9 predictions for fintech in 2026

Powerful forces are converging to reshape financial services in 2026. Neobanks are going public and filing for full banking licenses. Crypto-native firms are partnering and competing with the world's largest banks. AI agents are starting to move money autonomously. Together, these developments signal a shift in how financial services are built and who owns the customer relationship.

The 9 predictions below draw on CB Insights' proprietary signals across 25,000+ fintechs — including hiring momentum, commercial maturity, business relationships, and Mosaic scores — to identify which companies and sectors are pulling ahead.

NOTES:

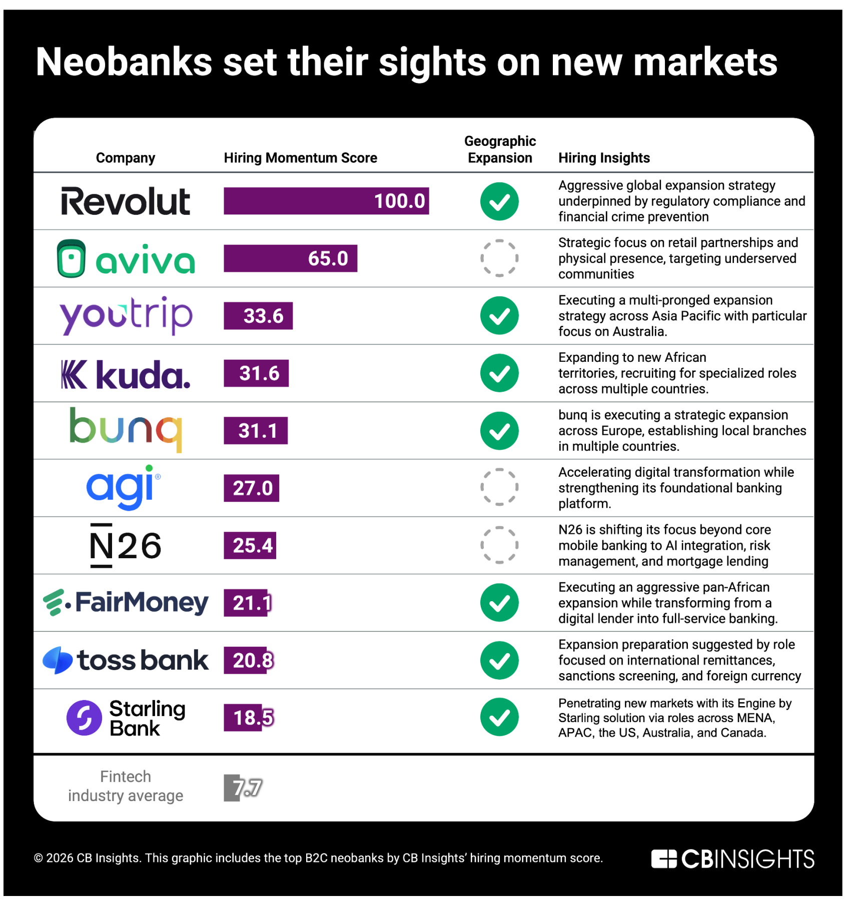
- Mosaic score is CB Insights' proprietary measure of private company health and potential (scored out of 1,000).
- Our proprietary Commercial Maturity scores range from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating the earliest stage companies, and 5 the most mature companies.
- Our proprietary Hiring Momentum scores (out of 100) are used to identify the fastest-growing private companies, which takes into account the size of the company and the number of job openings.

Prediction #1: Neobanks entering new markets will poach consumer deposits from banks

Neobanks are no longer the startups nipping at the heels of incumbent banks. A new class of digital-first institutions is scaling globally, going public, and filing for full banking licenses, competing directly for the primary consumer banking relationship.

The IPO pipeline signals mounting confidence in neobanks' commercial maturity. Chime completed the largest-ever US neobank IPO with its $864M public offering in June 2025. PicPay followed with its own Nasdaq listing in January. Nubank, the largest neobank by market cap, received conditional approval for its US banking license in January, pursuing the full charter route rather than partnering with sponsor banks, and relocating its co-founder full-time to the US to lead the new subsidiary.

On the private side, CB Insights' hiring momentum scores reveal which B2C neobanks are expanding most aggressively.



Revolut leads the pack with a perfect hiring momentum score of 100. It raised $2B at a $75B valuation in November, becoming the most valuable private neobank of all time, with a significant portion earmarked for US expansion. Its hiring insights reveal a systematic market entry strategy, evident through the simultaneous hiring of senior regulatory and compliance leaders across 20+ countries. Others include:

- YouTrip (33.6) is pushing across Asia Pacific with particular focus on Australia.
- Nigeria-focused Kuda (31.6) is recruiting across multiple African territories.
- Toss Bank (20.8) is hiring for international remittances and foreign currency roles signaling cross-border expansion out of South Korea.

