



The 2026 Last-Mile Performance Outlook

Where enterprise investment meets operational reality

Based on a survey of 150 retail and logistics executives at companies with more than \$1 billion in annual revenue. Conducted by Industry Dive Research in partnership with Bringg.



Custom content for Bringg from Studio by Informa TechTarget



Table of Contents

The last mile has changed. Most operations haven't.....	3
Key findings.....	4
Last mile is now a strategic growth lever. Most companies still run it like a cost center.....	5
Last-mile performance isn't keeping pace with investment.....	8
The AI investment surge is landing in the wrong places.....	13
Market leaders will close the alignment gap.....	17

The last mile has changed. Most operations haven't.

The last mile is the most expensive link in the supply chain. So, for most of eCommerce logistics history, the key focus has been cost: cost per delivery, carrier rates, route efficiency, and asset use. These have traditionally been the metrics that mattered in boardroom conversations.

That framing is no longer sufficient.

Last-mile delivery is the only part of the supply chain that end consumers directly experience. Not the warehouse. Not the carrier contract. Not the route-optimization algorithm. Delivery is the brand's final touchpoint; the driver at the door, the package on the porch, the crew in the living room—these are the most tangible interactions consumers have. And increasingly, these interactions determine whether a first-time consumer turns into a repeat customer.

Enterprise retailers and logistics operators know this. New research from Industry Dive, conducted in partnership with Bringg, made that clear: 93% of executives agreed that last-mile delivery was one of the most strategic components of their businesses. Investment plans followed that conviction as 94% expected to increase last-mile budgets over the next 12 to 18 months.

But strategic conviction and operational alignment are not the same thing. The research reveals a market that has correctly identified last-mile delivery as a growth lever but has not yet configured its investment, its performance metrics, or its AI strategy to pull that lever effectively.

Last-mile delivery is the only part of the supply chain that end consumers directly experience.



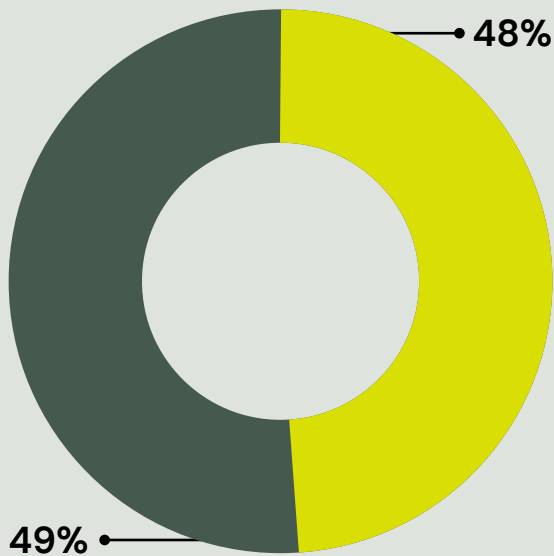
→ Key findings

93%

of retail and logistics executives agreed that last-mile delivery was one of the most strategic components of their businesses; with 45% agreeing strongly.

94%

expected their overall last-mile investment to increase over the next 12 to 18 months. More than half expected increases of 10% or more.



Fewer than half of executives overachieved on customer satisfaction (48%) or ETA accuracy (49%), their declared top performance metrics.

Key last-mile performance metrics:

Customer satisfaction

48%

ETA accuracy

49%

36%

Only 36% of companies exceeded their cost-per-delivery targets—the lowest overachievement rate of any primary metric—yet operational costs remain the No. 1 last-mile challenge.

70%

Artificial intelligence (AI) adoption exceeded 70% in routing and visibility, the most visible workflows. Adoption in exception handling, carrier management and billing reconciliation trailed significantly. Only 9% of executives expected AI to be truly transformational.





› SECTION 1

Last mile is now a strategic growth lever. Most companies still run it like a cost center.

