VENICE AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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The Briefing

July 20, 2026

Updates and analysis from the Government & Leadership Office of the Venice Area Chamber of Commerce

Demystifying AI Week 6 of 6

What We Cover This Week:

This is your graduation session. We integrate everything from the previous five weeks into a unified, actionable AI strategy framework. You will leave with a practical 90-day quick start plan, a fill-in-the-blank strategy template, and the confidence to lead AI adoption in your organization – deliberately, responsibly, and on your own terms.

1. Learning Objectives

- Synthesize the key learnings from all six sessions into a coherent, integrated understanding of AI's role in your business
- Apply the five-step Business AI Strategy Framework — Assess, Prioritize, Pilot, Evaluate, Scale — to your specific organizational context
- Identify who in your organization should lead AI adoption and how to build an internal AI champion structure
- Develop a realistic AI budget framework with ROI expectations appropriate for a small-to-mid-size business
- Leave with a concrete 90-day AI Quick Start Plan ready to implement immediately upon completion of the program

2. Session Overview

Six weeks ago, we started this demystify AI journey — what it was, whether it was relevant to your business, and whether you could afford, understand, or safely deploy it. You have covered substantial ground since then. You now have a clear vocabulary for AI, a map of its applications across business functions, a governance framework and plan to protect your organization, and a risk awareness that will serve you as the landscape continues to evolve.

The final piece is strategy: the deliberate, sequenced, resourced plan that converts AI awareness into AI capability. Strategy is how you move from knowing what is possible to making it real. This session provides the framework and the tools to do exactly that.

3. Core Content Areas

a. Recap & Integration — Connecting Five Weeks of Learning

Before building forward, let us briefly anchor where we have been:

- **Week 1** gave us a shared language and map — AI as a practical tool, not magic; the AI Adoption Spectrum as a self-assessment framework
- **Week 2** showed us operations — where AI eliminates friction, automates repetition, and sharpens financial intelligence
- **Week 3** explored marketing and sales — AI as a content multiplier, personalization engine, and customer engagement tool

- **Week 4** addressed our people and governance — how AI reshapes the employee lifecycle and why policy infrastructure must precede widespread adoption
- **Week 5** confronted risk honestly — bias, hallucination, data privacy, cybersecurity, and the evolving regulatory environment

Your AI strategy does not pick one of these areas in isolation. It integrates all of them into a sequenced plan that reflects your business's unique starting point, priorities, and capacity.

b. The Business AI Strategy Framework — Five Steps to Strategic Adoption

Step	Phase	What Happens in This Phase	Key Deliverables
1	**Assess**	Honestly evaluate your current AI maturity, your operational pain points, your data readiness, and your team's capacity. Use the AI Adoption Spectrum and Risk Assessment Checklist from this series.	AI Maturity Rating; Priority Pain Point List; Risk Profile
2	**Prioritize**	Select two to three high-impact, lower-complexity AI use cases to pursue first. Evaluate candidates against: business impact, implementation difficulty, cost, risk, and team readiness.	Prioritized Use Case List; Selection Rationale
3	**Pilot**	Run a structured, time-bounded pilot of your highest-priority use case. Define success metrics before you begin. Assign a clear owner. Set a review date.	Pilot Plan; Success Metrics; Assigned Owner; 30-Day Review Date
4	**Evaluate**	At the review date, assess results against your defined success metrics. Determine: continue and expand, adjust and continue, or discontinue. Document learnings (lessons learned) regardless of outcome.	Pilot Review Report; Go/No-Go Decision; Learnings Document
5	**Scale**	Expand successful pilots across the organization or to adjacent use cases. Update governance documents. Build team capability. Begin the next cycle with a new Assess phase.	Expansion Plan; Updated Policy; Team Training; Next Pilot Selection

Pro Tip

To be a sustainable “demystifyer”, pace yourself. Pick one use case. Run a clean pilot. Learn. Then expand. The tortoise wins this race.

c. Building Your AI Team — Who Leads AI Adoption in Your Organization?

Effective AI adoption does not happen without designated ownership. In large enterprises, there are Chief AI Officers and dedicated AI teams. In small businesses, the ownership structure looks different — but it is no less important.

