

AI for Small Business: A Brief Overview

Presented by Mark Coming

Monthly Business Leadership Series

Saint John Leadership Network



What We'll Cover Today

*This presentation is designed to demystify AI and give you a clear, actionable roadmap.
Here's our agenda:*

1 What AI Is (and Isn't)

*Plain-English definitions and
debunking common myths*

2 The History of AI

*Evolution from science fiction to
business tools*

3 AI Models Available Today

*Practical tools and platforms
available right now*

4 Real-World Business Applications

*How companies leverage AI for
tangible results*

5 The Future, Pros & Cons, and Next Steps

Future trends, risks, and getting started

What Is Artificial Intelligence?





AI in Plain English

*At its core, **artificial intelligence** is software that learns from data, recognizes patterns, and makes decisions.*

Think of it this way:

- *Traditional programs follow rigid, step-by-step instructions.*
- *AI systems improve by processing more information.*
- *AI functions like a learning apprentice.*
- *AI automates thinking-intensive work.*

What AI Is — and What It Isn't

✓ What AI Actually Is

- *Software learning from data to improve*
- *Automates repetitive, pattern-based tasks*
- *Assists human decision-making*
- *Affordable, easy-to-use platforms available today*
- *Competitive edge to do more with less*

✗ What AI Is NOT

- *Sentient being "thinking" like a human*
- *Replacement for human creativity and leadership*
- *Only for large, wealthy tech companies*
- *Magic button fixing everything overnight*
- *Infallible — AI makes mistakes*

The Core Types of AI

Not all AI is created equal. Understanding these categories helps you evaluate which tools are right for your business.

1

Narrow AI (What We Use Today)

Designed for one specific task only.

Powers virtually all current business applications.

2

General AI (Still Theoretical)

Systems that reason across any domain.

Does not exist yet; decades away.

3

Generative AI (The Hot Topic)

Narrow AI that creates new content.

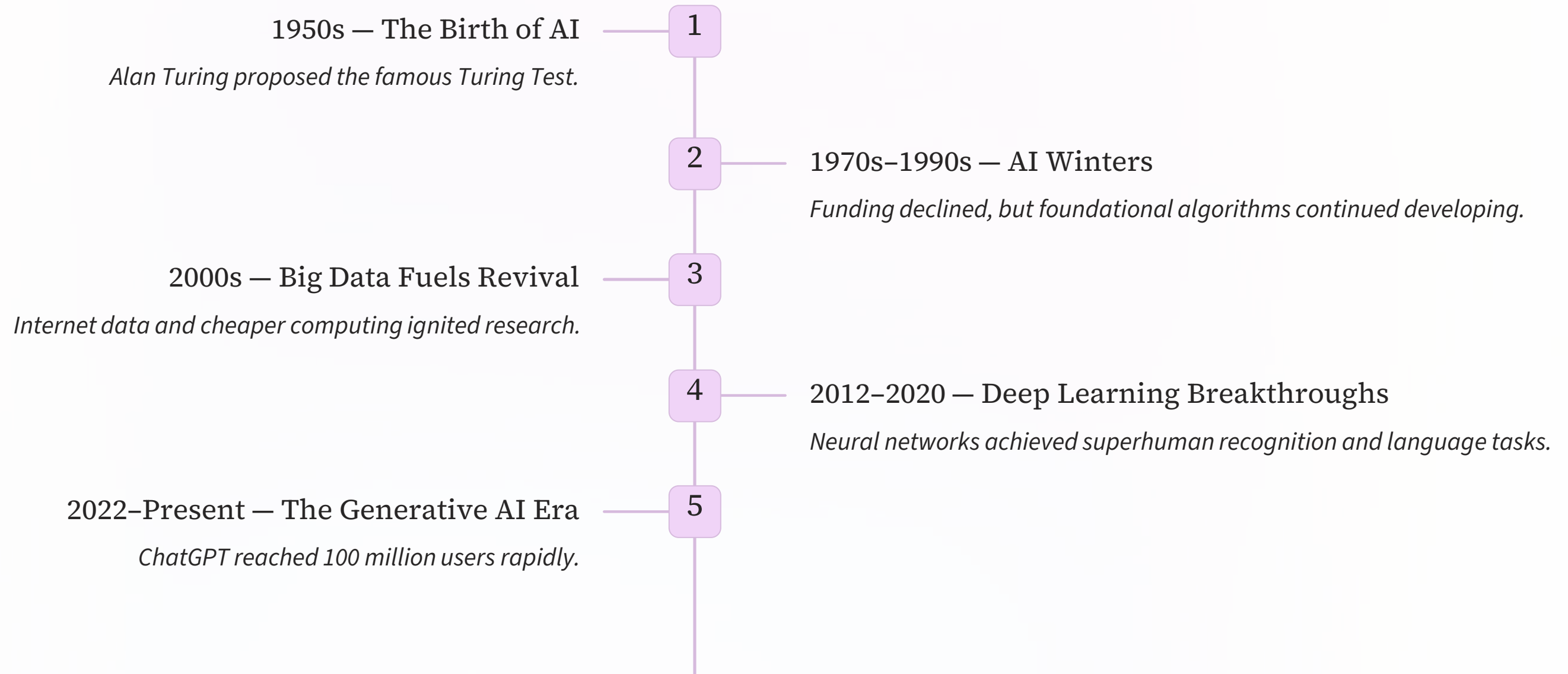
Powers ChatGPT, DALL-E, and Midjourney.

