

M LOCAL BUSINESS MARKETING

The Marketing Guide for Local Business Owners

November 2025

Leading in the Age of AI

**Positioning
Your Business
for 2026:**
Stay ahead by
planning your
brand's future
now



**Culture Over
Paychecks:**
Why great culture
wins teams and
drives success

**A Fresh Look at
Your Company:**
Small changes.
Big growth
Opportunities.

**Building
Trust
Through
Marketing:**
Turn credibility into
customer loyalty

Infographic:
AI Adoption
Over the Years

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Welcome to the November Issue!

As the year winds down, it's the perfect moment to step back, reflect, and plan ahead with purpose. This month, we're leaning into bold thinking, smart strategy, and the evolving role of technology in small business success.

Here's what you'll find inside:

- Leading in the Age of AI – Practical ways to embrace AI without losing your personal touch.
- Culture Over Paychecks – Why building a strong workplace culture is the real secret to retention.
- Positioning Your Business for 2026 – Start planning today to stay ahead tomorrow.
- A Fresh Look at Your Company – Small internal shifts that can drive big results
- Building Trust Through Marketing – Create credibility that earns long-term customer loyalty.

Whether you're wrapping up the year or already mapping out what's next, this issue is here to support your growth journey.

Thanks for reading, and don't forget to share it with a fellow business owner who's ready to lead boldly into the future.

Don Franklin
Founding Partner

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Marketing Calendar

Plan your marketing messages around these upcoming holidays and proclamations.

November

National Diabetes Awareness Month
Native American Heritage Month
National Family Caregivers Month
Lung Cancer Awareness Month
Men's Health Awareness Month

November 11 - Veteran's Day
November 27 - Thanksgiving
November 28 - Black Friday
November 29 - Small Business Saturday

1st – All Saints' Day
1st – World Vegan Day
1st – Author's Day
2nd – All Souls' Day
2nd – Daylight Saving Time Ends
3rd – Sandwich Day
4th – Candy Day
4th – Day of Community Service
5th – American Football Day
6th – Basketball Day

5th – Stress Awareness Day (First Wednesday)
6th – International Stout Day (First Thursday)
7th – Cancer Awareness Day
7th – International Merlot Day
10th – Marine Corps Birthday
10th – World Science Day
11th – Sundae Day
13th – World Kindness Day
14th – Pickle Day
14th – World Diabetes Day
15th – Recycling Day
16th – Fast Food Day
17th – Hiking Day
18th – Apple Cider Day
18th – Mickey Mouse's Birthday
18th – Entrepreneurship Day
22nd – Adoption Day
23rd – Espresso Day
26th – Cake Day
28th – French Toast Day
30th – Computer Security Day

December

Universal Human Rights Month
National Impaired Driving Prevention Month
Seasonal Depression Awareness Month
Safe Toys and Gifts Month

December 25 – Christmas Day
December 31 – New Year's Eve
December 7 – National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
December 24 – Christmas Eve
December 26 – Kwanzaa Begins

11st – World AIDS Day
2nd – National Mutt Day
3rd – International Day of Persons with Disabilities
4th – National Cookie Day
5th – International Volunteer Day
6th – St. Nicholas Day
7th – National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
8th – Pretend to Be a Time Traveler Day
9th – Christmas Card Day

10th – Human Rights Day
11th – International Mountain Day
12th – Gingerbread House Day
12th - Pulled Pork Day
13th – National Cocoa Day
14th – Monkey Day
15th – Bill of Rights Day
16th – Chocolate Covered Anything Day
17th – Wright Brothers Day
18th – Answer the Telephone Like Buddy the Elf Day
20th – Go Caroling Day
21st – Winter Solstice
21st – Crossword Puzzle Day
24th – Christmas Eve
25th – Christmas Day
26th – Kwanzaa Begins
27th – National Fruitcake Day
28th – Card Playing Day
30th – Bacon Day
31st – New Year's Eve

