LUMO INSIGHTS

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Data Strategy: The Key to AI ROI

Executive Summary

In recent news, data strategy has emerged as the key to AI ROI. MariaDB's GridGain deal exemplifies unified, in-memory platforms for AI (www.itpro.com [1]); analysts report that smaller, enterprise-trained models are already outperforming giant LLMs (www.techradar.com [2]). High-profile cases like Nielsen's lawsuit against OpenAI highlight proprietary data as strategic IP (www.axios.com [3]), underscoring that robust data pipelines, data quality and governance - not just model hype - drive real AI value.

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[3] www.axios.com — https://www.axios.com/2026/03/10/nielsen-gracenote-lawsuit-openai-copyright-infringement#:~:text=Why%20it%20matters%3A%20Gracenote%20is,support%20lucrative%20products%20like%20ChatGPT

AI-Optimised Data infrastructure

In the race for AI performance, data architecture has taken centre stage. Broad foundation models trained on generic data often fail to capture a company's domain knowledge (www.techradar.com [1]). Recent analysis finds that carefully-curated, enterprise-specific datasets and smaller models are outperforming larger ones (www.techradar.com [2]). This indicates firms must invest in platforms that directly integrate their proprietary data.

Enterprises are responding with unified, high-speed data platforms. For example, MariaDB's acquisition of GridGain combines ACID-compliant transactions with in-memory speed to create sub-millisecond AI queries (www.itpro.com [3]) (www.itpro.com [4]). This unified approach replaces slow, siloed stacks with a single system for analytics, transactions, and AI workloads. Organisations from startups to global players are building modern data architectures that ensure a single source of truth for AI-driven decisions (www.techradar.com [5]). Those who modernise their data infrastructure - focusing on real-time pipelines and tight integration - will be best positioned to scale AI.

Analysts predict this will sharpen the leader/laggard divide. Gartner forecasts that over 50% of enterprise AI models will be domain-specific by 2027 (www.techradar.com [6]). In practice, this means leveraging internal documents, code, and processes in model training rather than generic knowledge. The message is clear: the foundation layer - data platforms and pipelines - will determine which companies get real value from AI.

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Governance and trust: The hidden key

In many enterprises, AI is losing trust on the frontlines. Recent surveys find 71% of businesses hesitate to rely on autonomous AI agents (www.techradar.com [1]). When AI feels uncontrollable, employees often resort to ungoverned generative tools, introducing security and compliance risks (www.techradar.com [2]). Simultaneously, tightening regulations are raising the bar: for example, the UK's new Data (Use and Access) Act mandates stricter data residency and usage rules (www.itpro.com [3]). Datadog's move to establish a UK data centre underscores this trend, giving clients an in-region cloud for AI observability to meet both latency and legal requirements (www.itpro.com [4]).

To rebuild confidence, robust governance must guide every AI deployment. Opaque "black box" AI models introduce hidden dangers: even minor data gaps can cascade into major outages or compliance failures (www.techradar.com [5]). Today's technology leaders build traceability into AI: data provenance, bias checks, and human oversight are integrated from day one (www.techradar.com [6]) (www.techradar.com [7]). Proper explainability and audit trails become project features, not afterthoughts, accelerating adoption by making outcomes transparent and verifiable.

In fact, companies that embed governance early report far better outcomes. Recent research highlights that firms with cohesive data and governance strategies achieve roughly 3× the AI ROI of their peers (www.techradar.com [8]). For these leaders, governance is a growth enabler - ensuring compliance while unlocking innovation. Those lacking robust policies, by contrast, often see their AI projects stall at the pilot stage.

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Data as competitive advantage and IP

Enterprises are increasingly treating data itself as a strategic asset. A high-profile example: Nielsen's Gracenote subsidiary is suing OpenAI, alleging unauthorised use of Gracenote's proprietary metadata and relational maps (www.axios.com [1]). Gracenote's database (built by hundreds of human editors) is copyright-protected. The lawsuit underscores the new reality that unique data collections are intellectual property - not fodder for free model-building.

This shift has practical implications. Firms that embed their own operational data into AI systems gain a competitive edge. For instance, a model trained on a factory's specific quality-control logs will spot anomalies far better than a generic model. In finance or healthcare, AI solutions tuned to an

organisation’s workflows outperform off-the-shelf tools. The very act of curating and owning domain data becomes a moat. Savvy companies measure AI success in tangible gains: one study notes that even a 20% time saving in diagnostics compounds into large productivity gains over months (www.techradar.com [2]). These firms align technology with data strategy, continually improving models with new data and feedback.

In summary, today’s data leaders are doing more than deploying models - they are rethinking data as a core pillar of strategy. C-suite agendas now emphasise unified data platforms, high-quality data pipelines, and strict governance (including data sovereignty and IP protection). Those who invest first in their data foundations (rather than chasing the latest model hype) will turn AI from a risky experiment into a sustained ROI machine.

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Key Statistics

- 95% of enterprise AI pilots deliver zero return ([www.techradar.com](https://www.techradar.com/pro/what-if-the-ai-bubble-pops#:~:text=predicted%20the%202008%20housing%20crash%2C,what%20happens%20when%20it%20bursts)).
- 71% of organisations hesitate to trust autonomous AI agents ([www.techradar.com](https://www.techradar.com/pro/rebuilding-trust-in-ai-with-responsible-adoption#:~:text=At%20the%20very%20moment%20businesses,engine%2C%20that%27s%20a%20trust%20crisis)).
- "AI leaders achieve 3× ROI over laggards" with coherent data strategy ([www.techradar.com](https://www.techradar.com/pro/rebuilding-trust-in-ai-with-responsible-adoption#:~:text=governance%2C%20or%20change%20management%20needed,to%20be%20newest%20this%20month)).
- Gartner: >50% of enterprise AI models will be domain/company-specific by 2027 ([www.techradar.com](https://www.techradar.com/pro/domain-specific-ai-models-are-the-future-of-enterprise-roi#:~:text=Analysts%20also%20believe%20this%20is,in%202023)).

KEY TAKEAWAY

Leaders should treat data as a strategic asset, not just technology. Prioritise unified data platforms, data quality and strict governance (from compliance to IP protection). Without strong data foundations, even the most advanced AI tools can fail to deliver ROI.

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