Publication date:
October 2024
Author:
David Green
Eden Zoller

The AI-Driven Future Is Now, And It's Desktop-Enabled

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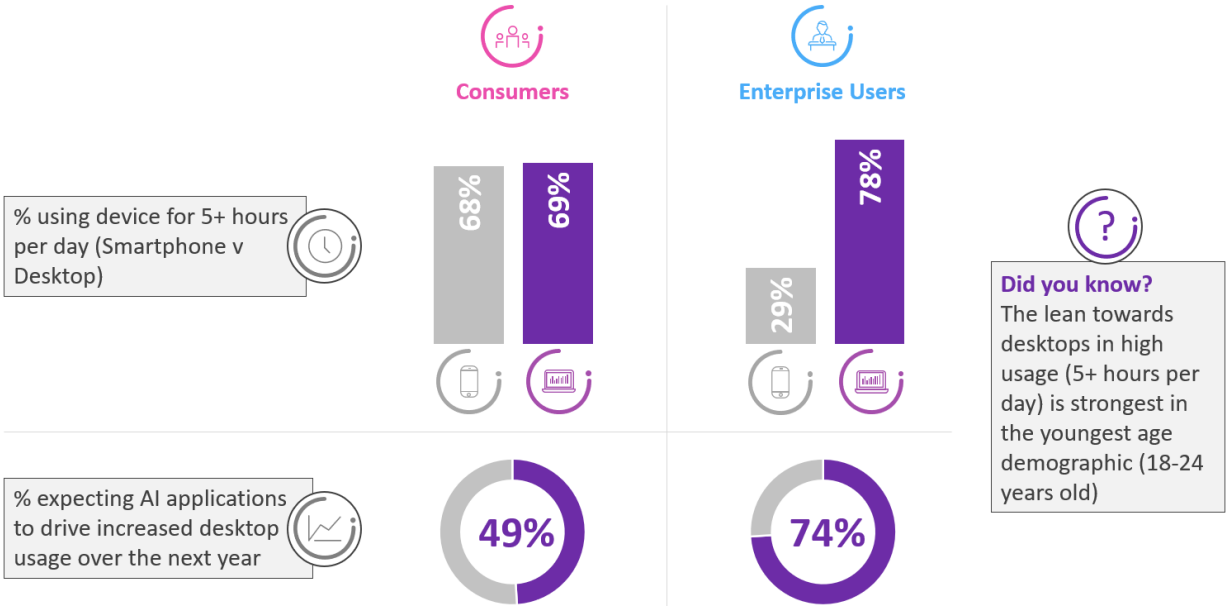
Introduction

Digital technology pervades all aspects of our day – from work life to personal life to everything in between. But in an increasingly connected environment, which are the devices that we choose to act as our gateways to the rest of the world?

People may assume that smartphones top all and continue to grow exponentially in their preference – but the reality is one where desktops more than hold their share, and AI-driven enterprise usage on the desktop could be key in future GDP growth through productivity.

Overwhelmingly, survey data shows a combination of Desktop PCs and Smartphones form the digital backbone for people's online activity – and that the gap is narrower than you would think. In fact, desktops and smartphones are comparable in total usage across all consumers (with desktops even ahead for the youngest age demographic)– whilst desktops take a clear number one status in the enterprise/business user's world. According to new Omdia surveys, over two thirds of consumers use both smartphones and desktops for more than 5 hours per day, whilst the difference is clear for enterprise users (78% for desktops and 29% for smartphones).

Figure 1. Top level survey insights for device usage



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

Overall, the message is one of choice being key – where both consumers and enterprise users take a hybrid view of their device usage, picking and choosing between their favored device depending on

the application – and even down to the choice of browser itself (over two thirds of all respondents say they've switched their default browser).

But is AI the game changer on the horizon, as it increasingly integrates into our world? The Omdia survey suggests the future may already be happening now – over a third of enterprise respondents saying they use AI applications daily – but it's the rise of AI tools in productivity applications (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack) that already drives the biggest engagement – and predominantly through desktops (both for consumers and enterprise users). This matches industry views where much of the initial projected GDP growth from AI adoption comes through productivity tools – which puts desktops and enterprise users at the center of this trend.

> *"In an AI-driven world, this push towards desktop usage, often through browsers (and carefully selected for the purpose), shows an increasingly judicious user – but one who sees desktops as a massively important part of their digital access."*

Allowing users to choose their device, browser and application combination is key to enabling future gains, where allowing users agency will increase adoption.

This whitepaper brings the story from these Omdia surveys, to understand the desktop future for consumers and enterprise users – including the 74% of enterprise users who say AI will increase their desktop usage in the next 12 months.

