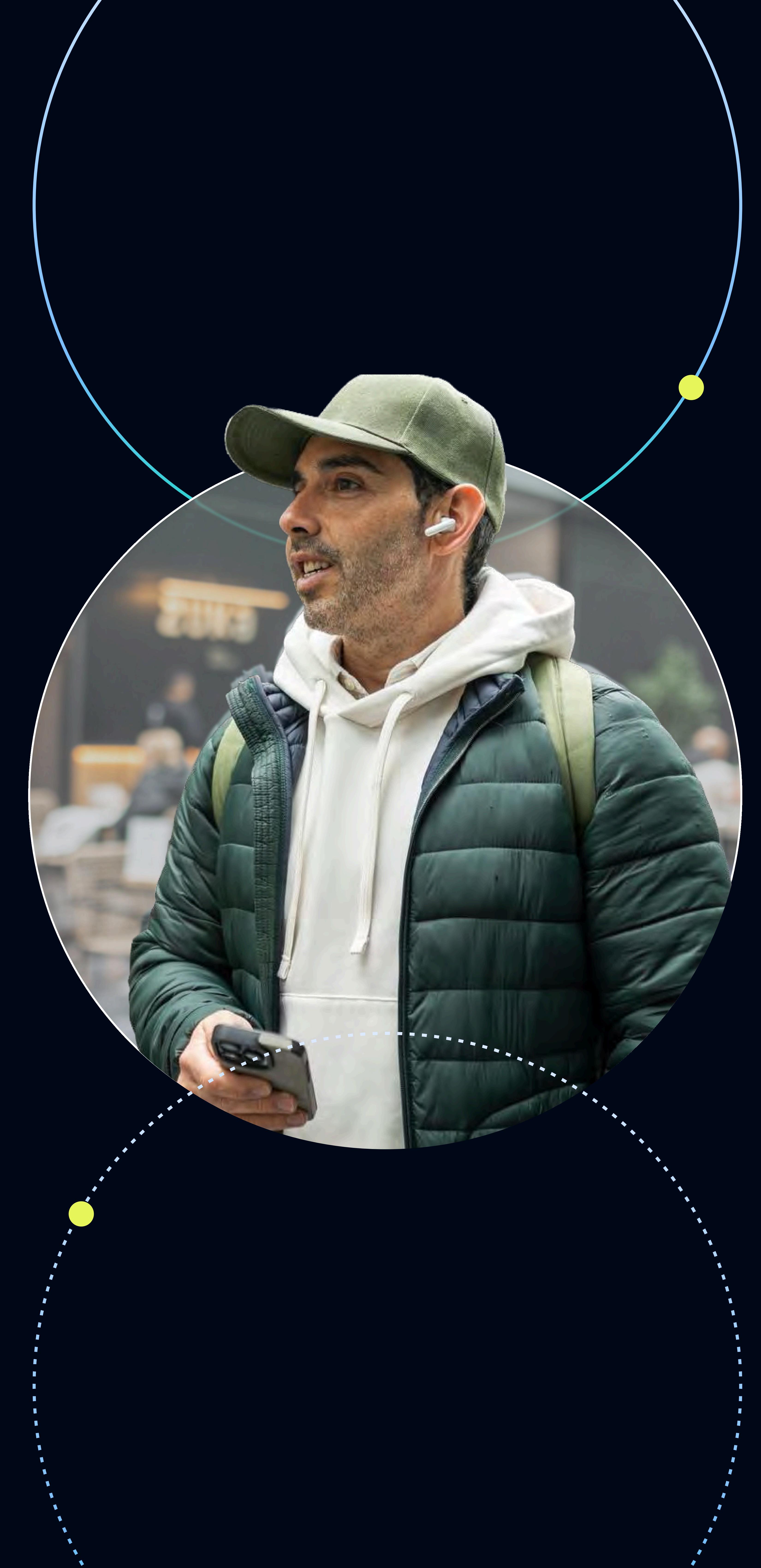


Airship's 2026 Martech Predictions

Closing the experience gap and
building loyalty that lasts





EXECUTIVES' IMPERATIVE

Profitability through retention, loyalty and lifetime value

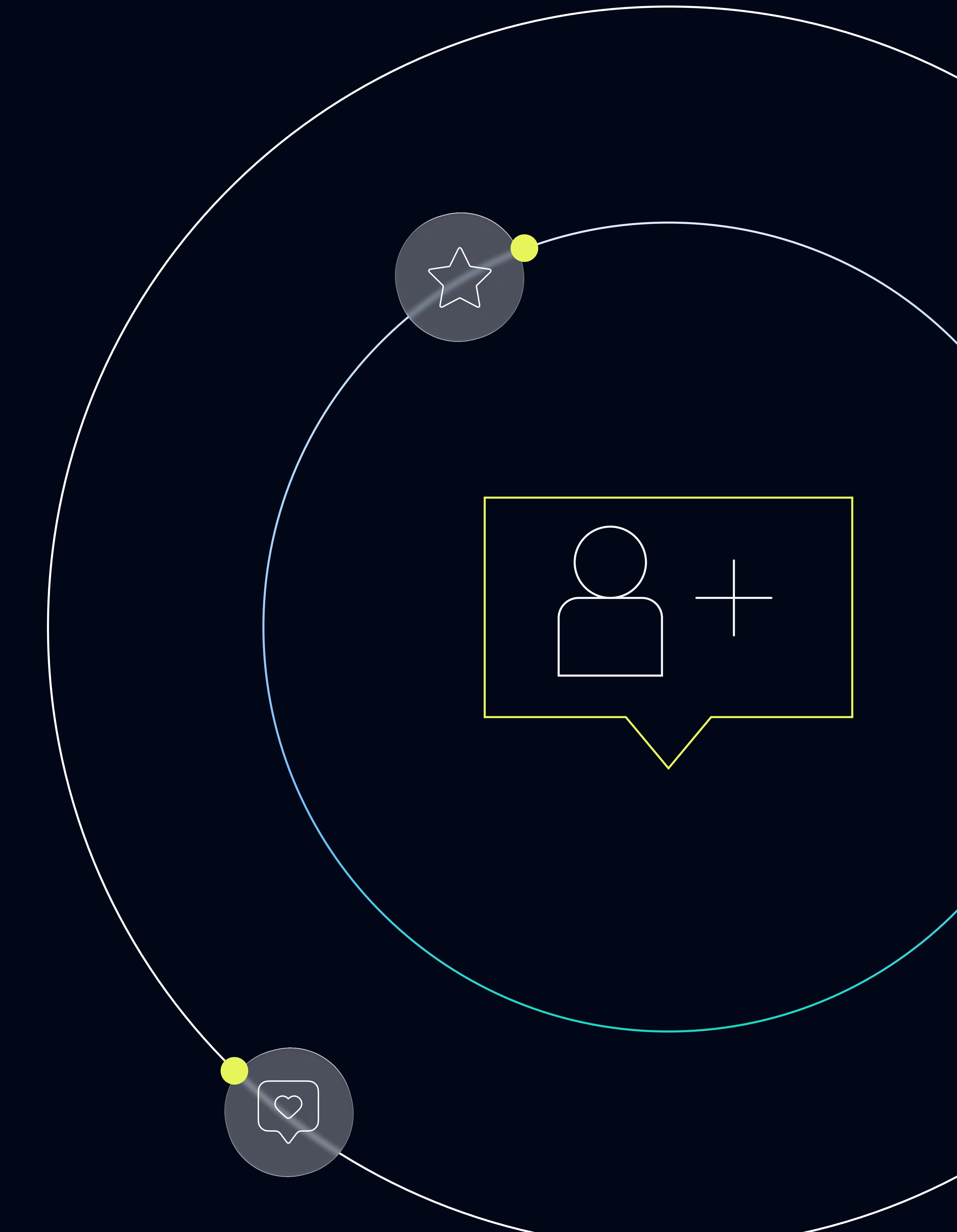
In a high-interest, high-volatility economy, the growth-at-any-cost era is over. For retailers and B2C brands, the new mandate is **profitable growth** — driven not by more acquisition, but by smarter **retention, loyalty, and customer lifetime value (CLV)**.

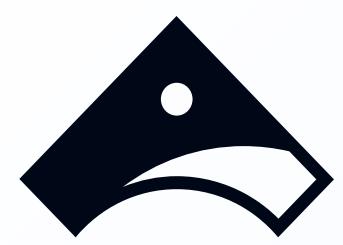
Persistent cost pressures and shifting consumer expectations make this pivot unavoidable. When one-third of customers of purely transactional brands are willing to switch over price, loyalty transforms from a marketing tactic into a **strategic moat**.

The winners will create **“total experiences”** that merge brand and customer experience (CX) — pairing functional value (points, perks, rewards) with emotional value (recognition, relevance, connection).

At the same time, margin-conscious retailers are rethinking customer policies. Advanced machine learning models will soon determine which customers merit flexible returns, early access, or white-glove treatment — shifting from blanket generosity to **data-driven retention strategies** that prioritize high-value, high-margin customers.

These dynamics will fuel demand for martech that can unify experience delivery, personalize at scale and quantify loyalty's financial impact.





The Threat: the experience gap becomes an existential risk

In 2026, customer indifference poses an even greater competitive threat than other brands.

The “Experience Gap” describes the widening divide between what customers expect — frictionless, contextually relevant, and human-feeling interactions — and what brands actually deliver. In too many organizations, marketing and product teams still work in isolation, running parallel systems that create disjointed journeys.

Customers, however, experience none of these boundaries. They move fluidly between messages, screens and channels, and expect the brand to “remember” who they are and what they need. When that continuity breaks, so does trust.

In this environment, mobile has become the gravitational center of experience. It’s where customers take action, convert and form impressions that last. To close the Experience Gap, brands must design for that center by using mobile-first orchestration to unify all other touchpoints — both online and offline — into a cohesive, continuous experience.

IN SHORT:

the brands that can't create these experiences will fade into the background. Those that do will define the new standard for modern loyalty.

4 : 05

A

Your loyalty rewards

Gus, Did you know, as a member of our rewards program you get early check-in?

✉ You're arriving today, Gus!

1:15pm

As an Aurelia Rewards member, you're welcome to arrive early and enjoy our lounge while we finalize your room.



The Onus: owned properties become guided-selling destinations

AI is redefining owned digital properties.