Consider the following roles, which in a small business may be filled by existing staff wearing additional hats:

- **AI Champion (required):** The internal advocate and coordinator for AI adoption — tracks progress, gathers team feedback, stays current on tools and developments, and take issues with solutions to leadership. Often a tech-comfortable operations or marketing staff member.
- **Executive Sponsor (required):** A senior leader — often the owner or CEO — who provides strategic direction, resource authorization, and organizational accountability for AI adoption. Is this you?
- **AI Policy Owner (required):** The individual responsible for maintaining the AI Acceptable Use Policy and governance documentation. Often the HR lead, operations manager, or office manager.
- **Departmental AI Leads:** As AI use expands across functions, identify a point person in each department who owns AI tool adoption and feedback within their area.

d. Budgeting for AI — Realistic Expectations for Small Businesses

One of the most practical questions business leaders ask is: what should I budget for AI? The answer depends heavily on your use cases, but the following benchmarks provide a realistic starting framework for small-to-mid-size businesses:

Budget Category	Typical Cost Range (Annual)	Notes
AI Tool Subscriptions (generative AI, productivity, content)	$500 – $5,000/year	ChatGPT Plus, Copilot for M365, Canva Pro — per user; scale with team size
Specialized Business AI Tools (CRM AI, scheduling, operations)	$1,000 – $15,000/year	Varies significantly by platform and user count; many SMBs can start at the low end
Staff Training & Development	$500 – $3,000/year	Online courses, this type of in-person series, vendor training programs
Implementation & Integration Support	$0 – $10,000 (one-time)	Many tools are self-service; complex integrations may require consultant support
Legal & Compliance Review	$500 – $3,000/year	Policy review, vendor agreement assessment; leverage existing attorney relationships

Budget Category	Typical Cost Range (Annual)	Notes
Total — Conservative SMB AI Budget	**$2,500 – $10,000/year**	For a business of 5–20 employees beginning structured AI adoption

When evaluating AI investment, think in terms of ROI: if an AI tool saves each of five employees one hour per week, and your fully-loaded labor cost is $35/hour, that is $9,100 in recovered productivity per year from a tool that might cost $600. The math is often compelling — but run it for your specific situation before committing.

e. 90-Day Quick Start Plan

📅 Your AI Quick Start Plan – The First 90 Days

Days 1–14: Governance Foundation

- Finalize and distribute your AI Acceptable Use Policy
- Designate your AI Champion and schedule your first monthly AI check-in
- Ensure all staff using AI tools are using approved platforms with appropriate data protections
- Complete cybersecurity briefing for staff on AI-enabled threats (see our “Did You Know” section)

Days 15–30: Pilot Selection and Launch

- Select your highest-priority AI use case using the Assess-and-Prioritize framework
- Identify the specific tool, the specific process, and the specific team member(s) involved in the pilot
- Define your success metrics before you begin — what does success look like in 60 days?
- Launch the pilot with a clear start date and 60-day review commitment

Days 31–60: Pilot Execution and Learning

- Run the pilot with consistent, intentional use — not occasional dips in and out

- Collect qualitative feedback from team members using the tool weekly
- Track your defined success metrics
- Identify unexpected benefits or friction points and document them

Days 61–90: Evaluate and Plan Next Step

- Conduct your formal 60-day pilot review against success metrics
- Make a documented Go/Adjust/No-Go decision
- If Go: begin planning expansion to adjacent use cases
- Select your second AI priority from your original list and begin the cycle again
- Share your pilot lessons learned with peers (Chamber peer group?)

4. AI Strategy One-Pager Template

📄 My Business AI Strategy – One-Page Planning Template

Business Information

Business Name:

____

Industry / Sector:

____

Team Size:

____

Current AI Maturity Stage (1–4):

____

AI Priority Areas

Priority #1 Use Case:

____

Tool / Platform:

____

Success Metric:

____

Priority #2 Use Case:

____

Tool / Platform:

____

Priority #3 Use Case:

____

Governance

AI Champion (Name / Role):

____

AI Policy Owner (Name / Role):

____

AUP Status:

□ Drafted □ Reviewed □ Distributed

Budget

Estimated Annual AI Tool Budget:

$ _______________

Estimated Training Budget:

$ _______________

90-Day Milestone

Pilot Launch Date:

____

Pilot Review Date:

____

My definition of a successful first 90 days:

____

5. Graduation & Next Steps — Your AI Journey Continues

Completing this six-week series is a meaningful accomplishment. But the series ending is not the end of your AI journey — it is the beginning of the intentional phase. AI will continue to evolve, new tools will emerge, regulations will develop, and your team's AI fluency will grow. Here is how to sustain momentum:

- **Build a peer “AI network”. We can start with one here at the Chamber.** Consider a quarterly informal AI roundtable through the Chamber.

- **Follow AI news through business-focused sources.** MIT Technology Review's business coverage, HBR's AI content, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Small Business AI resources are all accessible, high-quality, and non-technical.
- **Revisit your AI strategy quarterly.** The landscape moves quickly. What was accurate in Week 1 may have been superseded by Week 6. Build a quarterly review of your AI strategy and tool stack into your business calendar.
- **Look for Chamber follow-up programming.** The Venice Area Chamber of Commerce is committed to supporting member business development. Watch for advanced AI workshops, peer roundtables, and tool-specific training events as follow-on programming to this series.

