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# **AI Automation Agency**

*Start and Scale a Business That Sells AI Systems to Companies*

by Joe Giler

# Preface

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I did not set out to write a book about artificial intelligence. I set out to build a business that pays my bills, respects my time, and does not require me to raise venture capital or hire forty people before I earn a dollar. The AI automation agency turned out to be the cleanest path I have found to that outcome, and this book is my attempt to hand you the map without the detours I took to draw it.

Let me be honest about what this book is not. It is not a promise that you will make six figures in ninety days from your laptop on a beach. It is not a collection of screenshots of Stripe dashboards designed to make you feel behind. And it is emphatically not a pitch for a course, a mastermind, or a private community that costs more than your first three clients will pay you. If you came looking for hype, close the cover now and save yourself the time. There is plenty of it elsewhere online, and it will cost you far more than this book did.

What this book *is*: a practical, sequential guide to identifying automation problems inside real companies, building systems that solve those problems using tools that already exist, and charging money for the outcome. The word "agency" scares some people because it sounds like you need a downtown office and a receptionist. You do not. Most successful AI automation agencies in this moment are one person, sometimes two, working with a handful of contractors and a stack of software subscriptions that costs less than a used car payment.

I want to set expectations about the technology itself. The large language models and automation platforms that make this business possible are moving quickly, and any book that anchors too tightly to a specific product version will be stale before the ink dries. So I have written this to be durable. The tools I name are real and, at the time of writing, widely used, but the skill I am teaching is not "how to click buttons in a particular app." It is how to think about business processes, spot where they leak time and money, and stitch together software so those leaks close. That skill will outlast any single vendor.

A word on who I am writing for. You might be a freelancer tired of trading hours for dollars. You might be a small agency owner watching clients ask about AI and not

knowing what to say. You might be an employee who automates half your own job quietly and wonders whether that talent is worth more on the open market. It is. You might also be a complete beginner who has never written a line of code and worries that this world is closed to you. It is not, and I will show you why the non-technical parts of this business — sales, scoping, and communication — are where most of the money actually hides.

Throughout the book I use "we" more than "you," because building a business is not a spectator sport and I would rather stand beside you than lecture from a podium. When I share a number, it is a number I have seen or that a credible source has published, not a figure I invented to make a point land harder. Where I am uncertain, I will say so. Trust, in this business and in this book, is the whole game.

Turn the page and let us get to work.

# Introduction

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Every few years a technology arrives that quietly redraws the map of who makes money and how. Electricity did it. The personal computer did it. The internet did it, then mobile did it again, and each time a familiar pattern repeated: a powerful capability became available to everyone at once, but the ability to *apply* it to a specific business problem stayed scarce for years. The gap between "the tool exists" and "the tool is working inside my company making me money" is where fortunes are made. Right now, with artificial intelligence, that gap is enormous, and it is wide open.

Here is the tension at the heart of this opportunity. Nearly every business owner has now heard that AI can save them time, cut costs, and help them serve more customers. Surveys from McKinsey's ongoing research on AI adoption consistently show that a large and growing majority of organizations report using AI in at least one business function. The awareness problem is solved. The message got through. But awareness is not implementation, and this is where reality bites. The same business owner who read a breathless article about AI on a Tuesday has, by Wednesday, no idea which tool to buy, how to connect it to the systems they already run, who on their tiny team could possibly set it up, or whether the thing will break their existing workflow. They want the outcome desperately. They cannot build it themselves. That combination — high demand, low ability to self-serve — is the definition of a service business waiting to be born.

An AI automation agency exists to close that gap for a fee. We are the translators between what AI can do and what a specific company actually needs done. A dental office does not want "a large language model." It wants its front desk to stop spending two hours a day chasing appointment confirmations. A regional accounting firm does not want "generative AI." It wants client intake documents sorted, summarized, and filed without a junior staffer burning a full day on it every week. Our job is to hear the second sentence hiding inside the first, then build the plumbing that delivers it. The company pays us because the outcome is worth far more to them than our fee, and because they genuinely cannot get there alone.

