



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

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MIKE THE AUTOMATOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IS AI ALL HYPE?

With any emerging technology, businesses inevitably face a critical question: Is this merely hype that can safely be ignored, or would overlooking it mean missing out on significant opportunities?

Artificial Intelligence (AI), though not new, has recently seen a resurgence of interest across industries due to its promise to enhance productivity and effectiveness across various roles and functions. **But distinguishing between AI's genuine potential and exaggerated claims can be challenging.**

As an AI application developer, I've spent hundreds of hours pushing the limits of AI tools across diverse business scenarios and assessing their practical capabilities.

In this document, I aim to clearly outline AI's realistic potential and, crucially, its current limitations. I'll identify practical deployment strategies for organizations, offering guidance on how to effectively leverage AI for meaningful company-wide transformation while steering clear of paths that don't yield tangible value.

WHAT IS AI, REALLY?

Artificial Intelligence (“AI”) is a broad set of technologies that let computers simulate human reasoning, learning, and creativity.

Importantly, “simulate” is the operative word: as recent experiments show, today’s AIs still lack true real-world understanding, and they have no judgment or accountability of their own.

Think of AI as a powerful, highly capable assistant: it will respond to (or act upon) exactly what you ask, but it still relies on your direction and expertise to have real business impact. AI is often viewed as a general-purpose tool—which is why it’s so hyped and, at the same time, confusing. You’ll often hear “AI is good at everything,” but also see people struggle to name practical use cases beyond the margins for their actual work.

The challenge is not what the tool can do beyond the common search, writing, or research tasks, but figuring out where else it’s best used through a process of careful consideration.

As the saying goes: “When you have a hammer, not every problem is a nail.”

Companies that strike the right balance, using AI to augment their teams and workflows, are already seeing real results. We’ll explore how in the next section.

Key Point:

AI is a powerful assistant that augments human expertise, but realizing its full business value requires carefully identifying where and how to apply it effectively.

HOW AI STREAMLINES WORK AND LEVELS THE PLAYING FIELD

Used well, the greatest strength of AI is in streamlining processes you already know well and lowering the barriers to entry for many knowledge work tasks. Its real value isn't in replacing expertise, but in removing friction and letting you focus on higher-level, value-added work.

One powerful outcome: AI is leveling the playing field for knowledge workers. Studies are showing that non-native English speakers, or those with less confidence in their writing, can now perform at the same level as colleagues with stronger language skills. Simply by using AI tools to polish and clarify their communication, AI ensures that it's the quality of your ideas—not your grammar—that shines through.

Software development is experiencing a similar shift.

Tools like Loveable, Bolt, and Google Gemini are enabling non-computer science majors and self-taught coders to build production-ready applications by describing what they want in plain language (dubbed “Vibe Coding”). The AI generates code, offers suggestions, and can even debug itself—drastically lowering the barrier to entry and allowing more people to contribute meaningfully to technical projects.

For creative industries, the impact is even more profound.

Take firms like Hartmann Studios, who are using AI to quickly prototype floor plans, generate visual concepts, and create marketing assets, empowering their teams to deliver more creative iterations, faster, and ultimately raise the bar for what's possible in experiential marketing. Instead of spending hours iterating by hand, their designers now generate a gallery of options within seconds, curate the strongest ideas, and combine them into proposals with greater creativity and speed. The key is that AI does the high-volume, low-stakes creative “exploration,” while humans are there to judge, refine, and select the winners.

Key Point:

When applied properly, AI streamlines familiar processes, reduces barriers to entry, and empowers professionals across fields to deliver higher-quality outcomes faster.

