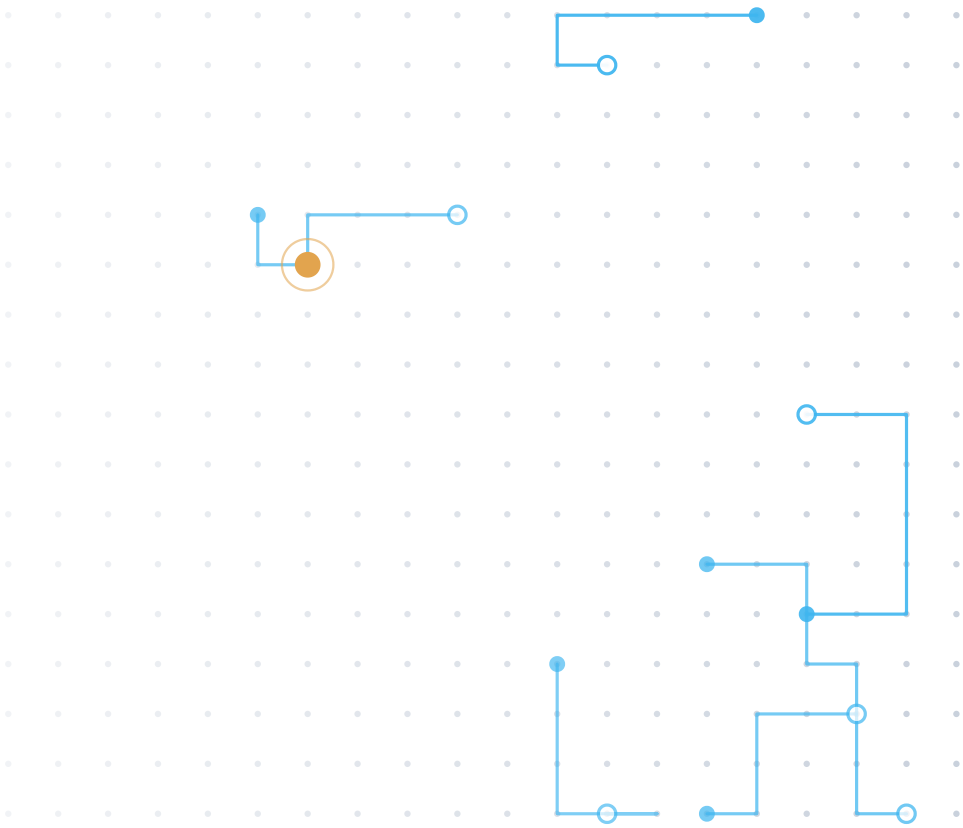


PRACTICAL GUIDE

Small pilots before big projects: how I start with a business

One number, one task and two weeks to find out whether AI really helps you

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FOR
Small business owners who want to try AI without committing to a long project

READING
7 min

EDITION
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BEFORE YOU START

What you will get from this guide

01 Find, in 20 minutes, the business number that really hurts.

02 Choose a single task and start with the AI writing drafts only.

03 Write down, before day one, what is measured and who answers for it.

04 Decide with data, after two weeks, whether to grow, repeat or stop.

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For: Small business owners who want to try AI without committing to a long project · 7 min read

01

Why big AI projects stall

The big project sounds great in the first meeting: "an assistant that handles everything". Then it stalls, and nearly always for reasons you could have seen coming.
Nobody agreed which number had to improve, so nobody knows whether it is working. It touches ten processes at once, and when one fails, people stop trusting all of them. It takes months to deliver a first result, and the business changes in the meantime. And it has no clear owner: when something goes wrong, nobody knows who to tell.

So I start differently, with a short conversation, a single task and a two-week pilot that can be measured. If it works, we grow from there. If it does not, you know within two weeks and it has cost very little.

TABLE 1 **Two ways to start with AI**

	Big project	Small pilot
NUMBER	Never agreed	One, counted beforehand
SCOPE	Ten processes at once	One type of task
FIRST RESULT	Months away	Within two weeks
OWNER	Nobody in particular	A named person
IF IT FAILS	Trust in everything drops	Only that task goes back to drafts

IN ONE LINE

Solve one small problem first; decide on the big one later, with data.