You may be wondering why now, and not a year ago or a year from now. Two things changed roughly simultaneously. First, the underlying models became good enough

and cheap enough that a small operator can build genuinely useful systems on top of them without a research budget. Andrew Ng, one of the most respected voices in applied machine learning and co-founder of Google Brain, has argued for years that AI is best understood as the new electricity — a general-purpose capability that transforms industries only when practitioners integrate it into countless specific applications. That integration layer is precisely our territory. Second, a class of automation and orchestration tools matured to the point where you can connect these models to email, spreadsheets, customer databases, and messaging apps with configuration rather than heavy custom engineering. The barrier to building fell through the floor at the same moment demand went through the roof.

Let me address the fear that stops most people before they start: "I am not technical enough." I want to dismantle this carefully, because it costs people real money. The hardest parts of running an AI automation agency are not technical. They are these: finding a business with a painful, expensive, repetitive problem; convincing that business to trust you; scoping the problem so you promise something you can actually deliver; and communicating clearly throughout. None of those require a computer science degree. The technical build, once you have a real problem in front of you, is increasingly a matter of assembling existing pieces — and, ironically, AI itself will help you write and debug the technical parts. I have watched people from bookkeeping, real estate, teaching, and customer support backgrounds outperform career programmers in this business, precisely because they understand how real companies actually work and where the pain lives.

Now the opposite warning, because I promised you honesty and honesty cuts both ways. This is a real business, which means it involves real difficulty. You will hear "no" far more than "yes." You will scope a project wrong and eat the cost of fixing it. You will build something that works perfectly in your test and breaks the moment a client's messy real-world data hits it. You will have months where the pipeline is thin and you question the whole enterprise. Anyone selling you a version of this that skips these experiences is selling you a fantasy, and fantasies are expensive. The people who win are not the ones who avoid these problems. They are the ones who expect them, price for them, and keep moving.

Here is how the book is organized so you know where we are headed. We begin, in this first chapter, by sizing the opportunity honestly and understanding why it exists — because you cannot sell something you do not believe in, and belief has to be built on evidence, not slogans. From there we move into finding and validating your niche, because "I do AI for anyone" is a positioning that sells to no one. We cover how to find your first clients before you have a portfolio, how to scope and price projects so you make money instead of trading it away, how to actually build the common automation systems companies pay for, how to deliver so clients stay and refer, and finally how to scale from a solo operator into something larger if that is what you want — with a full acknowledgment that many happy agency owners deliberately stay small and highly profitable.

A note on money, since that is presumably why you are here. Throughout the book I will talk about pricing in ranges rather than promises, because your market, your niche, and your skill will move the numbers. But the fundamental economics are attractive: this is a business with high margins, low overhead, recurring-revenue potential, and demand that is currently outrunning supply. Those four traits rarely appear together. When they do, the smart move is to show up early, do honest work, and compound.

Let us start by looking clearly at the opportunity in front of us.

# Chapter 1: The \$50B AI Agency

## Opportunity — Why Every Business Needs Automation and Can't Do It Alone

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I want to begin with a claim and then spend the rest of this chapter earning it: the market for helping ordinary companies implement AI automation is one of the largest and least-contested service opportunities of our working lives, and it is being served today by a tiny fraction of the operators it will eventually require. If that sounds like the kind of thing every hype merchant says, good — that skepticism is exactly the muscle you will need in this business. So let us not take it on faith. Let us examine the actual structure of the opportunity, piece by piece, until you can see it clearly enough to bet your time on it.

### **The demand is real, and it is measurable**

Start with adoption. For several years, McKinsey has run a widely cited global survey on the state of AI, and the throughline of that research is consistent: organizational adoption of AI has moved from a novelty to a mainstream expectation, with a majority of surveyed organizations reporting AI use in at least one function and a sharp acceleration once generative AI tools became broadly available. Meanwhile, research and advisory firms like Gartner have documented that a strong majority of business leaders now consider AI adoption a strategic priority rather than an experiment. You do not need me to feed you a precise decimal to grasp the shape of this: the demand side of the equation has already been created for you, at scale, by forces far larger than any marketing you could ever do.