6. Week 6 Key Takeaways — Series Wrap-Up

✅ **Series Key Takeaways – Five Things Every Graduate Knows**

- AI is a practical business tool — not magic, not infallible, not just for large enterprises — and the strategic window for adoption by Venice area small businesses is wide open right now
- The highest-value AI applications for most small businesses are operational automation, marketing personalization, and administrative productivity — not complex, expensive technical implementations
- Governance comes before deployment: every business using AI needs an AI Acceptable Use Policy, data protection practices, and human review protocols before AI use becomes widespread
- AI risk is real and manageable — bias, hallucination, data exposure, and cybersecurity threats are all mitigated by informed, governance-first adoption rather than anxious avoidance
- The best AI strategy for your business is not the most ambitious one — it is the most *deliberate* one: Assess, Prioritize, Pilot, Evaluate, Scale. One step at a time, consistently executed, produces transformational results.

Hot Topic – AI, the War and the Consumer Price Index – Nicolas Liberoni

On July 14th, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the month of June was released, signaling inflation at 3.5%. This is lower than the 3.8% inflation rate economists had expected. While the number is lower than anticipated, it remains well above the Federal Reserve's 2% inflation target, which it considers when determining potential interest rate cuts.

The war in Iran is a large contributor to the relatively high inflation rate. After the price of oil skyrocketed due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, inflation rose as businesses increased their prices to offset higher production costs.

While the intensity of the war quieted briefly, escalation seems more likely as the days pass. A potential re-escalation of the conflict will likely mean higher prices at the pump and more expensive products and services in the long run. While the war and the flow of oil have a strong influence on inflation rates, AI may already be affecting costs as well.

Beyond the broader implications of the technology, the growth of artificial intelligence has become a major topic in the worlds of economics and finance. Global investment has been funneled into companies seeking to develop the best and most cost-effective AI models. Unfortunately for many, the growth of artificial intelligence has not been particularly cost-effective so far.

Many economists debate the impact that artificial intelligence plays on inflation. Some economists argue that artificial intelligence has been inflationary due to the high volume of investment spending on AI models, which circulates throughout the economy. Google's parent company, Alphabet, for example, has sold $80 billion in stock to fund further AI investments. This spending circulates through the economy, places more money in people's wallets, and creates additional demand.

According to Yahoo Finance, AI investment has contributed to 25% of GDP growth and 8% of total GDP. This 8% figure is higher than the dot-com bubble's all-time peak of 6.5% of GDP. Additionally, those invested in the stock market who have benefited from the returns of the AI boom can now spend and consume more. This wealth effect suggests that an even greater percentage of recent GDP growth comes from AI investment.

Other economists expect AI to have disinflationary effects as businesses adopt AI, enabling employees to streamline tedious processes and increase productivity. In theory, this allows companies to produce more goods and services with the same resources, potentially lowering costs.

While the future of the Iran conflict and the debate over AI's productivity effects remain uncertain, June's latest CPI data is a positive indication that inflation may be cooling from the pandemic-era highs.

Did You Know?

At least once a month I see a business email compromise attempt. I have also been targeted with a voice cloning scam in which a family member's voice was obtained and used.

Here are common **AI-enabled threats** small businesses should know about:

- **AI-generated phishing emails** – Scammers use AI to write convincing, personalized emails that sound like a vendor, customer, bank, or coworker.
- **Deepfake video impersonation** – Attackers create fake video clips or live video impressions of executives, public officials, or trusted contacts.
- **Voice cloning scams** – AI-generated voices mimic owners, managers, family members, or clients to request payments, credentials, or urgent action.
- **AI-powered social engineering** – Criminals scrape public information and use AI to craft highly specific messages that feel legitimate.
- **Automated credential attacks** – AI helps attackers guess, test, or refine stolen passwords more efficiently.
- **Fake invoices and payment instructions** – AI can generate realistic-looking invoices, purchase orders, or bank-change notices.
- **Business email compromise at scale** – AI makes it easier to imitate writing style and timing, increasing the credibility of fraudulent emails.
- **AI-generated malware or malicious code assistance** – Bad actors may use AI tools to speed up development or modification of malicious software.
- **Disinformation and reputation attacks** – Fake reviews, fake social posts, or manipulated content can damage a business's credibility.
- **Data leakage through AI tools** – Employees may accidentally paste customer data, contracts, financials, or confidential information into public AI platforms.
- **Hallucinated information used in decisions** – AI-generated answers may sound confident but be inaccurate, leading to poor business, legal, or customer decisions.
- **Synthetic identity fraud** – AI can help create realistic fake profiles, documents, or online personas for fraud.
- **Fake job applicants or contractors** – AI-generated resumes, interviews, work samples, or references can make fraudulent applicants harder to detect.
- **AI-enhanced customer scams** – Attackers may use chatbots or fake support channels to impersonate a business and trick customers.