A Brief History of AI



From Science Fiction to Business Reality

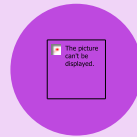
AI isn't new — the ideas have been around for decades. What's changed is that the technology has finally caught up with the vision, making AI accessible and affordable for businesses of every size.





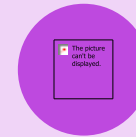
Why Now? The Perfect Storm

Three forces converged to make AI suddenly practical for small businesses:



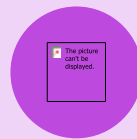
Massive Data

2.5 quintillion bytes of daily data fuel AI.



Cheap Computing

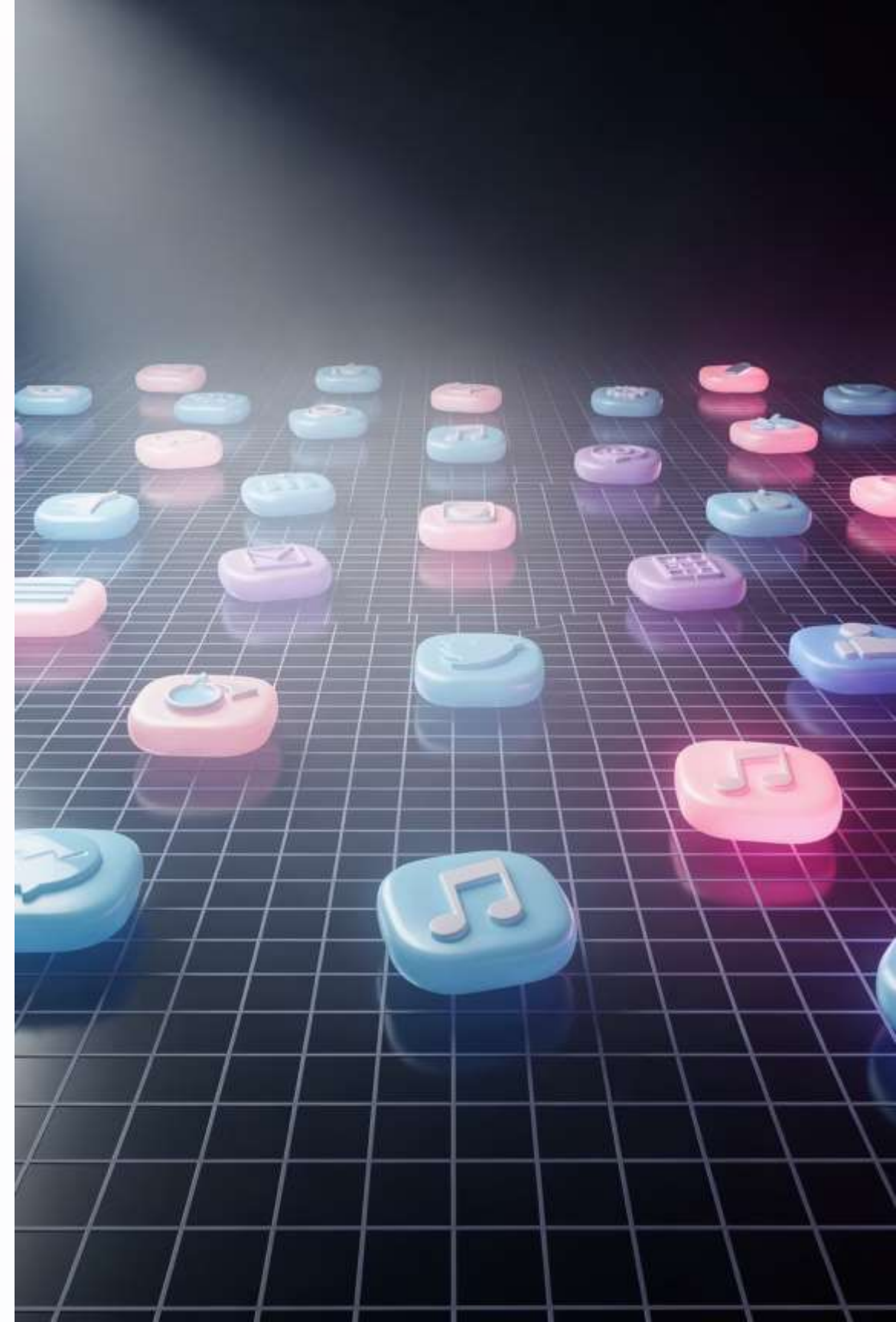
Cloud processing costs dropped over 99%.



