5 Powerful Ways to Streamline Your Work Processes with AI



Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

When Sydney J. Harris wrote this in his 1973 book “Clearing the Ground,” he touched on a concern that feels even more relevant today. Harris, a journalist with a keen eye on society, wasn’t predicting a sci-fi world where humans turn into robots. Instead, he was warning us about losing our unique human qualities in our rush to embrace technology.

Fast-forward a few decades, and AI and automation are no longer futuristic ideas. In 2024, they’re changing how businesses operate. However, instead of replacing humans altogether, business owners are optimizing results and processes by taking a hybrid approach to AI and human skills.

As the CEO of an international virtual assistant agency, I’ve

seen firsthand how this approach helps our clients thrive. A hybrid approach unlocks the best of both worlds: efficiency without eliminating the human touch that so many clients crave. In this article, we'll explore the power of a hybrid model, including a five-step approach you can apply to your business.

Related: Going All in on AI? Here's How to Navigate the Psychology of Artificial Intelligence

Understanding the hybrid approach

When automation, machine learning and AI were first introduced into the business world, countless owners and managers feared the worst: job elimination, permanent cultural changes and a futuristic work environment with no human interaction. While AI did disrupt fundamental business processes, business owners were able to preserve existing jobs and their workplace culture while unlocking major benefits.

For one, 85% of business owners agree that technology helps them succeed, whether that be scaling into new markets, infusing efficiency into core business processors, or better supporting their team members. Similarly, a Harvard Business Review study uncovered that 80% of employees reported that automation opens the door to more meaningful interactions with customers and stakeholders, offers the opportunity to learn new skills, and makes it easier to take on more complex tasks.

These advantages make it clear that AI and automation aren't about replacing humans with machines. It's about integrating the powers into existing teams to improve collaboration and eliminate mundane and inefficient processes.

How business owners are optimizing

their companies with AI

1. AI and machine learning: Many business owners use AI and machine learning to sift through mountains of data, spot trends, and make predictions to help make more informed decisions.

2. Automation: Clients leverage automation to eliminate mundane tasks, such as scheduling and inquiries, to improve consistency and accuracy.

3. Human intelligence: The human skill of a team is truly irreplaceable. Every company relies on its staff's creativity, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving abilities daily. They handle complex client requests, develop innovative solutions, and provide the empathetic touch that's crucial in any service industry.

Real-life hybrid application

Let's examine three real-life hybrid applications to show how the hybrid model works in day-to-day operations.

Task management

The task management function benefits from a hybrid model. AI handles the heavy lifting by sorting and prioritizing tasks to ensure that your team focuses on the most important and time-sensitive work. Then, a human team member manages the final assignment and oversight, addressing any unique needs or preferences. This hybrid model infuses efficiency without sacrificing the human touch that's essential for building long-term, successful relationships.

Ensuring quality for clients

A hybrid model can also help maintain quality by implementing routine reviews of customer service emails and reports. AI quickly flags missing information or errors, which are then sent to a human agent for final approval and guarantee that the work is in line with the brand and tone.

Review employee performance

AI is a fundamental tool in reviewing employee performance. In fact, we even use AI in our business for this exact purpose. AI tools can track activity and help measure performance across the board, saving managers time and giving them access to crucial information to offer better feedback.

Five key steps you can take to implement AI in your business

If it sounds like a hybrid model is right for your business, here are five key implementation steps:

1. Assess your current processes

The first step is to examine existing workflows. Which tasks are repetitive or prone to human error? Common examples would be manual data entry, responding to basic customer questions, and appointment scheduling.

- **Customer support automation**: AI chatbots can manage FAQs, initial inquiries and basic troubleshooting, freeing up human agents for complex customer issues.
- **Data analysis**: AI tools can sift through large datasets to generate reports and highlight key trends, replacing manual data collection and analysis.
- **HR recruitment processes**: AI tools can scan resumes,

shortlist candidates and schedule interviews, reducing the workload for HR teams.

- **Document processing**: AI-powered tools can automate the extraction of key data from documents, such as invoices, contracts and forms, significantly reducing the manual work involved.
- **Customer feedback analysis**: AI can scan and categorize feedback from multiple sources, such as social media, surveys and reviews, to identify trends and insights quickly.
- **IT helpdesk support**: Implement AI tools that can handle basic IT support tickets, diagnose common issues, and guide users through troubleshooting steps before escalating to human techs.
- **Inventory management**: AI can automate stock tracking and reorder processes based on predictive analytics, helping maintain optimal inventory levels.

These tasks are often good candidates for AI or automation. A McKinsey study found that about45% of paid activities can be automated using current technologies, which represents up to $2 trillion in annual wages.

2. Choose the right tools

Next, you want to choose the right AI and automation tools and resources. Look for solutions that play well with your current systems and can grow with you. For example, you want to find resources that offer user-friendliness, good support and customization options.

If you’re unsure which tools are best for your business, start exploring and reviewing reputable websites for insights. Alternatively, you might consider hiring a consulting firm or agency to help match you with the right tools or even customize an AI-based solution tailored to your specific business needs.

3. Retrain your team

Integrating AI and automation sounds great in theory, but if you never train your team, you will see little to no success. Your staff needs to be ready to work alongside AI. Focus on training that builds skills AI can't easily replicate, like critical thinking and creative problem-solving. At the same time, offer training on the processes that are changing and how employees can use the tools to make their daily lives easier.

Implementing robust training is a big task, as the World Economic Forum suggestshalf of all employees will need reskilling by 2025 due to new technology. To address this challenge, the World Economic Forum's Reskilling Revolution platform aims to reach more than600 million people around the world by 2030. Similarly, the resources you invest in will also offer some type of training for your team.

Consider utilizing a third-party Learning Management System (LMS) to automate and streamline your training process, making it more efficient and scalable. Platforms like LinkedIn Learning and Coursera offer a wide variety of pre-made templates and courses that cover essential topics.

Related: AI for the Underdog – Here's How Small Businesses Can Thrive With Artificial Intelligence

4. Start small and iterate

Don't try to change everything at once. Have you ever heard of information overload? Throwing too much information at your team can result in low productivity and heightened stress. Pick one department or process to start with. This lets you learn and adjust before going all-in.

Let's say you want to automate your customer service function. Instead of completely overhauling all processes, start with

one channel, such as email. As your team masters this function, add social media or phone services. Companies that scale up from pilot projects see much better returns on their AI investments.

5. Keep communication open

Help your team see AI as a helpful tool, not a threat. Be transparent about how AI will change their work, focusing on how it frees them up for more interesting tasks. It’s also important to reiterate that AI and automation are not replacing them. Instead, it’s a tool to help them succeed in their current roles.

Moving forward with the hybrid model

Applying a hybrid model means forming a partnership between people and technology. When executed correctly, it allows businesses to innovate and make meaningful connections with their customers.

The marriage of AI and humans naturally pushes both parties to work at their optimal level, that is, making AI do what it does best while letting humans take on the “big picture” work. This is how companies create a future where both machines and people can effectively coexist.

It’s helpful to revisit Sydney J. Harris’s words from earlier. The risk isn’t that computers will think like humans but that humans might lose their unique qualities as we automate more processes. A thoughtful hybrid model can help us avoid this outcome while still keeping up with today’s trends.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/growing-a-business/5-powerful-ways-to-streamline-your-work-processes-with-ai/480083