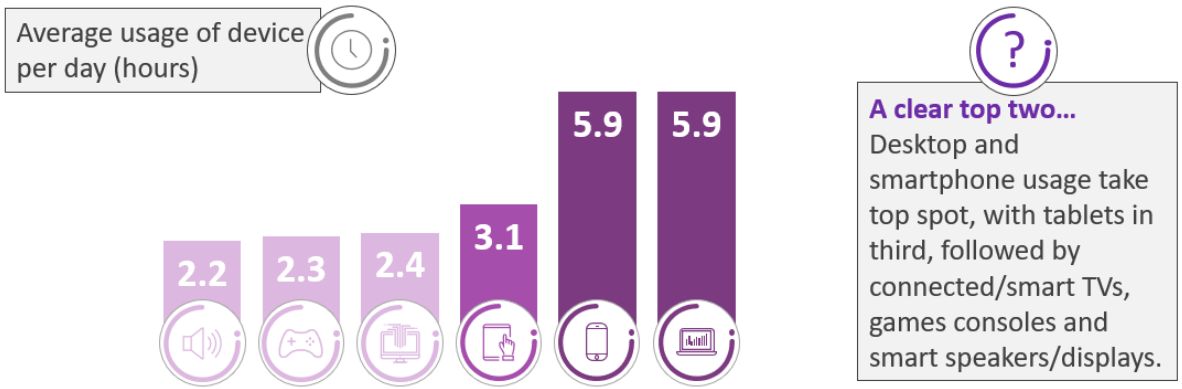
The Big Picture – Desktops And The Desire For Choice

In the search for ubiquitous connection and improved customer experience, almost every conceivable consumer device is now connected in some way.

> *"However, in terms of overall usage there are two clear leaders– Desktop devices and Smartphones, with Tablet PCs in a distant third place."*

This is according to new surveys run by Omdia, conducted with 1,000 Consumers and 1,000 Enterprise/business users, to understand preferences between device types.

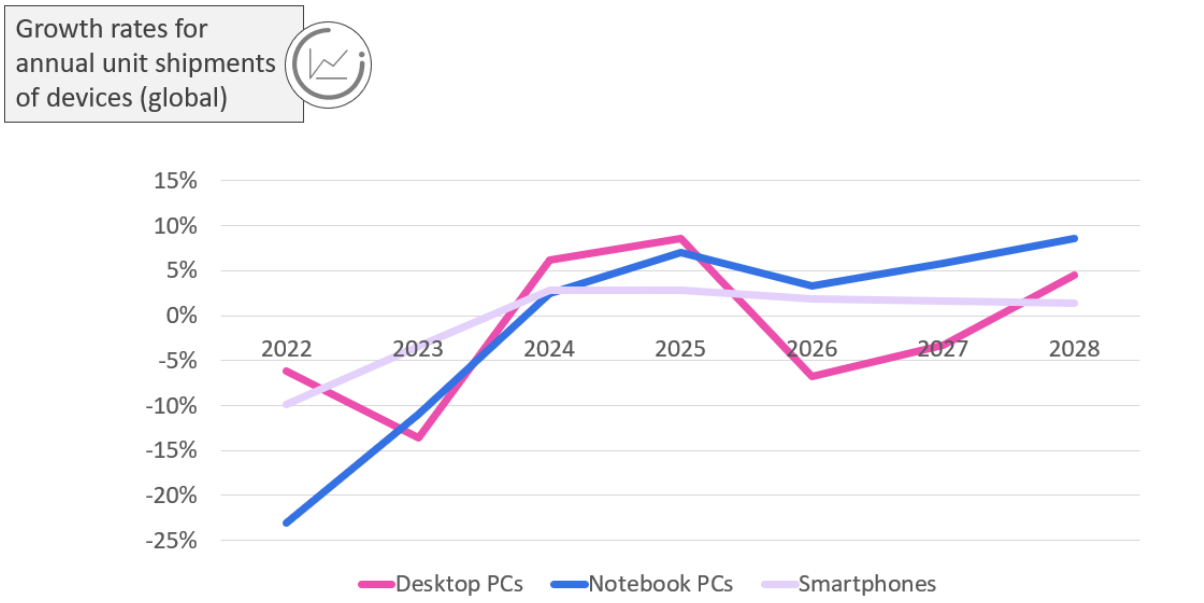
Figure 2. Average daily usage by device type (all consumers, by hours per day)



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

Desktop PCs have always been and remain one of the most important devices to users – in fact there are clear circumstances where they are preferred to smartphones (and some age groups where this is particularly strong). This matches up to the overall market growth for new device shipments too – where Omdia data shows comparable growth for all device categories through 2028 (broken out in the Omdia forecast in the figure below to Desktop PCs, Notebook PCs and Smartphones), even if their replacement cycles might differ.