Even neobanks not currently expanding geographically are transforming their model: FairMoney (21.1) is converting from a digital lender into a full-service pan-African bank, while N26 (25.4) is pivoting toward AI integration, mortgage lending, and risk management to deepen its competitive position in existing European markets.

As this generation of neobanks moves into new markets with increasingly full-service offerings, consumer deposits at banks of all sizes face pressure from a fundamentally new class of competitor.

Explore 900+ digital banking companies

Prediction #2: Battle of the BNPL Banks

Buy now, pay later (BNPL) is no longer a checkout feature. Klarna (2025's largest fintech IPO) and Affirm (higher market cap & actively expanding into Europe) are both building toward full-spectrum consumer banking, and CB Insights' business relationship data shows they're doing it through overlapping infrastructure. The two companies rank among the most active payments companies by partnership volume and share 27 partners — including Apple, Adyen, Google, and J.P. Morgan, among others — integrating BNPL into everything from device-based checkout flows and digital commerce to merchant banking and payment processing.

Klarna and Affirm battle for core financial infrastructure

Company	Banks & card networks	Consumer ecosystems	Payments platforms	Relationship with	Details
Apple		✓	✓	Klarna, affirm	BNPL available via wallet or device-based checkout flows
adyen			✓	Klarna, affirm	Embedding BNPL into merchant checkout and POS systems globally
fiserv.	✓		✓	affirm	Integration of BNPL into merchant processing and POS systems
Google		✓	✓	Klarna, affirm	BNPL integrated into digital commerce and payment flows
J.P.Morgan	✓		✓	Klarna, affirm	Integration of BNPL into merchant banking and payments platform
MARQETA	✓		✓	Klarna	Klarna Card launch and subsequent expansion into 15 new European markets
stripe			✓	Klarna, affirm	BNPL/pay-over-time offered to merchants via Stripe's platform and checkout
VISA	✓		✓	Klarna, affirm	Card network integration for BNPL products
Walmart		✓		Klarna	Klarna replaces Affirm as Walmart's pay-over-time partner
worldpay			✓	Klarna, affirm	BNPL integrated into merchant acquiring and payment processing

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Recent moves deepen this infrastructure play further. Affirm's partnership with Fiserv and Klarna's card expansion via Marqeta embed BNPL offerings into debit, banking, and everyday payments in ways that go well beyond installment lending at checkout. Klarna holds both EU and UK licensing and announced the pilot of a US debit offering via its partnership with Visa in June. Meanwhile, Affirm aims to expand beyond its existing savings account (held by Cross River Bank), having applied to the FDIC in January.

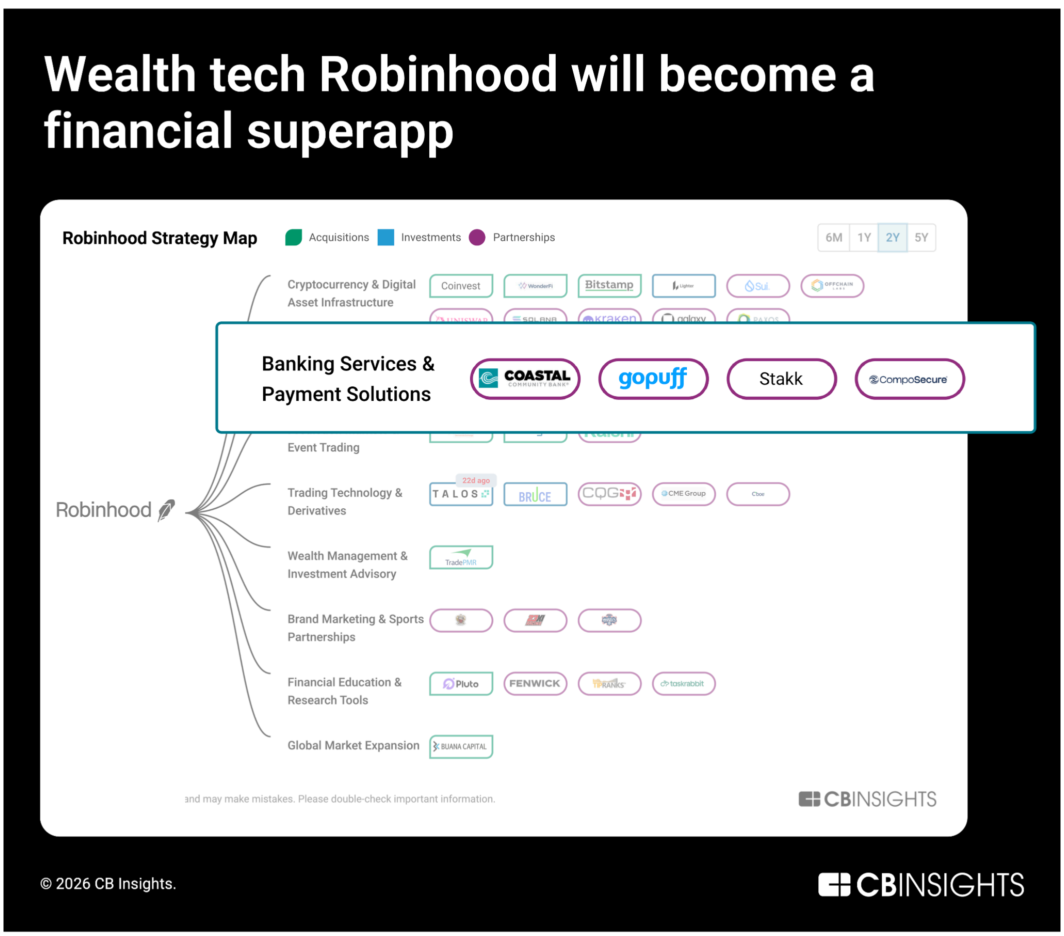
Our hiring insights show that Affirm is hiring for dedicated analytics leadership to develop its Partner Bank Debit Program. Klarna is fortifying its fraud detection and risk management capabilities through specialized roles, with a particularly strong focus on regulatory compliance in the UK market.