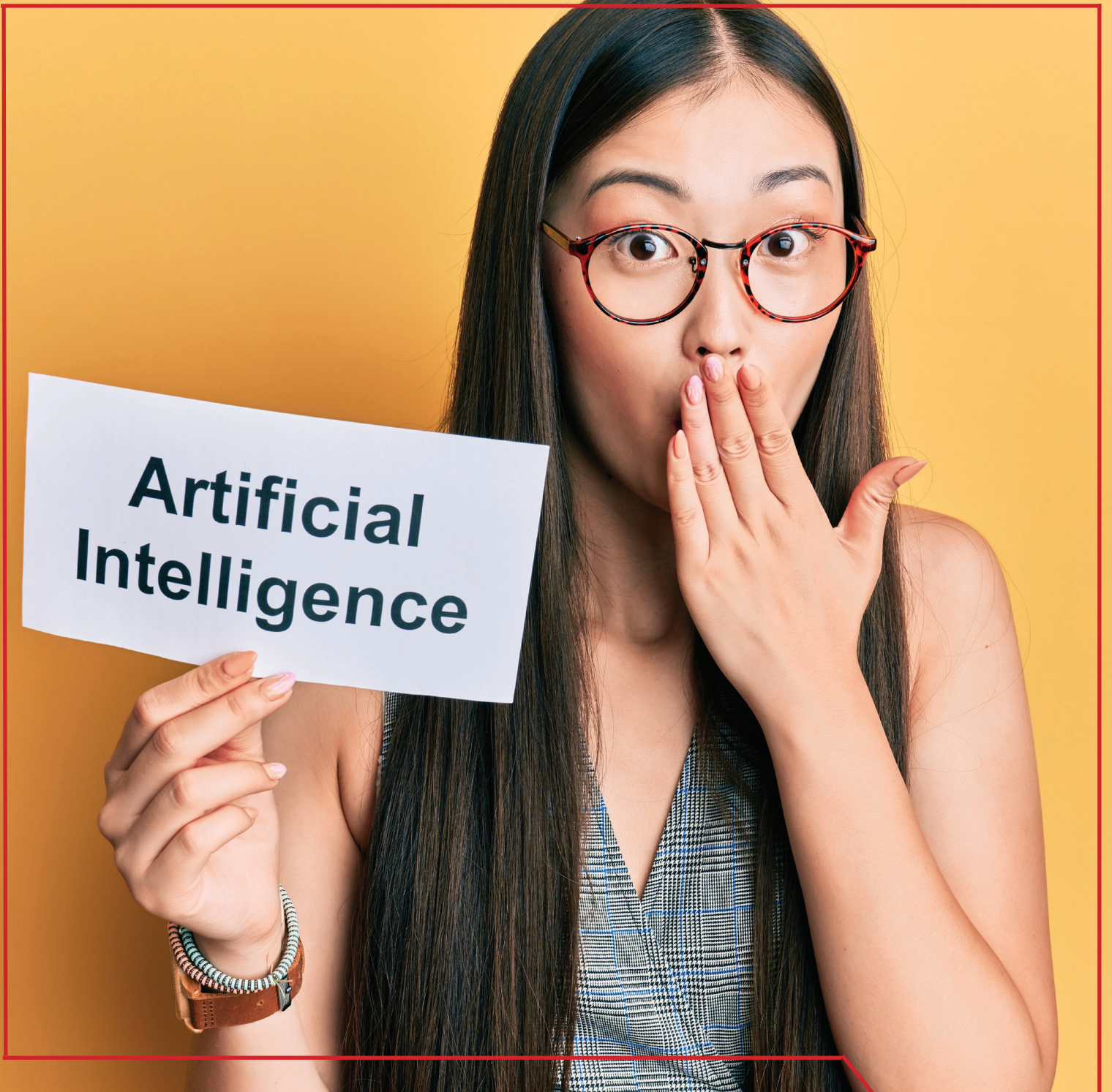


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Leading in the Age of AI: What Small Business Owners Need to Know

For a small business owner, stepping into the age of artificial intelligence (AI) can feel like navigating uncharted waters. Yet, as business leaders and marketing professionals helping clients (just like you and I do), we know that staying ahead isn't optional, it's essential. Let's walk through what leading in the AI era really means for small business owners, unpacking the why, the how, and the "what's next," with practical insights you can apply today.

1. Recognizing the AI Moment:

We are no longer on the fringes of AI experimentation, this is mainstream territory. According to a recent survey by McKinsey & Company, 88 % of organizations now report regular AI usage in at least one business function. (McKinsey & Company) While many are still in the pilot stage, the tide has shifted: adoption is accelerating. For small business owners, this means AI isn't just for the tech giants, it's a leadership imperative.

2. Why Small Businesses Should Care:

You might think: "Is AI really for a local shop, a boutique firm, or a service-business like the ones we support?" The answer is yes, because the competitive playing field is shifting. The U.S. Small Business Administration reports that 53 % of small businesses are already using AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants for customer service. (Small Business Administration) That means customer expectations are evolving, and businesses that ignore AI risk being outpaced.

3. Setting the Leadership Mindset:

To lead in the age of AI is less about handing off work to a machine and more about rethinking leadership roles. Leaders must become vision-holders for AI integration, culture-builders who help teams embrace change, and strategic thinkers

who use data and automation to elevate the business. The most effective leaders treat AI as a co-pilot, not a replacement.

4. Crafting Your AI Strategy:

As we guide small businesses, we emphasize that an AI strategy isn't simply "buy this tool and plug it in." According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), companies that integrate AI into their core business strategy will pull ahead. (PwC) Here's how to start: identify key business pain points (e.g., manual customer-service tasks), set objectives (e.g., reduce response time by 30 %), assess tools and budget, and lay out governance (how you'll monitor, adjust, validate outputs).

5. Automating Smart, Not For Its Own Sake:

Automation is seductive but risky when used without intention. We advise small business owners to focus on high-value, repeatable processes, such as appointment scheduling, basic customer queries, inventory alerts, that free up human time for creative work, relationship building, and growth. Small efforts can deliver outsized impact.

6. Investing in Talent and Culture:

Even when budgets are lean, leadership in an AI era means investing in people and process. The McKinsey survey found that high-

performing firms were three times more likely than others to have senior leaders who "strongly own" AI initiatives. (McKinsey & Company) For small businesses, that means you or your key controller must champion AI, set the tone, provide training or resources, and encourage experimentation.

