

2026 EY Loyalty Market Study

Exploring the gap between performance and experience



■ ■ ■
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Introduction

Over the past few years, loyalty programs have taken on a much larger role inside organizations. Companies are increasingly viewing loyalty as a growth lever, prompting them to re-evaluate and rightsize their teams and investments to support revenue and data goals, not just engagement. Simultaneously, consumers are participating in more loyalty programs than ever, raising expectations around ease of use and how clearly value shows up.

These dynamics set the stage for the **2026 EY Loyalty Market Study**.

Now in its third year, the study examines how loyalty is actually performing today and how perspectives and priorities are trending over time. Prior editions helped clarify where consumer expectations and organizational priorities aligned, and where they began to diverge. Those insights proved useful as EY teams worked with clients to refine loyalty strategies and rethink how success is measured.

This year, the focus shifted. As loyalty programs become more sophisticated and more technology-driven, particularly through the growing use of AI, the risk of misalignment has increased. Programs may be delivering strong results operationally while consumers experience value in less consistent ways.

So, a key question we wanted to understand this year: **Are loyalty programs performing well in ways that consumers can actually see and feel?**

By comparing consumer and corporate survey data, the study identifies a shifting disconnect between organizational performance and consumer experience. We also explore how emerging capabilities, especially AI, can either help close that gap or widen it.



Executive summary

Our 2026 data uncovered three significant trends.

1 Loyalty performance remains strong, but durability is weakening

The 2026 findings show that loyalty programs continue to perform well by many traditional business measures. Organizations report strong enrollment, revenue contribution and increasing return on investment (ROI), reinforcing loyalty's role as a core business capability. Meanwhile, consumer signals

suggest that this performance may be more fragile than it appears. Churn is beginning to rise as emotional engagement softens and neutrality toward loyalty programs increases. In other words, programs are still delivering results, even as signs tied to emotional connection and long-term durability begin to weaken. For brands, this raises an important question about staying power. Performance can look healthy today, even while signals indicate growing apathy and feelings of less attachment to any single program.

2 Experience is lagging behind program sophistication

As loyalty programs grow more complex and ecosystem-driven, consumers are finding it harder to see and track the value they are earning. Top rewards and benefits generally align with what organizations offer, but added layers of rules and partnerships, along with how rewards are earned and redeemed, are

making value feel slower and less tangible. More than half of consumers say they are checking their rewards less frequently than in prior years, shifting from weekly to monthly behavior. Simultaneously, delayed payoff issues remain a top frustration, including expiring points and the perception that too many purchases are required to redeem a reward. For companies, this highlights a growing gap between how sophisticated programs have become and how clearly that value, or lack thereof, shows up in the moments that matter to consumers.

3 AI is accelerating both opportunity and risk

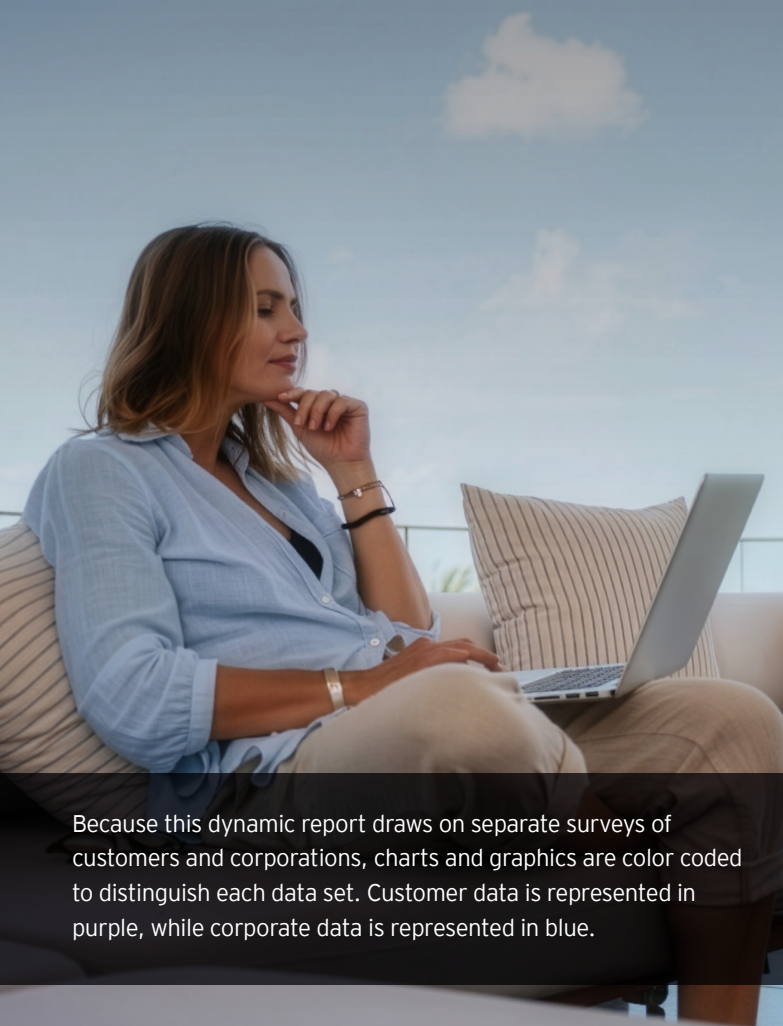
AI is now moving from experimentation as it becomes embedded in all areas of loyalty. Many organizations are embedding AI into personalization and day-to-day program operations, and planned investments reflect that shift. But consumers are not looking for

clever or unexpected interventions. They want clarity, and they want value to show up when it matters. The findings suggest that AI performs best when it helps bring value forward more quickly and makes redemption easier. When it adds opacity or complexity, it can quickly erode trust. For brands, the implication is clear: AI will play a defining role in whether loyalty programs close the performance-perception gap or widen it further, depending on how thoughtfully technology is applied.

EY Loyalty Market Study overview

In November 2025, the EY Studio+ team conducted the third EY Loyalty Market Study survey, focusing on both consumers and marketers managing loyalty programs. We collected and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data from over 1,400 consumers and about 300 corporate employees across several sectors, including, but not limited to, retail, consumer packaged goods (CPG), food and beverage, and hospitality. The study aimed to further our understanding of consumer motivations and evolving expectations for their current loyalty programs, as well as to explore where companies are investing and how they are measuring success across sectors.

See the EY survey methodology section at the end of this report for more details.



Because this dynamic report draws on separate surveys of customers and corporations, charts and graphics are color coded to distinguish each data set. Customer data is represented in purple, while corporate data is represented in blue.

Consumer survey

We surveyed more than 1,400 consumers to explore the changing motivations and preferences of individuals participating in loyalty programs.

Examples of what we asked:

- 1 What is the primary reason you remain loyal to a brand?

- 2 How emotionally connected do you feel to the loyalty programs you participate in?

- 3 What rewards do you most enjoy accessing?

Corporate survey

We surveyed about 300 loyalty leaders to analyze recent and planned investments, as well as how programs assess success across various sectors.

Examples of what we asked:

- 1 What benefits does your loyalty program offer to those enrolled?

- 2 What are the key performance criteria for your loyalty program?

- 3 Which of the following AI features are currently used in your loyalty program?

Chapter 1

Strong programs, but consumer expectations are shifting

Our survey data, over the past three years, shows loyalty taking on a much bigger role inside organizations. Teams are growing, investments are increasing and companies are actively reworking how their programs operate.

But the consumer data is telling a more nuanced story. People still want loyalty programs, and sentiment remains broadly positive. However, some early signals suggest enthusiasm is starting to cool, even as programs continue to perform well. That contrast is what we are exploring in this report.

Over the past three years of this annual study, we have seen consumer expectations continue to evolve. As loyalty programs scale and become more complex, small shifts in consumer behavior, such as fewer programs joined or less loyalty-driven shopping, can point to deeper shifts in what consumers value. That is why we focus on year-over-year trends, not just a single point in time.



1.1

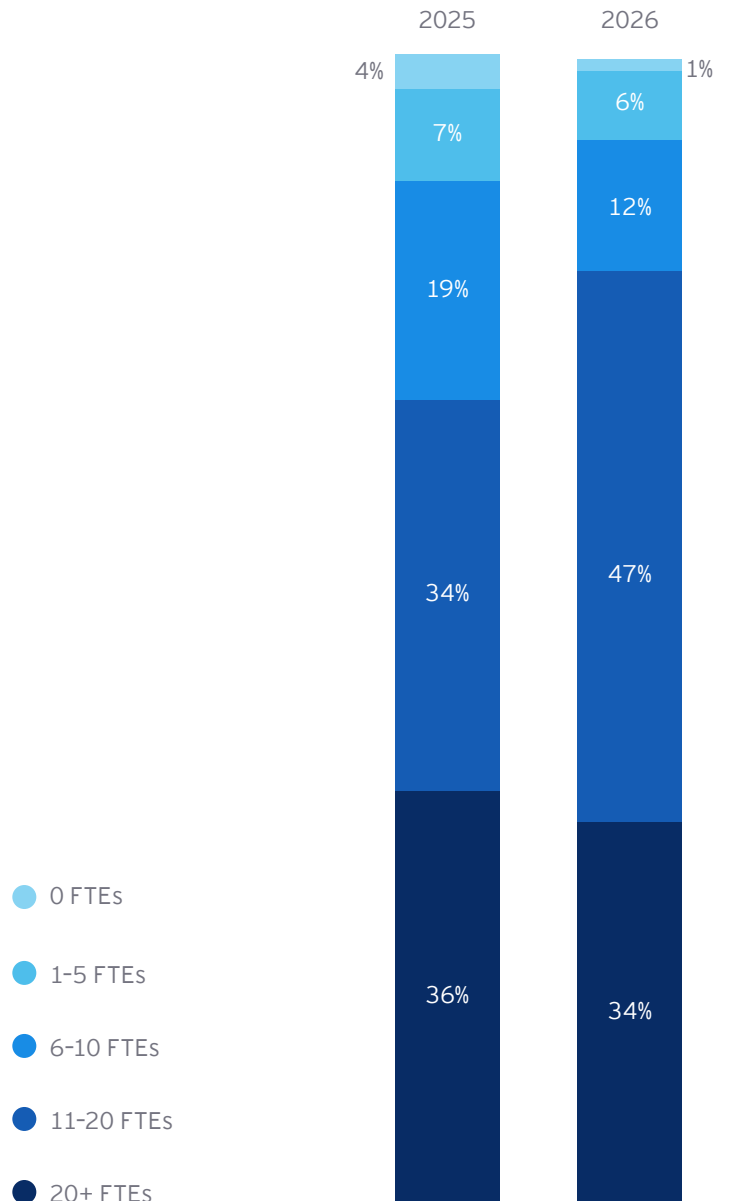
Organizations are going all in on loyalty



Loyalty is now an “always on” capability

Organizations are investing more in loyalty because they see the results. This is reflected in team size. 81% of the organizations in the study reported they have 11 or more dedicated full-time employees supporting loyalty, up from 70% just last year. As confidence in loyalty’s business impact grows, companies are moving beyond one-off campaigns or major launches and toward a function that is actively managed to drive performance.

Approximate number of FTEs (full-time equivalent resources) dedicated to loyalty program management



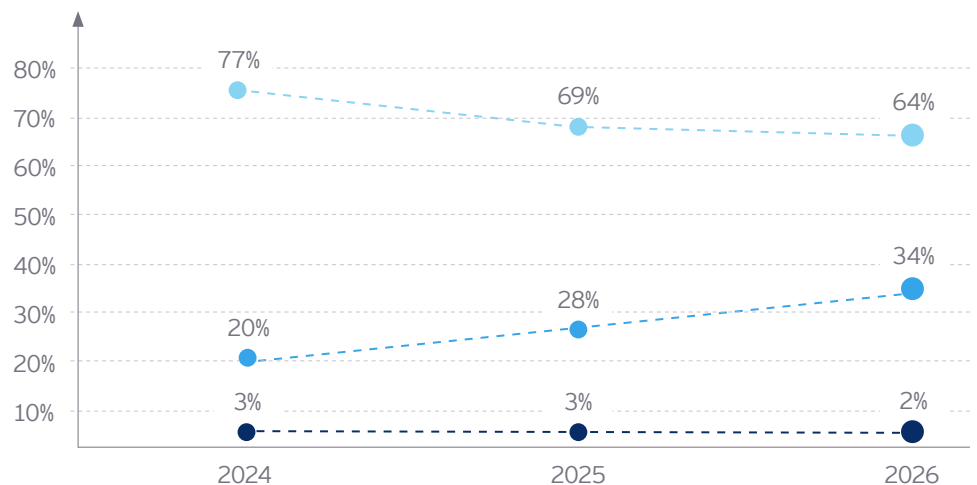
More programs are bringing in specialist support

As loyalty programs become more complex, operating models are evolving. Most organizations still manage loyalty primarily in-house, but partial outsourcing is becoming more common. 34% of respondents use external partners in targeted areas, up from 28% last year and 20% in 2024. This points to a more blended model, with organizations maintaining ownership while bringing in support where needed.



Extent to which loyalty programs are managed within the company

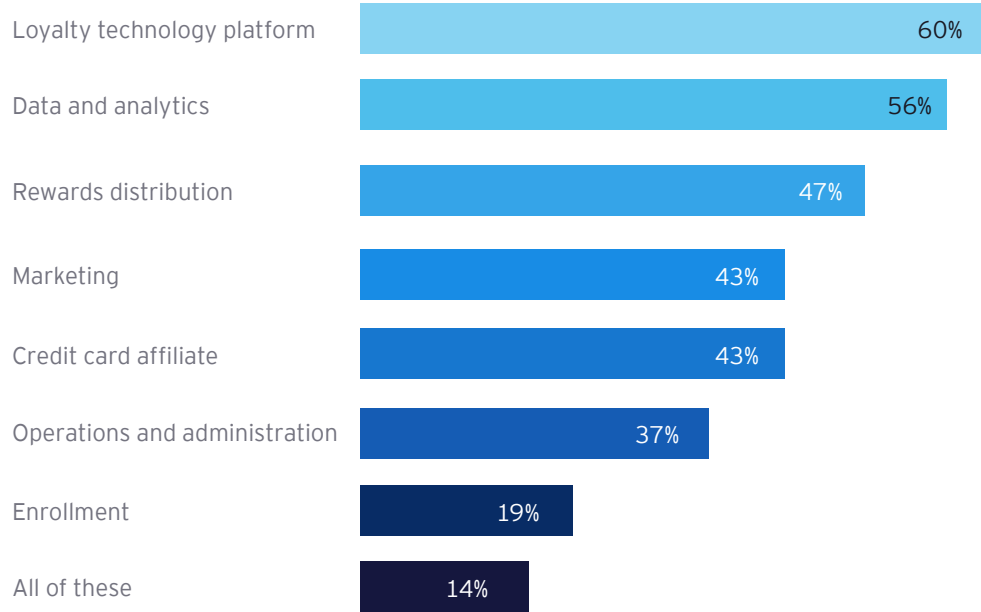
- The loyalty program is contained entirely within my company
- Parts of the loyalty program are outsourced to or managed by other companies
- The loyalty program is entirely outsourced to or managed by other companies



Companies outsource what's hardest to build in-house

Outsourcing is concentrated on areas where scale and specialization matter most. The most commonly outsourced areas include loyalty technology platforms (60%), data and analytics (56%) and rewards distribution (47%). This suggests companies are outsourcing the more complex and resource-intensive elements of loyalty while keeping strategic direction and customer experience decisions in-house.

If partially or entirely outsourced, aspects of the loyalty program that are outsourced to/managed by/partnered with other companies



Standing still is no longer an option for loyalty

Long-term loyalty planning is no longer the exception. The majority of organizations surveyed told us they were actively investing and evolving their programs. Almost 8 in 10 (79%) indicated that they have a clear vision and are either starting to put plans into action or are already well on their way. In contrast, only 4% of organizations see no need to evolve their program.

In food and beverage specifically, not a single company told us their program was "fine as is." In an increasingly competitive loyalty market, it's a clear sign that standing still is no longer the safe option, and programs must keep pace with quickly evolving customer expectations.



Coalition networks are redefining loyalty as an ecosystem

Coalition participation continues to rise with 79% of organizations now part of an alliance network, up from 73% in 2025 and 68% in 2024. This steady growth signals a clear shift in how companies are thinking about loyalty.

