Is my business ready for AI? A 10-question check for founders and owners

Is your business ready for AI? Answer ten yes or no questions across strategy, risk, data, tools, people and process, and see what to fix first.

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In brief

Your business is ready for AI when you know which number it should move, someone senior owns the result, risks are checked before anything reaches a customer, the data is usable, your tools can connect to it and the work is written down. This ten-question check gives founders and owners a straight answer in five minutes, and shows what to fix first when the answer is not yet.

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Your business is ready for AI when six things are true: you know which number AI should move, someone senior owns that result, risks are checked before anything reaches a customer, the data is usable without fixing it by hand, your tools can connect to it, and the work is written down. Answer the ten questions below. Eight or more yes answers means you are ready to run a first project. Fewer than five means not yet, and the no answers tell you what to fix first.

This check is for founders, owners and CEOs who keep hearing that they should “do something with AI” and want a straight answer before spending money. It takes about five minutes and needs no technical knowledge. It is the short version of the Armstrat AI Readiness Assessment, which scores the same six areas in more depth.

01

The 10-question check

Answer each question yes or no for your business as it is today, not as it will be after the next hire or the next system.

#	Question	Area
1	Can you name the one business number AI should move this year, such as cost to serve, cycle time or margin?	Strategy
2	Has one senior person agreed, by name, to own that result?	Strategy
3	Is there a budget and a date for judging whether it worked?	Strategy
4	Would someone check what an AI tool produces before it reaches a customer?	Risk
5	Do you know which AI tools your team already uses, and what data goes into them?	Risk
6	Could you trust the data the project needs without someone fixing it by hand first?	Data
7	Can the people who need that data get it in hours rather than weeks?	Data
8	Does the work already run in software that other tools can connect to?	Tools
9	Has anyone on your team put new software or automation into daily use before?	People
10	Is the work you want AI to do written down, step by step, somewhere other than one person's head?	Real use

02

How to read your answers

Count your yes answers, then look at where the no answers sit.

- **8 to 10 yes: ready to run a first project.** Pick one piece of work, agree the number it should move, and give it a quarter. The no answers you have left are what to watch during the project.
- **5 to 7 yes: ready in parts.** Choose a first project that avoids your weakest area. If your data is the problem, start with work that uses data you already trust, such as drafting from documents, rather than forecasting.
- **0 to 4 yes: not yet.** This is a useful answer. Spending on AI now would mostly pay for discovering the gaps this check has already found. Fix the foundations first; most of them cost little more than time and a decision.

The count matters less than where the no answers fall. One no in data or risk can stop a project that scores well everywhere else, because nobody will put an AI tool in front of customers on data they do not trust. In the full assessment, the weakest area is always where the report starts.

03

What each question is really testing

Questions 1 to 3, strategy. AI projects that start from a tool ("we should try a chatbot") rarely survive their first budget review. Projects that start from a number ("first-response time is too slow and it costs us renewals") have a reason to exist and a way to be judged. The owner matters as much as the number: when a pilot has no senior owner, nobody makes the hard calls when it needs data, time or a process change.

Questions 4 and 5, risk. Most businesses already use AI, through staff using chat tools on their own. That is not a problem in itself, but you should know what data goes into those tools and who checks the output before it reaches a customer or a contract. One review step before anything ships prevents most of the incidents that end AI programs early.

Questions 6 and 7, data. AI does what it is given. If a report has to be fixed by hand every month, an AI tool built on that data will be wrong in the same places, faster. Usable does not mean perfect: it means someone can say where the data comes from and trusts it enough to act on it.

Question 8, tools. Work that lives in spreadsheets passed by email is hard to automate. Work that runs in an accounting system, a CRM or a ticketing tool usually has a way in. You do not need a new platform to start; you need to know where the work runs today.

Question 9, people. A team that has rolled out software before knows how to change a process, train people and stop the old way. A team that has not will need more help and more time, which is fine as long as the plan allows for it.