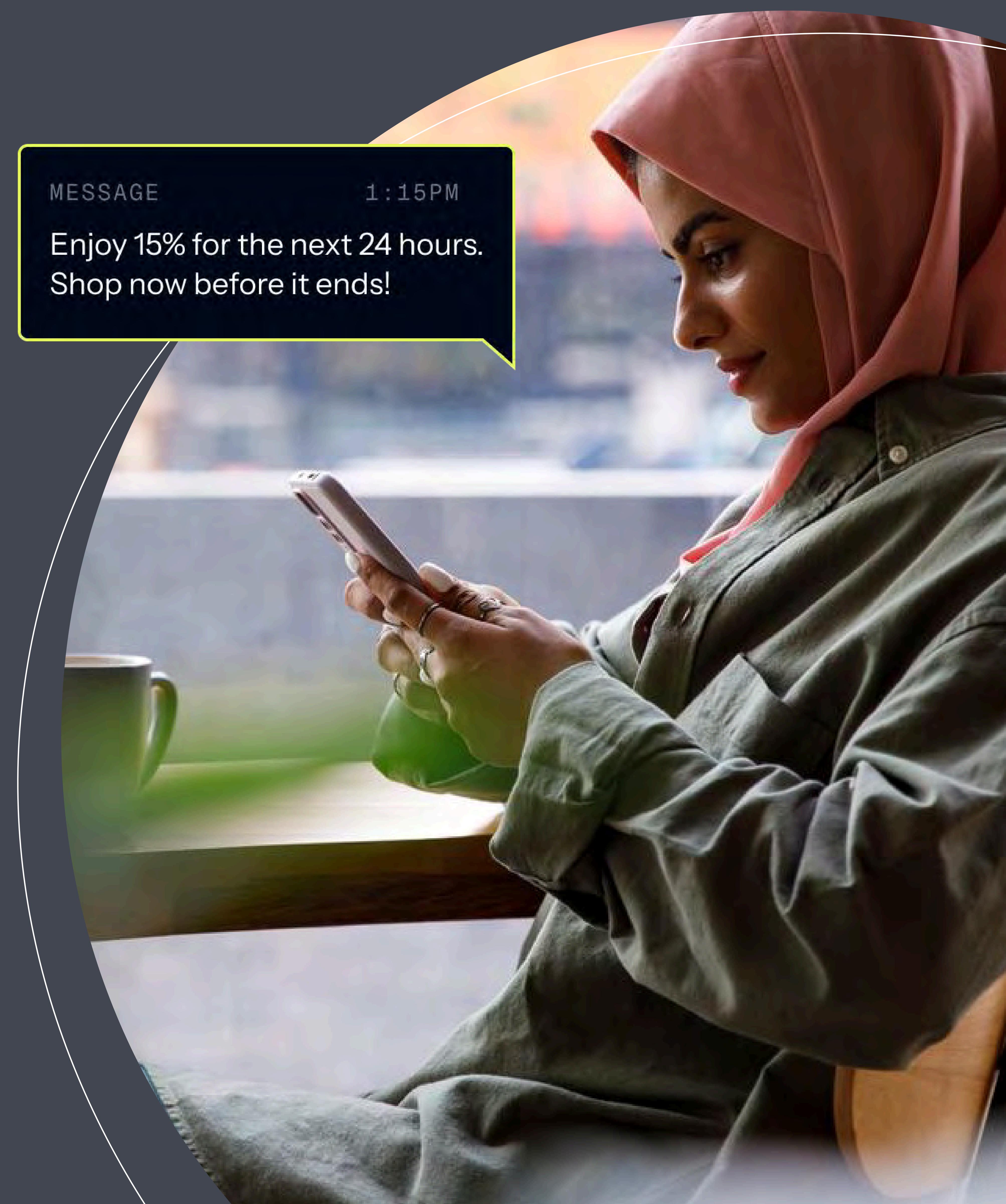
As generative and agentic technologies mature, the most successful brands will transform their apps and websites from static interfaces into dynamic individualized environments. These won't be places where customers simply browse and transact; they'll be spaces that anticipate, assist and adapt.

Think of it as concierge commerce:

- Immersive visuals replace linear navigation.
- Contextual guidance replaces guesswork.
- Data exchange becomes reciprocal — customers share preferences because the value is clear.

In this new landscape, every tap, scroll and swipe offers insight into intent. Intelligent orchestration will translate that intent into action, using design, data and dialogue to turn curiosity into conversion and conversion into connection.

For brands, this means moving beyond content management toward experience orchestration. The companies that can harmonize content, context and customer understanding will make every owned channel a growth engine, and every interaction a moment of loyalty earned.





“

Major players like Facebook — including Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube — have failed to enable transactions successfully for major brands and retailers on their sites, in spite of being strong shopper discovery engines. ...

Retailers are better off focusing on influencer-led content that surfaces during search on social platforms,

rather than encouraging transactions on the platform. They are best served by **owning their shoppers** and **not relying on a third party** for the shopping cart.

FORRESTER®

“Predictions 2026: RETAIL,”

Forrester Research, Inc., October 21, 2025



The Solution: no-code unifies marketing and product

For years, a wall has divided marketing and product. One side builds awareness; the other builds experiences. In 2026, that wall finally comes down.

The rise of no-code native experience editors marks a structural shift in how brands operate. Non-technical teams will design, deploy and iterate experiences directly, without relying on developer bandwidth or release cycles.

