



2026 TRENDS

Pharma and Biotech Commercial Operations Tech

The past year has put an impetus on commercial organizations to innovate effectively with AI. As a reflection, our 2026 Pharma and Biotech Commercial Operations Tech Trends tackle how we see industry leaders implementing common sales, marketing, and medical AI use cases to drive value for organizations. We explore how your commercial teams can build the operational foundations – including data, governance, workflows, and skills – required to sustain AI adoption.

Commercial AI Agents: Strategic Decisions to Build vs. Buy

Before jumping into key trends, it's critical that commercial leaders assess what intentional investments look like to synthesize information, improve processes, and ultimately provide stronger insights for their organizations. Moving into 2026, we anticipate commercial organizations increasingly having the confidence and repetition needed to integrate AI into their operations.

The strategic decision for commercial organizations now becomes determining the long-term strategy: should teams build these use cases internally or buy capabilities from the right technology partners?

The availability of open-source AI tools, easy-to-connect-to Large Language Models (LLMs), or AI capabilities within existing vendor landscapes allows the flexibility for teams to realize their AI, or agentic AI, dreams. Therefore, internally developed and/or augmented tools tailored for specific purposes often find the highest success rate and cost effectiveness in the long run.

AI accelerators are marketed as turnkey yet often focus on impressive front-end output and require heavy customization on the back end or excessive rework of input data to match tool expectations. When AI products are built custom-tailored to the unique needs of busy internal teams, user adoption rates improve, as these users don't have to drastically change their ways of working to accommodate the tool – it's the tool that's accommodating them.

The following trends outline where organizations are succeeding, where challenges persist, and how commercial leaders can make informed decisions about building and managing AI capabilities as they move from experimentation to operationalization.

TREND 1

AI Agents to Drive Commercial Team
Education, Prediction, and Efficiency

TREND 2

AI Readiness for Scale

TREND 3

AI Adoption for Change

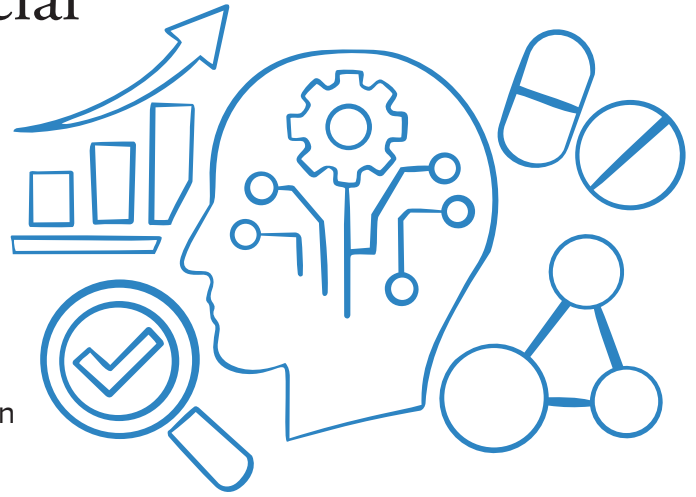
TREND 1

AI Agents to Drive Commercial Team Education, Prediction, and Efficiency

Should commercial leaders use AI to drive top-line growth or bottom-line efficiency?

In 2026, organizations enabling commercial field teams often start with field-enabling tools in three specific areas.

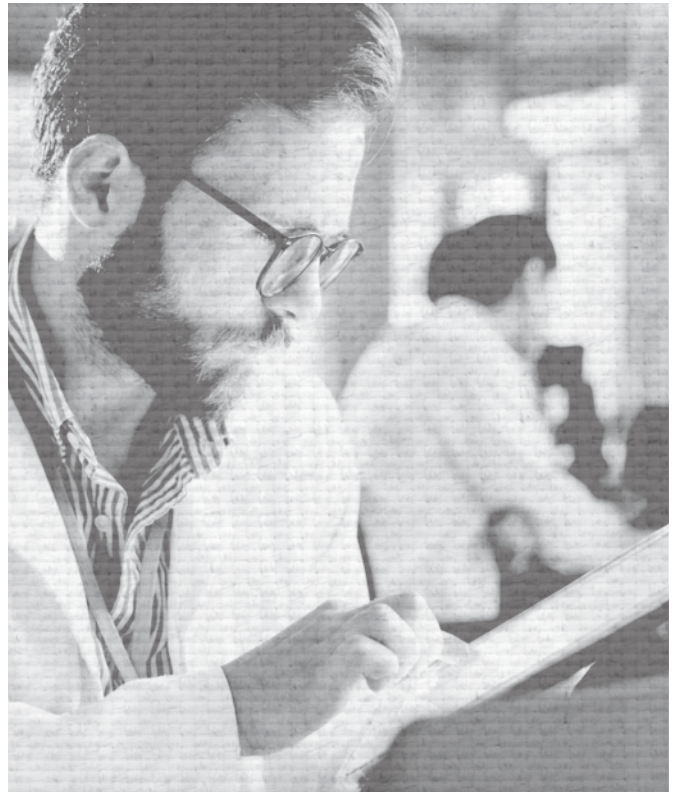
The first focus we're frequently seeing enabled is predictive modeling. With AI's ability to synthesize large amounts of data, assistance predicting patient enrollment and patient finding simplifies the targeting process.