Figure 3. Annual device shipment growth rates



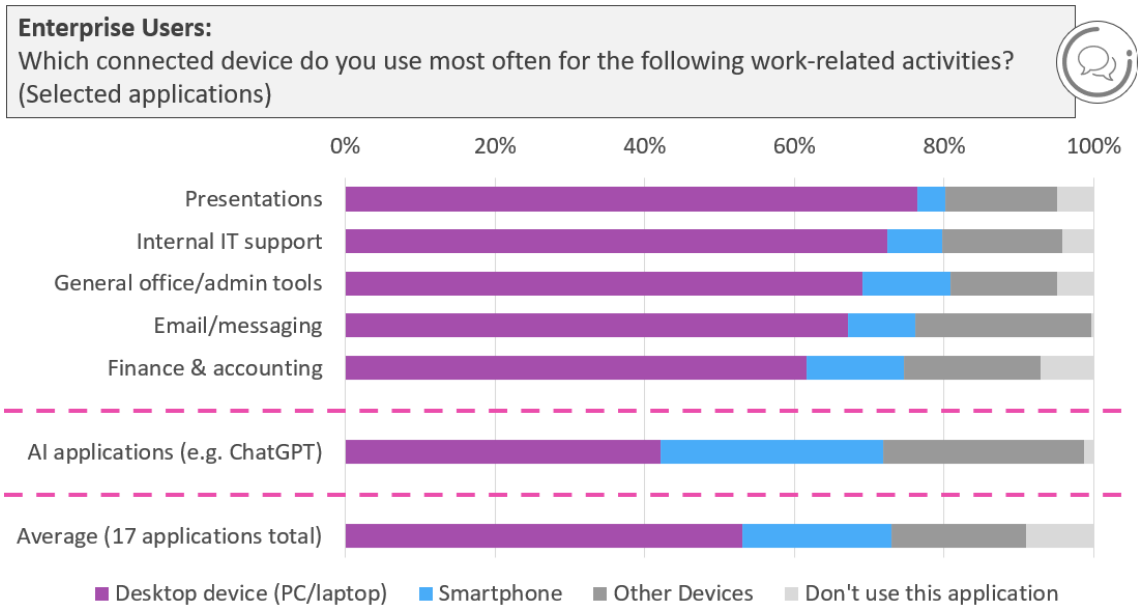
Source: Omdia Consumer Electronics Market Tracker, Q2 2024
Desktop PC: A non-portable, high-performance, single-user computing platform tasked with running complex applications and manipulating large datasets. Unlike the AIO (All-in-One) PC, it does not include a monitor.
Notebook PC: A complete portable unit with an integrated keyboard and with similar capabilites as a desktop PC. This category includes laptops, notebooks, netbooks and Chromebooks.
Smartphone: Mobile handsets capable of running advanced operating systems with third-party application development environments, an app store ecosystem, and a touch-centric user interaction model.

Given these strong growth trends across device types, enabling consumer choice will be ever more important to providing a positive user experience. In particular, the rise of hybrid working means that 63% of all consumers have flexible working arrangements – where desktops are the primary device for over half of those people. This increasingly leads to both hybrid use – using both desktops and smartphones either interchangeably or in different environments but for the same overall task, or selecting carefully between desktop or smartphone depending on the specific task. As such, enabling this choice between smartphones and desktops is paramount in ensuring the best possible user experience, reducing friction in workflows, and increasing the adoption of new, more efficient technologies therefore key in ensuring the best possible user experience and adoption of new technology.

The Consumer Versus Enterprise Difference

Whilst working conditions (such as in hybrid or office environments) make a difference, there's a vast range of other factors that the Omdia survey also assessed – from age range, to typical income, to country/region. Each of these undoubtedly explains minor changes in preferences – but by far the biggest differentiator is between personal and work user, between the Consumer survey respondents and the Enterprise survey respondents.

Figure 4. Enterprise user preference between device types for work-related activities



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

"Whilst Consumers might use both smartphones and desktops to equal measure, in the Enterprise arena, desktops are the champions."

When considering different applications, desktops were chosen as the favorite device type 53% of the time on average, compared to just 20% for the next device (smartphone). That's despite 78% of Enterprise respondents saying they have access to both desktop and smartphone for work usage. This desktop preference is shown across many applications, too – from the obvious of email/messaging and presentations to the likes of emerging AI applications and customer support.