7. Data Is Your New Currency:

AI thrives on data; without it, algorithms stumble. As small business owners, we must frame data collection, hygiene, and insight-generation as strategic tasks. Whether it's customer behavior at a retail store, service-delivery times, or digital engagement metrics, the data informs how AI can help. If you don't track it, you can't automate or improve it.

8. Ethical, Responsible AI Matters:

Leadership in the age of AI includes being aware of risk: bias, accuracy, transparency, and ethical issues. While small businesses may not have the same resources as large enterprises, they still must ask: How will the AI tool handle personal data? Who validates the output? Is there a fallback if the system's wrong? Good leadership means embedding oversight and human judgment.

9. Real-World Use Cases for Small Businesses:

Let's make it concrete. A local service business might deploy

an AI-enabled chatbot to handle appointment requests after hours. An e-commerce boutique might use AI to analyze purchase patterns and suggest personalized offers. A marketing agency (yes, like yours!) might use AI tools to generate drafts of content, freeing human writers for ideation and strategy. These are not futuristic, they're actionable now.

10. Measuring Impact and Adjusting: We often see small business owners deploy AI tools and then forget to measure. That's leadership misapplied. Key performance indicators (KPIs) matter: What's the change in response time? What's the uplift in conversions? What cost savings are realized? Regularly reviewing outcomes ensures the AI investment drives value, and enables course corrections when it doesn't.

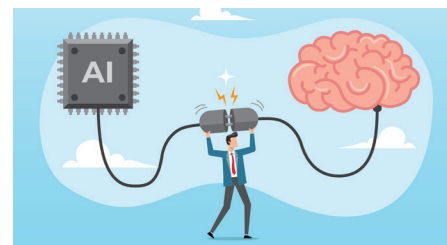
11. Integrating AI into the Customer Experience: In today's marketplace, customers expect personalization, speed, and convenience. AI can power each of these. As leaders, we must map the customer journey and ask: Where does human interaction matter? Where can AI amplify our response? For example, an AI-driven FAQ responder can handle common queries, giving your sales or service team the bandwidth to tackle more complex or high-value tasks.

12. Communicating the Value to Your Team: Change can trigger resistance; we've seen it. Leadership means bringing your team on the journey, not simply "here's the AI tool," but "here's how it helps us work smarter, serve better, achieve more." Transparent communication builds trust, helps define new roles, and ensures the AI-human partnership is seen as collaborative, not threatening.

13. Scaling Smart for Growth, when should a small business scale its AI efforts? The guiding principle: once you've automated one or two use-cases successfully, and you've measured positive impact, you replicate thoughtfully. The McKinsey survey shows while 88 % use AI in one function, only about one-third have scaled programs across functions. (McKinsey & Company) That indicates an opportunity. For small business leaders, scaling means expanding from "pilot" to workflow-wide use, but only when your foundation is solid.

14. Staying Agile in an Evolving Landscape: AI is evolving at breakneck speed. Former John Chambers (ex-CEO of Cisco Systems) warned that AI advances at five times the pace of the internet and produces three times the impact, meaning the old strategy cycle (refresh every 2-3 years) is no longer sufficient. (Business Insider)

As small business owners and leaders, we need to reassess more frequently, pivot quicker, and embed continuous learning into our culture.



15. The Future-forward Mindset: What's Next? Looking ahead, we anticipate AI becoming more accessible, more embedded in everyday business operations, and more personalized. With generative AI, virtual agents, and predictive analytics moving into small business vernacular, leadership will be about staying curious, responsive, and ethically grounded. If you lead your business by saying "How can we use AI to enable our purpose?" instead of "How can AI replace us?" you'll be far ahead of peers.

As small business owners in the age of AI, we're not just adopters, we're leaders. By embracing the right mindset, investing in strategy, empowering our teams, treating data as an asset, deploying AI responsibly, and measuring impact relentlessly, we can position ourselves not just to survive, but to flourish. AI isn't a magic bullet, but with sound leadership, it becomes a powerful co-pilot on the journey toward growth. Let's lead with intention, curiosity, and confidence.

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CULTURE OVER PAYCHECKS

WHY CULTURE IS THE NEW DRIVER OF HIRING, RETENTION, AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH.

In a world where talent can work from anywhere and opportunities pop up with a single LinkedIn notification, company loyalty isn't earned with a paycheck, it's built on culture. For small business owners and leaders, the challenge isn't just attracting talent anymore; it's keeping them. And while competitive salaries matter, the truth is simple: people don't stay for money, they stay where they feel valued, seen, and inspired.

Let's unpack what makes company culture the ultimate retention strategy, and how great leaders can build environments that people don't just work in, but thrive in.

The Shift in What Employees Value

The pandemic didn't just change where people work; it changed why they work. According to a 2025 Gallup study, 71% of employees now rank "a sense of purpose" as their top reason for choosing and staying with an employer. The paycheck is the ticket in, but purpose is the reason they stay seated. As leaders, that's a wake-up call. Culture isn't a buzzword anymore, it's a business strategy.

Redefining “Culture” Beyond Perks

Ping-pong tables, free coffee, and pizza Fridays used to symbolize culture. Today, those are extras, not essence. True culture is the invisible energy that defines how people interact, how they solve problems, how they celebrate wins, and how they handle losses. It’s the feeling employees get when they log in Monday morning or walk through your door, do they feel anxious or inspired?