Clarkston Project

Predictive Modeling That Doubles Accuracy

Enhancing an [in-house patient start model](#) to boost prediction accuracy by 101%. This empowered representatives to target physicians with the right information at the right time, driving efficiency and impact.



The second application of commercial and medical AI centers around education. Shortening the path to commercial and medical training has proven to be a no-brainer for implementing AI. By incorporating chatbots into the commercial learning process, organizations are enabling quick field team readiness and response.

Clarkston Projects

Pharma-Centric AI for Commercial Q&A

Replacing a cumbersome query engine with a [custom AI agent](#) that reasons through data, delivers precise answers, and generates visual insights resulting in faster, smarter decision-making and a more agile, data-driven field team.



LLM-Powered Insights for Medical Teams

Enabling cleaner data structuring, sentiment tracking, and dynamic dashboards. Teams now uncover engagement trends and unmet needs with ease.

The final focus area of AI use cases for commercial and medical teams revolves around driving efficiency. As LLMs evolve and get better over time, a lot can be done in the content generation arena. We see these use cases bring the greatest efficiency in generating derivative content or standard structured responses.

Clarkston Projects

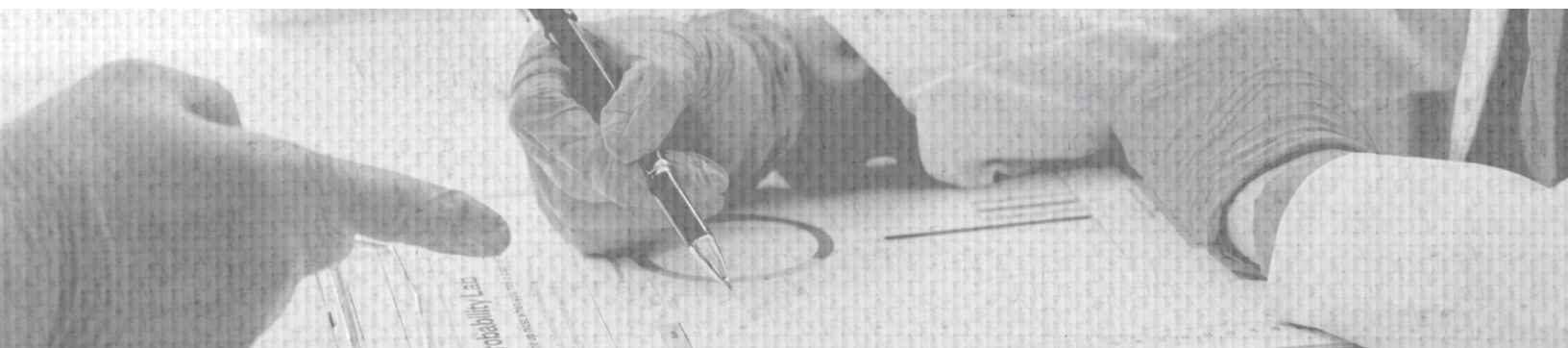
AI-Powered Marketing Content Generation

Developing [AI to read/interpret](#) the client's Core Visual Aid document along with existing promotional materials, implementing a tool capable of creating numerous versions of new content with different tones & custom specifications based on previously approved content. These solutions deliver faster turnaround times by up to 50%, while reducing agency costs and improving compliance. Marketing teams gained flexibility to create content in multiple tones, get closer to the desired message quickly, and focus on strategy rather than back-and-forth with agencies.

Standard Medical Response Automation

Streamlining medical response workflows by building an AI tool that [automates standard response documents](#) for information requests, saving time and improving compliance.

The emerging AI success stories in commercial life sciences aren't of businesses adopting every shiny, "out-of-the-box" AI tool hitting the market. The largest value and efficiency gains are realized by narrowing focus to building internal, purpose-driven tools tailored to unique processes.