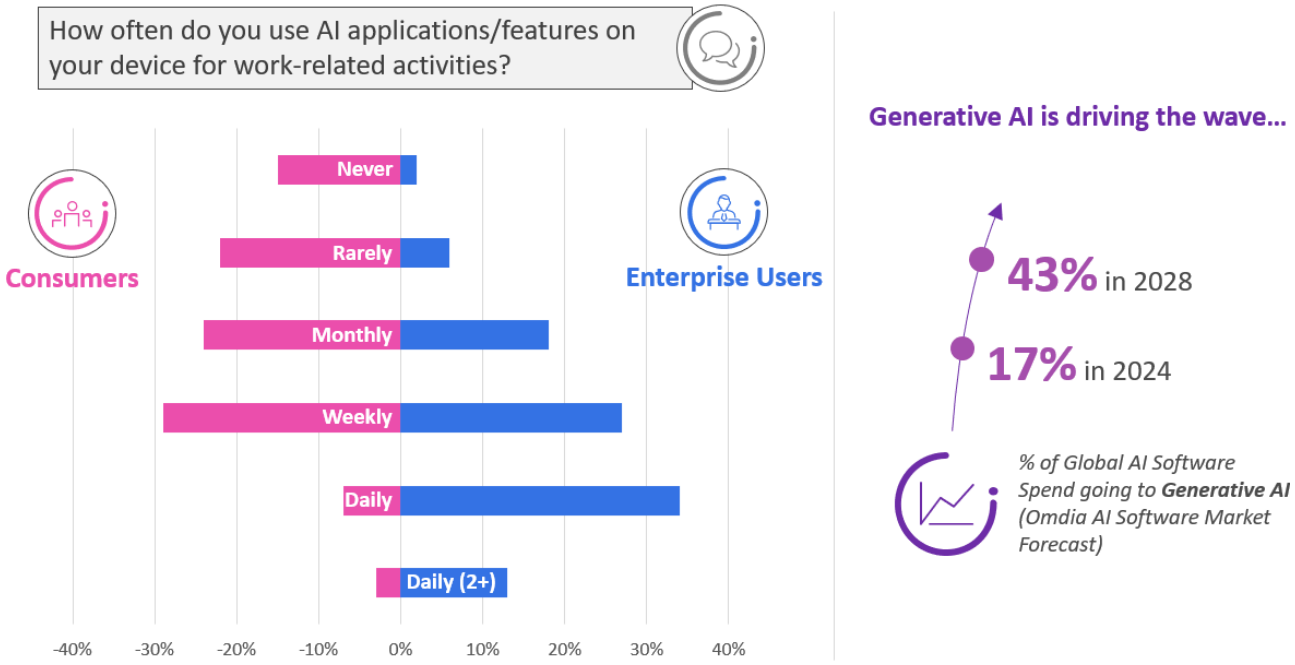
The Rising AI Wave

Behind the scenes of device usage, and indeed powering many devices and applications, is the unstoppable rise of AI. Over $50 billion a year was already being spent on AI software – from consumer to industrial applications – even before the generative AI (GenAI) wave broke into public consciousness. Interestingly, Omdia estimates that 17% of all AI spend this year (2024) will be on GenAI – an incredibly rapid rise that shows the pace of adoption and focus for these types of applications. Omdia also predicts that will rise to 43% of all spend in 2028 – as part of the overall growth of AI spend to almost $200 billion annually. Even now, AI is only just getting started.

But for all the promise of the future and potential transformational power of AI – the impact has very much started already. Both consumers and enterprise respondents alike are adopting AI strongly.

"In fact, 39% of all consumers are using AI applications for their work several times a week, whilst 47% of enterprise users are doing so every single day."

Figure 5. Current usage levels for AI applications and the future growth forecast



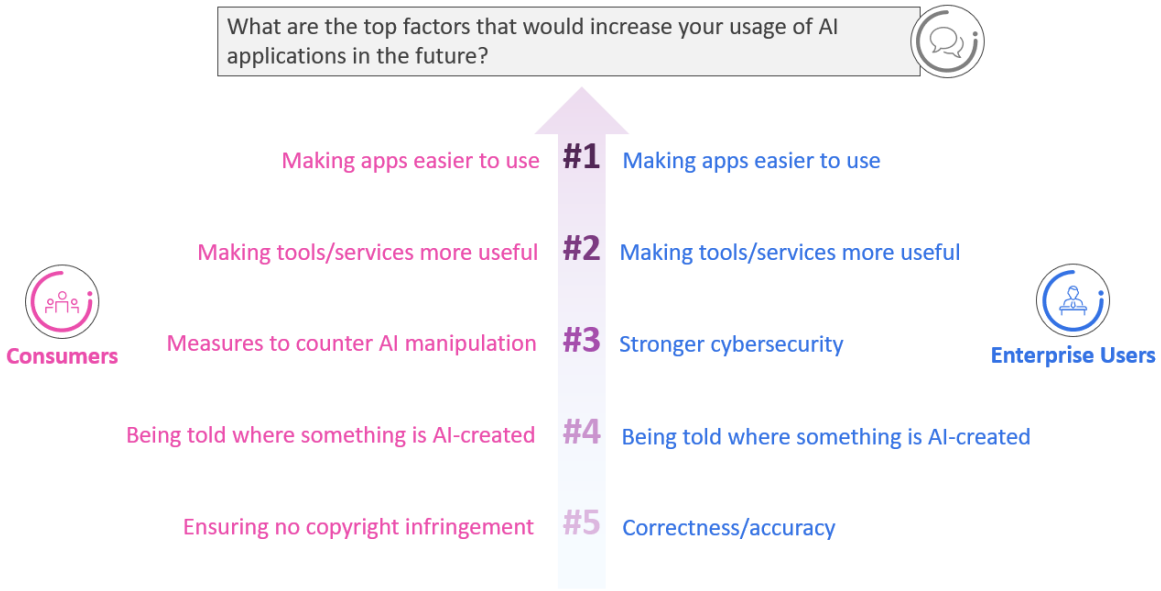
Source: Omdia end-user survey (2024) and Omdia AI Software Market Forecast (2024)

In many cases, Omdia sees that the rate of consumer adoption – whether for personal or work use – is far outpacing that of the individual enterprise's development and deployment of AI solutions, particularly for GenAI. In other words, many people are using GenAI to help improve their work – without or outside of their businesses' knowledge or control. In some cases, this explains the differences in usage preference by device too – whether someone is supporting their own work input (e.g., through smartphone usage) or applying work-based tools through desktops.