User-Friendly Tools

Intuitive interfaces for non-data scientists.

AI Models & Tools for Business



The Major AI Platforms You Should Know

The AI landscape is evolving rapidly, but a few key players dominate the market. Each offers distinct strengths depending on your business needs and budget.



ChatGPT (OpenAI)

Popular for writing, brainstorming, and data analysis.



Google Gemini

Deeply integrated with Google Workspace and Gmail.



Microsoft Copilot

Automates document creation within Microsoft 365 apps.



Claude, Midjourney & Others

Claude handles long documents; Midjourney generates images.

❏ ***ChatGPT, OpenAI, and Google Gemini currently have 90% market share for AI tools***

Comparing AI Tools at a Glance

Choosing the right tool depends on what you need most. Here's a quick comparison of the leading platforms by key business criteria.

Feature	ChatGPT	Google Gemini	Microsoft Copilot	Claude
Best For	Writing & brainstorming	Research & integration	Office productivity	Long-form & analysis
Free Tier	Yes	Yes	Limited	Yes
Paid Price	\$20/mo	\$20/mo	\$30/user/mo	\$20/mo
Learning Curve	Low	Low	Medium	Low
Integration	API & plugins	Google Workspace	Microsoft 365	API & web

  **Tip:** Experiment with free tiers before subscribing.

Beyond Chatbots: Specialized AI Categories

Generative AI chatbots get the headlines, but AI spans a much broader range of tools — many of which are already embedded in software you use every day.



Computer Vision

Analyzes images, video, quality control, and security.



Natural Language Processing

Understands human language; powers chatbots and analysis.



Predictive Analytics

Forecasts trends for sales and demand planning.