Instead of trying to do everything on their own, companies are leaning on partners to meet customers' evolving needs and offer a broader range of ways

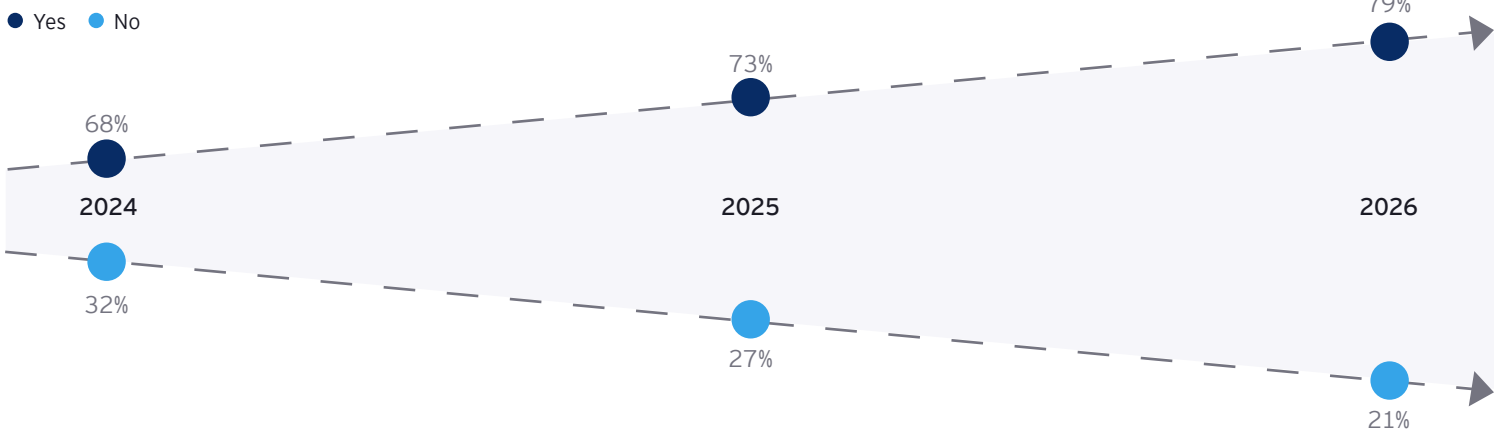
to earn and use rewards. Coalition networks make it easier to deliver more value, more quickly, without having to build every capability in the house.

That shift is already showing up in the market. Today, 54% of organizations include benefits or perks with other brands within their loyalty offering, a clear signal that loyalty is being built across the network of partners, not just a single brand.

“

Coalition networks make it easier to deliver more value, more quickly, without having to build every capability in the house.

% of loyalty programs part of an alliance or coalition network (e.g., a network of rewards or value provider for the loyalty program)



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Financial services

Coalitions are nearly universal in financial services, with 89% of firms participating. This makes sense when you consider how credit card loyalty works day to day. Issuers partner extensively with airlines, hotels, restaurants and lifestyle brands to bring rewards to life. Those partnerships power perks and premium experiences, which is why coalitions are both so prevalent and critical for financial services loyalty.



Partnerships cluster where customers already spend and engage

When companies partner, the most common partner categories are:



These are categories with frequent touch points, making them natural anchors for coalition value.

Industries that companies tend to partner with in network alliances

	2026
Food and beverage (restaurants, quick service and convenience, grocery)	56%
Hospitality and tourism (hotels, cruise, resorts)	49%
Consumer packaged goods	49%
Retail	45%
Transportation (airlines, rideshare, automotive)	36%
Financial services (credit cards, retail banking, etc.)	36%
Telecommunications (phone services, internet, cable TV, etc.)	25%
Insurance	21%

However, across industries, organizations are most likely to partner within their own industry first. Those partnerships are usually easier to align, with more overlap in customers and fewer differences in how programs operate. The result is that coalition growth can expand value, but it also raises the bar for coordination as programs become more interconnected.

Data exchange is no longer a side benefit of coalitions

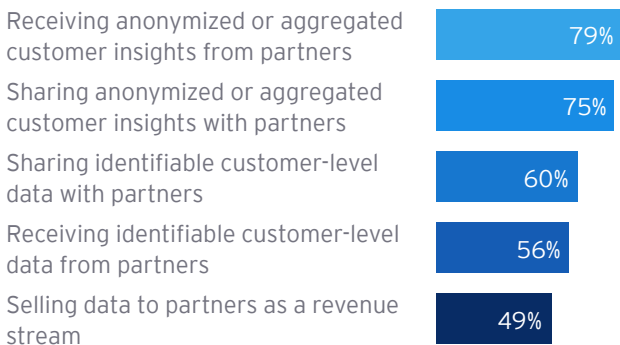
Data exchange now sits at the center of how coalitions work, becoming a growing source of value for organizations. Most organizations both share and receive both anonymized and identifiable data, highlighting how these partnerships are mutually beneficial

More importantly, this data exchange is no longer just about sharing insights. Nearly half of organizations (49%) say they sell data to partners as a revenue stream, signaling a shift in how loyalty is viewed internally. Loyalty programs are no longer just a marketing tool and are increasingly being treated as a second source of revenue for organizations.

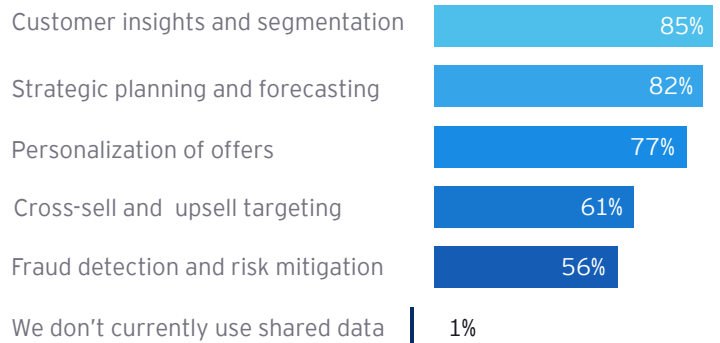
In practice, partner data is also shaping more proactive decision-making. Organizations rely on it to deepen their customer understanding, guide planning and forecasting, and inform offer design and growth priorities. As a result, coalitions are starting to matter beyond increasing customer engagement, influencing how organizations think about growth and where revenue comes from.



How organizations share, sell or receive data through coalition or partnership programs



How organizations currently use data received through coalition or partnership programs



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Transportation

Transportation loyalty programs, especially airlines, tend to be further along when it comes to using data. Every airline in the study shares identifiable customer-level data with partners, and 78% say they sell data as a revenue stream. That level of comfort reflects how mature airline loyalty programs have become.

In many cases, they operate more like stand-alone businesses, where data access is built directly into how partnerships are funded and managed. For many airlines, selling access to customer insights is built into how they price partnerships and negotiate terms as they scale their ecosystems.



1.2

Investment is paying off

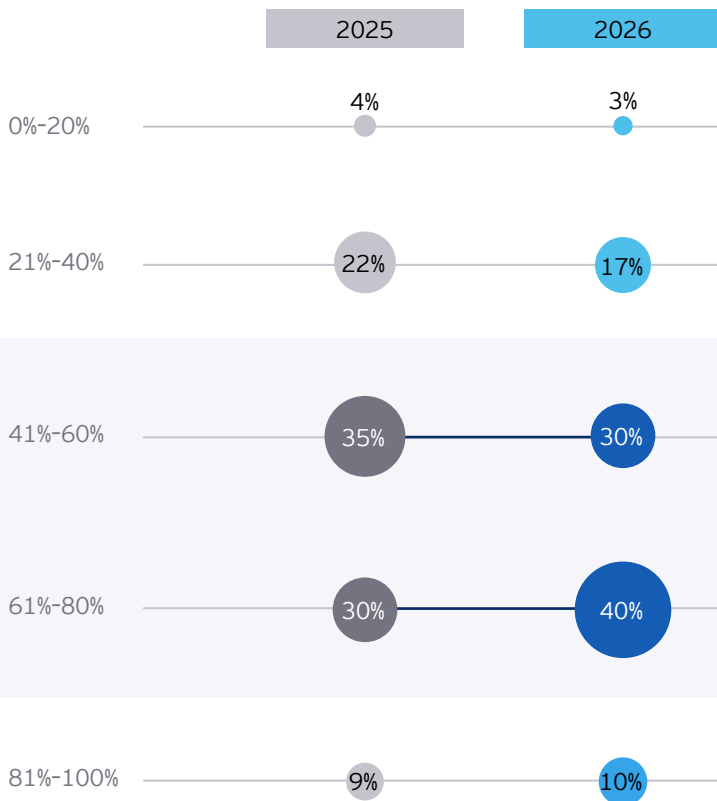
Organizations' strategic loyalty focus is translating into measurable results. Across key metrics, loyalty programs are performing better and driving real value for organizations. This reinforces loyalty's role as a meaningful revenue driver rather than a discretionary marketing expense.



Program enrollment is on the rise

More companies are enrolling a larger share of their customers. The biggest group now sits in the 61% to 80% range, marking a clear shift from where enrollment clustered last year (41%-60%).

Distribution of organizations by share of customers enrolled in their loyalty program



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Financial services

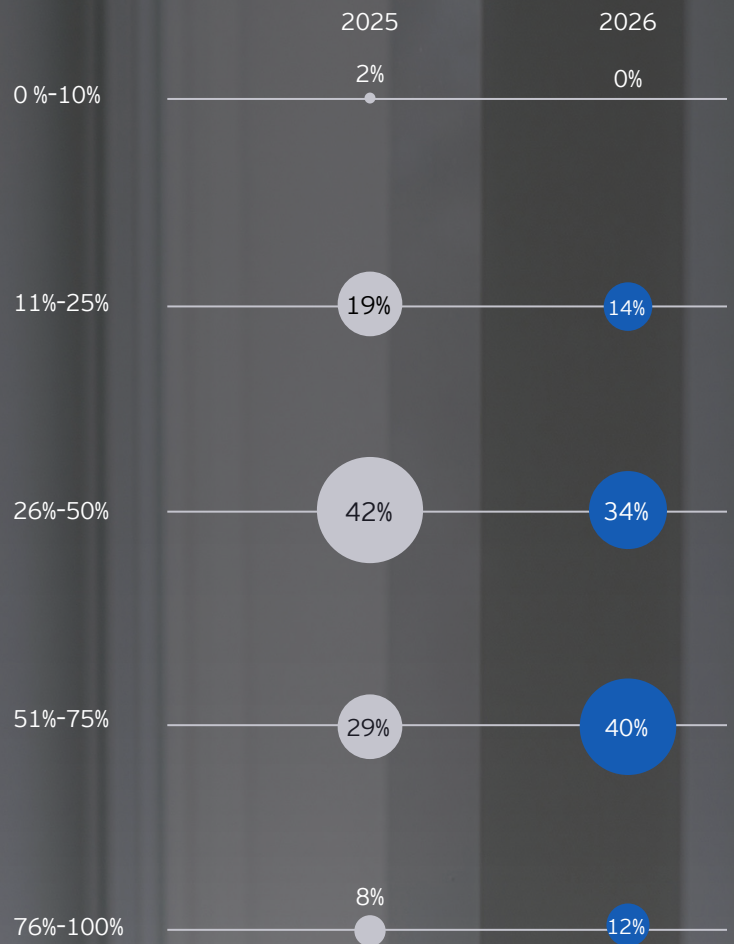
Enrollment is especially strong in financial services, where nearly a quarter (23%) report 81% to 100% customer enrollment, the highest of any industry. One reason this could be is that loyalty and rewards tend to be tied directly to their core product, like credit cards. Customers are enrolled automatically or at account opening, rather than opting in later. That alone drives penetration way up but can make measuring growth and impacts challenging without a clear baseline. Additionally, rewards like cash-back and points on everyday spend are both easy to understand and use. Customers see value regularly, not just on special occasions, which keeps participation high.



Loyalty members now drive more of the business

More organizations now say that a majority of their sales come from loyalty members. The largest group reports that 51% to 75% of annual sales are driven by enrolled customers, marking a clear shift from last year (26%-50%) and indicating how central loyalty members have become to overall revenue.

Distribution of organizations by percentage of annual sales that come from their loyalty members



INDUSTRY SPOTLIGHT

Consumer packaged goods (CPG)

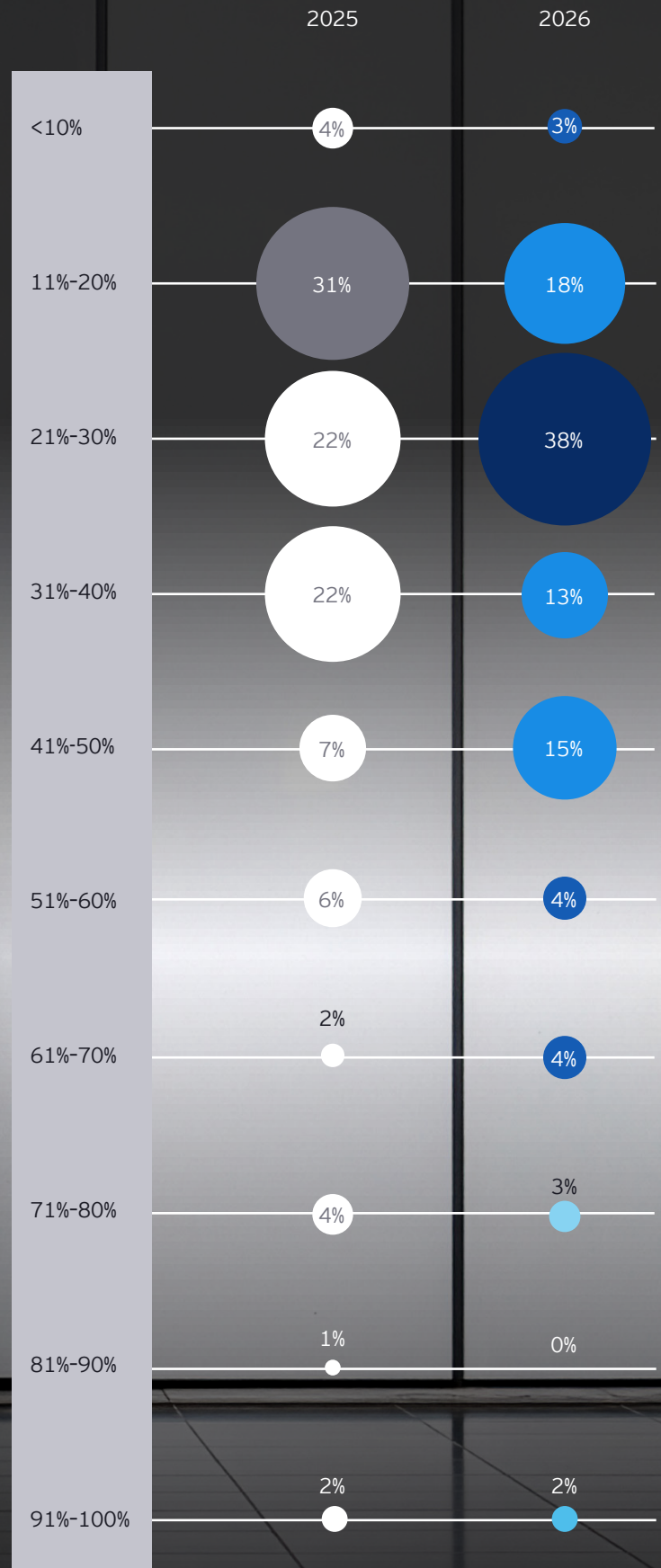
For CPG brands, nearly two-thirds (62%) say that 51% to 75% of their annual sales now come from loyalty members. Because CPG purchases are frequent and routine, loyalty members tend to drive a disproportionate share of spend. As retailer loyalty programs and personalized offers become the primary way shoppers access value, more sales flow through enrolled customers.

Stronger results across the board

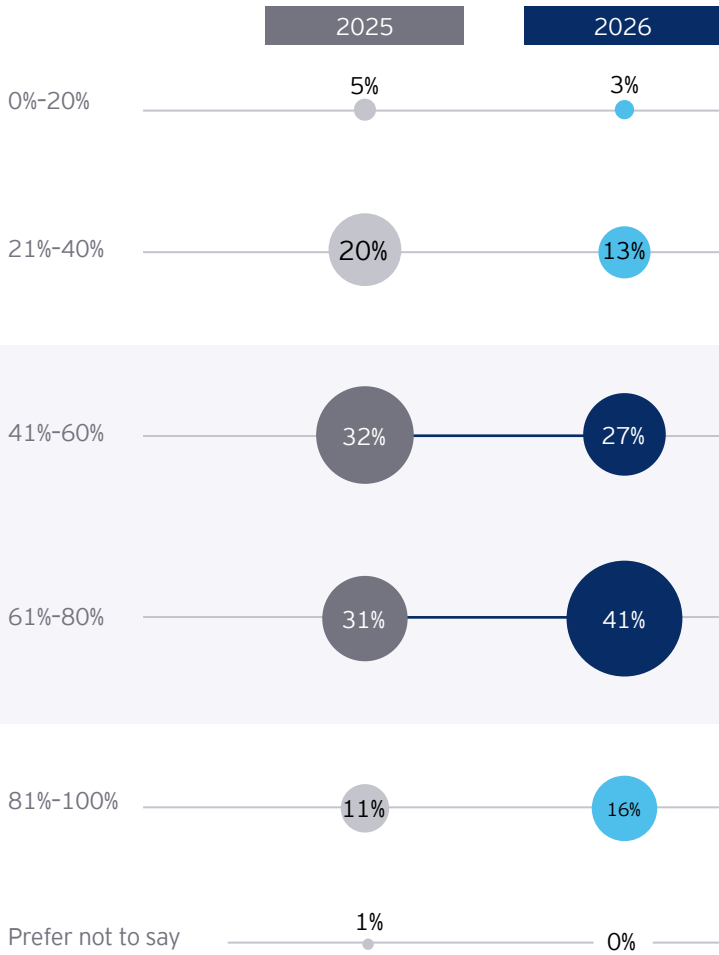
Overall, the numbers are moving in the right direction. ROI has shifted higher, with more programs now landing in the 20%-30% range, a jump up from the 10%-20% range last year. Redemption rates have improved as well, with the most common range now at 61% to 80%. Engagement remains high overall, and while the range itself hasn't changed, a large share of programs now operate at the higher end. In other words, programs are not simply holding steady. Increased investment in loyalty is translating into stronger performance and real, measurable impact for organizations.



