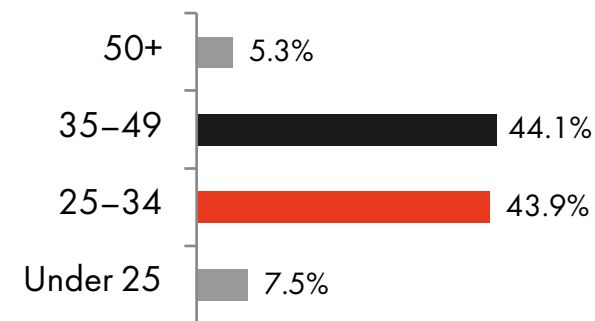
Across all roles, the workforce is 54% male and 46% female- closer to parity than many industries. But this conceals wide variation: 70%+ female in marketing vs 85% male in tech & engineering.

**46%** female  
**54%** male

female % by role — 2025 vs 2026



workforce age profile 2026

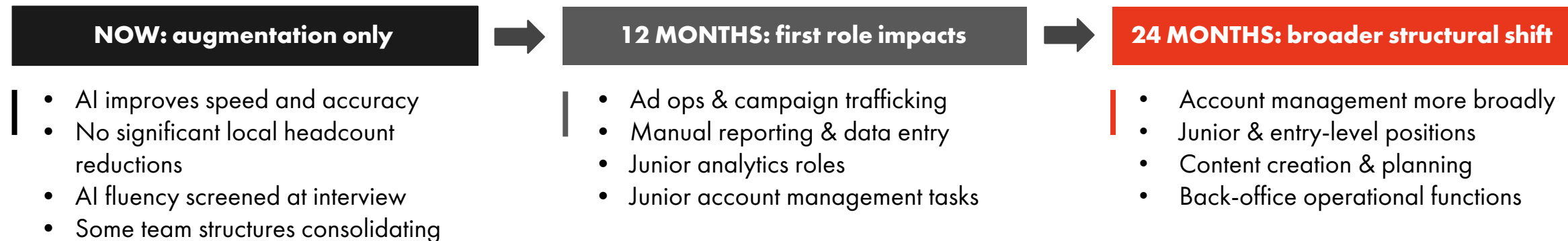


**~88%** aged 25-49  
**<13%** under 25 or over 50

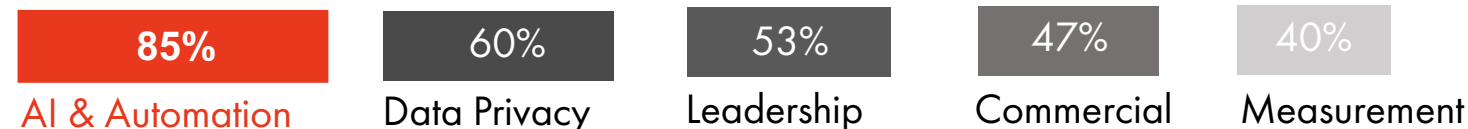
Digital advertising skews young. The thin 50+ cohort (5.3%) suggests limited mid-to-late career retention. Under-25s at 7.5% reflects the shrinking entry-level pipeline.

# AI: augmenting now, reducing roles in 12–24 months

Overall, no significant AI-driven local headcount cuts have occurred yet. AI is described consistently as an augmentation tool. But the direction of travel is clear, and the timeline is compressing: repetitive, process-driven and junior roles are under pressure.



## top upskilling priorities for 2026



# workforce capability: building & gaps

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Five themes emerge consistently **from the qualitative research**

## AI fluency is now a baseline

Every company with a training agenda lists AI upskilling as their primary investment. Some organisations have moved beyond training to mandate: AI usage is tracked, celebrated & screened at interview. Companies providing enterprise access with team-based hubs & peer learning see faster adoption.

*"We run usage stats on Claude and celebrates those harnessing it beyond chat to co-work and code. Those who do not embrace it will no longer have a career path."*

## AI as accelerant not just automator

Organisations with the most developed AI strategies, a clear pattern emerges: AI is a multi-dimensional capability embedded in the product, connected to external workflows & deployed to free up people for higher-value work. Organisations taking this approach reject the idea of a trade-off between AI adoption and headcount. Data-rich environments like programmatic are viewed as particularly well-positioned to realise this potential

*"Programmatic is positioned to benefit from AI like few other industries given the immense data we have to train from. AI will be an accelerant of client performance & human capacity at the same time."*

## Strategic and commercial thinking: the growing gap

The most consistently cited capability gap is not technical it is strategic. Junior & mid-level staff who are technically capable often struggle to think commercially, tell stories with data or engage senior clients consultatively. As AI handles more execution, the premium on interpretation, relationship management & strategic communication is rising. Storytelling, critical thinking & commercial acumen now sit alongside AI literacy as the most important skills.