Robotic Process Automation

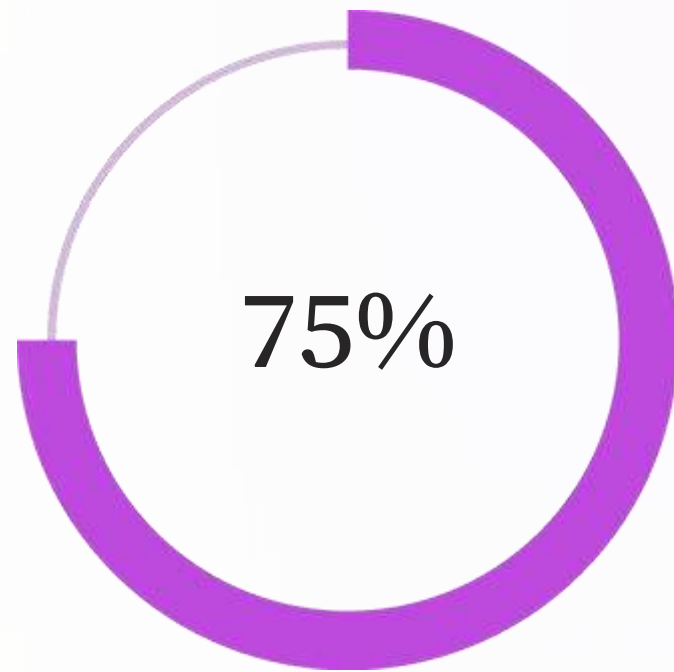
Automates data entry, invoicing, and report generation.

How Businesses Are Using AI Today



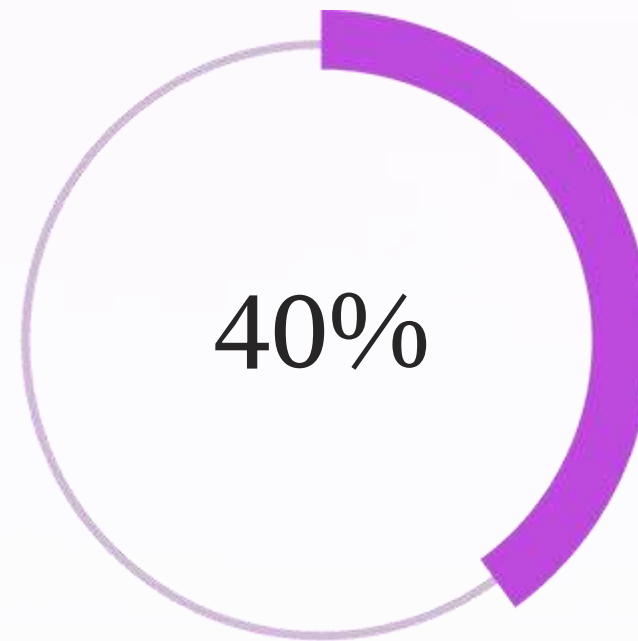
AI Adoption Is Accelerating — Fast

AI isn't a future trend — it's a current reality. Adoption among small and mid-sized businesses has surged dramatically over the past two years.



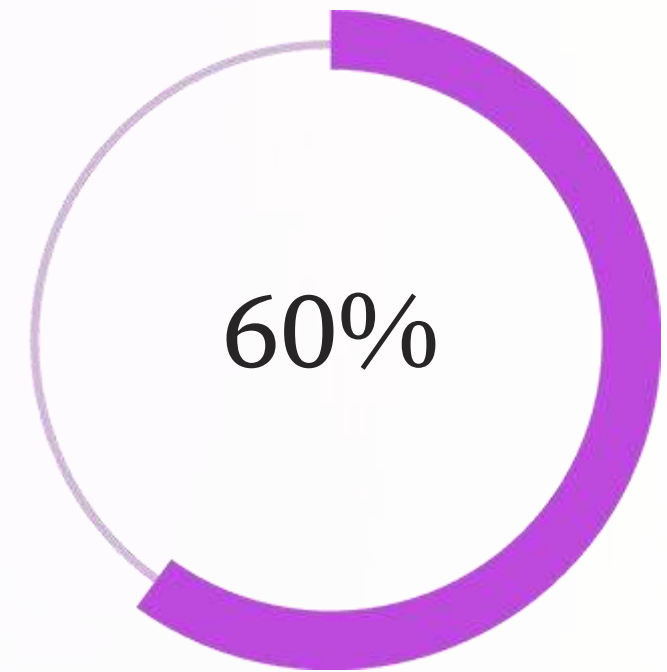
SMBs Exploring AI

Three in four SMBs actively using AI tools



Productivity Gains

Average productivity increase from AI automation tools



Cost Reduction

Reported cost savings within six months



Real-World Use Cases for Small Business

You don't need a million-dollar budget to use AI. Here are practical ways small businesses are leveraging these tools right now:

Marketing & Content

Generate social, emails, blogs, and ad copy.