02

Diagnose before selling

Before proposing anything, I spend 20 minutes talking with the owner. That is the free diagnosis, and we hardly talk about tools in it: we look for one business number that hurts and can be counted. Just one.
The questions are always similar. Which task do you repeat that you would rather not do? What slips through when you are busy? How many times does it happen each week, in numbers? Who does it today? The number usually comes out of those answers, and it can nearly always be measured with something the business already has:

BUSINESS	NUMBER TO COUNT	HOW IT IS MEASURED TODAY
Hair salon	Unanswered calls per week	The phone's call log
Car repair garage	Hours of paperwork per week	A sheet kept for five days
Clinic or practice	Appointments where nobody shows up	Last month's calendar
Travel agency	Enquiries unanswered after 24 hours	The inbox

If there is no clear number at the end, there is no project yet, and I say so. Sometimes the honest answer is "you don't need this" or "a template fixes this, no AI required". I would rather sell nothing than start a project nobody will be able to measure.

✦ KEY

I promise data measured with your own business numbers, not brochure percentages. If the number cannot be counted before you start, it cannot be counted at the end either.

03

Every step is earned

I do not propose the whole project on the first day. I propose it in steps, and the business goes as far as it wants. Each step has to leave something useful on its own, even if the next one never happens:

FIGURE 1 **The steps I work in**

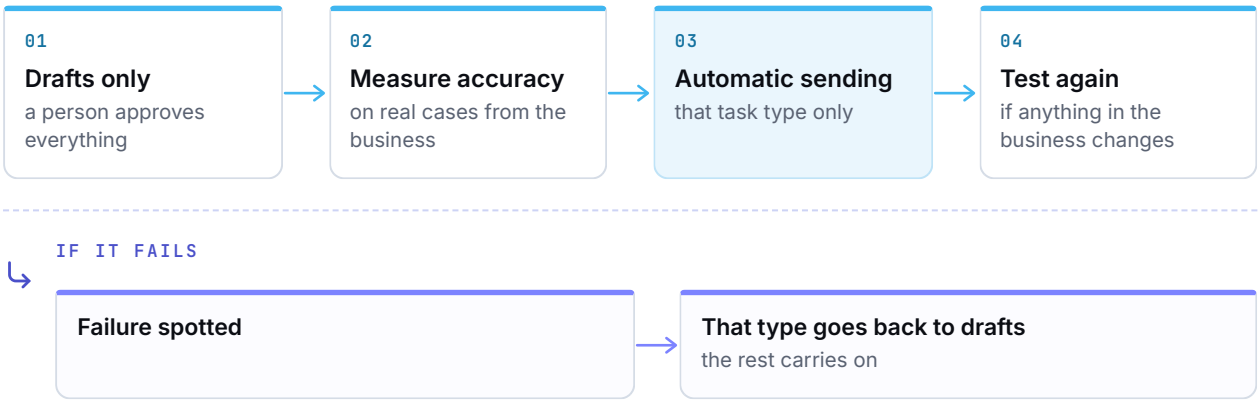
1. **Free diagnosis**
   20 minutes to find the number that hurts and decide whether there is a project.
2. **Set-up session**
   We prepare the chosen task: tidy data, written rules and a named owner.
3. **Fixed-scope pilot**
   Two weeks, one task, the AI in drafts, and the number measured before and after.
4. **Monthly plan**
   It carries on month by month, and only if the pilot moved the number.

When someone hesitates, I do not push; I lower the step. If two weeks of pilot feel like too much, we start with a smaller task, or the owner spends a week counting the number. What I am after is a first step that is an easy yes, and a next step the business asks for once it sees the number.

04 One task and one level of autonomy

With the number chosen, you pick a single type of task: replying to missed calls with a message, or sorting the emails that come in. One, not three. Then you decide how much autonomy the AI has on that task. At the start it is always the same: drafts only. The AI reads and writes; a person reviews and decides whether it goes out. Autonomy is earned one task type at a time, with evidence, and it is never handed to the whole system in one go:

FIGURE 2 **How autonomy is earned**



Some decisions are never left to the model: who the customer is, how much to charge and who gets which message. Code with fixed rules decides those, or a person does. The AI keeps the part it is good at, which is reading and drafting. The less AI a task needs, the better.

> ✦ **RULE**
>
> Money, complaints and refunds stay as drafts or go to a person, however well everything else is going.

05

The two-week pilot

The pilot lasts two weeks: long enough to see a pattern and short enough that nobody loses patience. Before it starts, I write down three things:

01 **What gets measured.** The agreed number, counted the same way as before. Plus a log of every draft: approved as it was, edited or discarded.