As agentic AI reshapes how consumers shop, pure-play BNPL is likely to lose momentum, and the next phase for both companies will be full-spectrum consumer banking.

Track Klarna’s and Affirm’s latest strategic partnerships

Prediction #3: Robinhood becomes a financial superapp

Wealth tech saw an 90% YoY increase in equity funding in 2025, the greatest among all fintech subsectors. [Robinhood](), the company with the highest market cap across the segment, is [expanding aggressively across banking, credit, and crypto infrastructure]() at the same time.



On the investment side, Robinhood is moving toward vertical integration. Its acquisitions of Bitstamp (institutional crypto exchange capabilities) and LedgerX (crypto futures) push it beyond retail brokerage. Its partnership with Offchain Labs to build "Robinhood Chain," a dedicated L2 for EU users, signals ambitions to own on-chain market infrastructure, not just distribute assets.

On the banking front, Robinhood continues to expand its capabilities as it prepares to launch a full banking offering. A November 2025 partnership with GoPuff and Coastal Community Bank embedded cash-delivery services, while its September 2025 acquisition of Stakk added deeper core banking capabilities. Our hiring data reinforces the shift, surfacing roles tied directly to credit cards, banking products, and credit limit expansion:

- Full Stack Engineer & Software Backend Engineer, Credit Cards & Banking
- Product Design Manager & Senior Product Engineer, Banking
- Credit Business Analyst, Banking Fraud

Rather than layering features through partnerships alone, Robinhood is assembling a vertically integrated financial stack and talent base spanning trading, crypto infrastructure, deposits, and credit. During a hot moment for wealth tech, Robinhood is rebuilding the consumer bank inside a brokerage wrapper.

Explore Robinhood's banking strategy moves

Prediction #4: Big crypto is coming for big banking.

Crypto firms are no longer providing alternatives to traditional banking. Instead, they're building its next phase.

The most aggressively partnering crypto-native companies of 2025 were Ripple, Coinbase, and Circle, all forging more than 50 relationships each. Per our Business Relationship Insights, all three leaders are targeting the traditional banking system:

- Ripple is building institutional-grade custody infrastructure for real-world asset tokenization and digital treasury management through white-label solutions backed by established financial institutions like BBVA and Absa Group.

- Coinbase is expanding from retail brokerage into institutional prime brokerage, custody, and payments infrastructure for financial institutions like JPMorgan Chase and Standard Chartered.

- Circle is embedding USDC directly into core banking systems and payment processors such as FIS, Fiserv, and Finastra to make stablecoin adoption seamless for traditional financial institutions.