The strategic consensus is real and recent

Last-mile delivery has not always been a boardroom topic. For most of its history, it was a back-office function, managed for efficiency and measured by cost. The shift in how enterprise leaders think about it is one of the more significant industry changes over the past several years.

The data captures that shift at its current high-water mark. Nine out of 10 executives (93%) agreed that the last mile was one of the most strategic components of their businesses. Nearly half (45%) didn't just agree with that statement, they strongly agreed, while only 7% pushed back.

93%

agreed last-mile delivery was one of the most strategic components of their business

75%

said the last mile was extremely or very impactful on customer loyalty

94%

expected overall last-mile investment to increase in the next 12 to 18 months

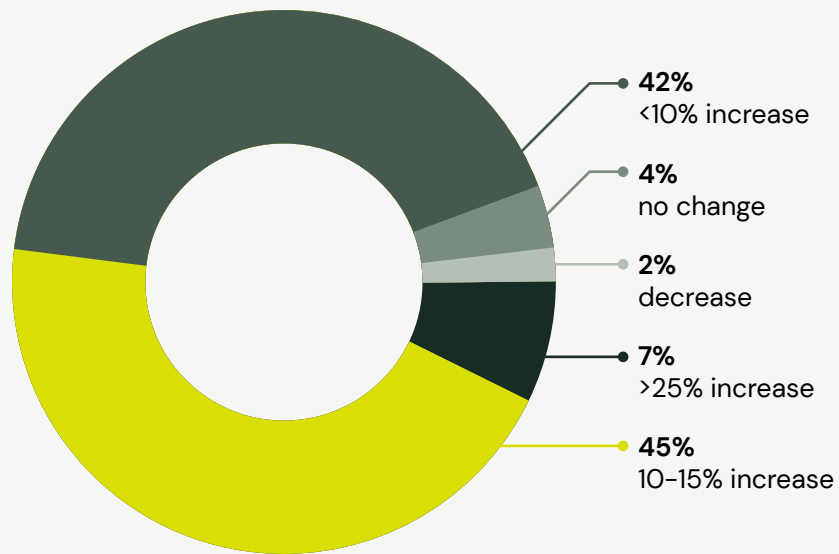


The customer-loyalty connection further elevates the last mile beyond just a cost or operational concern. Three out of four executives (75%) described last-mile delivery as very impactful on customer loyalty; 33% said extremely. While the last mile was once a shipping-efficiency problem, it's now a revenue-retention issue.

As a result, executives plan to increase investments: 94% expected their overall last-mile budgets to grow over the next 12 to 18 months. Nearly half (45%) expected increases between 10% and 15%, with 7% projecting increases of more than 25%. The direction is unambiguous.

Last-mile budget increase distribution

The majority of respondents plan to increase last-mile budgets by 10-15%



Where investment is headed

Last-mile investment data and allocation plans were telling: AI-driven planning, routing and forecasting led the list, cited by 68% of executives. Visibility (tracking, ETAs, alerts and analytics) was close behind at 66%. Real-time communication tools for customers and drivers followed at 50%.

What was being deprioritized was equally telling. Curbside pickup was the No. 1 planned investment decrease at 39%. The retreat

from curbside pickup, a significant strategic priority as recently as 2021, marks a decisive shift toward delivery as the primary last-mile channel. Companies are not spreading investment—they are concentrating it.

Following curbside were decreased investments in vehicle and fleet size (36%) and ship from store (26%). This indicates a shift from owned-asset investments toward a more hybrid, flexible model that reduces fixed costs.



The operational reality underneath the strategy

Overall last-mile investments are moving toward a fragmented operating environment. Eighty-two percent of companies ran hybrid or fully third-party fleets. Only 18% operated exclusively owned fleets. Most enterprise retailers were managing last-mile operations across multiple carriers, multiple systems and multiple data formats, each with its own performance standards, its own visibility limitations and its own failure modes.