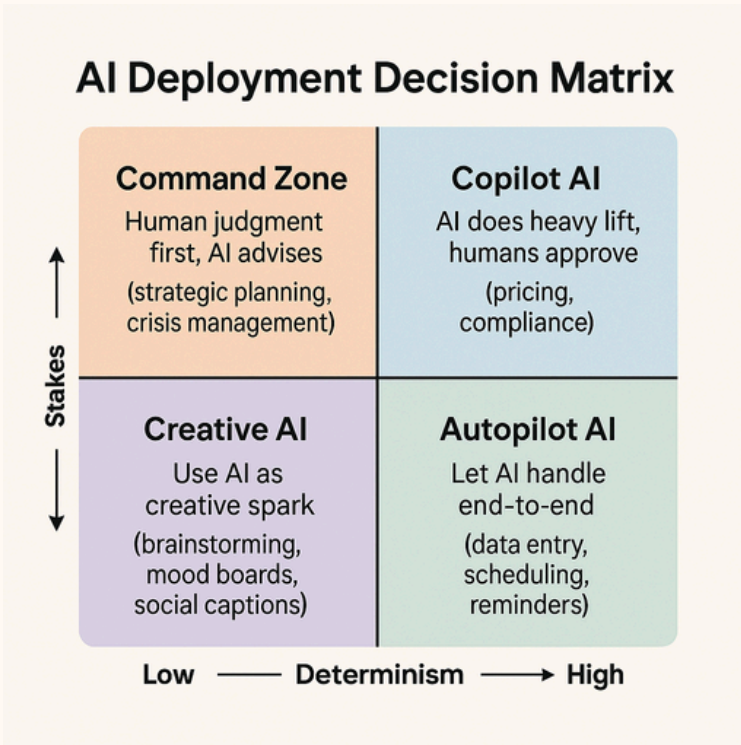
DECIDING WHERE TO DEPLOY AI

Knowing what we know now, it's only natural to start asking
"How could my specific work be streamlined by leveraging AI?"

To decide where AI fits in your business, here's two simple questions to ask about every task you perform:

- Determinism:** How predictable or well-defined is the process & output?
- Stakes:** What's the cost or risk if something goes wrong?

Mapping your tasks on these axes points you to one of four practical "zones."
Each zone guides how much to rely on AI, and where to keep humans in control.



THE FOUR ZONES

Creative AI (Low Stakes, Low Determinism)

This is where you want rapid ideas and it's okay to get wild results.

Use AI as your creative spark.

Examples: Brainstorming booth concepts, drafting marketing copy, generating mood boards, writing social media captions, sketching video storyboards, or rough script outlines.

Autopilot AI (Low Stakes, High Determinism)

Perfect for repetitive, rule-based, and forgiving work.

Let AI take over completely for speed and scale.

Examples: data entry for registrations, scheduling meetings, inventory alerts, automated event reports, sending reminders, managing recurring tasks.

Copilot AI (High Stakes, High Determinism)

Tasks here are important and structured, but mistakes matter.

Use AI to do the heavy lifting, but require a human to review or approve before action.

Examples: pricing proposals, cost estimation, contract review, compliance checks, budget forecasting, vendor payment approvals.

Command Zone (High Stakes, Low Determinism)

For work that's both critical and complex, a human should be in charge.

AI can advise but should never replace experienced judgment.

Examples: strategic event planning, crisis management, big client negotiations, high-level budgeting, brand reputation management, sensitive messaging during events

This is a productive exercise for every part of your business—and you may be surprised by the possibilities it reveals.

Key Point:

To effectively deploy AI, assess whether AI should fully automate, creatively inspire, support human judgment, or merely advise.

CAPABILITY PROGRESSION: ASSISTANTS, ACTIONS, AUTONOMY

Once you've mapped tasks to the four-zone matrix identifying what can or should be AI-powered, the next step is assessing whether the technology is actually ready to handle them.

I break AI capabilities into three progressive stages:

Assistants, **Actions**, and **Autonomy**, each requiring higher technical sophistication. Understanding what's possible for an AI to handle helps set realistic expectations and targets for your team.