02 **What "done" means.** One concrete sentence, agreed before the start. For example: "the number drops visibly and 8 out of 10 drafts go out unchanged".

03 **Who owns it.** A named person in the business who reviews the drafts and gets the alert if something fails.

> *An agent with no owner is an agent nobody is watching.*
>
> HOW I WORK AT FLOWARA AI

During the pilot, every correction is saved as a written rule, such as "don't offer Monday appointments" or "address older customers formally". That way the system gets better with each mistake, because each one turns into an instruction that stays written down.

And if something fails, it shows. Every step leaves a line in a log, a counter compares the messages coming in with the ones going out, and if they do not match, the owner gets an alert. Nothing fails silently.

IN ONE LINE

Before day one you already know what is measured, what counts as success and who answers for it.

06

When to grow and when to stop

After two weeks, I look at the number with the owner. There are three possible outcomes, and all three are good if they are decided with data:

01 Green **The number improves and drafts barely need edits.** That task type can move to automatic sending, if the owner asks for it.

02 Amber **The number improves, but there are many edits.** Two more weeks in drafts, with the new rules already written.

03 Red **The number does not move.** We stop, explain why and do not drag it out.

Whatever the outcome, the pilot closes with one written page: the number before, the number after and what we learned. If it worked, that page is a case the owner can show. If it did not, it explains why we are not carrying on.

Growing means adding the next task, with its own number and its own pilot. If a task type starts failing later, only that type goes back to drafts; everything else stays as it is.

> ⚠ WARNING
>
> Stopping is a result too. Learning in two weeks that something is not worth it costs far less than finding out six months into a project. And "this isn't working for you, let's stop here" leaves more trust behind than any proposal.

07

Example: the hair salon and the missed calls

A neighbourhood hair salon with two people (synthetic example). With scissors in hand they cannot pick up the phone, and those calls are usually lost bookings. It is a very common case in businesses that live on appointments.

FIGURE 3 **The hair salon pilot**

20 min	15	2 weeks
of diagnosis with the owner	missed calls a week, roughly	of pilot in drafts only

Source: the phone's call log (synthetic example)

Diagnosis. During those 20 minutes, the owner checks her phone's call log: around 15 missed calls a week, almost all at peak times. That is the number.

Task and autonomy. For each missed call, the system prepares a message to that number: "Hi, it's the salon, we were with a client. Shall we book you in? We have these free slots". Code pulls the slots from the calendar, not the model. The message stays as a draft and the owner sends it with one tap between clients.

Pilot. She is the owner of the pilot. What gets measured: how many missed calls turn into bookings and how many drafts go out unchanged. Every correction is written down as a rule, and the first one was "regulars get their first name".

Decision. After two weeks, almost every missed call gets a reply within minutes and the drafts rarely change. The owner asks for the free-slot messages to go out on their own. Changes and cancellations stay as drafts.

IN ONE LINE

The owner made the call with her own number in front of her.

08 Checklist

Before any pilot starts, go through this list with whoever is going to own it:

Before a pilot starts

14 ITEMS

- [ ] 20 minutes on the business
  not on tools
- [ ] One number chosen and counted
  before starting
- [ ] No clear number, no project
- [ ] A single type of task
- [ ] The AI starts in drafts
  a person approves every send
- [ ] Identity, money and sending kept from the model
  code or a person decides
- [ ] Money, complaints and refunds with a person
- [ ] Two weeks, with a review date
- [ ] "Done" written down before day one
- [ ] A named owner
- [ ] Every correction becomes a written rule
- [ ] Every failure leaves a log and raises an alert
- [ ] Growing means the next task
  with its own pilot
- [ ] Stopping is allowed
  and the number decides it

If you would like to find your number with me, the first step is the free 20-minute diagnosis.

NEXT STEP

Free diagnostic (20 min)

If you want to see which part of your business can be automated with the risk under control, book a free 20-minute diagnostic.

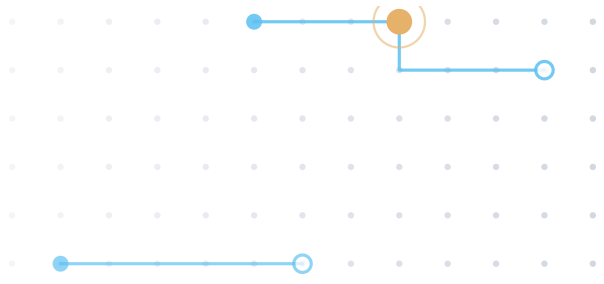
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