Different fleet models come with their own set of challenges. Those relying on third-party carriers reported that “where is my order” calls were their top challenge: the direct cost of trading operational control for carrier flexibility. Those running hybrid fleets cited routing inefficiency as their primary issue, illustrating the complexity of managing multiple fleet types simultaneously. Those with owned fleets felt execution risk most acutely, with late deliveries topping their list.

“Each fleet model creates a different control point,” said Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh. “Third-party fleets struggle with visibility. They’re trading off some level of control for the convenience of flexing up and down with third parties. Hybrid fleets are very complex operationally, and those that operate their own fleet feel execution risk directly.”

The tension Leigh identifies runs through the rest of the research. The strategic declaration has been made. The operational transformation that would make it real across performance, metrics, and in AI strategy has not fully followed.

“The last mile has moved from being a cost center to being more of a strategic growth lever. But what the data also shows is that most organizations still operate it tactically.”

› Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh



Last-mile performance isn't keeping pace with investment

Companies track the right metrics. Their performance against them tells a different story.

The metrics that enterprise retailers and logistics providers use to drive last-mile performance are, largely, the right ones. Customer satisfaction and ETA accuracy led the list, each tracked by 60% of executives as a primary KPI. Cost per delivery followed at 45%, as did first-attempt delivery success.

The problem emerges when those metrics are examined against actual performance.

Fewer than half of executives reported overachievement on customer satisfaction (48%) and ETA accuracy (49%). These were the metrics that 60% of the market identified as most important to their business, and less than half were winning on them.

Cost-per-delivery is worse. This is the metric most directly connected to margin, and only 36% of executives report overachievement, which is the lowest figure among all primary KPIs in the dataset. It is also the metric where performance has the most room to improve and has improved the least.

Core last-mile performance metrics:

- Customer satisfaction
- ETA accuracy
- Cost per delivery
- First-attempt delivery success





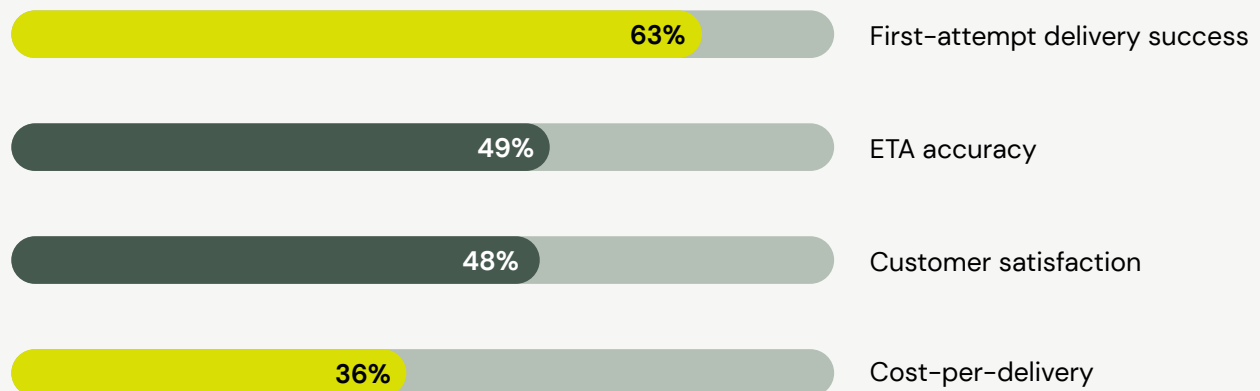
Overachievement rates across primary last-mile metrics

The outlier in the performance data was first-attempt delivery success: 63% of executives reported overachievement, the highest in the dataset. That number deserves a closer look. First-attempt success is primarily within a company's own operational control. It reflects the execution quality of a team operating its own systems on its own schedule. Customer satisfaction and ETA accuracy are harder. They

depend on the full chain of decisions preceding delivery and on how customers experience outcomes they had no hand in choosing.

The metrics that require coordination across carriers, systems, and customer touchpoints—the ones that most directly connect to revenue retention—are where performance most consistently lags.