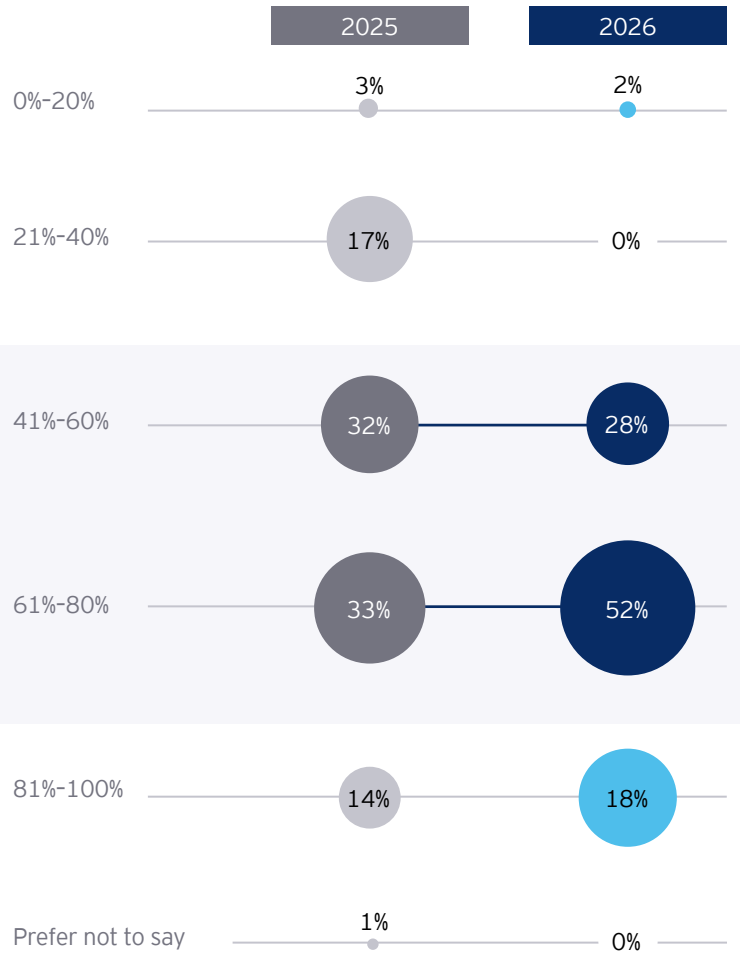
Distribution of organizations by average annual ROI of their loyalty program



Distribution of organizations by reward redemption rate (i.e., percentage of issued rewards that are actually redeemed by members)



Distribution of organizations by percentage of actively engaged loyalty members



1.3

Consumer sentiment remains positive, but it's softening



Performance alone doesn't tell the full story. Overall, loyalty programs leave most consumers feeling good, not frustrated. The most commonly selected emotions include being excited about rewards or offers (66%), and feeling appreciated or valued (55%), while only 4% of consumers have feelings of frustration, disappointment or confusion.

How loyalty programs make members feel



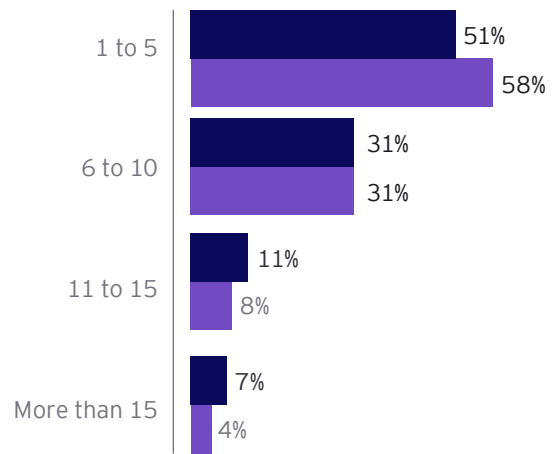
Beneath that stability, however, the data reveals early signs that loyalty programs' emotional pull and durability are weakening.

Consumers are narrowing their loyalty lists

Most consumers are now active in a smaller set of loyalty programs. Nearly 90% of consumers participate in 1-10 programs, representing a 7-point drop from last year. That concentration is especially strong among consumers who earn under \$50k (95%) and among those over 55 years old (93%). In contrast, higher-income consumers are more likely to stay active across a larger number of programs.

That pattern reflects the reality many consumers are facing today: higher everyday costs are forcing people to budget more carefully. As consumers become more intentional about where their money goes, they are also becoming more selective about where they invest their time and attention. As a result, loyalty programs are increasingly competing for relevance within a smaller personal set of programs per consumer.

Number of loyalty programs consumers are active members of

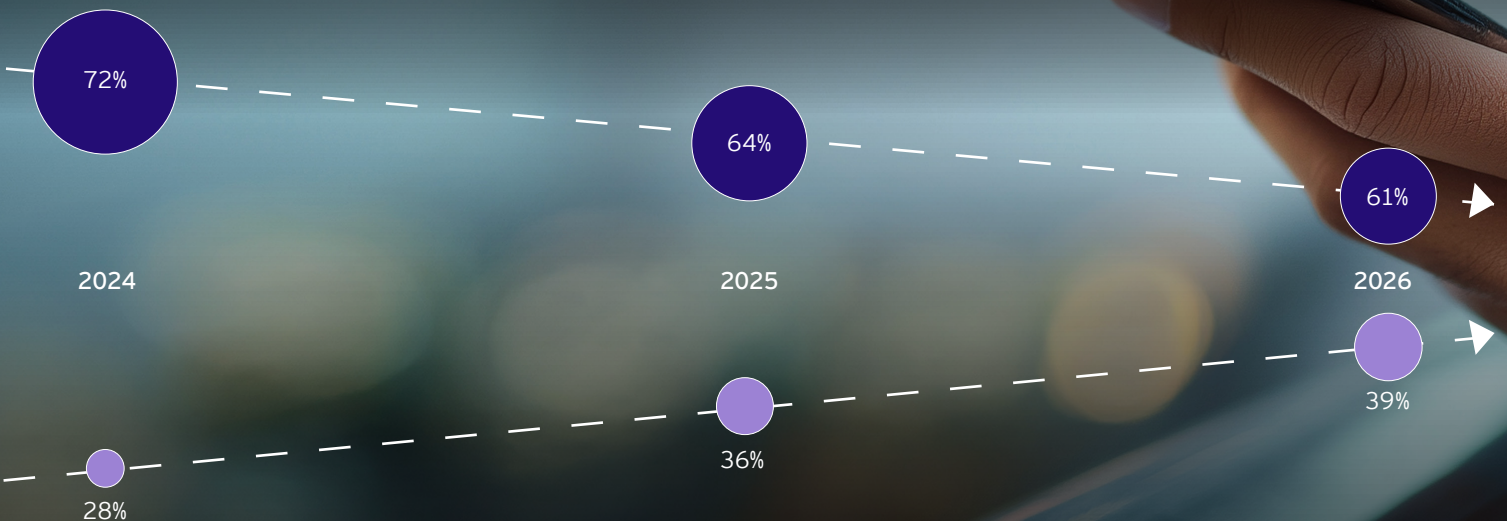


● 2025 ● 2026

Loyalty is shaping behavior less than before

Consumers are less likely to consciously choose where to shop based on loyalty programs. That shift has been gradual but consistent over the past two years. In 2026, 61% say they actively shop within their loyalty programs, down from 64% last year and 72% in 2024. Programs are still being used, but they're playing a smaller role in guiding everyday purchase decisions.

How frequently consumers consciously shop for products that are within their loyalty programs



● Does not consciously shop (1-3)¹ ● Consciously shops (4-5)²

¹ 1-3: not at all, rarely or sometimes. | ² 4-5: Generally or almost always.

Brand impact from loyalty is starting to soften

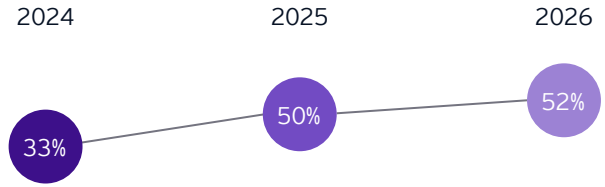
For the first time, neutral reactions now outweigh strong positivity when consumers think about how loyalty programs affect their view of a brand. Our 2026 data shows that just over half of consumers (52%) land somewhere between neutral to somewhat positive, edging out those who feel clearly positive (48%). This represents a noticeable shift from last year, when sentiment was evenly split, and an even bigger change from 2024, when nearly two-thirds of consumers felt generally to far more positive.

Loyalty programs are still delivering value, but that value is not translating as consistently into stronger emotional connection or brand lift as it once did in the past.

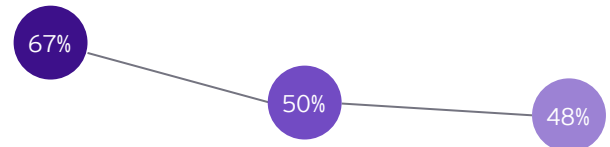
How loyalty programs influence consumers' opinion of a brand

Positivity scale

Neutral-Somewhat (1-3)



Generally-Far more (4-5)

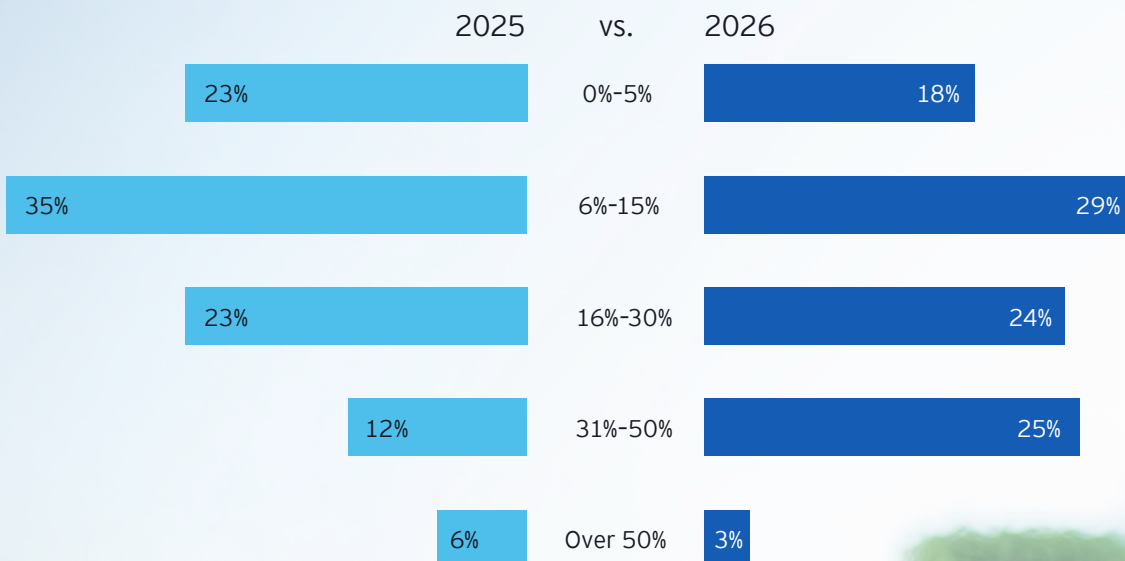


Churn is becoming harder to ignore

Even as business metrics continue to improve, churn is moving in the opposite direction. Over a quarter of organizations now report annual churn of 30% or higher, up from 18% last year. This pattern only

underpins these shifts in consumer sentiment and suggests loyalty relationships are becoming more fragile, even while enrollment, revenue contribution, ROI and other performance metrics remain strong.

Distribution of organizations by annual member churn rate (i.e., percentage of members who leave or stop participating in the loyalty program after a year)



1% of organizations in both 2025 and 2025 prefer not to say



Financial services

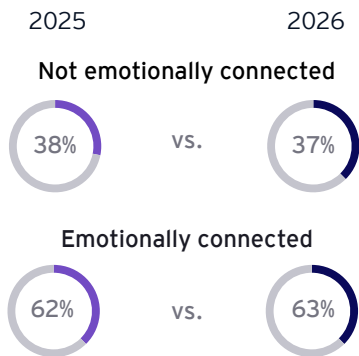
Churn is especially high in financial services. Just over 40% of firms report rates of 31% or more, a level significantly higher than other sectors. We hypothesize that this pattern likely reflects the way many people use credit cards today. Consumers often sign up for the initial bonus and use the card for a short period before switching to a new one.



Emotional connection is steady, but uneven

Broadly, emotional connection to loyalty programs hasn't shifted much year-over-year. Overall, 63% of consumers say they feel very to extremely emotionally connected, which is consistent with last year.

How emotionally connected consumers feel with their loyalty programs



However, that stability masks clear differences across groups. In a K-shaped economy, not all consumers are moving in the same direction, and loyalty engagement is reflecting that divide. Higher-income consumers are more likely to feel an emotional pull, with 67% of those earning over \$150k reporting strong emotional connection. These consumers also tend to participate in more

programs and remain active across a broader set.

Older and lower-income consumers tell a different story. Nearly half of those over 55 and 46% of consumers earning under \$50k say they do not feel emotionally connected to the loyalty programs they participate in. More so, overwhelmingly, these groups also tend to participate in far fewer loyalty programs overall; 93% of consumers over 55 and 95% of those earning under \$50k are active in fewer than 10 programs. Among consumers who do not join loyalty programs at all, more than half earn under \$50k, compared with just 15% who earn \$150k or more.

That split helps explain how loyalty investment is taking shape. As organizations focus more on driving ROI and revenue, attention naturally flows toward consumers who spend and redeem more. Higher-income consumers generate clearer and more immediate returns, making them easier to prioritize.

Older and lower-income consumers

often generate less absolute spend, even when they are engaged. As a result, they are less frequently prioritized in program design and investment decisions. This isn't because of a lack of interest, but because many programs are built around where value concentrates most clearly.

Taken together, this creates a growing tension. Loyalty's business performance remains strong, but emotional connection is not evenly distributed. Customers still want loyalty programs, yet expectations are rising and attention is narrowing as tolerance for friction continues to shrink.

“

49% of consumers 55 and older and 46% of consumers earning <\$50k say they do not feel emotionally connected to their loyalty programs.

1.4

Opportunity to recalibrate

Our latest loyalty research paints a clear picture: Loyalty programs are working, and customers still want them. They continue to drive meaningful results for organizations, which is why loyalty remains an important part of how companies compete.

But the survey also points to a moment of recalibration. Consumer attention is becoming more selective, and early signs of fatigue are starting to show. To reverse that trend, loyalty value needs to feel easier to grasp and must continue to resonate over time to stay effective.

The opportunity in 2026 is to rethink how loyalty shows up for customers. Reducing friction and strengthening emotional connection will help close the gap between perception and performance.



Chapter 2

Why performance and perception are diverging

As we've seen, even as loyalty programs are growing more sophisticated and delivering stronger results across nearly every business metric, consumer value has not kept pace, and excitement and emotional connection are beginning to soften. The data reveals four gaps in customer experiences that shed light on this disparity, which we will explore further:

- 1** Programs are increasingly emphasizing experiential and access-driven benefits when consumers most favor immediate savings and discounts.
- 2** Those savings and discounts can feel like they are slow to arrive and require too much effort to get through friction.
- 3** Consumers want proactive alerts about rewards, showing the importance of visibility and not just accessibility.
- 4** Programs that once were simple and free now add complexity, requiring consumers to spend more, pay fees or show greater commitment.



