



CLARECAST RESEARCH

Headcount Forecasting Benchmark

How Clarecast Compares Against the World's Leading AI Models

Executive Summary • May 2026

THE BOTTOM LINE

Clarecast outperforms every general-purpose AI model tested.

We ran a comprehensive head-to-head test: an automated weekly benchmark comparing Clarecast's purpose-built forecasting engine against 18 of the world's leading AI models, including GPT-5, Claude Sonnet 4.6, Gemini 2.5 Pro, Grok-4, and Perplexity. Across 2,128 publicly traded companies and 12-month forecast horizons, Clarecast ranked #1.

The result is not close. On the metric that matters most for business decisions, whether a forecast lands within 5% of the actual headcount, Clarecast is right 82% of the time. The best AI model is right 51% of the time. The implications matter for any company that depends on knowing where customer and prospect headcount is heading.

AT A GLANCE

Metric	Clarecast	Best AI Model
Forecasts within 5% of actual	82%	51% (Claude Sonnet 4.6)
Forecast stability	Highest in study	Highly variable
Composite ranking	#1	#2 Tied (Claude Sonnet 4.6, GPT-5)

WHY THIS MATTERS

Headcount is the most reliable forward signal of a company's trajectory.

Workforce costs are about 70% of operating expenses for most companies. Headcount changes reflect hiring plans, restructuring, growth, and strategic pivots, often before they show up in earnings. For insurance carriers, employee benefits brokers, staffing firms, B2B SaaS platforms, and private equity, knowing which companies will grow or shrink is the difference between acting early and reacting late.

The question we set out to answer: now that AI models like GPT-5, Claude, and Gemini can search the web in real time, can they do this job? If they can, the case for a specialized platform is weak. If they can't, the case is clear.

THE FINDINGS

The gap is wide, and it's structural.

1. Clarecast is the most accurate.

82% of Clarecast's forecasts land within 5% of actual headcount. The best AI model, Claude Sonnet 4.6, manages 51%. Most AI models cluster between 36% and 45%. For business decisions where a 5% margin is the line between actionable intelligence and noise, this is a defining gap.

2. Clarecast leads on direction.

Directional accuracy, whether a company will grow, shrink, or stay flat, is where forecasting earns its keep. Clarecast leads every model tested at 51%. Most AI models perform worse than simply guessing 'no change' every month.

3. AI forecasts are unstable.

A forecast that swings 20% from one week to the next is unusable for planning. Several AI models revised their predictions by more than 300% between weekly runs. Clarecast's near-term forecasts barely move. For any workflow that depends on consistency, instability is disqualifying.

4. AI models cannot scale to where the demand is.

This is the most important finding for the business case. AI models depend on retrieving information from the public web. They can perform reasonably on the 2,128 public companies tested here, because those companies generate news, analyst reports, and earnings calls. They cannot perform on the millions of small and mid-sized businesses that have no public web footprint, and that's where most real-world forecasting demand lives.

Clarecast's universe covers over 18 million companies, the vast majority of which would be invisible to a web-search-based AI model. A specialized architecture drawing on structured data is the only demonstrated path to forecasting at portfolio scale. **This is not a gap that closes as AI models get smarter. It's a structural input limitation.**

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

Specialized intelligence wins where it matters.

General-purpose AI is remarkable. It will continue to improve, and for a wide range of tasks it is already the right tool. But headcount forecasting is not one of those tasks. The reasons are structural:

- **Coverage.** Most companies don't generate enough public information for an AI model to forecast against. Clarecast covers them anyway.
- **Accuracy.** Purpose-built models trained on the right data outperform general-purpose models by a wide margin.
- **Stability.** Production workflows need forecasts that hold steady. AI models don't deliver that.
- **Methodology.** Clarecast is backtested across 10+ years of historical data. AI models have no equivalent track record on this task.

For organizations whose growth depends on knowing which customers and prospects will expand or contract, the question is not whether to use AI. It's which AI is built for the job.

ABOUT THIS BENCHMARK

Methodology, transparency, and an open invitation.

This benchmark was designed and conducted by Clarecast, whose proprietary system is among the models evaluated. We disclose this openly and welcome independent replication.

Clarecast runs this benchmark weekly. As new models are released and the evaluation window extends, we will continue to publish updated results.

See what Clarecast can forecast for your business.

Visit clarecast.com to schedule a demo.