*"Our industry has never moved faster. M&A, regulation, technology and economics are reshaping everything. Adaptability, entrepreneurial problem solving, storytelling and the ability to navigate uncertainty are becoming the foundational skills that allow people to invent and reinvent themselves fast enough to stay effective."*

## Mid-level leadership: most persistent structural gap

Leadership at mid-level is the most underdeveloped area of the workforce. Limited progression pathways cause ambitious staff to leave rather than grow into management. When people do move into leadership, they often lack the foundations; change management, performance coaching, people development. The industry's lean structures mean fewer opportunities to learn by doing. Only a small number of organisations have formal management coaching programs in place.

*"Our team's strength is deep operational experience, but limited exposure outside one organisation means leadership capability is underdeveloped. The gap becomes most visible when people transition into management."*

## Entry-level pipeline: a slow-building crisis

The entry-level workforce is shrinking from both ends. Automation is eliminating the tasks junior hires traditionally learned on; report pulling, campaign trafficking, ad tag management. Economic pressure is driving organisations to replace local junior hires with offshore resource. If junior roles disappear, the pipeline for future senior talent narrows permanently. Only a handful of organisations have active AU internship or graduate programs.

*"Automation has reduced the need for manual handling and processing ; data entry, reporting, insight creation — which improves speed and efficiency. It hasn't led to any reduction in headcount, but it has led to a re-allocation of human capital to higher impact activities. The question is whether entry-level roles evolve fast enough to remain viable."*

# the market wants senior, multi-skilled, AI-fluent talent

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Entry-level hiring has nearly stalled down from 13% of vacancies in 2024 to just 1% in 2026. The market is splitting: growing companies want proven senior talent; contracting companies are eliminating the roles AI can substitute.

## Roles in highest demand

Senior commercial leaders · Technical Account Managers · Developers & Engineers · Commerce & Retail Media Managers · Measurement specialists and AI governance roles.

Hardest to fill: the true T-shaped player - technical enough to understand the product, commercial enough to own the room. Trading skills are an emerging shortage as agencies offshore activation. Female engineering talent is specifically flagged as scarce. Senior Melbourne roles remain difficult with most specialist talent in Sydney.

## Skills rising most sharply in importance

AI literacy tops the list but what respondents mean by AI literacy is specific: AI query expertise, knowing how to prompt, evaluate output and integrate results into commercial thinking.

Alongside this: storytelling (the most common word across all responses), commercial acumen, solutions-based selling, omnichannel planning, CTV, and autonomy. One respondent: 'Move away from tactical execution style roles into solutions-oriented skills. Longer sales cycles mean tactical sellers are less desired.'

## What the industry is asking IAB Australia to support

- AI training at every level, from entry-level adoption to senior governance
- Deeper vertical industry knowledge (Retail, Finance, Auto cited)
- Product training in ad tech fundamentals
- Leadership and management development
- Data privacy and regulation
- Measurement capability.

# how IAB Australia supports talent development

The industry data is clear: capability building, career pathways and access to current knowledge are the most consistent requests from the market. IAB Australia offers a broad and growing ecosystem of programs designed to address these needs — from entry-level learning through to executive leadership.

## e-Learning Programs

Self-paced courses across digital advertising, ad effectiveness, retail media, digital audio, DOOH, ad fraud and measurement.

## AI Hub

Dedicated resource for AI in advertising, frameworks, case studies, governance guides and upskilling pathways as the industry navigates AI adoption.

## Mentorship Program

Structured one-to-one mentoring connecting emerging talent with experienced industry leaders. Focused on career navigation, leadership and capability growth.

## Events & Summits

17 industry-leading summits covering the most pressing issues in digital advertising.

## Podcast

Regular conversations with industry leaders on trends, challenges and opportunities shaping Australian digital advertising. Available on all major platforms.

## Video Content

Hundreds of on-demand videos on a wide range of topics from IAB Australia's events.

## Handbooks & Guides

Practical reference materials covering programmatic standards, video, audio, retail media, affiliate marketing, programmatic DOOH, measurement, data, privacy compliance and industry regulation.

## Research & Reports

Annual talent review, revenue reports, consumer research, category insights, nickable slides: the evidence base that informs industry strategy, investment and advocacy.

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