The gap between first-attempt delivery success and cost-per-delivery



The confidence gap

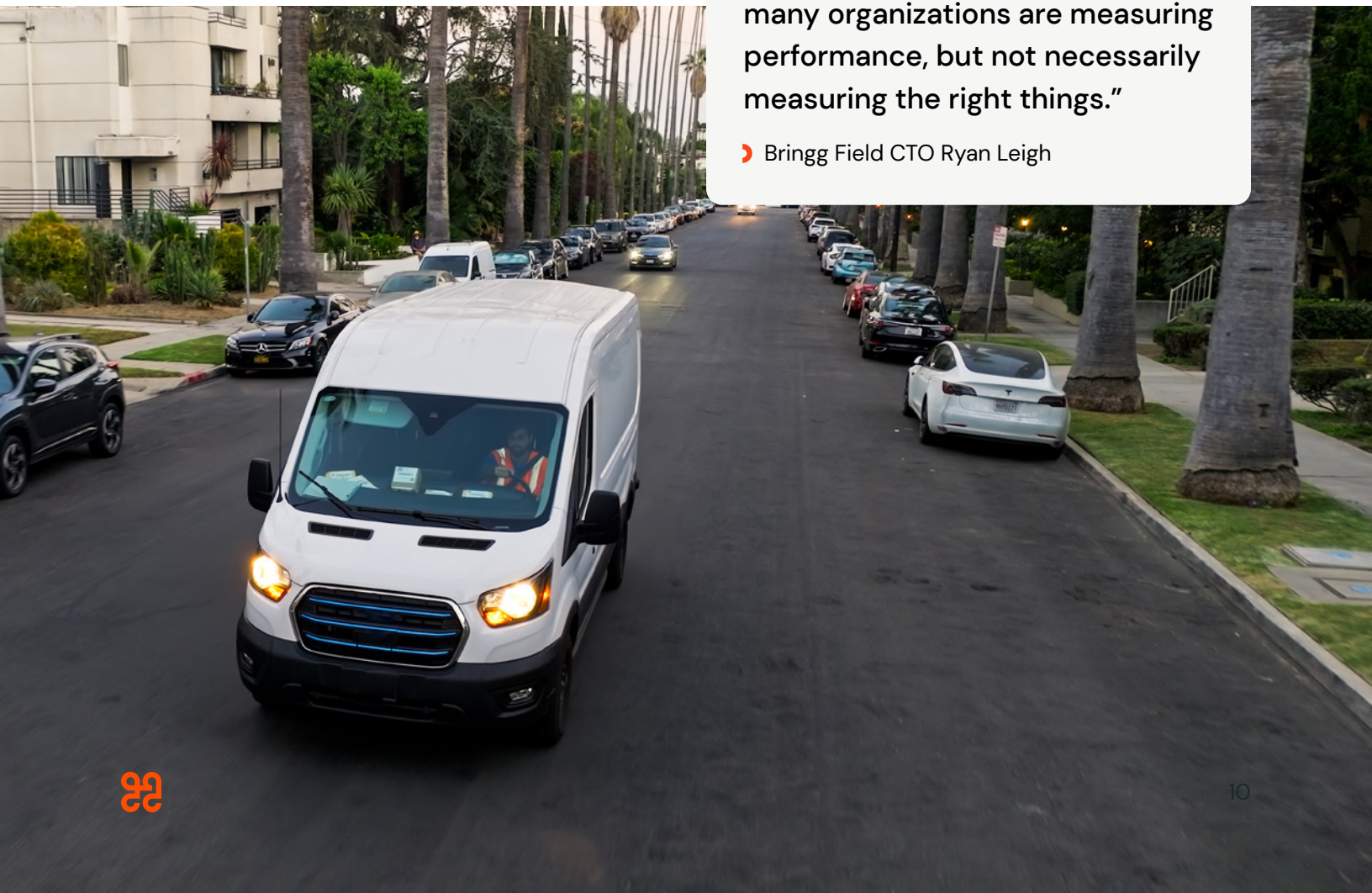
One finding sat at an uncomfortable intersection: More than seven out of 10 executives (72%) described themselves as extremely or very confident in the accuracy of the last-mile metrics their companies tracked. High confidence in a context where fewer than half were overachieving on their self-declared primary KPIs.