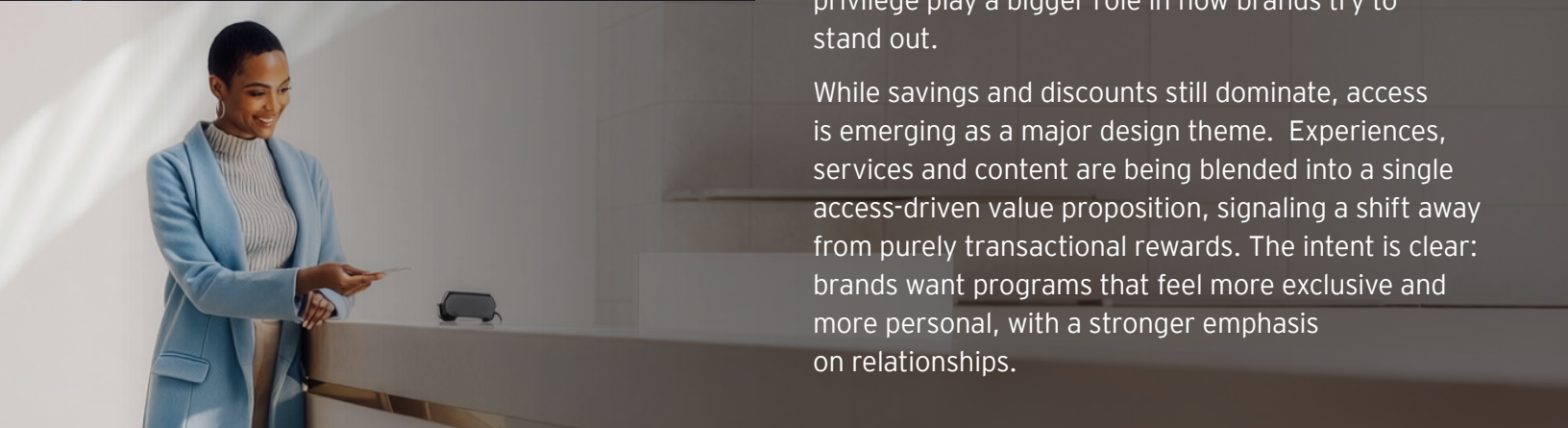
2.1

What value means in 2026

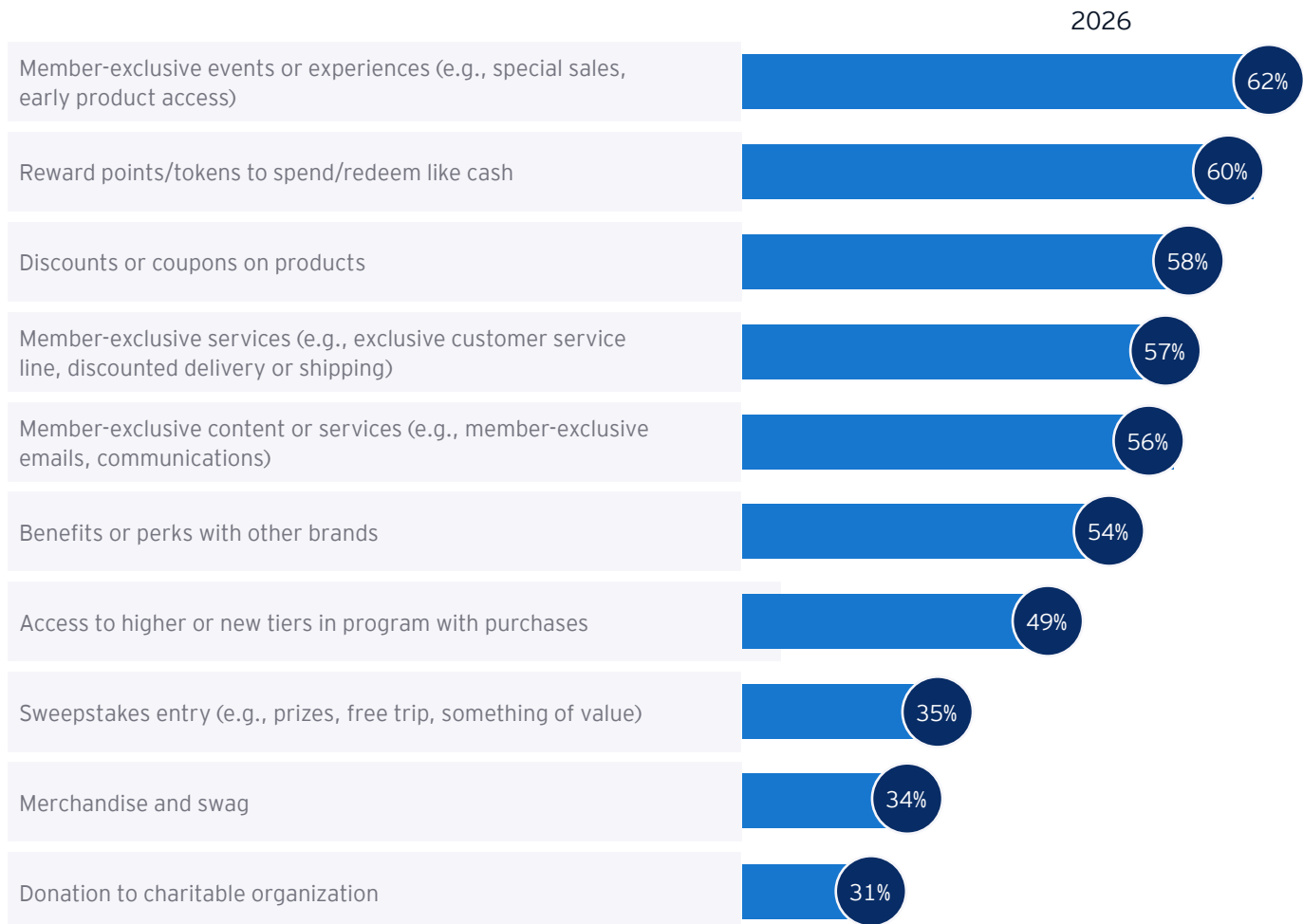
Programs are doing more, but value is blending together

From a design standpoint, loyalty programs across industries are doing more than ever, expanding well beyond traditional discounts and points to include experiential rewards, partner access and other benefits. This shift reflects a broader move toward membership-style benefits, where recognition and privilege play a bigger role in how brands try to stand out.

While savings and discounts still dominate, access is emerging as a major design theme. Experiences, services and content are being blended into a single access-driven value proposition, signaling a shift away from purely transactional rewards. The intent is clear: brands want programs that feel more exclusive and more personal, with a stronger emphasis on relationships.



Top benefits offered by loyalty programs



Consumer data tells a more complex story

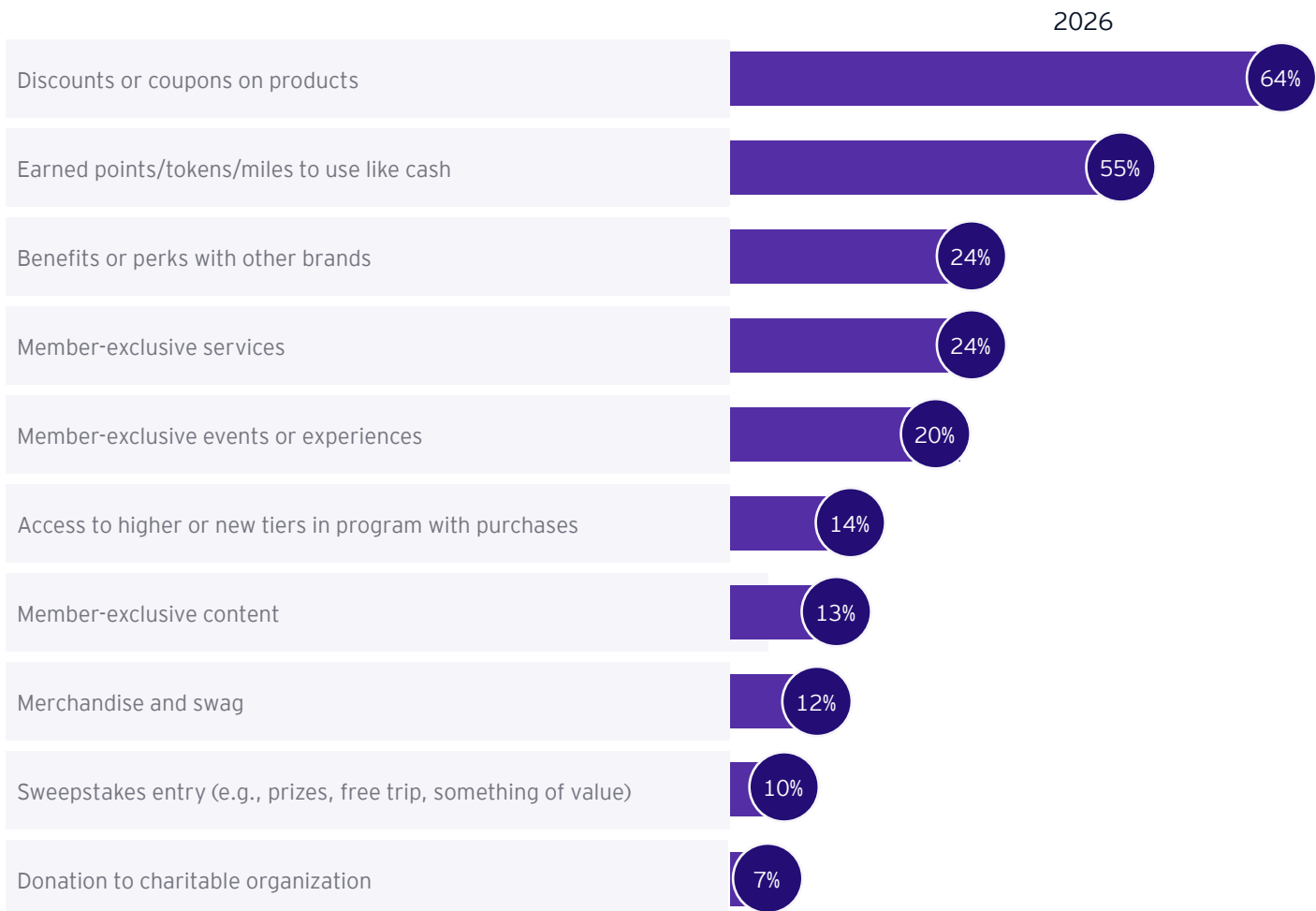
The reality is that consumers still prioritize immediate, tangible rewards.

Even though they are among the most commonly offered features, experiential and access-driven benefits are ranked significantly lower in overall enjoyment. For example, while nearly two-thirds (62%) of organizations offer member-exclusive events or experiences, only a small share (20%) of consumers say these are the perks they like the most.

Consumers, as a whole, still define value primarily through savings they can use right away. As their most favored rewards, consumers still prefer the immediacy of discounts and coupons (64%) and points that can be redeemed like cash (55%). While these preferences have declined from their 2024 peaks of 77% and 72%, respectively, they remain firmly at the top.



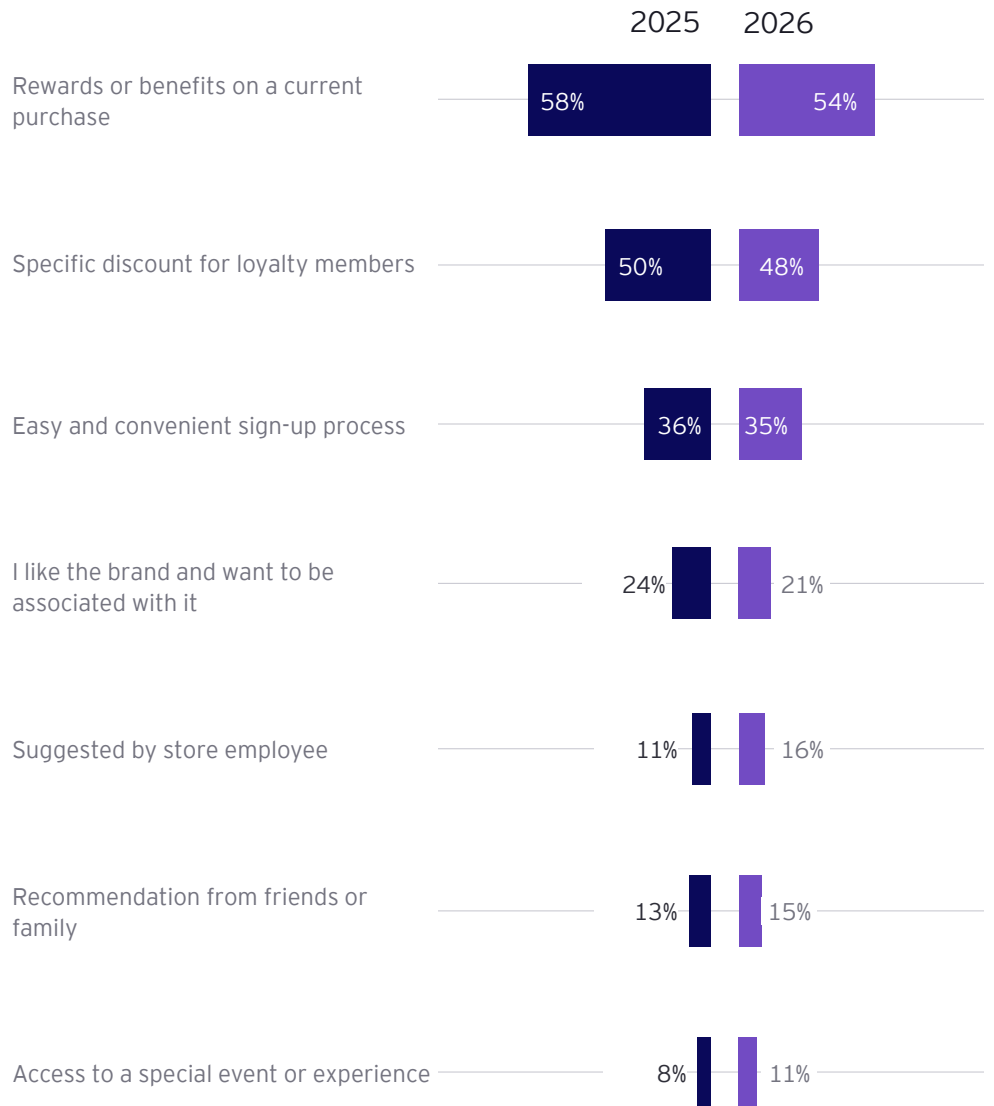
Loyalty program rewards consumers most enjoy accessing



Sign-up behavior reinforces a value-first mindset

Enrollment data reinforces this pattern, aligning with last year's results. Consumers told us that rewards or benefits tied to a current purchase (54%) and specific discounts for members (48%) were the top reasons why they signed up for their most recent loyalty program. Ease and convenience of sign-up follow close behind (35%).

Consumers' motivations to sign up for their most recent loyalty program









However, from last year, lower-ranked motivators tied to recommendations and access to experiences have gained modest ground, highlighting another nuance: As consumers enroll in more programs, the novelty of immediate discounts likely wears down, and recommendations and experiences gradually start to matter more at the margins. While savings still get consumers in the door, on their own, they are no longer enough to keep programs compelling or distinctive.

Value preferences diverge by gender and age




Overall results mask meaningful differences in how value is defined. What feels like added value to one group can feel irrelevant or even frustrating to another.






What different groups value

	Women	Men
	Rewards 	Convenience 
	Discounts 	Recommendations from family and friends 
	Tangible savings 	Trust signals 

Gen Z
(18-24)

Brand association	
Access to special events or experiences	
Identity and affiliation	

Points or cash value	
Predictability	
Finance clarity	

Older
(55+)

These differences help explain why benefits around access such as exclusive events, services and partner perks underperform overall while still resonating deeply with specific segments. (Chapter 3 explores these dynamics further through our four loyalty personas.)

What unites these groups is a shared expectation, not a shared definition of value. Value should be easy to understand and quick to access while also being simple to use. When that expectation is not met, even well-designed benefits struggle to land.

2.2

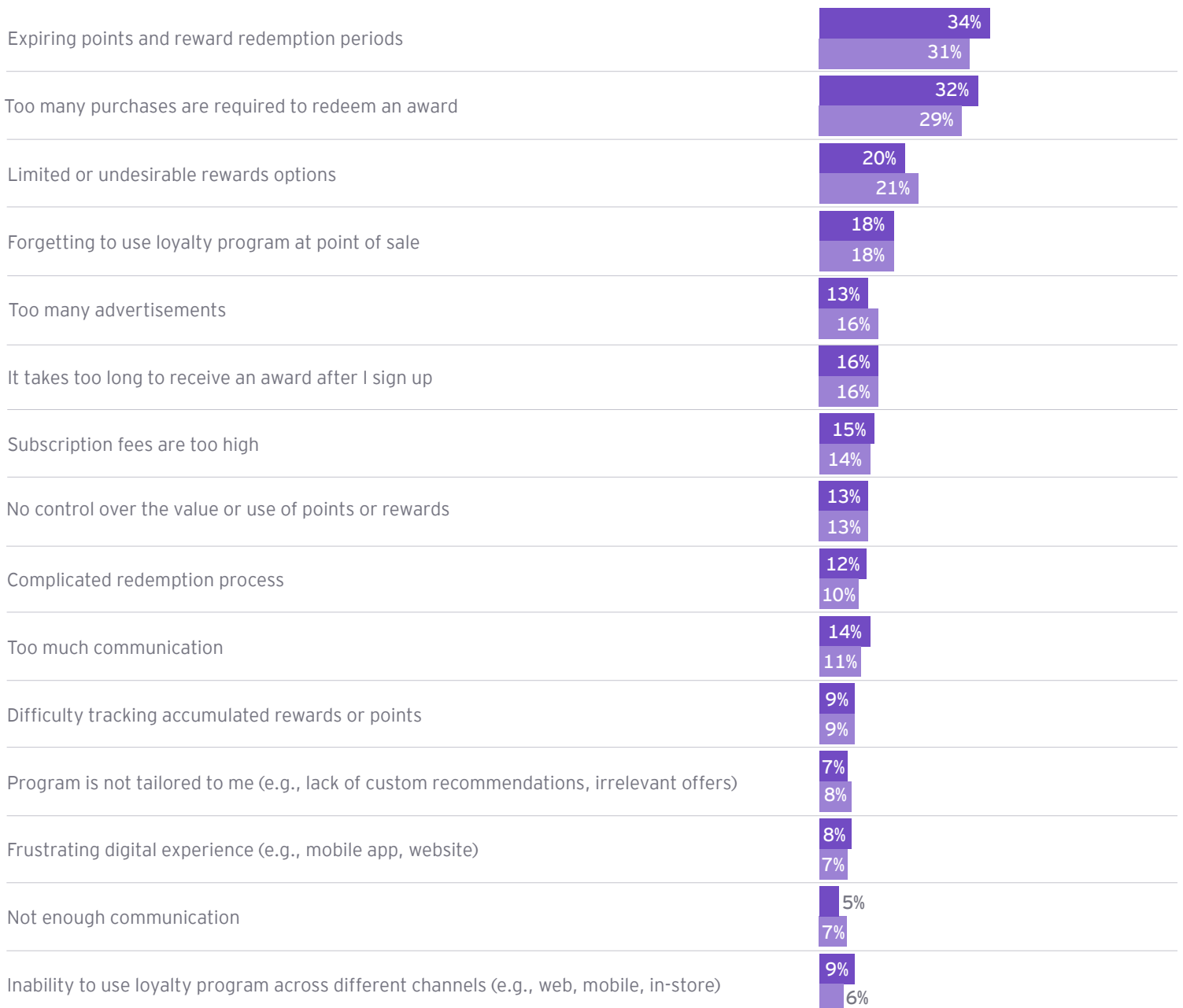
Speed-to-value gap: when earning feels slower than effort

Delayed payoff remains the top source of friction

While rewards are valued, customers say that one of their biggest frustrations is having to wait too long to get rewards. Expiring points or limited redemption windows remain the most common issue, followed closely by the number of purchases required to earn a reward. However, both of these frustrations have declined relative to prior years, suggesting brands are making rewards quicker and easier to access.

