# Business development pros embrace AI and agility to thrive despite tough economy at BD100 Awards



Amid an ever-challenging global economy, professionals in business development from leading marketing agencies gathered for the BD100 Awards, an event that shines a spotlight on the top 100 individuals in this field. The BD100, a collaboration between Propeller and The Drum, celebrates those who have not only adapted to but thrived amidst turbulent times, with many attendees expressing optimism, largely due to the transformative role of artificial intelligence (AI) in their work.

As Robert Yardy, director of partnerships at MMT Digital, noted, the competition is fierce, and agencies must remain ahead of their clients by embracing new technologies. “You have to admit the market is just so tough right now! But through investing a significant amount of time into building AI web tools and AI content migration for our clients, we’ve moved forward as an agency,” he remarked. This sentiment was echoed throughout the event, illustrating a broad acknowledgment that while challenges persist, AI is pivotal in reshaping agency practices and client relationships.

The evening was dominated by discussions on AI’s role in fostering creativity and efficiency, balanced by caution regarding its potential pitfalls. Tracey Barber, the chief marketing officer at Rapp, shared insights on the dual nature of AI in business development. “AI is freeing up more time so we can focus on speaking to our clients about growth,” she indicated, underlining the need for a careful balance between leveraging AI's strengths without sacrificing creative differentiation.

Indeed, while 62% of Business Development Representatives (BDRs) surveyed by 6sense characterised AI as enhancing their productivity, there remains a spectrum of opinion. Some professionals still regard it with apprehension, signifying a gap that needs addressing as the industry evolves. The report highlights that those who actively engage with AI are more likely to see it as an asset rather than a threat, suggesting an ongoing adjustment period for many professionals.

The pressures of the current economy were palpable, with many agencies reporting budget constraints necessitating dramatic shifts in their operations. Bérangère Fond, director of business development at Spring Production, articulated the challenge of maintaining client relationships while navigating economic hardship: “Remaining attractive from a cost-efficiency perspective is a key challenge… but this is a big risk and can actually make you less attractive to clients!” This tension between managing costs and delivering quality service exemplifies the complex landscape facing business developers today.

Many leaders are shifting their focus towards a more dynamic approach to development. Daniel Marriott, from Creative Artists Agency, advocates for embracing a “progress over perfection” mindset, suggesting that the imperative for innovation should not be stifled by the quest for flawless execution. His perspective resonates in an environment where taking risks and building iteratively is often more fruitful than waiting for the ideal moment.

The shift towards creativity on tighter budgets was another focal point of conversation. As Derek Dewosky from Publicis Groupe stated, success in the current climate hinges on “elevated storytelling that sells.” In his view, effective business development is rooted not just in capability but also in the ability to connect and engage authentically with potential clients. He alongside Fond, recommend that those in the field build robust personal relationships, fostering trust despite economic uncertainties.

This strong emphasis on human connections extends to leadership strides within agencies, as highlighted by Shruti Dixit at Publicis Groupe. She stressed the importance of stepping up and taking initiative: “You need to stand up and lead from the front.” This proactive attitude is essential for fostering resilience and adaptability in teams navigating a landscape that demands constant evolution.

Moreover, the emphasis on demonstrating tangible commercial impact is increasingly critical. As Yardy pointed out, agencies must clearly showcase their financial value to clients, an expectation that has never been higher given the competitive dynamics of the marketplace. “There’s way more competition than what we’ve ever seen before,” he noted, reinforcing the necessity for business developers to prove their worth through measurable outcomes.

The BD100 Awards also recognised remarkable achievements in business development, with Oya Mustafa of Recipe being named Business Developer of the Year for her commercially sharp, purpose-driven approach. Additionally, the Rising Star Award went to Becky Hipkiss from We Are Futures, highlighting the emerging talent committed to driving industry success.

