

✦ A FREE GUIDE FOR OWNER-MANAGED BUSINESSES

The 30-Day AI Head Start

Twenty practical things you can do in the next month to save hours, cut cost and keep your business safe — without hiring anyone, buying anything, or knowing how to code.

Paul Rudland

AI & Systems for Owner-Managed Businesses

paulrudland.uk

Read this bit, then skip to whatever hurts most

Most businesses do not have an AI problem. They have a where-do-my-hours-go problem, and AI happens to be the cheapest tool ever invented for fixing it. So this guide does not start with the technology. It starts with your week.

There is nothing in here you need permission to do. No procurement, no consultants, no integration project. Everything below can be done by one person with an ordinary laptop, a paid AI subscription costing roughly £17 a month, and an afternoon.

What is inside

#	SECTION	TIME IT TAKES	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
1	The Two-Hour Audit	2 hours	An honest map of where your week actually goes
2	The Twelve Jobs AI Is Genuinely Good At	15 min read	A shortlist, ranked by return
3	How To Ask (the CLEAR method)	10 minutes	The difference between a toy and a tool
4	Eight Prompts To Steal	Copy & paste	Immediate output on day one
5	Rolling It Out To Your Team	Half a day	Adoption instead of a shrug
6	Guardrails: Data, Law, Reputation	30 minutes	A one-page AI policy you can sign
7	What AI Must Never Touch	5 min read	The list that keeps you out of trouble
8	Your 30-Day Plan	Four weeks	Something to actually follow

ONE RULE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Do not start with the interesting thing. Start with the boring, repetitive, weekly thing that nobody wants to do — the one that always slips to Friday evening. That is where the money is. Interesting problems make good conference talks; boring problems make good margins.

The Two-Hour Audit

You cannot automate what you have not named. Before touching any tool, spend two hours doing this. It is the single highest-return exercise in this document, and the only one most people skip.

Step one: list the week

Take a sheet of paper. Write down every recurring task that happens in your business weekly or monthly. Not projects — tasks. "Chase overdue invoices." "Write the job advert." "Pull the numbers for the management meeting." "Reply to enquiry emails." Aim for thirty lines. Most owners get to forty and are quietly horrified.

Step two: score each line

Give every task three scores out of five.

SCORE	QUESTION	A FIVE LOOKS LIKE
F — Frequency	How often does this happen?	Every day, or several times a day
R — Repetition	How similar is it each time?	Same shape, different names and numbers
C — Consequence	What breaks if it is done badly?	Nothing much — it is inconvenience, not risk

Multiply the three. Anything scoring above 60 is a candidate. Anything above 100 is where you start on Monday.

WHY 'CONSEQUENCE' IS SCORED BACKWARDS

A high consequence score means low stakes. This is deliberate. Your first three AI wins should be things that, if the output is wrong, cost you an apology rather than a client, a fine, or a person. Confidence is built on small safe wins. Start there, and earn your way up to the risky stuff.

Step three: the honesty column

Against each candidate, write one of three words:

- **Delete** — nobody reads this report, nobody has asked for it in a year. Roughly one task in six falls here. Automating it would be automating waste.
- **Delegate** — a person could do this, and the reason they do not is that nobody has written it down. The fix is a checklist, not a language model.
- **Draft** — the work is genuinely yours, but ninety per cent of it is getting to a first version. This is AI's territory, and it is enormous.

Only the Draft pile goes forward. If your list of thirty tasks yields six, that is a good outcome. Six tasks, done in a quarter of the time, is roughly a day a week back.

The Twelve Jobs AI Is Genuinely Good At

Ranked by return for a business of five to fifty people. The estimates below are conservative and assume no technical work of any kind.

