



AI Brand Leader Report

Foundation Model Platforms

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of 222 votes from the AI developer community for Market Leader and Innovation Leader for Foundation Model Platforms, 1 of 26 products in the AI Engineering stack covered by March 2026 AI Brand Leader surveys.

This was by far the most difficult product taxonomy we've ever built because the AI engineering market is moving so fast, it's highly fragmented, full of new names, conflicting definitions, and the offerings in the product categories often overlap with the capabilities of products in other categories.

We're confident the taxonomy we use next year will look very different.



We define AI Model Platforms as services that provide access to foundation models and APIs for building, deploying, and scaling AI applications. These platforms deliver capabilities such as model inference, fine-tuning, prompt orchestration, safety controls, governance, and integration with cloud infrastructure, making them the core layer for operationalizing generative AI in production.

The March 2026 IT Brand Pulse survey highlights OpenAI as the market leader with 32.0% of votes, followed by Anthropic at 27.0%, indicating a competitive top tier rather than a runaway winner.

At the same time, Anthropic leads in innovation with 35.1% of votes compared to OpenAI's 30.2%, signaling a split between market leadership and innovation leadership. This divergence suggests that OpenAI currently holds the strongest overall developer mindshare and ecosystem position, while Anthropic is increasingly viewed as the vendor pushing forward the category in areas such as model quality, safety, and enterprise-readiness.

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What it means

Market leadership is not simply about size or revenue. In the AI world, it signals a brand's ability to set direction for the industry. A market leader defines categories, influences standards, attracts ecosystems, and becomes the default choice for buyers who want confidence and continuity.

Why it matters

AI buyers, especially enterprise buyers, want stability as much as innovation. They want to know the product they invest in today will exist, grow, and be supported tomorrow. Market leaders create this assurance.

The AI compute, storage, and networking market is in relentless flux. Technology leaps, pricing shifts, and competitive plays happen at breakneck speed. Brand leadership whipsaws as yesterday's innovators become today's laggards, while new entrants seize fleeting advantages. Perceptions shift constantly, creating volatility in trust, adoption, and market dominance. In this environment, market leadership becomes a stabilizing force.

In AI infrastructure, brands like NVIDIA and Dell demonstrate this dynamic. When IT Brand Pulse surveys AI infrastructure professionals, these brands emerge as primary benefactors, leveraging scale, ecosystems, and innovation to capture mindshare, reinforce leadership, and amplify perceptions of enduring strength and trust.

Market leadership becomes a strategic moat, one that can outlast technological cycles. A strong market leader builds ecosystem gravity that attracts developers, partners, integrations, and corporate alliances. Developers learn CUDA; universities teach CUDA; startups build on CUDA. This ecosystem gravity makes market leadership self-reinforcing in ways that pure technical advantages cannot match.



What it means

In AI, innovation is not optional. It's survival. Intelligence & innovation leadership represents a brand's ability to push boundaries, pioneer new capabilities, and deliver meaningful advancements before competitors. It's not about hype. It's about consistently releasing smarter models, introducing new techniques, improving performance, speed, and efficiency, challenging assumptions and solving previously unsolved problems