“They’re confident in the data they can see,” Leigh said. “The risk is that they’re not measuring the operational friction underneath it: exception handling, carrier logic, manual workarounds. Those are the areas where margin actually erodes.”

The distinction is important and often overlooked. Confidence in data accuracy is not the same as confidence that the data being tracked connects to the outcomes that matter commercially. A company can have highly accurate on-time-delivery data while customers quietly make permanent purchasing decisions based on communication failures that never surface in a routing dashboard.

“72% feel very confident in their metrics. But less than half say they’re overachieving on customer satisfaction or ETA accuracy, their own declared primary KPIs. That suggests that many organizations are measuring performance, but not necessarily measuring the right things.”

» Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh





Cost is the defining pressure. And it compounds.

Operational costs ranked first as the most pressing last-mile challenge today, cited by 34% of executives. They also ranked first as the issue that had increased most in severity over the past 12 to 18 months, cited by 24%. Carrier fees (16%), driver labor (16%) and fuel (15%) led the list of cost categories with the greatest negative effect on last-mile success.

“Cost pressure isn’t new,” Leigh said. “What has changed is volatility. The companies that win will architect optionality into their last-mile networks: a hybrid fleet, dynamic carrier selection, real-time optimization. Having the option to pull those levers and change the way

they operate according to the best potential margin or outcome—that’s the way to build in the flexibility you need.”

Failed deliveries require rescheduling. Rescheduling requires crew time, vehicle capacity and customer communication. Customer-communication failures generate support calls. Unresolved support calls create churn.

Each failure creates downstream costs that standard cost-per-delivery metrics rarely capture in full, which may help explain why confidence in those metrics remained high even as overachievement remained low.

34%

cited operational costs as their top last-mile challenge today

36%

overachieved on cost per delivery, the lowest overachievement rate among all primary metrics

No. 1

operational costs also ranked as the issue that had increased most in severity over the past 12 to 18 months



What the performance data signals

Taken together, the performance data tells a consistent story: Companies have optimized most effectively for the metrics most within their control. But they either struggle with the metrics that require coordination across systems, carriers, and customer touchpoints or they can't fix what they can't see.

Last-mile investment is real and growing. But spending more on the wrong layers of the operation, or measuring success against metrics that miss the full cost of failure, explains the pattern in the data. Confidence stays high. Gaps persist. Costs keep climbing.





› SECTION 3

The AI investment surge is landing in the wrong places.

AI leads the investment agenda

AI leads the list of areas where companies plan to increase last-mile investment, cited by 68% of executives. That figure reflects both the scale of market enthusiasm for AI and the belief held by nearly two-thirds of executives, that AI will deliver major or transformational impacts on last-mile operations over the next 12 to 18 months.

Confidence in existing AI solutions was high. Sixty-four percent of executives described themselves as extremely or very confident in their current last-mile AI deployments. Only 11% expressed low confidence. By the standard measures of AI sentiment in enterprise surveys, this is a positive picture.

The details tell a different story.