Customer Service

Handle FAQs, appointments, and routing 24/7.

Bookkeeping & Finance

Automate invoices, expenses, forecasts, and fraud detection.

HR & Hiring

Streamline screening, onboarding, and policy Q&A.

Industry-Specific AI Applications

AI solutions are being tailored to the unique needs of different industries. No matter what sector you're in, there's likely a tool designed for your challenges.



Retail & E-Commerce

Personalized product recommendations, dynamic pricing, inventory optimization, and visual search.



Food & Hospitality

Reservation management, menu optimization, and automated review responses.



Professional Services

Contract analysis, proposal generation, transcription, and client drafting.



Construction & Trades

Project estimation, safety compliance, scheduling, and automated bidding.

How the Music Industry Is Using Narrow AI



AI Session Musicians

- *Real-time adaptive backing tracks*
- *Full albums without live musicians*



Voice Replacement & Cloning

- *Professional vocal model swapping*
- *Licensed artist rights included*



Fully AI-Generated Artists

- *Chart-topping AI billboard success*
- *34% of daily platform uploads*



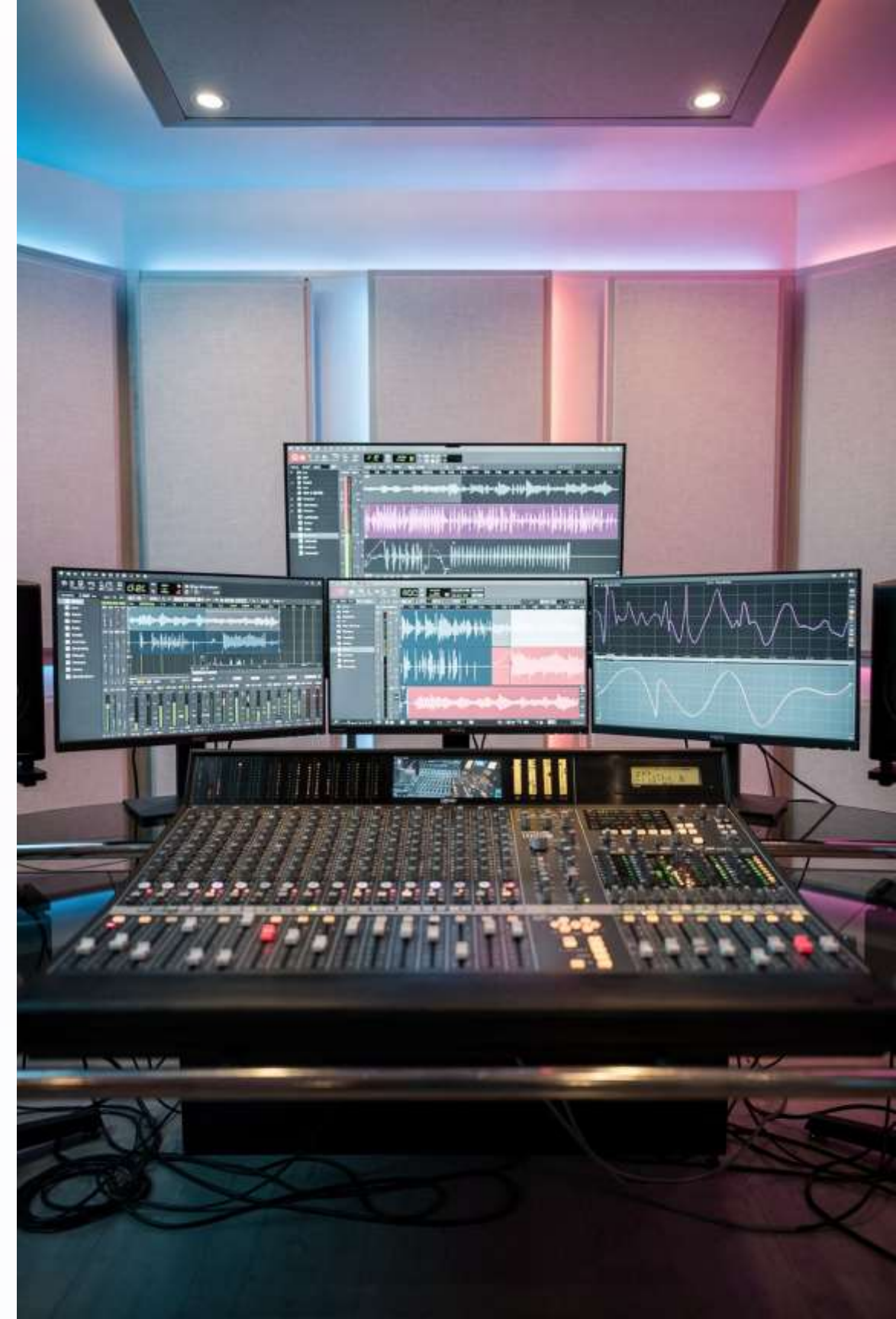
AI-Assisted Production

- *Automated mixing and mastering*
- *Production time reduced significantly*



Ethics & Legal Landscape

- *97% listeners cannot identify AI*
- *Shift toward mandatory artist licensing*



The Future of AI in Business



What's Coming Next

