AI for Every Business - A Quick Business Guide

In an era of competitive innovation, organizations must transform and automate to survive. Business leaders must invest in process optimization and technologies that can help them do exponentially more with fewer resources. Is artificial intelligence (AI) the answer? This white paper covers some of the what, why and how it is being used today across multiple function areas and where it may be a key to profitable business growth for small- to medium-sized companies.

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The Case for Artificial Intelligence

The magnitude of the advantages AI will bring to the business community could be a problem for those who do not quickly explore and adopt these technologies. Organizations that fail to embrace the innovation or delay plans for implementing these solutions could find themselves at a significant competitive disadvantage from a productivity, cost and customer service perspective.

Business leaders have little time to ponder the options as device and application providers introduce these advances in their latest offerings. Canalys Research[1] predicts that most personal computers will ship with AI-capability by 2027. Microsoft, Google and Apple have started integrating these technologies into their core offerings meaning most computer users already have access to the power of artificial intelligence (although many are not using it).

A rapidly increasing percentage of businesses are incorporating AI in their strategic plans. The definition of AI makes it easy to understand why organizations must quickly add and integrate these technologies into their operations. According to the University of Illinois, Chicago,[2] the objective of AI is to "create machines capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning from experience (machine learning), understanding natural language, recognizing patterns, solving problems and making decisions."

A Business Transformer

AI is not a single piece of hardware or software. These revolutionary technologies are coded algorithms that create powerful data intelligence and automation capabilities to significantly boost productivity and optimize a variety of corporate operations. AI is already being incorporated into computer operating systems, devices, and a plethora of applications. However, without effective procurement, implementation and adoption strategies, organizations may never reap the full benefits of any of these unique and powerful innovations.

Speed is of the essence for business leaders. According to recent research from Gartner,[3] 55% of organizations are already piloting or in "production mode" with generative AI and gaining the upper hand on their competitors.

To that point, 88% of companies have already implemented at least one AI-enabled solution successfully, and nearly two-thirds plan to expand their footprint over the next two years. According to a recent study by ChannelNomics,[4] approximately 80% of those organizations are looking to improve their competitive standing and 70% are seeking cost savings with these investments.

From powering inventory management and robotics to automating content development and marketing solutions, these technologies are already optimizing operations for millions of businesses in various applications. AI promises to reshape the work and personal lives of everyone and is already reducing, if not replacing scores of manual processes.

These invaluable tools will enhance operations for any type of (or size) organization. While large enterprises, franchise businesses and government agencies started moving full speed into adoption over the past couple of years, these revolutionary technologies create as many, if not more opportunities for small businesses, non-profits and municipalities. Getting the most value from

limited resources is a key value proposition for AI.

This guide will explain why every organization must be exploring, testing and employing artificial intelligence today. Where should you begin? What business applications make the most sense? Which skills and investments will be needed?

Getting Started: Assess Organizational Challenges, Opportunities and Requirements

Like any investment, business leaders must carefully evaluate existing operations and future aspirations prior to constructing an AI strategy (or procuring any related technologies). Performing an AI readiness assessment should identify gaps or limitations in current systems that could be addressed, or at least alleviated, with new IT solutions.

Here is a list of potential steps business leaders can follow to identify how their organization could best benefit from AI:

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1. **Identify Business Challenges:** Pinpoint specific areas where AI could potentially improve efficiency, productivity, competitive advantage or customer experience.
2. **Data Assessment:** Evaluate the quality and accessibility of your data. AI thrives on data, so ensure it's clean, relevant, and sufficient.
3. **Set Clear Goals:** Define specific, measurable objectives for AI implementation. What do you hope to achieve?
4. **Explore AI Tools and Platforms:** Research available AI tools and platforms that align with your business needs and budget. Consider user-friendly options for easy adoption.
5. **Pilot Testing:** Experiment with AI solutions on a small scale before full-scale implementation. This helps assess its effectiveness and identify potential challenges.
6. **Employee Training:** Invest in training employees to understand AI, its benefits, and how to use it effectively.
7. **Data Governess:** Develop guidelines for AI usage, ensuring data privacy, fairness, and transparency.
8. **Security Assessment:** Evaluate potential security risks including data leaks of proprietary information associated with AI implementation and implement appropriate safeguards to protect data and systems.

By following these steps, your small business can make informed decisions about AI adoption and maximize its potential benefits while minimizing risks.

The key point for business leaders to remember is that AI has the potential to transform their organizations and empower their people. Automating labor-intensive and difficult tasks allows companies to shift human resources to higher-value strategic activities, which reduces costs and creates opportunities for scaling and optimizing operations, sales and other parts of the business.

