

A Practical Readiness Framework for South African SME's

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Is Your Business Ready for AI?

Presented by 247 Digital

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Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer just for global giants. Across South Africa, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) are leveraging AI to enhance productivity, enhance customer experience, and drive new growth. But before you invest in AI tools or projects, it's crucial to understand: Is your business truly ready for AI?

This guide provides a practical, step-by-step framework to help you assess your organisation's AI readiness, so you can make smart, confident decisions and set your business up for success.

Why Assess AI Readiness?

Jumping into AI without preparation can lead to wasted resources, failed projects, and missed opportunities. A readiness assessment helps you:

- Identify your strengths and gaps before investing.
- Prioritise where to focus your time and budget.
- Reduce risks related to data, compliance, and change management.
- Build a clear roadmap for AI adoption that fits your business size and market realities.

The AI Readiness Framework for South African SMEs

Our framework is designed for businesses with 10–200 employees, reflecting the unique challenges and opportunities in the South African market. It covers six key pillars:

1. Strategy & Leadership

- Vision: Do you have a clear reason for adopting AI (e.g., automating admin, improving customer service, or gaining insights from your data)?
- Leadership Buy-In: Are your business leaders committed to exploring and supporting AI initiatives?
- Alignment: Is there agreement across your management team on AI priorities?

2. Data Readiness

- Data Quality: Is your business data accurate, up-to-date, and accessible?
- Data Management: Do you have basic processes for collecting, storing, and protecting data?
- Compliance: Are you aware of POPIA and other data privacy requirements?

3. Technology & Infrastructure

- Current Tools: Are your existing systems (e.g., CRM, accounting, website) compatible with new AI solutions?
- Integration: Can you connect new AI tools to your current workflows without significant disruption?
- Security: Do you have basic cybersecurity measures in place to protect sensitive data?

4. People & Skills

- Awareness: Do your staff understand what AI is and how it could impact their roles?
- Skills: Do you have (or can you access) people with the right skills to manage and use AI tools?
- Change Readiness: Is your team open to learning and adapting to new technology?

5. Implementation & Change Management

- Pilot Projects: Are you prepared to start small, test AI in one area, and learn before scaling up?
- Communication: Do you have a plan to keep staff informed and engaged during the AI journey?
- Support: Can you access external expertise (consultants, vendors, or partners) if needed?

6. Measuring Success

- Goals: Have you defined what success looks like for your AI project (e.g., time saved, sales increased)?
- Tracking: Do you have simple ways to measure and review the impact of AI on your business?
- Continuous Improvement: Are you ready to adjust your approach based on results and feedback?



Your AI Readiness Checklist

Use this checklist to score your business on each pillar (1 = Not Ready, 5 = Fully Ready):

AI Readiness Checklist: Scoring Guide

How to Score:

For each pillar, rate your business on a scale of 1 (Not Ready) to 5 (Fully Ready). Add up your scores for a total out of 30.

Your AI Readiness Checklist

Use this checklist to score your business on each pillar 1=Not Ready, 5 = Fully Ready

Pillar	1	2	3	4	5
Strategy & Leadership					
Data Readiness					
Technology & Infrastructure					
People & Skills					
Implementation & Change Management					
Measuring Success					

What Your Score Means & Next Steps

6–12: Early Stage / Not Ready

Your business is at the beginning of its AI journey.

Next Steps:

- Focus on foundational work: clarify your AI vision, improve data quality, and build leadership buy-in.
- Start with small, low-risk pilot projects.
- Consider external support for strategy and training.

13–20: Developing / Some Readiness

You have some building blocks in place, but there are key gaps that need to be addressed.

Next Steps:

- Prioritise areas with the lowest scores (e.g. data, skills, or change management).
- Invest in upskilling your team and improving your technology stack
- Run a focused AI pilot and measure results.

21–25: Advancing / Nearly Ready

You're well on your way!

