Cisco AI Research: The Most AI-ready Companies Outpace Peers in the Race to Value

2025-10-14

The 'Pacesetters' are 4x more likely to move AI pilots into production, and 50% more likely to report measurable value from AI.

News summary:

- **AI adoption matters:** The most AI-ready organizations are 4x more likely to move pilots into production and 50% more likely to see measurable value.
- **Agentic AI on the rise:** 83% plan to deploy AI agents, and nearly 40% expect them to work alongside employees within a year — but few have the secure infrastructure to sustain it.
- **Barriers to AI adoption:** The report identifies some of the obstacles that risk slowing innovation and growth, such as rising workloads, insufficient GPU capacity, and a lack of centralized data.

SAN JOSE, Calif., Oct. 14, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- Cisco (NASDAQ: CSCO), the worldwide leader in networking and security, today released the results from the third annual *CiscoAI Readiness Index*. A small but consistent group of companies surveyed — the 'Pacesetters,' about 13% of organizations for the last three years — outperform their peers across every measure of AI value, captured for the first time in Cisco's global study of over 8,000 AI leaders across 30 markets and 26 industries.

The Pacesetters' sustained advantage indicates a new form of resilience: a disciplined, system-level approach that balances strategic drivers with the data and infrastructure needed to keep pace with AI's accelerating evolution. They're already architecting for the future with 98% designing their networks for the growth, scale and complexity of AI compared to 46% overall.

The combination of foresight and foundation is delivering real, tangible results at a time when two major forces are starting to reshape the landscape: **AI agents**, which raise the bar for scale, security, and governance; and **AI Infrastructure Debt**, the early warning signs of hidden bottlenecks that threaten to erode long-term value.

"We're moving past the era of question-answering chatbots and stepping into the next major phase of AI: agents that independently execute tasks," said Jeetu Patel, Cisco's President and Chief Product Officer. "Today's study shows that over 80% of companies are prioritizing agentic solutions, with two out of three reporting that these systems are already meeting or exceeding their performance goals. The evidence points to a massive competitive advantage: companies that are further along are seeing dramatically stronger returns than their peers."

The Pacesetter profile: Readiness as competitive advantage
Cisco's research outlines a consistent pattern among these leaders delivering real returns.

- **They make AI part of the business, not a side project.**
  Nearly all Pacesetters (99%) have a defined AI roadmap (vs 58% overall) and 91% (vs 35%) have a change-management plan. Budgets match intent, with 79% making AI the top investment priority (vs 24%) and 96% with short- and long-term funding strategies (vs 43%).
- **They build infrastructure that's ready to grow.**
  They architect for the always-on AI era. 71% of Pacesetters say their networks are fully flexible and can scale instantly for any AI project (vs 15% overall), and 77% are investing in new data-center capacity within the next 12 months (vs 43%).
- **They move pilots into production.**
  62% have a mature, repeatable innovation process for generating and scaling AI use cases (vs 13% overall), and three-quarters (77%) have already finalized those use cases (vs 18%).
- **They measure what matters.**
  95% track the impact of their AI investments — three times higher than others — and 71% are confident their use cases will generate new revenue streams, more than double the overall average.
- **They turn security into strength.**
  87% are highly aware of AI-specific threats (vs 42% overall), 62% integrate AI into their security and identity systems (vs 29%), and 75% are fully equipped to control and secure AI agents (vs 31%). Trust is part of the Pacesetters' value equation.

Pacesetters achieve more widespread results than their peers because of this approach: 90% report gains in profitability, productivity, and innovation, compared with ~60% overall.

AI agents: Ambition outpacing readiness
The Index shows **83% of organizations plan to deploy AI agents**, and nearly **40% expect them to work alongside employees within a year**. But for majority of these companies, **AI agents are exposing weak foundations** — systems that can barely handle reactive, task-based AI, let alone AI systems that act autonomously and learn continuously. More than half (54%) of respondents say their networks can't scale for complexity or data volume and just 15% describe their networks as flexible or adaptable.

Pacesetters are again the exception. Their disciplined, system-level approach has already helped lay the foundations they will need to scale.

AI Infrastructure Debt: The emerging drag on value
The report introduces a new concept — **AI Infrastructure Debt** — the modern evolution of technical and digital debt that once held back digital transformation.

It's the silent accumulation of compromises, deferred upgrades, and underfunded architecture that erodes the value of AI over time. Some early warning signs are already visible: 62% expect workloads to rise by over 30% within three years, 64% struggle to centralize data, only 26% have robust GPU capacity and fewer than one in three can detect or prevent AI-specific threats.

These early warning signs point to a gap between AI ambition and operational readiness. But when the systems that power AI aren't secure, the debt can increase risk. Pacesetters aren't immune, but their foresight, governance, and investment discipline help them to avoid problems compounding into more costly risks.

Download the report: Value follows readiness
As agentic systems and autonomous AI push organizations into an era of constant compute demand, the report proves value follows readiness, with the most AI-ready organizations setting the pace for others to follow.

About the Cisco AI Readiness Index 2025
The Cisco AI Readiness Index 2025 is a global study, now in its third year, based on a double-blind survey of 8,000 senior IT and business leaders responsible for AI strategy at organizations with over 500 employees across 26 industries.

About Cisco
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