Leadership as the Culture Barometer

Here’s the truth: culture starts and ends with leadership. If leaders are transparent, empathetic, and consistent, employees mirror that behavior. If leaders are distant or reactive, teams crumble under uncertainty. People don’t quit companies; they quit managers who don’t model the values they preach.

Communication: The Cornerstone of Belonging

Nothing breaks trust faster than silence. Great leaders communicate early, often, and honestly. Whether it’s about a project setback or a big win, transparency fosters inclusion. Harvard Business Review notes that teams with open communication are 25% more productive and experience significantly lower turnover. When employees feel heard,

they feel invested, and investment breeds loyalty.

Building Psychological Safety

Google’s famous “Project Aristotle” found psychological safety, the belief that you can speak up without fear of punishment—is the single biggest predictor of a team’s success. Great leaders cultivate that safety by inviting ideas, celebrating failures as lessons, and never shaming mistakes. A culture where people can think out loud is one where innovation thrives.



Recognition That Feels Real

Saying “great job” in a weekly meeting isn’t enough. Recognition should be specific, timely, and genuine. When leaders call out contributions with detail, “Your quick thinking saved us two hours of client downtime”, it tells employees they’re seen, not just supervised. According to O.C. Tanner research, 79% of people who leave their jobs

cite “lack of appreciation” as a major reason.

Aligning Values with Actions

Company values are only powerful if they show up in decisions. If “work-life balance” is on your website but emails fly in at midnight, culture collapses. Leadership means living the values even when it’s inconvenient. It’s the owner who takes time off and encourages the team to do the same; the manager who admits mistakes first; the business that walks its talk.

Growth Opportunities Over Titles

Great leaders know that purpose and progress outweigh promotion. Employees stay when they’re learning, not when they’re stagnant. That might mean providing mentorship, cross-training, or paying for certifications. As LinkedIn’s 2025 Workforce Learning Report found, companies that invest in professional growth see 53% higher retention rates.

Embracing Flexibility as a Standard

Flexibility isn’t a perk anymore, it’s the new normal. Whether it’s hybrid work, adjusted hours, or autonomy in how tasks are done, flexibility signals trust. And trust is the foundation of loyalty. When leaders measure results

instead of time at a desk, employees feel empowered to do their best work without sacrificing their lives.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Diversity isn't just a checkbox it's a competitive advantage. McKinsey's research shows diverse companies are 36% more likely to outperform peers. But inclusion is the real differentiator. When employees see leaders championing every voice, celebrating individuality, not conformity, they know they belong. Belonging is culture's heartbeat.

Creating Rituals and Shared Moments

Culture lives in moments, those micro-connections that weave teams together. Whether it's a Friday gratitude circle, celebrating anniversaries, or starting meetings with personal check-ins, these rituals humanize the workplace. They remind people they're part of something bigger than themselves.

Encouraging Autonomy and Ownership

No one wants to feel like a cog in a machine. Great leaders give people ownership of their work and the freedom to solve problems creatively. It's the difference between "Here's what to do" and

"Here's the goal, how would you approach it?" Ownership breeds pride, and pride creates ambassadors who stay long after the honeymoon phase.

Transparency in Pay and Pathways

Ironically, even though this article is about culture over paychecks, transparency around pay is part of culture. People leave when compensation feels mysterious or unfair. Great leaders share the logic behind pay structures and growth paths. Transparency breeds fairness, and fairness fuels trust.

Leading with Empathy and Humanity

Empathy is leadership's superpower. It's not about being soft—it's about being human. Checking in on mental health, recognizing burnout, or giving grace during personal challenges doesn't weaken a company, it strengthens it. When employees feel like humans, not headcount, they'll move mountains for the business.

Measuring Culture Like You Measure Revenue

Culture can't be a side project. The best leaders track it with the same rigor as sales metrics, through surveys, feedback loops, and retention data. Is morale improving? Are people referring friends?

Are exit interviews revealing patterns? What gets measured gets managed, and culture deserves that same attention.

The Paycheck Still Matters, But Culture Wins the Tie

Let's be clear: people need fair pay. But when all else is equal, they'll choose the company where they feel part of something meaningful. A paycheck satisfies needs; culture satisfies purpose. Great leaders build both, ensuring that compensation supports, not substitutes, a thriving environment.

Leading By Example, Every Single Day

Ultimately, leadership is the most powerful culture builder. Your tone in meetings, your response to feedback, your willingness to listen, all of it creates the environment others live in. Culture is caught, not taught. Employees take their cue from you.

In 2026 and beyond, the greatest competitive advantage won't be technology, budgets, or brand awareness, it will be culture. Teams that feel seen and supported outperform teams that simply show up for a paycheck. The best leaders know this: culture is the currency of loyalty. When you build an environment where people are proud to belong, paychecks keep them paid, but culture keeps them home.

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Positioning Your Local Business in 2026

*Future-proofing
your brand today to
dominate tomorrow's
marketplace.*

As a local business owner, the year 2026 presents both exciting opportunities and real challenges. As marketing professionals and business-owners alike, we find ourselves at a crossroads: digital transformation is accelerating, consumer expectations are evolving, and budget constraints remain the reality for many. In this article, we'll explore how local businesses can deliberately position themselves for success in the coming year, strategically, creatively, and sustainably.

