

SMALL BUSINESS · AI · GETTING STARTED

As a Small Business, Can I Actually Use AI?

Short version: yes, and you are closer than you think. Longer version: most of the advice aimed at you was written for companies a hundred times your size, which is why it feels like it does not apply. Here is the version that does.

Yes, you can, and the barrier is almost never the technology. Australian adoption figures vary wildly depending on who is counting: the ABS put AI use at around **11% of small and micro businesses** in 2024. 25, while the National AI Centre's SME AI Pulse reported **43. 44% of SMEs** using AI in some form in the December 2025 to February 2026 quarter. Both are true; they are measuring different things, and the gap tells you something useful. The real obstacles are **trust, skills and time, not cost**: around 65% of businesses not adopting AI cite distrust of AI decision-making or a preference to keep humans in control. The best first project for most small businesses is **the telephone**, because missed calls are measurable lost revenue, the task is well-bounded, and you find out within a week whether it works.

■ The short version

Barrier	What it sounds like	Whether it is justified
1. Trust The biggest one by far	"I don't want a machine making decisions about my customers." Around 65% of businesses not adopting AI cite distrust of AI decision-making or a firm preference for keeping humans.	Partly. It is a bad reason to avoid AI entirely and an excellent reason to be specific about what it touches.
2. Skills	"Nobody here knows how to set this up."	Less true every year. The tools worth using now are configured, not coded, but somebody still has to sit down and do it.
3. Time The one nobody lists	"I'll look at it when things quieten down."	Decisive. This is what actually stops it, and things do not quieten down.
Cost	"We can't afford it."	✓ Rarely the real obstacle now. The sticker price on useful tools is small; the real cost is evaluation, setup and upkeep, which is time again.

■ Also worth knowing

Job	How well it works	Why
Answering the phone when you cannot	✓ Very well	The alternative is a missed call or voicemail nobody checks. The bar is low and the value is directly measurable.
Turning a call into notes	✓ Very well	Transcription and summarisation are mature. It removes admin nobody was doing properly anyway.
First drafts of writing	✓ Well, with editing	Quotes, listings, job ads, follow-up emails. Never send unedited, it reads like everyone else's.
Answering the same five questions	✓ Well	Hours, location, pricing, availability, lead times. This is most of your inbound volume.
Booking and qualifying	Well, if scoped tightly	Works when the rules are clear. Struggles the moment a caller's situation is unusual, so route those out.
Summarising documents	Usefully, verify anything that matters	Fine for getting the gist. Not a substitute for reading a contract.
Anything requiring judgement about a person	Poorly, and do not	Hiring, credit, complaints, vulnerability. Wrong technically and increasingly a legal exposure.

Why that gap is good news for you

It means most of the small businesses "using AI" are not running anything sophisticated. They are using ordinary tools for ordinary jobs, writing, summarising, answering. You are not behind a wave of small competitors who have automated their operations. Very few have. What has changed is that the entry point is now low enough that the ones who try something specific tend to keep it.

■ Questions the full guide answers

- ☐ Is my business too small to use AI?
- ☐ What should a small business use AI for first?
- ☐ What are the real barriers to small businesses using AI?
- ☐ Should I tell customers they are talking to AI?
- ☐ What should a small business never use AI for?
- ☐ What are my legal obligations if I use AI in Australia?
- ☐ How much does AI cost a small business, realistically?

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 881 662** or visit **unidenvoice.com/get-started**.