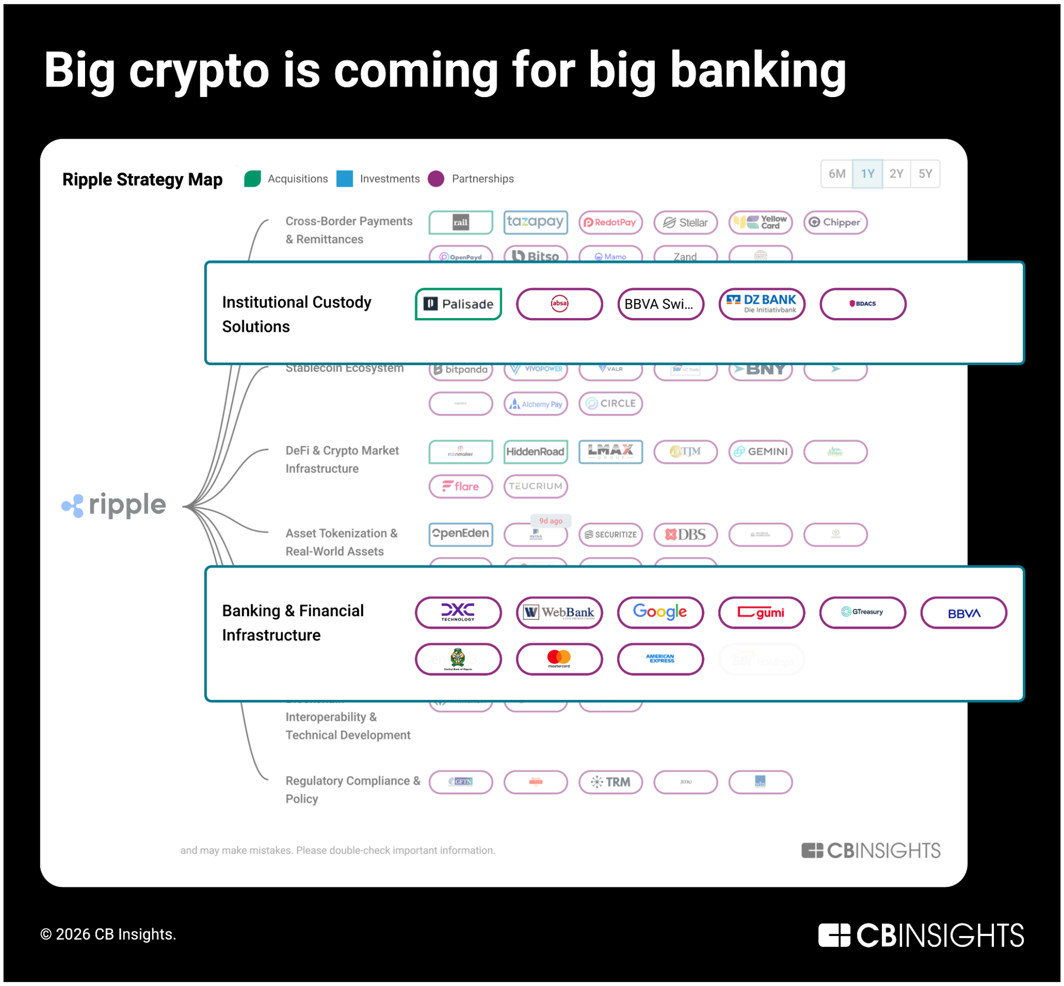
Ripple has most aggressively entered institutional banking, forging partnerships with 9 of the 100 largest traditional banks by assets since 2023, such as DBS Bank and BNY Mellon. Its strategy map from the past year shows 4 acquisitions across treasury management fintech, prime brokerage, and B2B cross-border transactions processing to build out its financial stack:

- Palisade (acquired November 2025), a wallet-as-a-service custody platform for high-frequency transactions, on/off-ramps, and wallet provisioning for fintechs and crypto-native firms.

- GTreasury (acquired October 2025 at a $1B valuation), a treasury management software provider used by large corporates to manage cash, FX exposure, and payment operations.

- Rail.io (acquired August 2025 at a $200M valuation), a B2B stablecoin payments startup providing on/off-ramps and cross-border transaction infrastructure for businesses.

- Ripple Prime (acquired April 2025 at a $1.25B valuation, formerly known as Hidden Road), a multi-asset institutional prime brokerage clearing approximately $3T annually for hedge funds and financial institutions.



Ripple and Circle both received conditional approval for US national trust bank charters in December, alongside BitGo, Fidelity Digital Assets, and Paxos. The next stage: crypto-native firms are positioning to move beyond partnerships and compete for the full-stack banking relationship.

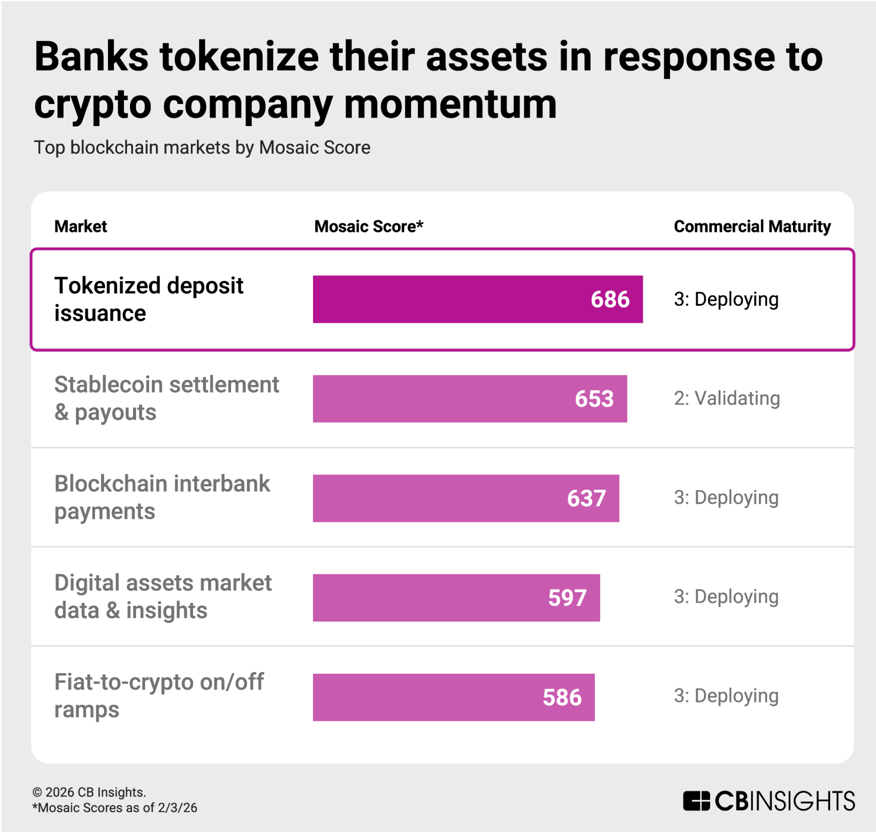
Track Ripple's strategic moves into institutional finance