Understand the Landscape: Where We Are Today

Before we talk about where to go in 2026, we must know where we are. There are roughly 34.75 million small businesses (less than 500 employees) in the U.S., making up nearly 46 % of the workforce. (Backlinko) Many local businesses are navigating economic uncertainty: nearly half (48 %) of small-to-medium businesses say economic volatility will be somewhat or very challenging in the next year. (LocaliQ) This means that positioning for success isn't just about "doing the marketing stuff," it's about building resilience and standing out in a crowded market.

Leverage Your Local Advantage

Large corporations may have scale; you have proximity. Local businesses uniquely benefit from being embedded in their community, your neighbors know you, your market knows your location, your reputation is local. Why does that matter? Because when we think of a "local" search or query ("near me", "in town"), consumers often pick a nearby business. In digital parlance, these are micro-moments: moments when a user acts nearby. (Wikipedia) Positioning your business for 2026 means maximizing this "localness", your store, your team, your story matter.

Build a Website That Speaks "We're Legit"

In a local context, a website isn't optional, it's essential. Studies show 81 % of consumers say it's important for a business to have a branded website; 15 % say lack of a website is a deal-breaker.

(wix.com) For 2026, this means your site must not only exist, but function: mobile-friendly, quick to load, clearly tied to your physical location and services, and optimized for search (SEO). It's the digital front door to your local storefront or service offering.

Optimize for Local SEO & "Near Me" Searches

If someone is searching for "handyman in Philly" or "coffee shop near Phoenixville", your business must show up. Having your address, phone, hours, and map listing correct is foundational. According to one study, 46 % of all Google searches are local. (800.com) That means you must claim your Google Business Profile, keep your NAP (name-address-phone) consistent across directories, collect reviews, and create localized content. For 2026, think beyond just "we're here", think "we're the right choice in the neighborhood."

Embrace a Hybrid Marketing Mix

Some might assume cloud-native digital only, but local businesses still benefit from blending traditional and digital. For instance, a direct-mail flyer announcing a community event, paired with an Instagram story reminding locals, can work together. In fact, 34 % of SMBs plan to expand both traditional and digital marketing in the next

12 months. (wix.com) For 2026, the key is integration, offline awareness feeding into online and vice versa.

Invest Smartly, and Know What "Smart" Means

Budgeting for marketing can feel opaque. One rule of thumb: spending 6–9 % of revenue helps maintain position; spending 10–14 % can grow your position. (Pronto Marketing) Of course, every business is different, but the point is clear: you can't treat marketing as a vanity expense. For 2026, budget like an investor: track what you spend, measure what comes back, and be prepared to pivot. Nearly half of SMBs plan to increase their marketing budget in 2025. (LocaliQ)

Social Media for Local Businesses: It's Non-Negotiable

Yes, social media still matters, and maybe more so for local businesses than ever. About 90 % of local businesses use social media in their marketing strategy, and 78 % rely on it to drive revenue. (Synup) What does that mean for 2026? It means show up. Be authentic. Use geo-targeted ads (e.g., "Nearby users within 5 miles"), showcase real life in your community, feature local employees, and engage with comments. Social isn't just for big brands, it's for local connections.

Video & Short-Form Content: Your New Best Friend

We hear the phrase "video is king" a lot, and for good reason. By 2025, nearly 78 % of people prefer to learn about new products via short video content. (Sprout Social) For local businesses in 2026, this could mean a 60-second behind-the-scenes tour of your store, a quick "meet our team" clip, or a local event highlight. These pieces build both brand and trust, and help you stand out in the feed.

Harness Data & AI, Even If You're Small

You don't need to be a tech giant to use data. Analytics tools (like Google Analytics) are accessible and immensely helpful for local businesses. And the rise of AI-assisted marketing tools means you can personalize and automate smarter. For example, 63 % of marketers are using generative AI. (salesforce.com) For 2026, think about using tools to segment your audience, track what local content performs, set up automatic follow-ups (emails/SMS) for inquiries, and refine your approach. Data + local insight = smarter decisions.

Reputation & Reviews: Your Social Proof Engine

In a local context, reputation drives foot traffic. When your business shows up online,

customers will check reviews. A positive experience on social media, for instance, can lead 63 % of consumers to plan a visit. (Synup) Encourage reviews, respond to feedback (even the negative!), and use them as testimonials in your marketing. For 2026, make reputation management part of your daily rhythm.

Community Engagement: Be More Than a Transaction

Local businesses succeed when they're part of the fabric of the community. According to consumer behavior data, 63 % of consumers say it's important for a business to support local issues and events. (wix.com) That means sponsoring a little league team, hosting an open house, participating in charity drives, or doing something that shows you're not just in the neighborhood, you're helping it thrive. That translates into loyalty and word-of-mouth.

Prepare for Evolving Consumer Behavior

Consumers are more discerning. They expect personalized and timely experiences. For example, 96 % of marketers report that personalized experiences increased sales. (Salt Creative) And 78 % of consumers prefer video-based learning about new products. So in 2026, your positioning must account for convenience, relevance, and authenticity. It's not enough

to say "We're local" — you must prove you know your customer, their pain points, and how you solve them.

