

DECISION WORKSHEET · AUSTRALIA 2026

Does My Business Need AI?

Not an argument, a calculation. Count the thing that happens fifty times a week, price all four costs rather than the one you were quoted, and work out what the current version leaks.

■ Why the Australian figures say 12%, 44% and 69%

Figure	What it counted
~12% ABS, 2024-25	Businesses reporting AI use: ~35% large, ~22% medium, ~11% small and micro. Tracks changed process.
~44% National AI Centre, Feb 2026	SME adoption on the government tracker. Sensitive to partial and short-term adoption.
~69% commercial surveys, Jan 2026	Regular use, up from ~40% in July 2024. Often one person, often invisible to everybody else.

One sentence tells you which you are

If the person who uses it left tomorrow, would anything about how the business operates be different? If not, you have a subscription and a habit rather than a change. The gap between the lowest figure and the highest is where the wasted money lives, because a business that reads its own activity as adoption stops asking whether anything actually changed.

■ The qualification test. Write the answers down

- **Frequency.** What happens fifty or more times a week? If nothing does, halve the threshold and look again before concluding there is nothing.
- **Uniformity.** Do four or five shapes cover most of the volume? If every instance differs, it is judgement work and belongs to a person.
- **Waiting.** What do customers wait for, and for how long? State a duration.
- **Measurability.** Could you count it next month? If not, fix that before buying anything.

Price the leak before the efficiency

For most businesses under two hundred people the real return is revenue already leaking, not labour saved. Count unanswered calls outside hours for a fortnight and multiply by conversion and average job value. Count quotes with no second contact. Time your median response against two competitors. An efficiency argument invites a debate about whether the time was really saved. A leak argument produces a figure for work you did not win.

■ Four costs. You will be quoted one

Cost	What it actually involves
Subscription	Per seat, minute or interaction. Quoted accurately, usually the smallest, gets all the attention.
Integration	Both directions, into whatever holds customers, jobs and calendar. Ask: included, or per connection?
Data preparation	Duplicate customers, four phone number formats, a knowledge base last touched in 2023. Where month one goes.
Supervision	Half an hour a day at first, an hour a week later. About 120 hours a year , often more than the subscription.

■ Four reasons to say no

- Low volume, high judgement work. Four cases a month cannot be evaluated.
- Errors that cost more than the labour saved.
- Anything you cannot measure. It may work; you can never show it.
- A process that is already broken. You get a faster broken process.

■ Do it in this order

- **First:** what you already pay for. Recent renewals shipped AI. Three of four costs already covered.
- **Second:** the communication leak. Calls reaching nothing, follow-ups never made, notes never written.
- **Third:** analysis. Forecasting and rostering need clean history, and the cleaning is the project.

■ Thirty days to a number

- 1 **Days 1 to 3.** The four qualification questions on one page.
- 2 **Days 4 to 7.** Measure the current state. A tally sheet is fine. This is the most valuable week.
- 3 **Days 8 to 14.** Audit what you already own and are not using.
- 4 **Days 15 to 21.** One job, one channel, one measure, one success sentence with a number and a date.
- 5 **Days 22 to 30.** Run it, read it daily, compare to the baseline, then keep, adjust or stop.

Be honest about headcount, early and to everybody

In most Australian SMEs the realistic outcome of a first project is the same people doing work further up the value chain, plus work getting done that previously was not, plus absorbing growth without the next hire. If that is the truth, say it in those words. If a role will change, say that. **Staff work out the real answer inside a fortnight either way**, and the difference is whether they flag problems with the system or quietly document them for later.