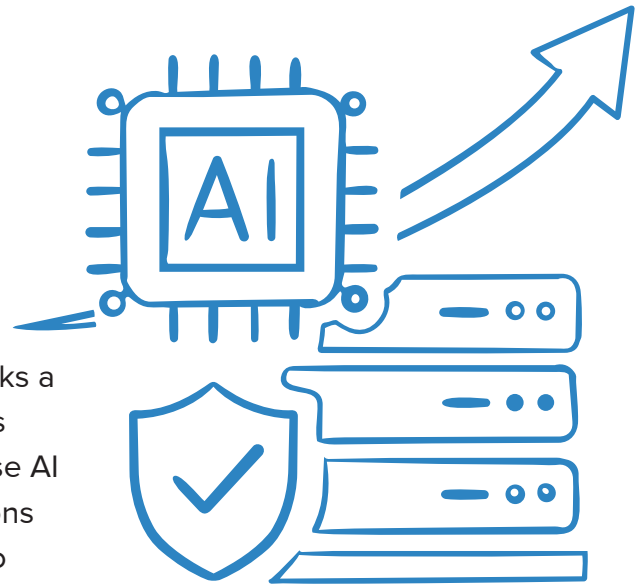


TREND 2

AI Readiness for Scale

How are commercial leaders ensuring scalability of their AI capabilities?

Commercial organizations have been poised for accelerating AI adoption over the past two years, but 2026 marks a shift from experimentation to operationalization. The companies gaining momentum are those with the structural readiness to use AI reliably. As field teams, brand leaders, and commercial operations teams push for practical applications, AI readiness is evolving to become a defining capability, and commercial teams must treat it as such.



Focus Area 1: Data Quality as a Mirror for Readiness

Commercial teams have always wrestled with data inconsistencies. However, with the rise of AI, data quality becomes a reflection of organizational maturity. AI (especially LLM-driven systems) require new types of clarity and structure. Data that was once not feasible for certain use cases, or too complex to be worth cleaning, is suddenly usable with AI's ability to handle ambiguity. This wider tolerance of data inputs and uses changes onus on teams to simply "fix all the data" (that never happens) to help the AI prepare for data inconsistencies.

Data teams supporting the commercial organization must now ensure:

- **Semantic hygiene**, which becomes essential as organizations discover that vague labels and inconsistent terminology weaken AI outputs.
- **Retrieval quality**, which emerges as a gate to an organization's ability to surface the right medical response letter, formulary status, or account access rule immediately when a representative asks.
- **Grounding practices**, which become critical as teams push for AI outputs tied directly to authoritative sources rather than model inference.

Commercial teams increasingly see that inconsistent engagement definitions, unclear account hierarchies, or unstructured reference materials can slow AI success. [Improving your data quality](#) requires clarifying processes, ownership, and business rules across commercial, not merely adjusting data pipelines.

Focus Area 2: Commercial Governance Evolves into an Enabler

As AI becomes more deeply embedded in customer-facing and field-facing workflows, governance expedites the transformation of AI into a valued commercial capability. Firms are becoming more comfortable setting up AI policy governance that goes beyond scaring employees away from usage. Teams are establishing clear rules for AI-assisted content creation, field usage, and customer interaction.

Medical, Legal, and Regulatory groups are evolving from reviewing static materials to evaluating dynamic workflows, conditional outputs, and the logic that drives AI recommendations.

Governance programs now include:

- Clear standards for grounding AI outputs in approved content
- Technologies and tool integrations that expedite analytics
- Documentation requirements aligned to how AI is actually used
- Oversight structures sized to commercial risk, not generic or clinical AI risk

The commercial teams progressing fastest in 2026 are those treating governance as the mechanism that enables efficient deployment, not just safe deployment.

Focus Area 3: Readiness Assessment to Drive Build–Buy Decision

When it comes to custom internal AI builds, the debate over whether to [build or buy AI capabilities](#) is giving way to a more pragmatic lens: what is your organization structurally ready to support?

Teams with mature governance, documented workflows, integration capabilities, and defined technical roles can reasonably build or extend custom agents. These organizations understand the responsibilities behind creating AI (*i.e., testing, monitoring, risk mitigation, and lifecycle oversight*) that make custom development viable.

Commercial organizations still working toward these foundations benefit more from vendor-embedded AI inside their CRM, content, and analytics platforms. These solutions offer structured guardrails, predictable updates, and managed risk, enabling commercial teams to adopt AI without taking on technical and compliance burdens that teams might not be equipped to manage yet.

