

Stratford's Annual Global Trends Report

STRATFORD MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

2025 Business Trends

As we step into 2025, businesses across industries are navigating a dynamic landscape shaped by evolving economic conditions, technological advancements, and shifting societal priorities. This report aims to provide a concise overview of the key factors influencing global markets and industries this year.

By examining emerging patterns and established developments, we seek to offer actionable insights that help organizations adapt, innovate, and thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

Our analysis is designed to support strategic decision-making by highlighting the forces shaping the future of work, commerce, and innovation. Whether you're an established leader or an organization looking to scale in 2025, we hope this report serves as a valuable tool in achieving your business objectives in the year ahead.



At a Glance.

Executive Summary

This report identifies and analyzes the key trends and industry shifts shaping the global landscape as businesses prepare for 2025.

Based on the foundations established in 2024, it is anticipated that 2025 will follow with enhancements in generative AI, sustainability initiatives, and decentralized finance, among others. However, the global business environment is further complicated by other factors due to potential significant policy shifts under the new U.S. administration.

Such things as proposed tariffs and evolving trade policies could disrupt global supply chains and introduce economic uncertainty and given Canada's deep economic ties to the United States, could particularly impact Canada.

With a focus on delivering actionable insights, the report highlights how companies can adapt to thrive in an evolving market, outlining ten transformative business trends and forecasts for fifteen industries.

The Top 10 Business Trends of 2025

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Who is Stratford?

Stratford Management Consulting, a division of Stratford Group, is a team of experienced business practitioners and digital experts who can support your organization with the awareness, knowledge, skills, and tools needed to execute your strategy for growth.

We empower leaders to enhance their organizations through improved strategies, streamlined processes, innovative technology, and effective leadership. Working closely with your team, we deliver tailored solutions that drive measurable results, realize value, and build sustainable capabilities.

Top Business Trends for 2025.

This section highlights the top 10 business trends that are reshaping industries and redefining success in 2025. From emerging opportunities to pressing challenges, these insights provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of today's business landscape.

Generative AI Matures

Generative AI transitions from experimentation in 2024 to widespread operational use in 2025. Companies are deploying AI to automate creative processes, optimize supply chains, and enhance customer interactions. Businesses that fail to integrate AI risk falling behind competitors who leverage their capabilities for efficiency and innovation.

Generative AI is expected to help reduce costs, enable faster product development, and personalize customer experiences, creating new competitive advantages. However, the potential introduction of U.S. tariffs on technology imports could slow the adoption of generative AI technologies, particularly for Canadian tech firms reliant on U.S. partnerships and markets.

Sustainability Goes Mainstream

In 2025, sustainability will move from the planning stage to execution including implementing circular economy principles, renewable energy solutions and transparent sustainability reporting. Recent changes in U.S. policy under the new administration are likely to impact this trend.

However, the demand for eco-friendly practices remains high globally, fueled by consumer demand and stringent environmental regulations in other regions, such as the European Union. International companies must align with these global standards when facing domestic policy changes. In addition, many U.S. states, cities, and corporations continue to uphold sustainability goals on their own, giving way to a decentralized but enduring environmental progress movement.

By investing in sustainability, businesses can enhance brand loyalty, reduce costs through energy efficiency, and have a competitive edge in markets that reward eco-consciousness.

Hyper-Personalization Amplified

AI-powered tools enable businesses to customize products, services, and marketing efforts based on individual customer preferences in real-time. This trend is a continuation of what we have seen in 2024 but expands personalization even more with predictive analytics and dynamic adjustments.

Enhanced personalization can increase customer retention, drive revenue growth, and strengthen brand differentiation in competitive markets.

Specialized AI Takes the Lead

AI solutions will become more domain-specific in 2025, addressing industry-specific needs such as healthcare diagnostics, financial fraud detection, and agricultural optimization. Companies will focus on ensuring ethical AI use and building trust with stakeholders.

Specialized AI increases efficiency, improves decision-making, facilitates innovations in specific sectors, and has a measurable return on investment for adopters.

Hybrid Work Matures

As of January 2025, hybrid work models remain prevalent, with 53% of U.S. employers and 54% of Canadian employers offering hybrid options, even though several major corporations are implementing stricter return-to-office policies.

As digital tools and collaboration platforms advance, hybrid work evolves with improved employee wellness programs. Organizations optimize productivity and engagement while prioritizing flexibility.

Companies that embrace hybrid work models can attract top talent, reduce overhead costs, and increase employee satisfaction, but they must invest in technology and communication frameworks.





Cybersecurity Becomes a Cornerstone

The increasing frequency and sophistication of cyber threats demand robust cybersecurity measures. Businesses are embedding cybersecurity into their core strategies to protect operations, data, and customer trust.