Budgeting for Growth, Not Just Survival

If you want to survive, you execute daily. If you want to position for success, you plan growth. The difference is mindset. Growing your market share, differentiating your brand, and planning for future-proofing (building a digital presence, streaming live events, offering curbside service) are all growth-oriented. In an era where about 45 % of small businesses say "getting new leads/customers" will be a top challenge in 2025, (WordStream) designing for growth is non-negotiable.

Measurement & Adjustment: The Feedback Loop

We can't preach "position for success" without an emphasis on metrics. Track visits, calls, email inquiries, social engagement, and ultimately conversion to customers. What's the cost per lead? Which channel is driving the highest value? Then adjust. The local business that learns fastest wins. Build review cycles quarterly: What's working? What's not? For 2026, your agility will matter more than ever.

Future-Proofing: What's Around the Corner

Looking ahead, technologies such as voice search, connected TV advertising, and more advanced local ad targeting are on the horizon. One guide identifies voice search as one of the five key strategies for small business advertising in 2025. (The MARC Group) The businesses that begin to experiment today will be ahead tomorrow. So positioning for success in 2026 means planting seeds now, for example, optimizing for "voice queries" ("OK Google, find the best, near me"), exploring streaming ads targeted by ZIP code, and keeping a pulse on consumer tech adoption.

In sum, positioning your local business for success in 2026 is far more than a checklist, it's a mindset. We must blend the local advantage with digital savvy, integrate offline and online strategies, invest smartly, and measure consistently. The numbers tell the story: local searches dominate, consumers expect authenticity and personalization, social media and video are critical, and budgeting remains a strategic lever. By leveraging your community presence, building a strong web and social foundation, using data to refine your approach, and preparing for future trends, you set your business not just to survive—but to thrive. Let's embrace 2026 with intention, agility, and confidence.

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A Fresh Look at Your Company

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There comes a moment in every business when the familiar starts to feel a little too familiar. The same messaging. The same processes. The same “we’ve always done it this way” mindset. Over time, what once worked seamlessly can start to lose momentum. Markets evolve, technology advances, customers shift, and suddenly, your business is running on yesterday’s strategy.

Refreshing your company isn’t about starting over, it’s about seeing clearly. Evaluating what still serves you, what’s holding you back, and what deserves the opportunity to grow. It’s not reinvention for the sake of change. It’s relevance.

Start with What Feels Outdated

A refresh begins by looking at your business from the outside in. Start with the most visible touchpoints, your website, logo, and brand messaging. Do they reflect who you are today? Or do they look stuck in a previous era?

First impressions matter more than ever. Research shows that 94% of first impressions are design-related. A dated brand can unintentionally signal that your business is outdated too, even if your service or product is exceptional.

Outdated elements often go beyond visuals. Consider operations and communication:

- Are manual processes slowing you down?
- Are you marketing on platforms your audience no longer uses?
- Are internal systems helping your team, or holding them back?

Identifying inefficiencies can feel uncomfortable at first, but it's also freeing. Growth requires clarity first.

Celebrate What's Working

Once you pinpoint what needs improvement, shift your focus to what is working. Every business has strengths worth protecting. Maybe it's your customer service,

your reputation for reliability, your community presence, or a flagship product that continues to perform.

These strengths are your foundation. The goal isn't to erase them, it's to build around them. Like renovating a house, you don't bulldoze the structure. You update what needs modernization while preserving what gives it character.



Evaluate Company Culture

One of the most overlooked areas of a business refresh is culture. Over time, even healthy workplace environments can drift from their original energy. Employees may still care deeply while no longer feeling connected to the mission.

Ask yourself:

- Are our values visible in daily decisions or just framed on the wall?
- Do employees feel energized or simply reliable?
- Are we leading with intention or operating on autopilot?

A company can update its branding, tools, and strategy, but if culture remains stagnant, momentum stalls.

Audit Your Tech and Tools

Technology moves fast. Tools that once felt innovative may now slow you down. From your website and CRM to analytics and marketing platforms, review everything for ROI, efficiency, and relevance.

Upgrading doesn't always mean spending more. Often, it means simplifying, integrating, or removing tools that quietly drain time, money, and energy.

Listen to Your Customers

Customer behavior is one of the clearest indicators of whether something needs to shift. Declining engagement, fewer referrals, slower repeat business, these aren't just metrics. They're signals.

Often, the improvements customers want most are practical, not flashy:

- Faster response times
- Clearer communication
- A smoother purchasing experience
- More personalization
- More human interaction

You don't need to guess, just listen.

Refresh Your Marketing, Not Just Your Message

Marketing that worked five years ago may not resonate today. Audiences now value connection over polish and authenticity over perfection.

Ask yourself:

- Do we sound human?
- Does our messaging build trust or just broadcast services?
- Are we showing up where our customers actually spend time?
- Does our content help people, or just promote to them?

Modern marketing doesn't just sell, it builds familiarity and credibility long before a purchase happens.

Leadership Sets the Tone

Change doesn't trickle upward, it starts at the top. Strong leadership embraces evolution, invites input, challenges assumptions, and adapts without defensiveness.

A brand refresh isn't an admission of failure, it's a commitment to growth.