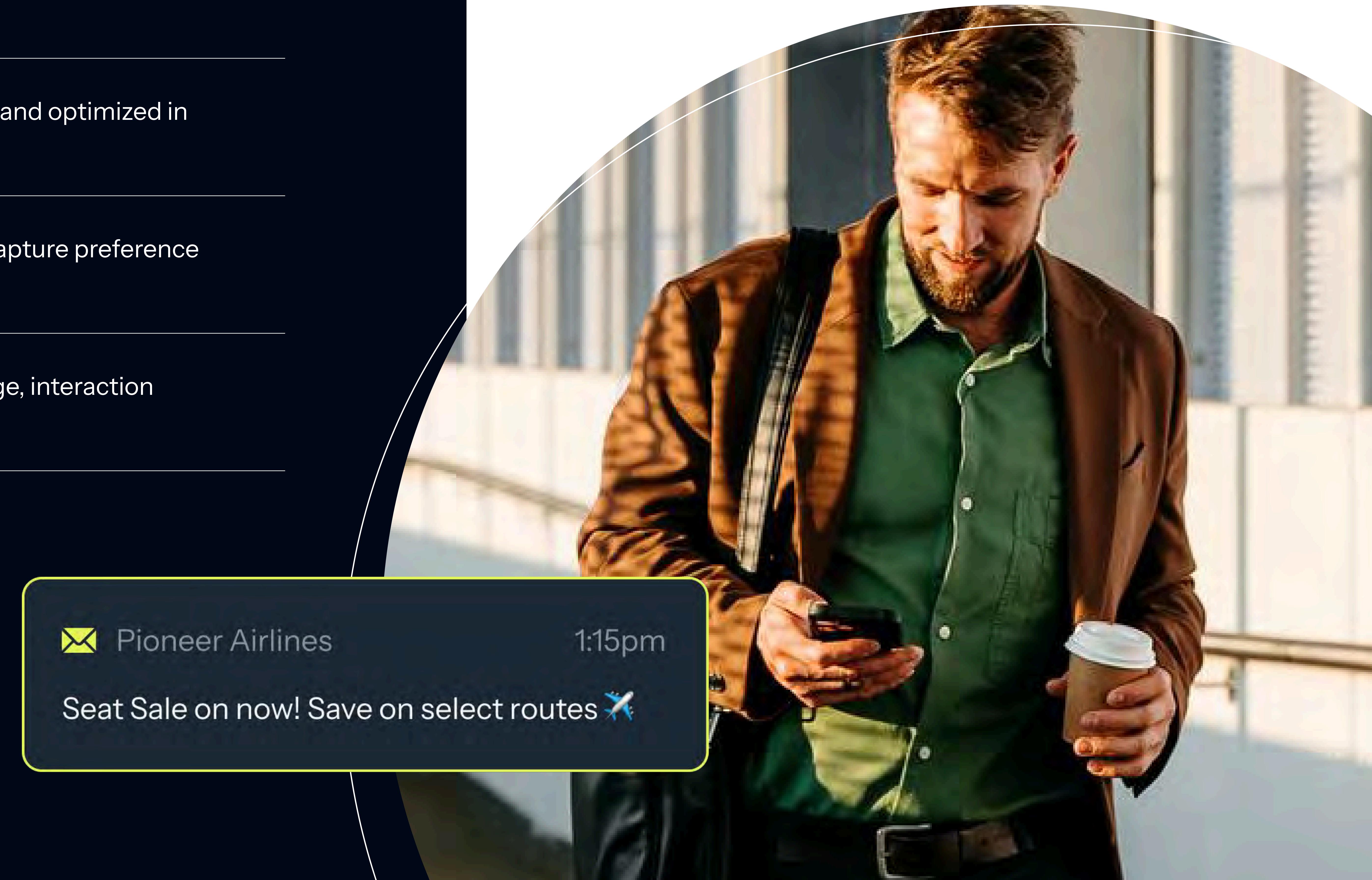
This democratization of creation brings together speed and alignment. Now, the people closest to customers can build directly for them.

Expect to see:

- Rich, multi-screen app and web experiences built and optimized in hours, not months.
- Interactive surveys and embedded content that capture preference data in the moment.
- Real-time orchestration connecting every message, interaction and conversion.

The impact is profound. Instead of fragmented workflows between departments, no-code systems create shared ownership of the customer journey. Experience becomes the new language of collaboration, turning brand vision into action at the pace of modern expectations.

In this model, marketing and product aren't separate functions, they're co-authors of growth.





“

By 2030, 50% of employees in large enterprises will be **aligned to customer journey phases**, working in multidisciplinary teams, rather than functional departments. ...

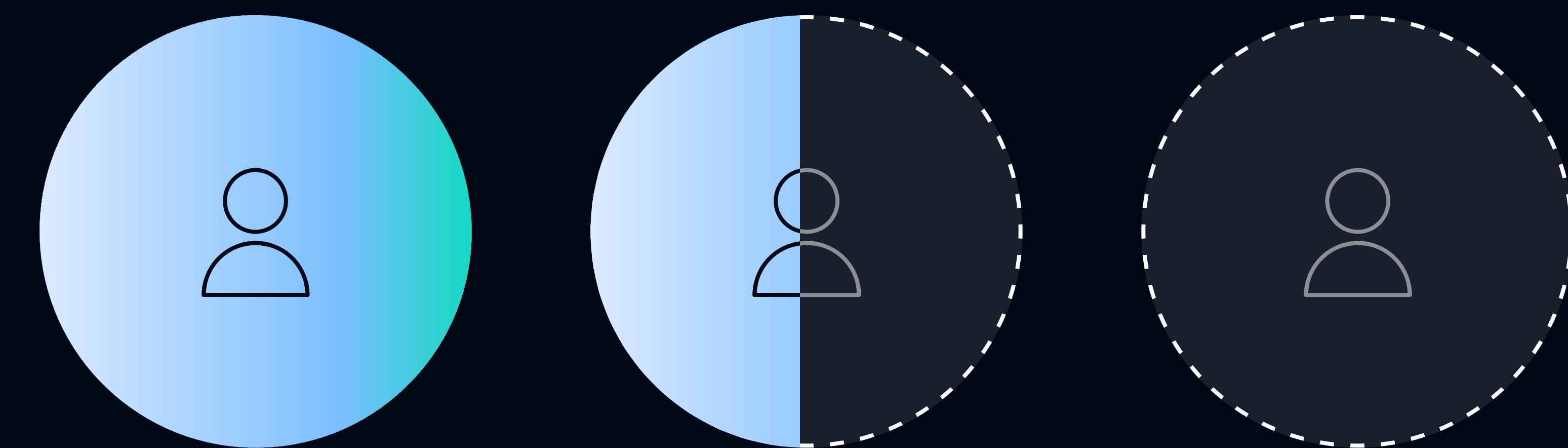
Executive leaders who co-own digital strategy and execution with their chief information officers (CIOs) achieve a 71% success rate for their digital initiatives

versus an average success rate of 48%. ...Leading product organizations are increasingly allocating funds directly to customer journeys and business value streams.

Gartner

Gartner, “Predicts 2026: Reduce Structural Rigidity to Prepare Enterprise Operations for AI,”

by Janelle Hill, Maddie Otter, Miles Gibson, 23 October 2025



50% of employees

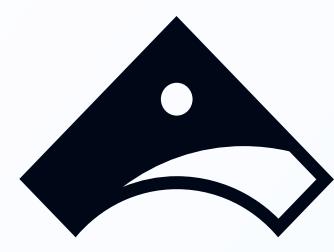
in large enterprises will be aligned to customer journey phases working in multidisciplinary teams by 2030



71% of digital initiatives succeed

when executive leaders co-own strategy and execution with their CIOs.