"In any case, the traditional habits on device usage die hard for cutting-edge AI applications too – with enterprise users heavily favoring their desktop PCs."

For consumers, it's a question of the light and heavy users of AI – where desktops are second to smartphones overall, they are a clear first amongst those spending 5+ hours a day using AI applications.

Figure 6. Top considerations for driving increased future AI usage



Source:

So, what will take this current picture of high, early adoption to the next level? Although the surveys point to healthy existing usage of AI applications and significant increases going forward, more can and will be done to drive AI usage across all devices and help increase work efficiency. The top two priorities for enterprise and consumer users are making AI applications easier to use (both at 47%), and not far behind is the need for AI applications to be more useful (enterprise at 40%, consumers at 35%). Given the AI application industry has so far remained competitive, we should expect to see those needs be met in the near-term. Maintaining vibrant innovation through competition, as well as allowing user agency in deciding which AI applications and access points are right for them, will be critical in achieving higher and more meaningful adoption.

Exploring The Nuance Of Consumer And Enterprise Choice

The top-level stories on device usage are therefore clear. Consumers use a healthy mix of smartphones and desktops, Enterprise users heavily favor desktops, and everyone's usage of AI applications is increasing quickly.

But behind the headline survey statistics are some interesting storylines and trends to highlight:

- People care about their choice of browser; over two-thirds have already switched from the default, and are driven by speed, features and the user interface.

- Productivity is a desktop-first application for all, and the tip of the spear for AI-driven desktop usage. This is where much of the early economic benefits of AI can be realized, particularly for enterprise users.

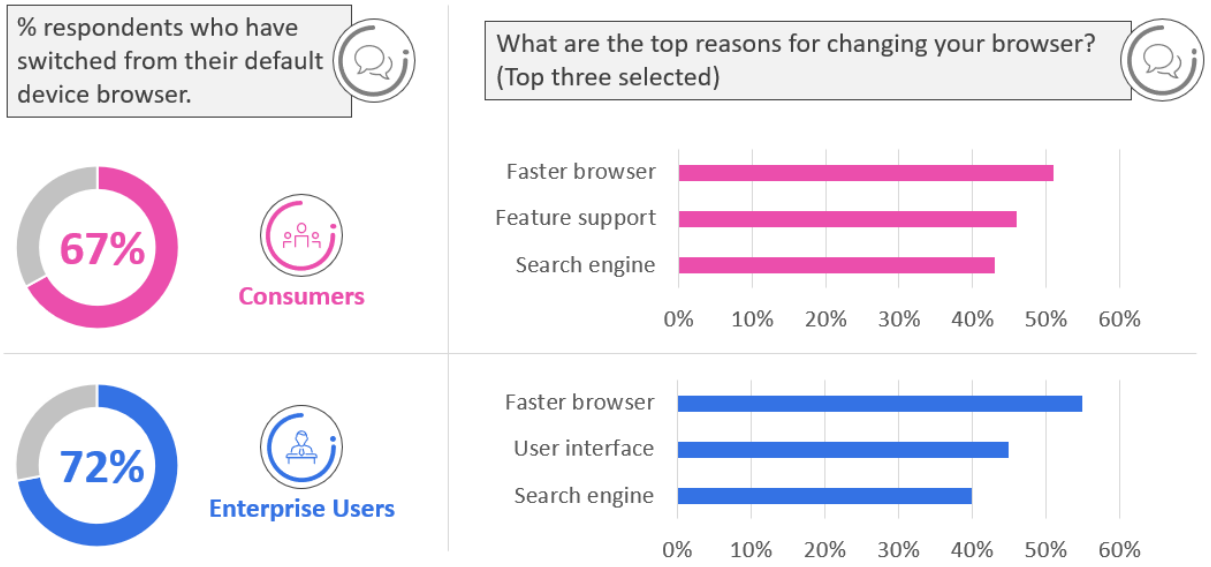
- The youngest age demographic is more discerning than average on device choice and use desktops more than other groups. This points to a future where desktop importance will only grow further.

The rest of this section dives into each of these in more detail.

Focus On Browser Choice

We already know that users like choice when it comes to device type – but users also give much thought to browsers, and don't just stay with the installed browser that comes with their devices. In fact, a huge 67% of consumers and 72% of enterprise users say they have changed their default browser on their device.

Figure 7. Browser switching preferences and drivers



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

Users pay close attention to the features and capabilities offered by browsers, just as they would any other application.