Enhanced cybersecurity reduces risk exposure, safeguards intellectual property, and strengthens customer confidence, which is crucial in digital-first markets.

“If boards continue following the same reactive path, there’s little hope for meaningful change. Governance systems must evolve from passive risk management to active drivers of business resilience and digital growth – directors must guide digital and cyber strategy, not just oversee incidents.”

Ezra Ortiz, Cybersecurity Oversight and Strategy Advocate

Economic Growth Despite Uncertainty

Global trade uncertainties persist, but 2025 forecasts solid economic growth driven by emerging markets and regional trade partnerships.

New U.S. tariffs on Canadian goods could intensify economic uncertainty, impacting Canada’s export-driven sectors and prompting companies to reevaluate market strategies. Shifts in tax regulations and tariffs could potentially impact growth strategies.

To counter the challenges, companies are considering diversifying their markets and strengthening their local operations. Thus, businesses can capitalize on growth opportunities by expanding into emerging markets and building resilience against economic volatility.

Health Tech Innovation Accelerates

Breakthroughs in AI-driven diagnostics, wearable technology, and personalized medicine redefine healthcare delivery. Companies are innovating to meet increasing consumer demand for accessible, efficient health solutions.

Technology can be used as a differentiator to unlock new revenue streams and, at the same time, improve patient outcomes for organizations in healthcare and adjacent industries.



▶▶ Decentralized Finance (DeFi) Expands

Decentralized Finance or DeFi is a blockchain-based financial system that eliminates intermediaries such as banks, allows peer-to-peer (P2P) transactions, and provides access to financial services such as lending, borrowing, and trading through smart contracts.

Blockchain and Decentralized Finance applications are gradually shifting from niche interest to mainstream adoption.

Financial institutions are interested in DeFi because it helps them increase transparency, decrease costs, and increase accessibility. The adoption of DeFi presents opportunities for financial inclusivity, operational efficiency, and innovation in products such as smart contracts and digital wallets.

▶▶ Resilient Supply Chains Prioritized

In order to increase supply chain resilience, businesses are investing in local production, predictive analytics and green logistics.

Lessons from past disruptions drive efforts to future-proof operations.

New U.S. tariffs may force Canadian businesses to accelerate supply chain localization or diversify sourcing strategies to mitigate cross-border trade risks.

Stronger supply chains reduce vulnerabilities, enhance customer satisfaction, and enable more sustainable operations.

“Products can be easily copied. But a supply chain can provide a true competitive advantage.”

Yossi Sheff
Elisha Gray II Professor of Engineering Systems at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.





2025 Industry Forecasts.

In this section, we provide forward-looking insights across 15 key industries, examining the trends, challenges, and/or opportunities expected to shape their trajectories in 2025.

Technology

Generative AI becomes a foundation of innovation, with use cases expanding across all sectors. Quantum computing transitions from experimental stages to early commercial applications, enabling previously impossible computations in pharmaceuticals and financial modelling industries.

Healthcare

Healthcare is experiencing transformative changes, with, for instance, AI diagnostics improving accuracy and reducing costs. Thanks to genomics and biotech innovations, treatment plans become more personalized and telemedicine services become more integrated and accessible.

\$148 Billion
 Global Artificial Intelligence (AI) influence on healthcare market expected to reach this number by 2029

MarketsANDMarkets

Retail

Immersive shopping experiences are created by combining augmented reality with physical spaces, and experiential retail is evolving. Direct-to-consumer models thrive as brands leverage data to deliver highly targeted marketing and personalized offerings.

→ Financial Services

Decentralized finance or DeFi platforms are gradually becoming mainstream and gaining recognition and use, thanks to their ability to increase transparency and accessibility in the financial sector. Financial institutions are increasingly using blockchain for operations such as cross-border payments and fraud prevention.

→ Energy

Under the Trump administration, U.S. energy policies have moved dramatically towards fossil fuels, ending subsidies for wind energy, freezing \$300 billion in green energy funding, and pulling out of the Paris Climate Accord. These measures are vastly at odds with global trends, where investments in renewable energy remain strong.

In 2024, nearly 60% of energy investments were in renewable energy, with China and the European Union leading the way. In fact, China alone is predicted to account for 54% of the world's renewable installations in 2024 and 2025. Global momentum towards sustainability may be slowing domestic progress in renewable energy to a crawl in the U.S., but it is continuing unabated on an international level, fuelled by international commitments and regional initiatives.

60%

**of 2024 energy investments
were in renewable energy**

→ Automotive

Potential tariffs from the U.S. administration on automotive imports from Canada and Mexico, in addition to plans to revoke federal EV tax credits and pause EV infrastructure funding, could threaten North America's integrated supply chain. They could increase production costs, slow EV sector growth, and reduce consumer incentives, creating significant uncertainty for automakers and slowing electric vehicle adoption in the region.