Those are just a few of the many reasons why organizations should already have AI strategies in

motion. Whether already utilizing technologies or researching opportunities, technologies and experts, who can assess, design, implement and support those solutions, AI is one investment no organization can afford to overlook.

AI Already Empowers Businesses in Many Functional Areas

The buzz and speculation around innovative technologies means nothing without actual real-world applications. Fortunately for AI, the anticipated outcomes are coming to fruition as organizations move from the planning to adoption phase and begin seeking new ways to employ these innovative solutions.

AI can empower every department and every employee. From C-level executives and other decision-makers to human resources, sales, marketing and operations, AI applications are already enhancing many aspects of the workplace. Here are a few ways various industries are using these solutions today:

Department	AI Augmentation/Automation
CEO/Executive	• Growth: Identify new market opportunities • Predictive analytics: Forecast market trends and customer behavior • Decision support: Analyze complex data for informed strategic choices
Finance / Administration / Legal	• Create formulas for powerful financial analysis • Fraud detection: Identify anomalies in financial data • Financial forecasting: Predict revenue, expenses and cash flow • Provide efficient legal research and personalized summaries that help with regulatory compliance
HR	• Create job descriptions • Talent acquisition: Screen resumes and identify qualified candidates • Employee retention: Analyze employee data to predict turnover risks • Performance management: Provide automated performance feedback
Customer Service	• Suggest next best response • Chatbots: Handle routine customer inquiries and issues • Sentiment analysis: Understand customer feedback for improvement • Personalized recommendations: Offer tailored product suggestions
Operations	• Supply chain optimization: Predict demand and optimize inventory • Quality control: Identify defects and production issues • Maintenance prediction: Prevent equipment failures through predictive analysis
IT	• Support for troubleshooting and generating code or scripts for automation • Cybersecurity: Detect and respond to threats • IT support: Automate routine IT help desk tasks • Network optimization: Improve network performance
Sales	• Preparing for a sales meeting including proposal support • Lead scoring: Prioritize leads based on potential conversion • Sales forecasting: Predict sales performance and quotas • Customer segmentation: Identify customer groups for targeted campaigns
Marketing	• Create presentations • Customer segmentation: Identify customer groups for tailored messaging • Marketing automation: Personalize email and social media campaigns • Campaign optimization: Analyze campaign performance for improvement

AI is rapidly transforming organizations. From automating routine tasks and creating unique content to analyzing vast quantities of data to providing valuable business insight, these technologies improve operational efficiency and decision-making.

Forrester research predicts AI investments will triple[5] over the next few years with a 36% compound annual growth rate through 2030. The number of businesses applications for these technologies will also increase exponentially as developers and IT companies integrate these innovations into their offerings. In other words, while AI is already gaining solid traction across the globe, especially in the mid-size and enterprise space, its potential is virtually limitless.

Amazon is the perfect example. The e-commerce giant uses AI to improve its recommendation engine by predicting what customers are likely to buy based on their internet browsing and purchase histories. Amazon's logistics and delivery operations also leverage these technologies to optimize routes, reduce costs and improve efficiency.

While enterprise organizations have embraced these applications, by no means are the benefits of AI restricted to the titans of industry. For example, in the healthcare industry, artificial intelligence is improving patient outcomes in hospitals, nursing homes, physicians' offices, laboratories and other medical facilities. The ability of AI to collect and analyze vast amounts of data allows healthcare professionals to diagnose problems and develop more effective treatment plans quickly and more accurately.

The value of these technologies is just as promising for small businesses. From improving the buyer and customer experience to driving operational efficiencies, AI allows organizations to get more power from their IT investments and compete on a more even playing field with their larger counterparts in a rising digital world.

An Increasingly Worthwhile Investment

The case for AI adoption gets stronger every day. Providing competitive advantage increases in productivity and resource utilization result in a positive and continually rising return on investment, as do the cost savings, improvements in customer satisfaction and retention, and boost in sales and revenue.

Automation is one of the key factors in escalating ROI. AI frees employees to focus on higher-value activities – a valuable feature with a tight skilled labor market. The automation element provides faster turnaround times, less waste, greater accuracy and fewer errors. For example, small businesses can employ AI to automate customer service inquiries, allowing employees to focus on more complex issues that require human intervention or to work on more strategic operations.

Companies may reduce the number of employees needed to perform certain tasks or at least minimize the time team members spend on those responsibilities. For example, small businesses could leverage AI to automate time-intensive financial reporting and analysis and reduce staff time required to manage those processes.

Another major value of AI is its **data intelligence capabilities**. Collecting, compiling and analyzing information from a multitude of internal and external sources offers businesses tremendous insight into existing and new markets, sales, marketing and other important areas. What organizations do with that awareness helps determine the ROI for AI.

