

AI FOR SMALL BUSINESS: WHERE TO START WITHOUT WASTING TIME OR MONEY



TECHNOLOGY

By Marc Umstead,
Plus One Technology

If you feel like everyone is talking about AI but nobody is explaining how to use it in your

business, you are not alone. Most small business owners are not struggling with a lack of tools. You are struggling with one simple question: "Where do we even begin?"

This article will walk you through a practical, no-hype approach to getting started with AI in a business with five to 200 employees. No jargon. No shiny object syndrome. Just a clear path forward that improves how your business runs.

The Real Goal of AI (It's Not What You Think)

AI is not about replacing your team. It is about removing friction from your workflows.

Think about your day: Repetitive emails. Manual data entry. Chasing information between systems. Answering the same questions repeatedly. AI shines when it improves these processes. But here is the catch. If your workflows are messy, AI will just help you make mistakes faster. That is why step one is not buying a tool.

Step 1: Document Your Current Workflows (Yes, Really)

Before you touch AI you need clarity. You need to answer: How does work get done today? Who is involved at each step? Where are the bottlenecks? What steps are repeated daily or weekly? This is not busy work. This is the foundation.

A simple way to start: Pick one process like onboarding a new client. Write down every step from start to finish. Identify who touches it. Note where delays or errors happen. Most businesses discover something surprising at this stage.

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No one agrees with how the process works. This is normal. It is also exactly why AI projects fail when companies skip this step.

Step 2: Involve Your Team (They Know More Than You Think)

AI should not be a top-down decision. Your team lives inside these workflows every day. They know: What slows them down. What is repetitive. What drives them a little crazy. Bring them into the conversation: Ask what tasks they would automate first? Ask where mistakes happen most often? Ask what would save them 30 minutes a day? You are not just gathering input. You are building buy-in. And that matters because AI only works when people use it.

Step 3: Identify the Right Opportunities for AI

Not every process needs AI. Focus on workflows that are: Repetitive; Time-consuming; Rules-based; Prone to human error. Examples: Customer follow-ups; Data entry between systems; Document generation; Internal knowledge look up. If a task requires deep human judgment or creativity, AI may assist but should not

replace the process.

Step 4: Build vs Buy (The Decision Everyone Gets Wrong)

This is where things can go sideways quickly. You have two main options:

Option 1: Buy (Most Common) Use existing AI tools that are already built. Pros: Faster to implement; Lower upfront cost; Supported and updated regularly. Cons: Less customization; May not fit perfectly.

Option 2: Build (More Control, More Complexity)

Create custom AI solutions tailored to your workflows. Pros: Designed specifically for your business; Can integrate deeply with your systems. Cons: Higher cost; Longer timeline; Requires ongoing management.

The Reality for Most Small Businesses

Start with buying. Then customize later if needed. Trying to build too early is like designing a custom race car before you learn how to drive.



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Step 5: Why a Consultant Can Save You Thousands

This is where many businesses hesitate. "Can't we just figure this out ourselves?" You can. But there is a cost. Time, mistakes, and choosing the wrong tools. A good technological partner helps you: Map work-

flows correctly. Identify the best use cases for AI. Avoid overbuying or underbuying tools. Integrate AI into your existing systems. At Plus 1 Technology, this is how we approach every engagement. We focus on aligning technology with how your business operates, not forcing tools into your workflow.

If you want to explore what that looks like, you can start here: <https://www.plus1technology.com>

Step 6: AI Is Not "Set It and Forget It"

This might be the most important part. AI is not a one-time project. It requires: Ongoing adjustments; Feedback from your team; Continuous improvement. Think of it like training a new employee. You would not expect perfection on day one. You refine, adjust, and improve over time. The businesses that win against AI are not the ones that implement it first. They are the ones that keep improving it.

A Simple Example

Let's say your team manually responds to common customer inquiries. Instead of jumping straight to an AI chatbot, you would: Document on how responses are handled today. Gather common questions and answers. Standardized responses. Identify where delays happen. Then introduce AI to assist or automate. Now AI is built on a solid foundation.

The Bottom Line

AI is powerful. But it is not magic. If you remember nothing else, remember this: Start with your workflows. Involve your team. Focus on real business problems. Choose tools carefully. Improve continuously.

Do that, and AI becomes a competitive advantage instead of an expensive experiment.

Not Sure Where to Start? That is normal. If you want help mapping your workflows and identifying where AI can make an impact, start with a conversation. For additional information, please call 610.792.5660 and visit www.plus1technology.com.



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