

## SMALL BUSINESS · AI · WHERE TO START

# You're Not Too Small for AI. You're Too Busy.

Every article about AI for small business assumes you have a spare afternoon and someone technical. You have neither. So here is the version written for an owner with five staff, no IT person, and a phone that keeps ringing while you.

**Size is not what is stopping you. Time is.** Australian adoption data looks contradictory, the ABS recorded around 11% of small and micro businesses using AI in 2024. 25, while the National AI Centre's SME AI Pulse found 43. 44% of SMEs using it in some form in the December 2025. February 2026 quarter. Both are right, and the gap is the difference between AI as a project and AI as a habit. Adoption rises with company size (roughly 11% small, 22% medium, 35% large) not because bigger firms get better tools, but because someone there is *paid* to evaluate them. Meanwhile **trust is the number one stated barrier**, with around 65% of non-adopters citing distrust of AI decision-making or a preference for human control.

## The short version

| Candidate project                  | Countable? | Repetitive? | Fast verdict?      |
|------------------------------------|------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Answering calls you currently miss | ✓          | ✓           | ✓                  |
| Turning calls into written notes   | ✓          | ✓           | ✓                  |
| Drafting quotes and follow-ups     | Roughly    | ✓           | ✓                  |
| Website chatbot                    | Rarely     | ✓           | Depends on traffic |
| Social media content               | No         | ✓           | No                 |
| "AI strategy"                      | No         | No          | No                 |

## ■ Also worth knowing

| Why it works                       | The detail                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The loss is already priced</b>  | You know what an average job is worth. Count the calls you missed last month, apply your conversion rate. That is your business case and you did not have to imagine any of it. |
| <b>You are not the competition</b> | The AI is not being compared with you answering brilliantly. It is being compared with the phone ringing out while you are under a house or with a client.                      |
| <b>The verdict is audible</b>      | Listen to a week of recordings. Either callers got what they needed or they did not. No dashboard, no consultant, no interpretation.                                            |
| <b>It undoes in a minute</b>       | Switch it off and calls behave exactly as they did before. Very few business experiments are that cheap to abandon.                                                             |
| <b>Nothing to install</b>          | No hardware, no cabling, no server in a cupboard. It is configuration on a cloud system, done from a laptop or a phone.                                                         |

### Read that as reassurance, not pressure

Very few small businesses have automated anything meaningful. The ones counted as “using AI” are overwhelmingly using ordinary tools for ordinary jobs, writing, summarising, answering. You have not fallen behind a wave of competitors who reinvented their operations. What has genuinely changed is that the entry cost is now low enough that the businesses who try one specific thing tend to keep it.

## ■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ Is my business too small to use AI?
- ☐ How do I choose my first AI project?
- ☐ Why is the phone usually the best place to start?
- ☐ What should never be handed to AI?
- ☐ What does AI actually cost a small business?
- ☐ Do I have to tell customers they are speaking to AI?
- ☐ What are the privacy rules for using AI in my business?

### This is the summary. The guide has the detail.

Every point above is worked through in full on our site, with the Australian context, the numbers and the exceptions. If you would rather talk it through, call 1300 663 222 or visit [vocphone.com/about/contact-us](https://vocphone.com/about/contact-us).