Challenges experienced by loyalty members

● 2025 ● 2026



Several friction points around the reward redemption process have not improved: Forgetting to redeem loyalty rewards at the point of sale and waiting too long to receive an award after sign-up both remain unchanged from last year. This can make loyalty still feel slow or require too much effort, even as programs appear easier to use on paper.

CONSUMER POPOUT

The challenge around slow rewards is experienced differently across genders. Female consumers are significantly more frustrated by expiring points and reward windows than males (33% female vs. 27% male). They are also more likely to be bothered by having to make too many purchases before earning a reward (32% female vs. 24% male).

This heightened sensitivity aligns with broader patterns in the data. Females show stronger interest in rewards and discounts overall, both as sign-up motivators and as favorite benefits. When points expire, the loss feels tangible: In addition to being a missed perk, it is earned value that disappears before it can be used.



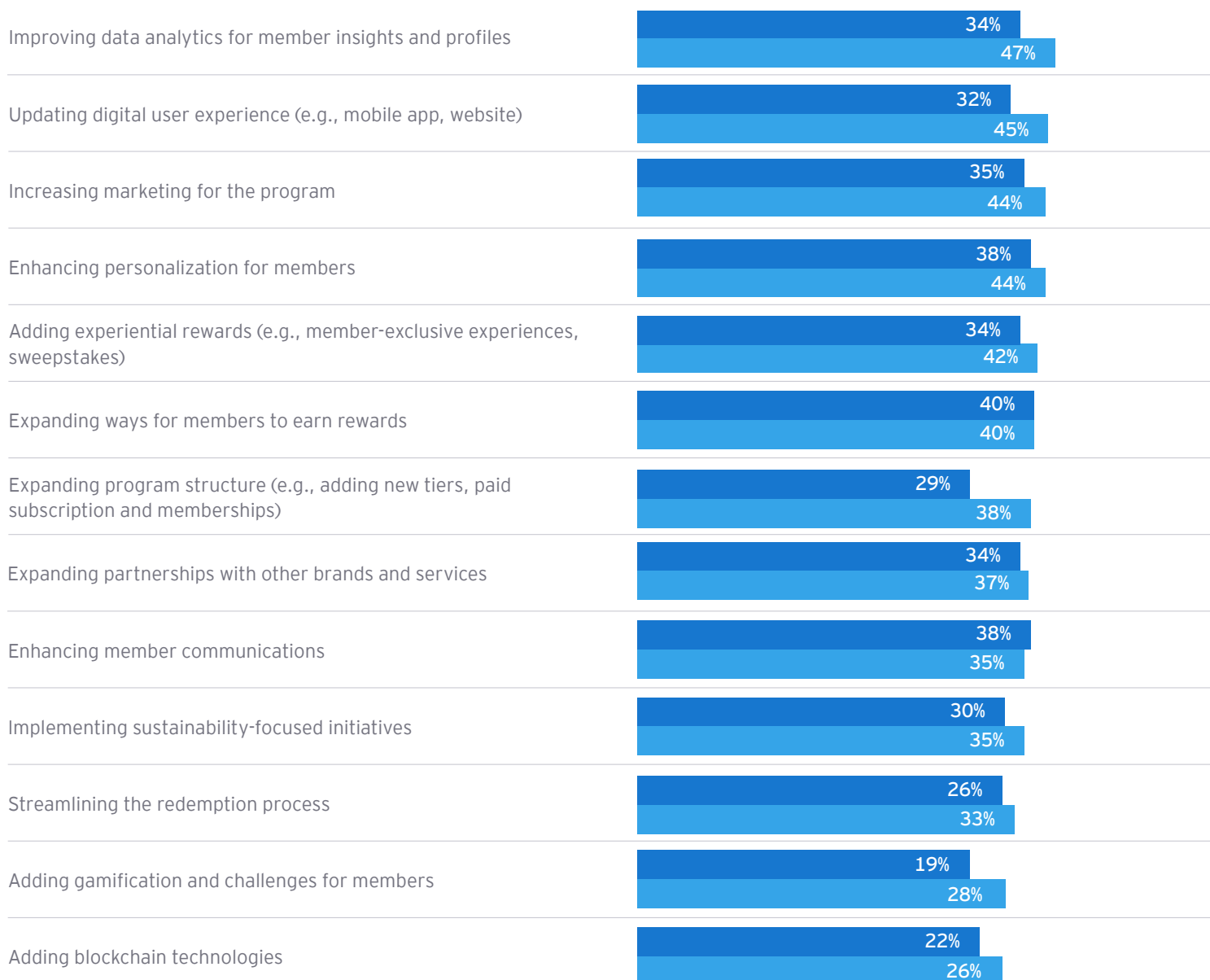
Brands are showing signs of simplifying

Organizations appear to understand that waiting too long for rewards creates frustration and poses a risk for their brand. Our survey showed that planned investments are increasingly focused on streamlining redemption (33%) and improving digital experiences (45%), both of which meaningfully increased from last year (+7 percentage points and +13 percentage points, respectively).

These investments align closely with consumer pain points. They signal that companies understand the issue is not generosity but accessibility. Still, speed to value remains a challenge. Making rewards easier to earn does not automatically make them feel easier to use.

Planned investments for loyalty programs for the next year

● 2025 ● 2026



2.3

Visibility gap: when value exists but is not surfaced

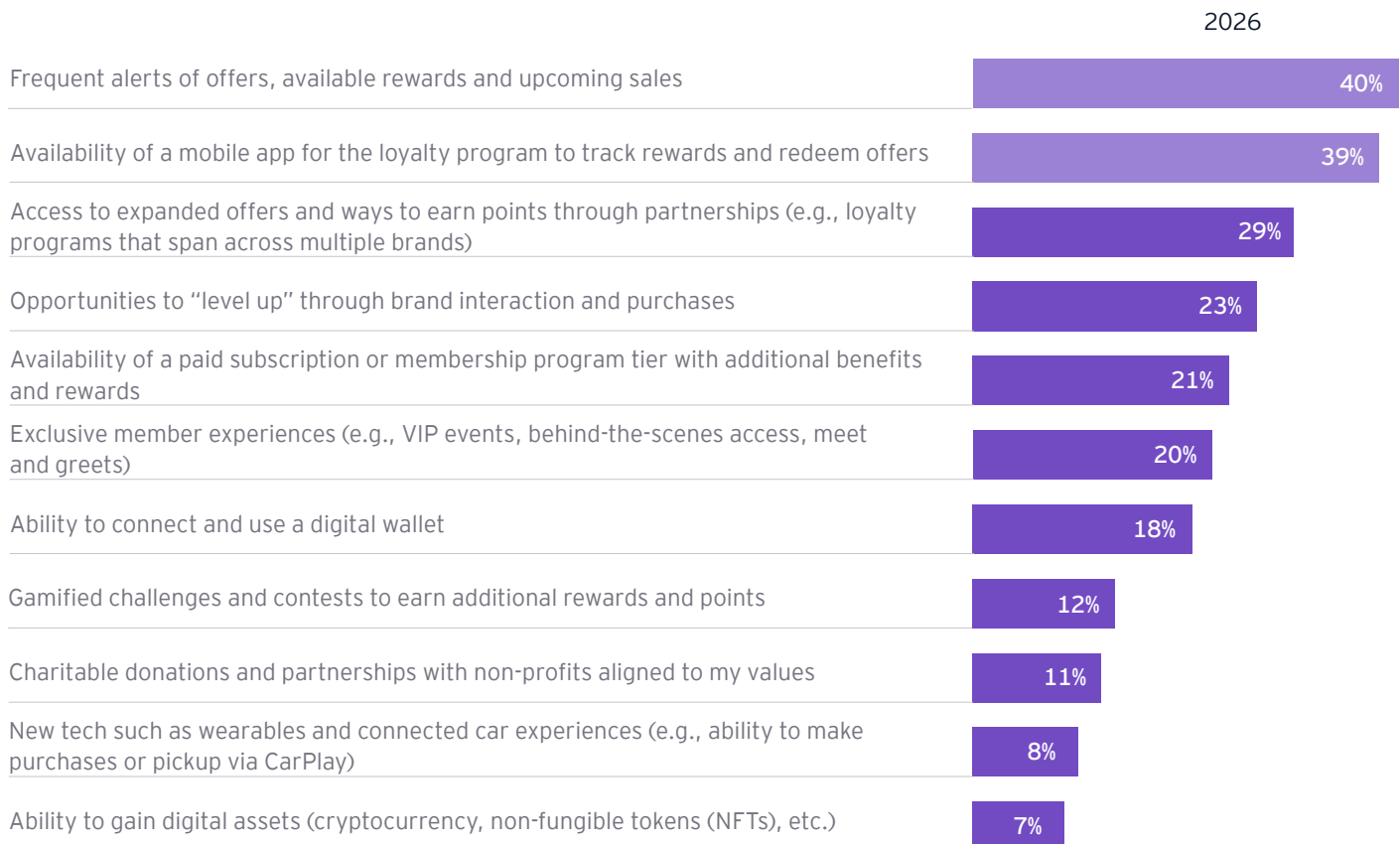
Consumers want value shown automatically

Our survey shows that consumers are interacting with loyalty programs less frequently year-over-year. Frequent alerts and mobile app tracking rank highest among desired features. Visibility has become as important as value itself. Rather than actively checking balances or offers, consumers increasingly want value shown automatically through timely prompts and reminders.

This reflects a shift away from consumers actively checking loyalty programs toward programs proactively telling them when value is available. As programs become more complex and people engage less often, alerts and reminders increasingly do the work. When value is not revealed at the right moment, it can feel diminished, even when program performance remains strong.



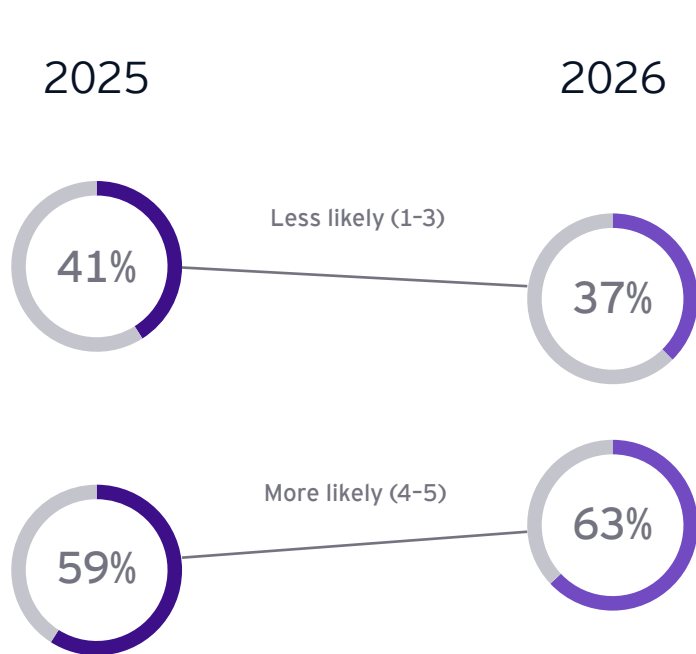
Loyalty features consumers would most like available



Consumers primarily engage through mobile

The mobile app has become the center of the loyalty experience. App adoption continues to grow year-over-year, driven largely by younger consumers, with 69% of those ages 25 to 44 using loyalty apps compared with 46% of those ages 55 and over. This upward shift reinforces the role mobile plays for loyalty.

Consumers' likelihood to download and use¹ a brand's mobile app to gain, track and redeem loyalty program rewards



¹Note that last year, survey question only included "download a brand's mobile app."

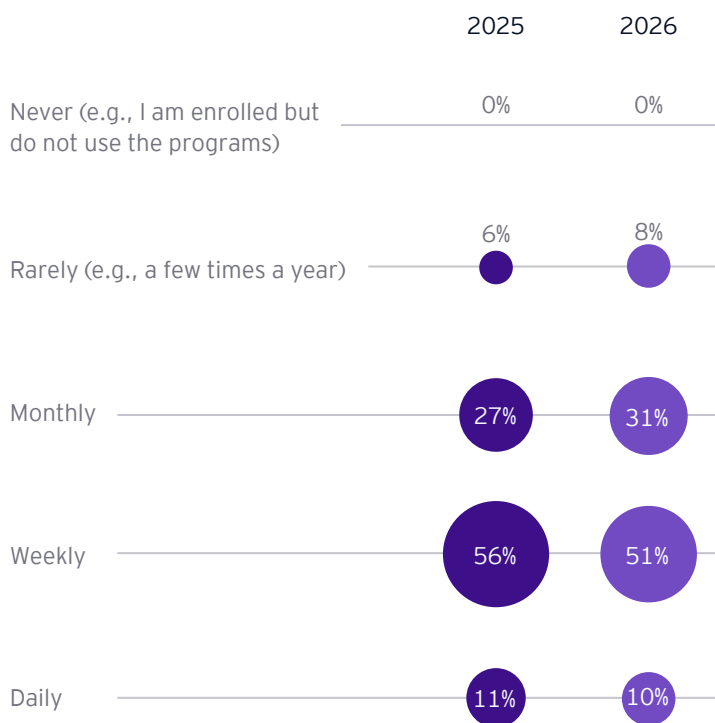
"and use" was an addition this year

²1 = Not likely at all, 2 = A little likely, 3 = Somewhat likely

³3 = Generally likely, 4 = Very likely

However, greater adoption does not mean loyalty apps are managed on a daily basis. Consumers are instead engaging with loyalty programs less weekly and more monthly.

How often consumers are using their loyalty programs (e.g., through purchasing an item to earn points, redeeming an award, checking point balance and points earned)



CONSUMER POPOUT

Female consumers are much more likely than males to prioritize having a mobile app to track rewards and redeem offers (43% female vs. 32% male).

However, they also engage with loyalty programs less frequently. More than a third of females say they check their loyalty programs monthly (36% female vs. 25% male). By contrast, 68% of males check their programs at least weekly vs. only 56% of females.

Females are more likely to want an app because it makes value easier to track without frequent check-ins. Males check more often, which may reduce the perceived need for dedicated tracking tools. Either case reveals that value needs to be revealed proactively, not left for members to discover on their own.