Prediction #5: Banks will tokenize their existing assets to retain control over deposits in response to crypto company momentum

Banks are responding to crypto company momentum by converting deposits into blockchain-based tokens. Tokenized deposits are digital representations of regular money held at a regulated bank and remain liabilities on the bank's balance sheet, giving customers the same protections as ordinary deposits. On blockchain rails, they can support faster settlement and programmable transfers, while the issuing bank retains regulatory oversight and the core customer relationship.

Tokenized deposit issuance is the highest-momentum blockchain market by Mosaic with an average Commercial Maturity score of 3 (Deploying) or earlier, outpacing even stablecoin settlement and payouts in Mosaic score. Key players according to our ESP (Execution, Strength, and Positioning) Matrix include:

- Stablecore (top 2% Mosaic score of 747), which enables banks and credit unions to offer digital asset products, facilitate transactions, and manage crypto collateral for lending.
- Fireblocks (top 1% Mosaic score of 867), which provides flexible, institutional-grade technology to tokenize fiat, money market funds, digital currencies, and real-world assets. In February 2026, Fireblocks launched the Canton Network, a Layer 1 blockchain specifically geared towards institutional finance.



Strategic partnerships are powering this movement:

- JPMorgan Chase has introduced both tokenized deposits and tokenized money market funds, and in November began exploring interoperability of tokenized TradFi products with DBS Bank.
- Citi's existing Citi Token Services solution added interbank payments functionality in September.
- Vantage Bank partnered with Custodia Bank in October on tokenized deposits, while Standard Chartered teamed with Ant International in December.

As stablecoins gain ground, banks will increasingly tokenize their own balance sheets, preserving deposit relationships while modernizing settlement rails, turning a defensive move into a competitive one.

Track the top tokenized deposit issuance platforms

Prediction #6: Stablecoins will become the rails for agentic payments.

AI agents need programmable, always-on money, and stablecoins fit the bill. The convergence is natural: AI agents need verifiable identity, programmable money, and autonomous execution, capabilities natively provided by blockchain-based currencies.

The data shows that this is already in the works. Per our Tech Trends report, financial services led all industries in AI agent partnerships in 2025, while payment processors building agentic commerce rails accelerated crypto integrations: Mastercard, for example, expanded from 6 crypto partnerships in 2024 to 25+ in 2025.

AI agent payments infrastructure startups at every commercial maturity use stablecoins

Notable company	Commercial maturity	Uses stablecoins?
circuit+chisel	1: Emerging	✓
catena	2: Validating	✓
Skyfire	3: Deploying	✓
crossmint	4: Scaling	✓
coinbase	5: Established	✓

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From early-stage players to incumbents, stablecoins are the common denominator across the AI agent payments infrastructure stack. In our AI agent payments infrastructure market, companies at **every stage of commercial maturity** run on stablecoin rails, including Circuit & Chisel (CM 1), Catena Labs (CM 2), Skyfire (CM 3), Crossmint (CM 4), and Coinbase (CM 5). Backers like Coinbase Ventures and Stripe reinforce the overlap.

As AI agents manage subscriptions, checkout flows, and post-purchase services on behalf of consumers, stablecoins will naturally transition from crypto-native tools to the settlement layer for agent-driven commerce. We predict that they will power instant, programmable payments across online marketplaces, cross-border retail, and embedded checkout experiences in 2026 and beyond.