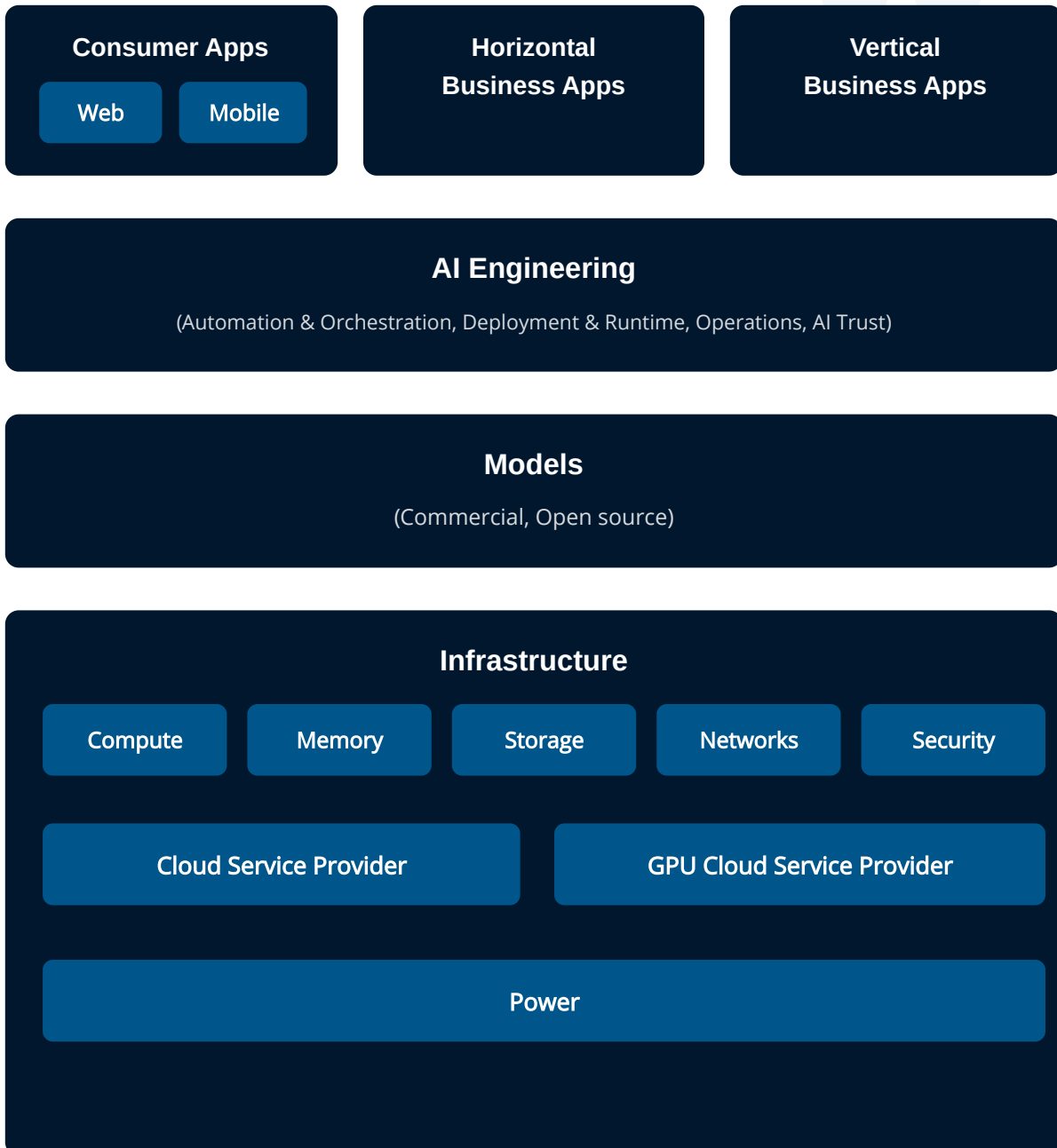
Why it matters

AI companies are judged by their rate of progress. Buyers want assurance that a brand's solutions won't fall behind as models and hardware evolve. Innovation demonstrates vitality, proof that the brand is not static. Innovation leadership attracts top engineering talent, fuels investor confidence, inspires developers to build on the platform, signals that the brand is shaping the future, not reacting to it.

In a market where yesterday's breakthrough becomes today's baseline, intelligence leadership is one of the strongest predictors of long-term viability. The brands that win are those that make others react to them, not the other way around. Consider how quickly the landscape shifts: a model architecture that was revolutionary six months ago is now table stakes. Inference speeds that were impressive last quarter are now minimum requirements. In this environment, a brand's innovation velocity becomes a signal of its future relevance. Buyers aren't just evaluating what a brand can do today; they're evaluating whether it will still be leading tomorrow.