The AI landscape is moving at breakneck speed. Here's what experts predict will reshape small business in the coming years — and why getting started now gives you a head start.



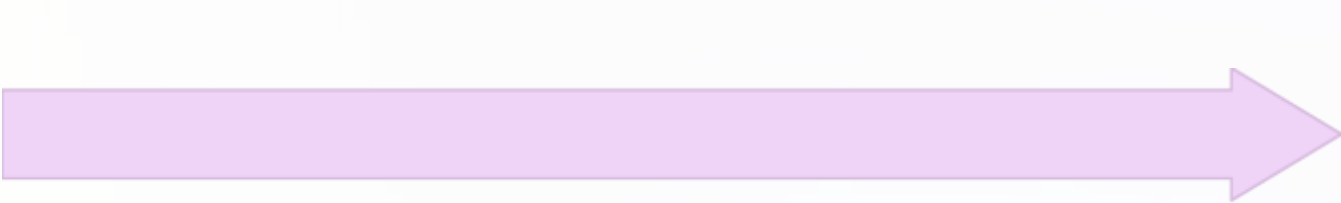
AI Agents (2025–2026)

Autonomous AI executing multi-step business tasks.



Hyper-Personalization (2025–2027)

Real-time, individualized customer experiences at scale.



Voice & Multimodal AI (2026–2028)

Seamlessly integrated text, audio, and visual experiences.



Industry-Specific AI (2026+)

Purpose-built tools with pre-configured industry workflows.

The Pros and Cons of AI for Small Business

Pros:

- *Dramatic time savings on repetitive tasks*
- *Reduced operating costs*
- *24/7 availability for customer interactions*
- *Better data-driven decisions*
- *Competitive advantage over slower adopters*
- *Scalability without proportional hiring*

Cons:

- *Learning curve and change management required*
- *Data privacy and security concerns*
- *Risk of inaccurate or biased outputs*
- *Over-dependence on technology*
- *Ongoing subscription costs add up*
- *Ethical considerations around transparency*

Common Risks and How to Mitigate Them

The risks of AI are real but manageable. Here's what to watch for and how to protect your business.

Data Privacy

Avoid inputting sensitive customer data publicly. Use enterprise-grade platforms and privacy-focused agreements.

Accuracy & Hallucinations

AI can generate incorrect information. Always have a human review all outputs.

Legal & Compliance

Regulations are evolving. Monitor industry rules, copyright, and disclosure requirements.