Track AI agent payments infrastructure companies

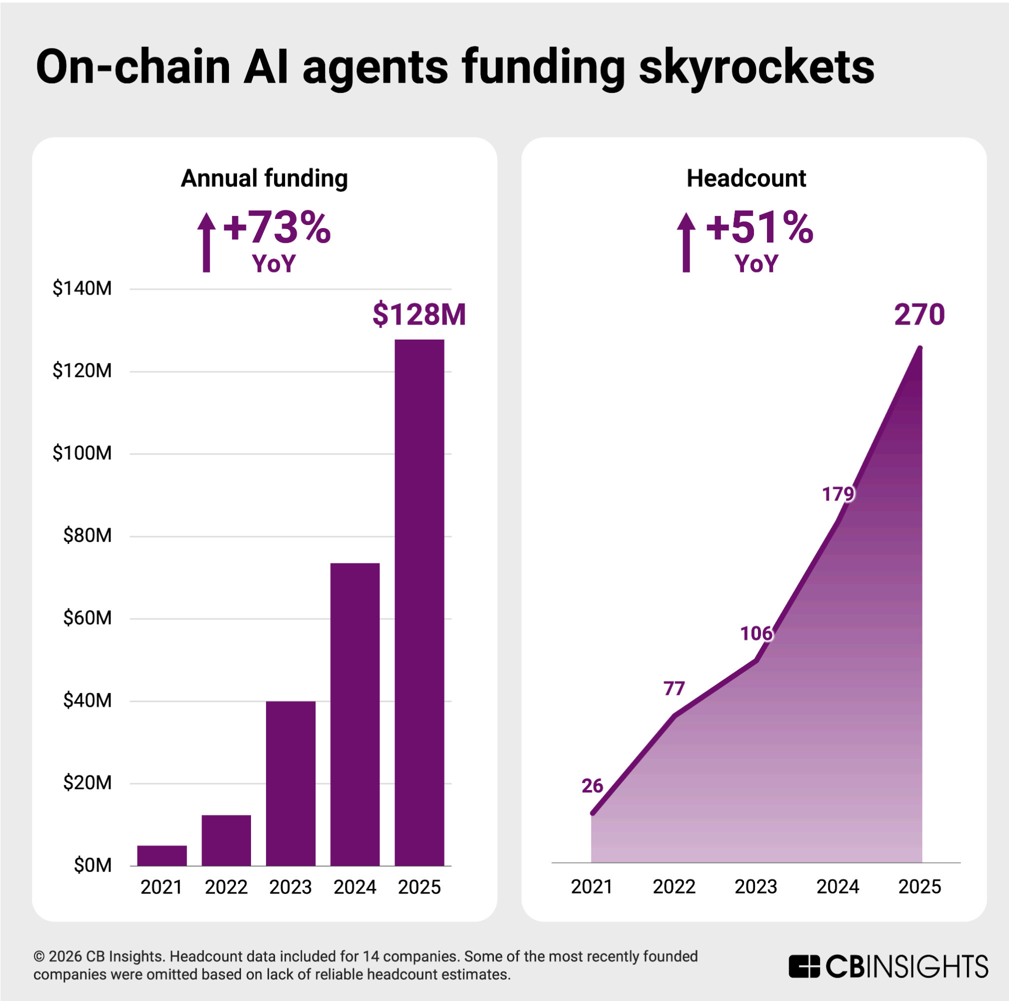
Prediction #7: On-chain AI agent platforms are laying the groundwork for autonomous agent economies.

Stablecoins are becoming a key payments rail for agentic commerce. But a parallel infrastructure layer is emerging that goes further: platforms where AI agents operate fully on-chain.

Blockchain-based AI agent platforms provide the tools for creating, deploying, and managing autonomous agents that operate natively on-chain. These agents can execute DeFi trades, participate in governance, interact with decentralized applications, and coordinate with other agents without human intervention.

Beyond execution, these platforms enable co-ownership and monetization of agents through tokenization, pointing toward agentic economies where autonomous software actors earn, spend, and allocate capital independently.

Startups in this space are moving from experiment to infrastructure, powered by advances in agentic AI. With an average commercial maturity score of 2 (Validating), this remains the earliest-stage market among three dozen blockchain sectors. Yet this sector is poised for explosive growth.



Equity funding nearly doubled YoY in 2023–2025, while headcount rose ~50%. Every independent company raised capital in the last two years, signaling strong investor conviction and rapid scaling ahead in 2026.

So far, agentic payments have focused on consumers and e-commerce, with Mastercard, Visa, Stripe, and Shopify introducing agentic commerce tools in 2025.