Review Your Financials with Purpose

A company refresh should also include financial clarity:

- Are your prices aligned with today's economy?
- Are all services still profitable?
- Are resources invested where they generate real return?

Sometimes growth begins with streamlining, not scaling.

Walk Through the Customer Experience

Put yourself in your customer's shoes. Is the journey smooth, clear, and enjoyable? Or cluttered, confusing, or inconsistent?

Even small friction points, slow follow-ups, unclear navigation, or complicated checkouts, can cost loyalty. Simple improvements can deliver huge results.

Return to Your 'Why'

Over time, businesses accumulate habits, tools, systems, and assumptions that once helped—but now crowd clarity. Refreshing your company clears the noise and reconnects you to the original reason you started.

The most successful businesses don't treat reinvention as a rare event. They make refinement a cycle. They stay curious, responsive, and proactive.

Taking a fresh look at your company is an act of leadership. It takes courage to evaluate honestly, vision to adjust boldly, and discipline to stay aligned.

Sometimes the most powerful growth doesn't come from adding something new—but from letting go of what no longer fits who you are becoming.



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Building Trust Through Authentic Marketing

The Era of the Polished Pitch Is Over

Consumers can spot a sales pitch from a mile away, trust has become the ultimate currency in marketing. The glossy slogans, overproduced ads, and too-perfect imagery that once defined successful campaigns now risk alienating the very people they're meant

to attract. Today's audience isn't just buying products, they're buying into the people and purpose behind them. And if there's one word that determines whether a brand sinks or soars, it's authenticity.

Trust Is at an All-Time Low

The digital marketplace is more crowded than ever.

Consumers scroll past thousands of brand messages each day, each promising something "new," "innovative," or "life-changing." But in a 2025 Edelman Trust Barometer study, only 34% of people said they trust the brands they buy from to be transparent and truthful in their marketing. That staggering number reveals the challenge:

audiences aren't short on options, they're short on trust.

Authenticity Isn't a Tactic, It's a Foundation

Authenticity, however, can't be manufactured or faked. It's not a branding tactic or an aesthetic filter, it's a mindset. Authentic marketing starts with truth, runs on consistency, and thrives on connection. It's the difference between telling people what you sell and showing them who you are.

From Transactions to Relationships

When a business embraces authenticity, it shifts from a transactional relationship to a human one. Consumers today crave relatability more than perfection. They want to see behind the curtain, to know the story, the struggle, the passion that fuels a business. That's why brands that lead with real stories, real people, and real values win hearts before wallets.

Real Moments Build Real Trust

Take the rise of local businesses that film behind-the-scenes clips or share unfiltered moments from their day-to-day operations. A bakery sharing the chaos of a morning rush or a small clothing brand posting about the challenges of sustainable sourcing—these moments

humanize the business. They tell audiences, "We're like you." And that "likeability" builds trust in a way no paid ad can replicate.

Imperfection Can Be a Superpower

Authenticity also means owning imperfections. Gone are the days when brands could hide behind polished PR lines. Mistakes happen, what matters is how you respond. When a company acknowledges a misstep, explains what happened, and commits to improvement, it demonstrates integrity. Consumers forgive mistakes; they don't forgive dishonesty. In fact, research from Label Insight shows that 94% of consumers are more loyal to brands that practice transparency.



Alignment Is the Accelerator

But being authentic doesn't mean being careless. It means being intentional. The best authentic marketing starts with alignment, between

what a brand says and what it does. If your company promotes sustainability, that commitment should show up in your packaging, partnerships, and policies. If you talk about community values, those values should be visible in how you hire, volunteer, or give back. Authenticity fails when words and actions don't match.

Storytelling That Connects, Not Performs

Storytelling plays a pivotal role in this equation. A brand's story is its emotional handshake with the audience, it's how customers decide whether to trust you. But not every story builds trust. Overly curated narratives can feel hollow. The strongest stories come from truth, why your business began, what challenges you've overcome, or what drives you every day. The goal isn't to impress; it's to connect.

Social Media's Shift Toward Real

Social media, once the domain of polished perfection, has become the front line of authentic marketing. Audiences reward realness, videos filmed on phones, unedited photos, heartfelt captions that sound like a human, not a corporate voice. The trend toward unfiltered, conversational content isn't about lowering standards; it's about raising trust. Brands

that dare to sound human, using humor, vulnerability, and everyday language, win engagement that feels genuine, not forced.

Consistency Builds Credibility

There's another side to authenticity that often goes unspoken: consistency. Trust isn't built by one honest post, it's built over time through repetition and reliability. If your brand's tone changes every month, or your message shifts with every trend, audiences sense instability. Great brands don't reinvent themselves constantly—they evolve naturally, guided by core values that never waver.

The Data Speaks for Itself

Data supports this long-game approach. A 2025 Sprout Social survey found that 86% of consumers say authenticity is a major factor in deciding which brands they like and support, while 68% said they would stop buying from a brand they felt was being deceptive. Those numbers underline a simple truth: in the age of information, authenticity isn't optional, it's survival.

Why Local Businesses Have the Advantage

For small businesses, this is an opportunity rather than a disadvantage. You may not have the budget of a

multinational brand, but you have what big corporations often lack, proximity, personality, and purpose. You can talk directly to your customers, show your face, share your process, and build relationships one post or handshake at a time. Authenticity scales best when it starts small and sincere.