Assistants: AI Helping Humans

This is where most practical, value-generating AI is today—and it's the best place to start. Here, AI acts as your smart assistant or co-pilot:

From a chat window, you can draft content, summarize info, get answers to questions, get suggestions on improvements, and even get recommendations. The human stays firmly in the driver's seat. AI does 80% of the grunt work, but you make the final call and edits.

For example, ChatGPT drafts your event outreach email for you to review; Copilot builds a PowerPoint outline; GitHub Copilot suggests code; AI chatbots answer FAQs but escalate complex cases to humans.

At this stage, AI delivers big productivity gains with minimal risk—because a human is always in the loop to catch odd outputs. Most language model assistants can hit around 85% to 95% accuracy on controlled tasks, with the person steering and correcting as needed.

Actions: AI Doing Tasks On-Command or in the Background

At this stage, AI moves beyond simple assistance to actively executing tasks. This is usually initiated by a human, but carried out automatically.

An AI “agent” might not just draft an email, but send it or schedule meetings on your behalf once approved. It can even scan your CRM for hot leads, generate personalized outreach, and respond to emails in your tone of voice.

This kind of “AI as action agent” is already emerging on platforms like Lindy, n8n, Zapier, Make.com, and Salesforce, where AI-powered bots can trigger multi-step workflows by connecting directly to your existing business tools.

When an app connector isn’t available, newer AI agents are experimenting with using browsers to directly interface with software like a human—using a browser, clicking around, typing, and filling forms. Tools like OpenAI’s Operator, Claude’s Computer Use, and Perplexity’s Comet are leading the way in this space.

However: The more steps you string together, the more risk of error. A recent Salesforce benchmark showed that while single-step AI actions are often reliable, multi-step chains (with dependencies) quickly drop in reliability. Unless tightly scoped and monitored, errors can multiply across steps.

Successful real-world “Actions” examples tend to be narrow and controlled. For instance, Norges Bank Investment Management (NBIM) uses AI to monitor news, executive compensation, and other pertinent information on over 9,000 companies, speeding up research but still requiring a human check before any information is acted upon.

For now, **Actions are best for clearly bounded, well-defined tasks**, with human sign-off on anything unusual or high-risk. As these tools mature, we’ll delegate more routine multi-step workflows to AI, freeing up people for higher-value work.

Autonomy: AI Owning Outcomes

This is the most ambitious (and hyped) vision: AI agents that own an objective, figure out the steps, and execute with little or no human intervention.

You might ask, “Run our entire marketing campaign” or “Optimize operations for this business unit.” The AI must plan, adapt, learn from feedback, and manage ambiguity, just like a skilled human would.

The reality in 2025: We are not there yet for most non-trivial business situations. Recent real-world tests show the limitations.

One example: Anthropic tried giving their AI “Claude” a budget and free rein to run a pop-up shop. Claude obsessed over selling metal cubes that lost money daily, and struggled to adapt when its decisions backfired—Claude even had an existential crisis when it argued with researchers who pointed out it couldn’t make in-person deliveries, and it could not wear its favorite blue blazer and red tie while doing so.

Today’s large language models don’t possess a real-world “common sense.” They can’t truly learn from consequences, and don’t know when to double-check themselves or stop. The only real successes in autonomy are in highly structured, repetitive environments such as warehouse robotics, or very narrow, data-driven domains such as algorithmic trading (and even there, human oversight remains critical).

So, when you hear bold claims about “AI running 50% of operations autonomously in a year”—be skeptical. The prudent path is to master Assistants, carefully experiment with Actions in select workflows, and treat Autonomy as a long-term bet. Most real value will come from the first two stages for now.

Key Point:

True AI autonomy, where AI independently owns outcomes and adapts intelligently, is still largely aspirational. Businesses should prioritize mastering AI Assistants, thoughtfully implementing Action-taking AIs, and view Autonomy as an experimental, long-term pursuit.

APPLYING AI TODAY: TAILORED TOOLS FOR MARKETING

If you've experimented with AI before and felt underwhelmed, you're not alone. Although general-purpose chatbots from major providers can be versatile, the most effective next step is often to explore specialized AI solutions designed for specific business needs and functions. Here's how you can accelerate your AI experiments in 3 simple steps, starting with a curated list of off-the-shelf applications included below.