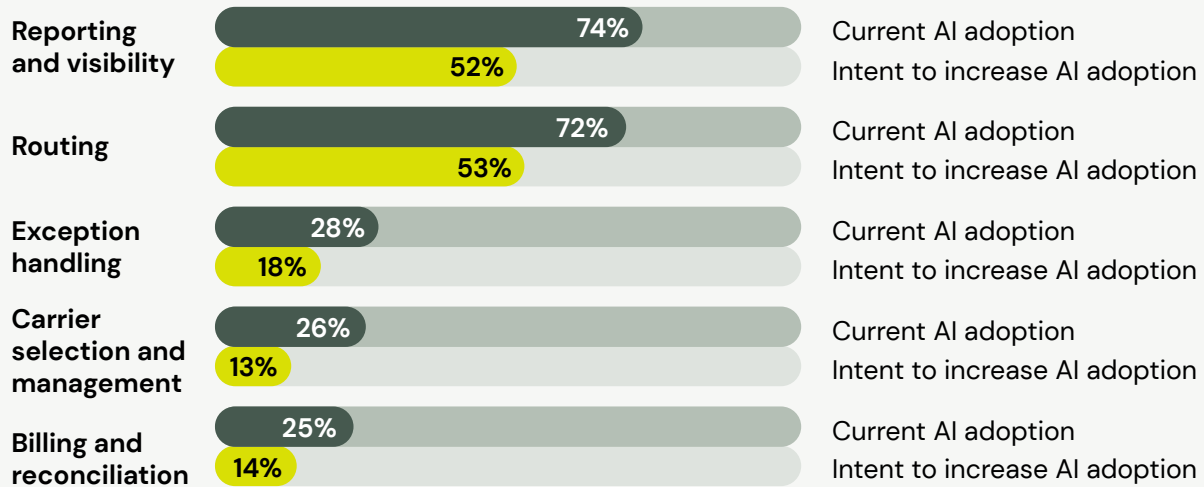
Where AI investment has landed

AI adoption stands at 74% in reporting and visibility and 72% in routing. These are the two highest adoption figures in the dataset, representing workflows that, by their nature, are among the most visible and legible in any

last-mile operation. They produce dashboards. They surface in operational reviews. They are easy to point to when a leadership team asks what an AI investment is doing.



Current AI adoption and intent to increase AI adoption



The intent to increase AI investment tells a similar story. Fifty-three percent of executives planned to increase AI adoption in routing over the next 12 to 18 months. Fifty-two percent planned to increase it in reporting and visibility. These workflows already exceeded 70% adoption.

Meanwhile, the workflows that carry the highest manual process burden—and the highest exposure to margin erosion and customer churn—received the least AI investment attention. Exception handling, carrier selection and management, and billing and invoice reconciliation all ranked at the bottom of planned AI investment increases, with 18%, 13% and 14% of executives planning to increase adoption respectively.

Exception handling is the clearest case. It is the workflow most directly involved in how delivery failures get resolved or don't. When something goes wrong in a delivery, exception

handling is where the customer either gets a resolution or doesn't. The consequences of the latter are visible elsewhere in the research: Operational costs compound, support volume rises, and the customers who experience unresolved failures have a well-documented tendency not to return. Yet AI adoption in exception handling stood at 28%, and only 18% of executives planned to increase it.

“Companies are investing in AI where it's visible and where they can talk about it, like routing or dashboards, because it feels strategic. But the biggest ROI is often buried in those manual workflows. That's where margins quietly leak.”

› Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh



The transformational gap

The AI confidence and impact data, read against the investment pattern, reframes a number that might otherwise seem like simple pessimism.

Only 9% of executives expect AI to be truly transformational in last-mile operations

over the next 12 to 18 months. That figure sits alongside the 64% who are confident in their current AI solutions and the 68% who plan to increase AI investment. This means that there's high confidence and significant spending, but limited transformation expected.

64%

were extremely or very confident in their last-mile AI solutions

68%

planned to increase AI investment in routing and planning

9%

expected AI to be truly transformational in the next 12 to 18 months

That combination is not necessarily a contradiction. It may be an accurate intuition. AI investment concentrated in routing and visibility, where adoption already exceeds 70% with diminishing incremental gains, is unlikely to produce transformational results. The transformational opportunity is in the workflows that AI investment has yet to reach.

A technical dimension is also worth noting. Routing optimization, the workflow where AI adoption was highest and investment intent remained strong, relies primarily on advanced optimization algorithms that have existed for years.