#	THE JOB	TYPICAL WEEKLY SAVING	SETUP
1	First drafts of anything written — proposals, adverts, listings, policies, tender responses, letters	3–6 hours	None
2	Turning a call or meeting into notes, actions and a follow-up email	2–4 hours	None
3	Reading long documents and answering questions about them — contracts, leases, surveys, reports	2–5 hours	None
4	Reformatting and cleaning data — messy spreadsheets, inconsistent addresses, exported reports	1–3 hours	Low
5	Triaging and drafting replies to inbound enquiries	2–5 hours	Low
6	Summarising a week of email, messages or reviews into a page	1–2 hours	Low
7	Writing the checklist, SOP or induction pack that lives in someone's head	One-off, large	None
8	Research with sources — suppliers, competitors, regulations, grant schemes	1–3 hours	None
9	Building small internal tools — a calculator, a tracker, a booking form	Varies, large	Medium
10	Translating between formats — notes to slides, spreadsheet to report, transcript to article	1–2 hours	None
11	Interrogating your own numbers — ask questions of a sales export rather than building a pivot table	1–3 hours	Low
12	Preparing for a difficult conversation — rehearsal, objections, the case against you	Hard to price	None

The First Five

If you do nothing else this month, do these. In order.

1. **Buy the paid tier.** The free versions of these tools are demonstrations. The paid ones are the product. Roughly £17 per person per month.
2. **Pick one task** from your Draft pile with a score above 100.
3. **Do it the old way and the new way, side by side, once.** Time both. Keep the number. It is the only evidence that will convince anyone else.
4. **Write down the prompt that worked** and put it somewhere shared. An undocumented prompt is a party trick; a documented one is a process.
5. **Show one colleague.** Not a training session. One person, ten minutes, their own worst task. Adoption spreads sideways, never downwards.

How To Ask

Most disappointment with AI is a briefing failure, not a capability failure. You would not expect a competent new employee to produce good work from the instruction "write something about our company." Brief it the way you would brief a sharp graduate on their first morning: they are quick, well-read, eager, and they know nothing whatsoever about you.

The CLEAR structure

ELEMENT	IN PRACTICE
C — Context	Who you are, who this is for, what has happened so far, what you are trying to achieve
L — Limits	Length, tone, what to avoid, what you must not claim, the deadline, the budget
E — Examples	One piece of writing you like, or a past version that worked. This single move improves output more than any other
A — Ask	The specific deliverable. "A 300-word advert", not "help with recruitment"
R — Role & Review	Who it should think like, and how you want to check it — e.g. "list your three least confident claims at the end"

THE ONE HABIT WORTH BUILDING

End every important prompt with: "Before you answer, ask me any questions that would make your answer better." You will get three or four questions back, half of which you had not thought about. Answer them, then let it write. The output improves out of all recognition, and you find out what you had not decided.

Four failures and their fixes

THE COMPLAINT	WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING	THE FIX
"It sounds generic"	You gave it no examples of your voice	Paste three things you have written. Say: match this.
"It made something up"	You asked a question it could not answer and gave it no way to say so	Add: "If you do not know, say so." Give it the source document.
"It is too long and flowery"	No limits	"Under 200 words. Plain English. No adjectives you would not use out loud."
"It got the facts wrong"	It was working from memory rather than your data	Never ask it to recall your numbers. Paste them in.

Eight Prompts To Steal

Copy these. Replace the square brackets. They are deliberately blunt.

1. The meeting into a follow-up

Here is a transcript of a meeting with [CLIENT]. Produce three things: (a) a summary in under 150 words, (b) a table of actions with owners and dates, (c) a follow-up email in my voice – direct, warm, no corporate language. Flag anything that was agreed ambiguously.

2. The document you do not have time to read

I am attaching a [CONTRACT / LEASE / REPORT]. I am the [ROLE]. Tell me: the three things that would cost me most if I missed them; anything unusual compared with a standard agreement of this type; and five questions I should ask before signing. Quote the clause numbers. Do not give legal advice.

3. The job advert and the sift

Write a job advert for a [ROLE] at a [SIZE] business in [SECTOR]. Salary [X]. Tone: honest, specific, no clichés – never use 'rockstar', 'fast-paced' or 'family'. Then give me five interview questions that distinguish someone who has actually done this from someone who has read about it.

4. The spreadsheet you do not want to open

Here is a CSV export. Clean it: consistent date format, remove duplicates, standardise the address column. Then tell me the five things in this data that I probably have not noticed, ranked by how much money they represent. Show your working. Do not guess at missing values – list them.

5. The enquiry triage

Here are 20 inbound enquiries. Sort them into: ready to buy, needs nurturing, not a fit, and time-waster. For each in the first group, draft a reply under 120 words that proposes a specific next step. Explain your reasoning for anything you put in 'not a fit'.