> *"Device users realize that browser choice has a significant impact on how they experience online services and applications – in fact, 70% of consumers agree/strongly agree that they carefully choose which browser they use for specific tasks (79% for enterprise users). "*

Browsers are the way that users experience the online world, and allowing user choice (and integration of key features) is therefore critical to overall experience – especially on desktops.

This will become even more important given that both consumer and enterprise users in the survey expect their online usage of devices to increase going forward (over half of desktop usage is already spent online), and to increase their usage of AI applications too.

When it comes to the reasons behind their choice to switch – the top answer of browser speed is consistent across all, and with the associated search engine also in the top three reasons for all groups. However, things diverge a little for the other top three drivers – where consumers are focused on the wide range of features supported, but enterprise users are more driven by user interface (and lower down, are much more likely than consumers to focus on better application/browser extension integration). In other words, enterprise users are often choosing different browsers specific to the work tool or application they're trying to use.

Interestingly, almost a quarter of both consumer and enterprise respondents are drawn to AI browser features as one of their reasons for choosing to switch. AI already enables browsers to varying degrees, but Omdia notes respondents could have had GenAI in mind, which are new

features and developing rapidly. This strong, early focus on AI-enabled experiences through browsers will only increase as more AI features are rolled out in key applications (such as productivity).

Enterprise users are also much more likely to prefer browser-based applications to native programs (51% versus 32%, with a further 17% expressing no preference). Where consumers or enterprise users do prefer the browser-based experience, it's most strongly driven by it being accessible from all device types – another nod to the desire for choice to engage with both smartphone and desktop in many scenarios.

Focus On Applications And AI-Driven Productivity

In searching to understand this choice by device type, the Omdia survey asked both sets of respondents for the device they used most often across a range of applications. Again, the split between consumer and enterprise view was clear. Smartphones (followed by desktops) were common for consumers, but desktops dominated for enterprise respondents – selected as the most common device 46% of the time (average across applications) compared to 19% for smartphones.

However, one piece of common ground between respondent types is for Productivity applications – e.g., such as Microsoft Teams/Slack, or writing assistants, database queries etc.

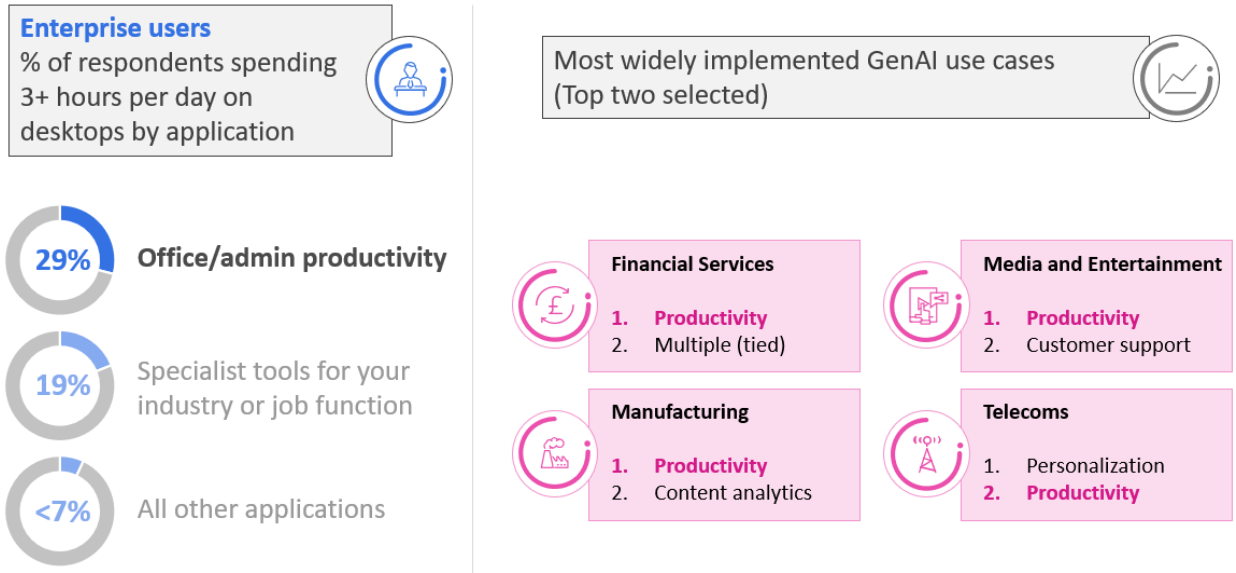
> *"Desktops were the number one device type for Productivity applications for both Consumers (37%) and for Enterprise users (63%). These are applications that over half of all respondents spend over 3 hours per day using, ahead of any other category."*

With productivity such a backbone application for so many other tasks, it's also interesting to see the rising importance of AI here too.