Next Steps:

- Address any remaining weak spots.
- Develop a clear roadmap for scaling AI across your business.
- Formalise processes for change management and performance tracking.

26–30: AI-Ready / Leading

Congratulations! Your business is well-positioned to adopt and scale AI.

Next Steps:

- Move forward with larger AI initiatives and continuous improvement.
- Share learnings across your team and consider advanced AI applications.
- Monitor ROI and keep refining your approach.

Tip:

No matter your score, 247 Digital can help you close the gaps, design your AI roadmap, and unlock real business value from AI.

How to use:

- For each pillar, tick the number that best describes your current state.
- Review your lowest scores, these are your priority areas for improvement.
- Use your results to guide your next steps and conversations with your team.

Turning Insights into Action

1. Start with a Pilot:

Choose one area (like customer service or sales) to test a simple AI tool. Learn what works before expanding.

2. Upskill Your Team:

Invest in basic AI training for your staff or partner with local experts to enhance your capabilities.

3. Strengthen Your Data:

Focus on improving data quality and compliance—this is the foundation for any AI project.

4. Build Partnerships:

Connect with South African AI vendors, consultants, or business networks for support and best practices.

5. Track and Celebrate Wins:

Measure the impact of your pilot, share results with your team, and use early successes to build momentum.

How AI Can Help: Use Cases for Marketing & Sales

AI isn't just for big business. Here's how South African SMEs can use Large Language Models (LLMs) and AI agents to boost marketing and sales:

1. Content Creation & Copywriting (LLMs)

- Instantly generate blog posts, social media updates, product descriptions, and email campaigns.
- Localise content for South African audiences, including translation and tone adjustment.
- Save time and reduce costs on routine writing tasks.

2. Customer Support & Lead Qualification (AI Agents)

- Deploy chatbots on your website or WhatsApp to answer FAQs, qualify leads, and book appointments 24/7.
- Utilise AI agents to route queries to the appropriate team member, enhancing response times and customer satisfaction.

3. Personalised Email Marketing (LLMs & Agents)

- Automatically segment your customer database and send tailored messages based on behaviour, location, or purchase history.
- Use LLMs to draft personalised follow-ups and nurture leads at scale.

4. Sales Assistance & CRM Automation (AI Agents)

- AI agents can update your CRM, log calls, and remind your sales team to follow up with hot leads.
- Generate sales reports and forecasts automatically, freeing up your team to focus on more sales.

5. Market Research & Insights (LLMs)

- Analyse customer feedback, reviews, and social media to spot trends and opportunities.
- Summarise competitor activity and market news, giving your team actionable intelligence.

6. Ad Campaign Optimisation (AI Agents)

- AI can monitor your ad spend and automatically adjust budgets or targeting to achieve a better ROI.
- Test different ad copy and creative using LLMs to find what works best.

Why Work with 247 Digital?

At 247 Digital, we don't just talk about AI, we engineer revenue. As South Africa's Revenue Engineers, we blend sales thinking, marketing execution, and system integration to create results-driven growth engines for SME's.

Here's how we can help you succeed with AI:

- **Strategy & Execution:** We align your sales and marketing teams, design your sales funnel, and build a roadmap for AI adoption that fits your business.
- **AI-Driven Lead Generation:** From email and LinkedIn outreach to paid ads and automated nurturing, we use AI to fill your pipeline with quality leads.
- **Customer Experience & Automation:** Our AI-powered chatbots and 24/7 Voice Agents handle customer queries, book appointments, and support your team around the clock.
- **CRM & Reporting:** Integrate all your channels into one CRM, with real-time activity tracking and AI-powered insights.
- **Hands-On Support:** We don't just hand over leads, we work alongside your team to close the gap between potential and performance.

Conclusion

AI can be a game-changer for South African SME's, but only if you're ready. Use this framework to assess your readiness, close the gaps, and set your business on the path to AI-powered growth.

Want a free consultation or more resources?

Contact us to discuss your AI readiness and next steps.

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