The AI Playbook for Australia and New Zealand Small Businesses

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) has already taken over industries worldwide. However, for Australia and New Zealand (ANZ) small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs), the journey towards AI adoption comes with its unique set of challenges and opportunities.

ANZ SMBs usually face resource constraints, limited access to technology expertise, and varying levels of digital maturity. These factors can get in the way of embracing AI-driven solutions effectively. Concerns around trusted data, regulatory compliance, and the need for upskilling existing talent can further complicate the adoption of AI.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of AI for ANZ SMBs are immense. AI-powered tools and technologies can streamline operations, enhance decision-making processes, personalise customer experiences, and drive overall business growth. They can even help SMBs gain a competitive edge, expand their market reach, and tap into new sources of revenue in both domestic and international markets.

Why is an AI roadmap essential for ANZ SMB success?

Generative AI could add $200 billion a year to the Australian economy and create an additional 150,000 jobs from 2023-2030. This potential presents several advantages for ANZ SMBs looking to capitalise on the AI wave:

Advantage AI: ANZ SMBs

Efficiency: Automate repetitive tasks, such as data entry, scheduling, and customer support, allowing employees to focus on higher-value activities.

Cost savings: Reduce labour costs and improve productivity, ultimately saving money in the long run.

Data analysis: Process large volumes of data quickly and accurately, providing valuable insights and enabling informed decisions.

Personalisation: Analyse customer behaviour and preferences to deliver personalised experiences, improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Competitive advantage: Gain a competitive edge by enhancing operational efficiency, improving customer service, and enabling innovation.

24/7 availability: Use AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants to provide round-the-clock customer support, engaging with customers at any time, even outside regular working hours.

Scalability: Scale AI systems up or down easily to meet changing business needs, making them adaptable for growth or fluctuations in demand.

Fraud detection: Detect patterns and anomalies in financial transactions to identify and prevent fraudulent activities more effectively.

Enhanced marketing: Analyse customer data to create targeted marketing campaigns, improving the effectiveness of advertising efforts and increasing return on investment (ROI).

Improved productivity: Streamline workflows, automate repetitive tasks, and provide real-time insights, leading to increased productivity and faster decision-making processes.

Risk management: Assess risks by analysing data and identifying potential threats or opportunities to improve resiliency.

Employee training: Provide personalised training and development opportunities for employees, enhancing their skills and knowledge.

AI-driven industry makeover: Reshaping operations across sectors

AI use cases are not only limited to a few industries. Its versatility extends to various sectors, offering SMBs opportunities to innovate, streamline operations, and deliver enhanced experiences to their customers.

AI in action: Real-world applications

Financial Services

- Improve fraud detection
- Assess risks accurately
- Provide personalised financial advice

Healthcare & Life Sciences

- Improve patient care
- Accelerate drug discovery
- Personalise treatment plans

Retail

- Personalise customer experiences
- Optimise inventory management
- Implement predictive pricing strategies

Consumer Goods

- Personalise marketing strategies
- Streamline supply chain management
- Optimise demand forecasting

Government

- Enhance citizen services
- Leverage data analytics for informed decision-making
- Optimise public sector operations

Automotive

- Enhance manufacturing processes
- Improve predictive maintenance
- Develop autonomous vehicles

Education

- Personalise learning experiences
- Automate administrative tasks
- Provide data-driven insights for educators

Manufacturing

- Optimise production processes
- Enable predictive maintenance
- Enhance quality control

Media

- Enhance content creation
- Predict audience behaviour
- Optimise content distribution strategies