Question 10, the work itself. If the steps live only in one person's head, AI cannot learn them and nobody can check whether it is doing them right. Writing the work down is often the most valuable step in the whole project, with or without AI. Our guide to writing down operating knowledge before AI covers how to do it in a few weeks.

04

Signs you are more ready than you think

Owners often underrate their own readiness. These are good signs, even in a small business:

- You already track a handful of numbers weekly and people act on them.
- Your best people have documented how they handle the common cases.

- One or two tools hold most of your customer and order data.
- Staff are already using AI tools on their own and finding them useful.
- You have changed a core process in the last two years and it stuck.

05

Where we say no

There are things we tell founders not to do, even when they ask.

We say no to buying an AI tool before you have named the number it should move and the person who owns it. Without both, the tool becomes a subscription nobody cancels and nobody uses.

We say no to running five pilots at once. In our work, the businesses that get value from AI cut their pilot list hard and fund the one or two with an owner and a target. The rest stall, and they take attention with them.

We say no to cutting roles before AI has carried the work through a full cycle. If you are considering it, read when to cut a role for AI, and when not to first.

And sometimes we say no to AI altogether, for now. If most of your answers above are no, the honest advice is to fix the foundations and come back in a quarter. Our article on when AI is not the answer lists the five signals we look for.

06

What to do next

1. Take the ten questions to your leadership team and answer them together. Disagreement is useful: it shows where people see the business differently.
2. Fix the cheapest no answers first. Naming an owner, setting a review step and writing down one process take days, not months.
3. Take the full AI Readiness Assessment for a score in each of the six areas, the one thing to fix first and a twelve-month plan. It takes about ten minutes.
4. If you want to see how the scoring works before you start, read the methodology.

07

Frequently asked questions

Is my business ready for AI?

Your business is ready for a first AI project if you can name the number it should move, one senior person owns the result, someone checks output before it reaches customers, the data is usable without fixing it by hand, and the work is written down. If you answer yes to at least eight of the ten questions in this check, you are ready to start.

How do I know if my company is ready for AI?

Check six areas: strategy, risk, data, tools, people and whether the work is documented. A short self-check like the ten questions above gives a quick answer. The Armstrat AI Readiness Assessment scores the same six areas out of 100 in about ten minutes and names the weakest one, which is usually what to fix first.

What does a small business need before using AI?

A clear reason, an owner and usable data. A small business does not need a data team or a new platform. It needs one piece of work worth improving, a person accountable for the result, a simple review step before anything reaches a customer, and data that someone trusts. Many small businesses can meet these within a month.

How long does it take to get ready for AI?

For most businesses, the basic foundations take weeks rather than months: naming an owner, agreeing the target number, adding a review step and writing down the work. Data problems take longer, often a quarter or two, depending on how many systems hold the data and how much has to be cleaned up.

Do I need a data team before using AI?

No. Many useful first projects, such as drafting, summarising or answering questions from your own documents, need no data team at all. You need a data team when the project depends on combining data from several systems, such as forecasting or pricing. Start with work that uses data you already trust.

Is there a free AI readiness assessment?

Yes. The Armstrat AI Readiness Assessment is free and takes about ten minutes. It asks 24 questions across six areas and returns a score out of 100 for each, the one thing to fix first, five moves in order and a board-ready PDF. There is no sales call.

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Abdullah leads delivery at Armstrat. He works inside client teams, owns the build, and stays until what Armstrat shipped runs without it in the room. His work spans the operating systems, decision flows and AI integration that turn a plan into something a team can actually run.

About Armstrat

Armstrat is a Business Transformation Office (BTO™). A partner leads every engagement, and forward-deployed engineers (FDEs) work inside your business across five capabilities: business transformation; operations and supply chain; people and organization; growth, marketing and sales; and AI and intelligent automation.

Engagements are a base fee plus a contingency paid on results, not on documents. We use AI only where it earns its place, and we say not yet when a business is not ready for it.

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