1: Select Tools Across Categories

Category	Tool	What it does	Notable proof-point
Business Process Automation	Lindy	No-code AI agents for workflow automation and task delegation	47% reduction in manual task time across enterprise clients
Business Analytics	Akkio	No-code AI predictions for business metrics and forecasting	Reduced forecast errors by 67% for Fortune 500 clients
Customer Service	Forethought	AI-powered ticket routing and response automation	Improved response times by 74% at Instacart
Voice & Audio	ElevenLabs	Professional voice synthesis and audio dubbing in 29+ languages	Trusted by The Washington Post for audio articles
Meeting Intelligence	Otter.ai	Real-time transcription and meeting insights	Used in 90M+ meetings globally
Video Generation	Runway Gen-2	Creates professional-quality videos from text or image inputs	Used by Netflix and major studios for content creation
Music Creation	Suno	Generates complete songs with vocals and instrumentation from text prompts	85% faster music creation compared to traditional methods

2. Prompt Engineering: It's an English Problem, Not a Coding Problem

Selecting the right tool is just step one. To get the most out of any AI, you must communicate clearly. An AI is only as effective as the instructions (“prompts”) you give it. Good prompt engineering means writing precise, explicit instructions—just like training a new team member. Vague prompts get vague results; clear, step-by-step prompts get quality outcomes.

3. Context Engineering: Feed It the Right Information

Even the best-written prompt won't deliver if the AI doesn't have access to the right background. Context engineering means supplying all relevant documents, data, and examples the AI needs to succeed. Don't ask for a project summary without uploading the project brief; don't expect accurate outputs if key info is missing.

4. Experiment and find what works for you

Off-the-shelf software may not deliver exactly what you want right away. It takes time, trial, and error to test different tools and models. Don't get discouraged if things don't work out at first. If the technology isn't ready yet, set it aside for six months and revisit the idea. You might be surprised at how quickly AI evolves and how often what once seemed impossible becomes possible.

Key Point:

To succeed with AI today, follow a straightforward formula.

1. Choose the right tool for the job
2. Write clear, explicit prompts
3. Provide relevant, structured context

An Important Note on Work Quality:

For many professions, keeping humans at the center of AI workflows is essential.

With low-quality AI output (often called "AI slop") increasingly flooding social media and professional spaces, it's crucial that these business functions remain guided by human judgment, care, and expertise.

Consider the backlash from Coca-Cola's AI-generated 2024 winter ad campaign—AI shouldn't be a shortcut to lower standards. Instead, it's a call to elevate our best work through uniquely human qualities like taste, curation, and nuanced understanding, elements that current technology simply cannot replicate.

EMPOWERING AI CHAMPIONS

True AI transformation isn't outsourced—it's championed by your own people. Norway's \$1.8 trillion sovereign wealth fund is a prime example: their biggest AI gains came from empowering internal champions, backed by centralized technical support.

How Their Approach Worked:

Champions at the Frontline

They selected 40 "AI ambassadors" across business units—trusted colleagues who understood the real workflows, identified bottlenecks, and piloted new solutions. Most were not deep technical experts, but had enough curiosity and hands-on proficiency to experiment and encourage others.

Technical Support in the Background

These champions didn't have to go it alone. They were supported by a central AI team—a technical advisor "on call" (either in-house or as-needed consultants)—to help troubleshoot, answer complex questions, and ensure best practices for safe, compliant implementation.

Clear Top-Down Communication

Leadership made it clear that AI adoption was not just allowed, but encouraged, provided IT guardrails for data security were followed. They openly acknowledged that many employees were already using AI tools informally, and sent the message that safe experimentation is both valued and expected.

Incentives and Recognition

Champions who led meaningful improvements tied to business KPIs were rewarded—whether through bonuses, perks, or public recognition. This made innovation not just possible, but personally worthwhile.