Team Resistance

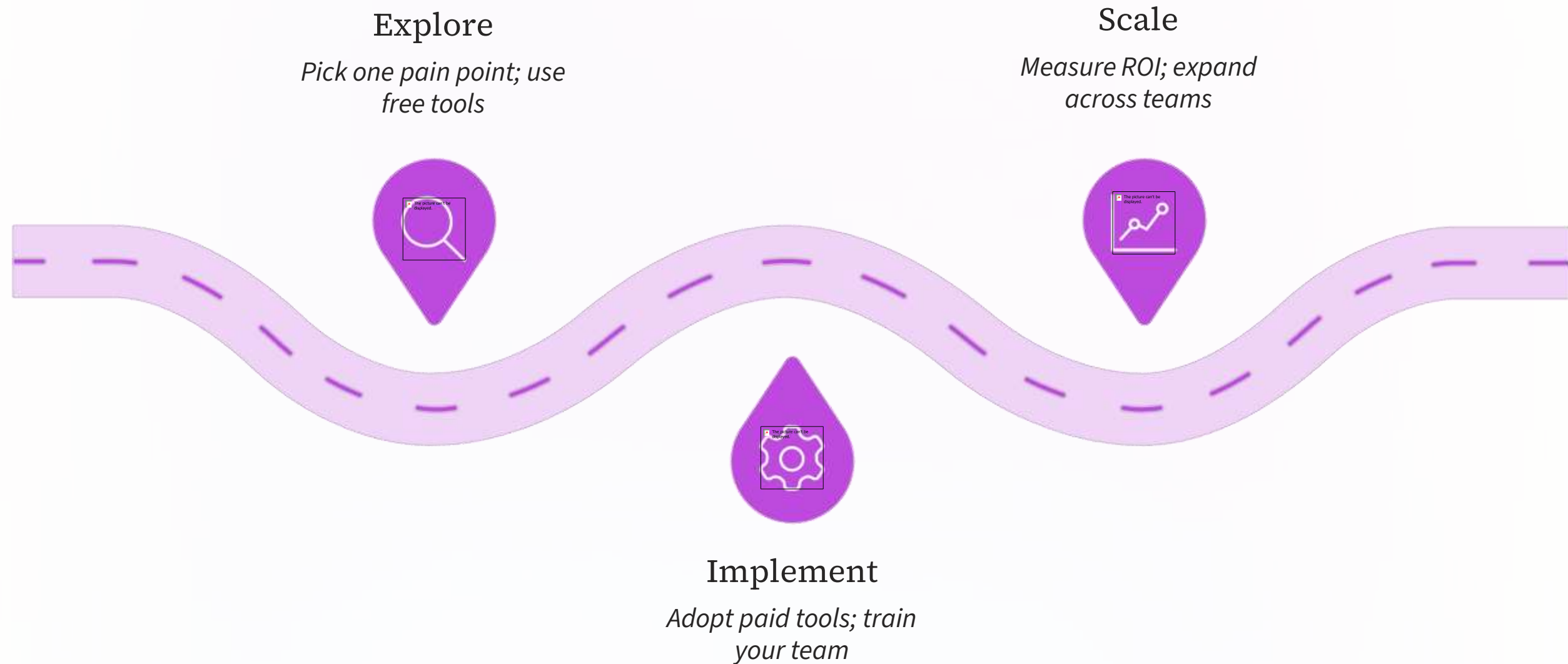
Frame AI as an empowering tool. Involve employees and celebrate early wins.



Your Next Steps

An AI Adoption Roadmap

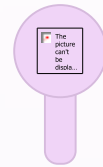
You don't need to transform your entire business overnight. Follow this practical, phased approach to begin leveraging AI with confidence.



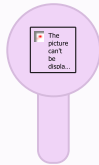
The key is to start small and iterate. Choose one specific pain point — like marketing emails or meeting notes — and build from there. Most businesses see clear value within the first 30 days.



6 Actions to Tap AI's Full Potential



Focus on activation, not just tool access.



Redesign work; combine human judgment with AI.



Integrate governance into performance and risk structures.



Ensure compliance with national data residency requirements.



Modernize to cloud-native, modular data infrastructure.



Reimagine business models from the ground up.

Key Takeaways to Remember

1 AI Is Here — and It's Accessible
Free, low-cost tools deliver immediate value now.

2 Start Small, Think Big
Achieve small wins, then expand your experiments.

3 Humans Stay in the Loop
Human judgment must guide AI execution.

4 The Biggest Risk Is Doing Nothing
The gap between adopters is widening monthly.

"The best time to start with AI was six months ago. The second-best time is today."