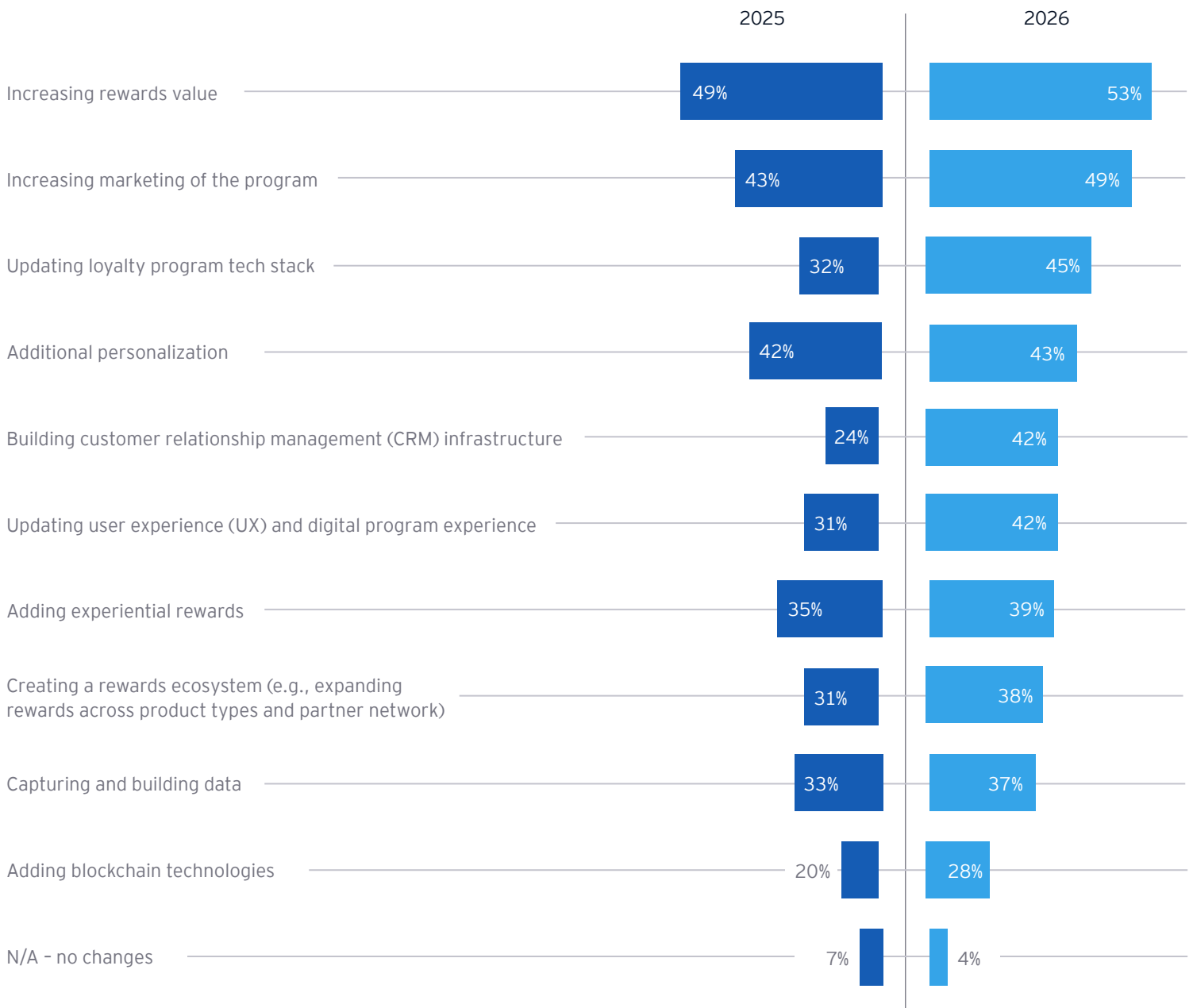


As a result, reminders and prompts play a bigger role in keeping loyalty top of mind – and brands are responding.

Increased marketing is one of the most common improvements made in the past year (49%, an increase of 6 percentage points from last year) and one of the top planned improvements for the year ahead (44%, an increase of 9 percentage points from last year). This shift reflects a growing recognition that visibility is now a core part of the loyalty experience.



Improvements brands have made to their loyalty programs in the past 12 months (November 2024–November 2025)



2.4

Complexity gap: when sophistication outpaces clarity

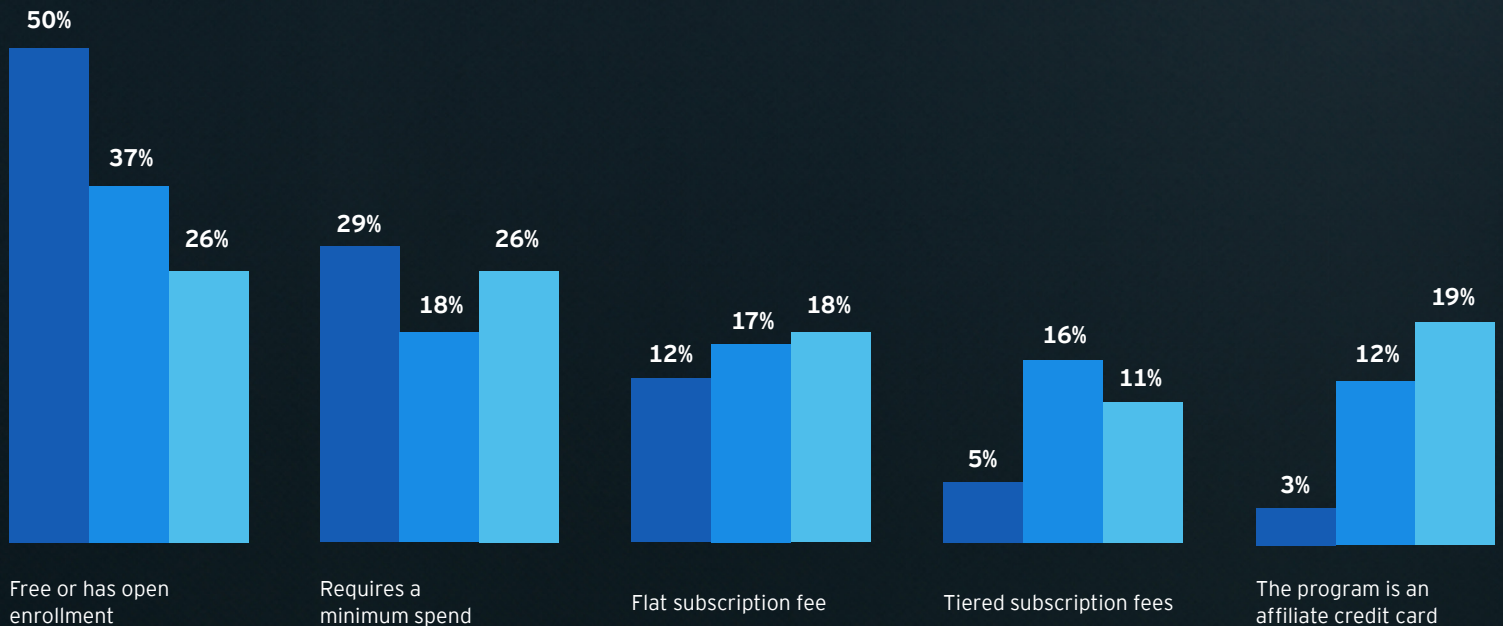


Program structures are becoming more complex

Loyalty programs were once simple and free, but they are increasingly being replaced by models that require spend, fees or deeper commitment. Free enrollment has declined sharply over the past two years, while programs based on credit cards have grown significantly. These shifts help brands improve program economics, but they also add layers of complexity for consumers to navigate.

Format of loyalty programs

● 2024 ● 2025 ● 2026



Ecosystems create value but add complexity

In addition, coalition participation continues to rise, with 79% of companies involved in a network alliance (an increase of 6 points from 2025 and 11 points from 2024). As discussed in Chapter 1, these ecosystem models allow programs to scale value and share data, but they also add layers of complexity. Varying earn-and-burn rules and uneven redemption experiences can make loyalty harder to navigate, especially when it is unclear where value is best used.

As loyalty programs evolve to drive revenue and data value, brands face a trade-off. Without deliberate simplification, complexity risks widen engagement gaps, even as overall participation appears to grow.

Across all four gaps (involving value misalignment, speed to value, visibility and complexity), a consistent pattern emerges: Perception improves fastest when value is immediate and easy to track, while also being simple to use.



CONSUMER POPOUT

Older consumers (aged 55 and over) appear less comfortable with the growing complexity of loyalty ecosystems. They are the least likely to care whether a loyalty program offers benefits or perks with other brands (16% vs. 24% overall). They are also far less willing to pay to participate in a loyalty program (24% vs. 41% overall). More than half of consumers in this age group say they primarily join a program simply because the brand offers one (52% vs. 40% overall), rather than for expanded features or partner benefits.

This suggests that for older consumers, simplicity and familiarity matter more than breadth. Programs that add layers of partners or monetization risk alienating a group that values ease and trust over optional features.

Chapter 3

Why loyalty value is not one-size-fits-all

Within the four gaps between consumers and brands that we just explored, added dimensions exist for different demographics. Loyalty programs may be performing well by many traditional measures, but consumers do not all experience value in the same way. How that value shows up depends on what people care about and how they interact with programs day to day. We're seeing those differences more clearly as programs expand and add new features.

We explore these variations through four personas, defined along age generations, which we introduced in 2024 and have continued to evolve each year with new results. Each has its own shifting expectations and beliefs, such as what it values more than the others and how each is responding to the influx of AI. Altogether, they help explain why a single program can perform well overall while still falling short for specific segments:



Younger **Connection Seekers** aged 18 to 24

respond to loyalty that makes them feel part of a community and gives them ways to participate.



Digital Pragmatists

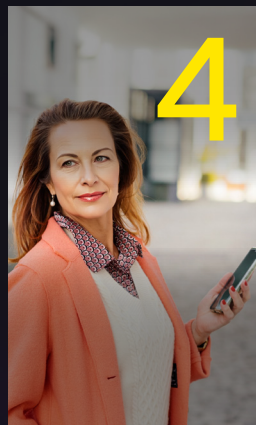
aged 25 to 44

care most about loyalty that reduces effort and saves time.



Value-First Loyalists aged 45 to 54

stay engaged when savings are easy to see and access.



Loyalty Traditionalists

55 and up

gravitate toward programs that feel predictable and financially straightforward.

Across the personas, one pattern is consistent: They expect value from loyalty that is clear and easy to access, without added effort. When that expectation is not met, engagement softens, even if a program is delivering results on paper.

Connection Seekers

18-24 years

Socially driven shoppers who look for participation, access and momentum from loyalty.

Identity and belonging shape how loyalty resonates

Connection Seekers tend to feel more emotionally connected to loyalty programs, often because of the brand itself rather than just savings.

- Stronger emotional connection than the average (67% are moderately or extremely emotionally connected vs. 63% overall)
- Increasingly more likely to join because they like the brand, rising to 29% vs. 21% overall, a 7-point increase from last year

Similar to last year, Connection Seekers respond most strongly when loyalty feels like a badge of belonging rather than only a way to save. Programs that use tangible community cues and language can reinforce that connection. For this group, sign-ups work better when they lead with what the brand stands for, not just discounts.

Value comes from access and participation

Savings still play a role for Connection Seekers, but they're not the main draw. Discounts (58% vs. 64% overall) and points (46% vs. 55% overall) matter less than average. What stands out more are access-driven benefits.

- More likely to enjoy exclusive content and experiences: 20% vs. 13% of overall consumers
- More likely to prefer gamified challenges: 18% vs. 12% of overall consumers

For Connection Seekers, value shows up through various moments that create urgency, like early access and exclusive experiences, rather than long paths to earning and redeeming rewards. Programs that let members take action and see progress tend to keep them engaged more than programs built around points alone.

Fans of mobile devices and frictionless experiences

Connection Seekers increasingly engage with loyalty through their phones, but their tolerance for friction is low.

- More likely to enroll through a brand mobile app (42% vs. 33% overall; up from 37% vs. 30% overall last year)
- Most likely persona to struggle using loyalty across channels (e.g., web, mobile, in-store) (12% vs. 6% overall)
- More than any other persona, this group finds difficulty tracking accumulated rewards and points as a top pain point

This group needs to see value in real time, with rewards and progress clearly reflected across channels. When tracking breaks or rewards feel unclear, patience runs out quickly. Friction can be a reason to disengage.

Open to AI and data sharing when benefits are visible

Connection Seekers are generally open to AI-enabled loyalty experiences, but their comfort depends on whether the benefit is clear and shows up quickly.

- Feel more positive than the average about AI in loyalty (43% vs. 41% overall)
- More comfortable using AI tools (47% vs. 44% overall)
- Comfort sharing data has declined year-over-year (48% vs. 53% last year); however, this decline is in line with the overall consumer dip

Connection Seekers are more comfortable when programs clearly connect data sharing to a more meaningful loyalty experience. Among Gen Z consumers who are uncomfortable sharing data, over half (52% vs. 31% overall) tell us they don't believe there is enough benefit in return. Privacy concerns also remain higher than average (82% vs. 72% overall).

Digital Pragmatists

25-44 years

Efficiency-driven members who expect loyalty to be both effortless and tailored to them.



Fewer loyalty programs, by choice

Digital Pragmatists are cutting back on how many loyalty programs they belong to, being more selective about where they stay engaged.

- Most stick to one to five programs (54%, up from 42% last year)
- Heavy participation is declining (12% in 11 or more programs, down from 24% last year)

For Digital Pragmatists, participation is becoming more intentional. As they cut back, programs need to prove their value through clear, ongoing usefulness rather than a long list of features. Programs that feel cluttered or hard to explain are more likely to be dropped.

Willingness to pay when value keeps showing up

Even as they cut back on how many programs they use, Digital Pragmatists are more open to paying for loyalty when it continues to earn its place.

- More likely than average to pay for loyalty (48% vs. 41% overall)
- Paid participation clusters around programs with clear usefulness

For Digital Pragmatists, programs work when they keep earning their place over time. Paying for loyalty is less about excitement and more about making a clear choice. Programs that feel redundant or take too much effort are more likely to be dropped.

Mobile as the main way they keep track of their loyalty

Digital Pragmatists are more likely than any other group to rely on a mobile app to manage their loyalty experience.

- High likelihood of using a loyalty app (69%, up from 65% in 2025 and 63% overall)
- Strong value placed on using an app for tracking and redemption (43% vs. 39% overall)
- Less interest in frequent alerts (34% vs. 40% overall)

For this group, mobile apps are the most practical way to see what they have and use it when needed. They prefer checking in on their own rather than being prompted constantly. Loyalty works best for this group when the app is quick and dependable, making it easy to check progress or use rewards.

Personalization still matters most

Personalization is one of the driving factors for how Digital Pragmatists decide if a loyalty program is worth keeping, especially when it helps them save time or cut down effort.

- 45% find AI helpful vs. 39% overall, the strongest of any persona
- Rising interest in tailored and personalized rewards (58%, up from 51% last year)
- More open than average to sharing personal data (52%, same as last year)

For Digital Pragmatists, personalization works best when it makes things easier rather than adding noise. Being able to set their preferences and see relevant options helps reduce effort and builds confidence. When programs explain how data is used and give members clear choices, personalization feels like a benefit rather than something to tolerate.

Value-First Loyalists

45-54 years

Frequent participants who stay loyal when savings are clear and accessible.



Recognition matters more than status

Value-First Loyalists are more likely than other groups to feel recognized by loyalty programs. At the same time, they are less interested in climbing tiers or chasing status.

- More likely to feel recognized by their loyalty programs (49% vs. 45% overall)
- Less motivated to reach higher status levels (26% vs. 32% overall)

For Value-First Loyalists, recognition works best when it shows up as immediate value rather than a future status. Simple acknowledgment paired with savings or offers helps signal that loyalty is noticed without asking for extra effort. More complex tier structures tend to have limited impact for this group, especially when they delay access to benefits that feel tangible.

Highly engaged, but not exclusive

Value-First Loyalists are very active with their loyalty programs, but that engagement does not translate into total exclusivity.

- Frequent check-ins are common (57% check weekly vs. 51% overall)
- However, 51% are willing to shop outside the program for a better deal (vs. 45% overall)

For Value-First Loyalists, loyalty is practical rather than emotional. Frequent engagement reflects an ongoing effort to get value, not a commitment to one brand. When programs fail to surface clear savings, this group is quick to look elsewhere. Keeping them engaged often comes down to reinforcing value at the moment of purchase, rather than relying on habit.

Savings shape how value shows up

Savings play the biggest role in how this group judges loyalty, but how those savings are delivered matters just as much.

- Strong preference for discounts (68% vs. 64% overall)
- Higher interest in frequent updates (44% vs. 40% overall)
- Within the mobile app, exclusive deals and offers are the most valued feature (70% vs. 63% overall), higher than any other persona

For Value-First Loyalists, loyalty works best when savings show up often and are easy to spot. Discounts and deals sit at the center of what they value most. Email and the mobile app remain the most effective ways to reinforce that value. When offers are easy to find and simple to use, engagement stays strong.

Comfort with AI is tied to control

Value-First Loyalists are generally comfortable with AI in loyalty programs, but only when it feels like they remain in charge.

- AI sentiment is positive but measured (40% positive; 39% find it helpful, in line with overall consumer sentiment)
- Comfort sharing personal data remains in line with how overall consumers feel (47% vs. 48%)
- 78% say being able to choose their own rewards is very important for them, more than for any other persona

What sets this group apart is not excitement about AI itself, but a strong preference for control. For Value-First Loyalists, AI adds value when it helps clarify choices without taking them away. Confidence grows when options feel visible and understandable. When AI starts making decisions for them or makes value harder to understand, comfort and trust drops quickly.

Loyalty Traditionalists

55 years and over

Longtime members who prioritize reliability and financial clarity.



Small circles, slow expansion

Loyalty Traditionalists tend to participate in fewer programs than other groups, even as some gradual expansion is underway.

- Fewer remain in one to five programs (65%, down from 74% last year)
- Participation in six to 10 programs is growing (28%, up from 18% last year)
- Very limited participation beyond that (7% participate in more than 10 programs vs. 12% overall)

For Loyalty Traditionalists, participation remains selective. The focus is on feeling confident in a small number of trusted programs, not on variety. Programs that feel stable and easy to understand are more likely to be kept, while frequent changes can make this group uneasy.