The Fuel: experiential loyalty replaces points

Loyalty programs built on discounts are relics of the transactional era. The next generation of loyalty is experiential, fueled by recognition, relevance and reciprocity.

Consumers now value being understood more than saving costs. That means loyalty will increasingly come from emotional connection, not economic incentive.

→ **Data with permission**

Customers share preferences through interactive, zero-party exchanges (polls, profiles, preference centers and contextual moments).

→ **Personalization in real time**

Data immediately shapes the next experience across app and web.

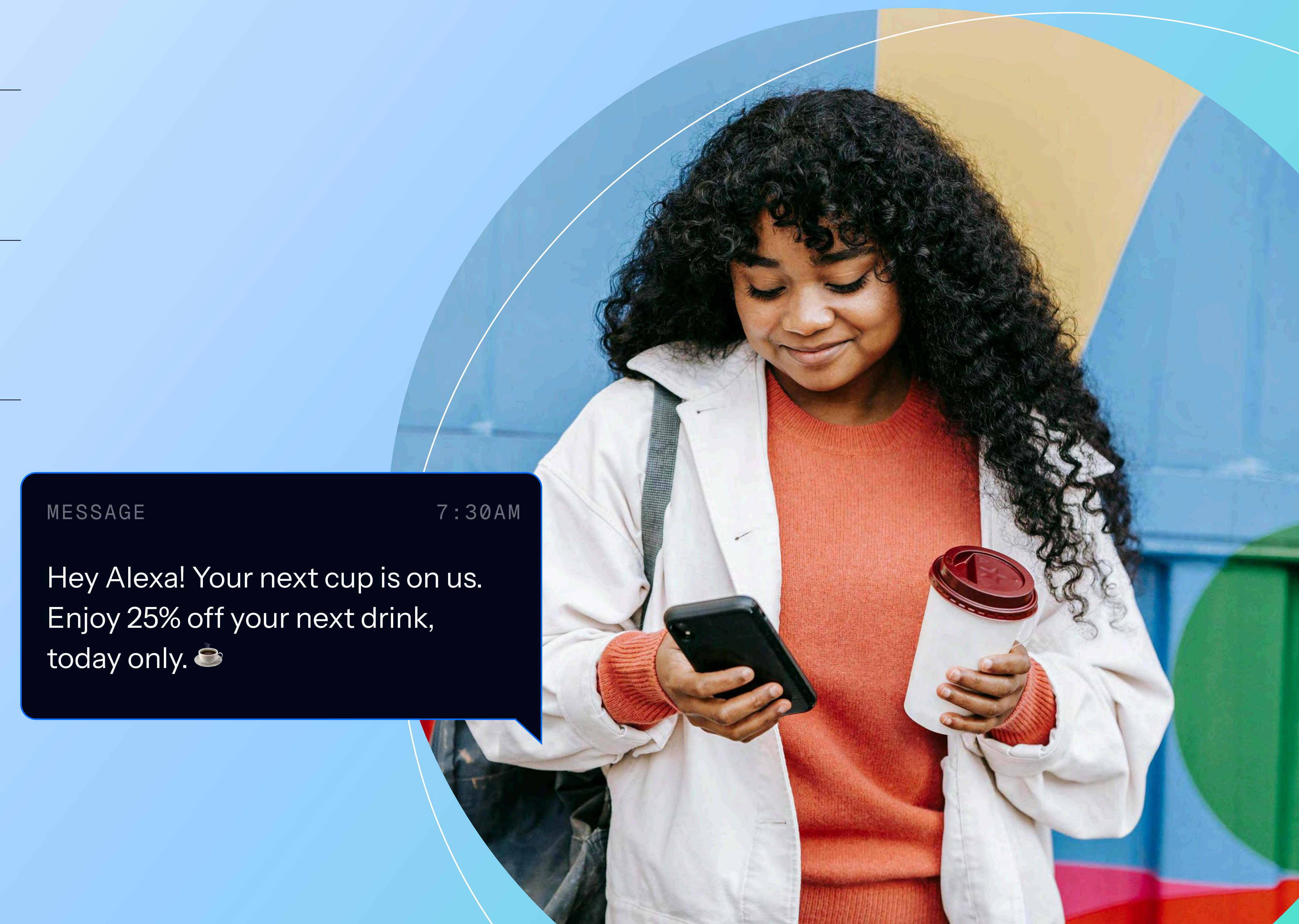
→ **Reinforcement through relevance**

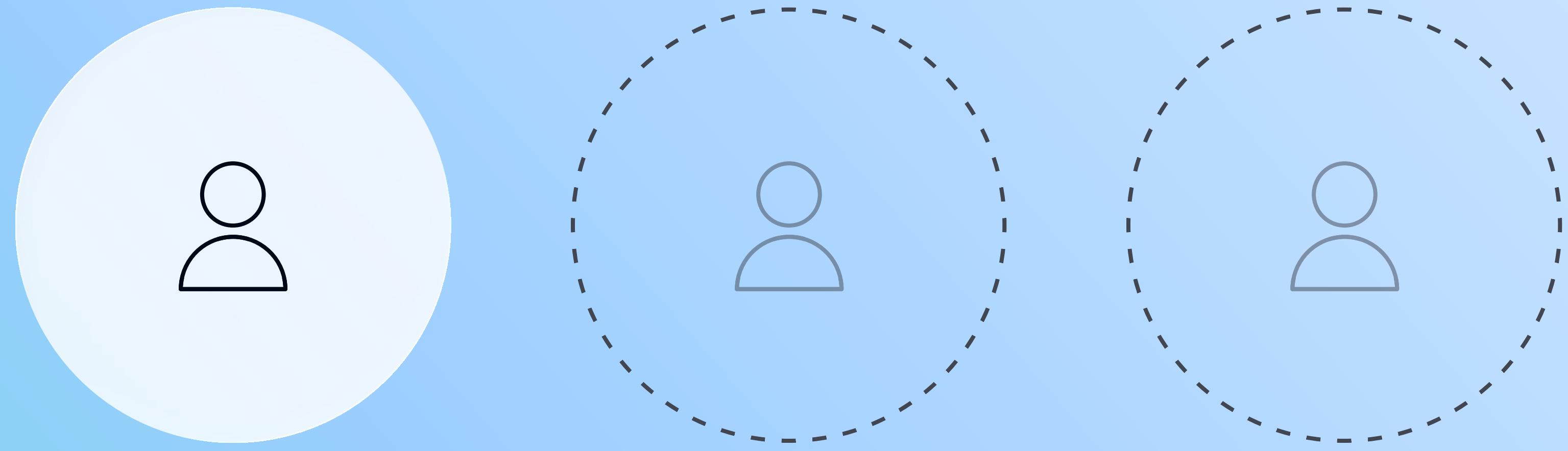
Each interaction reminds customers they're seen, known and valued.