Non-profit

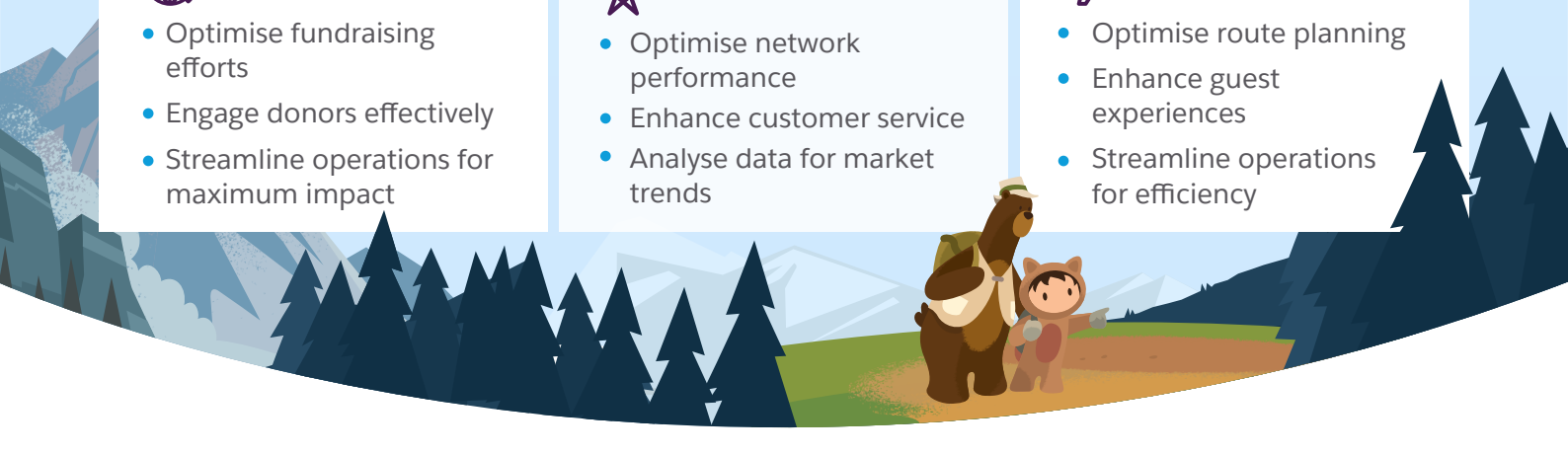
- Optimise fundraising efforts
- Engage donors effectively
- Streamline operations for maximum impact

Communications

- Optimise network performance
- Enhance customer service
- Analyse data for market trends

Travel & Hospitality

- Optimise route planning
- Enhance guest experiences
- Streamline operations for efficiency



The SMB imperative: Applying AI intelligently

While 92% of IT leaders believe generative AI will play a big role at their organisations, 4 in 5 people still want to learn more about how to use AI in their roles – pointing to a gap between business excitement and employee readiness for AI. That's one reason why it's important for SMBs to have a tailored AI roadmap that meets their specific needs and capabilities.

The advantages of an AI roadmap

Strategic planning
- Define clear objectives
- Identify key stakeholders
- Outline steps for success

Risk management
- Assess and mitigate risks like data security and regulatory compliance
- Minimise disruptions and build trust

Agility and adaptability
- Plan for continuous evaluation and scalability
- Adapt quickly to market changes and emerging technologies

Customer-centricity
- Focus on AI applications that enhance customer experiences
- Build loyalty and attract new customers through value creation

Resource allocation
- Allocate budget, talent, and infrastructure effectively
- Prioritise projects based on impact and feasibility

Competitive edge
- Maximise operational efficiency and personalised experiences
- Attract and retain customers in competitive markets

Cross-functional collaboration
- Collaborate across departments like IT, marketing, and sales
- Foster knowledge sharing and alignment of goals

Measurement and optimisation
- Use KPIs and metrics to track impact on business outcomes
- Identify areas for improvement and optimise for efficiency

Building blocks of an AI roadmap for your business

AI offers several opportunities for businesses, but effective implementation requires the right strategy. Here's a detailed guide on understanding the foundations and developing one for enterprises:

1. Evaluate existing capabilities and infrastructure

Before starting your AI journey, it's crucial to assess your organisation's existing capabilities and infrastructure related to data, technology, talent, and processes. Conduct a thorough evaluation to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) about AI adoption. Key areas to assess include:

- **Data readiness:** Evaluate the quality, quantity, diversity, and accessibility of your data sources
- **Technology stack:** Assess the suitability of your current IT infrastructure, AI tools, and platforms
- **Talent and skills:** Identify gaps in AI expertise and assess the readiness of your workforce for AI
- **Processes and workflows:** Evaluate existing business systems to identify areas where AI can add value

2. Set clear objectives aligned with AI implementation

Define specific objectives that align with your organisation's strategic goals and vision for AI implementation. These objectives should be:

- **Specific:** Clearly define the desired outcomes and objectives of your AI initiatives
- **Achievable:** Ensure that your objectives are realistic as per the available resources and timeframe
- **Time-bound:** Set deadlines and milestones to create a sense of urgency and accountability
- **Measurable:** Establish metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to track and measure progress
- **Relevant:** Align your AI objectives with your organisation's overall mission, values, and priorities

3. Engage leadership and cross-functional teams

Gain support and commitment from senior leadership to ensure the success of your AI strategy. Establish cross-functional teams comprising:

- **IT:** Technical experts responsible for managing infrastructure and data systems
- **Data science:** Specialists in data analysis, machine learning (ML), and AI algorithm development
- **Business operations:** Stakeholders from different business units who will define use cases
- **Compliance and legal:** Experts responsible for ensuring regulatory compliance and ethical AI deployment

Foster collaboration and communication among these teams to ensure alignment and coherence in AI strategy execution. Effectively communicate the benefits and vision of AI integration to stakeholders at all levels of the organisation. Highlight how AI can **drive innovation, enhance decision-making, improve customer experiences, and create competitive advantages.** And use clear and compelling messaging to build buy-in, address concerns, and inspire enthusiasm for AI adoption.

4. Prioritise based on business impact and feasibility

Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to assess the return on investment (ROI) of different AI projects and prioritise those with the highest impact and lowest implementation barriers. Consider factors such as:

- **Strategic alignment:** How closely does the AI initiative align with organisational goals and market needs?
- **Time-to-value:** Can the AI initiative deliver tangible results within a reasonable timeframe?
- **Resource availability:** Is there necessary talent, technology, and budget to execute the AI project?

5. Align with organisational goals and market needs

Ensure that your AI roadmap is aligned with both your organisation's strategic goals and the evolving needs of your targeted market. Here's how you can do it:

- Collaborate with stakeholders to understand strategic objectives
- Stay updated on industry trends and best practices
- Ensure regulatory compliance and ethical considerations
- Conduct market research to identify customer needs and trends
- Gather customer feedback for continuous improvement
- Analyse competitors to differentiate and stay competitive

6. Ensure data quality, accessibility, and security

Data is the fuel that powers AI, so it's essential to ensure data quality, accessibility, and security throughout the AI lifecycle. Almost 79% of desk workers report a lack of clear policies regarding generative AI use at work. Around six out of ten want it to be more secure.

To overcome this, you must have:

Robust data quality assurance processes:

- Use data validation techniques to ensure accuracy, consistency, and completeness of data
- Conduct regular data audits and checks to identify and rectify any errors or inconsistencies
- Implement data profiling tools to understand data quality issues and patterns
- Set up data cleansing procedures to remove duplicate or irrelevant data

Comprehensive data governance frameworks:

- Define clear roles and responsibilities for data management within the organisation
- Develop policies and procedures for data collection, storage, and usage
- Implement data classification and categorisation standards to ensure data is handled appropriately
- Create data access controls and permissions to restrict unauthorised access to sensitive information

Advanced encryption techniques and stringent access controls:

- Encrypt data at rest and in transit to protect it from unauthorised access or breaches
- Implement multi-factor authentication (MFA) to add an extra layer of security for accessing data
- Use secure protocols and technologies for data transfer and communication
- Regularly update security measures and patches to mitigate potential vulnerabilities

