

A PRACTICAL AI BRIEFING FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

Using AI Clearly and Safely

What the EU AI Act means for an architect's practice, a coffee-shop group and a village post office

The message in one line

Keep using AI. Keep a person in charge. Tell people when AI speaks or creates something that may look real.

AI can help a small business answer enquiries, prepare documents, create marketing and improve customer service. The new EU rules do not tell you to stop. They ask you to use AI openly and with care.

This paper uses three everyday examples: an architect's practice, a chain of coffee shops, and a village postmaster or postmistress. It explains what each business may do, what needs a clear label, and what should remain under human control.

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The message in one minute

GOOD

Most normal AI use remains allowed

You may use AI to draft emails, translate messages, summarise notes, create first ideas and help staff work faster. A person should check important facts before the work reaches a client or the public.

LABEL

Be clear when AI meets the customer

A chatbot should say that it is an AI assistant. A realistic AI-made or altered image, voice or video should carry a clear label when someone might think it is real.

HUMAN

Keep people in charge of important decisions

A person should approve architectural claims and drawings, prices and allergen information, postal notices, contracts, payments, safety advice, hiring and staff decisions.

STOP

Avoid secret or deceptive uses

Do not let AI pretend to be a real member of staff. Do not make fake testimonials, fake project photographs, fake shop scenes, fake public notices or cloned voices look genuine.

Why the EU rules may matter outside the EU

The AI Act can apply when an AI system is offered in the EU or when its output is used there. A business that serves EU customers should check whether the rules apply. Following the same clear standards for all customers often provides the simplest and safest approach.

The transparency rules apply from 2 August 2026. They aim to build trust and reduce fraud, impersonation and consumer deception. Large fines exist, but regulators must consider the size of smaller businesses and act proportionately.

What a small business may use AI for

1. Drafting and translating messages

AI may prepare a first draft of an email, translate it into another language, and make the wording easier to read. An architect might draft a meeting note. A coffee-shop manager might answer a catering enquiry. A postmistress might explain a local service in plain English.

Good example

AI drafts a reply to a client asking an architect about an extension. A member of the practice checks the project type, likely process, fees, timing and next step before sending it.

Poor example

AI sends the reply by itself and promises planning approval, a fixed fee or a completion date that nobody has checked.

2. Summaries and office work

AI may summarise meeting notes, prepare a task list, sort non-sensitive enquiries, suggest follow-up questions and help create a first customer record.

Good example

AI turns a long catering enquiry into five clear points: date, branch, guest numbers, dietary needs and budget. A coffee-shop manager checks the summary.

3. Marketing ideas and first drafts

AI may suggest headlines, website wording, social posts, FAQs and article plans. A knowledgeable person should check project facts, prices, opening hours, ingredients, postal services and promises before publication.

Good example

AI drafts a notice about a temporary change to village post-office opening hours. The postmaster or postmistress checks the dates, services affected and official information before displaying it.

4. Research support

AI may help gather questions, compare options and explain a difficult topic. It can make mistakes, invent facts or use old information. Staff should check the original source before relying on it.

When a small business should use a clear label

Use	What the rule means	Simple wording or example
Website chatbot	The visitor must know from the start that the conversation uses AI.	'Hello. I am this business's AI assistant. I can answer common questions and collect details. You can ask for a person at any time.'
Realistic AI business image	Use a label when the picture may look like a real building, completed project, coffee shop, post office, person, place or event.	'AI-generated concept image. It does not show a completed project or an actual business location.'
Altered photograph	Use a label when AI adds, removes or changes features in a way that may mislead a client or customer.	'AI-altered image showing a proposed design, finish or layout.'
AI voice or video	Use a label when AI copies or creates a person's face or voice.	'This voice or video was generated with AI.'
Public information with no real review	Label AI text about public matters when nobody with the right knowledge checks the substance and takes responsibility.	Example: an automatic article about a planning-rule change, a food-safety warning or a change to an official postal service.

A label should appear where people can see or hear it. A hidden technical mark alone does not give the customer enough information.

What usually needs no public label

- Cropping, resizing, brightness changes and normal colour correction.
- Spell-checking, grammar correction and simple formatting.
- Internal drafts that never reach the public or a customer.
- AI working in the background, with no direct conversation with a person.

A useful small-business rule

When a reasonable customer could mistake AI-made content for a real building, real shop, real person, real event, real public notice or real promise, add a clear label.

What a small business should avoid

STOP

An AI bot pretending to be a person
The bot says, 'I am Anna from the practice,' although no Anna is writing. The bot may have a friendly name, but it must also say clearly that it is AI.

