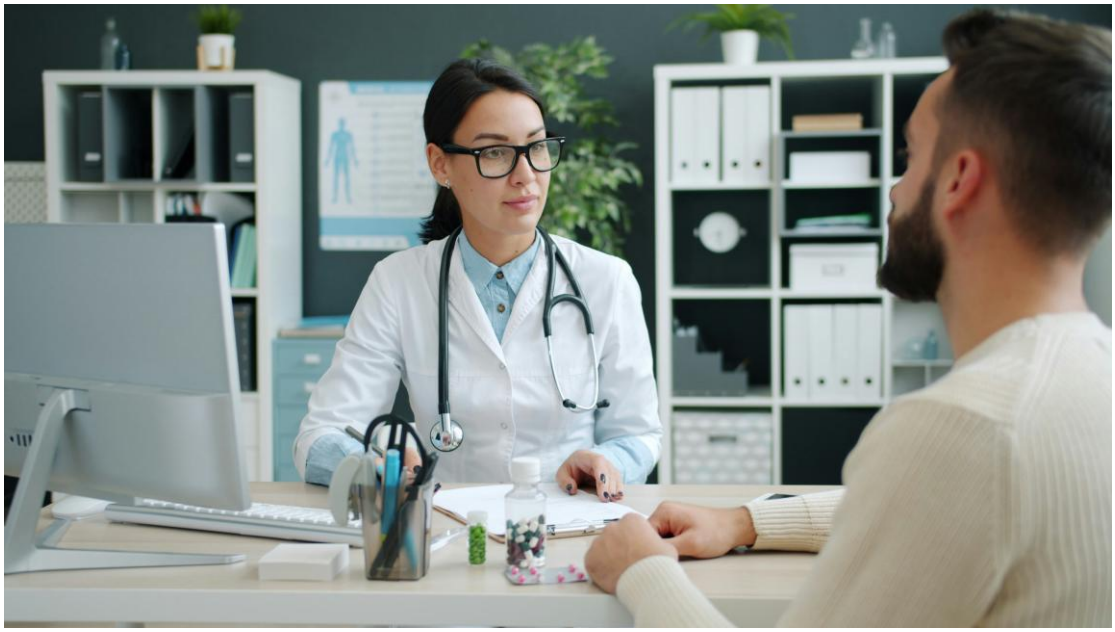
How is AI Shaping Your Business?

I read an email from a business broker recently. He said, “The biggest threat from AI isn’t that it will replace their business. It’s that it could change what their business is worth.” It’s not all doom and gloom, even in the industries most affected by AI. Here are some examples of how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can improve productivity and strengthen your business, and where you still need a human in the loop.



Before we look at specific industries, some of the quickest wins are common to every business. AI can summarise meetings and long email threads, draft letters and proposals, tidy up reports and pull the key points out of lengthy documents. These small savings of time add up across a team, freeing people to focus on clients and decisions.

Construction and Related Trades

Builders, electricians and plumbers do a lot of physical work that can’t be replaced by AI. But AI tools can take on much of the work around the job, such as scheduling, preparing quotes and diagnosing defects on building sites. AI can also handle invoicing, customer enquiries and administration, and turn voice notes or photos from site into job records, so tradespeople spend less time on paperwork in the evenings.

Manufacturing

AI can streamline your workflows and report on efficiency and throughput. It can report on job profitability, prepare cashflow projections and improve operational efficiency by highlighting job overages, wastage and rework. It can also help predict when machinery needs maintenance, reducing costly downtime. Agentic AI can collate reports from multiple divisions and summarise them in a single report for the chief executive to read over morning coffee.

Graphic Design, Marketing, Content Creation

Even if you only spend a couple of minutes on social media, you can see how prevalent AI is in content creation. AI tools are improving so rapidly at producing graphics and videos that it's getting hard to distinguish them from real photos and work by real people. The European Union requires advertisers to declare and label AI-generated content, so that users are not misled. If you are creating an avatar or synthetic person, replicating someone's voice or altering images in a way that may be misleading, you need to disclose it.

People who tend towards AI-generated content are more likely to have DIY budgets and less likely to hire graphic designers, photographers and videographers. If you're in those industries, target the businesses that want authenticity and creativity in their marketing. You can also use AI yourself to speed up mock-ups, resizing and first drafts, leaving more time for the original creative work clients pay you for.

Accounting, Bookkeeping and Business Analysts

AI helps to take away the mundane tasks like coding bills and bank statements, and it can prepare first drafts of reports and flag unusual transactions for review. That means we chartered accountants can spend more time having conversations with business owners. It makes my job so much more enjoyable!

AI can analyse a vast amount of data in a short time and produce salient insights. But that isn't going to put chartered accountants, bookkeepers and business analysts out of work in a hurry. One of our manufacturing clients was using AI to review financial data, but it didn't identify that accruals were being posted backwards. We can use our expertise and experience to get the stories behind the data and help our clients decide what to do next. If your business model is only about crunching the numbers, then it's time to make changes.

Health Care Services

No matter how sympathetic an AI avatar sounds, it can't replace a human for delivering comfort when we are ill. But AI can analyse patient scans and health records to help with early detection of cancers, fractures and other health issues. It can transcribe patient notes, help triage patients for medical attention, and manage appointment bookings and reminders, giving health professionals more time with their patients. The diagnosis and the care decisions still rest with the clinician.

Sales and Customer Service

AI can answer routine customer queries around the clock, draft responses for your team and summarise a customer's history before a call, so your people can focus on the conversations that matter. If you're training your AI to deal with customer service, make sure that it has context for each customer interaction and that it escalates to a human for sensitive client management. You might have a customer who has had a severe weather disruption and can't make payments until they resolve some of the chaos. They might not be pleased with automated payment demands or unsympathetic, routine treatment.

AI is Shaping Your Business

Artificial Intelligence is shaping your business, whether you like it or not. Across every industry we've looked at, AI is lifting productivity by taking care of repetitive, data-heavy

work. But it can do much more than that. AI can produce genuinely insightful analysis, spot patterns across vast amounts of data, and bring to light factors you might not have considered. Used well, it's a valuable thinking partner.

What AI can't do is take responsibility. That stays with us. AI didn't spot the accruals posted backwards, it can't comfort a patient, and it doesn't know when a customer needs a little grace after a storm. Treat what AI gives you as input, not the final answer. Question it, test it against your own experience, and apply your critical thinking before you act. The decision, and the accountability for it, should always sit with a person. Unless you have vast IT resources, you won't design your own AI, so put the right guardrails in place to protect your data, customer privacy and reputation. Train your AI like you would a new team member, under close supervision until it has proved its reliability.

Whether you embrace AI or differentiate your offering, remember the business broker's warning: AI could change what your business is worth. The businesses that thrive will be the ones that combine AI's insight with human judgement, experience and accountability.

- *Serena Irving*

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