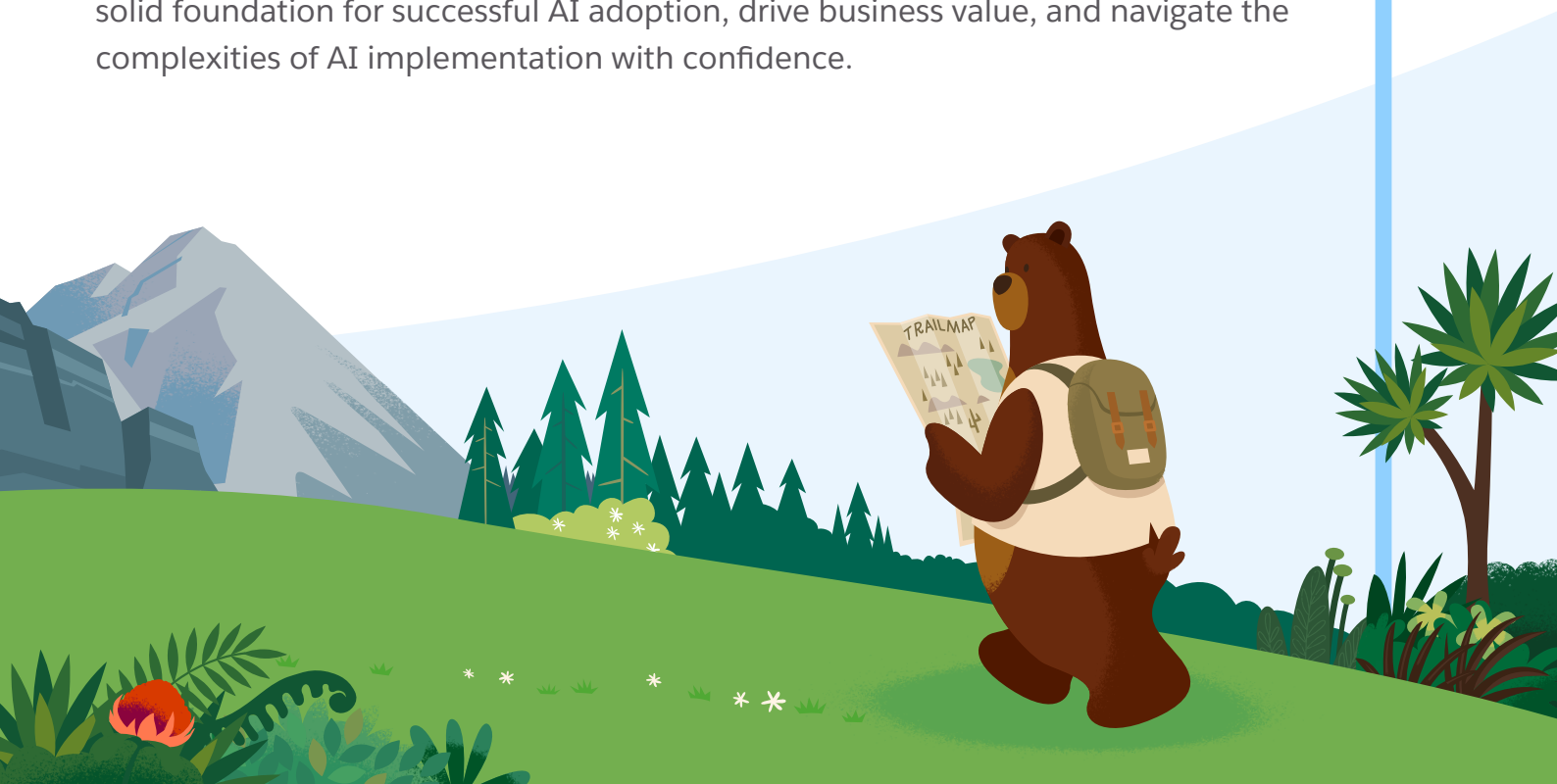
Culture of data stewardship and accountability

- Educate employees about the importance of data quality, security, and ethical data usage
- Encourage data stewardship practices such as data ownership, documentation, and lineage tracking
- Establish accountability mechanisms to ensure compliance with data policies and regulations
- Promote transparency in data handling processes and encourage reporting of data-related issues

High standards of data integrity:

- Adhere to legal and regulatory requirements governing data privacy and protection
- Conduct regular data ethics assessments to evaluate the potential impact of AI algorithms
- Implement data masking techniques to protect individual privacy
- Engage in responsible AI practices by considering fairness, transparency, and accountability

By incorporating these building blocks into your AI roadmap strategy, you will lay a solid foundation for successful AI adoption, drive business value, and navigate the complexities of AI implementation with confidence.