STOP

Fake proof
A fake client testimonial, fake photograph of a completed building, fake picture of a busy coffee shop, or fake official postal notice appears to be genuine.

STOP

Secret cloned voices
AI copies an owner's or manager's voice to approve a payment, change a design, order stock or give staff instructions without telling the listener.

STOP

AI that guesses protected personal traits
Do not use AI to guess a client's or worker's race, religion, political views, union membership or sexual orientation from a face, voice or behaviour.

STOP

Secret emotion checking at work
Do not install AI that tries to decide whether architects, baristas or postal staff feel angry, dishonest, afraid or loyal. Workplace emotion recognition is generally banned, apart from narrow medical or safety uses.

STOP

Pressure aimed at vulnerable people
Do not use AI to exploit age, illness, money worries or distress so that a person buys, pays or signs when they would otherwise choose differently.

Uses that need extra care

CHECK **Hiring and staff management**
AI screening of job applications or scoring workers can fall into a high-risk area. Use a qualified system and take legal advice before letting AI rank, reject, discipline or dismiss anyone.

CHECK **Contracts, prices and payments**
AI may prepare a draft. A named person should approve the final fees, quotations, discounts, bank details, payment terms and cancellation rules.

CHECK **Design, food and public-service safety**
AI may help explain information. An architect should check drawings and regulations. A coffee-shop manager should check ingredients and allergens. A postmaster or postmistress should check official postal rules and public notices.

CHECK **Private client and customer data**
Keep identity documents, bank details, medical or dietary needs, home addresses, staff records, loyalty data and confidential projects out of public AI tools. Use only an approved secure system with clear data rules.

CHECK **Automatic customer scoring**
AI may help organise enquiries. A person should review any score that could deny service, change a price or label a customer as difficult, risky or untrustworthy.

The human-review test

A real review means checking the facts and meaning, changing errors and taking responsibility. A quick spell-check alone does not count as a proper review.

A simple AI policy for a small business

1. Use approved tools

Keep a short list of AI tools that staff may use. Record who owns each tool and what it does.

2. Tell customers when they meet AI

Put a clear message at the start of every chatbot or AI voice conversation. Offer a simple move to a person.

3. Label realistic AI media

Label AI-made or AI-altered images, audio and video whenever people may think they show something real.

4. Give important work a named reviewer

Choose a person to check drawings, project claims, prices, ingredients, opening hours, postal information, contracts and safety matters.

5. Protect private information

Place sensitive client, employee and business data only in systems approved for that information.

6. Train the team

Give each user simple guidance about errors, privacy, labels and human approval. Keep a note of the date and people trained.

7. Keep a small AI register

Record the tool, purpose, data used, customer label, human reviewer and any problem found.

A simple AI register

Tool	Purpose	Data used	Customer label?	Human owner
Website bot	Answer common questions	Name, email, enquiry	Yes - start message	Business manager

Wording a small business can use today

Chatbot opening

Hello. I am this business's AI assistant. I can answer common questions and collect the details the team needs. You can ask to speak with a person at any time.

Concept image

AI-generated concept image. It shows an idea and does not show a finished building, an actual coffee shop or a real post office.

Altered business photograph

AI-altered image showing a proposed design, finish or layout. Please ask the business for current photographs and confirmed details.

AI-assisted article

Prepared with AI assistance and checked by a responsible person.

Move from AI to a person

I can collect the details now. A member of the team will confirm the price, availability, information and next step.

Final advice for the small-business owner

AI should make a business faster, clearer and easier to reach. The best safeguard is simple: use AI as a capable assistant, show where it is present, and keep a responsible person in charge.

Sources and legal note

This briefing explains the rules in plain language for business use. It does not replace legal advice about a particular system or case.

- [European Commission: Transparency obligations under Article 50 of the AI Act, updated 24 July 2026](#)
- [European Commission: Quick Facts - Transparency rules for AI systems](#)
- [European Commission: Navigating the AI Act, updated 27 July 2026](#)
- [European Commission: AI Literacy - Questions and Answers, updated 27 July 2026](#)
- [Malwarebytes: The AI Act kicks into action, 3 August 2026](#)

Key date: The Article 50 transparency rules apply from 2 August 2026. Content created before that date generally does not need a new label, although voluntary labelling may help trust.

Practical legal point: A business outside the EU may still come within the Act when it offers an AI system in the EU or its AI output is used there. Ask an EU-qualified adviser to review any custom chatbot, employee-scoring system, biometric tool or fully automatic decision system before launch.