Familiar brands bring people in

For this group, loyalty is shaped more by long-standing brand relationships than by features or added extras.

- Enrollment driven by brand familiarity (52% vs. 40% overall)
- Less interest in joining multiple programs in the same category (60% vs. 68% overall)
- Low interest in partner benefits (16% vs. 24% overall)

For Loyalty Traditionalists, trust and familiarity carry more weight than novelty. Messaging that emphasizes consistency and predictability tends to work better than leading with innovation. Brands should also anchor loyalty messaging to the core brand relationship, not partners or ecosystems, and avoid heavy reliance on referrals, partnerships or cross-brand perks.

Straightforward value matters most

Loyalty Traditionalists respond most strongly to rewards that feel clear and financially familiar, and are increasingly cautious around digital complexity.

- Strong preference for cash-like rewards (61% vs. 55% overall, making cash-equivalent rewards the strongest driver for this group)
- High sensitivity to expiring points (35% vs. 31% overall)
- Least likely to sign up because of a recommendation from friends or family (7% vs. 15% overall)

For this group, loyalty works best when rewards are easy to understand and easy to use. Confusing rules or unclear redemption steps can quickly erode confidence. Value is reinforced when it shows up clearly at the moment it is earned or used, while complex rules tend to weaken engagement.

Growing hesitation around technology and AI

Loyalty Traditionalists are becoming more cautious about technology-led loyalty experiences, especially when those experiences feel unfamiliar.

- Feel more positive than the average about AI in loyalty (43% vs. 41% overall)
- More comfortable using AI tools (47% vs. 44% overall)
- Comfort sharing data has declined year-over-year (48% vs. 53% last year); however, this decline is in line with the overall consumer dip

For this group, experiences that push app-first or AI-led interactions often create friction. More traditional paths, supported by email or in-store touch points, tend to feel easier. As comfort with data sharing drops, a restrained approach to personalization becomes even more important for maintaining trust.

Chapter 4

AI as a multiplier for loyalty experience

AI is becoming embedded into how loyalty programs operate, driven by significant corporate investment and moving well beyond pilots and experiments. However, what matters is not whether companies are using AI, but how it shows up for consumers.

Our data reveals a clear tension. AI can help close the experience gaps we identified in Chapter 2, and yet, without being designed thoughtfully, AI can also amplify these very same gaps. Expectations do not change with AI, but visibility does.

This chapter explores how organizations are embedding AI into their loyalty programs, how consumer attitudes toward AI and data sharing are evolving and why AI can either strengthen loyalty experiences or expose where they fall short.

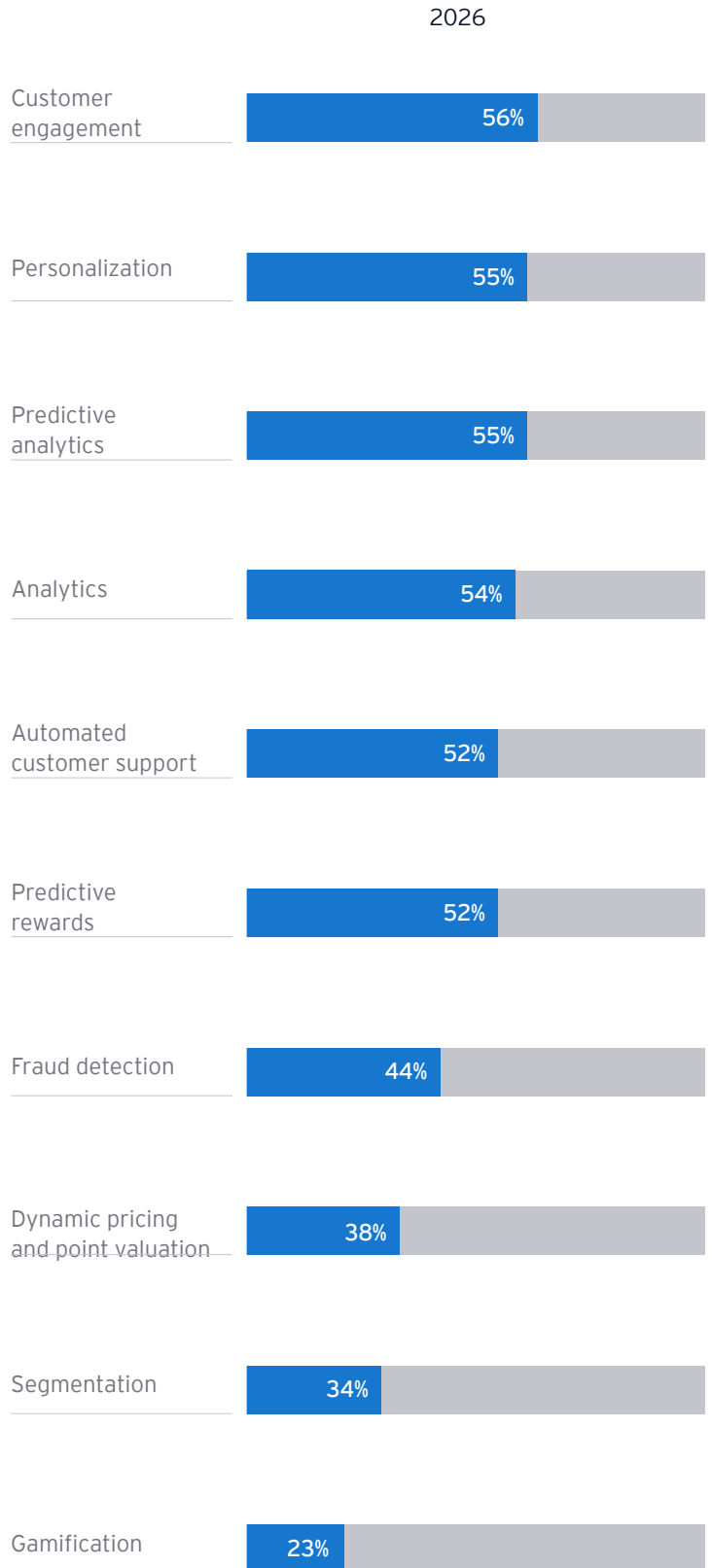
4.1

AI use is expanding across loyalty programs

AI has increasingly become interwoven throughout the loyalty experience, marking a shift away from limited pilots toward everyday use. Over half of organizations say they use AI for customer engagement, personalization, analytics and automated support, signaling a focus on scaling existing capabilities rather than reinventing the loyalty experience. Broad use of predictive analytics and rewards signals an emerging shift toward using AI to create more anticipatory loyalty experiences.



AI features currently being used in loyalty programs today



Looking ahead, organizations are prioritizing AI capabilities that are still less common today. Dynamic pricing and fraud detection sit on the lower end of current adoption, yet they are the most frequently planned additions in the next year. This suggests that AI is becoming part of how loyalty programs are built and managed, not just how they engage members.

As AI use expands, organizations are also focusing on how loyalty programs run day to day. More investment is going toward improving efficiency and managing risk, alongside customer-facing use cases. Much of this work is less visible to consumers, but it plays a growing role in making loyalty programs feel more reliable and fairer.

AI features organizations plan to add in the next 12 months

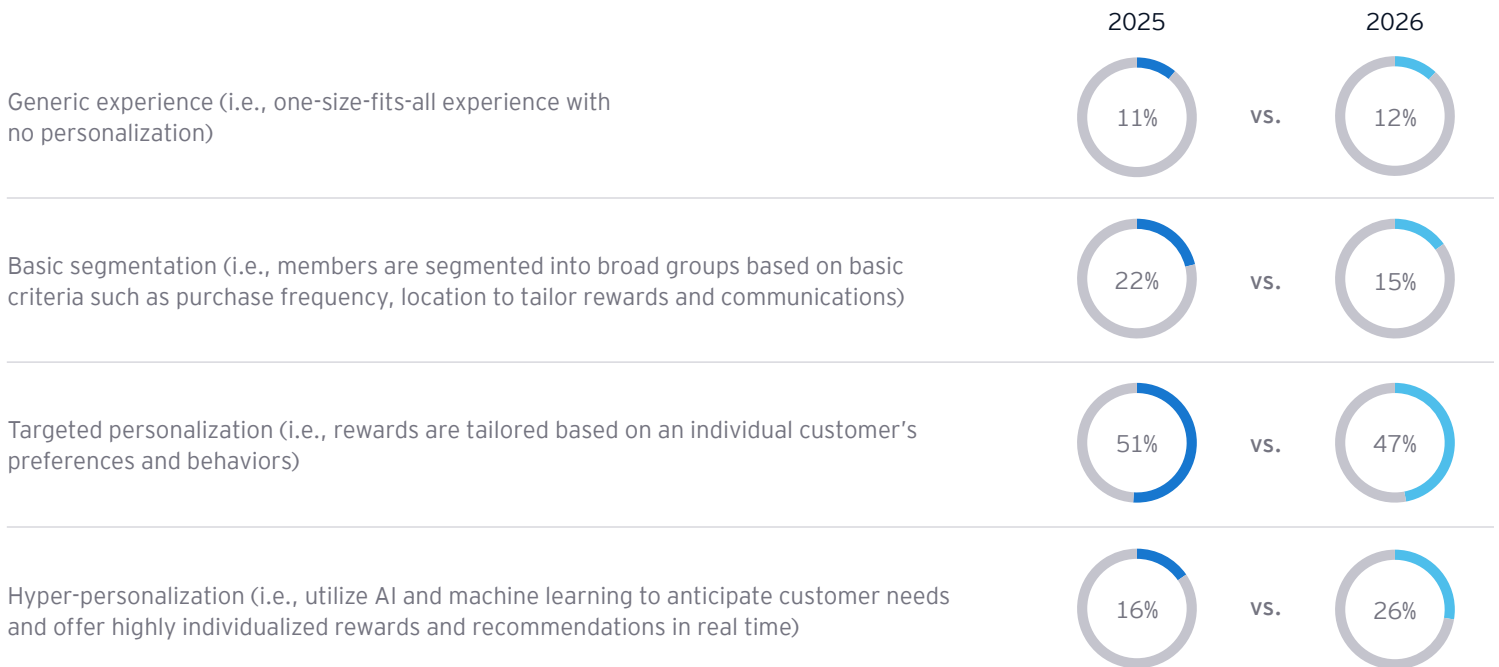


Personalization is becoming more advanced

Organizations are moving toward more sophisticated personalization models. Adoption of basic segmentation and targeted personalization declined from last year, signaling a shift away from one-size-fits-all targeting and rigid rules. Instead, more organizations are prioritizing adaptive, AI-driven personalization that supports individualized, real-time decision-making at the consumer level.



AI features currently being used in loyalty programs today



This change is most apparent in industries with frequent transactions and rich behavioral data, such as retail (31%, up from 13% last year), CPG (rising to 36% from 16% last year) and hospitality and tourism (40%, up from 19% last year). These industries have many moments where tailored offers or reminders can influence consumer behavior and play a critical role in elevating the customer experience.

Rather than treating loyalty as a static structure, organizations are beginning to treat it as something that adjusts continuously. AI plays a central role in that change. But greater flexibility also raises new questions for consumers about control, clarity and trust.

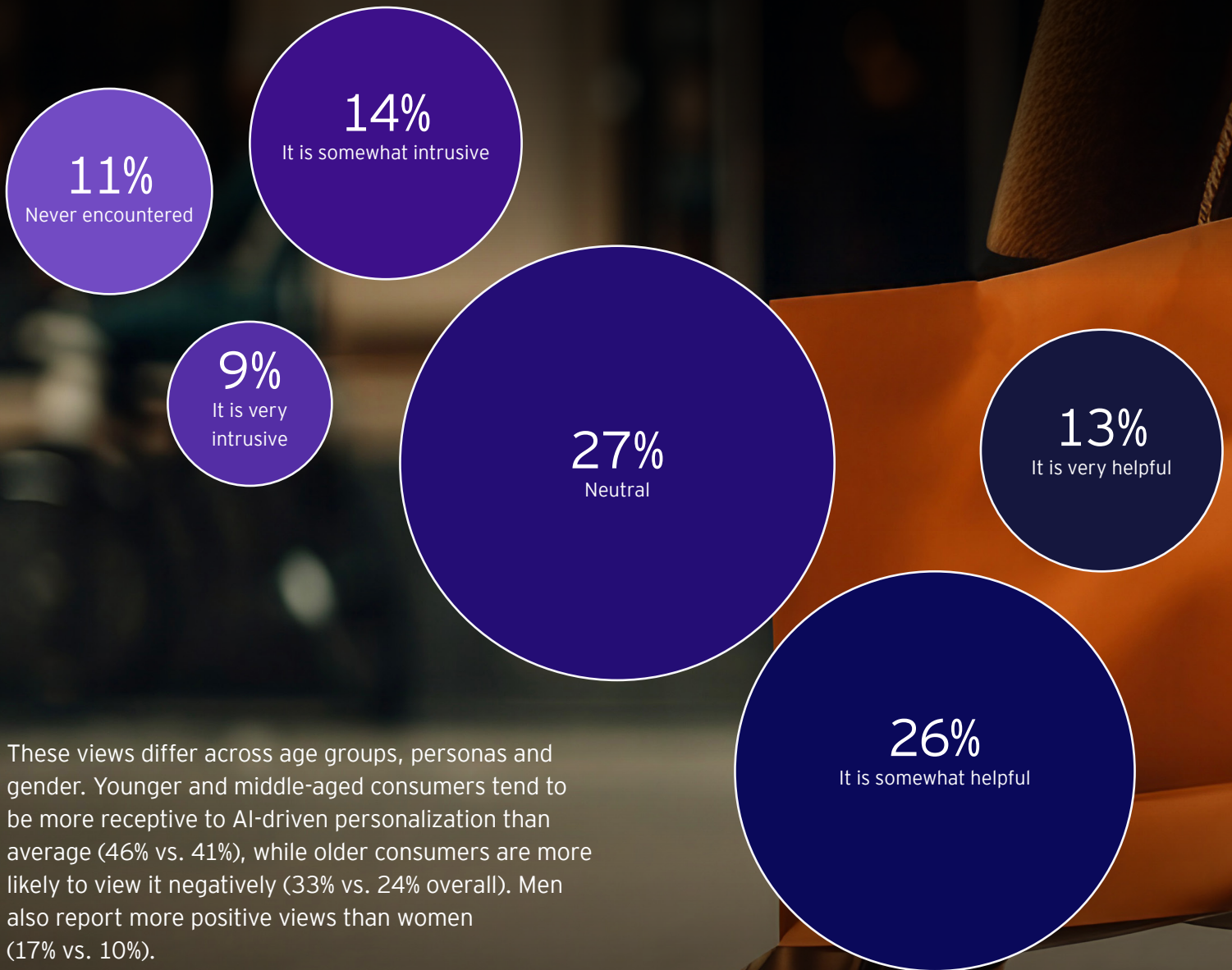
4.2

Consumer views on AI are mixed



As organizations expand their use of AI in loyalty programs, consumer reactions to AI-powered personalization remain largely varied. While nearly (40%) of consumers tell us they find it at least somewhat helpful, strong enthusiasm is limited and many remain neutral or wary. These results together suggest that while AI has not been rejected, it also has yet to earn broad trust or full perceived value.

How consumers feel about the use of AI-driven personalization in loyalty programs



To deliver AI-driven personalization, loyalty programs need customer data. That makes how consumers feel about sharing data an essential part of the story, not a separate issue.

Consumer comfort with sharing personal data is declining. In 2026, only 48% of consumers say they are generally comfortable with sharing personal data with loyalty programs, down from 55% in 2024. This is the first time comfort has fallen below a majority, even as organizations continue to invest in AI-driven personalization.

Comfort levels differ sharply by age. A majority of millennials (52%) say they are comfortable sharing personal data, consistent with what we saw last year. By contrast, only 39% of consumers aged 55 and over report the same comfort, down from 47% last year. At the same time, overall discomfort continues to rise, with 22% now saying they feel uncomfortable sharing personal data, up from 13% in 2024.