Strategies to implement, integrate, and optimise AI

A key aspect of any AI roadmap is the establishment of a strategic framework that can facilitate capability building, implementation, and integration.
This requires organisations to:

1
Check if chosen AI platforms can grow, fit in, and be affordable before using it

2
Get the right setup to support AI systems, like using cloud services for less cost

3
Find and fix any skill gaps by hiring or training people for AI jobs

4
Ensure regular training on latest AI trends for all employees

5
Assess and fix any problems in AI systems quickly

6
Make sure AI fits smoothly with what you already use

7
Test and learn to ensure AI tools fit your business needs

Ethical AI framework: Managing risks and fostering continuous innovation

Nearly 58% of people believe the rise in AI and automation has increased the importance of their ethical considerations. When building an AI roadmap, it's therefore crucial to incorporate ethical considerations, robust risk management strategies, and a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. Addressing these aspects ensures that AI development and deployment aligns with societal values, minimises potential harm, and maximises benefits.

Here's how to integrate these elements effectively:

Address bias, privacy, and cybersecurity

- Detect and fix biases in AI models with diverse teams
- Protect privacy using encryption and access controls
- Strengthen cybersecurity with regular audits and protocols

Follow data protection laws and ethical guidelines

- Comply with data laws and get consent for data use
- Follow ethical frameworks like IEEE and ACM guidelines.

Improve AI performance and scalability

- Refine AI models for better accuracy and efficiency
- Design scalable AI solutions for real-world challenges

Foster creativity, collaboration, and learning

- Encourage innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration
- Invest in employee training and engage with AI communities

Small Business Trailblazer PaySauce takes the leap to experiment with AI

PaySauce is a New Zealand-listed B2B start-up that strives to make payroll simple and easy for small businesses. Now, they are breaking into AI capabilities to further enhance their customer service and support.

PaySauce has begun developing AI capabilities to help augment their employees' technical knowledge, ensuring customers are provided with effective and efficient support. Serving a diverse range of small business industries, the Support Team was previously constrained by each employee's own area of expertise and learned knowledge to answer customer queries. Mathew Stokes, Chief Operating Officer of PaySauce, was intrigued by the ways AI could improve PaySauce's business. Stokes started experimenting with AI and realised it would allow employees to broaden their capabilities by leveraging a centralised company-wide knowledge base.

PaySauce implemented an internal chatbot, powered by Einstein 1 Service, to assist with framing cross industry RFPs, research, and customer responses. Now, they don't have to rely on industry specialists; rather any employee can feel confident tackling any query by using the chatbot's AI abilities to shape answers and respond to customers in a timely manner. By introducing AI internally first, it allows the team to "fact check" the responses before communicating back to the customer – maintaining their values of prioritising the customer experience.

Tips for getting started with AI:

Start every AI project as a data project. Stokes shared that the amount of work they put into refining their data and knowledge was as much of an investment as implementing AI.

Be proactive with AI experimentation. PaySauce established a strong knowledge base and KPIs for future data to adhere to – you don't want to start late AND not have your data ready.

Experiment with AI internally first. This allows employees to adjust while also protecting customers from a negative experience.

While they are still in the beginning stages of their experimentation with AI, PaySauce leaders are enthusiastic. In fact, they are already identifying areas to further explore utilising AI.

Read more about PaySauce's digital transformation

Driving AI-enabled digital transformation with experts

AI frameworks are vital for modern digital operations. Strategic partnerships are essential for enterprises looking to benefit from these frameworks for efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness. ANZ SMBs can also simplify their business challenges and seize AI opportunities by partnering with solutions providers offering innovative tools and a robust technology ecosystem. These partnerships provide expertise, tailored solutions, guidance on AI implementation, data management, training, scalability, and risk management. They also support legacy infrastructure compatibility, data analytics, and compliance, making them indispensable for organisations.

Salesforce's AI-powered CRM solutions for small businesses are designed to drive efficiency, productivity, and growth across various industries. Using them, organisations can automate routine tasks, personalise customer interactions, forecast trends, and optimise resource allocation. This not only improves operational efficiency but helps deliver superior customer experiences and gain a competitive edge in the market. Salesforce Einstein 1, for instance is an AI-driven solution that allows SMBs to leverage our AI in their customer data and create customisable, predictive, and generative AI experiences. Einstein 1 brings conversational AI that can fit all your business needs, and can be brought to any workflow, user department, and industry.

Ready to harness the power of AI for your business?

Try our Starter Suite and begin your Salesforce journey.
To know more about our offerings, you can also book a demo or
contact our experts for customised support.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