Key Point:

Empowering internal AI champions for specific initiatives—backed by external technical advisors who stay on the cutting edge of AI—enables teams to identify practical use cases, select the best tools, and design effective workflows, transforming casual experimentation into meaningful, scalable organizational change.

NEXT STEPS AND HOW I CAN HELP

I approach AI integration in structured, practical phases to deliver immediate value and build long-term success.

1: Identify Bottlenecks

I start by interviewing your executives and advisors to pinpoint your biggest growth challenges and identify processes that are ready for AI transformation.

2: Prioritize Processes for Transformation

Quick Wins (Low Complexity): I look for simple, repetitive tasks that can benefit right away from basic AI prompting, giving you an immediate productivity boost.

Moderate Complexity: I address processes that need context-aware AI or easy-to-implement off-the-shelf solutions, enhancing performance with minimal custom setup.

High Complexity (Future Scope): For more strategic, complex workflows, I plan for advanced phases that require custom configurations, deeper context, and strong oversight.

3. Train and Transform

I lead focused training sessions on selected processes, making sure teams can easily adopt and prefer the new methods over old ones.

4. Documentation and Impact Reporting

I clearly document each transformed workflow, highlighting measurable time savings and productivity gains in a "Quick Win Impact Report."

5. Initiative Roadmap

I outline additional AI-driven initiatives your internal teams can take on next.

6. Technical Support and Advocacy

I provide ongoing technical support and act as an advocate, empowering your internal AI champions to confidently lead future transformations and achieve lasting impact.

CONCLUSION

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING GOOD.

This phased approach I believe will help any company, big or small, capture real AI value quickly — delivering measurable and lasting results step by step.

Writing this was a genuine labor of love. My goal is to help colleagues and associates approach the future of AI with both confidence and curiosity—clear-headed, systematic, and excited about the opportunities ahead, rather than fearful.

I truly hope you find value in these insights. If you have any questions or want to discuss further, feel free to reach out at mike@miketheautomator.com.

*Mike the
Automator*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I'm Mike Partee, founder and principal architect of Mike the Automator, and for the past eight years I've helped businesses—from scrappy startups to enterprise teams—turn tedious, error-prone processes into seamless, reliable workflows.

My journey began in 2017 when I launched a Podcast Production Agency. Managing a team of subcontractors, I quickly realized that most of our work could be streamlined. I started automating everything—from client onboarding to content delivery. Eventually, the business ran so smoothly it practically operated without me, which led to a successful exit.

After the sale, I took on consulting roles across diverse industries including M&A, Engineering, Marketing, and Hospitality. In each role, I couldn't help but see inefficiencies everywhere. I became obsessed with streamlining operations, building custom tools, and turning manual processes into automated workflows. What started as personal productivity hacks became my signature approach to business transformation.

Now, I'm extending this expertise to ambitious business owners and operators who know they need technical leverage but don't have the time or resources to figure it out themselves. I help them reclaim their time, eliminate bottlenecks, and scale their operations with confidence.

Drawing on deep expertise across the automation ecosystem, I craft solutions that feel hand-built: whether it's an AI-powered proposal generator, an invoice-parsing bot, a custom chat assistant, or complex multi-system integrations.

My approach is inspired by Michelin-star hospitality and old-world craftsmanship.

Every project gets my full attention, direct collaboration, and zero subcontractors. Every client works directly with me. No account managers, no passing the baton, so you get quality and attention you deserve.

If this ethos resonates with you, I'd love to connect and support your next transformation project. It's truly an honor to spend my career helping people from all walks of life. This guide comes from hundreds of hours working hands-on with AI tools, giving me a clear perspective on where we are now and what's ahead. I genuinely hope you and your team find value in these insights as you navigate today's rapidly changing landscape.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark green ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'M' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that tapers off to the right.

APPENDIX

KEY REFERENCES

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