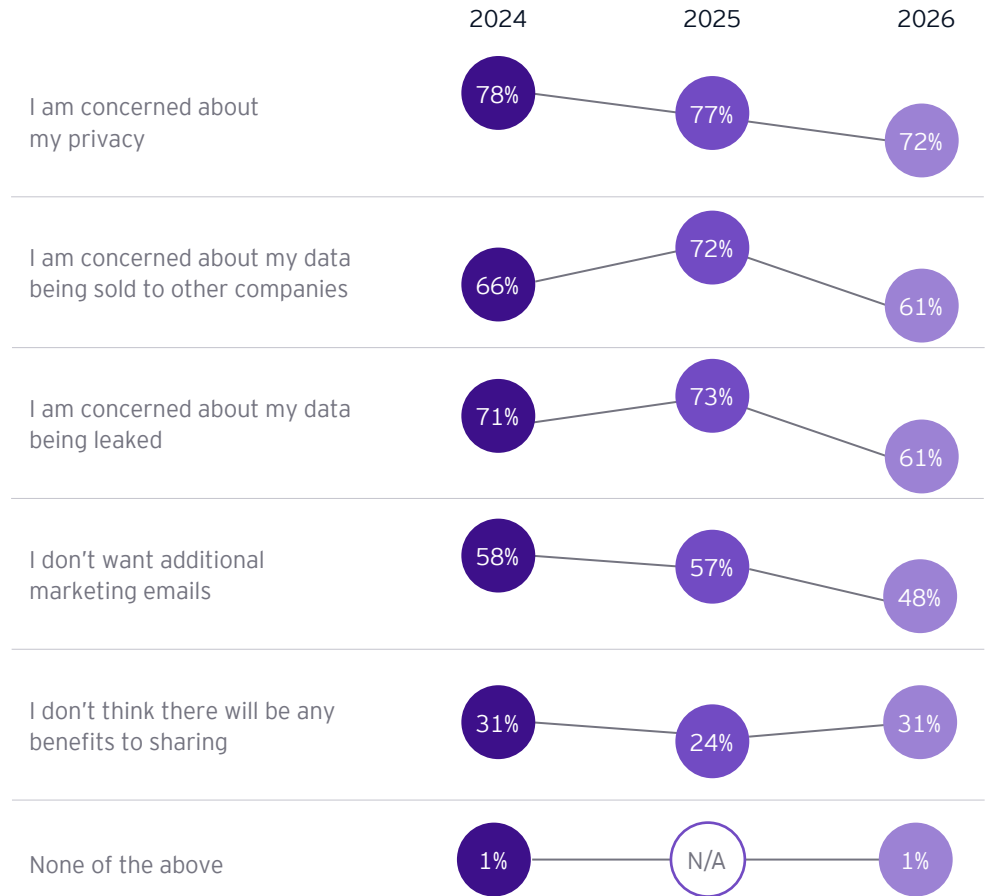
How comfortable consumers are sharing personal data with loyalty programs

● 2024 ● 2025 ● 2026



Why consumers are uncomfortable sharing personal data is evolving. Privacy concerns remain the most common reason for hesitation, but fears around data being sold or leaked have eased year-over-year. What is rising instead is increased skepticism about value, with nearly a third of consumers, the same as 2024 levels, questioning the benefits to sharing. What's clear is that the barrier is shifting from fear alone to proving clear and tangible value.

Why consumers said they were not comfortable sharing personal data with loyalty programs



CONSUMER POPOUT

Smarter might not always mean better

Coalitions with AI-powered personalization does little to move the needle for older consumers. Only 22% of those aged 55 and over say it is helpful, compared with 39% overall. Features tied to curation matter less as well. Just 44% say curated rewards are important, and the same share tell us that being able to choose specific product types matters, both well below the overall average (about 55%).

For this group, smarter doesn't necessarily mean better. AI is unlikely to boost engagement when it leads with personalization. Where it adds the most value is behind the scenes: helping prevent point expiration and simplify earn-and-burn rules while surfacing clear, cash-equivalent value at the right moment. For older consumers, feeling in control and seeing value clearly matter more than smart recommendations.



4.3

AI can make experience gaps harder to ignore

Based on our data, it's clear that AI raises the stakes on consumer expectations for loyalty. The same four gaps we identified in Chapter 2 (trust, visibility, speed to value and complexity) are exactly where AI can either help loyalty programs catch up or make existing weaknesses harder to ignore. As AI becomes part of how programs run, these gaps stop being things teams can overlook. They become basic design expectations that shape whether AI actually makes loyalty easier or just makes problems more obvious.



1 Design for customer control to address increasing gaps in trust

Consumers are not broadly negative on AI, but they respond poorly when it feels imposed. The clearest signal here is choice. 75% of consumers tell us that being able to select their own rewards is important. That is the preference AI should be built around.

Customers lose trust quickly if they don't feel in control. Clear control makes AI feel helpful instead of intrusive. That's why default options should be adjustable and easy to change.

2 Make value clear so it feels real

AI should make value easier to see, not harder to interpret. This is where AI can do very practical work, especially when programs are getting more complex and people are less patient with hunting for value.

What matters most is clear balances and clear progress toward a reward, as well as clear reminders before benefits expire. When those cues are present in the moment, value feels real. Without them, value can feel theoretical, even if it exists on paper.



3 Explain how data is used to build trust

Data discomfort has been on the rise in recent years, and increased data sharing through coalitions will only make this a more sensitive issue. Twenty-two percent of consumers this year say they are uncomfortable sharing personal data, an increase from both last year (17%) and 2024 (13%).

That does not mean AI can't work. It means AI has to explain itself at the right moments. Consumers want to understand why an offer is showing up and what it is based on. Clear, straightforward explanations drive trust; without them, discomfort grows, even when an offer is relevant.

4 Reduce friction so value shows up sooner

Delayed payoff is still the biggest frustration. Expiring points (31%) and having to make too many purchases to redeem (29%) indicate a redemption problem, not a marketing one.

This is where AI can be genuinely helpful. It can surface reminders and warnings before value is lost, and it can nudge people toward the right moment to redeem. At its best, AI makes loyalty programs feel easier to use. Applied poorly, it makes delays feel harder to justify.

4.4

Bringing it together

AI is quickly becoming central to how loyalty programs run, but consumers are not looking for “smarter” surprises. They want value that is clear, easy to use and fair.

When designed with those expectations in mind, AI can help close the gap between strong program performance and softer consumer perception. Otherwise, it risks widening that gap more quickly than any other change in the loyalty experience.



Conclusion

The 2026 Loyalty Playbook

Loyalty programs are at a critical moment in how brands are shaping them. Many organizations have made loyalty a more strategic and cross-functional focus, and the results help explain why. Programs are delivering higher enrollment and contributing more to revenue as ROI continues to improve.

Yet consumer signals tell a different story when it comes to the loyalty experience itself. Churn is rising as enthusiasm for loyalty programs begins to soften.

This tension exists because performance has outpaced how consumers perceive value. Programs have become more sophisticated and more monetized, with data playing a bigger role in how loyalty is designed and managed. But for many consumers, value is harder to see and takes longer to show up.

Closing this gap calls for reprioritizing how consumers receive and understand value, based on how loyalty actually works for them today.

Differentiation is increasingly shaped by the day-to-day loyalty experience, rather than by adding more features. The brands that stand out will be the ones that reduce effort for customers while making the payoff clear in the moments that matter.



So, how can marketers do this?

Across the survey data, a few consistent patterns point to where loyalty programs tend to fall short. Together, they highlight a small set of experience gaps that marketers can actively address.

1 Lead with value customers can feel right away.

Start with payoff. Discounts and value-first approaches still matter, with 64% of consumers saying they enjoy discounts the most. Where programs struggle is in the delays that make value feel distant, especially when points expire or earn thresholds feel too high before a reward is within reach.

2 Highlight progress at every step.

Visibility is now part of the experience. Consumers continue to point to alerts (40%) and app tracking (39%) as features that help them keep up with value. On the brand side, this is where investments in user experience, customer relationship management, analytics and marketing matter most. When value is earned but not presented or articulated clearly, it often feels like it is not there at all.

3 Simplify the story as programs get more complex.

As coalitions expand and program formats shift away from free or open models, the member-level story needs to be simpler. That means clearly explaining partner roles and earn paths, and making redemption logic easy to follow. Consumers do not need back-end detail, but they do need to understand what to do and how to achieve various rewards.

4 Earn trust by design.

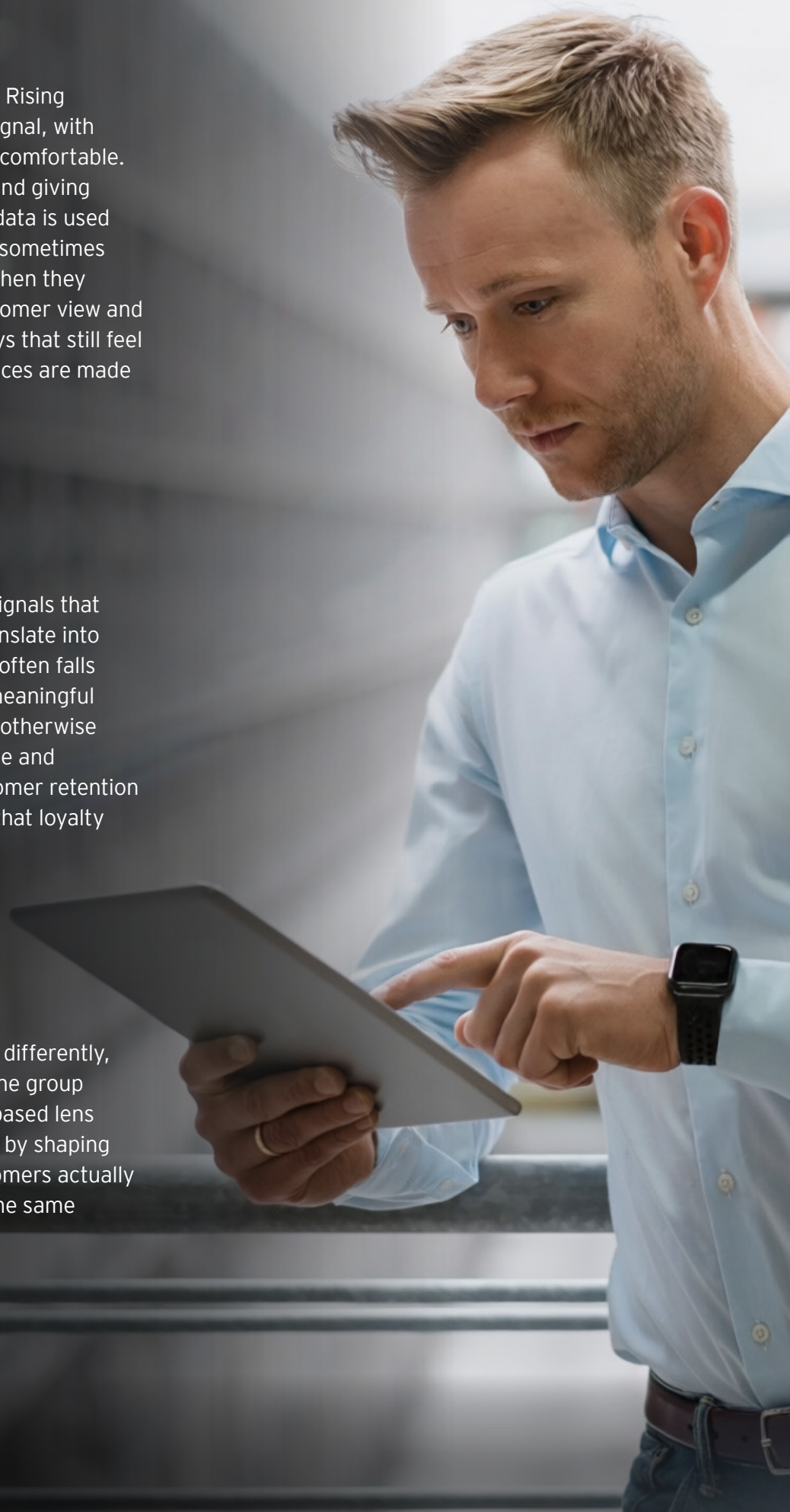
Trust has become a design requirement. Rising discomfort with data sharing is a clear signal, with 22% of consumers telling us they feel uncomfortable. In response, setting clear expectations and giving customers more control over how their data is used can help address this. Loyalty data may sometimes sit in a silo, but brands get more value when they connect loyalty behavior to a single customer view and activate it across the organization in ways that still feel respectful to customers. How those choices are made and explained increasingly shapes trust.

5 Measure loyalty as customers feel it.

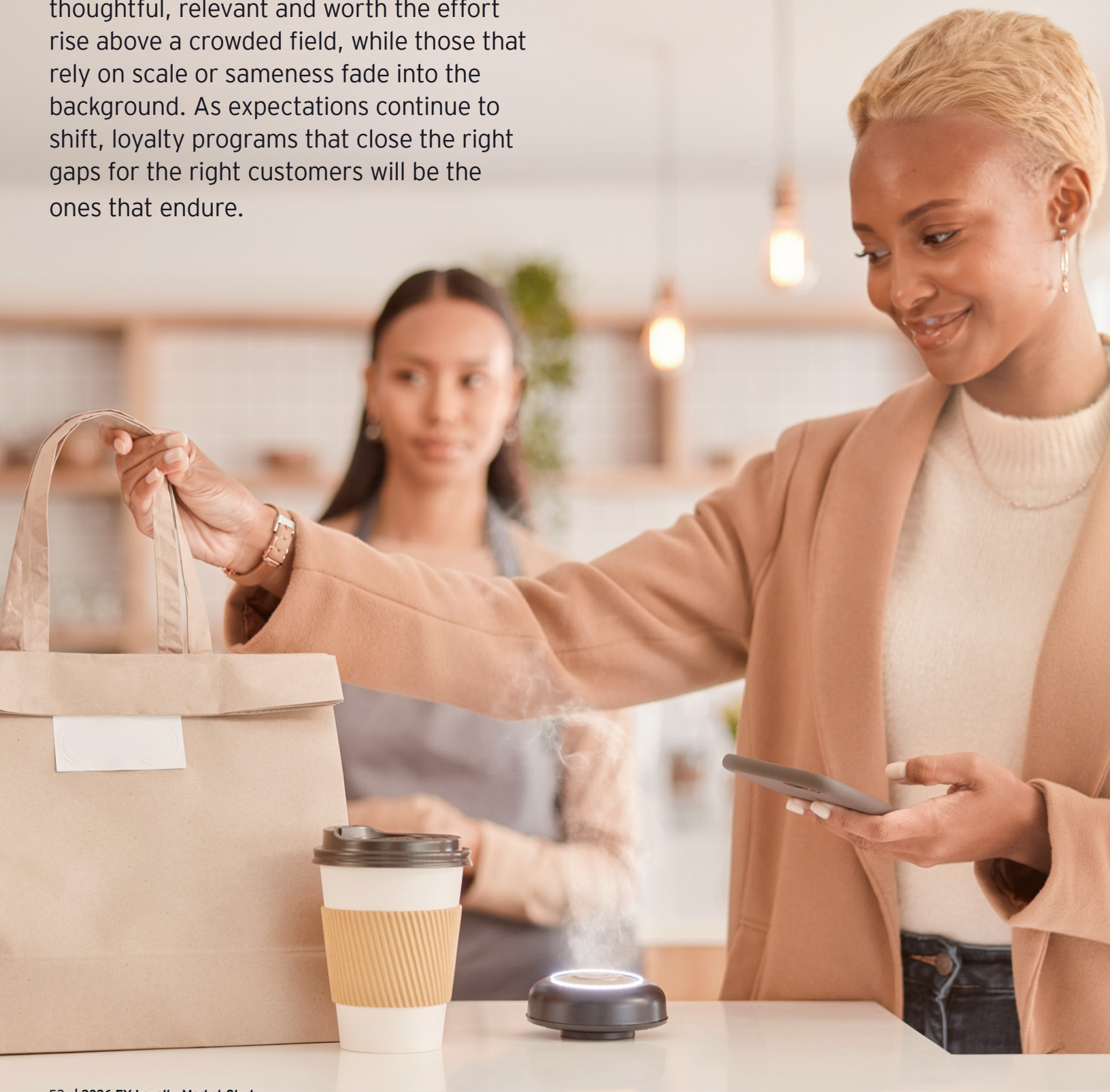
Worsening churn is one of the clearest signals that strong performance does not always translate into lasting loyalty. In our study, churn most often falls in the 21%-40% range, which points to meaningful attrition even among programs that are otherwise performing well. Looking beyond revenue and enrollment, measures that capture customer retention and engagement can reveal early signs that loyalty is weakening.

6 Move beyond one-size-fits-all loyalty.

Customers define value, effort and trust differently, so the same program change can help one group and frustrate another. Using a persona-based lens helps focus effort where it matters most by shaping loyalty strategies for how different customers actually experience them, rather than applying the same approach across the entire audience.



Loyalty in 2026 will belong to brands that make the payoff obvious and timely while maintaining a sense of fairness across interactions. With organizations investing heavily in loyalty programs and consumers encountering more of them than ever, design becomes the primary means of standing out. Programs that feel thoughtful, relevant and worth the effort rise above a crowded field, while those that rely on scale or sameness fade into the background. As expectations continue to shift, loyalty programs that close the right gaps for the right customers will be the ones that endure.



Survey methodology

Consumer survey

The EY organization worked with a panel provider to field a web survey instrument to US consumers who generally participate in consumer loyalty programs for goods and services. The analysis was primarily conducted on the 93% of respondents who are a member of at least one consumer loyalty program. 58% of the respondents identified as female, and 42% identified as male. The survey data was collected from November 6 to November 14, 2025, and 1,505 usable responses were collected.

Corporate survey

The EY organization surveyed industry professionals who oversaw, managed or contributed to customer loyalty programs. Respondents with the title of Director/Senior Manager or Executive/Vice President/Division Head and who had about 10 years of experience were screened into the survey. These professionals worked for firms with \$100m to more than \$5b in annual revenue. Respondents came from a variety of sectors but were primarily concentrated in retail, food and beverage, and hospitality sectors. The survey data was collected from November 6 to November 27, 2025, and 298 usable responses were collected.



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