In terms of desktops being chosen for AI applications by Enterprise users, there are a distinct top three of Automated coding/software development, Advanced process automation, and Employee productivity tools – with the rest further behind. Again, given the overall time spent using all productivity applications (not just AI-powered) it's significant to note the level AI-driven usage already in place.

But is this usage high because that's where the need lies, or because that's where AI has been integrated first? Omdia data from a recent GenAI Early Adopters Survey shows that Employee productivity tools are one of the most widely implemented GenAI use cases to date, across a wide range of industry verticals. The answer is therefore surely both – where such popular and fundamental use cases are seeing the greatest early impact from GenAI capabilities, and will continue to drive many of the average consumer/enterprise respondents' earliest interactions with integrated AI tools.

Figure 8. A view of GenAI-driven productivity tool adoption



Source: Omdia end-user survey (2024) and Omdia Generative AI Early Adopters Survey (2024)

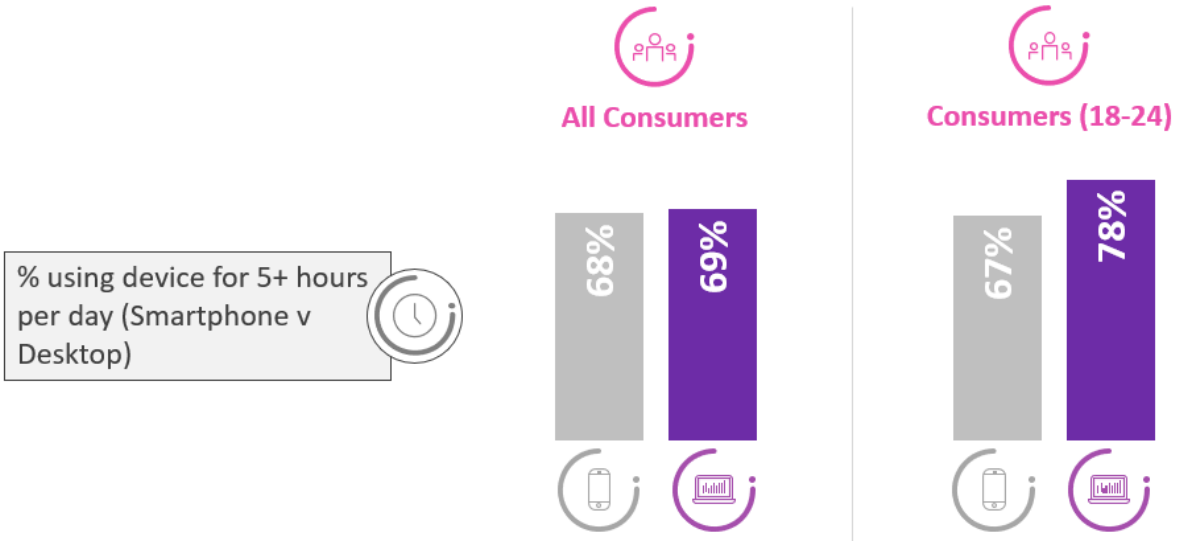
This particular combination of desktops, browsers, and AI applications amongst enterprise users is a significant one in terms of potential economic impact. For example, a PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) study estimates that global GDP could increase by 26% by 2030 as a result of increasing AI adoption, which is a $15.7 trillion contribution to the global economy. A huge $6.6 trillion of this is expected to come from increased productivity.

This new Omdia survey shows where the bulk of those AI-driven productivity gains will therefore come from: the desktop. For those remaining applications, it's also important to see that desktops rate higher than smartphones on some of the higher-value items – such as automated coding/software development and advanced process automation.

Focus On The Youngest Age Demographic

Whilst enterprise versus consumer usage is universally the biggest differentiator in device choice – it's also interesting to see where the future lies by analyzing the youngest age group (18-24 years old).

Figure 9. Consumer breakdown for high usage (5+ hours) by device type



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

"It's notable that the youngest group are higher users of desktops than the average – 78% of consumers use desktops more than 5 hours per day, compared to 67% for smartphones."

The youngest group are also the heaviest users of AI than any other group (based on spending 3+ hours per day using that category of applications), and those heaviest users prefer desktops to smartphones in doing so.

The desire for choice is a common theme across the survey – moving between smartphone and desktops depending on use case – but this is sharpest amongst 18-24s. Almost two thirds of respondents say they use a mix of connected devices depending on the activity (highest of any age category).

This is further shown by the preference for each AI application type, in the consumer survey. For the overall average respondent, only two applications had smartphones and desktops at comparable preference levels (within 5% of each other); Live transcriptions, and Productivity tools. For 18-24s, there are five applications where usage is even across smartphones and desktops: Live transcriptions, productivity tools, music editing/creating, GenAI general purpose chatbots, GenAI video creation.

The youngest group are the most judicious choosers of all when it comes to device – including for the heaviest users of AI applications.