6. The process that lives in someone's head

I am going to describe how we do [PROCESS] and I will ramble. Ask me one question at a time until you could hand this to a new starter. Then produce a one-page SOP with a checklist, the three most common mistakes, and who to escalate to.

7. The argument against you

I am about to propose [DECISION] to my board. Steelman the strongest case against it. Then list the three questions I am least prepared for, and what evidence would change my mind. Be unkind. I would rather hear it now.

8. The weekly digest

Here is everything that came into my inbox this week. Give me one page: what needs a decision from me, what is drifting, what has gone quiet that should not have, and anything a competitor is doing. Nothing else.

Rolling It Out To Your Team

The failure mode is predictable: a well-meant training session, polite nodding, and nothing changes. Adoption is not a knowledge problem. It is a permission problem and a fear problem.

Say the quiet part first

Everyone in the room is wondering whether they are training their own replacement. If you do not address it in the first two minutes, they will spend the session thinking about it instead of listening. Be straight about what you intend. If the honest answer is that roles will change, say which, and say what happens to the people in them. People will forgive a hard truth; they will not forgive discovering it later.

The half-day that actually works

TIME	WHAT HAPPENS	WHY
0:00	The honest conversation above	Removes the thing blocking their attention
0:15	You do one live task badly, then well	They watch you fail first. This matters more than you think
0:45	Everyone brings their own worst task	Generic exercises teach nothing
1:30	Break, then pairs: each person teaches theirs to one other	Teaching is the only proof of learning
2:30	Write the prompts down together, in one shared place	Otherwise it evaporates by Thursday
3:00	Agree the guardrails as a group, not from the top	Rules people wrote are rules people keep
3:30	Each person commits to one task they will do this way for a month	One task, one month, tracked

MEASURE ADOPTION, NOT ENTHUSIASM

At the end of the session, everyone is excited. Four weeks later is the only number that means anything. Ask two questions: how many hours did you save, and what did you do with them? If the answer to the second is "more work", you have built a treadmill, not a business.

Who to pick first

- Not your most technical person. They will build something clever nobody uses.
- Not your most sceptical person, to prove a point. You will lose.
- Pick whoever is most visibly drowning in admin and is respected. Their relief will be public, unfaked, and contagious.

Guardrails

This page is the difference between a competitive advantage and an incident. It takes half an hour and it is not optional. None of this is legal advice — if you handle sensitive personal data at scale, take proper advice.

The four questions to answer before anyone types anything

1. **Where does the data go?** Consumer accounts and business accounts are not the same product. Business and enterprise tiers generally do not train on your content by default; consumer tiers may. Check the setting, in writing, today.
2. **What may not be pasted?** Personal data you would not put in an email to the wrong address. Anything under NDA. Anything a client would be upset to see leave your building. Card details, health data, safeguarding records, unpublished financials.
3. **Who checks the output?** Every externally-facing artefact has a named human who read it. Not "the team". A name.
4. **What gets disclosed?** Decide now whether clients are told when AI is used in producing their work. In some sectors you must. In all sectors, being asked and having no answer is worse than the answer.

Your one-page AI policy

Ten lines. Print it, sign it, put it in the induction pack. Adapt freely.

We use **[named tools]** on **[named paid plans]**. No other AI tool is used for company work without approval.

We have confirmed, in writing, that our content is not used to train models.

Personal data about clients, staff or children is never pasted into an AI tool.

Nothing under NDA or commercial confidence is pasted into an AI tool.

AI drafts. Humans decide. Nothing leaves this business unread by a named person.

Any AI output containing a fact, figure, date or legal reference is verified against the source.

We do not use AI to make decisions about people — hiring, dismissal, credit, tenancy — only to prepare information for a human decision.

Prompts and outputs relating to client work are stored where the client's data is stored.

If a client asks whether AI was used, we tell them the truth.

Any mistake caused by AI is reported the same way any other mistake is reported. No blame for using it correctly.

THE REGULATORY DIRECTION OF TRAVEL

UK GDPR already applies to everything you paste. The EU AI Act's obligations are phasing in and reach any business selling into the EU. Sector regulators — financial, legal, healthcare, education — are publishing their own guidance and it is tightening, not loosening. The businesses that will struggle are not the ones that moved early; they are the ones that moved early and kept no record of how.