→ Construction & Real Estate

There is an increasing demand for IoT-enabled smart buildings, driven by sustainability goals and tenant expectations. Hybrid residential and commercial properties with flexible work and living arrangements are also continuing to rise.

→ Media & Entertainment

Content creation undergoes a transformation with generative AI producing high-quality outputs at scale. VR and AR experiences are gradually entering the gaming industry, as well as the training process and even live events offering, in this way, new possible revenue streams.

→ Education

With AI-driven personalized learning platforms, the traditional education system is being revolutionized, filling the skill gaps and making way for continuous learning. Institutions are adopting hybrid teaching models of online and personal interactions.

→ Agriculture

AI and IoT-based precision farming technologies become the norm to boost yields and cut resource consumption. Automation and advanced lighting systems backed by vertical farming continue to grow in urban areas.

→ Logistics

To increase efficiency, logistics companies are turning to artificial intelligence (AI) driven demand forecasting and route optimization. The green logistics initiatives such as electric delivery fleets and sustainable packaging are gaining prominence.



→ Manufacturing

New technologies, including digital twins and AI-powered production lines, become mainstream. Circular manufacturing processes reduce waste and promote sustainability across supply chains.

→ Hospitality & Travel

With sustainable tourism on the rise, eco-friendly accommodations and experiences are becoming the norm. The new normal for travel features AI-powered personalization that guarantees tailored recommendations and seamless booking processes.

→ Telecommunications

In preparation for ultra-fast connectivity, the telecommunications sector is accelerating research into 6G networks.

Investments in cybersecurity are intended to ensure robust protection against ever-evolving threats.

79.4
zettabytes

amount of data expected to
be generated in 2025 just by
connected IoT devices

International Data Corporation (IDC)

→ Professional Services

Professional services firms are using generative AI for client insights, creating reports, and developing scenario plans, thus boosting productivity and the overall quality of services.

ESG consulting becomes a key growth area as organizations align with evolving regulations and stakeholder expectations.



Looking Ahead.

Building on the innovations of 2024, 2025 features profound enhancements in technology, sustainability and customer engagement. This is a pivotal moment for businesses, who must decide whether to transform themselves in response to shifting trends and invest in new technologies to ensure their survival in the future. The maturity of AI technologies, such as generative and specialized AI, provides new and unprecedented opportunities for efficiency, creativity and decision-making.

Sustainability is no longer optional; it's an imperative for survival in markets increasingly driven by eco-conscious consumers and stringent regulations. Despite the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under President Donald Trump in January 2025, sustainability remains a critical imperative for businesses. This is driven by ongoing global consumer demand for eco-friendly products and stringent environmental regulations in other regions.

As industries adopt decentralized finance, blockchain technologies, and advanced health tech solutions, the global economy will see an acceleration in innovation and inclusivity. Supply chains that were very vulnerable to disruptions a few years ago are evolving into stronger systems with the help of predictive analytics and localized production strategies. These advancements will help fix existing vulnerabilities and create a base for more sustainable customer-centric operations.

In the interconnected world where businesses operate, it is necessary to ensure that organizations build digital trust through robust cybersecurity measures and ethical AI usage. This trust will be a fundamental element for customer loyalty and operational success.

Hybrid work models will continue to evolve, with organizations that effectively manage flexibility and productivity gaining a competitive edge in talent acquisition and retention.

Looking ahead, companies that proactively embrace these changes and invest in upskilling their workforce to align with technological advancements will thrive. By balancing innovation with adaptability, businesses can position themselves to not only navigate the challenges of 2025 but also seize its myriad opportunities for growth and transformation.

Potential changes to American trade policies, such as tariff imposition, highlight the need for Canadian businesses to be adaptive by either changing their strategy to decrease their dependence on the United States or better cope with policy-related shocks.

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How Can We Help?

"Stratford's team mix was excellent, they brought in the strengths we needed at the right time."

—JEFFREY DALE, CEO, EORLA

Feel confident with your plans and strategies to grow and scale your organization in 2025. Drive results and accountability with a strategic plan that leverages trends and best practices cultivated from years of experience.

We can support you to operationalize and implement recommendations, develop strategies to leverage these trends, and create and develop a clear road map that aligns the organization with clear steps and milestones to achieve your objective.

Leveraging our business expertise, Stratford has helped organizations like yours successfully navigate times of growth, reorganization, and transformation.

[Book your private strategy session](#)

About Stratford Group.

At Stratford, we believe better is possible, and it's our mission to help clients get there with better strategies, better processes, better technology, better intellectual property protection, and better leadership. Our teams have years of practical business experience and deliver customized solutions that help clients realize value, achieve results and build enduring capabilities. Capabilities that leave our clients in better positions to thrive and contribute to the prosperity and vibrancy of their organizations, their teams and their communities.

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