The brands that operationalize this loop will not only retain customers but increase their lifetime value through genuine connection.

Machine learning will further refine this by identifying which customers merit flexibility, such as priority service, early access or premium care, based on their profitability and behavior. Loyalty will be both felt and quantified.

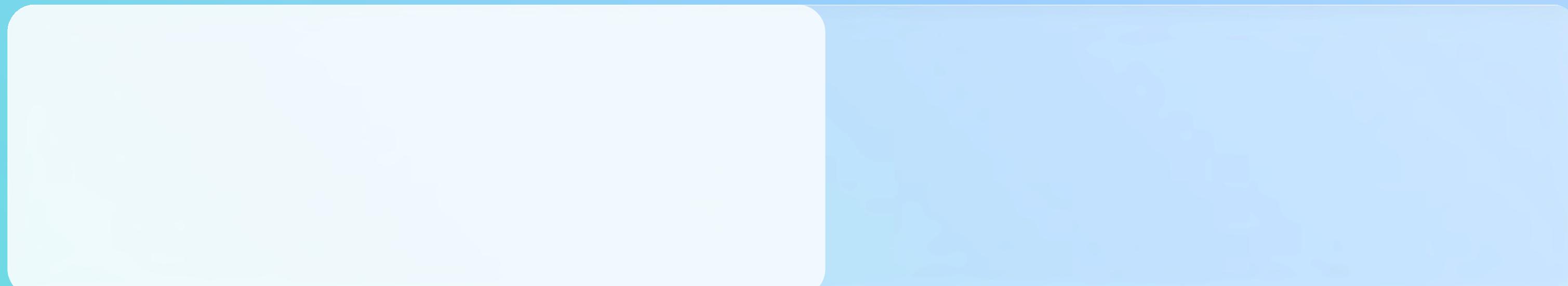
In a margin-conscious economy, this is where empathy meets efficiency.





1/3 of consumers

of consumers will opt for offline brand experiences



52% of online adults

in the US actively pursue in-person experiences

“

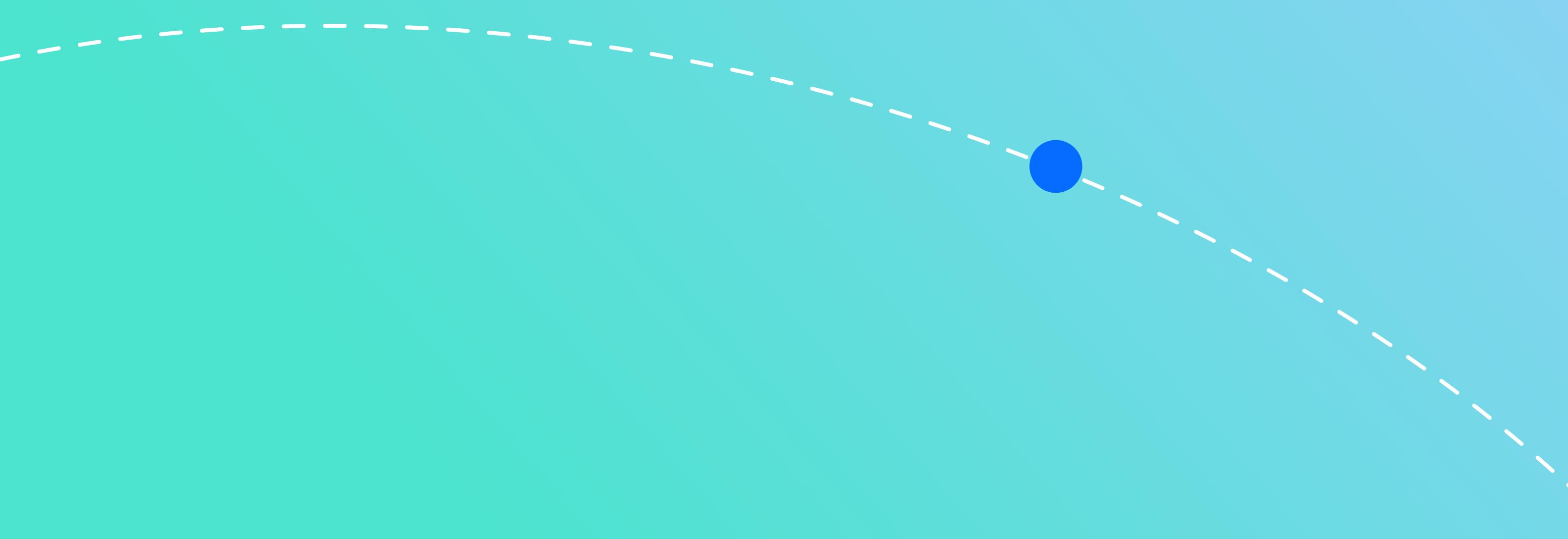
A third of consumers will opt for **offline (over online) brand experiences**. Forrester's 2025 data shows that 52% of US online adults actively pursue in-person, tactile experiences — making up for lost time (even five years later) after secluded pandemic lockdowns. ...