Improved customer satisfaction and retention are two valuable objectives for those employing these advanced technologies. AI analyzes historical and current data to personalize the buyer's and customer's experience, providing personalized recommendations, offers and promotions. These steps boost client loyalty and help generate repeat business. For example, sales teams can leverage AI to analyze customer purchase history and feedback and develop personalized pitches and complementary purchase recommendations.

These solutions can also optimize pricing, promotions and inventory management. Some AI-enabled applications analyze market trends and customer behavior to determine the ideal value for particular products and services to increase the chances of closing sales without compromising cash flow or revenue opportunities.

The value of using AI to automate customer service inquiries and sales processes will vary between companies. According to a recent [Forbes Advisor survey](),[6] nearly 60% of business owners believe these technologies positively impact their client relationships. Reports about great reductions in response time and significant increases in customer satisfaction bolster that research.

Overcoming Security Concerns

While AI is upending the way people live and work, technologies that leverage internal and external data must have strong protections in place to protect the business. Compliance with ever-increasing regulations and evolving industry standards is another area of focus. As AI systems become more advanced and integrated into daily operations, ensuring the safety and security of individuals and organizations must be a top priority for IT teams and business leaders.

Data privacy is one of the primary information security-related concerns. AI relies on vast amounts of information to assess the environment and make recommendations and decisions, and, if not properly segmented, may expose sensitive or personal files. Exposing unneeded data creates vulnerabilities and could leave competitive, customer, employee and partner information exposed and leaked to the public via consumer-oriented AI resources.

Knowledgeable IT professionals understand the reasons for identifying, segmenting and locking down that type of information to secure it from outside threats.

Bias is another area of potential concern for AI systems. These applications require authentic data to make intelligent decisions and if the input has not been validated, those tendencies or predispositions will be incorporated in the output and processes these technologies manage. Biased data can negatively affect customer interactions, hiring procedures, loan approvals and virtually any step that the company automates. Choosing qualified vendors and IT providers who understand and can add validation steps in the collection process is one of the best ways to alleviate these concerns. In addition to implementing data security (i.e., secure backup, encryption, muti-factor authentication) and validation measures, businesses must create clear AI governance and ethics

policies to ensure responsible use of these systems. Those documents should detail acceptable uses, who has access to which data, and how the data and technologies are to be managed, protected and audited.

While AI does present security and compliance concerns, especially in today's high-threat environment, these risks can be mitigated through a proactive approach. Selecting trustworthy and skilled AI vendors, implementing strict data protection measures protocols and establishing clear governance and ethics policies significantly reduces the danger factors.

Take the Next Step with Artificial Intelligence

AI is a game-changer. No organization can afford to take a 'wait and see' attitude when competitors are surely evaluating, implementing and adopting revolutionary new solutions.

These innovative technologies are already reshaping industries and providing businesses with significant operational advantages. From manufacturers and retailers to professional services firms, AI-enabled solutions are reducing human workloads, minimizing waste, optimizing outputs and strengthening sales and marketing activities.

The only challenge for those not already evaluating or adopting these technologies should be determining a place to start. Some of the most notable companies developing AI-powered solutions may already be in their technology stack, including Microsoft (Copilot), Google (Gemini) and IBM (Granite). With a plethora of offerings available and fresh solutions rolling out regularly, businesses have an overabundance of options to choose from depending on their workplace and technology requirements.

Finding a qualified IT specialist with a comprehensive understanding of AI solutions can ease the burden of sorting through all the possibilities. Consultancies with expertise in a variety of AI activities - including planning, procurement, implementation and support - can streamline the process and ease the transition for everyone.

A number of educational resources are also available to provide background and aid in the development of AI-related business strategies, including:

- AI for Small Business: A Beginner's Guide (Microsoft)
- An Executive's Guide to AI (McKinsey)
- Building a Value-Driving AI Strategy for Your Business (Gartner)

Glossary of AI-Related Terms

1. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** the simulation of human intellect in computers and applications.
2. **Machine Learning:** a subcategory of AI that involves the development of algorithms that learn, predict or make decisions based on available data.
3. **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** uses machine learning to enable computers to understand and communicate human speech.
4. **Deep Learning:** leverages neural networks with multiple layers to improve the accuracy of predictions and decisions.

5. **Algorithm:** a set of rules or instructions followed by a computer to solve a problem or complete a task.
6. **Data Mining:** the process of discovering patterns and knowledge from large amounts of information and files.
7. **Robotics:** deals with the design, construction, operation, and use of machines to perform tasks traditionally done by humans.

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