"Many routing engines use advanced algorithms, but that's not necessarily AI in

the transformative sense," Leigh said. "The real AI opportunity is in automating exception handling, reconciliation, decision-making logic: the back-office work that actually erodes profit.

"AI has the power to be truly transformational in the last mile, but I'm not surprised that number is only 9%," Leigh said of the transformational-impact figure. "There are many repetitive manual processes in the last mile that AI can improve, which would then free up teams to focus on more complex problems that require judgment. But there's a trust gap between how much autonomy a large retailer or logistics company is willing to give AI at this stage, and that also explains why investment is going to more visible operations like routing."

A maturity curve, not an ambition failure

The pattern that emerges is not misplaced optimism or AI washing. It's a maturity curve. Companies invest first in what's visible and familiar, build operational confidence, and aren't yet ready to extend AI into the workflows where organizational, technical, and trust barriers are highest.

"There are those at the advanced end of the maturity curve who will have the opportunity to implement AI and really benefit from it," Leigh said. "But even for those on the lower end of that curve, there are things you can implement,

not necessarily AI, that are still going to transform your business. The adoption curve needs to be followed."

The market is not wrong to invest in routing and visibility AI. Those capabilities deliver real operational value. The question is whether the same discipline being applied to high-visibility workflows is being applied to the workflows where the cost and customer impact of manual processes is greatest, and where the gap between current AI adoption and the available opportunity is widest.





› CONCLUSION

Market leaders will close the alignment gap

The research presents a market that has gotten several important things right.

The strategic elevation of last-mile delivery is real and warranted. The investment commitment is nearly universal. The focus on customer satisfaction, ETA accuracy and cost per delivery as primary performance metrics reflects a genuine understanding of where business outcomes are won or lost.

What the data also reveals, consistently across every dimension examined, is a gap between stated priority and operational alignment. Performance is weakest where it matters most

commercially. AI investment is strongest where it has already been deployed most extensively. The metrics executives are most confident about are not the ones that reduce costs and build customer loyalty

The companies that close this gap will not do so by increasing investment uniformly across last-mile operations. They will do it by directing investment, including in AI, at the specific decisions and workflows where performance gaps are greatest and the business impact of improvement is clearest.



“The next phase of last-mile won’t be defined by faster delivery. It will be defined by performance. The companies that treat last-mile as a dynamic network rather than a fixed cost center will outpace the market.”

› Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh

Last-mile delivery is now a boardroom priority and its connection to revenue and customer loyalty will only strengthen. The businesses that will pull ahead in the months and years to come not only see delivery as a strategic growth lever, they do the hard work to materialize that vision. They will align investment, measurement, and technology to tangibly move the needle on earnings calls and at the front door.

About this research

This report presents findings from an online survey conducted by Industry Dive Research in partnership with Bringg. The survey was fielded in January 2026 and a total of 150 executives participated.

All participants hold titles of Director or above; 60% hold titles of VP or above. Seventy percent work in IT, operations, or C-suite leadership roles. All work for retail/eCommerce or transportation and logistics companies with more than \$1 billion in worldwide annual revenue operating primarily in North America.

Expert commentary provided by Bringg Field CTO Ryan Leigh, based on an interview conducted in March 2026.

© 2026 Industry Dive. Produced in partnership with Bringg. All rights reserved. Reproduction or redistribution in whole or in part requires written permission.



BRINGG

Global retailers and logistics providers reduce costs and deliver differentiated customer experiences with Bringg Last-Mile Solutions. Through Bringg's modular technology platform, integrated fleet network, and services suite, business leaders automate processes, optimize order delivery, and invent new business models. Unlock flexibility at scale.

[LEARN MORE](#)





Expert led. Impact driven.

Studio is Informa TechTarget's global content studio offering brands an ROI rich tool kit: Deep industry expertise, first-party audience insights, an editorial approach to brand storytelling, and targeted distribution capabilities. Our trusted in-house content marketers help brands power insights-fueled content programs that nurture prospects and customers from discovery through to purchase, connecting brand to demand.

[Learn more](#)