

The Columbia Business Owner's Guide to AI in 2026

No tech background needed. No hype. Just the stuff that actually
works for businesses like yours.

by Jason Calhoun
MuleTown.ai

Columbia, Tennessee

Why I Wrote This

I live in Hampshire. I've spent 15 years in marketing and branding, and the last three years deep in AI. Most of what I've learned came from expensive mistakes and conversations with business owners just like you.

I started MuleTown.ai because I got tired of watching smart founders get sold expensive tools they didn't need. They'd come to me saying, 'AI sounds important. Do I need it? What does it actually do? How much does it cost?' And they'd ask these questions to people who were incentivized to say yes.

So I wrote this. It's what I wish someone had told me when I first started looking at AI. No buzzwords. No fluff. Just the actual applications that make sense for a Columbia business right now.

If you're reading this, you probably suspect AI matters. You're right. But the version that matters for your business is probably simpler and cheaper than you think.

Jason Calhoun
Founder, [MuleTown.ai](#)

What AI Actually Is (In Plain English)

Let's start with what AI is not. It's not robots. It's not going to have an opinion about your business decisions (yet). It's not conscious. It's not sentient.

AI is pattern recognition plus automation. Think of it as a very smart assistant who never sleeps, never forgets, and gets better over time because it learns from every interaction.

Imagine training an employee so well that she can handle 90% of your customer calls without asking you a question. She knows your hours, your prices, your policies. She can book appointments, answer FAQs, and flag the calls that actually need you. Now imagine that employee never needs a break, never gets sick, and never costs you more than \$300 a month.

That's AI. It's useful because it handles the repetitive stuff. The things that matter but don't require judgment.

The best part? You don't need to understand how it works. You don't need to be technical. You just need to understand what it does and whether that's worth paying for.

5 Things AI Can Do For Your Business Right Now

1. Answer your phone 24/7

Your AI receptionist knows your hours, your services, your rates. It books appointments, handles urgent questions, and takes messages. Customers feel like they reached a real person.

2. Respond to every Google review in your voice

No more missed reviews. AI answers them immediately, in your voice, with the tone you want. You look responsive and professional without spending time in your inbox.

3. Follow up with leads who never booked

That person who called but didn't book an appointment? AI sends them a text or email on your schedule. Some come back. Some don't. But you're not losing them because you forgot.

4. Reactivate lapsed customers

Patients who haven't been in 6 months. Members who stopped coming. Restaurant regulars you haven't seen in a while. AI reaches out with a simple, warm message. Some come back.

5. Handle the FAQ calls that eat your team's day

How late are you open? Do you take insurance? What's your appointment availability? AI answers these 50 times a day so your team can focus on the calls that matter.

What AI Costs (The Honest Version)

Let's talk numbers. The bad news is there's no free option that's worth your time. The good news is you don't need to spend enterprise money.

	Per Month	Per Year
Single AI system (phone or reviews)	\$200-500	\$2,400-6,000
Integrated AI stack (phone + reviews + follow-up)	\$1,500-2,500	\$18,000-30,000
Full AI ecosystem (everything)	\$3,500-5,000	\$42,000-60,000

Here's the math that matters. If AI saves you 15 hours a month and brings in 5 extra customers, what's that worth?

For most businesses, the answer is somewhere between 'a lot' and 'way more than the monthly fee.' Most of my clients tell me that one extra customer per month covers the entire cost.

You're probably already spending \$200-500 a month on disconnected tools you're not fully using (scheduling software, email, review sites, chat systems). We integrate AI into that ecosystem. No new tools. No new logins.

How to Know If Your Business Is Ready

You don't need to be a certain size. You don't need to have 50 employees or a million-dollar revenue. Here's what matters.

Answer these honestly:

- Do you miss calls after hours? (Or do you let them go to voicemail?)
- Do reviews go unanswered for days or weeks?
- Do leads slip through the cracks because follow-up takes time?
- Do you spend 10+ hours a month on repetitive admin that doesn't require your judgment?
- Do you wish you could reach out to lapsed customers but never have time?

If you said yes to two or more of these, AI can help. If you said yes to four or more, AI isn't optional. It's leaving money on the table to not implement it.

What This Looks Like for Real Columbia Businesses

Restaurant on the Square

Problem: Problem: Calls during dinner rush go unanswered. Reservations get lost. Regulars try to call ahead and can't reach anyone.

AI Solution: AI Solution: 24/7 call answering + reservation booking. Peak hours are no longer a nightmare. Staff focuses on the kitchen and the floor.

Dental Practice on Trotwood

Problem: Problem: Google reviews sit unanswered for weeks. New patients see old complaints with no response.

AI Solution: AI Solution: Every review gets a response within minutes, in the practice's voice. New patient perception changes immediately.

HVAC Company Serving Maury County

Problem: Problem: Leads from Google Local + Facebook come in through different channels. Half get lost in email. Half-booked jobs fall through on follow-up.

AI Solution: AI Solution: All leads funnel through one AI system. It texts next-day reminders. It re-books no-shows automatically. Closing rate jumps 20%.

These aren't made-up scenarios. These are real problems I see every day. And AI solves them at a price that makes sense.

Your Free AI Analysis

Here's what I'm offering. Give me 97 seconds and I'll send you a custom AI Readiness Analysis.

You'll find out what AI could actually do for your business. Which systems would help most. What the timeline looks like. What it costs for you specifically, not some generic price list.

It comes back in 48 hours. Built by someone who lives 20 minutes from your business and actually understands what it takes to run something here.

Visit muletown.ai

Or call us at **(931) 954-7187**

*Jason Calhoun
Founder, MuleTown.ai
Columbia, Tennessee*