The Catholic Church on AI

Insights from Antiqua et Nova (January 28, 2025)

A landmark document, approved by Pope Francis, offering anthropological and ethical reflections on artificial intelligence.



What Is Antiqua et Nova?

Published on January 28, 2025 — the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas — Antiqua et Nova (Latin for 'Ancient and New') is the Catholic Church's most comprehensive official statement on artificial intelligence. It was jointly issued by two Vatican dicasteries and approved by Pope Francis.

The Document at a Glance

- *Issued: January 28, 2025*
- *Authors: Doctrine of the Faith & Culture/Education*
- *Signatories: Cardinals Fernández and Mendonça*
- *Length: 117 paragraphs across 6 sections*
- *Approved by: Pope Francis (January 14, 2025)*

Its Purpose

The document addresses the anthropological and ethical challenges raised by AI — particularly because AI is designed to imitate the very human intelligence that created it. It offers guidance for parents, teachers, pastors, bishops, and all people of goodwill.

AI Is a Product of Human Intelligence — Not a Form of It

One of the document's most important distinctions: AI can perform tasks, but it cannot think. The Church warns against equating AI with human intelligence — a confusion that risks diminishing our understanding of what it means to be human.

1

Performs Tasks

Excels at pattern recognition and data analysis.

2

Cannot Think

Lacks human embodied, relational, and spiritual dimensions.

3

Not a Person

AI is a tool, not a person.

4

A Product, Not a Peer

Product of human intelligence, not artificial form.

The Church's Ethical Framework for AI

Antiqua et Nova insists that AI must always be directed by human intelligence toward the good. Technology is not morally neutral — it reflects the values of those who design and deploy it. The Church offers these guiding principles:

Human Dignity First

Applications must uphold the human person's dignity.

Human Moral Responsibility

Humans, not machines, remain the moral agents.

The Common Good

AI must foster human fulfillment for everyone.

Transparency & Accountability

Ensure trustworthy, transparent algorithms free from bias.

Subsidiarity

Decisions should occur at appropriate, local levels.

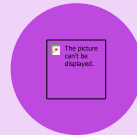
Key Concerns Raised by the Church

While the Church welcomes AI's potential to serve humanity, Antiqua et Nova identifies serious risks that must be actively managed across multiple domains of life.



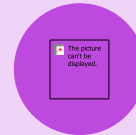
Work & Labor

AI must assist, not replace, human workers.



Healthcare

Human-patient relationship must remain central.



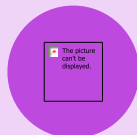
Education

Prevent erosion of critical thinking skills.



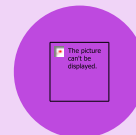
Misinformation & Deepfakes

Protect truth, social trust, and human dignity.



Privacy & Surveillance

Do not exploit or restrict human freedom.



Warfare

Prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems.

AI and Our Relationship with God

Perhaps the most theologically distinctive section of Antiqua et Nova addresses the spiritual danger of turning to AI as a substitute for God — a form of modern idolatry.

“The presumption of substituting God for an artifact of human making is idolatry.”

— Antiqua et Nova, §105

The Danger

AI creates an illusion of responsive meaning. True fulfillment requires communion only with God.

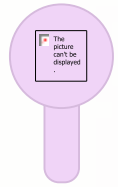
The Reminder

AI is merely human creation, not divine. Humans possess interior lives that transcend technology.

Wisdom of the Heart

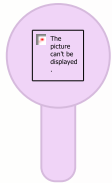
The Church's Call to Action

Antiqua et Nova closes with a call not just for ethical regulation, but for a deeper spiritual response. In a world shaped by AI, the Church calls every person — believer and non-believer alike — to cultivate true wisdom.



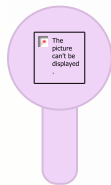
Evaluate Every Application

Promote human dignity and the common good.



Resist Digital Reductionism

Prioritize empathy, prayer, and authentic human relationships.



Act as Moral Agents

Order technological progress toward the True and Good.

“Only by adopting a spiritual way of viewing reality, only by recovering a wisdom of the heart, can we confront and interpret the newness of our time.”

— Pope Francis

