

AI starter checklist for UK small businesses

23 practical checks for before and after you start using AI tools: which jobs to start with, how to check the real price and VAT, how to keep customer data safe, and when to cancel.

1 Pick the jobs first

- ☐ Write down the 3 to 5 tasks that take most of your week, such as emails, quotes, social posts, meeting notes or bookkeeping.
 - ☐ For each one, note roughly how long it takes now, so you can tell later whether a tool saved any time.
 - ☐ Start with one job, not five. Our AI Tool Finder suggests a pick and an alternative for each job.
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2 Start with what you already pay for

- ☐ Check whether your existing software already includes AI: Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, your accounting software, Canva or your website builder.
 - ☐ Only add a new tool when the built-in option isn't good enough for the job.
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3 Try it free, then decide

- ☐ Use the free plan or free trial first, with real (non-confidential) work.
 - ☐ Note the limits: minutes, credits, exports, watermarks, history and number of users.
 - ☐ Put any trial end date in your calendar so you don't roll onto a paid plan by accident.
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4 Check the real price

- ☐ Check the currency. Many AI tools charge in US dollars, so the pound price can change with the exchange rate.
- ☐ Check whether the price includes VAT. UK VAT at the standard rate is 20% (see GOV.UK VAT rates). If you're VAT-registered, ask your accountant how to treat the invoice.
- ☐ Check whether the price is per user, and whether the monthly figure assumes you pay for a year up front.

5 Protect customer and staff data

- ☐ If you put personal data into an AI tool, UK GDPR applies. Check the provider offers a data processing agreement (see the ICO's advice for small organisations).
- ☐ Check where the tool stores data. If it's outside the UK, read the ICO guidance on international transfers.
- ☐ Check whether the tool uses what you type or upload to train its AI, and switch that off where your plan allows.
- ☐ Keep health, financial and other sensitive details out of AI tools you haven't checked.
- ☐ Tell people before you record or transcribe a call.

6 Check every output

- ☐ AI tools can be confidently wrong, including made-up facts and sources. Read everything before it goes to a customer.
- ☐ Adverts and social posts must not mislead, even if AI wrote them. The UK advertising codes still apply.
- ☐ Check the tool's terms before you use AI images, voices or music commercially.

7 Keep a simple record

- ☐ List which tools you use, who uses them, for what, what they cost and when each renews.
- ☐ Write one line for your team on what may and may not be put into AI tools.

8 Review after 30 days

- ☐ Compare the time each job takes now with your note from the start.
- ☐ Keep the tools that saved time, cancel the ones you didn't use, and pick the next job.

From **PurposeFit AI** (purposefitai.co.uk): fit-for-purpose AI tools, picked for UK small businesses. Updated 19 October 2026. General information, not legal, tax or financial advice. Editorial picks are never paid for.