AI Product Taxonomy

The Foundation Model Platforms covered in this survey are part of the AI Engineering layer in the IT Brand Pulse AI Product Taxonomy. AI Brand Leader surveys are based on the product groupings below with shared characteristics, intended use, target customer, and other criteria.



AI Engineering Stack

Below is the stack of 7 product categories and 26 sub-categories, including Foundation Model Platforms, that makeup the AI Engineering layer in our AI Product Taxonomy.

Development

- AI Model Development Frameworks
- Foundation Model Platforms
- LLMOps Platforms
- AI Agent Development Frameworks
- AI App Builder Platforms

Context & Memory

- AI Context Engineering Platforms
- AI Memory Platforms
- Multimodal Memory Platforms
- Knowledge Graph Platforms
- Vector Databases

Data & Retrieval

- Feature Stores
- Synthetic Data Platforms
- Data Labeling Platforms

Automation & Orchestration

- AI Workflow Automation Platforms
- Agent Orchestration Platforms
- AI Integration Platforms
- Deployment & Runtime
- Model Serving Platforms
- AI Inference Optimization Platforms
- AI Application Platforms

Operations

- AI Observability Platforms
- AI Evaluation Platforms
- Experiment Tracking Platforms
- Model Registry Platforms

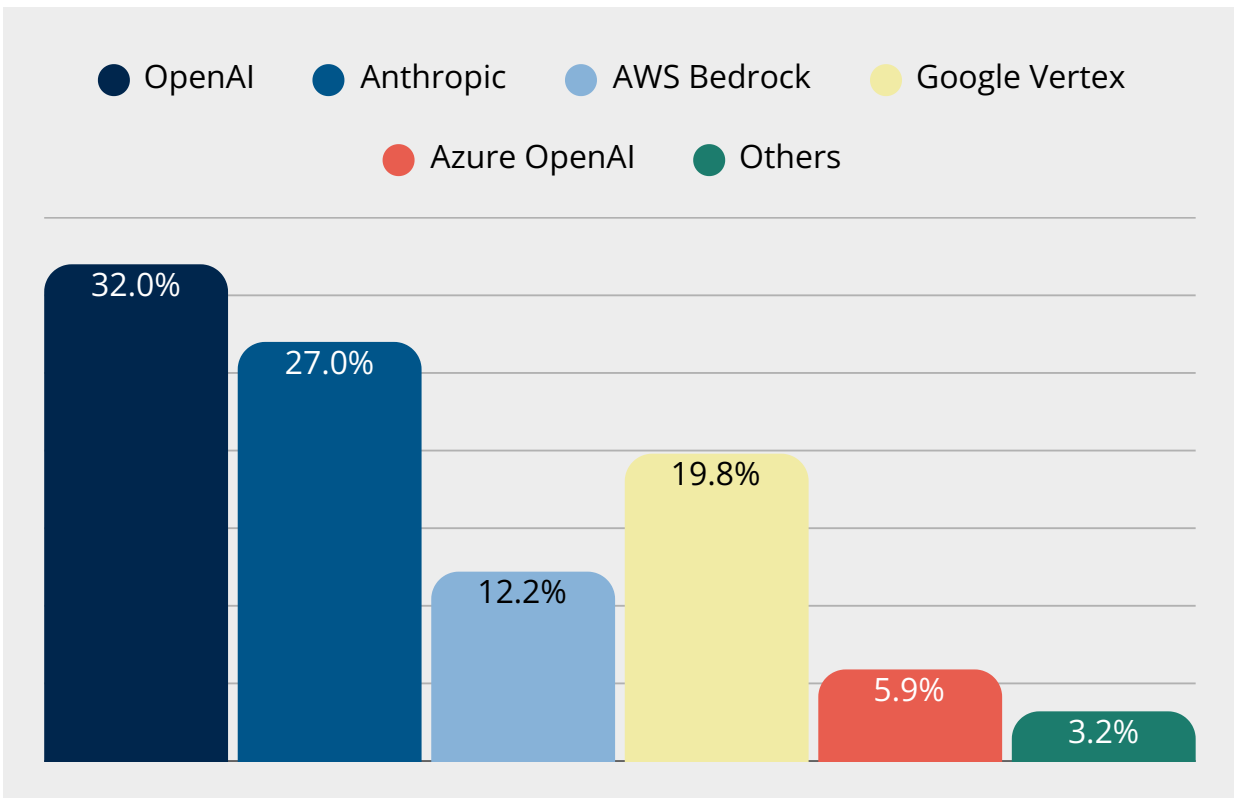
AI Trust

- AI Governance Platforms
- AI Security Platforms
- AI Guardrails Platforms

Foundation Model Platforms



The AI developer community voted OpenAI as the Market Leader for AI Model Platforms, with 32.0% of votes, followed by Anthropic at 27.0%. The 5% spread is narrow rather than a dominant position, suggesting the category is highly competitive. 41.0% of votes were spread across Google Vertex, AWS Bedrock, Azure OpenAI, and Others, leaving room for multiple players to remain relevant.



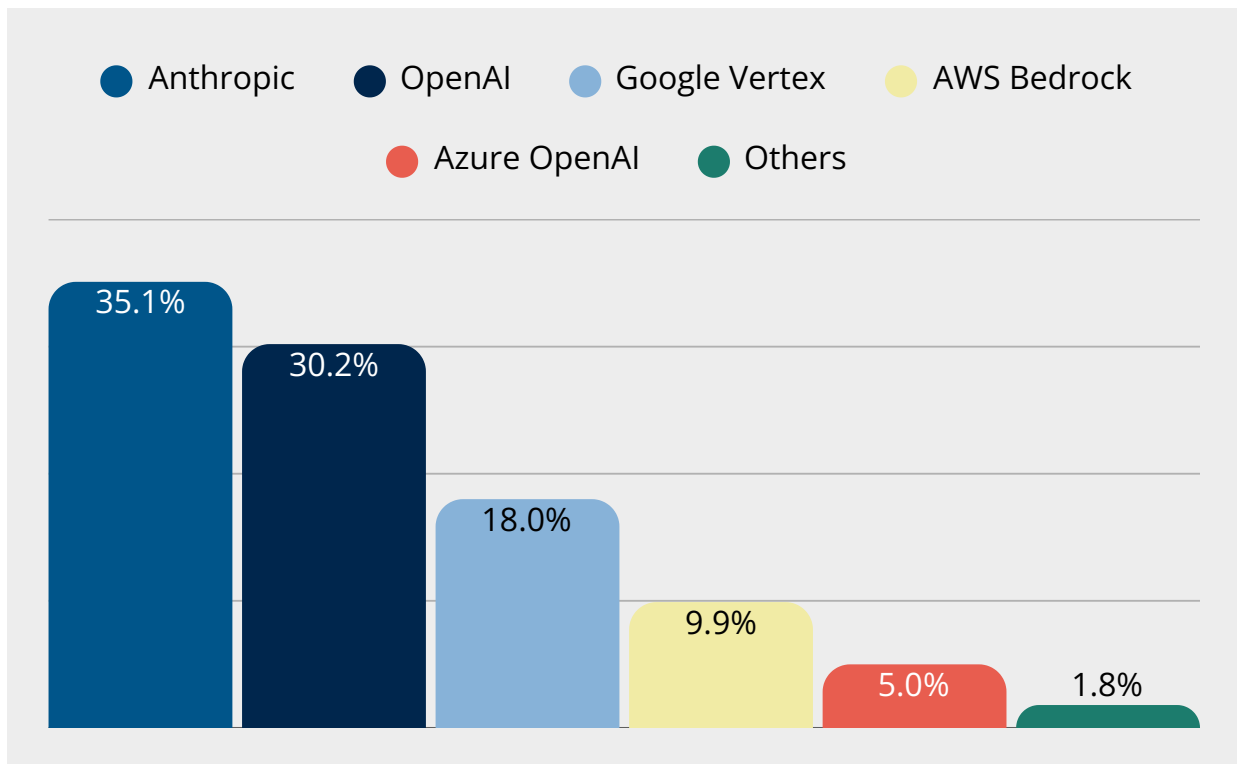
OpenAI's lead reflects its first-mover advantage, strong developer adoption, and broad ecosystem reach. It is the vendor most associated with mainstream Gen AI usage, and its early success with APIs, assistant workflows, and multimodal capabilities resulted in durable brand recognition. OpenAI is also benefiting from the platform with the largest community, most third-party integrations, and broadest tooling support.