This matters enormously for a service business, and here is why. In most new markets, the entrepreneur has to spend money and years *manufacturing* demand — convincing people they have a problem worth solving. In this market, the world's largest consulting firms, every business publication, and the vendors themselves have already convinced your future clients that they need AI. The business owner walks into the conversation already wanting what you sell. Your job shifts from creating

desire to directing it — from "why should you care about AI" to "here is exactly how it solves your specific problem." That is a far easier and far more profitable place to stand.

## **The "can't do it alone" problem is structural, not temporary**

Now the second blade of the scissors. Wanting AI and being able to implement it are separated by a chasm, and that chasm is not closing on its own. Consider what implementation actually requires: someone has to understand the business process well enough to model it, choose among a bewildering and constantly shifting set of tools, connect those tools to systems that were never designed to talk to each other, handle the messy reality of real company data, account for security and privacy, test the thing against edge cases, and maintain it as tools and needs evolve. That is a specialized skill set, and specialized skill sets are, by definition, scarce.

The scarcity is compounded by where the talent lives. The engineers who deeply understand these systems are overwhelmingly employed by large technology companies and well-funded startups, working on products at scale, earning compensation that a five-person plumbing supply distributor could never match. The gap between the small and mid-sized business that needs help and the technical talent capable of providing it is not going to be bridged by those businesses hiring their own AI engineers. It cannot be. The math does not work. It will be bridged by service providers — agencies — who spread their expertise across many clients, making the cost per client sane. That is the economic reason our business exists, and it is durable.

There is a human dimension to this too. Even when a small business could theoretically hire someone, the owner does not want to. They do not want another full-time salary, another set of benefits, another management headache, or the risk of that person leaving with all the institutional knowledge in their head. They want the problem solved by someone who does this all day, who will hand over a working system, and who can be called when something breaks. This is exactly the preference that built the entire IT services industry, the accounting profession, and the marketing agency world. AI automation is the newest member of that family, and it is arriving with unusually strong tailwinds.

## Why "small and boring" is where the money hides

Here is a counterintuitive truth that took me too long to internalize. The most durable money in this business is not in glamorous, cutting-edge AI projects for tech-forward companies. Those companies often have in-house talent and will build it themselves. The money is in unglamorous automation for the enormous population of ordinary businesses that make up the actual economy — the dental practices, HVAC installers, law firms, e-commerce brands, medical billing companies, real estate teams, and regional manufacturers. There are millions of these businesses. The U.S. Small Business Administration's research consistently shows that small businesses make up the overwhelming majority of employer firms in the country. Each of them runs on repetitive processes that leak time and money, and almost none of them have anyone on staff who can plug the leaks with modern tools.

Think about what a single such business loses to manual, repetitive work. A team member spending two hours a day copying data between systems, or answering the same customer questions, or manually sorting incoming leads, represents thousands of dollars a month in salary spent on work a well-built automation could do in seconds. When you frame your fee against that ongoing cost — not against some abstract sense of "what software should cost" — the value becomes obvious to the client and the pricing becomes comfortable for you. You are not selling technology. You are selling reclaimed hours and reduced payroll drag, priced as a fraction of what the problem currently costs them.

## About that "\$50B" number — and how to think about market size honestly

I put a figure in the chapter title, and I owe you honesty about it. Market-sizing numbers for anything with "AI" in the name vary wildly depending on who is counting and what they include, and I would be lying if I pretended there is a single authoritative figure for "AI automation agency services" specifically — the category is too new and too fragmented for that. What we *can* say with confidence is that the adjacent, well-established markets are already massive: global spending on IT services, business process outsourcing, and marketing services each runs into the hundreds of billions of dollars annually, and analyst firms broadly agree that AI-