In conclusion, the BD100 Awards illustrated that while the journey through a demanding economic climate presents numerous challenges for business development professionals, a collective optimism prevails. The integration of AI, a focus on authentic relationships, and a willingness to adapt and innovate are key tenets for navigating this tumultuous period. As leaders in the field continue to champion these principles, the future seems ripe for those ready to embrace both the challenges and opportunities ahead.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[2]](https://bd100.club/blog/2025/04/celebrating-the-brightest-stars-in-business-development-the-bd100-announces-its-2025-list)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[3]](https://www.dnarecruit.com/news/bd100-2025-list-is-now-live)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.thebdschool.com/blog/business-development-trends-for-2025), [[5]](https://6sense.com/science-of-b2b/the-2025-science-of-b2b-bdr-benchmark-succeeding-in-a-changing-landscape/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[6]](https://marketingtechginsights.com/6sense-releases-2025-bdr-report-highlighting-ais-impact-on-sales/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[2]](https://bd100.club/blog/2025/04/celebrating-the-brightest-stars-in-business-development-the-bd100-announces-its-2025-list)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.skills-coalition.com/nl/news/business-development-professionals-%26-hiring%3A-thriving-in-the-ai-driven-market-in-2025)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[3]](https://www.dnarecruit.com/news/bd100-2025-list-is-now-live)
* Paragraph 8 – [[4]](https://www.thebdschool.com/blog/business-development-trends-for-2025), [[5]](https://6sense.com/science-of-b2b/the-2025-science-of-b2b-bdr-benchmark-succeeding-in-a-changing-landscape/)
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* Paragraph 10 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[3]](https://www.dnarecruit.com/news/bd100-2025-list-is-now-live)
* Paragraph 11 – [[1]](https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and), [[2]](https://bd100.club/blog/2025/04/celebrating-the-brightest-stars-in-business-development-the-bd100-announces-its-2025-list)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thedrum.com/news/2025/05/23/bd100-2025-how-business-development-pros-are-tackling-tough-times-with-ai-and> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://bd100.club/blog/2025/04/celebrating-the-brightest-stars-in-business-development-the-bd100-announces-its-2025-list> - The BD100 has announced its 2025 list, highlighting the top 100 business development professionals who have demonstrated exceptional impact, innovation, and tenacity in a competitive environment. The list serves as a celebration of individuals and teams redefining success in business development, showcasing those who have transformed their agencies and set new industry standards. The announcement emphasizes the evolving role of business developers and their contributions to agency growth and success.
3. <https://www.dnarecruit.com/news/bd100-2025-list-is-now-live> - DNA Recruit has announced the live release of the BD100 2025 list, celebrating the top 100 new business developers across UK agencies. The list recognizes individuals and teams who are redefining business development by driving growth, landing wins, and pushing boundaries in the industry. The announcement highlights the increased competition and exceptional submissions this year, underscoring the significance of making it onto the BD100 list. Additionally, DNA Recruit invites attendees to the BD100 Awards Event on 21st May 2025 at The Drum Labs in London, featuring awards, a keynote address, and networking opportunities.
4. <https://www.thebdschool.com/blog/business-development-trends-for-2025> - The BD School outlines the top five business development trends for 2025, emphasizing the importance of agentic AI, tribe-led growth, enhanced customer experience, co-creation, and the need for business developers to adapt to these changes. The article discusses how agentic AI is transforming business development by automating tasks and improving efficiency. It also highlights the significance of building strong, engaged communities (tribe-led growth) and providing exceptional customer experiences to meet rising expectations. The trend of co-creation involves involving customers in product or service development, fostering innovation and stronger relationships. The article concludes by advising business developers to upskill in AI and digital strategies to stay relevant in the evolving landscape.
5. <https://6sense.com/science-of-b2b/the-2025-science-of-b2b-bdr-benchmark-succeeding-in-a-changing-landscape/> - 6sense's 2025 BDR Report reveals that Business Development Representatives (BDRs) are embracing AI tools, with 62% stating that AI enhances their productivity. The report highlights a divide in perception, with 25% of BDRs not yet finding AI impactful and 13% viewing it as a potential threat to their roles. The study also notes that non-adopters of AI are more likely to perceive it as a threat, suggesting that firsthand experience with AI can alleviate concerns and foster a more optimistic view of its potential to support and enhance roles rather than replace them.
6. <https://marketingtechginsights.com/6sense-releases-2025-bdr-report-highlighting-ais-impact-on-sales/> - Marketing Technology Insights reports on 6sense's 2025 BDR Report, highlighting that Business Development Representatives (BDRs) are integrating AI tools into their workflows, leading to improved performance metrics. The research indicates that AI is enhancing, not replacing, the BDR role, with teams embracing AI while maintaining strong performance outcomes. The study surveyed 262 BDRs primarily in North America's technology sector, revealing a positive correlation between AI adoption and team growth, suggesting that AI is a valuable asset in the evolution of the BDR role.
7. <https://www.skills-coalition.com/nl/news/business-development-professionals-%26-hiring%3A-thriving-in-the-ai-driven-market-in-2025> - The Skills Coalition discusses how AI and automation are reshaping senior business development roles in 2025. The article emphasizes the need for Business Development Managers, Directors, Vice Presidents, and Chief Business Officers to integrate AI-driven decision-making, data analysis, and digital business strategies into their roles. It outlines key AI-powered changes in business development, such as data-driven sales, automated lead generation, hyper-personalized outreach, and AI-powered networking. The piece also highlights recruitment and hiring trends, noting that companies are prioritizing AI-ready BD leaders and that AI and automation knowledge directly impacts salaries. The article concludes by advising BD professionals to develop AI and data analytics expertise and build strong digital business networks to future-proof their careers.