Foundation Model Platforms



Anthropic was voted Innovation Leader for AI Model Platforms, with 35.1% of votes, ahead of OpenAI at 30.2%. Unlike categories where one vendor overwhelmingly defines the direction of the market, these results suggest developers see innovation in AI model platforms as contested, with at least two vendors driving the frontier. Google Vertex also stands out at 18.0%, indicating that developers still recognize meaningful innovation from cloud-native platform providers even if they trail the top two.



ANTHROPIC

Anthropic’s innovation leadership reflects its reputation for advancing model safety, controllability, long-context performance, and enterprise usability. Developers increasingly value models that are not just powerful, but dependable in real-world production settings, and Anthropic has built strong momentum around those attributes.

Looking Forward



Predictions

Major shifts in the AI landscape will change both how IT Brand Pulse structures the AI Engineering taxonomy and how brand leadership is measured, because the boundaries between models, platforms, clouds, and application layers will continue to blur.

1. The AI engineering category will shift from tools and vendors to control layers.

The current taxonomy will become less useful as the stack collapses into a few integrated systems. Instead of organizing around discrete tools, the taxonomy will move toward layers such as Model Layer, Runtime Layer, Orchestration Layer, and Optimization Layer.

2. The development sub-category will evolve from frameworks and APIs into agent development environments.

What developers think of today as “development” will become a broader environment for building, testing, evaluating, and operating AI agents and applications. As this happens, voting will shift away from asking which API or framework is preferred and toward asking which platform serves as the primary environment for AI application development.

3. AI Model Platforms will split into two leadership models: model innovators and platform owners.

Over time, IT Brand Pulse may need to divide the category into sub-categories such as Foundation Model Providers and AI Platform Services, because the same brand may not lead both. Brand leader voting will therefore need to measure not only who has the best models, but also who owns the developer workflow, governance layer, and production environment.



MARCH 2026

AI Brand Leader Program

IT Brand Pulse Brand Leader Awards are voted by thousands of IT professionals, not algorithms or small judging panels. Our surveys measure brand perception across the Five Pillars of AI brand leadership, giving winners credible, third-party validation that resonates with customers, analysts, and investors.

See the latest survey results at:

<https://itbrandpulse.com/brand-leader-program>.

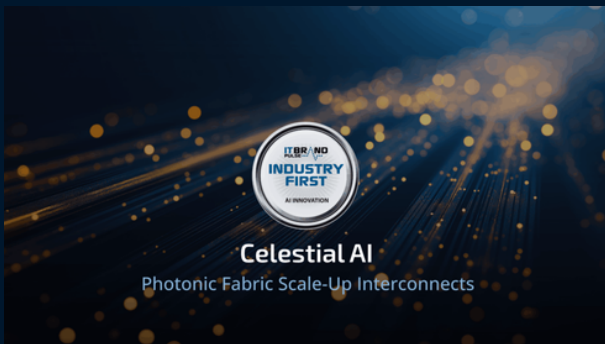




Industry First Program

IT Brand Pulse's Industry First Program provides independent, third-party validation that you were first to deliver a meaningful AI innovation. Our analysts verify your timeline, technical claims, and market precedence, then publish a comprehensive validation article documenting your achievement.

See the latest industry firsts and nominate your product at: itbrandpulse.com/industry-first.



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