No, digital experiences aren't going away, but consumers will choose to disconnect online to connect offline.

In 2026, marketers should reconcile their budgets to bolster offline consumer interactions— as in-person experiences present **stickier impressions** that you can't easily scroll past or swipe away.

FORRESTER®

“**Predictions 2026: Consumers,**
Forrester Research, Inc., October 21, 2025





The Scale: AI agents automate optimization

Personalization at scale has long been a paradox: desired, but operationally impossible. In 2026, that changes.

AI agents, each specialized for a single task, will automate the testing, optimization and refinement of customer journeys.

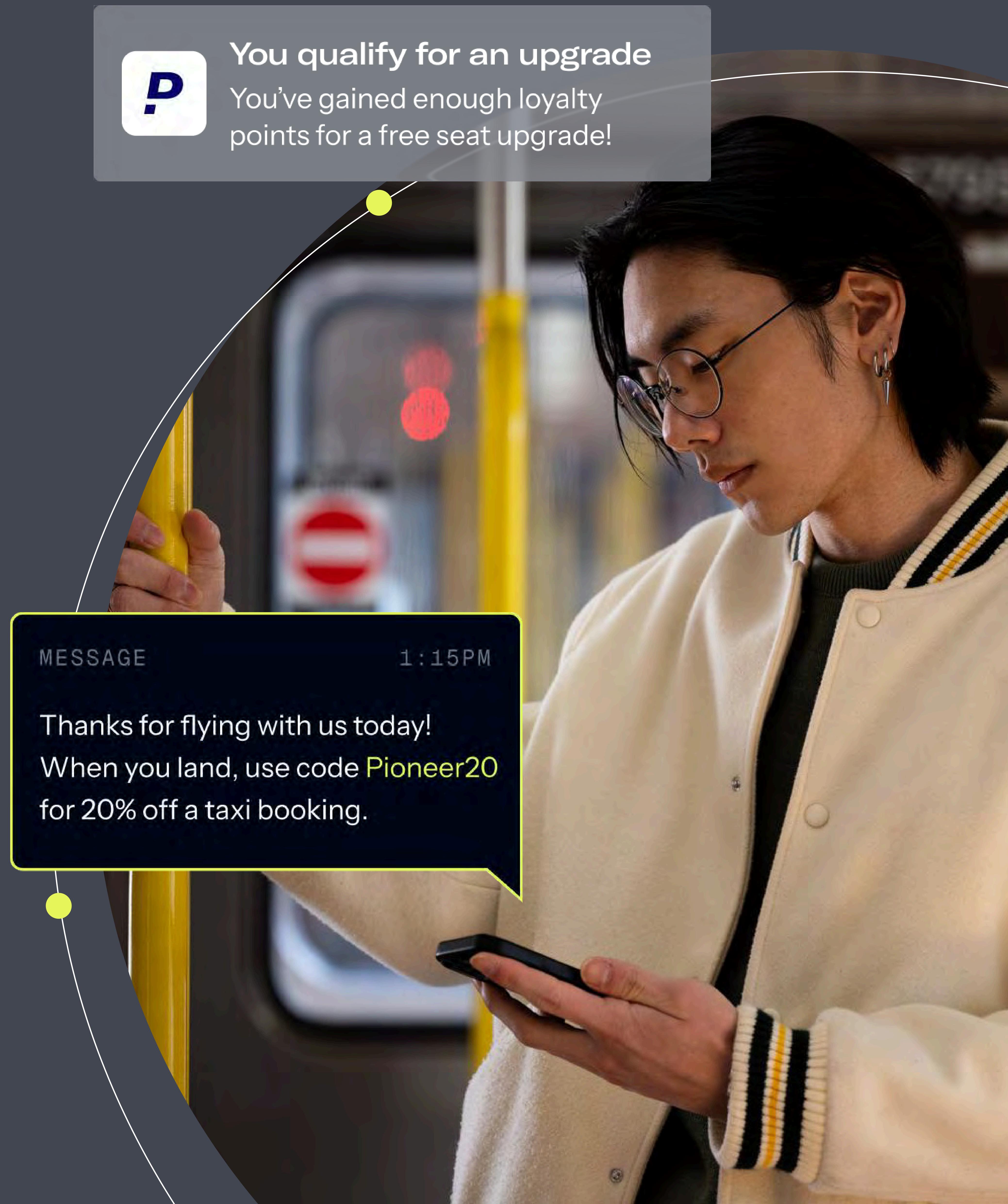
These agents will work behind the scenes to:

- Generate personalized, multi-screen experiences from a few strategic inputs.
- Run real-time experiments across channels and app and web experiences.
- Surface actionable insights and recommendations for human teams to approve or adjust.

AI agents will work hand-in-hand with humans, amplifying their creativity and execution. AI will handle the precision and pattern recognition while humans will provide context, empathy and direction.

The result is a new rhythm of collaboration: human intuition sets the goal, AI execution accelerates it and shared intelligence closes the loop.

This “human-in-the-loop” design transforms personalization from a manual craft into a scalable, measurable system of growth.