What AI Must Never Touch

Every item on this list has produced a headline for someone.

- **The final decision about a human being.** Use it to prepare, structure and challenge. Never to decide who is hired, dismissed, promoted, given credit, or given a tenancy.
- **Anything where the cost of a plausible falsehood is high.** These systems are fluent before they are correct. Fluency is exactly what makes a wrong figure dangerous.
- **Legal, medical, tax or safety-critical output that goes out unchecked.** Drafting a contract clause is fine. Sending it is not.
- **Your specific numbers, from memory.** Paste the data. It cannot recall your revenue, and it will not tell you it is guessing unless you ask.
- **Client or personal data on a consumer account.** The most common serious error, and the easiest to avoid.
- **The relationship.** Nobody has ever renewed a contract because the follow-up email was well structured. Automate the admin around the relationship. Never the relationship.

The purpose of this is not to remove people from your business. It is to remove the work that was making them worse at their jobs.

Two failure modes worth naming

The pilot that never lands. Six months of trials, no decision, nothing in production. Cure: pick one process, set a date, put it live, measure it. A mediocre thing running beats an excellent thing being evaluated.

The shadow rollout. Your staff are already using these tools. They are using them on personal accounts, with company data, and not telling you, because they think they will get in trouble. Every week you spend deciding your policy is a week that is happening. Publishing permissive, clear rules is a security measure, not a cultural one.

Your 30-Day Plan

Four weeks. Roughly two hours a week. Tick them off.

Week one — Look

- Do the Two-Hour Audit. Thirty tasks, three scores, three columns.
- Delete the tasks nobody reads. Say so out loud in a meeting.
- Buy one paid subscription. One. For yourself.
- Run one task both ways and time it. Write the number on a whiteboard.

Week two — Prove

- Take your top three Draft tasks and do them with AI for a full week.
- Save every prompt that worked into one shared document.
- Show one colleague. Ten minutes. Their task, not yours.
- Answer the four guardrail questions. Write the ten-line policy.

Week three — Spread

- Run the half-day session. Everyone brings their own worst task.
- Agree the guardrails as a group. Everybody signs the page.
- Each person commits to one task, done this way, for one month.
- Set up one shared prompt library. Owner: a named person.

Week four — Bank it

- Collect the hours saved. Actual numbers, not impressions.
- Decide explicitly what those hours are being spent on. Write it down.
- Pick the one process worth building properly — the one where a tool, not a prompt, is the answer.
- Book the next review for 90 days out, before the momentum dissolves.

THE NUMBER THAT MATTERS

At the end of thirty days you should be able to finish this sentence with a figure you would defend to an accountant: "We have taken ___ hours a week out of this business, and we are now spending them on ____." If the second blank is empty, the first one does not count.

If you would rather not do this alone

Everything in this guide works. What most owner-managed businesses lack is not intelligence but an uninterrupted stretch of time with somebody who has done it before. Here are the ways to work with me, each designed so that the next one is optional.

MOST POPULAR · IN PERSON

The 2-Day Live Intensive

£1,995 + VAT

Two days in person, capped at fifteen. You leave with an AI-generated website built for your business and a clear understanding of which AI tools can streamline and enhance how you work. The fastest way from this guide to something live.

The Half-Day Deep Dive

£1,100 + VAT

Half a day on site. We walk your systems and processes as they actually are, not as the manual says. You receive a written report of findings and a prioritised plan for where AI and technology will pay for themselves fastest. No obligation to do anything further.

The Full-Day Implementation

£1,500 + VAT

A full day on site with your key decision-makers. Systems review, process review, document review — and before I leave, low-cost AI solutions are implemented and running. You end the day with working tools, not a proposal.

The Twelve-Month Mentorship

By conversation

One day a month, on site, for a year. Advanced integration, new tooling, best practice and staying compliant as the rules change. Deliberately limited to a handful of businesses — and the Deep Dive and Implementation Day are credited back.

START WHERE IT IS CHEAPEST

Not sure where to begin? Book a free thirty-minute call and I will tell you honestly whether there is enough in your business to justify going further — including, sometimes, that there is not.

 **Paul Rudland**

paulrudland.uk · hello@paulrudland.uk

This guide is free. Please pass it on to anyone it would help. Nothing in it constitutes legal, financial or regulatory advice.