Balance Is Key

Of course, authenticity also requires restraint. Not every story needs to be told, and not every moment is marketing gold. Oversharing or forcing vulnerability can backfire if it feels self-serving. The art lies in striking a balance between openness and professionalism, between transparency and intention. It's about being real, not reckless.

Trust Creates Advocates

Trust, once earned, becomes a force multiplier. Loyal customers not only buy more, they become advocates. They tell friends, leave reviews, and defend your brand when others question it. That's the compounding return of authenticity: credibility that money can't buy but consistency can earn.

Human Connection Wins

In a marketplace overflowing



with artificial intelligence, algorithms, and automated outreach, the most powerful differentiator remains profoundly human, trust. Consumers don't expect perfection; they expect honesty. They don't need grand campaigns; they need connection.

Authenticity Is the New Competitive Edge

Authentic marketing isn't about crafting a perfect image. It's about revealing the imperfect truth that makes your business real, relatable, and worth believing in. In the end, trust isn't built through marketing, it's built through meaning. And the brands that embrace that truth will find their customers aren't just buying, they're belonging.



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FUN FACTS

December, the twelfth and final month of the Gregorian calendar, derives its name from the Latin word “decem,” meaning ten, as it was originally the tenth month in the ancient Roman calendar. With the addition of January and February, it became the last month, marking the year’s end. December is traditionally associated with winter solstice celebrations, including Christmas and other cultural festivities, symbolizing hope and renewal during the darkest time of the year.

December 1, 1955: Rosa Parks sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott when she refused to give up her seat to a white passenger in Alabama, becoming a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights Movement.

December 10, 1901: The first Nobel Prizes were awarded in Stockholm, Sweden, honoring Alfred Nobel’s wish to recognize outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace.

December 17, 1903: The Wright brothers achieved the first powered, controlled flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina—an event that changed the course of transportation history.

December 21, 1937: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Disney’s first full-length animated feature film, premiered and became a major success, revolutionizing animation and film.

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72.5% of the US population is active on social media

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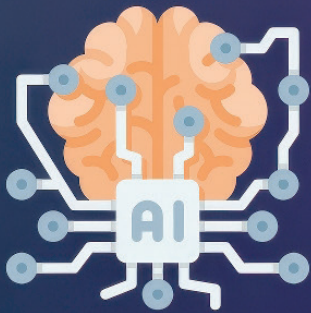
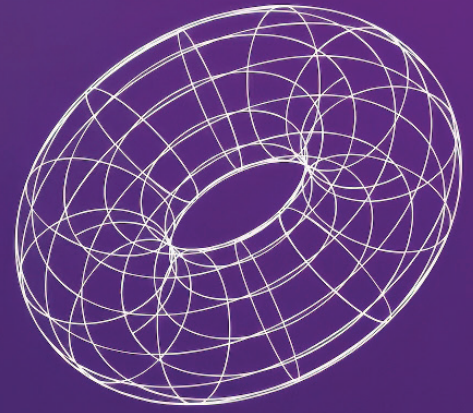
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THE JOURNEY OF AI ADOPTION OVER THE YEARS



1950'S

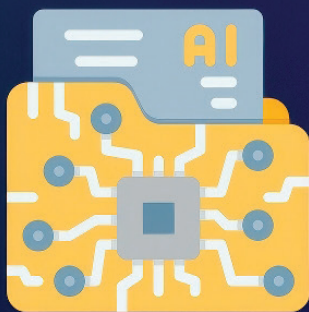
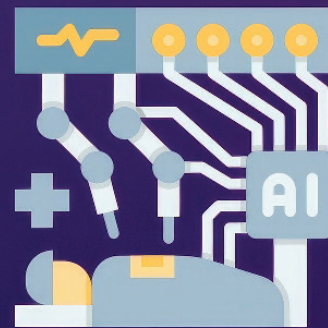
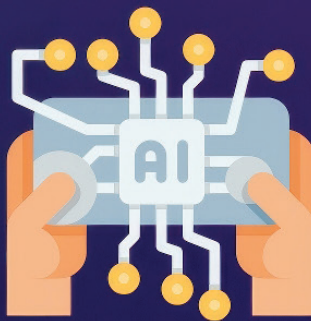
ALAN TURING INTRODUCES
"THINKING MACHINES"

1980'S

AI IS USED IN
LABORATORIES AND THE
MANUFACTURING
INDUSTRY

2000'S

THE RISE OF BIG DATA
AND MACHINE
LEARNING

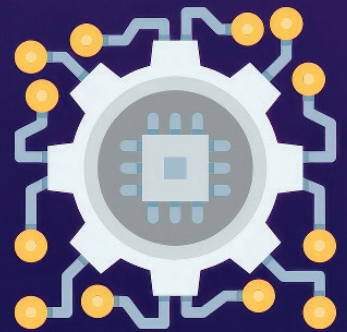


2010'S

AI ENTERS
SMARTPHONES

2020–2023

AI TOOLS BECOME
POPULAR GLOBALLY



2025 (PRESENT)

AI IS WIDELY USED BY
BUSINESSES, STUDENTS,
CREATORS, AND EVEN
MSMES



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