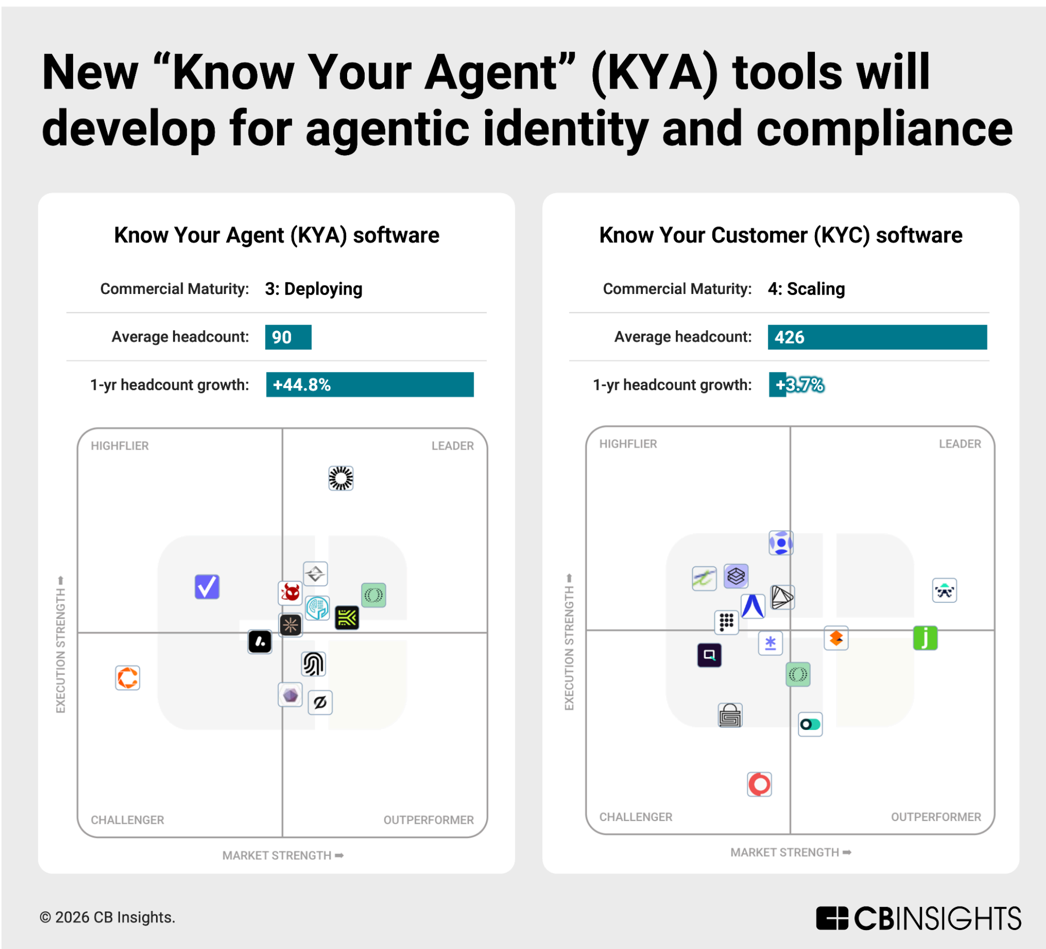
Blockchain-based AI agent platforms lay the groundwork for economically autonomous actors trading and operating across decentralized networks. As agentic payments infrastructure matures, this deeper coordination layer will be where the next phase of agentic finance gets built.

Track blockchain-based AI agent platforms

Prediction #8: New "Know Your Agent" (KYA) tools will develop to police agentic payments

As AI agents gain authority to transact, a new compliance perimeter is forming.

Agentic AI security and risk management platforms now rank as the highest-momentum segment across 96 cybersecurity markets we track. "Know Your Agent" (KYA) startups, distinct from traditional KYC "Know Your Customer" providers, have posted >450% funding growth over the past year despite having an average Commercial Maturity score of 3 (still developing).



Early-stage startups are building identity, permissioning, and behavioral scoring systems tailored to autonomous software actors. Despite their nascent stage, each of the following enjoy strong momentum with our proprietary Mosaic score placing them in the top 15% of all companies:

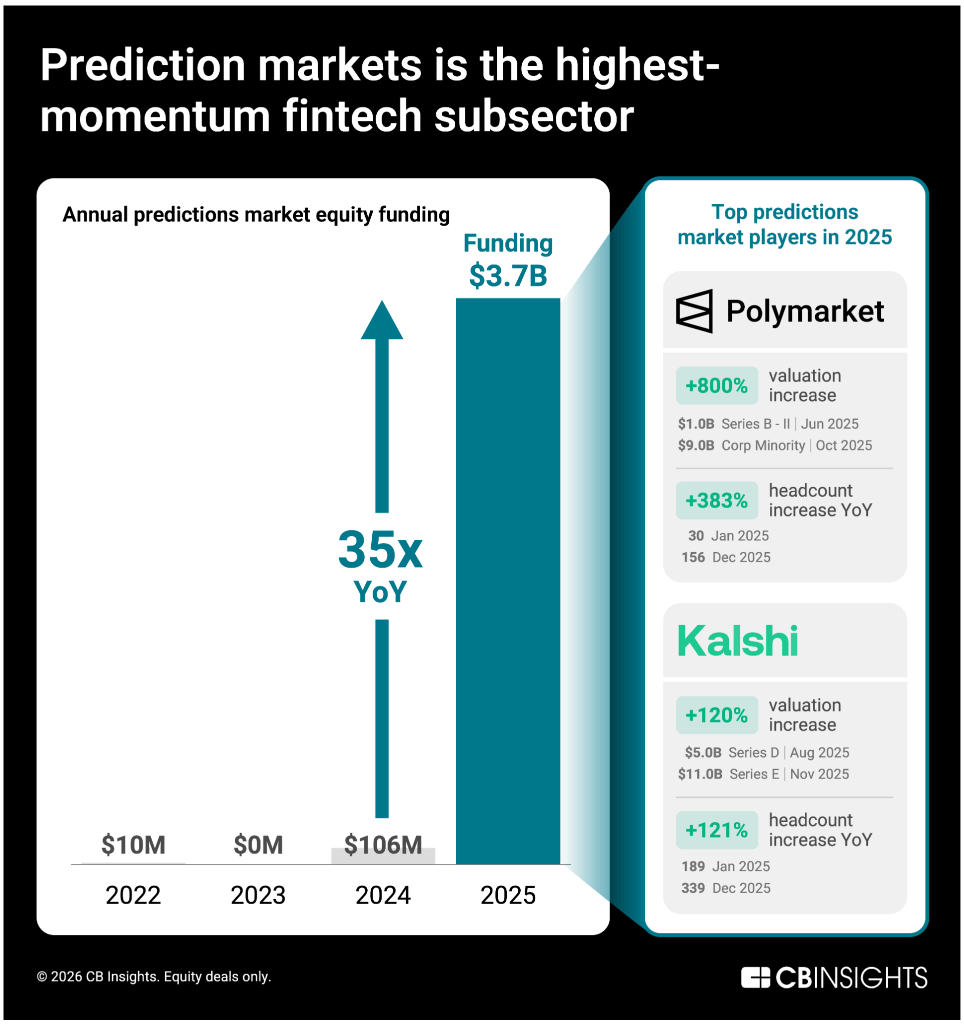
- Keycard (Commercial Maturity 2, raised $30M Series A in October, top 2% Mosaic) builds programmable identity and access infrastructure for AI agents, enabling secure authentication, wallet control, and policy-based permissions across financial applications.
- Helmet Security (Commercial Maturity 2, raised $9M Series A in December, top 8% Mosaic) develops agent-native compliance and risk tooling, embedding transaction monitoring, policy enforcement, and auditability directly into autonomous workflows.
- RunLayer (Commerical Maturity 1, raised $11M seed round in December, top 6% Mosaic): provides execution infrastructure for AI agents, managing credentials, environment isolation, and secure task orchestration across enterprise systems.
- Overmind (Commerical Maturity 1, raised seed round in September, top 15% Mosaic) focuses on behavioral monitoring for AI agents, tracking activity patterns and enforcing guardrails to prevent misuse, fraud, or policy violations.
- T54 Labs (Commerical Maturity 1, raised seed round in February 2026, top 12% Mosaic) scores payment agents based on a comprehensive, dynamic risk profile spanning transaction history, counterparties, and behavioral signals.

As regulators and enterprises demand accountability for machine-driven finance, KYA tooling will become as foundational to agentic payments as KYC is to human banking.

Learn more about early-stage KYA startups

Prediction #9: Prediction markets attempt to transition from betting platforms to trusted data providers.

Prediction markets (platforms where users trade on the outcome of real-world events) are experiencing unprecedented momentum. Equity funding surged 35x YoY in 2025, climbing from $106M in 2024 to $3.7B, driven by Polymarket and Kalshi. CB Insights' Mosaic data ranks prediction market platforms as the highest-momentum fintech niche across 150+ financial services and blockchain markets.



The valuation and headcount signals show how fast both companies are moving. In 2025 alone, Polymarket increased its valuation from $1B to $9B alongside a 333% jump in headcount, while Kalshi saw its valuation rise 120% and expanded its team by 72%.

Our hiring insights reveal that Polymarket's key priorities are building a regulated US exchange infrastructure and expanding to mainstream consumers beyond politics and crypto with the aid of new marketing talent. Kalshi is likewise investing in marketing roles to drive mainstream adoption, while building robust connections to traditional financial platforms via multiple engineering roles.

Strategic partnerships data further emphasizes that both Polymarket and Kalshi are looking to enter mainstream financial services while reframing themselves as trusted signal providers. Kalshi partnered with Harvard University in December 2025 to provide prediction market data to academic researchers. Polymarket partnered with Dow Jones to distribute market-derived insights to institutional audiences. And in December, Crypto.com joined forces with Kalshi to launch a national prediction market alliance, extending reach beyond crypto-native users and into mainstream financial channels. The companies are also making identical plays for consumer trust: both ran grocery store pop-ups in New York in February 2026.

The winners in this space won't just be those who capture trading volume. They will be those who convert collective market signals into institutional-grade data products and forge partnerships with established institutions. For Polymarket and Kalshi, the end game is transforming prediction markets from speculative instruments into core information infrastructure for decision-makers.

Track rapidly maturing prediction markets platforms

METHODOLOGY:

Our bottoms-up analysis draws on CB Insights' proprietary datasets spanning 150+ financial services and blockchain markets and 25,000+ fintechs. We tracked signals including hiring momentum, partnerships, commercial maturity, Mosaic scores, funding, and valuations across both private companies and leading public players to surface the trends shaping fintech's next chapter.