Looking To The Future

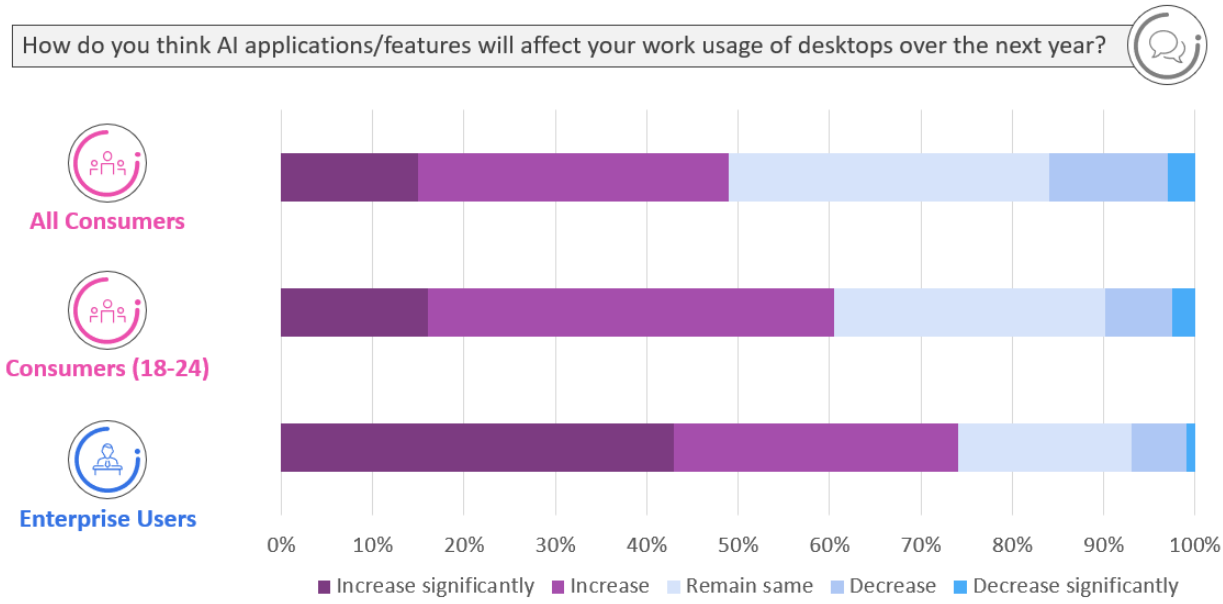
The AI-driven future is already happening now, with high usage of desktops – especially for productivity applications – and with the youngest age demographic leaning more heavily this way. But what of the survey respondents' views for the future of their own usage?

Despite the already high usage levels, both consumers and enterprise respondents say their average usage of desktops for AI applications/features will further increase over the coming year.

> *"Almost half of consumers say that AI will drive an increase/significant increase for their desktop use in the next 12 months – whilst 74% of enterprise respondents say their desktop usage will rise."*

Again, whilst the average consumer thinks their smartphone usage may rise more – it's the youngest age demographic that thinks desktop and smartphone usage will rise by the same amount (60% for both).

Figure 10. Expected trend in AI-driven usage of desktops in future



Source: Omdia end-user survey, 2024

More than anything, it is clear that both consumers and enterprise users value choice, especially for their majority usage of online activity. A mix of smartphone and desktop helps them best access all

the applications they need – including AI-driven use cases, as they start to increase in integration through both native programs and within browsers.

The future of the connected world is about enabling and optimizing features and applications across both smartphones and desktops. Desktops have a massive role to play in this future – and take the lead for digital access in the enterprise world, and even for the youngest age demographics of consumers too.

Digital access, through browser-based, desktop usage is therefore very much alive and kicking, and the AI-driven future will only increase the economic importance of these practices in the coming years – especially as the world looks to realise the potential GDP benefits on offer from AI applications starting in productivity.

Survey Demographics

The consumer and enterprise surveys were conducted by Omdia from May-June 2024. There were just over 1,000 respondents for each survey, with the overall demographics shown below.

Consumer Survey = 1,052 Respondents

Country	
US	26%
UK	16%
Brazil	26%
Japan	16%
Korea	16%

Age	
18-24	14%
25-34	32%
35-44	33%
45-54	17%
55+	4%

Income (Annual)	
<$25,000	24%
$25,000 - $49,999	34%
$50,000 - $74,999	20%
$75,000 - $100,000	11%
>$100,000	6%
Prefer not to answer	5%

Enterprise Survey = 1,020 Respondents

Country	
US	26%
UK	16%
Brazil	26%
Japan	16%
Korea	16%

Age	
18-24	15%
25-34	33%
35-44	31%
45-54	16%
55+	4%

Company Revenue (Annual)	
<$250 million	21%
$250 - $499 million	24%
$500 - $999 million	27%
$1 – 5 billion	19%
> $5 billion	9%

Appendix

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Author

David Green
Consulting Director, Applied Intelligence
David.Green@omdia.com

Eden Zoller
Chief Analyst, AI
Eden.Zoller@omdia.com

Get in touch

www.omdia.com
askananalyst@omdia.com

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