Focus Area 4: Shift to Workflow Definition, Oversight, and Interpretation

The most significant barrier across commercial organizations is a lack of well-defined workflows, since a process cannot be automated if it's not clearly defined. As an example, consider an organization augmenting a healthcare professional (HCP) communication strategy with AI agents. This relies on well-defined inputs, decision points, exceptions, and approval gates. If these are inconsistent across the brand, the build stalls. Once aligned, teams then need the ability to evaluate AI suggestions, decide when to trust them, and recognize when human judgment should intervene. As a result, the skills of marketers and those with domain expertise are shifting from being able to effectively work with analytics teams to working with AI agents directly. Your marketers will need to understand how they can best help the



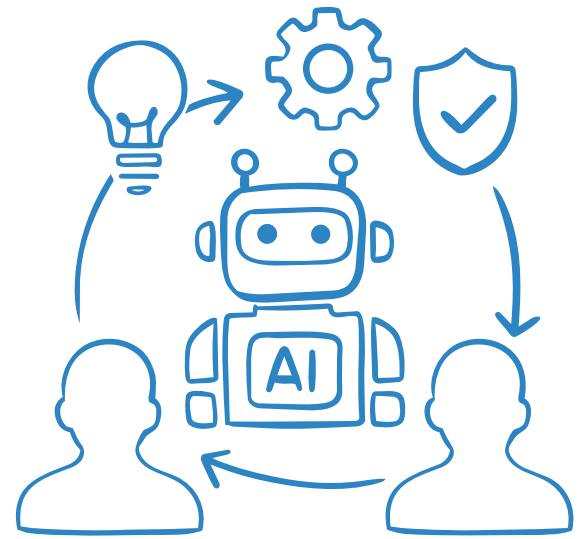
TREND 3

AI Adoption for Change

What should commercial leaders do to drive AI business adoption?

Building the tools is just half of the battle. Commercial organizations most commonly overlook bringing users along for the journey.

As more commercial teams adopt AI-enabled solutions, strong organizational change management strategies must be front and center [to ensure adoption](#). Too often, organizations become hyper-focused on the platform itself and fail to devote sufficient attention to the people side of the transformation. Slowing down to speed up is something that is more important than ever when implementing AI-enabled tools.



Focus Area 1: Strong Definition of AI's Role vs. Human Role

With 71% of respondents in a recent [Reuters study](#) worried AI could eliminate many jobs, organizations must address that concern directly in change management efforts. The message should be clear: AI is an augments, not a replacement.

AI works best when handling more repetitive, rules-based, and [large-scale analytical tasks](#). Organizations should design clear [human-in-the-loop oversight models](#) with defined processes incorporating designated checkpoints to ensure safe, high-quality outputs. For example, for a use case like [HCP targeting](#), AI can help produce a suggested target list, but field leaders validate and adjust the output based on knowledge of the market and specific nuances.

We often think of RACIs (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) as a valuable tool when it comes to defining roles and responsibilities among groups of people, but we've seen them be equally effective for driving conversations about what types of roles belong to AI compared to a human. RACIs can help establish things like "decision rights" – what AI can autonomously suggest vs. what requires human approval.

We're also seeing leading organizations revise job descriptions and competency models to incorporate AI skills in commercial roles. By adapting job descriptions to include core skills like AI literacy, we help reinforce the message that AI will become an integral part of the job and that embracing it will only help employees succeed.

Focus Area 2: Ensuring Transparency, Education, and Trust

[AI initiatives succeed](#) only when employees understand how systems work, where insights come from, and how to safely apply them. Tailored AI education and [literacy programs](#) are a must when it comes to gaining both buy-in and trust from commercial teams. Alongside a broader curriculum, monthly microlearning sessions can reinforce key topics such as machine learning basics, safe use, output interpretation, and bias awareness, while also helping implementation teams stay attuned to evolving needs.

In any transformation, there's often a "coalition of the willing." It's important to focus on the early adopters and identify them as change champions early in the journey. Highlighting their impact will generate energy throughout a "Change Champion network" that will create ripples throughout the commercial organization around AI adoption. A diverse network of champions from different business domains will help extend support and reinforce key messages within teams.

Finally, we return to the need to [define a governance and risk management](#) program as a mechanism to engage. Leading organizations often have a defined AI governance board with cross-functional representatives from Compliance, Privacy, Commercial Ops, and Information Technology (IT) who are responsible for establishing guardrails to manage compliance and ethical use as well as regulatory exposure. These boards often help facilitate quarterly audits, monitoring things like bias, model drift, and explainability, and define and monitor messaging to be cascaded by Change Champions.

Good change management is making as much of your organization as possible feel as if they are part of the change. A transformational change like the one with AI will require commercial leaders to transform together with their teams.



Looking Ahead

As we reflect on the story above, the transformational nature of technology is not new to commercial organizations, but the magnitude is unprecedented. Leaders who make mindful choices for purpose-built use cases while keeping AI readiness and AI adoption top of mind will see increased value as they turn from experimentation to operationalization on their AI journey.

If you're a commercial organization looking for guidance on your AI journey, our team can help.

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For more information about how we can help your company, [please contact us](#).