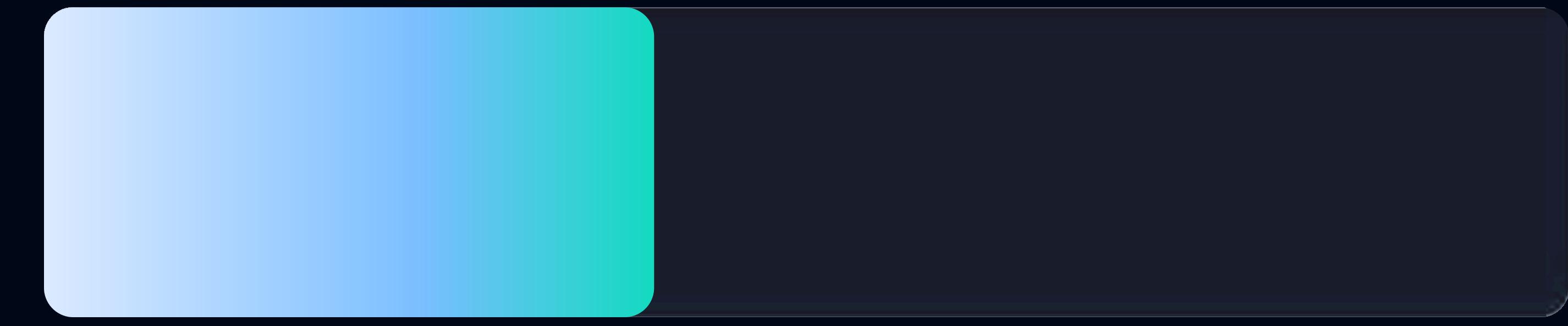
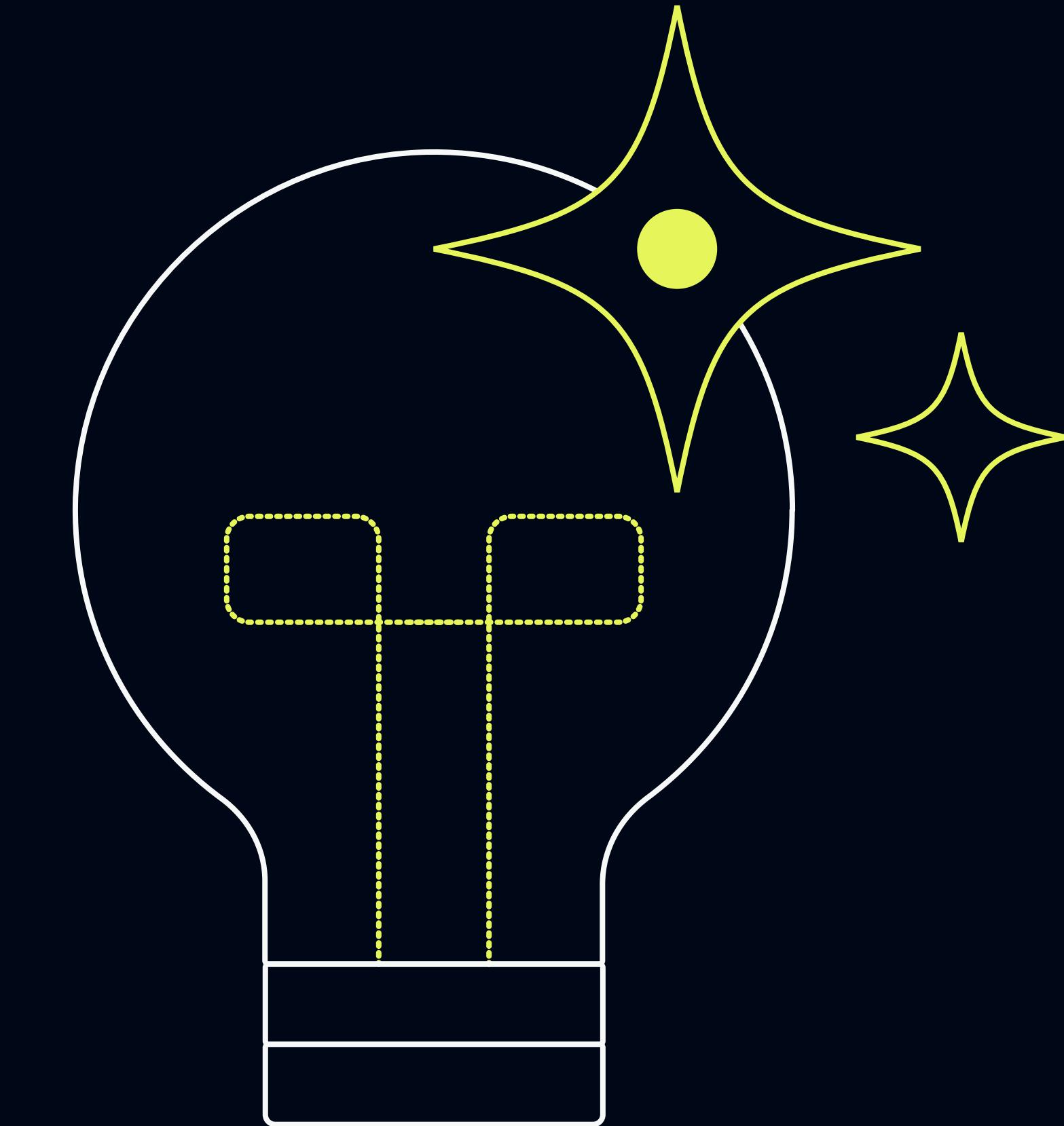
“

Gartner predicts that 40% of enterprise applications will feature **task-specific AI agents** by 2026, up from less than 5% in 2025. ...The ability to process and operationalize domain-specific data and user patterns will be crucial to model performance.

The providers best positioned to leverage high-quality data ecosystems will be the winners of the agentic AI race.

Gartner[®]

Gartner, “Tech FutureSight: AI Agents Will Erode Traditional Software Application Advantages,” by Will Sommer, Christine Adams, David Yockelson, Mark McDonald, 15 October 2025



40% of enterprise applications

will feature task-specific AI agents by 2026



Ready to accelerate growth?

Join thousands of top brands and discover what happens when mobile expertise lifts up every customer journey at airship.com

Contact us 